# Understanding Chinese Society

**SECOND EDITION**

Edited by Xiaowei Zang

# Understanding Chinese Society

This second edition of *Understanding Chinese Society* provides a comprehensive, readable, and well-grounded introduction to the key issues affecting contemporary China. A thorough analysis is undertaken not only of China's family patterns, education system, status, hierarchy, and ethnic diversity, but also of China's mass media, work, and cultural expression. As well as being thoroughly updated and revised throughout, this edition offers new chapters on urbanization, the environment, and civil society in China.

A team of international experts guide students through social issues that include:

- What are the key features of the family and marriage institutions in China?
- How are women and men faring differently in Chinese society today?
- How are minorities faring in China?
- How does the education system differentiate Chinese society?
- How are cultural traditions expressed?

With handy pedagogical features such as a chronology of the People's Republic of China, further reading suggestions, and related novels and films, *Understanding Chinese Society* is suitable for anyone studying Chinese Culture and Society, Chinese Studies and Asian Sociology.

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# 1 Introduction

*Xiaowei Zang*

When I was a research student at the University of California at Berkeley from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, the majority of the students of East Asia on campus and at other major universities in the US were preoccupied with the study of Japan and the Four East Asian Tigers. The few students who ventured into Chinese studies chose to major in Chinese language, Chinese history or Chinese politics. The study of Chinese society was not seen to be fashionable and 'cool' partly because, at that time, the People's Republic of China (PRC) was weak economically and had limited influence on international affairs. It was ruled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and struggled with an inefficient planned economic system and the increasingly difficult task of feeding a large, growing population. The 1989 Tiananmen Square tragedy ended the honeymoon period between China and the Western world and discouraged hopes for political liberalization and democratization in the PRC. China seemed stagnant and hopeless.

Surprisingly, significant changes have taken place in China since then. The Chinese economy has expanded at an explosive rate for the past three decades. China surpassed Japan as the world's second-largest economy in the first half of 2010. By 2009 its economy was already more than 90 times bigger than when Chinese market reforms were launched in 1978 (Bloomberg News 2010). Experts in Goldman Sachs and PricewaterhouseCoopers predicted that China was on course to overtake the US as the world's largest economy around 2020 (Collins and Erickson 2011). Some people in the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank suggested that China was according to purchasing power parity already the largest economy in the world in 2014 (春緋 2014). There are loud talks about how G-2 (i.e. Chinamerica) has influenced the world (Jones 2010). Today, no major global issues can be satisfactorily addressed without China's effective involvement.

As the PRC has become powerful economically and politically, interaction between Chinese people and people outside China has also become more frequent and important. It is no longer sufficient for students to study Chinese language, history and politics. They must also equip themselves with knowledge on various aspects of Chinese society. Studying Chinese society is itself intellectually rewarding as one can appreciate the peoples, cultures and social

organizations in the world's most populous country. Pragmatically, it is impossible to learn the insights of Chinese economic growth without a good understanding of Chinese society. While economic governance relies very much on government policy and market activities, it is also affected by societal organizations including the family, kinship, etc. How social fabrics in China function and how Chinese people live everyday life have a direct impact on economic behaviours and market transactions in the PRC.

However, many books on China sold in bookstores focus on Chinese language, history, or politics. It is difficult for students and professors to find a suitable textbook for a course on Chinese society. The first edition of *Understanding Chinese Society* was designed to address this issue and was on sale since 2011. The contributors of the book were excited to learn that the first edition was sold out and both the publisher and the reviewers thought that it was high time for a second edition to be released in 2015. We were deeply honoured by their request and the market demands. During the course of preparing for the second edition of *Understanding Chinese Society*, the contributors revised their chapters according to the constructive criticism and comments of the reviewers and updated information on the subjects they examined. Based on the recommendations of the reviewers and publisher, the second edition includes three new chapters that discuss issues related to urbanization, the environment and civil society in China. Overall, the second edition of *Understanding Chinese Society* responds to the increasing fascination with China among students around the world with the best foundational and cutting-edge scholarship. It is more comprehensive than the first edition and offers students a readable, well-grounded exploration of some major issues affecting Chinese society today and familiarizes them with available resources for learning about Chinese society.

*Understanding Chinese Society* is written by an international team of experts on Chinese society, drawing on their teaching and research experience at universities in Australia, China, Hong Kong, Singapore and the UK. Each chapter (apart from the chapter on urbanization) is written by a university lecturer with both classroom experience and relevant expertise on the subject. *Understanding Chinese Society* places the collected material in its historical and intellectual context and is an essential textbook for courses on Chinese society and a work of reference for courses such as Chinese politics and comparative sociology, valued by scholars and students as a vital one-stop pedagogic resource.

In Chapter 2, Marjorie Dryburgh reviews changing understandings of what it means to be Chinese and the ways in which place, culture and history have been reinterpreted across time as building blocks of Chinese identity. In examining the concept of place, she recognizes the tensions between the idea of 'one China' and the substantial regional variations in topography within the territories now identified as Chinese, as well as the ways in which these have produced variations in local cultures and practices and, at times, profound divisions within the all-China community. She highlights both the

mechanisms through which Confucianism was propagated through Chinese elites and the limitations of Confucian cultural authority in the face of challenges from Daoist and Buddhist traditions. In addressing the identity crises of the early twentieth century, she points to the external and internal pressures that shaped emerging Chinese nationalisms, and the ways in which national and social identities were negotiated through the mass media. In considering the post-1949 era, she pinpoints the intensive state engagement in the public processes of identity building, in the reshaping of opportunities for individuals and the assertive provision of new models of personal, social and national identity. Finally she suggests that the reinvention of Chinese traditions and the reinterpretation of place and history continue in reform-era China, in an increasingly complex debate as identity is mediated between competing social, official and commercial interests.

Lucy Zhao discusses rituals and the life cycle in Chapter 3. Different societies have developed distinctive rituals to demarcate, regulate and commemorate the different stages of life. In this chapter, Zhao introduces readers to some milestones in the life cycle among Han Chinese: birth and childhood, entry into adulthood, weddings, retirement and old age, and death and memorial celebrations. Zhao points out that there can be different rites for the same life event in China during different historical periods. Some rites have been passed down for generations, others have been given different meanings, and others have faded away from daily life. Zhao argues that not everyone in China practises popular rites; also, people may practise some rites but not others, and certain rites are commonly practised in some places but not in others. There are also differences in adherence to rites in terms of age, gender, class, etc. Ethnic minority groups in China perform different rituals. Zhao's chapter facilitates readers' understanding of other aspects of Chinese society examined in various chapters in this book.

Xiaowei Zang provides readers with an introduction to the family and marriage in China in Chapter 4. Zang first discusses a popular belief that in traditional China many people lived in large, multi-generation families. However, recent studies have challenged this view. Next, Zang shows that households in traditional China are thought to be large partly because of high fertility rates. There has been a gradual movement toward small family size and low fertility, and the change apparently took place after the 1970s. Because of the post-1980 demographic transition, China's fertility has reached a level well below replacement. Some scholars have attributed the fertility decline to China's birth control policy, others however have argued that the main determinant of the demographic transition is socioeconomic factors. China's below-replacement fertility has attracted attention from scholars given its social costs and the long-term demographic effects such as accelerated population aging, elderly care, sex selective abortion, distorted sex ratios, and changes to the Chinese family and kinship system.

Next, Zang examines the changes in the marriage system and shows the increases in late marriage and free choice. However, love and romance are a

necessary but not sufficient precondition for a lasting relationship in China. Other important considerations in mate selection include status similarity, health and domestic skills. Issues in marriage such as the male marriage squeeze and the so-called female marriage squeeze are also discussed in some detail. Finally, Zang examines the historical trends in divorce and possible causes of marital breakdown in China.

In Chapter 5, Jieyu Liu discusses gender and sexuality in China. She first outlines the ways that gender and sexuality affect the organization of Chinese society in both public and private domains. In pre-modern China, Confucianism acted as the core principle for regulating society and prescribed a patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal family system. As continuing a family line through male heirs was the family's priority task, sexuality was mainly harnessed to serve the needs of the procreation of future generations. In the past century, various national projects have challenged Confucian ideologies and practices and re-arranged the relations between men and women. However, due to an insufficient understanding of gender in the socialist modernization project, inequalities between men and women persisted. Despite the fact that women were officially mobilized into the workplace, the gendered division between domestic sphere and social production was maintained. In recent years, opening up the economy and the availability of new communication technologies have led to the emergence of new sexual cultures and made sexual alternatives possible. However, sexuality is enmeshed with gender relations. The abundance of sexual discourses has re-sexualized women. The chapter also examines issues related to prostitution and homosexuality.

Chunrong Liu examines rural communities and urban neighbourhoods in China in Chapter 6. He scrutinizes change and continuity in the rural community and urban neighbourhood, with a focus on grassroots-level social solidarity and its impact on the post-1978 context. He shows the explosive growth of new social fabrics such as rural solidarity groups, urban property-based organizations and spontaneous bottom-up activisms in the post-1978 era, and argues that the grassroots-level social transformation is deeply rooted in market reforms that have undermined the socialist social control system and collective good regime, opened up new horizons for community interactions, and contributed to the growth of community autonomy. Community-based governance and welfare programmes have developed, involving villager committee elections, 'new socialist countryside building' and 'urban community building'. These initiatives have shaped the opportunities and resources, as well as the boundaries, for the making of grassroots social solidarity and creating conditions for the emergence of civil society in China.

Gerard A. Postiglione discusses the challenges, policies and practices of education in China's rapidly changing society in Chapter 7. He first discusses the imperial legacy and provides detailed information about the modern education system in China. He then examines the educational system in Mao's China of 1949–1976. Next he argues that education in the post-1978 era is increasingly responsive and shaped by market demands. These include

the demand by individuals and employers for relevant knowledge and skills to boost their economic prospects and the urban middle class demand for higher cultural status through social competition for educational credentials. He discusses the development of private schools in China and identifies the problems of school access and equity as they affect rural girls, children of rural migrants, and ethnic minorities.

In Chapter 8, Qian Forrest Zhang discusses status and hierarchies in China. Social hierarchies and inequality in a society are shaped by the modes of production that extract and transfer surplus among social groups through economic activities. In Mao's China, the central-planned economy established a powerful tributary mode of production (TMP) that extracted surplus from rural areas (and commoner producers) and transferred it to cities (and cadre-officials). This TMP created two fundamental hierarchies in socialist China: the urban-rural divide and the official-commoner divide, both of which were based on politically defined statuses. China's post-1978 transition has led to both a resurgence of the traditional petty-commodity mode of production (PCMP) and the rise of a capitalist mode of production (CMP). The PCMP and CMP have created new social hierarchies that are based on people's economic positions in the market and are making today's Chinese society increasing stratified by a hierarchy of economically determined classes, rather than a hierarchy of politically determined status groups. For example, in both rural and urban areas a new economic elite has emerged, its wealth accumulated from entrepreneurial activities under the CMP. The rank of petty-commodity producers has also increased sharply through urban self-employment and household-based commercial productions in rural areas. The nature of the urban-rural divide is also changing. Although the politically defined urban and rural statuses are still in effect, economic positions in the labour and housing markets are becoming more important in determining rural migrants' life chances in cities and in shaping inequality between urban and rural areas. The TMP, however, has remained powerful and the divide between officials and commoners has persisted. Despite the decline of surplus extraction from rural areas, dismantling of the central-planned system and privatization of many state-owned firms, the state has maintained its extractive power through the monopoly positions of large-scale state-owned firms and its own monopoly on urban land.

Colin Mackerras examines ethnic minorities in China in Chapter 9. The Chinese state officially recognizes 56 ethnic groups, the Han and 55 ethnic minorities. Some of the ethnic minorities are quite similar culturally to the Han, but others are very different indeed. Although there are many commonalities among ethnic minority groups, they illustrate great diversity in terms of language, religion, the arts, architecture, diet and family practices. Mackerras shows that the ethnic populations have been rising consistently in the PRC and the proportion of the minorities within the total Chinese population has increased greatly since 1953. Although the population of ethnic minority groups is less than one-tenth of China's total, they represent a wide

range of cultures and live in strategically important geographic areas of China. Mackerras then examines official policy towards the ethnic minorities and how it relates to reality, including the governance of ethnic minority autonomous regions. The government's economic priorities in the ethnic areas are to promote development, hoping that raising the standard of living will persuade the ethnic minorities to wish to remain part of the PRC and increase their loyalty to the state, as well as improve ethnic harmony and good relations among the various ethnic groups. There are preferential policies for minorities in a range of areas such as employment in government positions, enrolment in higher education, and population control. Minorities are entitled to preserve the 'good' aspects of their cultures and to use their own languages not only at home but in the public sphere – such as in government, law and education. However, the government bans the use of religion to try and destabilize the state; and in politically sensitive regions authorities are frequently so cautious in interpreting religious observation as political opposition as to contravene freedom of religion. Mackerras also discusses occasions when factors such as political dissatisfaction, the fear of being culturally submerged, ethnic inequalities and the fanning of discontent from outside or inside China have led to ethnic violence and animosities, including movements that have tried to separate particular ethnic areas from China. To make this point Mackerras analyzes the major disturbances that occurred in the Tibetan areas in 2008 and in the Xinjiang capital Ürümqi in 2009. However, he argues that the Chinese state has handled its minority problems quite well, considering how serious they are, and that the overall trend since the middle of the twentieth century has been towards a better-integrated Chinese state.

In Chapter 10, Yi-min Lin describes the transformation of work in post-1978 China. China has the world's largest workforce, totalling 780 million in 2009. Lin first offers an overview of the evolution of work organization in China's economic reform era. The first section of the chapter highlights the basic features of the Maoist system of employment and behavioural control in urban and rural work units. It shows that the CCP's capital-intensive economic development strategy and the desideratum of social and political control combined to shape the structure of the workplace and the patterns of authority relations. The second section of this chapter traces the main threads of economic institutional change since 1978, including market-orientated reforms among SOEs, urban social security reforms, and the rise of the private sector. The third section of this chapter discusses the implications of these changes for labour relations. One major issue is the tensions and conflict in the workplace that have increased as a result of the growth and exacerbation of both old and new problems. Another major issue concerns authority in the workplace: with the increase in economic freedom, the decline of public ownership and the rise of markets, the authority structure uniformly imposed before the reform has fallen apart. The characteristics, causes and ramifications of other new types of authority relations are nevertheless less well studied. Among the factors that need to be closely examined in future research

are legacies from the era of state socialism, as well as the impact of globalization and technological change.

Yu Hong studies major issues related to urbanization in China in Chapter 11. The post-1978 era has witnessed rapid urbanization in China as millions of rural migrants have flowed into cities to work in labour-intensive manufacturing industries. Local governments have relied on a land-centred strategy for their urbanization and industrialization and for securing revenues from land sales/leases. Land-centred urbanization is a primary means of chasing high GRD rates by local government officials in China, whose behaviour is dictated by the development and fiscal policies of the central government. Uncontrolled land development and the proliferation of new cities in China are seemingly unstoppable.

Yu Hong argues that the land-centred urbanization is responsible for institutional discrimination against migrants, local government debts, dependency on land revenues for local fiscal expenditures, and the emergence of ghost cities in China. Ghost cities are fully built urban areas that have few residents and are littered with unoccupied newly built residential properties and uncompleted construction projects. The emergence of ghost cities is the result of the urbanization strategy implemented by local governments, which is top-down, state-led and land-centred. In order to accelerate the urbanization process and boost capital investments in real estate and infrastructure construction, local governments have created new urban areas using large tracts of rural farmland. One example of this land-centred urbanization that is discussed in some detail in Chapter 11 is a ghost city called Chenggong in Yunnan province, a new town built by the Kunming government using its own government-run financing vehicles.

Xiaoling Zhang provides a detailed study of the mass media in China in Chapter 12. As a party that came to power as much through the power of the pen as through the barrel of the gun, Chinese Communist Party leaders know all too well the importance of ideological domination and the value of mass media as part of an ideological apparatus for social mobilization and control. The first and foremost function of media and communication is to reflect the regime's point of view on ideological issues.

The economic reforms in China since 1978 have brought about a radically changed communication landscape, a landscape shaped by unprecedented growth in the number of newspapers, TV stations and satellite channels and by Internet expansion. It has become more pluralized, commercialized and liberalized. Changes in China's media sphere during this period are not the result of a single event but the consequence of a number of overlapping and interrelated factors and forces, including commercialization, the new global and regional structure and environment, pluralization which partly (but not exclusively) results from commercialization, China's multifaceted interactions with the outside world, and the advancement of new information and communication technologies. More importantly, all these changes are happening in the context of the Chinese Communist Party wanting to manage the whole

process and stay ahead of the unwanted consequences of the reforms. These overlapping and inter-related factors and forces constitute the backdrop of the transformation of mass media, although the backdrop itself is in continuous flux. This chapter starts with a brief review of the history of China's communist communication, which serves to provide the context within which the country's media reform and the fast-moving social transitions in the reform era have been occurring. It then introduces the transformation of mass media as a result of accelerated commodification, globalization, rapid advancement of media technologies and intensified ideological and social struggles. This chapter serves to improve our understanding of the continuities and changes in China's mass media after the economic reform. It finishes with the challenges that both the party-state and the media industry face in furthering the development of mass media in China.

Vic Li examines environmental issues in China in Chapter 13. He starts with a brief review of China's environmental problems and the pre-reform situation. This provides the context to understanding the changing roles and relations of the state and society in the decades after reform. The exponential economic growth since the late 1970s has taken a huge toll on the natural environment. Freshwater sources are depleted, with some 70 per cent of China's rivers and lakes polluted; 16 per cent of surface soils contain toxic chemicals, including one-fifth of farmland, which is no longer arable. Air pollution continues unabated in nearly every major city, with levels of harmful particulates far exceeding international safety standards. The health costs of air and water pollution alone would amount to at least 6 per cent of China's annual GDP. If the wide array of environmental challenges the country confronts is taken into account, this figure would certainly be much higher, implying a negative growth scenario in recent years.

Although the rapid industrialization and massive urbanization of the reform period are obvious culprits, understanding China's response necessitates examination of the transformation of the roles of the Chinese state and society and their interrelationship in environmental affairs. Contrary to the gross neglect of environmental impacts during the mass line campaigns of the Mao era, the reform period has witnessed several interrelated developments that have resulted in remarkable advances in environmental protection. First, the introduction of a sustainable development agenda into the state apparatus in the 1980s marked the beginning of environmental governance in contemporary China. Regulations and laws were introduced and environmental bureaucracy took shape. This made possible the many top-down regulatory actions of the state authority in response to pressing challenges like industrial and household pollution. Second, political mobilization of cadres and the public has become the predominant means of galvanizing public support and encouraging compliance. Since the 1990s there has been a surge of green activism within China, championed by NGOs, activists, the media and research institutions, that has supplemented the state's endeavours. China's rising middle class and corporate sector have also gradually come to terms

with green values and standards thanks to the globalizing environmentalism driven by transnational NGOs, industry standard-setting bodies and the scientific community.

All these have contributed to the general rise of environmental consciousness and occasionally generated effective response to severe and worsening problems like large-scale water pollution and deteriorating air quality in urban areas. However, they have fallen short of bringing about lasting change in corporate behaviour or the priority government gives to the delivery of economic performance that often comes at the expense of environmental protection. Much of their successes are contingent on the policy and political parameters delimited by state authorities at the central and local level, and are compromised by the persistent NIMBY mentality of society. The prospect of a vibrant green society in China remains a distant probability. This chapter concludes with an assessment of the continuing challenges society faces in transforming itself into a strong defender of China's environmental quality.

Kam-yee Law studies civil society in China in Chapter 14. China's drive toward reform and modernization over the past three and a half decades has not only led to rapid economic growth but also nurtured new opportunities for social change. The outcome of all this change is the emergence of a new set of institutional arrangements. Do these sorts of dynamic market transitions and social changes suggest that civil society is indeed emerging in China? To what extent and in what shape has China's totalitarian regime transformed into a party state? What are the key characteristics of China's middle class and NGOs? Law provides an analytical survey of China's market economy, middle class and social organizations, protests and community in the cyber world cultivated and developed during the reforming age. Law seeks to explain how socio-economic changes can co-exist with the continued dominance of the party state. He understands the 'state-society relationship' in contemporary China from the perspective of the 'macro regularization' of state power and the societal pattern of opposition and cross-regional or class coalitions.

In Chapter 15, Xiaowei Zang briefly outlines the history of the Chinese Communist Party before 1949, the socialist transformation in the Mao era 1949–1976, and the post-1978 market reforms. Zang then examines the system of government, describing its institutional components, the principles determining how they operate, and the way in which it is controlled by the CCP. Zang also discusses changing state-society relations since 1949. While there has been continuity in the major government institutions and the persistence of one-party rule in China, there have been significant political changes in the post-1978 era due to the diminishing role of the state in society, the imperatives of market reforms and the open-door policy. Some scholars have complained bitterly about the slow process of political liberalization since 1978. Zang shows the considerable extent of democratization in China. This chapter provides important contextual material for readers to enhance their understanding of the aspects of Chinese society discussed in Chapters 2–14.

*Understanding Chinese Society* is indexed and equipped with a basic chronology of the PRC. Further reading and some films/documentaries are recommended at the end of many of the chapters for readers who want to know more. When contributors wrote their chapters they made no assumptions about readers' knowledge of China. Each chapter was written in such a way that it would be readily accessible to anyone interested in China. The book is not intended to be a Chinese Society ABC or an encyclopaedia; it is an effort to open a door for readers to some aspects of social organization and daily life in China. The book could help someone studying Mandarin to appreciate the language in its social context and be a useful companion to someone planning to visit or spend time as an exchange student or expatriate in China. It also can provide the reader with answers – or ways to think of answers – to questions which may arise when he or she meets and interacts with people in China. Once the reader is armed with this background information, he or she will be in a good position to achieve a deeper understanding of Chinese society and/or function socially in China with more skill.

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# 2 Foundations of Chinese identity

## Place, past and culture

*Marjorie Dryburgh*

This chapter discusses what it means to be 'Chinese' today. Identity provides the frameworks within which individuals locate themselves within a community: as individuals we see ourselves as members of many overlapping communities – of nation or hometown, of gender and generation, of class or profession, of recreation or consumption, of social or historical experience – and *personal* identities are therefore made up of changing combinations of these various collective identities. While a community may declare its collective identity to be fixed, essential and timeless, scholarly understandings of identity have focused on the ways in which identities are socially constructed and subject to repeated negotiation and on the interplay or tensions between multiple identities – between gender and class, between region, ethnicity and nation – and the variations in any of these adopted by different groups (Calhoun 1994).

Given the dramatic changes that China has undergone in the past century since the collapse of the imperial order in 1911 and within living memory, we should expect those discussions of identity to be intensive, complex, and shifting, as different understandings of China's past and future and of 'Chinese traditions' are reinterpreted to meet the needs of China today. We should consider also *whose* rendering of Chinese identity we have before us. We should not assume that the understandings of identity asserted in the state-sponsored discourse of the mainstream media are the same as those revealed in everyday behaviour at local level and, while the growing use of social media has allowed other voices to emerge, constraints on expression remain (indeed, at the time of writing these were becoming tighter) and a persistent 'digital divide' has ensured that some communities are better represented and more widely heard in the virtual world as in the physical world. Finally, we should be conscious of the images of China that come to us from our own local media or popular histories, or from film and fiction. Representations of China in Europe and North America were until relatively recently dominated by a handful of central images of a China that valued the community over the individual; that was generally internally homogeneous and governed by rigid 'Confucian' principles and a strict social hierarchy headed by scholar officials over farmers, artisans and, finally, merchants; that was resistant to change

and distrustful of external influence. Recent scholarship has done much to highlight the complexities behind these quite simple images, and an examination of the building blocks of identity in China – in place, culture and history – reveals significant diversity, in the vitality of regional identities, in reinterpretations and assertive challenges to core values, and in changing understandings of China's past and its meanings.

## Geography: placing 'China'

The People's Republic of China today covers a territory that stretches from Korea in the northeast across the southern borders of Siberia to Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Pakistan in the west, and through Tibet to Vietnam and Burma in the southwest. It is important to note, first, that China in this current form is a relatively recent creation, and second that this territory – covering an area comparable in size to the United States – contains enormous internal variation.

While images of China overseas are often dominated by the rice terraces and karst limestone landscapes of the south, much of what is marked as China's earliest history and most ancient culture unfolded in a handful of provinces in the Yellow River basin, where landscape and climate are very different. Archaeologists have located the capitals of the early dynasties, Shang, Zhou and Qin, in modern Henan and Shaanxi provinces; the philosophers Confucius and Mencius, who articulated the core values of the imperial era, were both natives of modern Shandong. The expansion of the empire to incorporate all of modern China proper as well as Manchuria in the northeast, Mongolia, Xinjiang and Tibet in the northwest and Taiwan entered its final stages only in the eighteenth century. Each expansion drew in variations of land, custom and language, and accompanying potential challenges to the idea of a unitary China. For centuries, therefore, China has been marked by regional variations rooted in climate and topography and manifested in dialect, the arts, culinary traditions and commercial development; and regional identity was thus an important complicating factor in the negotiation of all-China identity.

G. William Skinner (1977: 212–16) proposed that China should be understood as a collection of nine 'macro-regions': bounded by geographical features such as mountain ranges, and centred on major river systems, the primary transport and commercial arteries of pre-twentieth-century China, these macro-regions developed close internal trading relations and a relatively high degree of social and cultural coherence. Despite the emergence of national markets, first in luxury goods and then in staples such as grain, between the ninth and fourteenth centuries, there was much less contact between macro-regions. These remained distinct in many ways into the twentieth century, and robust local cultures therefore competed for attention and allegiance with awareness of a wider China.[1]

Topographical and environmental differences influenced local cultures and societies. For example, as noted earlier, the earliest traces of civilisation now identified as Chinese are tied to the relatively cold, arid north China plain, where the climate favoured crops such as wheat, millet and sorghum but did not make farming particularly fruitful and therefore did not encourage an early emergence of commerce or of a powerful commercial class that could challenge the state or provide an alternative space in which social interests could be negotiated. By the fourteenth century, however, the economic centre of gravity of the empire was shifting southwards to the Lower Yangtze region ('Jiangnan', south of the river), where the wetter, milder climate allowed a more productive agriculture that consequently fuelled rapid growth in commerce. Rising status for traders destabilised traditional social hierarchies, and Jiangnan and its cities – Yangzhou, Suzhou and Nanjing, among others – became the heartland of a newly commercialised culture that owed significantly less to formal official or imperial patronage than that of earlier centuries (Chow 2004; Marmé 2005).

By the late eighteenth century, with the incorporation of Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet and Taiwan into the empire, China was possibly better understood as a multi-ethnic empire than as a unitary state. Although that empire was at this time ruled by a Manchu 'conquest' dynasty and although the new territories and their people were understood as exotic and alien, influence in these outlying regions was an assertive statement of imperial power and prestige (Teng 2004). We should not ignore the significant periods of disunion in China's history, between the third and sixth centuries, the early tenth century, and most recently in the 'warlord' era of the 1920s: when the centre declined, the pull of regional loyalties, and the power of regional organisation and identification, rose correspondingly. Despite these regional shifts and variations, the idea that there was nonetheless 'one China' has remained a powerful one.

Different regions of China also varied in their apparent level of interest and engagement with the world beyond China's shifting borders. Early western scholarship suggested that China's relations with its neighbours were governed by a 'tribute system' that interpreted all contact as a form of homage by lesser, 'barbarian' powers to a culturally superior China, and this understanding did much to feed the stereotype of a 'closed' and inward-looking China (Fairbank and Reischauer 1989).[2] It is arguable of course that the magnitude of the task of governing the empire drew official attention inwards until external forces presented a threat and that this has skewed the treatment of external contact in official sources. But it is also clear that, where external contact was a matter of routine – for example, in the southeast coast and Lingnan regions and on the inland frontiers of the north and west – there was much more intensive and pragmatic interaction through trade and traffic of persons than the 'tribute system' framework would encourage us to expect. Today, too, a comparison of the central and regional media suggests that as Chinese provinces and regions look to their external neighbours – Yunnan to

Burma, for example, or Liaoning to North Korea – the central and regional world views are differently framed.

## Chinese traditions: Confucianism and beyond

Chinese identity is also rooted in shared traditions though we see shifts in principles and interpretations. For much of the imperial era, social and political beliefs among the elite were most visibly shaped by the ideas of Confucius (*c.* 551–479 BCE), a philosopher and adviser to rulers, as recorded after his death and elaborated by his followers. But this was by no means the only source of important values, particularly among the common people; and the meanings of Confucianism even among the ruling elite changed significantly over time.

Why, then, did Confucianism appear so important? Again, the explanation lies partly in the governing classes' control of the written records: the people who had the education to record their understanding of Chinese society and its workings and the prestige to ensure that efforts were made to preserve those records were educated from childhood in Confucian texts and traditions. A Confucian education was an important marker of social status, and the route towards prestigious government service lay in a Confucianised examination system. Like the Greek or Roman classics or the Christian canon in Europe, the Confucian canon in China did much to shape the mental landscape of the ruling classes. It provided instruction in proper values, stories that demonstrated proper and improper behaviour and offered an assurance that the rulers of the empire were united by clearly articulated common culture (Elman 2000).[3] The durability of Confucianism was enhanced by periodic reinventions, most significantly in the second century BCE, when it was established as a philosophy of government; after the eighth century, when it extended its attention from statecraft to cosmological enquiry to meet the challenges posed by Buddhism; and in the eighteenth century, when a new school of 'evidential research' emerged to question the canon itself and its relevance for China centuries after its production.

The core values associated with Confucianism – an insistence on the importance of the family, of education, of public service – appealed to the relatively powerful, while the inclusion of benevolence among Confucianism's cardinal virtues offered a promise of justice and security that could be used to pacify the weak and disaffected. These values were also broad enough to be adapted and re-imagined as society developed, offering an appearance of continuity even in times of dramatic change. So central has Confucian culture been to understandings of Chinese elite identity that culture and values have been taken at times as more important defining elements of Chineseness than, for example, descent or ethnicity, and this centrality of Confucianism has been invoked to suggest that incomers – even conquest dynasties – might be effectively 'sinicised', or made Chinese, through the adoption of core values and behaviour. Better understandings of Chinese historical concepts of

ethnicity (Dikotter 1992) and of the relations between alien rulers and Chinese elites have challenged this argument (Ho 1998; Rawski 1996), but its durability nonetheless highlights the importance attached to values as a means of binding communities together in China.

Despite its influence in public life, however, Confucianism was by no means the only important source of shared values, and other schools of thought also shaped personal identities and served as a focus for local community activity. Confucian principles and the Confucian pre-occupation with social activism were challenged both by Daoism, an indigenous Chinese school that emerged in the same period as Confucianism, and by Buddhism, which reached China from India in the second century and was well established across the empire by the Middle Ages. Both attracted the philosophical interest of the educated elite, were highly influential in the arts and became the source of much popular religious practice (Schwartz 1985). At popular level, therefore, 'Chinese values' were an eclectic mix of principles culled from different and competing traditions that might vary according to locality and social class.

## Histories of China

The past matters to Chinese identity. Discussions of the past connect China today with its ancient civilisation, and while many aspects of China's history are still understood in stereotypical terms as 'feudal', the material heritage of the imperial era is celebrated and the past is a source of stock tales and characters, positive and negative, that one could call on to frame later experience. China conventionally claims a five thousand-year history:[4] written histories purportedly record events that they date back to around 2600 BCE, and there is a rich archaeological record. While it is not possible to tie some of the earliest archaeological finds specifically to the written sources, it is nonetheless clear that organised and materially sophisticated societies flourished in central China from a very early period (Liu and Xu 2007). Chinese history was intensively, though selectively, documented by China's governing elites. The earliest systematic history, Sima Qian's *Records of the Historian*, was compiled in the first century BCE, and comprised chronologies of historical events, biographies of emperors, nobles and other notable individuals, and treatises on topics such as rites, astronomy, river management and other areas of state interest (Hardy 1999). Later histories of the empire borrowed heavily from this template, and the writing of histories became a core official project, each new dynasty compiling a history of its predecessor while routinely documenting its own activities. The cumulative effect of this activity was to create a body of work that tied the foundation of each dynasty to principles of legitimacy that appeared consistent across recorded history and that heavily emphasised continuity rather than change.

This image of an 'unchanging China' has had a powerful hold over foreign imaginings of China. While some early visitors, such as Jesuit missionaries, enthusiastically recorded Chinese prowess in technical fields including

mathematics and astronomy, later visitors, particularly those thwarted in their dealings with the Chinese state, were far more likely to interpret their own failures as evidence of Chinese intransigence and cultural stasis, and the judgement had profound and long-standing effects on official attitudes to China and academic work alike.[5]

However, that appearance of continuity dissolves if we shift our attention from the empire-wide, official record to the local and personal histories that more recent academic work on China is using so effectively. Regional histories of China offer rich data on the local unfolding of empire-wide developments, and personal writings such as private biographies and epitaphs, family histories and genealogies, letters, poems and essays on diverse subjects that China's educated elite were expected to produce show us how personal identities were articulated and how some relatively affluent Chinese understood their society and their own place within it.

While official histories might reflect the shift from aristocratic to bureaucratic rule in the Middle Ages or the changes in taxation practice that followed the growth of commerce in the early modern era, local and personal histories show far more clearly the deeper impact of those changes. These histories show how the 'gentry' families who supplied the imperial state with its officials built and manipulated social networks to make powerful friends and arrange advantageous marriages. They show how rising volumes of trade created a powerful class of merchants who were able to compete with the gentry through charitable works and displays of wealth and taste (Lufrano 1997; Clunas 1991). They show the powerful economic and social constraints on many Chinese women beside the growing expectation that the daughters of the gentry would themselves be educated (Bernhard 2002; Mann 1997). These histories therefore highlight the negotiations of power, interest and allegiance that were central to identity construction in late imperial China.

By the eighteenth century, attitudes towards the past itself were the subject of debate in official circles. Ambivalence towards the past became more acute in the nineteenth century, as Chinese faced first economic, then political and military pressure from imperialist powers, primarily Britain and France. Defeated in foreign wars – from the Opium Wars of the 1840s, through the first Sino-Japanese War of the 1890s – China was forced to conclude a series of 'unequal treaties' that conceded trading and residence rights, and control over territory and local affairs in treaty ports to foreign powers. These defeats overstretched the material resources of the state, leaving China vulnerable to further external challenges and internal disruption, and eroded the legitimacy of the Qing dynasty and eventually of the imperial order itself. The governments of the new republic had little more success than their predecessors in resisting external pressure, and the first decades of republican rule were marked first by further economic and political losses and then by the traumas of all-out war with Japan in the 1930s and 1940s. This period is now most commonly remembered in China as a century of 'national humiliation' (Cohen 2003), and the insistence that the past was to be remembered above

all as a series of mistakes that must not be repeated was a common element in reformist and revolutionary thinking in the twentieth century.

## Self, community and nation in the early twentieth century

The traumatic encounter with foreign imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries forced China to re-evaluate its place in the world. While the revolution of 1911 replaced the dynastic order with a new republic, it did not resolve either the practical problems or the wider anxieties that had emerged in the previous century. Through the 'May Fourth' era of the 1910s and 1920s, this continuing failure fuelled an energetic questioning of the core principles that governed Chinese society and its future. Many prominent debates revolved around political philosophies: did anarchism or Marxism offer practical answers to China's problems? Could democracy be made to work in Chinese conditions? At the same time, though, questions of identity ran through the discussions: could 'Chinese traditions' be adapted to the modern world? What would be gained or lost by the adoption of foreign ideas or foreign technologies? How should individual Chinese understand their own place within communities such as family, workplace or native place? How did these smaller, face-to-face communities relate to China as a whole? What were citizens of the new republic expected to do, or know, or be (Chow 1967)?

This also marked a new interest in nationalism. The foreign powers that had defeated China in the wars of the past decades were understood to be driven and directed by a sense of nation that defined a collective project and set out the responsibilities of individuals to the national community. Reformers such as Liang Qichao and revolutionaries such as Sun Yat-sen argued that one of China's great failings was the absence of any shared sense of national interest and the obscuring of a sense of national community by loyalties to native place, family and status group, and that this had left China vulnerable in the face of foreign pressure and allowed its relegation to inferior status in its dealings with foreign powers (Bergere 1998). Discussions of nationalism therefore drew in both outward-facing questions of international status and inward-facing questions of cohesion and community. While the outward-facing questions have historically attracted more attention, their impact on the ground – like foreign pressure in China – was extremely uneven and they have rarely formed the basis of a persuasive and durable nationalism. The inward-facing questions, of how the national community was to be understood and taken to heart by its members, have been less visible but equally intractable.

We see these questions through the writings of Chinese intellectuals, but they touched on problems that other Chinese faced every day. Economic development in the cities and pressure on farmers in the countryside created new opportunities and new insecurities, forced many to seek new sources of income and encouraged migration to cities. This produced changes that went far beyond intellectual life. By the 1920s, for example, women were far more

likely to work outside the home, not only in traditional occupations such as domestic service but also in factories, department stores, offices and schools; and this, as much as the early debates on feminism and the traditional status of Chinese women, presented them with new challenges and new choices (Goodman and Larson 2005).

Both abstract and practical questions were discussed in the expanding Chinese press (Reed 2004). Newspapers had circulated in China in the nineteenth century and had been influential in supplementing informal, personal communication among officials and the educated classes about current events and the state of the empire. Now, however, the very rapid expansion and diversification of the print media in the 1910s and 1920s changed the whole game. Scholars have pointed to the role that the print media have had in shaping nationalism in other societies (Anderson 1983); while the readership for newspapers in China was still limited by low literacy levels and constraints on distribution, many more people now had direct, personal access to a far greater variety of content and opinion on both national and social matters. Highbrow journals such as Chen Duxiu's *New Youth* have been extensively examined for their discussions on the new literature, science and democracy and high-level reform; but Shanghai's flourishing tabloid press, with its coverage of celebrities, scandals and social anxieties, attracted a wider audience, one which had not only some appetite for sensationalism but possibly also first-hand experience of the economic uncertainties, the pressures on working women, and the compromises and detours required to survive in a new China that underpinned the tabloid dramas (Goodman 2005).

## New revolutionary communities after 1949

The establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 was hailed as the creation of a 'new China', the point at which the Chinese people had 'stood up' after centuries of oppression by landlords, bureaucrats and foreign invaders. New China required that a new Chinese people come forward as citizens of the new order; while much of the rhetoric of the early People's Republic focused on building socialism, nation-building and identity formation, assertively championed by Party and state, were also important parts of the project.

Many key reforms of the 1950s and 1960s therefore served both practical and nation-building ends. Land Reform was presented as a step towards securing the welfare of China's farmers and making agriculture more productive in order to feed a new population of industrial workers. At the same time, it overturned traditional rural socio-economic hierarchies and gave every family a class label – poor, middle or rich peasant, or landlord – that defined their place in the new order. The expansion of primary education was designed to eradicate illiteracy and build the basic skills needed for national economic development and modernisation; it also instilled revolutionary and national values as a counterweight to local and traditional cultures. The

policies of the Great Leap Forward were championed as a means to catapult China into international economic pre-eminence, but their application also became a test of loyalty and dedication.

These efforts to transform the present and future were accompanied by a radical reinterpretation of China's past, and the reshaping of understandings of national histories was central to the Party's training of its own members, its rehabilitation of outsiders, and its socialisation of the citizens of new China. Workplace and community meetings, the media, and art forms such as cinema drew mass audiences into emotional engagement with stories of China's recent history and people were encouraged to consider their experiences and past actions within that national context (Apter and Saich 1994). The revolutionary epic *The East is Red* (1965) echoes these strategies. This 'play-within-a-film' charted the humiliations suffered by China at the hands of foreign imperialists and traditional Chinese elites and the rise of the Communist Party as China's saviour, connecting that national journey from oppression to liberation with common experience. An opening framing sequence tracks across central Beijing and follows an audience into the auditorium where the drama is ostensibly staged: wherever and in whatever company we see the film, we begin watching over the shoulders of another audience in which families, the elderly, blue- and white-collar workers and members of China's minority nationalities were all represented.

Broadcasting and the print media – now owned by the state – were also important in instilling a sense of the nature and mission of the national community. The competing voices of the pre-war media had gone and were replaced by a striking uniformity in tone and content. Consumption of the media message was also a communal activity, and many would read a newspaper publicly displayed on a glass-fronted notice board rather than buying a personal copy, or hear the radio broadcast over loudspeakers in a workplace canteen. Finally, images of the new China were ever present in propaganda posters displayed in homes and workplaces. As well as rallying support and raising awareness of specific campaigns, these displayed models of the new Chinese citizen at work, study and (occasionally) leisure (IISH and Landsberger n.d.). The meanings of these nameless models were explored in depth through revolutionary martyrs and exemplars whose life stories became patterns, for the new ideal Chinese. The most famous of these was Lei Feng (雷锋, 1940–1962), the orphaned son of a poor family who lived only to serve the revolution and his army comrades through modest acts of selflessness and came to prominence in 1963 after an accidental death. Other models too, such as peasant organiser Fang Zhimin (方志敏, 1899–1935) and cadre Jiao Yulu (焦裕禄, 1922–1964) formed part of a cult of 'red martyrdom' that was reflected in public monuments and commemorations and reinforced by constant exhortations to learn from their examples.

This intensive, top-down work of moulding new identities left little visible space for negotiation, though we should question how fully this identity discourse was accepted by most Chinese: how many recognised enough of their

own lives and experiences in revolutionary propaganda to accept the models of identity that accompanied it; how many presented an appearance of compliance in pursuit of a quiet life. Here again new scholarship is beginning to tease out some of the personal and local experiences behind the official stories, suggesting that official identity discourse was adapted and complicated by place, gender and status (Lee and Yang 2007); and work in China in the past decade – the monumental chronicle of the Great Leap (1959–1961) famine of the early 1960s produced by historian journalist Yang Jisheng; memory works on the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution – produced or sponsored by independent documentary-makers Wu Wenguang and Hu Jie.[6]

## Modernisation, globalisation and the re-imagining of China

As we examine China today, we find the forces shaping identity shifting ever more rapidly. Attitudes to the past, to traditional culture, and to the regions within China are all changing; dramatic economic development is allowing the more fortunate to define themselves in terms of their new choices in work and leisure, while at the same time creating a growing gap between rich and poor, urban and rural. The work of community-building, both in the immediate communities of place and profession and in virtual communities online, is becoming more complex. The voice of the state, which was at one time almost the only voice audible in discussions over the nature and future of 'China', is still privileged over competing voices in public discourse; at the same time, the authorities as aspiring identity-builders are becoming more sophisticated, and more instrumental, in their presentations of China as they understand it to a range of audiences.

Efforts to create reformed citizens for a reforming China continue, both in official discourses of 'civility' (*wenming*) and 'quality' (*suzhi*) and in the search for new models of identity. The cult of Lei Feng was revived in the 1990s, yet the search for exemplars has extended somewhat to encompass other qualities and achievements. Thus, on one hand, changes in official media content, notably in the rising use of human interest stories to illuminate social issues, allow community and model qualities to be identified in the everyday, without constant recourse to icons on the scale of Lei Feng; on the other hand, the appetite for contemporary biography (Chua 2009), celebrity lives and fictional treatments of real-life dilemmas has engaged commercial interests in the negotiation of identity; and rising access to the Internet, blogs and micro-blogs is creating new spaces for representation and community-building. In that context, where pluralism and contention are thinkable even where they are constrained, the building blocks of identity in place, culture and history are being reshaped to meet new needs.

The meanings of place in China have shifted dramatically with rapid, but uneven, economic development and rising personal mobility. Major cities such as Shanghai – and to a lesser extent many others on the eastern seaboard – are bound into global networks of trade and consumerism. They

present a self-consciously cosmopolitan face to the world and are developed as magnets for financial and human capital and as the motors of China's future. The speed of this development is in stark contrast to conditions in poorer inland regions, despite government efforts to reduce the disparity; this rising inequality has a potentially corrosive effect on national community as it calls into question the extent to which coastal and inland regions can be seen to be partners and beneficiaries in a shared project. While coastal development has been heavily dependent on labour migration and the displacement of growing numbers of Chinese from poorer regions, legal and social discrimination against migrant workers in the cities has underlined the fissures within the China-wide community. Discussions of local cultures by some inland provincial leaderships have aimed to address this problem on two levels, working to enhance provincial economic status by promoting the province as a destination for inward investment, but constructing local cultures as more authentically Chinese than those of coastal provinces, and as untainted by the problems that have come with rapid development (Oakes 2000).

As economic development provides new opportunities – for some, at least – social identity is defined increasingly in terms of wealth, occupation, and consumption of goods or services, from restaurants to electronic media. In this context of greater pluralism, traditional cultures too are becoming more visible; but the apparently familiar figures of Confucianism and religious Buddhism are made to serve contemporary uses. After a century in disrepute, Confucius is becoming respectable again and 'Confucian' private schools in Chinese cities are attracting media attention (*BBC News* 2008), and this may suggest a hankering in some quarters for traditional values; but the figure of Confucius is also deployed in the global branding of China, in the expanding programme of cultural outreach and soft power run through the new network of 'Confucius Institutes'.[7] Traditional religion, too, is adapting to new social landscapes. In some areas, local temples are as central to the building of identity and community and to practical public works projects as they are to worship; in others, they are tied into transnational networks of patronage and nostalgia (Chau 2006).

Finally, China's recent and distant pasts are still under reinterpretation. Some aspects of the past have become assets to be displayed and commodified, as tourist destinations for domestic and foreign travellers, or as World Heritage sites, such as the tomb of the first emperor near Xi'an or the imperial Summer Palace in Beijing; and archaeological finds are a prominent topic in the official press (*People's Daily* 2010), emphasising that to be Chinese is to inherit one of the world's great cultures. Other histories are more contentious, as even a cursory glance at Chinese cinema demonstrates. Chinese films set in the past – from art-house fare such as *Farewell My Concubine* (Chen Kaige 1993) to blockbusters such as *Hero* (Zhang Yimou 2002) – are familiar to western audiences as exotic, visually sumptuous experiences; but Chinese audiences appear to examine historical content more critically. While *Hero* attracted massive audiences in China, it was criticised

for masking the darker aspects of the career of the first emperor Qin Shi Huangdi with a glossy, Hollywood-style wrapper (Wang 2009). Although it is often films that attract official criticism – Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Blue Kite* (1993), which covers the Cultural Revolution, and Jiang Wen's bitter war comedy *Devils on the Doorstep* (2000) – that receive most attention overseas, the case of *Hero* suggests that histories old and new matter to Chinese mass audiences as well.

These sensitivities are particularly acute when recent history is discussed. On the one hand, Chinese suffering during the war with Japan (1937–1945) is a common point of reference both for survivors of the war and for younger Chinese, and this collective understanding of Chinese victimisation can be mobilised in support of anti-Japanese commentary in the press and in public demonstrations. As the war passes from personal, living memory, its place in collective memory and its value in identity-building depend on the retelling of the wartime story in schools, in the media and in public monuments, on the marking of anniversaries and on unresolved contentions such as territorial or island disputes. On the other hand, though, literary reinventions of the past – for example in the works of Mo Yan and Yu Hua – are often more sceptical of those highly visible official narratives.

The foundations of Chinese identity therefore are not fixed. Place, past and culture offer a range of ideas and precedents that can be adopted and adapted to meet the needs of the time, though understandings of those needs may be the subject of debate or dispute between different groups and the processes of identity formation depend on constant negotiation. While it is still the voice of the relatively powerful that is most audible in these debates and negotiations, we can now hear other voices, and see with far greater clarity than was once the case the work involved in securing a common understanding of the nature of the Chinese community and the bonds that draw it together.

## Notes

1 Skinner's macro-regions, and the modern provinces to which each roughly corresponds were: Northeast China (Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang), North China (Hebei, Shandong, Henan), Northwest China (Shanxi, Shaanxi, Gansu), Upper Yangtze (Sichuan), Middle Yangtze (Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi), Lower Yangtze (Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui), Southeast Coast (Zhejiang, Fujian), Lingnan (Guangdong and Guangxi autonomous region), Yungui (Yunnan and Guizhou); Skinner 1977: 212–16.
2 The work of John King Fairbank was tremendously influential in early twentieth-century English-language scholarship on China; for a detailed critical discussion of his legacy, see Cohen 1984.
3 Benjamin Elman's homepage at www.princeton.edu/~elman/ gives electronic access to much of his work on Confucianism.
4 There are numerous historical surveys of China; the best concise recent work is probably Ropp 2010.
5 This is most visible in the mid-twentieth-century scholarship on China – again, see Cohen 1984 for a fuller discussion – but the assumptions underlying the 'unchanging China' construct survived for longer in 'world histories' such as Braudel 1995.

6   For an introduction to Wu's work, see the Duke University Library Digital Collections at http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/memoryproject/.
7   See the online presence of the Confucius institutes at http://about.chinese.cn/en/.

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# 3    Rituals and the life cycle

*Lucy Zhao*

Studying rites (or rituals) in the life cycle facilitates our understanding of a society. Different societies have developed distinctive rituals to demarcate, regulate, and commemorate the different stages of life. In this chapter I consider rites as social behaviour that is determined by the society, with individuals having little choice about their definitions and execution. I do not seek the root(s) of a popular rite or rites in China. Nor do I try to explain why some traditional rites have faded away whereas others are still being practised. Rather, I introduce readers to some major rituals that are related to some key milestones in the life cycle among Han Chinese, who represent some 91 per cent of the total population in the People's Republic of China (see Chapter 9): birth and childhood, entry into adulthood, marriage, retirement and old age, and death and memorial celebrations.

## Birth and childhood

For many centuries considerations were given to childbirth before the marriage ceremony, and proactive measures were taken to boost the fertility of the wife after the marriage. In some parts of China, married couples went to the temple to pray to *songzi guanyin*, a goddess who was believed to decide if a couple deserved to have a child or children and made sure that the couple received the child or children. It was considered very important for a married couple to produce children to carry the family name into the next generation. In fact, having a child was the most important criterion for judging whether a woman deserved to be a wife and whether a man was filial. As a Chinese saying goes, *bu xiao you san, wu hou wei da* ('there are three types of upmost unfilial behaviour, among which the worst one is to produce no heir') (Liu and Li 2008: 2). A woman with wide hips was considered to be fertile and hence a desirable bride. A son was much preferred to a daughter to such an extent that only the names and achievements of sons were recorded in the family log and clan chronology. Although these beliefs and practices have ceased to prevail, especially among the educated urban population, the influence is still strong enough for hospitals not to disclose the gender of the foetus to would-be parents for fear that a female foetus would be aborted.

Unlike in the West, it is uncommon in China to throw a baby shower before the birth. In fact, many consider such a practice to be a possible jinx. Traditionally, the maternal grandmother prepares the whole layette for the child before the due date. In some parts of China, she sends a package to her daughter one month before the due date to speed up the delivery, placing a piece of white cloth inside. After the baby is born, the mother is supposed to wrap the baby with this.

Nowadays, the delivery usually takes place in hospital. The mother and newborn baby will stay in the hospital from three to seven days. Most Chinese believe that labour greatly weakens a woman's body and that the first month after birth has an essential bearing on the health of the mother for the rest of her life. A Chinese woman is encouraged to *zuo yuezi* for one month after childbirth – that is, she is supposed to rest and to refrain from all household chores (Liu and Li 2008: 2–4). The paternal or maternal grandmother normally comes to help during this critical period of time. Hiring a *yuesao* (a woman professionally trained to take care of new mothers and babies) is gaining popularity in China. There are a lot of taboos associated with this month. Traditionally, the new mother was not supposed to shower or wash her hair during *yuezi* for fear that her body was too weak to handle the water and it would result in long-term migraines. She could instead be sponged with certain herbal waters. The use of cold water by the mother was prohibited. Young Chinese women tend to take a mid-way solution. They shower during *yuezi*, but take extra care not to expose themselves to cold air. Food is also carefully chosen and prepared for the mother. Cold drinks and uncooked food (such as fruit) are off-limits. Food such as fish soup and pig-trotter soup is often prepared, as it is believed that these help the mother produce plenty of milk for the baby.

The general practice is that only close relatives such as paternal and maternal parents can visit the mother and her baby during the month of *yuezi*. More distant relatives and friends visit the mother and baby after the first month, although they probably send gifts beforehand. It used to be the grandparents' responsibility to dispatch cooked eggs dyed with red paper to friends and relatives to celebrate the birth of the child, but this practice is dying out. In many places, new parents hold a large party at the end of this month and invite all their family and their friends to eat out in a good restaurant.

The baby's first jewellery from his/her parents or grandparents is a gold or silver bangle called *changeming suo* ('longevity lock') for the wrist or ankle. In ancient times it was difficult for babies to survive due to harsh living conditions and insufficient medical care. But infant mortality was often attributed to evil spirits. Symbolically, the longevity lock was supposed to hold the baby in this world and keep evil spirits away. The practice continues today even in urban China, the longevity lock still expressing the parents' wish that their child will live a long life.

The parents host a banquet to celebrate the child's first birthday with relatives and friends. It is a tradition to give the child a bowl of changshou *mian* ('longevity noodles') on the birthday as goodwill gesture to ensure the child will live a long life. The child has his/her longevity noodles again on every subsequent birthday. Another important ritual on the child's first birthday – and in fact the highlight – is *zhuazhou* ('the choosing ceremony on the first birthday') (Liu and Li 2008: 5–6). The parents prepare an assortment of articles, including a seal, brushes and an abacus, for the child to pick after the birthday banquet. Each of the articles symbolises a unique career ambition and future occupation. If the baby picks an abacus, for example, the parents and their guests will assert that he/she will be an accountant in adulthood. If the baby picks a seal, the parents and their guests will assert that he/she will become a government official when grown-up. This is because government officials used seals for official documents in ancient China. If the child selects a brush, the parents and their guests will assert that he/she will become a scholar. In one of the Chinese classics, *Dreams in the Red Mansion*, the main male character (Jia Baoyu) picked rouge and powder at his *zhuazhou* ceremony. Later in life he grew up to be a person who loved mingling with girls. It is said that Mr. Qian Zhongshu, a renowned writer in China, picked a book at his *zhuazhou* ceremony, much to his father's delight; he was consequently named *Zhongshu*, meaning 'to like books'. His later achievements made him a significant example for believers of *zhuazhou*. Today, *zhuazhou* is mostly for fun and the results of *zhuanzhou* are no longer taken seriously. The assortment of articles used to vary between boys and girls. Nowadays, boys and girls get the same assortment in most places.

## Entry into adulthood

As most Chinese mothers work full time, children are normally sent to kindergarten at a young age. In families that do not for some reason have the help of grandparents, the child may be sent to a kindergarten at one or two years old. Most children go to primary school at the age of six. They stay in the education system for at least nine years. When a child gets admitted to a university, his/her family's friends congratulate his/her parents with gifts in the form of money in a red packet. The parents treat their friends to a great banquet in return. If the family is very well connected, these banquets can go on for several days. It is consequently difficult to book a table in a good restaurant in August when the results of the university matriculation exams are announced.

In imperial China there were rituals marking the passage from childhood to adulthood, i.e. the *guan* and the *ji* ceremonies (Liu and Li 2008: 10–11). The *guan* ceremony took place when a young man reached the age of 20. It was organised by a respectable senior member of his relatives in his clan's ancestral temple on a carefully chosen, auspicious day. The senior member would coil the young man's hair into a bun, place three caps on his head and give

him an adult name with a desirable connotation. After the *guan* ceremony the young man would be regarded as an adult and accorded both the responsibilities and rights of an adult. For example, he would be eligible for marriage and, in some cases, he would be given or asked to manage part of the family business as an adult member of his family. The equivalent event for a young girl was the *ji* ceremony, which took place when she reached the age of 15. On that day, her hair would be gathered up and fastened with a *ji* ('hairpin') and she would be given a grown-up name. After the *ji* ceremony she was regarded as an adult woman and eligible for marriage. Of course, poor families were less likely than well-off families to hold the *guan* and *ji* ceremonies for their sons and daughters. Ethnic minority groups in China have their own adulthood ceremonies, and many are still practised today.

For Han Chinese, the *guan* and *ji* ceremonies are long gone. With the recent interest in Confucian traditions, however, there are voices in favour of reviving the practice. But the difficulty is that there are no commonly accepted ceremonies to mark the coming of age for Han Chinese today – in particular, it is problematical for people to identify an age that signifies the entry into adulthood. According to the Chinese Constitution, individuals can cast their votes when they reach 18. However, in China individuals are not socially regarded as independent grown-ups until they are married. The legal age for getting married in China is 22 for men and 20 for women. But the legal marriage age cannot be used to indicate entry into adulthood because few people get married when they reach the legal age for marriage: more and more people marry quite late. Part of the reason for this is high real estate prices and the intense competition for jobs in China. For many Chinese parents, their children are not grown-up until they are financially independent and have their own dwelling.

## Weddings

Marriage is one of the most important events for individuals worldwide. The Chinese are no exception. For a woman in traditional China, marrying the right man was considered to be 'as important as a man choosing the right occupation', as the Chinese saying goes, and it was celebrated accordingly. A marriage ceremony involves numerous rituals and it is where traditional rituals are most retained in contemporary Chinese society.

Matchmaking was a key mate selection method in traditional China. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, though, free choice, love and romance have increasingly become the criteria for mate selection (Zang 2011). Matchmaking has not been totally phased out, however, but it is arranged between mate seekers rather than between the parents of the mate seekers, and it generally takes a more subtle form than before. For example, a matchmaker may gather a group of people together along with the mate seekers to liven up the atmosphere and make the occasion less awkward.

On some occasions, even though the couple has already decided to get married, the groom's parents still find a matchmaker to visit the bride's parents to officially ask for their permission for the would-be couple to marry. The matchmaker arranges for the two families to meet and get to know each other over a meal. The groom's family then sends betrothal gifts to thank the bride's parents for their efforts in raising the bride. The kind and amount of betrothal gifts have changed over time. The gifts traditionally included tea, poultry, and so on. Later they became things such as furniture that the would-be couple could use after marriage. When TVs and fridges were introduced to China, it was fashionable to use them as the betrothal gifts. At one point, gold jewellery was popular. Cash has been used as a betrothal gift for some time, and the amount has been rising. By accepting the gifts, the bride's parents pledge her to the groom. The bride's parents prepare the dowry for their daughter. This may take the form of a wardrobe in which there are red duvets, normally with a phoenix and peony pattern (Liu and Li 2008: 17). Other colours are also used in present-day China. The betrothal gifts and the dowry vary a lot from place to place. In most cases it is the outcome of negotiation between the groom's family and the bride's family. Theoretically, the larger the betrothal gift, the more 'face' (respect and esteem) it gives to the bride's family; it is also used by the groom's parents to publicise their wealth and enhance their status in local society. The dowry from the bride's family performs similar social functions.

If the bride and groom choose to have a collective wedding ceremony organised by professional wedding planners, they and their parents have little say over the dates. However, most would-be couples organise their own ceremony and select their own wedding date. If both the bride and groom are working professionals, it is likely that they pick a public holiday so they can have a longer honeymoon in combination with their marriage leave. Some would-be couples or their parents check the lunar calendar and select an auspicious day for the wedding. Once the date is set, the two families work out a guest list and send out the wedding invitations, which are often red and gold and seldom white. White is the funeral colour; it does not symbolise purity in traditional Chinese culture. Not everyone in China is ready to embrace the Western tradition of using white for weddings. Even if white is used, it is often toned down with pink or other colours.

The wedding is a very good opportunity to maintain social relations for the families of the bride and the groom. Gifts are given to the groom's parents in the form of a red packet with cash in it. The amount of cash in the red packet varies from a nominal amount to a large sum. It is not deemed inappropriate to send the gifts before one receives the invitation. The groom's family makes a detailed record of the people from whom they receive gifts, as gift-exchanging is strictly reciprocal in China. They will give gifts of at least the same value when there is occasion. As in other cultures, the arrangement of the guest tables is always a painstaking process, requiring detailed attention to the

status of the guests. It is common to seat people who know each other or who are from the same firm at the same table.

There is an increasingly popular practice of having one's wedding photos taken by a professional photographer after the marriage is agreed on but before the actual wedding ceremony takes place. The couple makes an appointment with a photographic studio, which provides make-up artists, hairdressers and a whole selection of costumes for the couple to choose from. The photo-shoots are done both inside the studio and in scenic places recommended by the photographer or chosen by the would-be couple.

The couple must register their intention to marry with the local Bureau of Civil Affairs to make their marriage legally binding. Most would-be couples do so before the wedding ceremony. Two marriage certificates with a photo of the couple will be issued. At that point the marriage becomes legal and is fully protected by the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China. However, most would-be couples, their parents and other people like to think that a couple become married at the wedding ceremony.

Traditionally, on the day of the wedding a groom meets his bride with a sedan and horse. Some grooms still do so, but this practice is a rarity nowadays. The modern wedding ceremony is a combination of traditional Chinese elements and Western wedding elements. It normally takes place in a grand restaurant. It is a tradition for the groom or his family to prepare and pay for the wedding ceremony. A professional wedding firm is hired to help decorate the restaurant, the wedding car and the marital home. This includes putting up 'double happiness' cut paper on the doors, windows and other places in the marital home. The traditional colour for weddings is red, so the decorations are mostly red. Similarly, the wedding car is decorated with red rose bouquets and ribbons. But increasingly other colours are also used. The seats in the restaurant have covers that are often in shades of red, pink or gold. Since people like to get married on an auspicious day, a restaurant often hosts several weddings on the same day. Thus, a big poster with a photo of the bride and groom and their names is placed in front of the dining hall to make sure the guests arrive at the right venue. There is often a pink or flower arch either outside the restaurant or in front of the platform in the dining hall. The wedding firm will put a triangle-shaped or heart-shaped rack of wine glasses or candles in front of the platform.

Everything on the wedding bed is supposed to be new. The groom's parents will put on red duvet covers, pillowcases and sheets. In some places there is a practice of putting dates, peanuts and walnuts under the corners of the sheets because they resemble the words that express good wishes. The dates are there to convey the wish for the new wife to conceive soon. The peanuts signify that many children will be born – and both boys and girls – out of this marriage. The walnuts symbolise harmony and happiness. On the night before the wedding ceremony, the groom's parents also have boys and girls roll on the bed, again as a good omen that the couple will have both boys and girls.

Unlike weddings in the West that tend to start in the afternoon, the wedding ceremony in China often starts in the morning. The bride either has her hair done the night before or gets up early to have her hair and the make-up done. The groom and his attendants, including the best man, set off early in the wedding car to pick up the bride from her parents' home, followed by a parade of cars of the same colour. It is a big show and a matter of 'face' for the bride and the groom, so the groom tends to hire the best cars he can afford. The groom normally arrives at the bride's home around 10.00 a.m. Firecrackers are set off when he arrives. He will be stopped at the door by the bride's friends, including the bridesmaid, who do not 'give away' the bride until they are satisfied by the groom's answers to their questions or requests and until they get sufficient cash in red packets. This is the occasion of much good-natured wordplay and haggling before the two parties reach an agreement (Liu and Li 2008: 17–18). Once the groom is let into the bride's room, the bridesmaid prepares tea for the couple to serve the bride's parents as a way of showing respect and gratitude to them. The bridesmaid also gives sweet soup to the would-be couple, signifying that they will have a sweet life together. Traditionally, the bride's brother or other relatives carried the bride out of the house, as an indication that the bride was being sent away from her maiden home. Now this has increasingly become the groom's privilege. In many places the bride's feet are not supposed to touch the ground at any point from her parents' home to the marital home. Unlike the Western tradition, the bride and the groom are both seated in the wedding car.

In traditional China, the bride was supposed to be in tears when she left her parents' home, but this is rarely followed nowadays. The wedding costume for the groom is a black suit with a red tie. The traditional costume was red for the bride, but this has been replaced by a white wedding dress for the first part of the wedding ceremony. There is no taboo that the groom shall not see the bride's wedding dress before the wedding ceremony. As a matter of fact, the bride and the groom are likely to choose the dress together. Unlike the Western tradition, the bride arrives at the restaurant with the groom before their guests. They stand at the gate of the restaurant with the parents to greet their guests. The wedding ceremony is hosted by a professional MC. After the guests arrive and are seated, the ceremony begins. Rose petals or coloured ribbons will be thrown at the bride and the groom when they walk to the platform. There can be various procedures during the ceremony, depending on the MC. One is that the bride and the groom pour wine into a rack of wine glasses or light candles. This is a new ritual for Chinese weddings, possibly inspired by the cake-cutting ritual at wedding ceremonies in the West. During the ceremony, the bride serves tea to the groom's parents and changes to addressing them as parents. When this happens, the parents-in-law give a red packet with cash to the bride. Representatives of the bride, the groom and a guest representative then deliver congratulatory speeches. The ceremony finishes at noon and then the feasting starts. This is when the groom's drinking ability is put to the test. By then the bride has changed to a traditional

Chinese wedding dress or another type of dress that is easier to walk in. The bride and the groom, accompanied by the bridesmaid and the best man, go to each table and make a toast. The bridesmaid and the best man are expected to come to the rescue if the bride and the groom have too much to drink.

After dinner, some young relatives and friends will go to the marital house and start to *nao dongfang*, i.e. 'tease the bride and the groom and play practical jokes on them'. A frequent activity is to dangle an apple on a thread and make the bride and the groom bite it at the same time. Another is to make the couple drink wine with their arms crossed. Traditionally, *nao dongfang* was a ritual used to gather healthy young people to liven up the room so that evil spirits would be driven out of the marital house and it would be ready for the wedding night.

## Years of calamity

Like the Western Zodiac, the Chinese has a cycle of 12 guiding animals: rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog and pig. Unlike the Western Zodiac, the 12 guiding animals rotate on a yearly basis (Wang and Lu 2008: 5–6). The year of one's own guiding animal is one's *benmingnian*. Thus, people encounter their *benmingnian* at the age of 12, 24, 36, 48, 60, 72, and so on. It is a common belief that life is not going to be smooth for people in their *benmingnian*. They are more vulnerable to illness and/or other misfortunes and need to be especially cautious. People are often recommended to wear something red around their waists for protection during their *benmingnian*. A piece of red underwear and a red belt are popular items, for the simple reason that they are less visible. Some people also visit Buddhist or Taoist temples to pray to gods and obtain amulets. Some Taoist priests carry out rituals for people in their *benmingnian* or give instructions for them to conduct certain rituals to eliminate potential misfortunes. With rapid economic growth and rising living standards, Chinese people pay increasing attention to personal health and more and more people are vigilant in their *benmingnian*. The older they are, the more likely they are to take the measures they can afford to protect them from potential misfortunes.

## Retirement and old age

The majority of the population in China live in rural areas. They do not have a retirement age because they are not protected by the government welfare system and do not have a pension. Urban workers in the private sector retire from work if they save a sufficient amount of money or cannot find a job. Urban employees in state enterprises and government agencies retire at age 60 if they are men and at 50 or 55 if they are women. The earlier retirement age for women is partly based on the assumption that men are providers and women are homemakers. The Chinese Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security is about to review the retirement age for women in the state sector,

considering factors such as the employment situation, gender equity, and social security (Xinhua 2011), for the sake of equality and fairness.

When some state workers retire, they try to find a new job to get some extra income. Others prefer to spend time on leisure activities. A lot of retirees in urban China take on the important responsibility of minding grandchildren and doing household chores for adult children who work full-time and cannot afford or do not want to hire a maid. For some female retirees it is fashionable to practise dancing with a dance group in parks on early mornings and/or in senior entertainment centres in the evening. Some male retirees kill time by learning Chinese chess strategies, tactics and rules or drinking tea with their friends. There are senior entertainment centres in many cities in China. They provide a good venue for the activities mentioned above. Many retirees, men or women, attend senior colleges. Chinese painting is a popular subject, as it is believed to nurture the soul and help develop a calm temperament. Some retirees take part in charity events and other activities.

The sixtieth birthday is considered a particularly important birthday in China. The children of the family will organise a grand dinner to which relatives and close family friends are invited. Perhaps due to the collective nature of Chinese culture, the interests of the parents and the children are closely related. People who wish to maintain a good relationship with the children often send them gifts on their parents' birthdays.

## Death and memorial celebrations

The burial of the deceased is a serious business. Dealing with it the wrong way makes the family of the deceased a laughing stock in the local community and it is believed may bring bad fortune to the family. Age is an important factor in the choice of the form of the funeral service. If a baby or child dies, he/she will be buried in silence. No funeral rites will be performed at all. The same applies to an unmarried bachelor. But when an elderly person passes away, a 'proper' funeral is called for, otherwise his/her children can be accused of being unfilial. This is where Confucianism still demonstrates its influence. The children are supposed to show their devotion to their deceased parent by arranging an impressive funeral (The Ministry of Culture 2003).

When it is judged that a person is close to his/her last breath, the children or other relatives will change him/her into the *shouyi* ('funeral wear'), which will have been prepared by the person or his/her children long before. *Shouyi* is traditionally brown or blue, but nowadays people accept other colours. Before the burial day, the family decorates the mourning hall in white and black. A black and white picture of the deceased is hung on the wall. On the day of the burial, bright colours and jewellery are not considered appropriate and family and relatives wear white linen over their clothes. Friends of the deceased and of his/her family come to pay their final respects, and express their condolences. When the guests leave, the family and relatives accompany

the cinerarium casket to the burial place. In some rural places, the procession to the burial place can be quite a spectacle. Members of the family and relatives wrapped in white linen walk in single file. They are accompanied by musicians playing sad funeral music. In some urban areas, funeral parlours provide places for the cinerarium caskets (Liu and Li 2008: 19–20).

Burial places figure strongly in Chinese *fengshui* culture. A burial place with good *fengshui* is supposed to be able to protect and bring good fortune to the descendants for years to come. (There are numerous stories from Chinese history about someone who strives to get the throne attempting to demolish the rival's ancestral tomb to stop him/her from getting the position of power.) After the casket is buried, the family may burn some coarse white or yellow paper, which is supposed to be the currency in the other world. This tradition is particularly followed in rural areas of China. Food and fruit are placed in front of the burial place as sacrifice.

After the funeral, the family makes a sacrifice every seven days for 49 days; this is called *zuoqi* ('to do the sevens'). The fifth day of sacrifice is when most rituals take place (Liu and Li 2008: 20–1). During this period, the family hosts a meal for relatives and friends. The family hires Buddhist monks to pray for the deceased's soul. Some people prefer Taoist priests to perform rituals. Another round of sacrifice takes place a hundred days after the death. Then the frequency of the sacrifice reduces to once a year for three years. Most people visit and clean their parents' graves on the annual *Qingming Festival* or *Tomb Sweeping Day*, which varies slightly from year to year but is usually around 4–6 April (Liu and Li 2008: 116–18; Wang and Lu 2008: 29–31).

Before 1949 the body was buried. Now it is normally cremated in a state-run crematorium, partly because it is very expensive to buy burial ground and partly because the government has promoted cremation as a clean and relatively inexpensive way to dispose of the body. Cremated remains are buried or immured in memorial sites or cemeteries, or retained by the surviving children. All crematoria are run by the government and cremation has become big business; it can be very expensive.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I introduce readers to some milestones in the life cycle of the Han Chinese: birth and childhood, entry into adulthood, marriage, retirement and old age, and death and memorial celebrations. I would like to point out that I discuss the associated rites at a general level. There can be different rites for the same life event in China at different historical periods. In addition, rites change over time. Some traditional rites have been passed down, while others – such as the *guan* and *ji* ceremonies – have faded away from daily life. New rites appear due to exposure to other societies and cultures. It is equally important to point out that not everyone in China practises the same rites. People practise some rites but not others, and certain rites are

practised in some places but not in others. There are also differences in adherence to rites related to age, gender, class, and so on. Ethnic minority groups in China perform different rituals. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this chapter helps readers advance their understanding of Chinese people with a little information about the main rituals in Chinese society.

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# 4 Family and marriage

*Xiaowei Zang*

Chapter 3 discusses some aspects of marriage (especially wedding ceremonies) in China. This chapter examines other aspects of marriage, such as mate selection and divorce. In addition it looks at the institution of the family in China. There have been profound changes in the family and marriage since the nineteenth century due to industrialization, urbanization, Western influence and, post-1949, the political campaigns of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Nevertheless, the family has remained a fundamental social unit in Chinese society, as Chinese people have continued to rely on the family to both meet basic human needs – mating, reproduction, the bringing up of children and care for the old – and respond to new trends in employment, education, housing, etc.

## Family structure

It is widely believed that, in traditional China, many people lived in large, multi-generation families. A typical extended household is thought to consist of five generations living together under one roof, sharing a common purse and common stove, under one family head. Some scholars have claimed that 'the so-called large, extended, or joint form of the family was commonplace' in China (Cohen, 1976: xiii). Wolf (1985) finds that in nine districts in northern Taiwan between 1906 and 1946, more than 70 per cent of the population lived in 'stem' families in which parents lived with a son, his spouse and his children. Wolf's findings are supported by research on mainland China by Lee and Gjerde (1986) and Lee and Campbell (1998).

Other scholars, however, argue that in reality, extended families with five generations living together were rare. Eastman (1988: 16) estimates that the proportion of such extended households might have reached 6 or 7 per cent in the past. Lang (1946: 10) claims that 'the joint family is not and never was the "normal" type of Chinese family'. Freedman (1979: 235) asserts that the large joint family 'could not have existed as a common form of the family because of the statistical fact that the average size of the domestic family was between five and six souls'. Goode thus contends (1963: 296) that in China,

the large multigenerational family appeared to have been 'the ideal exception' and 'a luxury'.

A major reason for the different assessments is data limitation and deficiencies in methodology (Zhao 2000: 266–7). Recent computer microsimulation using both cross-sectional and longitudinal approaches shows that in traditional China, at all specified ages, the proportion of individuals who lived in a five-generation household was well below five per thousand. Ten per cent of them lived in a household with four or more generations at the time of their birth. Living in a four-generation household seemed rather difficult to achieve (Zhao 2000).

Despite the above-mentioned difficulty, large extended households have persisted into contemporary Chinese society. This is remarkable given the rapid social change and the family revolution in China since the nineteenth century. Indeed, most urban Chinese have resided in nuclear families since the 1930s. Increasing urbanization and industrialization since 1949 have contributed further to the movement toward a conjugal family structure. By 1900, over half of urban Chinese families took the nuclear form; by the 1980s this had grown to two-thirds (Zang 1993). Yet extended families with three generations still constituted a substantial proportion of the households in China: 18.3 per cent in 1990 and 19.5 per cent in 1995, respectively. In 2000, 20.1 per cent of all households in China had at least one elderly member aged 65 or above (Zeng and Wang 2003). These households have existed partly because of their utility in the provision of elder care by adult children and of childcare and family services by parents.

Despite the persistence of extended households, available data show the continuous reduction in family size since 1949. Households in traditional China are thought to have been quite large partly because some of them were extended and partly because of high fertility rates. Before the 1950s, the average household in China consisted of more than 5.3 people (Lu 2014). There was a gradual movement towards smaller family size after 1949 due to the increase in the number of nuclear families. Yet it would seem that the major change in family size took place after the 1970s, following the implementation of the one-child birth control policy, and the change has accelerated since the 1990s. The average household shrunk in size from 3.5 persons in 1990 to 2.88 in 2010, and then slightly increased to 2.98 in 2013 (Statista).

Many factors have contributed to the decline of family size in China. For example, household size in China is closely correlated to family income. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, in 2012, households with the lowest income consisted on average of 3.3 people, while households with the highest income consisted of only 2.52 people (Statista). In addition, as Lu (2014) outlines, three other demographics increasingly stand out in the reduction in family size:

> unmarried young workers, couples who have delayed or foregone childbirth, and elderly empty-nesters. One hundred sixty million Chinese

households, or 40 percent of the nationwide total, now consist only of one or two people. In the decade between 2000 and 2010, when urbanization was at full throttle, the number of solo households doubled and the number of two-member households increased by 68 percent.

Last but not least, fertility transition, discussed in some detail below, is also a reason for shrinking family size in China.

## Fertility transition

There was a rapid, sharp fertility decline in China – from total fertility rates of approximately six births to two – between 1970 and 1990. One child is now the dominant mode of family size in major metropolitan areas (Cai 2010: 422, 434; also Cai 2013; Liu and Zhang 2009; Zheng et al. 2009; Retherford et al. 2005). According to China's 2000 census, the total fertility rate (TFR) in the year 2000 was 1.22 children per woman. Yet it is widely believed that this estimate is too low, and this underestimate is attributed to fertility under-reporting that has plagued China's censuses (Morgan, Guo and Hayford 2009: 605). Some scholars assert that the TFR in 2000 was 1.8 children per woman (Retherford et al. 2005: 57). The estimate by the National Bureau of Statistics of China was 1.4 children per woman (Morgan, Guo and Hayford 2009: 605). Retherford et al. (2005) argue that the true level of the TFR in 2000 should be between 1.5 and 1.6 children per woman. Using data from the 1997 National Population and Reproductive Health Survey and from the 2001 Reproductive Health and Family Planning Survey, Morgan, Guo and Hayford (2009) find that the TFR was most likely in the range of 1.4 to 1.6 per woman at the turn of the twenty-first century. Based on the analyses of data from two nationally representative surveys, Wu et al. (2014: 13) show the differences in fertility among different cohorts of Chinese couples: 3.30 children for those married before 1971, 2.23 for those married between 1971 and 1980, 1.75 for those married between 1981 and 1990, and 1.14 for those married after 1991.

There have been heated debates on the main causes of China's demographic transition. Some scholars argue that China's fertility transition has taken a different course from that in other societies due to heavy-handed government intervention. For example, in December 1973, the Chinese government introduced a *Wan, Xi, Shao* (晚, 稀, 少) policy that promoted late marriage and low fertility among Chinese people. In 1979/80 it officially launched the one-child birth control policy which confined couples to one birth only. The one-child programme has been supported by routine surveillance and vigorous enforcement by local governments in both urban neighbourhoods and rural villages (Scharping 2003). Retherford et al. (2005) argue that about two-fifths of the decline in the conventional TFR between 1990 and 2000 was accounted for by later marriage, and three-fifths by declining fertility within marriage. Their analysis also includes the estimates of trends in fertility by urban/

rural residence, education, ethnicity, and migration status. Over time, fertility has declined sharply within all categories of these characteristics, indicating that the one-child policy has had large across-the-board effects. It is thus argued that government intervention has played an important role in fertility decline (also Liu and Zhang 2009). It would be problematical to discuss the demographic transition without reference to the power and determination of the Chinese government to control China's population growth.

However, other scholars argue that China's current low fertility is not simply an intended result of the one-child policy (Chen et al. 2009; Zheng et al. 2009). For example, China's fertility transition shows the rapid fertility decline under the *Wan, Xi, Shao* programme in the 1970s. Yet when the one-child policy was vigorously enforced in the 1980s, the observed fertility level in China hovered above the replacement level with visible ups and downs, a clear reflection of the difficulties in implementing such a draconian policy. Only in the 1990s did China's fertility drop below the replacement level, where it has remained to date (Cai 2010: 422; Coale 1989: 834, 839; Morgan, Guo and Hayford 2009: 608–9).

As another example, Jiangsu province and Zhejiang province have had different fertility policies, yet this pronounced policy difference has not translated into significant difference in observed fertility levels between these two provinces. Development factors explain a much larger proportion of fertility variation in Jiangsu and Zhejiang than do policy factors. After controlling for other factors, the fertility difference between these two provinces is small. The two provinces also have similar variability in fertility at county level. TFRs in Jiangsu range from 0.69 to 1.49, with a mean of 1.01; and TFRs in Zhejiang range from 0.68 to 1.87, with a mean of 1.15 (Cai 2010: 428, 433). Thus, it is argued that the one-child policy has had some effects on birth rates, but structural changes brought about by socioeconomic development and shifts in values and norms on family behaviour have played a key role in China's fertility reduction. Below-replacement fertility in China, as in other societies, is driven to a great extent by social and economic development (Cai 2010: 422, 435; Morgan, Guo and Hayford 2009: 624).

China's below-replacement fertility has social costs and long-term demographic effects such as accelerated population ageing, distorted sex ratios, and changes to the Chinese family and kinship system. For example, China has experienced an unprecedented rise in the sex ratio at birth (ratio of male to female births). There are simply far more male live births than female live births compared to the numbers expected in most other human populations. China's sex ratio at birth in the 1982 census was 108.5, rising to 111.3 in the 1990 census, and worsening to 116.9 in the 2000 census and 118.6 in the 2010 census. The rise of the sex ratio at birth is attributed to fertility decline, the one-child policy, a strong parental desire to have at least one son, and the increasing availability of sex-selection technology (Bhattacharjya et al. 2008: 1,832–3; also Liu and Zhang 2009). In a study of two groups of pregnant women in rural Anhui in 1999, it was found that the sex ratio at birth was 152 males to 100 females as reported by the first group of women, and 159

males to 100 females as reported by the second group of women. It is also found that the risk of death for girls was almost three times that for boys during the first 24 hours of life. The study compares the estimated number of missing girls by parity and pregnancy approval status with the recorded abortions and stillbirths. Selective abortions of female foetuses may contribute most to the extremely high sex ratio for males among newborns (Wu, Viisainen and Hemminki, 2006).

A large-scale study of 4,764,512 people in all of China's 2,861 counties shows that sex ratios were high across all age groups, but they were highest in the age group 1–4 years, peaking at 126:100 in rural areas. Six provinces in China had sex ratios of over 130:100 in the age group 1–4 years. The sex ratio at birth was close to normal for first-order births but rose steeply for second-order births, especially in rural areas, where it reached 146:100. Nine provinces in China had ratios of over 160:100 for second-order births. The highest sex ratios were found in the provinces that allowed rural inhabitants a second child if the first was a girl. This is partly why one study finds that in 2005, males under the age of 20 exceeded females by more than 32 million, and more than 1.1 million excess births of boys occurred (Zhu, Li and Hesketh 2009). There are consequences of the high sex ratio in terms of a male marriage squeeze in China, to be discussed later in this chapter.

## Marriage

In most historical Chinese populations, virtually all women were married by age 30 (Coale 1989: 834). In contrast, not all men were married, and their marriage age varied widely depending on their financial status. Marriage in traditional China had little to do with romance and love. It was instead seen as the transfer of a woman from her family to that of her husband, and the bride's family justifiably demanded financial compensation. A man could not get married unless he was able to pay for a bride (Zhou 2006). The prevalence of paying a bride price was partly related to the male-centred patrilineal family system, and it discouraged parents from raising a daughter since she would be 'married out', representing a loss in parent investment. A 'rational' preference for sons and discrimination against daughters in turn led to an imbalance in the population's sex structure in traditional China (Jiang and Sanchez-Barricarte 2012: 3), and the gap between supply of and demand for brides resulted in a steep increase in competition for – and hence price of – brides in the marriage market. Some families therefore resorted to the practice of purchasing a young girl as their future daughter-in-law (Johnson 1993: 61–87; also Wolf 1980), which can be seen as the investment strategy of the groom's family for meeting the unpredictable future challenges of the marriage market.

In the case of first marriages, the groom's parents negotiated the bride price with the bride's parents, which, once paid, gave them the right to arrange the marriage of their son. Their power also derived from the fact that they 'owned' their child, just like the bride's parents. Unsurprisingly, young people

had very little say about either timing or partner – and the groom and bride did not meet each other until the wedding day, to avoid their spoiling the business transition struck by their parents. All this gave parents effective control over the marriage of their offspring and the continuation of the family line (Parish and Whyte 1978).

There have been significant changes in the institution of marriage in China since the early twentieth century. One study finds that the mean age at first marriage increased from about 17.5 years around 1930 to 18.5 in the 1940s, about 20 in 1970, and about 23 in 1980 (Coale 1989: 834). Another study shows that about 10 per cent of Chinese brides during the 1930s were under 15 years of age; by 1950, early marriage had reduced significantly. In 1994, the average age of women marrying for the first time was 23. Freedom of choice in choosing one's partner has also increased in China since 1900. Parents arranged more than half of all marriages between 1900 and 1938; by 1982, arranged marriages had almost disappeared. By then, four in every five couples married of their own volition. Many young people found their mates themselves. For others, introduction by co-workers, supervisors, friends or relatives was an important way of getting to know the opposite sex before 1978. These changes have been brought about by the forces of industrialization, urbanization, mass education and government policy (Zang 1993). Globalization, the internet, etc. have strengthened the trend towards free love and romance among young people in China. Today, young Chinese men and women enjoy much more freedom in selecting mates than their parents.

However, it is important to point out that love and romance are a necessary but not sufficient precondition for a lasting relationship in China. One study (Jackson et al. 2006) finds that fairy-tale ideals are a major theme for American young adults but not for Chinese young adults. Another study (Buss et al. 1990) examines 37 countries and reports that the Chinese sample differed from other international samples in paying more attention to health, chastity and domestic skills and less to traits such as mutual attraction, dependability and sociability. One plausible explanation is that in collectivistic cultures such as China, family-related or group-related characteristics of the potential mate are more important than romantic love (Dion 1993). Not surprisingly, family influence is still important in marriage decisions in China (Pimentel 2000). A recent study found that parents and friends still had a great influence on marriage decision-making for young Chinese in dating relationships. Young Chinese gave more weight to their family and friends' opinions than to their own views. They agreed that approval by parents, friends and other family members was important for them in deciding whether they wanted to marry their partners (Zhang and Kline 2009).

Status similarity is another important factor in the choice of marriage partner. Successful matchmaking in traditional China was based on the principle of 'One door matches another door', i.e. a go-between would not waste her time and energy trying to fix a match for a man with a woman unless their families were of equal socioeconomic status. This pattern persisted into

Mao's China till the Cultural Revolution of 1966–76, when state policies deliberately lowered educational legitimacy and educational homogeneity in the urban marriage market in its quest for greater equality in China. As a result, educational homogamy in urban China during the Cultural Revolution was weakened (Song 2009). Assortative mating has come back in the post-1978 era and many marriages today are same-status matches. One study finds that, from the 1980s, individuals have increasingly married others similar to them with respect to education. The percentage of couples with the same years of schooling increased from 50 per cent to 65 per cent between the 1985–1989 marriage cohort and the 1995–2000 cohort. At the national level there was an overall 15-point increase in the percentage of educational homogamy between 1970 and 2000. The odds of crossing two or three educational barriers were cut in half between 1980 and 2000. For college graduates in urban areas, the odds of marrying junior high school graduates (i.e. crossing two educational barriers) shrank from 0.11 to 0.02, and the chances of marrying a person with less than six years of schooling (i.e. crossing three educational barriers) in the late 1990s were only one-tenth of the odds in the late 1970s. There appears to be a greater degree of social closure among college graduates than among other educational groups in China (Han 2010).

Coupled with rising educational homogamy has been a declining trend in marital-age homogamy in the post-1990 era, as evidenced by data from the China 2005 One-Percent Population Inter-census Survey (Mu and Xie 2014). It is argued that intensified economic pressure, rising consumerism, and a shrinking gender gap in education during the post-1990s era have acted to increase women's desire to marry men who are more economically established, and thus usually older, than less financially secure young men. Thus, age hypergamy (younger women marrying older men) maintains status hypergamy, a deeply rooted norm in China. Mu and Xie (2014) claim that a continued trend in age hypergamy implies a future male 'marriage squeeze' for men of low socioeconomic status.

## Marriage squeeze

The male marriage squeeze refers to the phenomenon of tension, difficulty and failure for men to find a female in the marriage market because of 'the imbalance in the numbers of marriageable males and marriageable females at the same ages or close ages' (Huang 2014: 1,643). It is typically related to patriarchal and patrilineal societies because of discrimination against women (Huang 2014; Jiang et al. 2011). The male marriage squeeze has always been part of the marriage market in China (Jiang and Sánchez-Barricarte 2012: 2–3). The data of both the 1953 and 1964 census show 12 million excess males over 20 years old, which was 8.5 per cent of the total male population of marriageable age in 1964. The number of excess males in the 1982 census, about 20 million, was larger than that in the 1964 census, but the proportion of the excess males in the 1982 census was less than 8.4 per cent, which was nearly

the same as that in the 1964 census, largely because the total population had increased. The 1990 census data show that the total number of excess males reached 22 million in 1990, and the proportion of the excess males over 22 to the total number of males over 22 was 7.3 per cent. According to 2010 census data, the number of excess males in 2010 was 14 million, and their proportion was only 3.1 per cent (Huang 2014: 1,651–3).

Although the trend is encouraging, it is too early to celebrate the possible end of the male marriage squeeze in China. Poston and Glover (2005) show that there were 23 million more boys than girls among those born between 1978 and 2000. Huang (2014: 1,657) claims that '70% of the surplus males in the next 60 years were born between 1983 and 2011. These surplus boys or babies will grow to be the surplus males at the marriage ages with an annual increase of 1.31 million in the next 20 years.' Since the sex ratio at birth in the future is likely to be as high as that in 2012, the male marriage squeeze will become more serious: there is likely a surplus of 1.31 million males each year in the next two decades because of the high sex ratio at birth since 1983, and the total number of excess males will reach 30 million in 2028 and peak at 41.41 million in 2043 (Huang 2014: 1,653; also Ebenstein and Sharygin 2009; Guilmoto 2012; Pan and Wu 2009; Poston, Conde and DeSalvo 2011). Huang (2014: 1,645) similarly argues that:

> With the comprehensive impact of the sustained decline of fertility, the increasingly aging population and the long-term high sex ratio at birth, the marriage squeeze both in 2015 and in 2020 in Mainland China, when the proportions of males in the marriage market will be, respectively, 11.4 per cent and 16.0 per cent higher than females, are much more serious than that of the 1960s in China.

The unbalanced sex ratio at birth leads to concerns about the prevalence of prostitution and sexually transmitted infections in the years to come. Research using demographic and behavioural data shows the combined effect of sexual practices, sex work and a male surplus on HIV transmission across China's urban areas. Surplus men could become a significant HIV risk group in China (Li, Holroyd and Lau 2010: 402; Zhang et al. 2007: 456–7; also Tucker et al. 2005). Recent survey data suggest levels of untreated chlamydia infection in urban China are as high as or higher than in urban areas in the West, and levels in rural China are similar to those in rural Africa (Parish et al. 2003). Chlamydia is often asymptomatic and goes untreated, which can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease and secondary sterility (Morgan, Guo and Hayford 2009: 620).

However, there are some doubts about the severity of the predicted male marriage squeeze in China due to uncertainty about the high sex ratio at birth since the 1980s (Huang 2014: 1,646). This uncertainty is reinforced by the different predictions from different studies regarding the number and proportion of excess males in the marriage market in China, and the differences

occur partly because the different studies use different data and methods, including different measures of marriage squeeze (Huang 2014: 1,646–7). Finally, Huang (2014: 1,654) argues that the number of surplus males will decrease from the mid-2040s. 'In 2070, the surplus males born between 1983 and 2030 will drop to less than 1 million and the proportion of all males older than 22 years will be less than 2%.'

Recently, some people in China have asserted that there is also a female marriage squeeze. The term *shengnü* (剩女) has become frequently used in public. The so-called female marriage squeeze occurs not because there are surplus women in China but because there is, allegedly, an increase in the number of women who are well educated, have a high income, are at their most marriageable age, and refuse to compromise their mate selection criteria (Fincher 2014; Huang 2014; To 2013). In 2007, the PRC Ministry of Education released an official statement to define *shengnü* as unmarried women over the age of 27 and added it to the national lexicon (Fincher 2012). Since then, according to Fincher, 'the state media have aggressively disseminated this term in surveys, and news reports, and columns, and cartoons and pictures, basically stigmatising educated women over the age of 27 or 30 who are still single' (Magistad 2013). The term *shengnü* has been greatly popularized by a television series comedy titled *My Eldest Girl Should Get Married* (大女当嫁) premièred on the state-run channel CCTV-8 in 2010. This media frenzy is both unusual and strange in a country where men greatly outnumber women, as mentioned above and where one in five women between 25 and 29 remain unmarried while one in three men in that age group is unwed (Magistad 2013). Ji and Yeung (2014: 1,678–9) argue that Chinese women who choose to remain single voluntarily are denigrated by society as 'leftover' females because of the traditional social norm of status hypergamy (i.e. women marry up in terms of income, education and age) and the 'gender double standard of aging' (Berman, O'Nan and Floyd 1981; Sontag 1972). It is urgent for the public and policy makers to promote a gender-egalitarian ideology and respect women's choice in relation to marriage formation.

Nevertheless, some people insist that there is indeed a female marriage squeeze in China. Qian and Qian (2014: 1,337) argue that the rapid rise in women's education, coupled with persistent traditional gender roles, contribute to low marriage rates among older, highly educated Chinese women. As education levels rise, the likelihood of marriage increases among men but decreases among women, especially among those over 30, and more marriages involve better-educated, older men and less-educated, younger women. This is partly because Chinese women value economic prospects in a potential mate, and women with high earning potential and career aspirations may not find marriage beneficial, due to clashes between career and family. Highly educated women may not want to compromise their careers when they search for marriageable partners. In addition, these women are more likely than highly educated men to support gender egalitarianism. Highly educated men with less egalitarian gender attitudes can marry down both in terms of age

and educational attainment, whereas highly educated women cannot. As a result, the marriage pool for highly educated women becomes smaller due to a shortage of similarly educated men. 'This contributes to a "marriage squeeze" for highly educated women in urban China' (Qian and Qian 2014: 1,341; also Simpson and De Lacey 2013; Subramanian and Lee 2011).

However, using the 2005 One-Percent Population Survey of China, Ji and Yeung (2014: 1,662, 1,678–9) find that 'by age 35 to 39 years', almost all women are married. Women university graduates may delay marriage for career development and can afford to spend more time searching for a compatible mate than less educated women due to their relatively favourable financial situation. Regardless, most of them are married by age 35. As higher education continues to expand, it is likely that more Chinese women will postpone their marriage decisions. It is difficult to predict to what extent Chinese women will eventually forgo marriage in the future; this is a pattern that can also be observed in societies such as South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Regardless of what may happen with regard to the male marriage squeeze or to the so-called female marriage squeeze in the years to come, there will be a huge number and increasingly high proportion of elderly bachelors in China. Huang (2014: 1,655) predicts that the number of bachelors more than 60 years old will rise from 610,000 in 2043 to 9.68 million in 2058, when 33 per cent of bachelors will be over 60. After 2058, the number of bachelors over 60 will decrease but their proportion to all bachelors will increase to 47 per cent. Such a large number and high proportion of elderly bachelors will pose a major challenge for the provision of elder care in areas such as the supply of nursing homes and pension arrangements.

## Marital breakdown

In imperial China, a husband could expel his wife or terminate his marriage to her on a number of grounds: barrenness, wanton conduct, neglect of his parents, loquacity, theft, jealousy and chronic illness. The wife's legal protection derived from (1) the claim to full membership in her marital family after observing three years of mourning for her parents-in-law, (2) the fact that she had gone through adversity with her husband (e.g. from rags to riches), and (3) the fact that she had no natal home to return to. The wife could apply to the courts for the dissolution of her marriage on a limited number of grounds: if her husband had deserted her for a prolonged period, seriously injured her, forced her into illicit sex, or tried to sell her to another man. But she could never terminate the marriage on her own as her husband could. A traditional Chinese saying goes: 'If a woman marries a rooster, she follows the rooster for her lifetime; if she marries a dog, she follows the dog for her lifetime.' Although only men were entitled to initiate divorce proceedings, they were not always ready to do so due to strong cultural norms and associated social pressures, which were reinforced by the high costs associated with divorce and remarriage (Huang 2001).

After 1949, new marriage laws altered the legal context for divorce and empowered women, and social change redefined the social nature of married life. In 1953, China experienced a major surge in divorces, probably due to the promulgation of the Marriage Law in 1950. It was popularly maintained that many government officials, who had been penniless peasants before joining the communist revolution, divorced their rural wives in order to marry urban women. But more importantly, the 1950 Marriage Law allowed women to initiate divorce. Some married women, who were urban residents, had more education and whose marriages had been arranged by parents, used divorce as a way out of their marriages. In southern China, for example, 49 per cent of the divorce applicants were between 18 and 25 years old. In 1950, three-quarters of the divorce cases in Shandong were brought by the wives. In 1951, women took the first step in 76 per cent of the divorce applications in 32 cities and 34 rural counties. There were '186,167 divorces in 1950, 409,500 in 1951, and 398,243 in the first half of 1952'. The courts handled 1.7 million petitions in 1953. The 1950 Marriage Law was thus called the 'divorce law' (Platte 1988: 430–2, 441–2). After the mid-1950s, divorce became less frequent. For example, divorce suits handled by the courts in Beijing remained at around 7,000 per annum until the mid-1960s (Platte 1988: 433).

Another major surge in divorces occurred during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). The impact of the Cultural Revolution on divorce is difficult to assess with accuracy because of the lack of data. The extraordinary social upheavals and fear of persecution often led one partner to ask for divorce when the other got into political trouble. The implications for the whole family of one member's political wrongdoing were potentially disastrous. Divorce proceedings were initiated not because of a lofty sense of ideological outrage against the offending spouse but for the purpose of social survival and protecting the children's future (Conroy 1987: 55–6; Liang and Shapiro, 1983).

Divorce has been on the upswing in China since economic reforms started in 1978 (Alford and Chen 2004; Platte 1988). The divorce rate was 0.03 per cent in 1979 and slowly rose to 0.07 per cent in 1990 and roughly 0.1 per cent in 2000, then quickly climbed to 0.21 per cent in 2003. Between 2005 and 2009 there was an annual rise of 7.6 per cent in the number of divorces (Bao 2010). Davis (2010; similarly, FlorCruz 2010) reported that in 1978 there was one divorce for every 20 marriages. By 2008 there was one divorce for every five marriages. He (2014) reports that there were 3.1 million divorces in 2012, which was a 133 per cent increase over 2003. There were 3.1 million divorces in 2013, and now some 10,000 marriages break up in China every day (Wang 2014). This is an alarming trend because Chinese culture has for so long been heavily against divorce (FlorCruz 2010).

The government is fighting an uphill battle against this increasing trend. The court works hard to preserve the conjugal family against 'light-hearted decisions' to separate and often sets up a mediation session with the concerned parties before it is willing to consider a verdict. Mediation has been used as one of the first instruments to deal with divorce applications since

1949 (Huang 2005; Lubman 1967). Wang (2013) observes similar patterns of reaction in the post-1990 era and reports that under the influence of traditional Chinese values and public policy to maintain stability, the mediators often act like patriarchs and take advantage of their privileged position to talk the disputants into reconciliation:

> As a result, freedom to divorce is an illusion in most cases. Consequently, mandatory mediation provides neither a just nor a more humane alternative to adjudication, and divorce mediation actually turns into a process for giving effect to mediators' values, with the interests of one or both parties more or less jeopardized.

This is partly why more and more people choose to register at civil affair bureaus if they agree to divorce by mutual consent. When a couple cannot reach an agreement (especially if they disagree with each other on the division of property), they request marriage dissolution by a court verdict, which in the past was used as a last resort when all other efforts were exhausted (Platte 1988: 435–6). The court proceeds with the divorce application if its attempt to mediate fails, and as Davis observes (2014: 558), it has started to turn towards extending the protection of individual claims to property, probably because an ever-higher percentage of wealth is privately held in China. It has also turned away from surveillance of private life, probably because the state has gradually accepted voluntary contracts and the right to privacy.

The main causes of marital breakdown in China include the failure to provide emotional support or a gratifying sexual relationship, family violence, the fading of romantic love after marriage and extramarital affairs. All these are said to have contributed to a rising divorce rate. In addition, Davis (2010) insightfully observes that the privatization of urban housing in China has altered the basic parameters of household dissolution from those that prevailed before 1980. Divorce was rare during the Mao era partly because there weren't enough public housing units to go around for urban residents, and an employee could become homeless instantly or have to share the same bedroom with his or her ex-partner after divorce. Now the majority of urban couples are homeowners thanks to successful market reforms. Simultaneous with the privatization of urban real estate has been a divorce revolution. Some people argue that social changes will lead to a further increase in divorce rates in China. Others, however, have claimed that Chinese cultural traditions and the laws concerning divorce will contribute to a low divorce level in China relative to Western countries, at least for the foreseeable future.

## Conclusion

This chapter outlines family and marriage institutions in China. It examines the post-1949 changes in family structure, family size, marriage, mate choices, the marriage squeeze and marital breakdown. This chapter also

introduces readers to some major issues and recent developments in the study of the family and marriage in China. While industrialization, economic growth, the spread of mass education, and urbanization in the post-1949 era have been partly responsible for these drastic changes, political campaigns and legal reforms carried out by the CCP to transform Chinese society have also played a key role in the transformation of family and marriage institutions in the PRC. China's market reforms and its integration into the global capitalist system have allowed globalization to increasingly impact on Chinese society. Future changes in the family system are anticipated.

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# 5 Gender and sexuality

*Jieyu Liu*

Following the mainstream acknowledgement of the feminist movement in the early 1970s, gender is now widely recognized as one of the key concepts in understanding society. While difficult to define, gender in social science is generally acknowledged to be 'denoting a hierarchical division between women and men embedded in both social institutions and social practices' (Jackson and Scott 2002: 1). Gender significantly influenced the way in which Chinese society was organized in pre-modern China and continues to do so today. Gender shapes various aspects of life in China, such as family, work, education and political participation.

Sexuality, while closely affected by the gender system in a society, focuses upon a more specific aspect of life, i.e. organization and experiences around sex. Rather than being a 'natural' construct, it is widely accepted that sexuality is socially organized through various institutions such as family and education, and maintained by various discourses (such as religion and science) that tell us what sex is, what it ought to be and what it could be (Weeks 1986).

Since gender and sexuality are experienced as social structural phenomenon, as well as embodied and lived in everyday interactions, the examination of these concepts sheds light on various aspects of Chinese lives in both public and private domains. This chapter starts by examining the historical context of gender and sexuality in China; then focuses upon gender transformation in the twentieth century with a close examination of gender relations in work and family; finally the chapter explores sexuality in contemporary China including issues such as intimacy, sex and economy, and homosexuality.

## Historical context of gender and sexuality

Throughout much of pre-modern history Chinese rulers adopted Confucianism as the core principle for regulating society, that is, everybody should know and behave in accordance with their position in society to achieve a harmonious and hierarchical order. Unfortunately for women, they were located at the bottom of this hierarchy. The idea of *Nanzunnübei* (that 'women are inferior to men') served as the code for women's conduct in

society, exemplified by prescriptions such as the *Sancong* (the 'Three Obediences'), which dictated that women were subject to the authority of their father when young, their husband when married and their son when widowed (see Min 1997). In essence, Confucianism prescribed a patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal family system where men officially dominated women (Ebrey 1993; Mann 2001; Zang 2011).

For the male patriarch it was important to maintain familial lineage where the living respected ancestors and present elders, and familial continuity was maintained by producing male heirs. To continue a family line, if the first wife failed to produce a son, a concubine might be purchased in the hope she would bear a male heir (in many wealthy families concubinage was a common part of family life) (Mann 2001). The cornerstone of this system was that marriage and sexuality existed to build future generations, with love and pleasure secondary to this (Barlow 1994).

While it was accepted that a man would have various sexual partners throughout his life, female fidelity was crucial because one of the most important feminine virtues prescribed by Confucian writings was for a woman to have only one man in her life. Widows who refused to remarry, even when pressured by their parents or parents-in-law, were singled out for praise in contemporary accounts of exemplary women, published either as independent volumes or as chapters in dynastic histories (Mann 1987). Indeed, even if a woman was raped, suicide was an accepted approach for the maintenance of her virtue.

The subordination of women was considered essential for the preservation of social stability and civilization itself in pre-modern China (Watson and Ebrey 1991; Zang 2011). One of the ways in which gendered norms of sexual control were structurally reinforced was through the segregation of boys and girls from the middle years of childhood. While females were confined to the 'inside'/domestic sphere, excluded from public life, denied access to education or eligibility for examinations, males were given free rein to explore and dominate the 'outside'/wider world. As a result of this distinction, *nei ren* (inside person) came to be the common term for a wife (Watson and Ebrey 1991).

Some have argued that in reality the Confucian patriarchal arrangement was less negative than feminist historical interpretation might imply (Mann 2001; Wolf 1985; Watson and Ebrey 1991). The husband gained sexual access to his wife and his patriline gained claims to her labour and the children she would bear. The wife gained financial security via a claim on her husband's estate and also a place of honour in ancestral rites. A few women of the largest, wealthiest families were even able to have significant influence through the management of household funds and control over female relatives and servants (Mann 2001). More commonly, when a wife successfully gave birth to a male heir, her status rose in her family, or when her son got married she would earn the right to oversee her daughter-in-law. It is noted, however, that whatever powers women obtained in pre-modern China, these were not theirs

by right but delegated to them by men and circumstance (Wolf 1985; Zang 2011).

For example, while imperial legal codes granted a mother the same authority over her children as a father, the mother derived this right through her capacity as a wife; and if there was a conflict of views the father's will would always prevail (Mann 1987). Such power dynamics were also demonstrated in the movie *Raise the Red Lantern* (Zhang 1993). Although it was set in the early twentieth century, the film offered a view of life in a closed patriarchal household of wealth in pre-modern China. The film described the shifting balance of power between various concubines in their struggle to improve their standing in the household. Although the movie showed how easily the master could be manipulated by his concubines, it was evident that the power a concubine could command closely derived from her capacity to gain the master's favour. Further, bearing a male child played a more critical role than a woman's beauty and sexual appeal in determining her position in the household.

## Gender norm transformation in pre-1949 China

At the start of the twentieth century, many contemporary intellectuals began to question Confucianism as they sought to explain China's constrained modernization and the inferiority which had allowed European powers to take effective control of key parts of the country. These intellectuals regarded the unequal status of women as one of the key obstacles to Chinese development and they promoted ideas such as free marriage and women's education. It is necessary to point out that because of social and political disorder during the early part of the century, these practices were confined to a privileged few (Barlow 2004).

At the same time, the engagement with Western scientific discourse persuaded many Chinese intellectuals to prioritize a biological determinist approach to the understanding of gender (Zheng 2009). As a result of the alleged superiority of modern science, the belief that gender roles were determined by biological differences and gender hierarchy was 'natural and progressive' was firmly legitimized (Dikotter 1995: 9). This biological determinist understanding persisted in the Mao and post-Mao eras (Evans 1997; Gilmartin et al. 1994; Jacka 1997; Ko and Wang 2006; Liu 2007a; Zheng 2009).

The founders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were part of the intellectual forces advocating gender equality and regarded the liberation of women as an essential part of a successful communist revolution in China. However, they revised their views on the urgency to promote gender equality later: the rural focus of the CCP insurgency against the Nationalist government from 1927 onwards meant that the fight for women's emancipation had to be subordinated by 'more important' revolutionary tasks. For example, the campaigns to end wife-beating and ban arranged marriages needed to be

carefully weighed against the need to win the support of peasant men, the source of recruitment for the CCP's Red Army. CCP leaders firmly believed that women's emancipation could be postponed till the CCP won political power in China and then realized through their full-time participation in paid work outside of the home, as advised by Marx and Engels (Andors 1983; Davin 1976; Johnson 1983).

## Gender and work in post-1949 China

When the CCP came to power in 1949, it introduced a new ideology of gender equality and legislated on issues such as marriage, labour and land. The All-China Women's Federation, a government department, was set up specifically to deal with women's issues, including women's entry into paid employment (Croll 1983; Davin 1976). In pre-Communist China, women were already to be found working in cotton mills in industrial centres such as Shanghai and Tianjin (Hershatter 1986). However, the large scale of women's employment took place starting in the Maoist years. Since the mobilization of women into paid work was among the top gender campaigns after 1949, this section will focus upon the changes in the workplace to critically evaluate the gender transformations in the latter half of the century. As a result of the state's mobilization, paid employment became a normative feature of urban women's lives in the Maoist era (Wang 2000). Research has shown that women born under socialism (post-1949) established a full-time working identity and that for these women it was far less acceptable to be a housewife (Liu 2007a; Wang 2001). Moreover, by earning a wage that was central to the family budget, urban women were more readily able to achieve parity with men in the family decision-making process (Jankowiak 2002). Similarly, in rural areas, women were expected to join in with collective labour and such work relationships equipped them with wider social networks that went beyond their own family (Hershatter 2002). It is widely acknowledged that these actions genuinely improved women's status and quality of life.

However, in keeping with Marxist theory, which locates gender issues within class struggle (Landes 1989), the CCP's attempt to uphold women's interests was subordinated to an extent by other prioritized efforts in building the socialist nation. For example, women were called upon to return home and be good housewives in the early 1960s when there was huge unemployment pressure (Andors 1983). As a result of competing interests, the Women's Federation often struggled with its role of assistant to the CCP's central work and role of protector of women's interests (Jin 2001). During the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), class issues took precedence and, despite slogans such as 'Women hold up half the sky' and 'What men can do, women can do', hardly any official attention was given to women's issues (Honig 2002). The exception is the 1973 campaign to criticize Confucianism, which offered a rare moment for gender inequality to be openly addressed in the context of a political campaign (Andors 1983; Johnson 1983; Croll 1980). After Chairman

Mao's death in 1976, the Chinese government adopted an approach to socialist construction that was centred on economic modernization, and women's emancipation was subsumed by this priority (Honig and Hershatter 1988). This meant that only limited progress in the promotion of gender equality in China was achieved

For example, the mobilization of women into the workplace in the post-1949 era mentioned above has not exempted them from their more traditional duties, such as being a good wife and mother. Although men were called upon to do a share of domestic work, research has shown that women continued to spend far more time undertaking domestic tasks (Research Institute, All China Women's Federation 1998: 473, Table 9.1). The strong cultural association of women and family meant that women entered social production on terms that were not equal to those of male workers, and through a vicious circle of devoting more time to domestic duties, reinforced the workplace gender hierarchy. Contemporary narratives of urban industrial women workers show that, unlike their male counterparts, women suffered from time poverty, juggling work and family duties, and this made it difficult for them to invest time in cultivating social connections that would benefit their career (Liu 2007a). Rural studies demonstrated the double burden upon women affected their ability to earn work points and be active in political campaigns (Andors 1983; Hershatter 2004).

In the post-1978 reform era, gender is increasingly recognized as a key factor in the reorganization of work and employment. Liu (2007b) finds that women's unequal working experiences and social disadvantages in the pre-reform era shaped their greater vulnerability to redundancy during economic restructuring. This link is particularly evident in the experiences of 'older, redundant women workers from the Cultural Revolution generation, or the "unlucky generation" which experienced famine in the 1950s, the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s–70s, the one-child policy after 1979, and redundancies from the late 1980s' (Liu 2007b: 126). While older women bore the brunt of economic restructuring, young educated women benefited from opportunities which arose out of the reforms. Although young educated women fare better than older women, they are still disadvantaged in the labor market compared with their male counterparts. A biological determinist understanding of gender naturalized men's superiority over women, which often shuffled highly educated women graduates into secondary and supporting roles in their organizations (Liu 2013). For those women who reached manager positions, Liu (2008) found that the sexualized business culture, including frequent visits to leisure venues with the clients, made women professionals vulnerable to sexual harassment and exploitation.

In the countryside, from the 1980s collective farming was displaced by a return to family farming, which meant that women's labour was once again controlled by the head of the household (Davin 1999; Jacka 1997). Because restrictions on rural-urban migration reduced, men and young women left the countryside for better-paid jobs in cities. Older and married women continued

to run low-profit agricultural businesses while having limited access to the micro-financial loans initiated by the government (see Jacka 1997; Judd 1994). Among the rural-urban migration of today, gender continues to play an important role. As a result of the gendered expectation in marriage and family, marriage cut short women migrants' working life while enabling men to migrate since the wife was expected to look after the household in the countryside (Fan 2007). Further, male migrants are mainly found working on construction sites, while young migrant women mainly work as domestic workers, waitresses and assemblers in foreign-owned factories (Tan 2000). Overall, economic reforms have improved living standards immensely; however, the effects of these reforms have been differently felt according to age, location, social hierarchy and their intersections with gender.

## Sexuality in contemporary China

The Confucian emphasis on family and lineage meant that in pre-modern China sexuality was prioritized to ensure procreation of the next generation. The Communist revolution in 1949 brought many challenges to Confucian ideologies and rearranged many aspects of social life, including sexual relations. While journalistic reports tend to view the Mao regime as puritanical and the following reform era encompassing a sexual revolution (Jeffreys 2006), research findings question a simple dichotomy between the repression of the Maoist era and the apparent liberalization of the post-Mao period (Hershatter 1996; Evans 1997, 2000). In order to capture the changes and continuities on organization and experiences around sex in China, the following section discusses issues such as sexuality in intimate relations, sex and economy and homosexuality to unfold the complexity of the sexuality picture.

### Sexuality in intimate relationships

The 1950 Marriage Law outlawed concubinage and arranged marriages; free-choice marriage became the expected norm for families in socialist China. Pan (1994) highlighted that as a result of this law, the role of love gradually became important in marriage. With the introduction of the one-child policy in 1979, the traditional equation of sex with procreation was fundamentally undermined. Sigley (1998) showed that with the aim of promoting the one-child policy, there was abundant official literature highlighting the pleasurable aspects of marital sexual relations.

Free-choice marriage and family were promoted and established as the main site where sexual equality might be achieved. While the heterosexual marital unit became normalized in terms of sexual relations, this excluded and deviated other forms of relationship such as premarital sex and homosexuality (Jeffreys 2006). Evans (1997, 2000) discussed the significant gendered consequences of the official discourses on sexuality. Despite the rhetoric of equality, women were still defined in 'scientific' terms as essentially

different from and less sexual than men. In this monogamous picture, women were represented as the principal targets and agents of sexual morality and reasonability; and so the double standard implicit in the Confucian principle of female chastity was recast in gender-specific identification of female responsibility for the maintenance of social and sexual morality (Evans 1997, 2000). Despite the abundance of sexual representations since the 1980s, neither the popular nor the official discourses have tackled sexuality as a gender issue and so the view that 'nature subjects women to lives dominated either by male or reproductive concerns continues to permeate' (Evans 1997: 219–20).

Although a wife is obligated to support her husband's interests and serve his needs, sexuality can also function as a site to enact resistance. During an ethnographic study of an urban setting in the 1980s, Jankowiak (1993) found that women had some say in the frequency of intercourse in marriage. If a wife felt satisfied with her marriage, she was more than responsive to her husband's advances; if not, she rejected the advances either directly or with excuses (e.g. sleeping with a child in order to avoid her husband). Jankowiak (2002) also pointed out the variation in male sexual techniques by social class, with the educated men putting more emphasis on women's enjoyment. Finally, it is noteworthy that while Chinese women regarded sexual relations as a marital duty, male identity is equated with sexual performance (Jankowiak 2002). If a husband is impotent, a Chinese woman is within her rights to request and immediately receive a divorce.

Over the last two decades, the amount of newspaper and media coverage of extramarital love has rocketed. Through interviews with men and women in Shanghai, Farrer and Sun (2003) found that while extramarital affairs allow the expression of romance and sexual exchange unspoiled by economic factors, these affairs usually coexisted with a continuance of fulfilling family responsibilities by the philandering spouses. Although participants saw sexual satisfaction as important, media accounts were gendered in ways that paralleled mate choice for marriage: women sought affairs with men of higher status, while men looked for young and beautiful partners (Hershatter 2004).

Public discussion of divorce has also increased considerably. Many divorce cases are filed by women, often on grounds of incompatibility; however, at the same time, divorce is often portrayed as disadvantageous to women (Honig and Hershatter 1988). As a result of the implicit standard of female chastity, divorced women were often pitied or looked down upon, subject to stigma in the natal family network and in public domains such as the workplace (Liu 2007a).

The post-Mao period has also witnessed the emergence of new sexual discourses in the popular domain, exemplified by the proliferation of novels and online blogs about personal sexual experiences. When these accounts are written by women, they are particularly controversial. For example, when Wei Hui published her novel *Shanghai Baby* in China in 1999, the graphic description of the heroine's sexual experiences attracted a lot of readers but also prompted a public moral crisis. It was officially banned as being

decadent, but internet availability enabled wide unofficial circulation. While some of these publications to some extent objectify women and satisfy the male gaze, Wei and other young women writers who wrote about their sexual experiences were pioneers in the sense that they talked about sex publically as women, which challenged male authority and male control over sexual discourse. However, in public, these women writers were generally condemned as morally disreputable.

Some mainland Chinese scholars feel that the younger generation is more associated with China's sexual revolution, though with a significant gender twist. Survey data show that young Chinese men increasingly view sex in a manner unrelated to romance, but young women are still constrained by traditional assumptions about female sexual behaviour, with a high value attached to female chastity (Pan et al. 2004 in Jeffreys 2006). By analyzing sexual culture among Chinese youth, Farrer (2002) found that official sex education, by condemning premarital sex and reinstating sexual morality, continued emphasizing the importance of female chastity and traditional gender roles. With such strong gendered implications it seems problematic – despite the abundance of sexual representations in the post-Mao era – to use the term 'sexual revolution' to describe the transformations in China (Liu 2008).

## Sex and economy

Since the 1980s, China has pursued a policy of 'opening up' to the outside world and moving towards a market economy – which has, among other things, led to the emergence of a new sexual culture in large coastal cities: for some young women in Shanghai, being 'sexy' and sexually more adventurous has become a badge of 'modern' status (Farrer 2002). 'Opening up' has also brought with it a growing deployment of sexualized femininity in the market domain. The beauty economy is booming: commercial companies employ models to advertise their products and many local governments have sponsored beauty contests to boost local tourism (Xu and Feiner 2007). The sex industry has also hugely expanded in response to the emergent consumerism, catering to the demands of an increasing number of wealthy businessmen, with sexualized leisure activities becoming normative business practice to maintain good relationships with clients.

The wider socio-economic background embedded in the sexual consumption of women's bodies has created particular problems for white-collar professionals, a status many female university graduates aspire to. Case studies show that women's sexuality has become a commercial resource deliberately initiated and developed by their organizations; they are expected to engage in 'sexual labour' (Adkins 1995) during interactions with clients at work and when in leisure venues are vulnerable to sexual harassment and exploitation. Despite the desexualization of women in the market economy, past restrictions on sexual expression and discussion have given 'reputable' women little

or no opportunity for sexual autonomy. While men happily consume women's sexuality, women who are actively engaged in sexual activities are considered decadent; women's sexuality is still strictly moralized. This is a challenge for white-collar professional women as they attempt to negotiate the sexualized work culture while maintaining their sexual reputation. In view of the close link between morality and women's sexuality, it seems impossible to both excel in a sexualized business world and be a reputable woman. Either women ignore the sexual gossip and adapt to business-related leisure in venues designed for men's sexual pleasure or miss out on networking that might be vital to effective performance. These white-collar professional women seem to walk a fine line between respectability and disreputability (Liu 2008).

At the other end of the labour market are the sex workers involved in prostitution, which has re-emerged in the post-Mao era. Prostitution was rampant prior to 1949. When the CCP took over, eradicating prostitution was regarded as a sign of the moral superiority of socialism. As a result, prostitution became non-existent (Sigley 2006). In the post-Mao years, despite government efforts to ban commercial sex to ensure a 'healthy' social environment, the sex industry has boomed, serving the increasing number of wealthy businessmen (Jefferys 2004). The value of government intervention has been questioned by some scholars, since research shows that the policing of commercial sex is generating corruption and bringing social injustice to sex workers (Pan 1994).

As a result of a strong association between morality and female sexuality, sex workers are widely regarded as decadent and as bringing about a crisis in national morality. While subject to extensive institutional and social discrimination in the city, sex workers negotiate an urban identity through 'their consumption practices and through exploiting the superior social, cultural, and economic resources possessed by their clients' and to act as 'brokers of modernity' in the countryside (Zheng 2009: 5). Unlike white-collar women stuck in a dilemma between maintaining a high moral reputation and excelling in a sexualized business culture, sex workers have assumed entrepreneurial ownership of their own bodies and 'reclaimed the commodification of their bodies as an empowering practice.' By disregarding their reproductive duties to family and the state, these sex workers have 'subverted the gender and social hierarchy' (Zheng 2009: 12). Women working in the Pearl River Delta felt that the term 'sex work' placed too much emphasis on 'sex' at the expense of other aspects of their 'work' – that is, the emotional and embodied labour they provide (Ding and Ho 2008).

## Homosexuality

While there was no mention of homosexuality in the official publications of the Maoist years, in the reform era it entered both popular and official discourse, closely associated with AIDS, crime, sickness and abnormality (Evans 1997). The aversion to homosexuality is dissimilar to homophobia in the

West. Homosexuality and lesbianism are not merely objects of moral outrage, but challenge the foundations of the Asian patriarchal family. To live as a gay man is to 'renege on the paramount filial duty of continuing the family line and ensuring parents' future status as ancestors; to live as a lesbian refuses women's part in this project, brings shame on the family, and flies in the face of all tenets of feminine virtue' (Jackson, Liu and Woo, 2008: 24). Historians have found that from the time of the late Qing legal code in the mid-eighteenth century, homosexuality has been thrown together with other kinds of extra-marital sex and considered undesirable because it did not lead to legitimate procreation within marriage (Dikotter 1995). Aggravated by the assimilation of Western concepts of biological science at the earlier twentieth century, homosexuality became further condemned as a form of sexual pathology (Hinsch 1990).

In such a hostile environment, homosexuals' lives are not easy. Although Chinese law makes no specific mention of homosexuality, narratives of male homosexuals show that they are subject to brutal treatment, including beatings by police in public (Evans 1997), while lesbians have been subject to administrative detention and re-education as 'hooligans' (He and Jolly 2002). In recent years, some Chinese researchers have played an important role in exposing the discrimination suffered by homosexual people, pleading for greater tolerance. Gay clubs have been established in some of the larger cities (Li and Wang 1992). Although homosexuals 'are talked to, or talked about', they are effectively 'denied a voice in public discourses about sexuality' (Evans 1997: 208). The pleading for public tolerance and recognition by some Chinese scholars co-exists with a persistent view of homosexuality as a deviant or diseased state, the result of a naturalized view of heterosexuality and sexual difference (Evans 1997: 209).

## Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the ways that gender and sexuality have affected the organization of Chinese society in both public and private domains. In the past century, various national projects have challenged Confucian ideologies and practices and re-arranged the relations between men and women. Due to an inadequate understanding of gender in the socialist modernisation project, inequalities between men and women persist. For example, although the boundary between inner space and outer domain has been refined, the gender segregation based upon 'heavy' labour and 'light' labour still predominates at work. The gendered division between domestic sphere and social production has been maintained despite the fact that women were mobilized into the workplace. Further, due to the intersection of gender with other social categories, attention needs to be paid to urban/rural location, social hierarchy and generational differences to understand the complexity of gender transformations in China.

Sexuality, while traditionally serving the needs of producing the next generation, has undergone great changes in the last five decades. The Maoist period was not a puritanical era, as people might assume: sexuality was more closely regulated than repressed (Evans 1997). In the post-Mao era, even though the government has tried to limit access to knowledge about 'decadent' sexual practices, new communication technologies as well as the demands of a market economy have begun to make it easier to avoid censorship and exchange sexual information. Although the great abundance of sexual discourses more often than not re-sexualize women, studies show that, in the case of sex workers, women have subverted the gender and social order by claiming ownership of their own bodies (Zheng 2009). Despite hostile attitudes in public, homosexuality is also becoming gradually visible in some urban areas.

Further, it is important that we recognize that sexuality is 'embedded in wider social relations and in non-sexual aspects of social life; in particular, it is enmeshed with gender relations' (Jackson, Liu and Woo 2008: 18). The gendered implications of current changes around sexuality are significant. For example, women's sexuality is still strictly moralized, which leaves women who are engaged in sexual pleasure or discourses morally decadent (Liu 2008). An entrenched biological determinist belief in gender not only normalizes heterosexuality, deviating other sexual alternatives, but also limits the liberating effects of such sexual transformations for women.

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# 6　Contested ground
## Community and neighbourhood

*Chunrong Liu*

An extraordinary consequence of China's market reforms is the fundamental change within rural villages and urban neighbourhoods where signs of grassroots autonomy seem to alter the pre-existing pattern of social infrastructure and pose a challenge to the Chinese state. Indeed, the revival of communal groups and emergence of property-based organizations, as well as collective action, have tempted many observers to interpret villages and neighbourhoods as springboards of civil society, in sharp contrast to organized dependence during the pre-reform era (Derleth and Koldyk 2004; Lei 2001; Lin 2002; Xu 1997).

This chapter discusses the complexity of Chinese grassroots society with reference to market reforms, social change and state adaptation. Rapid market-orientated reforms combined with massive urbanization have profoundly transformed social fabric in local communities. Meanwhile, persistent demands for stability and governability have generated new forms of state intervention such as villager committee (VC) elections, the 'New Socialist Countryside Building' campaign (NSCB) and the push for 'Urban Community Building' (UCB). These drastic dynamics have systematically shaped access to and control over resources in the grassroots society, which will continue to be a contested domain between state power and social forces in China.

## Grassroots society in Mao's China

Traditional Chinese grassroots society was composed of semi-autonomous local units, each of which was structured around the kinship system at its core (Yang 1959). Rural community was governed by local leadership based on the solidarity groups of kinship, and social control was based upon the collective principles of joint responsibility and mutual surveillance. The imperial state limited its formal bureaucratic power to magistrate level, engaging local community from within through the agency of gentry as well as the *Baojia* system – a community-based system of law enforcement and civil control with one *jia* consisting of ten families and ten *jia* (or one hundred families) making a *bao* (Hsiao 1960).

The kinship-based community order was demolished by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) after 1949. Land reforms, agriculture collectivization and the creation of a people's commune system in the 1950s restructured natural villages, turning them into production brigades and production teams. Villager life was penetrated by state authorities. Parish and Whyte (1978) observed that through administrative sanctions (coercion, material sanctions, etc.) and normative influence (communications, childhood socialization, and mobilized social pressure), the government was able to induce changes in rural life. As a result, traditional moral bonds such as kinships, clans and religion that had long governed the vast countryside were largely destroyed. Gone also were armed bandits, lineage, and ethnic feuds. A new governance system, in which loyalty to kin, village and lineage was replaced by loyalty to the production team and brigade, emerged to dominate peasant community life (Potter and Potter 1990).

A parallel grassroots reconstruction also occurred in the post-revolutionary urban context. The socialist distribution system including the public allocation of housing and jobs produced a unique quality of rootedness in urban life (Whyte and Parish 1984). Guided by the socialist ideology of 'production first and life second', work-unit (i.e. *danwei*) compound and residential community became the prevailing form of urban neighbourhood. The principle of socialist communal living was extended to the neighbourhood, and 'most urban residents would rarely have any need to travel beyond the walls of their work-and-living unit' (Gaubatz 1999: 1,497; also French and Hamilton 1979). While there were some differences in housing consumption (Logan, Bian and Bian 1999), people working for the same *danwei* often lived in the same *danwei* compound, shared similar housing conditions and amenities, and enjoyed no independent location choices. This made urban neighbourhoods more heterogeneous in social status than was the case in other countries (Whyte and Parish 1984: 237).

Urban neighbourhood in China, however, was far from an autonomous social space. Residents' committees (RCs), an elaborate state-sponsored social organization, were established to incorporate, assist, mobilize and monitor the population. Invented in the early 1950s as an 'autonomous mass organization' to replace the *Baojia* system, native-place associations and lineage organizations, the RCs helped organize urban residents who did not belong to *danwei* (Salaff 1971). Under the jurisdiction of each street office and relying on small groups and individual activists in the neighbourhoods, the RCs coordinated a broad range of activities, promoted and organized citizen participation in political campaigns, and supervised public services (Gaulton 1981; Dixon 1981; Read 2012).

Despite the extensive state penetration and organized control (Walder 1986), some traditional aspects of community life survived in both urban and rural settings, and some unintended consequences occurred. Davis and Harrell (1993) observed that family loyalty and obligation had not been totally destroyed in rural areas. There were clientelist authority relationships between

village leaders and villagers and some scope for bottom-up interest articulation (Oi 1989; Burns 1988). These ties gave rise to a honeycomb structure of cellular units within village communities and lineage groups (Shue 1994). In urban areas, the low rate of residential mobility, shared living spaces and the same *danwei* affiliation generated considerable neighbourhood solidarities, which served as a buffer between individuals and government campaigns (Whyte and Parish 1984). Bringing residents together, the RC-led neighbourhood mobilizations could facilitate the cultivation of 'a sense of neighbourliness' (Chan 1993).

## The changing rural community

Tremendous changes have occurred in the village community since the end of the Mao era. *Decollectivization* took place as the result of market reforms that swept rural China in the late 1970s. The household contract responsibility system produced systematic changes in the rural community (Oi 1999; Unger 2002). With the dissolution of the pre-1978 collective structures and control organs, rural farmers have witnessed significant social differentiation and geographic mobility. More importantly, decollectivization and market-orientated rural reforms have weakened the relevance of state agents in the community and therefore created spaces for new forms of community life. In the organizational vacuum left by decollectivization, two notable social dynamics have emerged: solidarity groups and social mobilizations. They have transformed the village from an organized political space into a contentious social setting where state power is constantly challenged.

### *Solidarity groups*

Spontaneous, self-governing and village-based social organizations, large in number and of great diversity, constitute a daunting social dynamic in the post-reform village. A nationwide village-level survey in 2005 estimated that the overall number of rural grassroots social organizations had reached 3.16 million. Among the surveyed 552 organizations, over 18 per cent were churches, temples, and other religious organizations; 16.7 per cent were cultural, sports, and health organizations; 14 per cent were civil dispute mediation organizations; 13.8 per cent were engaged in community security control or patrol activities; and another 13.8 per cent were related to technical assistance and mutual-aid in production (Pesqué-Cela et al. 2009).

   In this grassroots associational sphere, especially prominent is the revival of lineage and religious groups. Although they were suppressed in the Mao era, lineage forces have re-emerged in the post-1978 era, manifested in enthusiasm for the re-compiling of genealogical records, the renovation of the ancestral house and the revival of lineage rituals and sentiments (Wang 1991). Along with this change is the explosion of cults of folk-faith and religious activities, including church attendance, pilgrimages, geomancy, temple

building and *qi gong* practice. These developments can be largely attributed to the state's retreat from the ban on religious activity, a decline in the appeal of official ideology and individuals' psychological needs for security amidst rapid commercialization and increasing social dislocation (Dean 2003; Madsen 2010).

The solidarity groups have functioned as a main source of social identification and differentiation in post-1978 rural China. They have inculcated an extraordinary sense of obligation to the group and created informal accountability for local state agencies, making village elections more competitive (Tsai 2007; Pesqué-Cela et al. 2009; Thurston 1998). As Dean (2003) noted, the revival of religion-based communal networks may indicate a gradual development towards community autonomy because there is a process of merging local governance with religious activities.

### Conflict and mobilization

Post-reform policies have not only created spaces for community solidarity accumulations but also altered the substance of conflicts both within the rural community and between the community and the local state. While arguably there has been a close association between the local lineage structure and the degree of social cohesion, inter-clan rivalry and violence have apparently become important sources of community conflict in some areas, particularly in southern China (Chiang 1995). When the rival clans rejected the intervention and mediation of the local government, the disputes often led to large-scale violence and harmed community social cohesion.

Conflicts between the rural population and representatives of the local state have been intensified due to the weakening of Maoist collective organs and the deteriorating provision of public goods and services (Bernstein and Lü 2003). No longer dependent on the collectives for a living, villagers have become much more ready to defend their interests against local cadre exploitations, state policies such as birth control, grain procurement, and taxes and levies. Since the 1990s, excessive tax burdens, widespread official corruption, land expropriation and the degradation of the environment have been major sources of rural conflicts.

Interestingly, existing informal social networks in the rural community have played an important role in resisting state control. O'Brien and Li (2006) have applied the term 'rightful resistance' for understanding peasants' strategic use of both formal and informal institutions in their conflicts with the state. Recent rural resistance has been organized with more sophisticated activists and leaders. By setting up various types of community-based organizations, both formal and informal, community leaders have been able to mobilize the constituencies and lodge complaints. The emergence of mobilization agents signifies a further change in the rural community as it has robustly led the charge, shaped collective claims, recruited activists and mobilized the public, devised and orchestrated the acts of contention, and even organized cross-community efforts (Li and O'Brien 2008).

China scholars have disputed the causes, nature and implications of resistance that has arisen in the rural community. Some have argued that peasant claims represented a nascent 'rights consciousness', precipitating a fundamental change in the state-society relationship (Li 2010). Others have argued that rural resistance represented a historically familiar pattern of 'rule consciousness', which undergirded rather than undermined the political system (Perry 2009). In any case, the post-1978 rural community has become fertile soil for active, self-conscious mobilization that is reconfiguring community power and affects the making and implementation of public policies.

## State interventions

The collapse of the pre-1978 commune structure has altered the distribution of power and social infrastructure in the rural community. However, the village community should not be treated as a unified and autonomous entity insulated against state domination and influence. The Chinese authoritarian system has had a strong interest in controlling society to minimize or eliminate alienation and political and social crisis (Ding 1994). The regime is wary, at best, and hostile, at worst, to any organization independent of its direct or indirect control (Saich 2000). Since the 1980s, the need for stability and effective governance has triggered many state intervention programmes. One of these is VC elections and another is the recent 'New Socialist Countryside Building' (NSCB) campaign. Both are reconstituting social solidarity in the rural community.

### *Village democracy*

The VC was initially organized by community-spirited cadres as a community response to the decline of social control due to the withdrawal of the people's commune system. With the support of some top leaders, this bottom-up initiative was legitimated as a basic-level mass organization of self-government in the 1982 Constitution. The progressive political climate for popular participation in the early 1980s further contributed to the experiment of VC elections (O'Brien and Li 2000). Since the implementation of the Organic Law of the Village Committees (experimental) in 1987, elections have been gradually institutionalized, with approximately six to seven rounds being held in most parts of rural China by 2009. VC elections have come along with other community-based institutional designs such as village assemblies and village representative assemblies, which were intended to encourage villager participation in public deliberations. There was also the cadre responsibility and evaluation system to enforce local officials' compliance with central government policies.

Although many problems have afflicted VC elections, this invention with a rights-based institution has redefined state-society relations in the countryside. By providing an educational opportunity for peasants to learn the concepts,

procedures and organization of democratic processes, VC elections have enabled villagers to demand citizenship rights they have never enjoyed before (Li 2003). As Thurston (1998) observes, one unintended consequence of village elections is the restoration of the sense of community after the collapse of the communes. Manion (1996) finds that competitive elections have shortened the distance between village leaders and their constituents, resulting in the increasing congruence between the two. It follows that such congruence between the elected village government and rural residents would help reconstruct social order and strengthen communal bonds.

VC elections have also established a legal-rational type of authority in the village by exposing village leaders to elections based on voluntary participation. The peasant community during the Mao era was organized with state control and mobilized participation. Yet it failed to develop a true sense of community as it was not based on self-organization or voluntary participation from within. By gradually turning 900 million rural peasants into participatory citizens, VC elections have rationalized the community power structure, shifting its base from top-down coercion to bottom-up participation for the common good of the community.

### Welfare programmes

The community-oriented welfare programmes have also been a key form of state intervention in the reform era. After 1949, rural welfare provisions were revolutionized. Family networks were largely destroyed and the concept of rural mutual aid was encouraged in which neighbours assisted each other in times of need. Under the rural commune system (1958–77), the welfare responsibility was formally shifted to the commune away from the family and social support was based on a universal approach (Dixon 1982). In the post-1978 context, the end of collective agriculture and the virtual demise of the collective left many villages without public welfare provision during the early stage of rural reforms. The urgency of rural welfare issues was compounded by rapid demographic changes, as the problems of pensions and care for the elderly were the critical issues among other rural challenges that caused peasant resistance and social instability.

The Chinese government has perceived that social benefits matter for regime support and since the 1980s has adopted many policy measures such as poverty alleviation programmes and tax reduction initiatives to reinvent the rural welfare system. One of the most comprehensive initiatives is the New Socialist Countryside Building (NSCB) programme, which was part of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2006–10). The NSCB programme not only prioritizes the goal of rural modernization but also embraces social policy reforms and addresses growing disparities and discontents in rural society. Key components of the programme include developing modern agriculture, increasing peasants' income, conducting rural environmental protection, promoting rural healthcare and sanitation, and developing the rural education and the

social security system (NDRC 2005). A new insurance system was to be established in the countryside with the premiums paid by the beneficiaries and the collective and government subsidies.

The introduction of the NSCB programme signifies that the state is committed to taking a more active role in rural development and social welfare provision, with an implicit goal of ensuring social stability in the countryside. It has been implemented through propaganda and work teams (Perry 2011). Since the beginning of the NSCB, access to health care, education, infrastructure and a safety net has been expanded. The programme has constituted more than a political slogan and has the potential to successfully overcome rural poverty as well as rural marginalization (Ahlers and Schubert 2009). Arguably, welfare policies matter for the production of social capital, and exposure to social benefits and entitlements in the rural community may condition social interactions among peasants and remould elite-mass relations and the community power structure.

Both welfare provision and village democracy have been challenged by rapid urbanization, which has been established as a key strategy in China's Twelfth Five Year plan (2011–15). By the end of 2011, the number of city dwellers reached 690.79 million, accounting for 51.27 percent of the country's total population (Xinhua Net 2012). This critical demographic shift will have complex impacts on rural community, as population migration will undermine rural solidarity as well as the relevance of state-led grassroots institutions, and the crying demand for efficiency of land use might stimulate new forms of peasant organization, such as cooperatives (Yan 2013).

## The changing urban neighbourhood

This section discusses the changing grassroots society as well as state responses in the urban setting. Neighbourhood dynamics are grounded in two major social and spatial transformations that have distinguished Chinese urban society since the market reforms. The first was the stratification of urban space stemming from rapid urban development, urban gentrification and housing commoditization. In particular, housing reforms since the 1990s have privatized much of the publicly owned housing stock and promoted home-ownership investments, which have directly led to changes of residential patterns and neighbourhood forms and growing residential segregation (Wang and Murie 2000). While less than 15 per cent of the urban population had lived in privately owned dwellings at the end of the Mao era, the homeownership rate reached a remarkable 71.98 per cent in 2000 (*China Real Estate News*, 19 May, 2000). Private residential buildings have mushroomed and become an established form of accommodation in cities.

The second dynamic is state enterprise reforms or *dedanweilization*, which have created millions of unemployed industrial workers who 'find themselves in the painful process of adjusting to a way of life that centres on their community rather their workplace' (Pan 2002: 6). *Dedanweilization* has stimulated

community governance by shifting social functions and responsibilities for occupational welfare from *danwei* to the local community (You 1998: 23–8; Lee 2000; Derleth and Koldyk 2004; Chan 1993). The crucial question confronting the urban government and its grassroots agent is whether and how they can maintain stability by re-engaging urban residents and meeting the enormous demand for localized public provision.

## New neighbourhood space

Rapid urban transformation is responsible for the differentiation of organizational infrastructures in the neighbourhood and the growth of neighbourhood-based collective actions for community space. Dynamics in these two dimensions have been combined to demonstrate a greater degree of social autonomy at urban grassroots level.

### *Organizational structure*

While urban neighbourhoods were firmly organized by the state-led RCs in the Maoist era, two market-based innovations – management companies and homeowner association (HA) – have assumed the obligations that were previously held by the RCs on commercialized residential estates. Management companies and HAs originated in residential neighbourhoods built by Hong Kong and Singaporean developers in 1994, which have subsequently been extended into commercial estates throughout China (Read 2003). The contract-based management companies are responsible for fee-charging businesses that provide sanitation services, routine building maintenance and ground/lawn care. An HA is defined as a homeowner assembly's 'executive body' by the 'Codes of Property Management in People's Republic of China' issued on June 8, 2003. An HA has between five and fifteen committee members and is empowered to set up discussion agendas in the neighbourhood, choose and employ a management company, and raise and manage neighbourhood maintenance funds.

HAs have faced some constraints from both the government and real estate developers. Yet they have gradually become institutionalized in neighbourhood society and regarded as one of the most dynamic signs of China's nascent civil society. As Read (2008: 1,241) comments, 'The more active of these organizations constitute a startling break from the practices of Communist Party-sponsored groups and afford residents significant space in which to meet, debate, take action at their own initiative, and manage their neighbourhoods in a democratic fashion.' It raises questions about community governance. For example, how can new governing forces cooperate with the official self-governing organization of the RC as well as the CCP's neighbourhood branch?

Another new player in neighbourhood space is the 'community mass group' (*shequ qunzhong tuandui*). Differing from property-based homeowner

associations and RC-led sub-groups, community mass groups are mostly self-empowered, volunteer-run, and organized with an informal leadership. As an indigenous ingredient of community infrastructure, its growth has been phenomenal. Mass community groups are deeply rooted in the *dedanweilization* reform, which shifts leisure space and social interaction from occupation-based *danwei* to neighbourhood communities and creates a particular association demand. They have also developed because of an opaque, ambiguous regulation environment. The Regulation on the Registration and Administration of Associations (revised in 1998) considers groups operating within the urban neighbourhood and community as 'internal' organizations, which are not required to register with MCA administrations.

For example, in Shanghai there were more than 18,000 community mass groups with over 450,000 participants by 2009, providing their members with rich information, stimulation and opportunities for self-expression, social support, fellowship and mutual aid (Li 2010). Despite their limited resources and external reach, their impact cannot be underestimated. They have significantly diversified the organizational life of neighbourhood society and frequently contributed to problem solving and community identity building at urban grassroots level.

### Neighbourhood activism

The emergence of competition for community space, which ranges from disputes over housing management quality to mobilization against state policies, has constituted a further change in the urban neighbourhood. Among them, homeowners' contestations over housing management issues have been growing strikingly since housing reform. In 2000, about 166,000 disputes reached the courts nationwide, a 42 per cent increase since 1997 (Tomba 2005). Ironically, this type of collective claim is largely an unintended consequence of housing privatization, which has contributed to the accumulation of neighbourhood common interests and fostered the awareness of homeowners (Davis 2006).

In addition to housing management issues, many neighbourhoods have acted on local governance problems with a NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) orientation, such as the damaging effects that development can have on air quality and the danger of noise pollution. An extraordinary case was the 2006 battle against the Shanghai Maglev extension project, which aimed to link the new airport at Pudong to the old Hongqiao airport. Another key event was the spontaneous mobilization of the *Tiantongyuan* neighbourhood in greater Beijing in 2008, which was an effort to modify the route plan of line no. 5 of the Beijing subway system so that the neighbourhood could be more conveniently connected. Unlike the Maoist state-mobilized collective action for policy implementation, bottom-up activism is consistently associated with the pursuit of enhanced life quality and generated by the property-based

organizations. By activating neighbourhood residents, it has contributed to local identity building and urban policy dynamics (Tomba 2005; Zhu 2008).

## Neighbourhood-orientated reforms

Local authorities in urban China are active in figuring out community governance reforms to accommodate the unprecedented changes in neighbourhood society. In the general scheme of 'urban community building' (UCB) since the mid-1990s, state intervention has reconfigured neighbourhood society with community-based services and neighbourhood self-governance programmes, among many other policy tools.

### Community services

As an emerging functional need of post-*danwei* urban society, community services are regarded as localized, self-administered, welfare-orientated and diversified and able to serve the variety of needs in neighbourhoods. To install community service programmes, a new organizational structure has been innovated in the national UCB scheme. In 1994, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) issued a circular to promote *Shequ* (community) construction. A joint document emphasizing urban community as a basic unit for service delivery was released in 2000 by the office of the CCP Central Committee and the State Council. Since then, the MCA has explored several models of *Shequ* building based on local initiatives and experiments in Shenyang, Shanghai, Wuhan and Qingdao. The concept of *Shequ* varies in different localities in terms of the degree of scale, autonomy, and government control over communities (Derleth and Koldyk 2004). In the Shenyang Model, for example, it was felt that neighbourhood-based residents' committees were too small to operate effectively, while street offices were too large to function as effective grassroots organizations. These communities were rescaled to be larger geographically than an RC-organized neighbourhood. The MCA called the new social infrastructure organizations 'community residents committees' (*shequ jumin weiyuanhui*).

The formulation of Shequ has paved ways for the government to initiate and sponsor community service centres and programmes. Meanwhile, the RC has been adapting and changing its traditional role in the community. As a result of a reformed urban welfare framework and decentralized urban administration, the RCs have developed and implemented a range of service programmes for community residents, such as daily elder care and child care, morning exercise teams, evening social events, and cultural gatherings (Xu et al. 2005). The community-based comprehensive and efficient delivery of social services has been established to meet the diverse needs of local residents, and also helped achieve greater political and social integration (Bray 2005).

*Participatory innovations*

In many newly established gated communities, resident autonomy is comparatively stronger than in the previous work-unit compounds. Since the late 1990s, considerable efforts have been made to revitalize the RC in neighbourhood life by showcasing citizenship and promoting community elections and participation. In 1998, the *Sifang* district of the Qingdao City in Shandong province organized the first RC direct election. This was followed by several experiments in several other cities. In Shanghai, the first round of RC direct elections in 1999 was piloted by two street offices. The latest development in 2012 witnessed over 90 per cent of RCs restructured with direct elections (SBCA 2012).

   To expand spaces for neighbourhood participation, the post-election administration of urban neighbourhood is typically reinvented with the principle of 'separation of deliberation and administration' (*yixing fenli*). Under this arrangement, a RC shall be staffed by three to nine elected and voluntary representatives as the 'deliberative force' which works on participatory issues. Full-time professional social workers who are contracted by a street office are regarded as the 'administrative force' and take care of government-assigned administrative affairs. With this division of labour, top-down policy implementation and bottom-up participation are expected to be balanced. A further reform is to establish a grassroots deliberative institution as an advisory body to the RC. In many neighbourhoods, the deliberative institution takes the shape of the 'deliberative assembly' (*yishi hui*), which is appealing to many community residents and is networked by the HAs and other community organizations (Lin 2002). Community-based deliberation varies both in form and effectiveness. It has been found that deliberation is more effective in neighbourhoods where the power of the RC over residents is weak and it works better where there are strong resident representatives to mobilize information and shape public reasoning (Tang 2014). In any case, in contrast to the earlier stage of community building featuring administrative integration and top-down public service delivery, these new strategies of community organizing can be viewed as a process of grassroots democratic empowerment. They have made the RC more inclusive and less hierarchical, and enabled the RC as a source of localized civic community (Liu 2007; 2008).

## Conclusion

This chapter shows the growth of social solidarity at the local level of Chinese society. The Maoist pattern of community social infrastructure, marked by a high degree of organized dependence, has been significantly eroded with the explosive growth of new social fabrics such as rural solidarity groups, urban property-based organizations and spontaneous bottom-up activisms. Diversification and proliferation of grassroots social fabrics portend that Chinese society has grown more autonomous if not contentious. Despite great

variations, there is a general direction pointing towards 'a substantial rene-gotiation of state-society relations at the grassroots level' (Perry and Goldman 2007: 13–14). The rise of community autonomy is associated with market-oriented reforms including rural *decollectivization*, urban *dedanweilization*, and housing privatization. The waning of socialist social control and the col-lective regime has opened up new horizons for grassroots reorganizing and shaped the social infrastructure of local communities. The growth of new social fabrics confirms that, as the government has further withdrawn from many aspects of citizens' social life, some degrees of autonomy would sooner or later emerge (Sullivan 1990; Davis et al. 1995).

Without underestimating the role of state power withdrawal in the creation of civic spaces, many changing aspects of the neighbourhood and the com-munity must be viewed as a result of deliberate interventions and strategic institutional choices by the state. Indeed, confronted by grassroots power vacuums and social fabrics associated with market transformation, and rea-lizing that the previous pattern of organized control is losing relevance, the state is striving to validate and re-validate its authority (Shue 2004). In both the rural community and the urban neighbourhood, state re-validation for stability and governability, which is processed by embracing village democ-racy, designating comprehensive rural welfare programmes, and promoting community services and neighbourhood-level democratic governance, has largely decentralized the opportunities, resources and also boundaries for the making of grassroots associational space.

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# 7 Education

*Gerard A. Postiglione*

Contemporary education in Chinese society has become more of a priority for both families and government for different reasons. Families view it as a path to social mobility and are willing to spend a large portion of the household budget for it. For government, education is socialization into the national identity and a means to strengthen the nation and build a knowledge economy. Compared to other developing countries, China has made rapid progress in implementing nine years of basic education, senior secondary academic and vocational schools, and a system of mass higher education. According to the National Outline for Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development 2010–2020, the average years of schooling for the working age population will reach 11.2 years by 2020 (from 9.6 years in 2010). By 2030, the access rate to higher education will reach 40 percent. Education has become central to making the country globally competitive by providing human capital that will drive its transition from middle- to high-income nation (Outline 2010). This chapter starts with a brief history of education, to be followed by a discussion of contemporary primary and secondary schools, higher education, the rural-urban divide, and education for ethnic minority groups in China.

## A brief history

As a social institution, schools generally promote continuity more than change. For most of China's history, education has been a conservative force, as Confucianism emphasized the diligent study of moral principles underlying the social order (Elman and Woodside 1994, Lee 2000). For over a thousand years, Confucian orthodoxy was the basis of an examination system (*keju*) that determined merit and the path to officialdom for men. This examination system did make possible a certain equality of opportunity among men, although the advantages were still in favour of those families who had wealth and power (Chang 1963). While it created a pool of highly educated men, it was superimposed upon a mostly illiterate population.

After the defeat of China in the Opium Wars in 1840, the Qing Dynasty began to consider initiating educational reforms in the name of modernization.

By 1905 the imperial examination system was abolished. A Ministry of Education was established that used Japan's education system as a model for modernization. Western missionaries also established schools and universities, and a small number of Chinese students began to study overseas. After the collapse of the Qing Dynasty and the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911, the new government permitted co-education, sought to remove classical learning from primary school, emphasized the learning of mathematics and science, and made lower primary education compulsory. The New Culture Movement of 1919 replaced the classical written language with a Beijing-based vernacular called Mandarin that became the national language. Some contend that the visit of educational philosopher John Dewey in 1919 influenced the establishment of a new school system based on the American 6-3-3 pattern.

Throughout the effort to reform and modernize the new nation, debates continued about the best way to modernize while retaining the essence of Chinese education. This became less of an issue as Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong heralded the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Radical Marxism and Mao Zedong thought reached a peak during the Cultural Revolution of 1966–76, a time of class struggle and political upheavals that led to the closure of schools and universities for two years. A hyper-politicized definition of educational success prevailed until 1976.

When Deng Xiaoping led China into an era of economic reform and opening to the outside world in 1978, academic standards were reintroduced along with a national college and university entrance examination (*gaokao*) (Pepper 1996). Deng espoused that 'science and technology are the key to modernization and education is the means to develop science and technology' (Gu 2001: 112). Since Deng's administration, China has popularized basic education, shown the world that Shanghai secondary school students come first over those in 60 countries in science and mathematics, provided access to higher education for more students than any other country in the world, and built several world-class universities.

However, while the economic reforms brought about much prosperity, they also led to vast inequalities that began to be reproduced in the education system. The legitimacy of an education system depends to a great extent on the promise of social mobility and a better future (Postiglione 2006). The most formidable domestic challenge for the state is to ensure that education responds to a diverse population: to rural as well as urban families, to rural migrants as well as urban middle class, to ethnic minorities as well as poor rural Han Chinese, to girls as well as boys, to those with learning disabilities as well as those who are intellectually gifted. While China has succeeded in the impressive achievement of providing nine years of basic education to more than 95 per cent of the school age population in a country of over a billion people, it is also haunted by educational inequality. The richest 10 per cent of society was 23 times richer than the poorest 10 per cent in 2007, an

increase since 1998, when it was only 7.3 times (Jia 2010). While this might create upheavals in many other societies, relative stability has been maintained by China's rapid economic growth and a cultural heritage with a preference for harmonious social development. As economic indicators rise for a nation of one-child families, quality of life has become a priority and education is expected to make sure it is achieved.

Unsurprisingly, there has been a rapid expansion of educational opportunities for all social groups in the post-1979 era. The state has continued to popularize basic education and literacy for all, expand secondary and tertiary vocational-technical education for job skills in a burgeoning labour market, and increase university enrolments to strengthen the knowledge economy. The demand from the new middle class in an increasingly urbanized society was met by a highly differentiated system of educational credentials leading to elite urban schools and top-tier universities, both domestic and foreign. Women and ethnic minorities began to gain greater access to more social and educational opportunities (Postiglione 2009a). The demand of the state for education as social control was met through the preparation of high-calibre leaders who were able to reconcile communist precepts with market economics (Law 2006).

Managing domestic demands continues to be increasingly difficult and complex. China's education system is shaped by a shifting market of demands from different sectors of the population. Rural parents pay more and more for their children's education and demand that it will lead to a good job (Xie and Postiglione 2015). Meanwhile, employers demand that graduates have relevant knowledge and skills for supporting industrial upgrading. An increasingly influential urban middle class demands that education bring with it a cultural capital and social status that places their children in an advantaged position. This has fuelled shadow education (e.g. cram schools and supplementary coaching for examinations) and opportunities to study abroad as early as junior secondary school. Meanwhile, rural migrant children struggle to obtain meaningful access to urban schools. Other 'left behind' rural children are cared for by grandparents and school services in villages and towns as their parents migrate to cities for work. Finally, the state continues to demand that education be an engine for economic growth but also an instrument to prepare leaders, integrate ethnic minorities, promote ideological socialization, and maintain social stability.

These overlapping demands for practical skills, status culture and social control compete at different times for influence over educational reforms. Each demand takes precedence in different circumstances and at different times. Such a market of multiple demands is recalibrated year by year according to how much the economy grows, how much social dissatisfaction arises, and how quickly the urban middle class prospers. Changes in society determine the pecking order of these demands. In times of rapid economic growth, the demand for practical skills is a top priority. In times of internal strife, the demand of the state for social control takes precedence. As the

middle class expands, the demand for education to confer status culture grows. Reforms in the structure and content of education are influenced by a combination of the three demands. It is also influenced by how well the legal system can temper market forces that obstruct equity and social justice in education.

Equally important, the expansion of educational opportunities in China has to reconcile multiple polarities: foster high-quality learning not only in schools of the prosperous east but also in the poorer west; ensure social stability but not stifle innovation and creativity; preserve aspects of cultural heritage while adhering to the ideological precepts of a socialist market economy; promote mainstream cultural capital while sustaining the cultural vitality of an ethnic minority population a hundred million strong; learn from the outside world to spur high-level scientific and technological progress but temper the younger generation's attraction to aspects of globalization viewed by the government as hostile to national interests; and remain committed to a market economy while providing fair educational opportunities.

Even though China has shifted away from a planned economy and toward a market economy, the central government still sets out national plans and directs local authorities to design implementation strategies. For education, there are usually five-years plans, though occasionally they may introduce a longer-term initiative. One example is the National Outline for Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development, 2010–2020, which aligns with interlocking plans for science and technology (2006–2020) and talent development (2010–2020). Such plans provide a macroscopic framework. While the local authorities are expected to follow them closely, there is enough flexibility to refute the idea of a strictly top-down authoritarian system. Localities sometimes find creative ways to circumvent central policies. This is especially true if educational policies from the central government appear unsuitable for local conditions due to financial or cultural reasons, as in the case with some ethnic minority regions. Rather than confront higher authorities, localities often find alternative means of making progress. Non-adherence to central policies may result in trouble for local officials if results are unimpressive or directly contradictory to central policies. But by instituting experiments and alternative adaptations of a policy in ways that improve education, local governments can influence subsequent policy deliberations at the central level.

## Primary and secondary schools in today's China

The main school subjects are mathematics and Chinese language and literature, science, geography, history and moral education. Secondary school students in the city of Shanghai scored above their counterparts in 60 countries on an international evaluation of mathematics and science achievement. However, students in many other parts of China are far less competitive. For all children in China, learning English is a requirement from grade three of

primary school. At the end of nine years of basic education (six years of primary and three years of junior secondary education), an examination determines the future path for students who continue on in school (Cheng 2000). About half of all students are tracked into the vocational/technical path, while the rest attend senior secondary school in preparation for the national entrance examination for college and university. Vocational schools struggle with funding constraints, teacher quality issues, facilities and equipment, and alignment of training with labour market needs, especially in less developed parts of the country. However, the Ministry of Education has made it a priority to improve senior secondary and tertiary vocational-technical education by building school-industry partnerships. The requirements of gifted and special needs students were not addressed until about 1985. There are an increasing number of special schools, and vocational training schools that have been established for special needs students. The concept of inclusive education has become a regular part of the discourse on educational reform.

In many ethnic minority areas there are nationality schools (*minzu xuexiao*) in which the commonly used written script (Uyghur, Tibetan, Mongolian, or Korean, etc.) may be used as the medium of instruction. In cases where a minority only has an oral language in common use, a phonetic script is devised, and the medium of instruction can be in that mother tongue for the first year or two of primary school, after which the medium of instruction switches to Chinese. The medium of instruction is a complex issue and varies across ethnic autonomous regions (Postiglione 2009a; Postiglione and Beckett 2011).

After completing the compulsory nine years of education, students who wish to continue to senior secondary school normally pay for further education. Although most primary and secondary schools in urban China are state run, the private school movement has gradually gained momentum. Private (*minban*) schools have proved that they can also provide a high-quality education, sometimes superior to that in state-run urban schools, though this is more the case in primary and secondary education than in tertiary education.

The government has encouraged the private school movement, partly because it is unwilling to risk increased government funding in an entrenched school system in which bureaucracy and corruption often place educational progress at risk. Instead, it has looked to social forces (*shehui liliang*), including non-government groups and individuals, to take a lead in establishing and running private schools. While good government schools may survive, some less successful government schools have become converted to the private mode of finance and management to make them more competitive (Hu et al. 2009). By the mid-1990s, a growing number of urban students began to attend the growing number of private schools, including pre-schools, primary and secondary schools, as well as colleges and universities (Lin 1999). In 2003, the government also promulgated a Private Education Promotion Law (2003).

In short, Chinese society is learning to adapt to a transformative education system. Markets have come to matter as much as Marxism in educational provision. Parents are paying more for their children to receive a quality education and access to a college or university that leads to a job after graduation. China has managed to push enrolment rates for primary and secondary schooling to levels above many other developing countries, despite the fact that it only allocates a relatively small proportion of its Gross Domestic Product to education, finally reaching 4 per cent by 2011.

## The rural-urban divide

There is generally a significant difference between rural and urban education. For example, it is notable that while girls outperform boys in urban regions, the opposite is true in rural areas of the country. Before the school finance reform of 2007, less than a quarter of the funds for education went to rural areas, even though more than half of the national population was considered rural. China's new market economy has continued to favour the urban middle class, leaving the rural poor, rural migrants, ethnic minorities and rural girls with poorer access to education and higher drop-out rates.

The rural-urban gap is also reflected in the structure of the education system. More urban than rural students have access to three years of preschool (the final year of which is kindergarten). Preschools emphasize basic training as well as the writing of Chinese characters, games, dance and singing, and promote values such as kindness and beauty. Most rural students do not have the opportunity to attend preschool, although the government has made the expansion of rural preschool education a high priority since 2011. Approximately 20 per cent of preschool-age children do not get a year of preschool education. About 40 per cent attend no preschool at all. These national figures mask urban-regional disparities. A 2008 Survey showed that 56 per cent of rural children aged four to six attended no preschool education (Rural Education Action Programme, 2008). Even in a major city like Shanghai, only about 60 per cent of migrant children aged three to five are in preschool. As a consequence, rather than take their children with them, many migrant parents leave their children behind. These become the so-called left-behind children (*liushou ertong*).

At age six, urban children begin six years of primary school, which is usually located in their neighbourhood. For many Chinese children the school day is long and arduous with a lot of homework – on top of household responsibilities, especially for girls. The story of Guo Guo, a senior secondary school student from Chongqing city, is typical (Muyi 2005; Yang 2006). She awakes about 6:30 a.m. and eats a piece of bread on her way to school. After the regular school day she begins her evening school class at 4:40 p.m. Her father delivers her dinner to her at school, after which Guo Guo begins her second evening school class at 6:30 p.m. After evening school she arrives home to do her daily homework assignment, which she completes by 1:00 a.m., then gets

to sleep not much before 2:00 a.m. In some rural and pastoral areas, students may not begin school until they are eight years old if the school is far from home and roads are unsafe for small children. This situation is beginning to change as village schools are consolidated at town and county level and rural students are bussed to central schools. In such cases, an increasing number of students board at school.

Fewer girls attend school in rural areas and may also drop out of school earlier than boys (Ross 2006). There has been an effort to correct the impression in society that a boy is more valuable than a girl. The sex ratio has improved from the 2000 census figure of 117 boys to 100 girls to the 2010 census figure of between 103 and 107 boys to 100 girls. The encouraging news is that female illiteracy has been slashed from 31 per cent in 1990 to 13 per cent in 2000 and 7 per cent in 2012 (National Bureau of Statistics 2013). Boys and girls attend primary school in near equal numbers nationally, but rural girls have a lower attendance and higher dropout rate.

In the past it was common for many rural village children to attend a two- or three-year primary school in their village, then move on to board at a full six-year primary school in the township to complete their primary education. Those going on to junior secondary school would board at the school in the county, far from their home village. After nine years of basic education, about a quarter to two-thirds of students attend senior secondary vocational-technical school. In some rural areas, vocational-technical education begins as early as junior senior secondary school. In order to make better use of scarce resources, many village schools have been closed. Many rural migrants have taken their children to urban areas for schooling, or left them behind (*liushou ertong*) with relatives and friends in their villages. Children of migrants have diminished educational opportunities. New national guidelines have been proposed to eliminate this problem.

There are other issues related to education in rural areas. A nine-year cycle of compulsory education is guaranteed by law. However, it is not unusual for there to be supplementary fees, especially in rural areas. Indeed, as educational costs rise, many poor households find it increasingly difficult to cover the costs (Kong 2010). Some rural counties struggled to fund nine-year compulsory education. Until late 2005, many children in poor rural counties were required to pay for their schoolbooks. However, since 2007, governments at central and local levels have instituted measures to prevent schools from charging exorbitant fees. Financial reforms in education have improved the free provision of school textbooks and injected funds to assist schools in poorer rural regions (Lou and Ross 2008). The situation has gradually been eliminated in which many rural areas lack the basic conditions necessary for education, including desks, and teaching aids like chalk. School facilities have been improved nationwide. However, the Sichuan earthquake of 2008 demonstrated the poor quality of school building construction.

Teacher qualifications and salaries are on the rise but often not enough to keep good teachers in rural areas. Some remote areas have qualified teachers,

new schools, adequate facilities and even libraries, while others endure shortages of all of them. Achieving a more balanced development remains an elusive priority and drop-out trends have been a major problem in rural areas. For example, in a study of three poor counties in Southwest China, Ding (2012) found there were 214 persons in the seventh grade in 2007, 152 in eighth grade in 2008, and 104 in ninth grade in 2009. In this case, more than half dropped out. Although this is not a typical case, and Ding even called it an extreme case, it does demonstrate that high drop-out rates still exist in some localities. Such a situation could be viewed as troubling since attendance is very high in urban schools. Ding concludes that the government's 2007 policy of free compulsory education and living expenses subsidies for boarding school students resulted in a decline of the drop-out rates. This does not mean that merely increasing funding is the answer to improvements in education.

Rural girls have constituted a high proportion of the drop-outs. Municipalities like Beijing and Shanghai, and east coast provinces like Zhejiang and Jiangsu have lower drop-out rates for girls (Ross 2006). Urban families with their only child being a girl are more likely to give as much attention to ensuring a good education as if she were a boy. While 16 provinces in eastern China had virtually full enrolment, the Northwest and Southwest have struggled to catch up. However, the statistics on school attendance and enrolment do not always match the reality because there is pressure on local officials to reach targets set by the central authorities. This can result in a sugar coating of educational statistics. However, such statistics are increasingly being challenged. A study in 2005 contended that enrolment figures were exaggerated. Students were encouraged to attend on the day that attendance figures were tallied by school inspectors (Ma 2005; Zhu 2005).

The Chinese government set aside 15 billion yuan for rural education in order to reduce educational inequality between rural and urban areas. The *Decision of the State Council to Further Strengthen Education in Rural Areas* has proposed to achieve the 'two basics' (literacy and basic education) and improve the educational quality in 372 rural western counties in China. By 2007 all poor students were exempted from miscellaneous fees and textbook charges, and would receive lodging allowances for boarding at school.

Finally, migrant children's education, which is related to the rural-urban divide, has become a major challenge to continued urbanization of the country. There were 35.81 million migrant children aged 0–17 in 2010, and 69.73 million left-behind children aged 0–17. This amounts to almost one in every four children – over 100 million in total (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2013). Migrant children do not have the same educational rights as urban children. Migrant schools, though not always legal, are sometimes the only option for migrant children. Yet these schools are often closed down for not meeting the basic building standards of space and safety.

Public primary and junior secondary schools are supposed to take the major responsibility to educate migrant children and their enrolment rates

should reach the local level. Migrant children are supposed to be charged the same amount for school fees as children of permanent urban residents. Even when they are able to attend school, their parents' lack of an urban household registration document means children must return to their hometown once they wish to attend senior secondary school.

Finally, poor nutrition for children in rural areas is directly linked to educational achievement. Nutritional deficiency in early childhood substantially hinders cognitive development, leading to poor educational performance. Making early childhood education compulsory is one way of monitoring nutritional indicators. Survey data in rural areas shows that stunting and nutritional deficiencies affect more than 20 per cent of children in poor rural counties (Hannum et al. 2012).

## Education and ethnic minority groups

Another major dimension of educational inequalities is the gap in schooling between Han Chinese and ethnic minority groups in China. Only ten countries in the world have total populations that surpass that of China's ethnic minorities. The 55 officially designated minority groups live in 116 ethnic autonomous areas, which cover half the country and 90 per cent of the border region. In minority areas, the state has to ensure education promotes access and equity, economic development, cultural autonomy as set out in the constitution, and national unity. The education of ethnic minorities has thus become a key sector of China's education system (Zhu 2007; Chen 2008; Gao 2008; Yu 2008; Zhao 2010). The Ministry of Education has a division dealing directly with their educational policy and practices. The State Ethnic Affairs Commission also has a division of minority education that oversees many of the ethnic (*minzu*) colleges in China.

It is impossible to conceptualize China's ethnic minorities as a single entity due to cultural, regional and developmental differences. However, the government's unified set of ethnic minority education policies are intended to be implemented flexibly so as to take account of the unique situation in each ethnic minority region. Ethnic autonomous regions became authorized to develop their own educational programmes, including levels and kinds of schools, curriculum content and languages of instruction. Special funds for minority education were increased, and a portion of the annual budget for ethnic minority areas could be used for education. Funds for teacher training increased and various types of in-service training have been set up. Schools can be established according to the characteristics of the ethnic minorities and their regions. In rural, frontier and cold mountainous regions, boarding schools were arranged and stipends provided for students. Special emphasis in education could be placed on ethnic minority language, culture and historical traditions. Several major universities have special remedial classes for minority students with preparatory programmes in the first year. University admission standards for minority students have been lowered or points added to

ethnic minority students' examination scores to make admission easier to attain.

There are some issues related to educational policies for ethnic minorities in China. Through state educational institutions, ethnic minority culture becomes transmitted, celebrated, transmuted, truncated, or in some cases eliminated. Formal education can become an instrument to broaden cultural sophistication beyond the ethnic community, or it can radically intensify ethnic identities and inequalities in cultural capital. In the case of China, the diversity that exists among its ethnic minority population is only partially reflected in the content of school textbooks, even though minority languages are emphasized in many regions.

In addition, multi-ethnic diversity is salient in propaganda but not highly encouraged in state education. Ethnic cultures are celebrated at national events, but cultural diversity in schools and society is carefully managed. It is prescribed within the context of the ruling ideology of 'ethnic plurality within the unity of the Chinese nation' and within the government's 'harmonious society' campaign. The debate over cultural preservation, ethnic autonomy and state schooling has remained complex (Postiglione 1999).

Schools can shape ethnic identity through the values they transmit. Making ethnic minorities into Chinese citizens is an educational task, which has remained a work in progress. Culturally meaningful access to mainstream schools, colleges and universities has remained a major challenge for improving the quality of ethnic minority community life in China.

Furthermore, most minority groups have trailed Han Chinese in educational attainment. The notion of cultural backwardness has continued to be part of popular discourse about ethnic minorities, and has often been cited in China as the principal reason for educational inequalities between Han Chinese and ethnic minority groups. Cultural backwardness however is not a good argument since about ten of China's 55 minority groups have education levels above the national average. There is a key question on the extent to which school norms recognize and encourage diverse cultural groups and create a learning environment that reflects the ethnic diversity of the nation. The extent to which schools in China create an atmosphere that has positive institutional norms towards diverse cultural groups is limited by notions of cultural backwardness. In some cases, mainstream education has led to a loss of self-esteem and interest in education, particularly in the case of Tibetans, and is reflected in drop-out rates (Nyima 1997, 2000).

## China's higher education

Beginning in 1998, China's higher education system experienced an unprecedented expansion (Postiglione 2005, 2009b). As universities became increasingly viewed as instruments of national competition, more students attended higher education in China than anywhere in the world (Levin 2010). Between 1999 and 2004, enrolments nearly quadrupled. In 1999, enrolment in higher

education stood at 1.6 million, and in 2004, enrolment was 4.473 million. According to the 2007 Ministry of Education statistics, in 1990, less than 4 per cent of the 18–22 age group was enrolled in higher education, compared to 22 per cent in 2005. In 2014, there were seven million college and university graduates. However, less than half had located a job by the time of graduation, prompting a major effort to find ways to address this problem.

The decision to begin a rapid expansion in 1998 was in response to several factors. The successful policy of basic education had pushed more and more students toward higher levels of the education system. The Asian financial crisis had slowed the economy and the government's decision to expand higher education was a way to keep more students out of the labour market until the economy picked up again. It was also a way to get families to spend more of their savings so as to stimulate the economy in the aftermath of the Asian economic crisis. Education is the fastest growing focus of consumer spending by urban residents. This spending is increasing at an average rate of about 20 per cent annually. An average of 10 per cent of savings goes to education, which is higher than the 7 per cent put aside for housing. Finally, the expansion of higher education was a way for China to strengthen its knowledge economy amid economic globalization.

China has the world's second largest economy, yet its universities produce fewer independent thinkers than its competitors. As China loses its labour cost advantage, maintaining the country's economic ascent will depend on boosting the quality of its higher education system. Generating new products and services, as well as building a civil society, will require universities to foster creative and innovative thinking, in addition to carrying out cutting-edge research. China's higher education system has expanded to widen student access, but there is a need to reform university governance and better align university teaching to the needs of the workplace.

The National Outline for Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development 2010–2020 calls for less bureaucratic control of universities and more institutional autonomy. Universities are to be governed by the institutions themselves. Student admission is no longer to be determined solely by the national college and university examination. The universities will aim to make their admission criteria more diverse, with an emphasis on whole-person development. As the massification of higher education continues apace into the future, China's colleges and universities will become more of a leading force in the larger education system and, as has been the case in other countries, a major driver of the democratization of Chinese society.

Rising unemployment of university graduates, something not seen before China embarked on mass higher education, has created an inflationary spiral that will have to be addressed sooner or later. China has to rapidly expand but also privatize much of its higher education system, raise the quality of undergraduate education while broadening the curriculum for more liberal thinking, provide jobs for seven million graduates annually, and keep a lid on various forms of academic corruption.

   The globalization of the Chinese economy is compelling universities to adapt and compete like never before. With the phasing out of a planned economy, Chinese higher education moved towards reforms similar to those in other parts of the world, including a proliferation of non-government-supported institutions of higher education. Private (*minban*) colleges and universities were entering the scene for the first time since 1949, and their numbers were increasing rapidly. By 2006 they numbered 318 with 1,467,000 students (Hu et al. 2009). Some universities even established independent colleges on their own campuses to compete with private colleges and universities. These independent colleges admitted students with lower scores and charged them higher fees than regular students. However, for both *minban* and independent colleges, quality remains a problem. The main accomplishment of private higher education has been to improve access to higher education for more students.

   China is making great efforts to establish several world-class universities that can stand alongside leading universities such as Harvard and Yale, Oxford and Cambridge. To do so, China launched two programmes in higher education known as Project 211 and Project 985. These two plans selected a group of top universities and provided very generous financial support for them to upgrade their standards of teaching and research. Peking and Tsinghua universities, both located in Beijing, and Fudan and Jiaotong universities in Shanghai enjoy some of the highest reputations in the country. However, China's efforts to build world-class universities are heavily influenced by global university ranking systems developed in the West. Although it tries to catch up with top universities in the USA and the UK, many Chinese scholars argue that China should not neglect its own historical tradition of academies to develop its full potential and become an internationally influential part of the higher-education landscape (Hayhoe 1995; Yang 2013).

## Conclusion

China's education system is confronting many challenges. It has to unite a vast multi-ethnic country by managing increased diversity and providing every student with an education that will open their opportunities and pathways to the national mainstream of knowledge and skills, employment and wealth. It has to both raise the quality of education and reduce the uneven balance in access and equity across regions and groups. This will be complicated by the changing demographic profile. Since the beginning of the economic reforms in 1979, there has been a gradual decline in the number of children by about a third. Those 14 years of age or under declined from 360 million in 1975 to less than 250 million in 2010. As the population ages and fewer young people enter the workforce to support an increasingly older national demographic, the education system has to go into overdrive. The number of students with an education has to increase but this will be unhelpful if young people are unable to adapt to an increasingly high-tech

world in which the low-level jobs that have supported China's rise are gradually eliminated. The rapid expansion of higher education can make Chinese society more prosperous and stable but only if it aligns with changes in society and the economy.

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# 8   Status and hierarchy

*Qian Forrest Zhang*

This chapter examines status and hierarchies in Chinese society. A society is differentiated and stratified in many ways; hierarchies can be formed and found along multiple dimensions: political power, social honor, economic wealth, cultural knowledge and even skin color. All hierarchies, however, do not have the same import. In any society, therefore, one can potentially identify a 'hierarchy of hierarchies' – different dimensions of social inequality and hierarchy form a hierarchy in terms of its importance in shaping people's lives and social relationships.

Throughout human history, most people's lives revolved around economic activities, by which we mean, following Polanyi (1957: 248), 'interaction between man and his environment, which results in a continuous supply of want-satisfying material means'. Therefore, a useful way to understand the 'hierarchy of hierarchies' in any given society is to see the dominant *mode of production* (MOP) in an economy as the basis of the most important social hierarchy. 'Mode of production' here refers to the system of organizing the production of 'want-satisfying material means' and then extracting, transferring and distributing the economic surplus generated from such production among different social groups. Although this hierarchy is formed in the processes of economic production and consumption, as we shall see, the basis of this hierarchy – the resource used to create and maintain this hierarchy – can be political power, social status or even religious quality.

Hill Gates (1996) contends that for the past one thousand years, socio-economic hierarchy in Chinese society was primarily structured by two different modes of production: the state-managed tributary mode of production (TMP) and the lineage-based petty commodity mode of production (PCMP). As Gates summarizes:

> For a thousand years in the late-imperial tributary mode, a class of scholar-officials has transferred surpluses from the various producer classes (peasants, petty capitalists, laborers) to themselves by means of direct extraction as tribute, taxes, corvée, hereditary labor duties, and the like. In the private markets that flourished in China from the Song forward,

free producers transferred any remaining surpluses *among* the commoner classes by means of wage labor and a hierarchical kinship/gender system.

(p. 7)

These two systems of organizing production and distributing surplus placed Chinese people within their reach in a two-tiered class structure. Under the TMP, extraction of surplus from producers by holders of political power created the most important status divide in the traditional society: officials vs. commoners. In the PCMP in imperial China, the main unit of petty commodity production was *patricorporations* – household and lineage enterprises that owned or controlled properties and used mainly family labor to produce commodities to be sold on markets for profit (Gates 1996). Within these patricorporations, men, older members and members descended from the male side typically controlled the ownership of properties, commanded the production process, and determined consumption patterns. This relational hierarchy, culturally defined and politically enforced, created a socioeconomic hierarchy within these patricorporations under the PCMP.

Despite a tumultuous century of confrontation with the outside world and internal societal transformation, the existence of some form of state-managed tributary mode of production and market-based petty commodity mode of production persisted to be the two dominant modes of production that shaped socioeconomic hierarchies in Chinese society. The really fundamental change came only after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

## Hierarchies in Mao's China

During the Mao era (1949 to 1978), the reach and strength of the TMP reached its apex, whereas the PCMP was suppressed to the point of near elimination. The new socialist state, led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), had two main policy goals when it was founded in 1949 – creating an egalitarian society on the basis of public ownership of means of production and industrializing an agrarian society with a war-torn economy. Both goals required a transformation of the modes of production in the economy and their underlying property relations, which the state started to implement during the 1950s. The transformation of property relations and the ensuing changes it caused to the class structure allowed the state to, on the one hand, eliminate the economic basis of local elites and other countervailing social forces in the society, and, on the other, extend the reach and strength of its tributary extraction. The state needed a ratcheted-up tributary system to transfer surplus from rural producers to both build urban industries and create new urban administrative and working classes. To further eliminate competition with the state and concentrate resources in state control, the state also suppressed the market-based PCMP to the point of near elimination.

By the mid-1950s, the new regime had largely completed the transformation of the national economy and created a new socialist economy. Although

the state had proclaimed creating an egalitarian society as its goal and indeed successfully transformed pre-existing social hierarchies, true equality remained an elusive goal. New social hierarchies soon took shape on the basis of the transformed modes of production.

### Socialist transformations of Chinese society

The transformation started in rural areas with the land reform of the early 1950s. The land and property of landlords and rich peasants was seized and redistributed to other rural households. But in less than a decade, the state started to push for collectivization in agriculture. Land ownership was transferred from individual households to three levels of collective organizations: production teams, brigades and communes. Production teams and brigades that comprised tens or even hundreds of households also became the units that organized farming activities. The PCMP was greatly reduced, as its material foundation – private land – was pulled from underneath it and families, as a unit of organizing production, were dissolved into production teams. Peasants were only left with small plots of land to grow vegetables for self-consumption.

The land reform and collectivization indelibly changed the class structure and social hierarchy in rural China. The landed gentry, the political and economic elite in pre-socialist China, were eliminated as a class – in some extreme cases, even physically; the rural socioeconomic hierarchy was effectively flattened. The Chinese countryside became a sea of small peasant households under socialism. Political status became a more significant dimension of hierarchy that set rural residents apart – in a way that reversed the previous hierarchy in rural society. The new regime entrusted local political power and the operation of surplus extraction to political activists who rose from among the lower and middle strata of the rural society: the poor and middle peasants. As a class, these peasants gained not only economically through the redistribution of landlords' properties, but also politically via the extractive power granted by the new state. The former landed gentry and other classes classified as counter-revolutionary, on the other hand, not only descended economically to the same level as – if not lower than – other rural residents, but also regularly became subjects of political attack and public humiliation.

A similar social transformation swept Chinese cities. Private properties of urban capitalists were nationalized with modest compensations by the state and private enterprises turned first into public-private joint ventures and then publicly owned enterprises. Just as in rural areas, the PCMP declined; first, because private properties were seized; second, for those hold-outs to nationalization, as more resources began to be included in the central-planned redistribution, markets shrank for both industrial inputs and consumer products, leaving little room for their survival. The state's direct control over the increasing number of public enterprises strengthened the TMP, allowing the

state to extract surplus from these state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and collective-owned enterprises (COEs).

The establishment of state-owned enterprises gave rise to a new system of regulating urban consumption and workers' lives – the work units. These urban work units provided their employees a cradle-to-grave system of social services that included housing, childcare, healthcare, education, pensions, old-age care, and even on-site canteens and public bathing houses. The work units were also a part of the state's plan of managing urban collective consumption. Replacing markets for housing and other consumption needs with state-planned allocation helped the state to suppress labor wages and private consumption, so that more surpluses were not 'wasted' in frivolous consumption but re-invested in industrialization.

With the establishment of a public enterprise system and state-planned allocation of resources, a new hierarchy emerged in the urban employment structure (Bian 1994). SOE workers became a new labor aristocracy, enjoying fully the benefits of the cradle-to-grave welfare system. (There was a further hierarchy within the SOEs: those with higher administrative ranks had access to more resources and enjoyed greater benefits.) COEs, in comparison, were smaller and had lower administrative ranks; their ability to provide for their employees was limited. The remaining petty commodity producers, who struggled at the margin of the state-run economy and had no work units to provide for them, constituted the bottom rung of this urban employment hierarchy.

### The urban-rural divide and official-commoner divide

The strengthened TMP erected new hierarchies in its own mold. Hierarchies among different social groups based on their standings in the tributary mode of production intensified along two dimensions: urban vs. rural and officials vs. commoners. Fundamentally, the rural-urban divide was created by the state's extraction of rural surplus, which was then invested in urban industries and social services. It had to be maintained by a politically defined status hierarchy that the state erected to segregate rural and urban residents. The existence of wide gaps between rural and urban living standards could lead to spontaneous city-bound migration by rural residents, which would threaten to both reduce surplus created in the agricultural sector and divert industrial investment into more urban consumption. To prevent this and to keep rural producers staying within the reach of the TMP, the state implemented strict residential control through the Household Registration System (HRS), which separated rural and urban residents into two distinct classes of citizen.

Rural residents, without urban registration, were not only denied urban employment opportunities but also excluded from the rationed distribution of many basic consumption items, making it extremely difficult for any unauthorized migrants to survive in cities. A highly rigid status hierarchy based on

residential registration (*hukou*) separated urban and rural residents. Only a few channels of mobility, all managed by the state, allowed rural residents to move to and settle in cities (Zhang 2014).[1] This urban-rural divide became a long-lasting legacy of the socialist era, shaping the trajectories of many later developments.

The subsuming of a great amount of economic activity under the TMP also strengthened another divide that had long existed in Chinese society: that between 'the officialdom', members of which were now further empowered by strong central-planning institutions, and commoners, who were further deprived of the opportunity to accumulate wealth in a subordinate PCMP. The socialist officialdom was now given a different name, selected through different procedures, and proclaimed a different ideology. But nevertheless it shared one fundamental commonality with the imperial ruling class of scholar-officials: they both exercised state power to extract tributes from commoners and shared the spoils.

Because the socialist state put almost all areas of society under its admin-istration, this official-commoner divide and the administrative hierarchy within officialdom also penetrated and manifested themselves in all walks of life, far beyond just government bureaucracies or state-owned enterprises. The entire society became encompassed within the administrative hierarchy, with the great majority of the population merely commoners, at the bottom of the hierarchy and with no administrative rank, and a small officialdom on top, itself hierarchically organized in multiple ranks.

Entering the officialdom became a quantum leap in social mobility. And entrance was strictly controlled by the state. Even the privileged urban SOE workers didn't automatically have the 'cadre status'. Before an ordinary worker could be promoted to an administrative post – gaining a position in the administrative hierarchy – he or she first needed to be granted a 'cadre quota', which changed their status from commoner to cadre, a member of the officialdom. Thus, despite the profound social changes implemented by the new socialist regime to create a more egalitarian society, the 'new society' remained highly hierarchical.

## Hierarchies in post-Mao China

With the reforms starting in the late 1970s, another round of profound social change began, although this time in a more peaceful and incremental fashion than during the Communist Revolution. In the first half of the reform or post-socialist era (1978 to present), the central-planned, redistributive econ-omy had remained in force and the dominance of the TMP intact. However, on the margins of the redistributive economy and the TMP, markets started to revive and expand. The PCMP, which had been suppressed and dormant for at least two decades, re-emerged and a new mode of production, the capitalist mode of production (CMP), arose.

*Changes in the modes of production*

Self-employment and entrepreneurial activities were again allowed in both cities and countryside at the beginning of the reform period, though limited to no more than seven employees. In cities, the return of sent-down youths from the countryside and the entry into the labor force of cohorts born during the 'baby boom' years of the 1960s created rampant unemployment. The state had to open up the private petty commodity production to accommodate the growing demand for jobs. Initially, self-employment mainly attracted disadvantaged groups – people who could not get jobs in the state sector. The growth of self-employment in cities increased sharply after 1992 when the central government accelerated market reform and encouraged private entrepreneurial activities. The rise in self-employment also occurred because the state sector reform started to downsize SOEs and lay off redundant workers in the 1990s.

An internal hierarchy started to emerge in the burgeoning private sector. Those who entered to pursue entrepreneurial career opportunities brought with them greater capital and skills and usually had greater success and financial returns from private entrepreneurship. Others who were pushed into petty commodity production by state-sector downsizing and were seeking a refuge from poverty had little more than their own labor to rely on and had far less chance of becoming prosperous.



*Figure 8.1* Petty commodity production in rural areas: a noodle shop in Henan

In rural areas, the resurgence of the PCMP took a markedly different path. The rural reform disbanded rural communes and brigades as collective units of production, re-assigned land use rights to rural households, and, as a result, restored households as the unit of production and consumption in rural areas. Smallholding household producers again dominated the rural economy. While many of these small farming households remained subsistence producers, more and more were becoming commodity producers producing both agricultural and non-agricultural goods for markets. Rural households were still within the reach of the TMP, subject to the state's extraction in the form of obligatory grain quotas. They were, however, allowed to engage in market-oriented petty commodity production, whether diversifying into non-farm employment or selling agricultural surplus on markets. The new rural economy resembled the pre-socialist formation, where both the TMP and PCMP existed.

Before long, the trickle of rural petty commodity production turned into a gusher, especially in non-farm production. The growth of rural non-farm employment took different forms in different regions: in the southern coastal region, more in the form of small family-based enterprises, similar to the traditional patricorporations; in northern coastal and inland regions, more in the form of collective township-and-village enterprises (TVEs). For the first 15 years of the post-socialist transition, the growth of TVEs and rural household enterprises became the main force that drove China's rural industrialization and transfer of labor from farming to non-farming jobs. A new dimension in rural social stratification emerged: managers in TVEs, who were usually current or former village cadres, and the enterprising families became the new economic elite in rural society, accumulating wealth through market-based entrepreneurial activities that grew outside the reach of the TMP.

A novel development of the post-socialist era, especially from the 1990s onwards, has been the emergence and rapid rise of a capitalist mode of production (CMP) in the economy. Unlike the PCMP, the CMP uses commoditized labor in non-family-based organizations. The extraction of surplus is based on ownership and control over means of production. A crucial event in the rise of the CMP in the Chinese economy is the legalization of private enterprises through a constitutional amendment in 1988, which gave protection to private properties and allowed the employment of eight or more employees. As a result, domestic private firms started to grow, and joined the foreign-invested firms, which had first introduced the CMP, in expanding the CMP in the economy. The growth of CMP was further fueled by the privatization of collective rural TVEs and urban SOEs in the 1990s. The number of domestic private firms increased sharply and some large-size firms started to emerge. In recent years, the domestic private sector has grown to one-third of the national economy, while foreign-invested private firms and state firms each take another third. With this rapid rise of the CMP, the transfer of surplus from

commoditized laborers to capital owners emerges as a new and increasingly powerful process in creating social inequality and forming hierarchies.

Not surprisingly, the resurgence of PCMP and rise of CMP pushed the once-dominant TMP into retreat, as the reform opened up new markets and shifted more economic activities outside the reach of the TMP. In the increasingly marketized urban economy, the state withdrew its direct tributary extraction from the increasing number of non-state firms. Even in state firms, more management autonomy and property rights were devolved from government to the firms themselves. Since the late 1990s, the accelerated pace of privatization in state sectors, especially that of smaller-scale SOEs, further reduced the scale of the state-run economy and restricted the reach of the state-managed TMP.

In recent years, however, after the initial period of retreat, the remaining large-scale SOEs, albeit few in number, have experienced a revival and helped to ensure that TMP remains a powerful force in the new economic system and in shaping social hierarchies. These large-scale SOEs gained strength not only from an influx of capital after being listed on domestic and overseas stock exchanges but, more importantly, from greater capacity of surplus extraction based on market monopoly. These SOEs concentrated in the so-called 'strategic sectors' of the national economy, where entry by private firms was severely restricted: banking and finance, telecommunication, oil and petrochemical, energy and resources, public utility, defense and transportation.[2] Protected by politically granted market monopoly and emboldened by the political power they had within the state system, these SOEs were able to extract surplus from consumers in the form of monopoly rent – for example, artificially high oil and electricity prices and low (savings account) interest rates.

However, the corporate reforms implemented in these SOEs and their participation in capital, labor and other markets transformed them from traditional socialist firms into a new breed of state firm. Both the CMP and TMP are at work in these state monopoly firms: the state monopoly capital simultaneously extracts surplus from workers on the basis of control of means of production (CMP) and extracts surplus from consumers through monopoly rent created and protected by the state's political power (TMP).

In rural areas, although the reform allowed households to diversify into farm and nonfarm production outside the reach of the TMP and gradually did away with state-imposed mandatory production quotas, the TMP became more intense for a period of time. In the 1990s, the fiscal reform and the privatization and decline of TVEs severely reduced local governments' revenue sources. Local governments had nowhere to turn but to ratchet up their extraction of surplus from rural households. As a result, besides the agricultural tax levied by the central government, various levels of local governments created a myriad of new taxes, levies, charges and corvée labor to extract surplus from rural residents (Bernstein and Lu 2000). Excessive peasant

burdens soon became a nationwide problem and led to the rapid deterioration of local governance in rural areas.

This trend was finally reversed when the Hu Jingtao and Wen Jiabao administration came into office in 2003. In 2004, the agricultural tax was abolished nationwide and, with it, the central state's direct surplus extraction from individual agricultural producers. A practice that had existed in China for over 2000 years finally came to an end. Furthermore, central government brought in a direct subsidy to farmers on the basis of farm size. Central government also introduced strict restrictions on the type and amount of taxes, levies and corvée labor that local governments could impose on rural residents. Although implementation varied across regions, the combination of these measures helped to curtail the power of state-managed TMP in rural areas.

### Changes in social hierarchies

Under socialism, the dominant mode of production – the TMP – was a political creation: the extractive power was based on the political power of the state in turning private properties into state properties, in controlling farmers' harvest, in disciplining labor, and in restricting rural residents' exit from state extraction. The hierarchies it created in society, although they had clear social and economic consequences, were primarily based on politically defined statuses – urban vs. rural and officials vs. commoners. Society, thus, was politically stratified, or, in sociological terms, it was a status-stratified society.

In the PCMP and CMP of post-socialist China, the extraction of surplus is based on economic ownership rather than political power. Even the TMP, which remains powerful, now mixes with and draws on the CMP in its operation in the hybrid form of state monopoly capital. Correspondingly, the hierarchical structure of society is changing, from comprising primarily politically based hierarchies to a mixture of political and economic hierarchies, with the latter becoming increasingly significant. The most notable change in this process is, therefore, the emergence of economically based hierarchies – class stratification – in contemporary China, which can be seen from changes in the rural-urban divide and the emergence of new classes.

To what extent the rural-urban divide has weakened and whether rural-urban inequality has declined or increased are still hotly debated. Over-shadowed by these debates, however, is an important change: the source of rural-urban inequality is shifting from political to economic. The household registration system that used to create the differential statuses between rural and urban residents is still in effect. However, its impact on people's life chances and living conditions has been considerably weakened.

As the institutional barriers erected under socialism to help maintain the TMP and transfer of rural surplus into urban industries were gradually dismantled, urban lives were no longer dependent on the rationed allocation of consumer goods and social services, tied to employment in work units and

urban registration. In the past three decades, hundreds of millions of rural residents have migrated to cities – to either work temporarily or settle permanently. These rural migrants are indeed still poorly treated in cities and stigmatized by urbanites, and have difficulty getting a good job or permanently settling down; but these difficulties are increasingly the result of their disadvantaged economic positions in the CMP and PCMP, especially in labor and housing markets, and less the result of a politically defined rural status (Zhan 2011).

To the extent that institutional discrimination of rural migrants still exists in areas of urban services such as education, healthcare and public housing, these institutions discriminate against them because they are migrants, not because they are *rural*. In fact, these institutions discriminate against a poor peasant-turned-construction worker, a millionaire entrepreneur whose household registration is in another city, and a foreign CEO of a multinational firm just the same; the difference is that the latter two have the money – thanks to their advantageous market positions – to pay for what they want, including more and more better alternatives outside the state-administered system. Rural migrants do face disadvantages of being 'rural'; but those are created by the social exclusion of them by urban residents and organizations, not by their legal *hukou* status (Zhan 2011).

A similar change is happening to the inequality between urban and rural areas. In the past, 'rural' status was defined not by your occupation in agriculture in the economic division of labor but by your position in a political classification – the household registration system. This rural status then simultaneously subjected you to the extraction of surplus under the TMP and excluded you from receiving the transfer of surplus in the form of all kinds of urban social services. But nowadays the rural registration status no longer has such an effect: rural producers are not only freed from the extraction by central government but receive direct transfer of surplus in the form of farming subsidies. They can also freely migrate to cities and have gained access to many urban services.

Rural areas are still generally poorer than cities, but not because they are politically subjected to the tributary extraction by cities. They remain poor mainly because of their specialization in the less profitable area of agricultural production, which occupies a peripheral and subordinate position in the economic division of labor relative to the manufacturing, service and administrative activities in cities. When a rural area upgrades its economy from agriculture to manufacturing, as many rural villages in peri-urban locations have done, it quickly improves its economic prosperity to a level comparable to that in similar urban areas, without ever changing its politically defined 'rural' status.

Another situation puts this new source of rural-urban inequality into even sharper relief: when rural residents manage to occupy advantageous positions in the economic system vis-à-vis urban residents, the urban-rural hierarchy can be reversed without any change to political status. One can find such

*Figure 8.2* Independent family housing in a new rural community in Sichuan



*Figure 8.3* A village-in-the-city (*chengzhongcun*) in Changsha, Hunan

examples in the so-called 'villages-in-the-city', or *chengzhongcun* – rural villages encircled by an expanding city. Residents in these villages retain their rural *hukou* and, thanks to this, the property rights attached to land and houses located in these urban 'villages'. These property rights place them in an advantageous economic position as landlords; rental income allows them to live in material comfort and they have become the envy of many urbanites. On the other side of the equation, many well-educated urban residents – college graduates in Beijing, for example – find themselves in disadvantaged positions in both labor and housing markets. Their situation has given rise to a new social phenomenon: the 'antizens' or *yizu*: people who, like ants, struggle in low-paying, unstable jobs and live in cramped quarters – oftentimes rental houses located in peri-urban villages and villages-in-the-city and owned by 'rural' landlords. For parties involved in this confrontation, the more important divide is clearly not whether one has rural or urban status in the political scheme but whether or not one owns property in the economic market.

The hierarchy that may still exist in relations between rural and urban residents is now undergirded by different modes of production. While the TMP is still in effect, the central processes that create rural-urban disparities are both located in the rising CMP: first, the transfer of surplus from rural migrant laborers to urban owners of capital through the sale and use of commoditized labor; and second, the transfer of surplus from rural agriculture to urban manufacturing and financial industries, in which capital and industry increasingly control and profit from both the inputs and outputs of agricultural production.

In both cities and rural areas, people's position in the economic hierarchy is also gaining importance over their position in the hierarchies of social status and political classification. In cities, a new economic elite, comprising private entrepreneurs and high-salaried professionals working for multinational firms and big state firms, has not only carved out an enviable position for themselves in the social hierarchy but also made an indelible mark – with their unprecedented wealth and extravagant lifestyles – on the collective imagination of the new consumer society. In recent years, another group that has attracted a lot of attention is the so-called 'rich second generation' or *fu erdai*: young adults who are born to substantial family wealth and are eager to flaunt it, often in an in-your-face manner that triggers strong reactions from the masses.

In rural areas, class-based stratification – a hierarchy based on economic assets and position – is also gaining ascendance. Under socialism, rural stratification was based on two factors: access to political power and the demographic structure of the family. Since the 1980s, however, when first rural industrialization and then rural-to-urban migration unleashed the massive transfer of labor from agriculture to non-agricultural jobs, access to non-farm wage jobs has become the greatest source of household income inequality in rural China (Khan and Riskin 1998). Families with political connections are still doing better; but most cadre families get a higher income because they

*Figure 8.4* Rural prosperity, living right next door to poverty

use their political power to either secure wage jobs for family members or venture into private entrepreneurship (Walder and Zhao 2006).

In recent years, class-based stratification even started to emerge among agricultural producers. Up until the mid-1990s, income from farming was highly equitable among rural households in China. This was mainly because land was distributed within a village in a largely egalitarian manner. Another reason was that farming in general was not very profitable and could not generate much wealth even for families with more labor and land. But profound changes have taken place in Chinese agriculture in recent years. New actors – in particular, entrepreneurial farmers and agribusiness companies – have entered agriculture and started to organize agricultural production on a large scale with rented land and hired labor. A new hierarchy – one that is determined in this emerging CMP on the basis of economic position – is transforming what used to be a flattened and homogeneous peasantry class into a host of unequal class positions (Zhang and Donaldson 2010).

Despite the changes outlined above, the continued existence of TMP means that the divide between the officialdom and commoners persists. In some areas this divide is intensifying. With the retreat of TMP, social services ranging from healthcare to education to housing, which used to be subsidized for urban residents, have been marketized. As a result, for many urban residents now working in nonstate sectors (PCMP and CMP), rising prices for these goods and services are now consuming an increasing portion of their income and becoming a heavy burden. In the housing market in particular they have shifted from being recipients of state transfer of surplus

under socialist TMP to subjects of extraction under post-socialist CMP, paying monopoly rent to state and corporate actors that now control the privatized urban housing.

Thus, access to state transfer of surplus under the TMP, in the form of subsidized housing and healthcare, job security, pensions, and even the possibility of collecting 'informal incomes', became an even scarcer opportunity and a greater privilege. This explains the enthusiasm shown by young people for pursuing a career in a state sector. A civil service job remains one of the most sought after in the job market. In 2010, over a million applicants participated in the nationwide qualifying examination for civil service jobs, competing for 16,000 openings, making it the most competitive examination in the country and showing the huge appeal that a place in the officialdom still holds for the younger generation. The craving for a ticket into the officialdom, however, has been tempered in recent years by the anti-corruption campaign launched by the new president, Xi Jinping. The ratio of applicants to vacancies has declined by half from 134:1 in 2011 to 64:1 in the 2015 round.

Those who are already in the officialdom are also acutely aware of their privileges and are trying hard to pass them down to their children. In many local government agencies or state firms, the recruitment of new employees has become an intensely guarded process only open to insiders: children of the officialdom and well connected others. Enriched by the privileges granted by state institutions and protected by the rampant abuse of official power, some children of the officialdom have so antagonized the public with their reckless behavior and condescending attitudes that they have been labeled the 'officials' second generation' or *guan erdai*, a group now more widely loathed than the *fu erdai*.

## Conclusion

Many aspects of Chinese society are still in flux; but the set of hierarchies that are now taking root in the social structure, as described above, are likely to be long-lasting features. Fundamental change has taken place in areas ranging from property rights to corporate governance to market regulation to lay a stable institutional foundation for the operation of the three modes of production: tributary, petty commodity and capitalist. The balance between the three will shift; but, barring the unlikely event of regime change or economic collapse, these three modes of production and the socioeconomic hierarchies they generate will be here to stay.

There is little doubt that the CMP is going to grow even stronger, as foreign investment continues to pour in and domestic firms grow in size. The increasing clout of 'big capital' and the growth of the CMP are squeezing the space for petty commodity production. Unless the state steps in to curb the power of big capital, petty commodity producers will face increasing competition in markets. The experience of developed countries, however, shows that petty commodity production remains viable even in capitalist economies dominated

by large firms. In China's case, the vast number of petty commodity producers in rural areas provides an even stronger base for the persistence of the PCMP. So long as collective land ownership in rural areas persists – for which central government has repeatedly asserted its support – rural petty commodity producers will retain some protection against capital's encroachment on their land rights and continue their independent commodity production. Their rank may even grow as more subsistence farmers gain the skill, capital and market access to make the transition to commercial farming, a process that is currently underway in many areas of rural China (Zhang and Donaldson 2010).

The number of large SOEs will probably decline slightly, as central government has announced plans to further divest itself of some less profitable SOEs in competitive sectors. However, the large SOEs that are protected by state-imposed market monopolies and constitute the core of the state sector will remain strong. Central government has made it clear that these national champions will constitute a pillar in the national economy. Just like the hybrid economy, the structure of Chinese society will be characterized by a hybridity of hierarchies. While the politically defined status of officials and commoners continues to bring sharply different life chances to groups of different status, this status divide is no longer the only dimension that differentiates people and creates different life chances. People who are excluded from the officialdom can now gain economic wealth in markets through both the PCMP and the CMP. Success in the market economy has already given rise to a growing economic elite.[3] Some of them may not enjoy as much social prestige as officials and may even be harassed and extorted by corrupt officials; nevertheless, their economic wealth and the freedom they have to dispose of it are still the envy of many – including members of the officialdom (Zhang 2014).

The urban-rural divide is increasingly sustained through the unequal division of labor and exchange relationships within a capitalist economy. The declining significance of political status and increasingly greater significance of economic condition in determining rural-urban inequality can also change the structure of the rural-urban hierarchy. In rural areas, the strong institutional protection of small farmers' land rights and intrinsic agricultural barriers against the penetration of capital provide stronger foundations for the survival and even growth of petty commodity producers in agriculture. In the urban economy, by contrast, petty commodity producers face increasing competition from big capital and declining profits in the production process. Proletarianized urban workers who are exposed to the brute forces of markets are in even worse condition. Compared to agricultural petty commodity producers in rural areas, they may find that the social status they enjoy as urban residents, which under socialism put them in an enviable position in the status hierarchy, now provides few material comforts and is dwarfed by the economic disadvantages they confront in their low positions in the new class hierarchy.

**Glossary**

**Means of production (MOP)**  The system of organizing the production of want-satisfying material means and then extracting, transferring and distributing the economic surplus generated from such production among different social groups in a society.

**Tributary mode of production (TMP)**  A system using political power to extract surpluses from direct producers through tributes, taxes, various forms of labor duties, and the like.

**Petty commodity mode of production (PCMP)**  Producers use their own resources, including means of production and labor, plus some small amount of hired labor, to engage in small-scale commodity production. Typically, the units of petty commodity production are families. Surpluses created from such activities are unevenly distributed within families based on the hierarchical social relationships that exist in the families.

**Capitalist mode of production (CMP)**  A system of organizing production and extracting and distributing surpluses based on, first, the separation of means of production from direct producers and the concentration of these means in the hands of capitalists, which enables the latter to extract surpluses from the former, and second, all actors' dependence on markets for their social reproduction.

**Notes**

1  Some rural residents worked for state factories as part-time workers – they did manual labor and were kept off the regular payroll. At the end of each year they went back to their villages and bought work points from their production teams with cash they earned in city jobs so that they would receive their grain rations. I am grateful to the editor for pointing this out.

2  In recent years, the state has started to open up these protected monopoly sectors to private firms. In 2005 and 2010, two rounds of liberalizing measures were implemented to ease and encourage the entry of private capital into these previously protected sectors. However, given the huge size and market dominance of state firms in these sectors, private firms' role will continue to be marginal.

3  In reality, however, people who rise to join the economic elite through success in the CMP are more likely to have close ties with the officialdom. In a hybrid economy where the TMP remains powerful, ties with officials help private entrepreneurs to either keep the state's grabbing hand from predatory extraction of their wealth or gain access to monopoly rents protected by state power.

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# 9 Ethnic minorities

## Colin Mackerras

The borders of the People's Republic of China (PRC) are mainly those established by the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) and inherited by the Republic of China (ROC, 1912–49). The territory the Chinese sometimes call 'Outer Mongolia' belonged to Qing China, but is now an independent state called the Republic of Mongolia, although Inner Mongolia remains part of China. Potter (2011: 2) notes the importance of the 'frontier' in 'China's sense of itself' and its relations with its neighbours, as well as with the communities that live in the frontier areas, which include Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia. There is a good deal of overlap between China's border regions and the 'ethnic areas' (*minzu diqu*), which are those places where there are significant ethnic minority populations.

### What is an ethnic minority?

The term 'ethnic minority' is the usual English translation of the Chinese *shaoshu minzu*, which means literally 'minority nationality'. The word *minzu* is understood as a community of people with a shared history, territory, language, economic life and culture. First proposed by Stalin in 1913, this definition was adopted by the PRC in its early days and has survived substantially unchanged ever since. Chinese-language texts from the PRC still talk of the *shaoshu minzu*; those in English having changed to current usage from 'minority nationality' or 'national minority'.

The Chinese state recognizes 56 ethnic groups, the Han and 55 ethnic minorities. Everybody is registered as belonging to a particular ethnic group, the decision as to which one resting less with individuals than with the state. The process of reaching the number 56 has been complex, but broadly successful in the sense that Chinese people overwhelmingly accept their assigned ethnic classification. (See Mullaney 2011: especially 120–36.)

There are many ways of categorizing these minorities, including economic life in the pre-modern era, language, culture and religion. The one with the largest territory, though not the most populous, is the Tibetans, who live in the southwest in areas making up nearly a quarter of all China. Two of the minorities formerly ruled the whole of China. The first was the Mongolians

who ran the largest land empire in world history, including the Yuan dynasty in a united China from 1280 to 1368; the second was the Manchus, whose ruling family were the emperors of the Qing Dynasty. A range of ethnic minorities live in China's south to southwest, especially Yunnan, Guangxi and Guizhou. They include several with significant cultures and identities, such as the Zhuang, the Yi, the Miao and the Yao. Finally, a very important group are the Islamic minorities. There is a total of ten, but the two most noteworthy are the Hui and the Uyghurs. The Hui live all over China; they are ethnically and culturally Chinese, except for their Muslim religion. The Uyghurs are Turkic linguistically and culturally, with almost all of them living in Xinjiang, in the far northwest.

Some of the ethnic minorities are quite similar culturally to the Han, but others are very different indeed. Although there are many commonalities among them, they illustrate great diversity in terms of language, religion, the arts, architecture, diet and family practices. On the whole, China has managed this cultural diversity quite well and the great majority of the members of the ethnic minorities appear willing, even happy, to remain within the PRC. The overall trend since the middle of the twentieth century has been towards a better-integrated Chinese state. However, there have been occasions when factors such as political dissatisfaction, the fear of being culturally submerged, ethnic and other inequalities, and the fanning of discontent from outside or inside China have led to ethnic violence and animosities, including movements that have tried to separate particular ethnic areas from China. Among the minorities that have seen separatist movements, the two most notable are the Tibetans and the Uyghurs.

## Population

Although the territory of the 55 ethnic minorities takes up about 65 per cent of China's total area, their population is small relative to the whole country. The 'ethnic areas' are actually much less densely populated than those inhabited by the Han. They include the dry pastoral areas of Inner Mongolia, the Gobi and Taklamakan, among the largest deserts in the world, and the relatively infertile high-lying Tibet-Qinghai Plateau. This vast plateau is home to almost all China's Tibetans, as well as quite a few other people belonging to an ethnic minority.

There have been six censuses under the PRC, held in 1953, 1964, 1982, 1990, 2000 and 2010. In China the census includes ethnic breakdown and also gives aggregate figures for the ethnic minorities as a whole as well as their proportion in China's total population. The 1953 census showed the minorities at 34 million, or 5.89 per cent of the total population; that of 1982 put them at 66.4 million, or 6.62 per cent of the total. In 1990 the ethnic minority population had climbed to 90.1 million, the proportion to 8.01 per cent. By 2000 the ethnic proportion had risen further to 8.41 per cent or 106.46

million people, while the 2010 census counted the ethnic minorities as total-ling 113.79 people, which was 8.49 per cent of the total population of China.

The most populous of the ethnic minorities is the Zhuang, who numbered just under 17 million in the 2010 census. Others with large populations (all according to the 2010 census) include the Hui (10.59 million), the Manchus (10.39 million), the Uyghurs (10.07 million), the Miao (9.43 million), the Tibetans (6.28 million) and the Mongolians (5.98 million). The smallest in population in 2010 was the Tatars, who live in Xinjiang and who numbered 3,556.

The ethnic populations have been rising consistently under the PRC. More importantly, the proportion of the minorities within the total Chinese popu-lation has increased significantly since 1953, the most rapid increase being between 1982 and 1990. There are a few reasons for this that are worthy of comment.

First, the policy of one-child-per-couple adopted in the late 1970s did not apply to the minorities. This did not mean that there were no rules or recommendations for the minorities, but they varied greatly from place to place and from one minority to the other. In general, sensitive ethnic mino-rities with relatively low and thinly spread populations were subject to more flexible and lenient rules than others. A good illustrative example is the Tibetans, a government statement of 1999 stating that Tibetan farmers and herdsmen in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) may have as many chil-dren as they like. (See discussion, including relevant figures in Mackerras 2003: 134–41.)

With the end of the Cultural Revolution, it became more socially accepted to belong to certain ethnic groups than had been the case before. Moreover, the government reinstituted and broadened its programme of affirmative action or 'preferential policies' (*youhui zhengce*) for the minorities. The result was that groups and individuals who had hidden their identity were happy to expose it, even with pride. Perhaps the best example is the Manchus, whose population in the 1982 census numbered 4.3 million but had more than dou-bled to 9.85 million in that of 1990. This extraordinary growth in just eight years was largely due to re-registration, meaning that the state allowed groups or individuals who had initially been called Han to change their registration to Manchu. Formerly, Manchus had felt a sense of shame because their ethnic group had ruled China's last dynasty, the Qing, being in effect coloni-zers. But with the passage of time, and with new policies, such a history was no longer relevant, and there was no reason why Manchus could not share the privileges accorded other minorities.

## The Han and the ethnic minorities

Given that the ethnic minorities make up less than 10 per cent of China's people, it follows that the Han are overwhelming in terms of the population, and in more or less all other respects. Indeed, with over 1.2 billion people on

the Chinese mainland alone in 2010 and over 70 million elsewhere, the Han are close to 1.3 billion in number and the world's most populous ethnic group. Given that the Han is so dominant and the ethnic group one normally associates with the Chinese, the question arises whether the ethnic minorities should be regarded as Chinese. Both the PRC and the ROC have been very clear that they are indeed Chinese, with the combination of the Han and the ethnic minorities making up 'the Chinese nation' (*Zhonghua minzu*).

Actually, this concept only dates back to the early twentieth century but has become important to various Chinese leaders since then. Among these, the main one was Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), whom Chinese of virtually all political persuasions honour as the founder of the ROC. Sun developed the 'three people's principles' (*sanminzhuyi*), which became the ROC's guiding ideology. The first of them is 'nationalism', a doctrine requiring the assimilation of the ethnic groups into a unified Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu*) based on the Han.

Sun recognized only five ethnic groups, the Han, Manchus, Mongolians, Tibetans and Hui, the last one including all Muslims, not just the Sinic ones. The PRC expanded the number and replaced the idea of assimilation with that of 'ethnic unity' or 'the unity of the nationalities' (*minzu tuanjie*). However, all PRC leaders have followed Sun in stressing Chinese unity. They have retained the notion of 'the Chinese nation' and, although it has received stronger emphasis at some times than at others, it has always remained acceptable in the PRC.

While the idea of a unified nation is a reasonable one that enjoys a great deal of support both inside and outside China, there could be a problem with the term *Zhonghua minzu*. This is the risk of 'essentializing the Han', a potentially racist notion signifying that the 'subordination of nationalities in China leads to the clear promotion of the Han to the vanguard of the peoples of the People's Republic' (Gladney 2004: 59). In ancient times, the term *Huaxia* (the *Hua* being the same character as in *Zhonghua*) referred to China's majority ethnic group, so *Zhonghua* appears to give the focus to ethnicity as opposed to *Zhongguo* (the current Chinese term meaning China), which could be taken to emphasize place. The implication is that the use of *Zhonghua minzu*, instead of *Zhongguo minzu*, to represent the totality of the Chinese nation, could lead to a revival of assimilative thinking, if not in theory then at least in practice. The idea of the superiority of Han culture is extremely widespread in China, both among the Han themselves and even the minorities.

There will be more to say about how minority cultures fare in the context of Han-led modernization. However, here I think it fair to point out the rise of consciousness among some minorities, especially since the 1980s. Scholarly works have noted this rise of feelings about identity among such peoples as the Hui (Gladney 1991), and the Zhuang and Yao of the southwestern region of Guangxi and elsewhere (Kaup 2000; Litzinger 2000). Observers have given more attention to ethnic minorities like the Tibetans and Uyghurs, but that

does not mean they are the only ones to have experienced a growing ethnic identity.

## The ethnic minorities: policy and reality

The basic policy of the PRC towards the ethnic minorities allows them to exercise autonomy in their own areas, but absolutely forbids separatism. The PRC has set up five autonomous regions, which are equivalent in status to provinces, namely the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region (set up 1947), the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (1955), the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (1958), the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (1958), and the TAR (1965). In addition, there are 30 autonomous prefectures and some 120 autonomous counties or units of equivalent status.

As defined in Chinese law, autonomy has a range of meanings. The head of government in the ethnic areas must belong to the ethnic group that exercises autonomy. The government tries to increase the number of minority members holding positions of influence or power or professional qualifications. Minorities are entitled to preserve the good aspects of their own cultures. There are preferential policies for minorities in a range of areas, such as employment in government positions, enrolment in higher education, and in matters of population control.

There are, however, severe restrictions on autonomy. The main one is that there is no requirement on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to select minority members for high positions in the minority areas. So, the government head of Xinjiang must be a Uyghur, but the party secretary need not be so. Moreover, it is well known that the CCP actually holds far more power everywhere in China than the government. Although members of ethnic minorities are encouraged to join the CCP, those of religiously dedicated ethnic groups, such as the Tibetans or the Muslim minorities, are generally reluctant and there is a sense among some CCP members that they are untrustworthy anyway. The result is that the proportions of such ethnic groups entering the CCP are fairly low.

## The economy

Probably the highest of all Chinese government economic priorities in the ethnic areas is to promote development. This has been especially the case in the reform period and in general appears to have gathered momentum. Chinese authorities believe that raising the standard of living will persuade the ethnic minorities to wish to remain part of the PRC and promote their loyalty to the state, as well as improve ethnic harmony and good relations among the various ethnic groups. Successive official reports and white papers have claimed, for the ethnic areas, continual rises in overall production and in consumption levels, improvements in infrastructure, housing and health delivery, and increases in tourism and outside investment.

In 2000 the government launched its Great Western Development Strategy. This aimed not only to push economic development in general but also to reduce the economic gap between the prosperous coastal areas and the comparatively poor remainder of the country. Mainly focused on the western half of the country, the targeted regions include the great majority of the ethnic areas.

Successive visits to Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and various other ethnic areas have made me witness to gigantic improvements in living standards, in both urban and rural areas. The capital of Xinjiang, Ürümqi, was a totally different world during my 2010 visit from when I first went there in 1982. It was much more modern, much cleaner, with generally far better housing, more prosperous markets and a larger number of tall buildings. There could, however, be a cost in terms of cultural preservation, because modernization does not generally sit well with traditional cultures. (See next section.) Moreover, despite the overall growth, poverty remains a problem and inequalities, especially between Han and ethnic minorities, appear to have widened during the reform period.

One of the greatest gaps in China is between urban and rural, the former being considerably better off than the latter. On the whole the proportion of ethnic minorities living in the countryside is higher than of the Han. There has been a rapid and accelerating process of urbanization since the early 1980s, to the extent that the 1982 census put the urban proportion at 20 per cent but the 2010 at almost exactly half the total. However, on the whole this urbanization process has affected the Han much more than the minorities. Historically, especially in southwestern provinces like Guizhou and Yunnan, the Han have tended to take over the agricultural land on the plains, chasing the minorities into the mountains. The result is that the minority communities are mostly at a severe disadvantage in achieving economic parity with the Han.

The Chinese government's record in reducing absolute poverty is a very good one by international standards. Using the borderline of US$1.25 per day as a measure, the World Bank estimates that between 1981 and 2011, no less than 753 million of China's people 'moved out of extreme poverty'. The number estimated as still living below US$1.25 per day in China in 2011 was 84.1 million. China's comparative success in dragging people out of extreme poverty is evident in the world-wide context over the same period, which was of a reduction of extreme poverty among 942 million people in developing countries. What this means is that about four in five of those who moved from below the $1.25-per-day level in those three decades were in China (World Bank 2014).

Several major programmes have targeted ethnic areas and populations in poverty alleviation. These have succeeded in reducing absolute poverty among the ethnic minorities, but the rate remains much higher than in the population as a whole. On 30 March 2007, China's official Xinhua News Agency reported a vice-director of the government's State Ethnic Affairs Commission as

stating that about 7 per cent of China's minority people were living in absolute poverty, as opposed to about 2.6 per cent of the total population. Translated into absolute figures, about 8.5 million members of ethnic minorities, out of a national total of about 34 million people, were afflicted by absolute poverty. Although it has since raised the line, the cited 2007 figures assumed a boundary of US$0.66 income per person per day, as opposed to the US$1 generally used internationally at that time and the US$1.25 cited from the World Bank figures above. As for the causes behind the persistent disparity, a major study of poverty and inequality among China's minorities puts them down not to cultural differences but to factors like locality, mountainous terrain, underdeveloped infrastructure and low education levels (Bhalla and Qiu 2006: 168).

## Some aspects of culture

This claim brings us to culture. The focus here is less anthropological than political, taking up the controversial issue of cultural survival among ethnic minorities in the PRC. The term culture is so broad that it becomes necessary to break it down. Here I discuss only two aspects: language and religion. Language is essential to the lives of all ethnic groups, and of crucial importance to cultural survival. Religion generally weighs more heavily with the ethnic minorities than with the Han, especially Tibetan Buddhism and Islam.

The languages of China's minorities belong to several different families, Sino-Tibetan and Altaic being best represented. The Hui are Chinese-speaking, but the other ethnic minorities have their own language, some of them two or more. Although they once ruled all China, the number of Manchus who still speak their own language is vanishingly small.

Minorities are entitled to use their own languages not only at home but in the public sphere, such as in government, law and education. In many parts of China where schoolchildren belong to one ethnic minority, it has been common practice for teachers to use the local language in primary school as the medium of instruction, though the higher up the education system, the more Chinese tends to become the language for teaching. As the economy has grown, it has become more important for nation-building that all citizens are able to converse and be literate in Chinese. More and more parents want their children to know Chinese for one very simple reason: if they do not know Chinese, they are at a great disadvantage in finding good employment. The upshot is that Chinese has tended to become increasingly dominant in the public sphere, resulting in the decline of ethnic languages. Among several ethnic minorities, especially Tibetans and Uyghurs, this has been a matter of enormous concern and resentment.

Chinese law guarantees freedom of religion. Although the Cultural Revolution saw great persecution against all religions and faiths, they have experienced powerful revivals since the 1980s. However, Chinese law bans the use of religion to try and destabilize the state; and in politically sensitive regions

authorities are frequently so cautious in interpreting religious observation as political opposition as to contravene freedom of religion. Moreover, the state has control over senior clerical appointments and remains extremely suspicious of any non-state-sponsored political activity on the part of religious personnel. As we'll see later, Buddhism is interwoven with politics among the Tibetans, and Islam among the Uyghurs, but on the whole religions and faiths of various kinds flourish openly among the ethnic minorities. The interconnection between Islam and ethnicity is of particular interest. In China, *all* Muslims belong to an ethnic minority, not to the Han. This is because anybody who is Chinese culturally but also Muslim is automatically Hui, not Han.

Evidence from impressions gathered through extensive travelling in ethnic areas of China over a long period suggests to me that religious practice and thinking there are open and very much alive. Currently, about 1.5 per cent of the TAR's total population is in the clerical order, which is very high by world standards (about three times higher, for example, than in Thailand). Islam remains very strong, both politically and in social influence. Are these religions in gradual decline as modernization gathers momentum, as has happened with Christianity in countries such as France and the United Kingdom? Possibly male urban Muslims pray less and pay less serious attention to religious duties than their fathers or grandfathers. Trends in the countryside are less clear, but possibly moving in a similar direction. The Tibetan Buddhism of the Mongolians is clearly weaker than it was, with urbanites not allocating it much attention. Particular ethnic religious traditions may die out over the coming decades. However, I doubt a more general death of religious faith and practice among the ethnic minorities. In particular, I do not foresee the day when Buddhism is no longer a social force among the Tibetans or Islam among the Uyghurs, Hui or a range of other ethnic groups in China.

## Main problem areas

The ethnic minorities to have posed most difficulty for the Chinese state are the Tibetans and the Uyghurs. Both groups have strong religiously influenced cultures, Tibetan Buddhism in the former case, Turkic Sunni Islam in the latter. The Tibetans have an internationally admired leader, the Dalai Lama. The main Uyghur diasporic leader is Rebiya Kadeer, the World Uyghur Congress president since 2006, but her international profile is insignificant by comparison.

In 1950 the People's Liberation Army (PLA) moved into Tibet and on 23 May 1951, the Dalai Lama's representatives and the central Chinese government signed an agreement, under which Tibet was recognized as part of the PRC, but with the Tibetans enjoying autonomy. On 10 March 1959, a major uprising erupted against Chinese rule, the Dalai Lama escaping to India, where he set up the Tibetan government-in-exile (TGIE). The Chinese

*Figure 9.1* Tibetan mountain village near Xining

government undertook major reforms, the TAR's 1965 establishment being one of the results.

After a period of severe persecution of Tibetan religion and culture during the Cultural Revolution, the reform period saw a major revival, with attempts to strengthen autonomy and relieve the people of certain types of taxation. In 1985 the only non-Han ever to hold the position of CCP secretary in Tibet arrived in Lhasa. This was Wu Jinghua, who was Yi and thus a member of an ethnic minority. Though not a Tibetan, he encouraged policies of Tibetanization, renamed streets in Tibetan and attended religious functions himself, wearing Tibetan dress.

However, from 1987 to 1989 there were major disturbances in Tibet, especially Lhasa, with monk-led demonstrations calling for Tibetan independence. The Chinese suppressed the demonstrations, and blamed the Dalai Lama and his American supporters for inciting them. In March 1989, the Chinese government declared martial law in Lhasa, the first time under the PRC and two months earlier than the similar move to curb the student demonstrations in Beijing, and did not lift it until April 1990.

In 1995 there was major international controversy over the choice of the eleventh incarnation of the Banchen Lama, the most important figure in Tibet after the Dalai Lama, since the tenth had died in January 1989. Beijing and the Dalai Lama favoured different boys. Of course, the Chinese government won the day, holding a grand ceremony to enthrone its own choice as

the Eleventh Banchen Lama, and blocked the Dalai Lama's from communica-
tion with visitors from outside China. Most Westerners interested in the issue
had sided with the Dalai Lama in the argument and charged the Chinese with
imprisoning the child he wanted as the Eleventh Banchen Lama.

Yet despite this controversy, the 1990s and the first years of the 2000s were
relatively free of incident in Tibet or other Tibetan areas. There were no
major demonstrations pushing independence, and no serious rioting. The
Chinese government actively promoted economic development and allowed a
considerable degree of religious and cultural freedom, provided nobody used
this flexibility to seek independence or threaten China's stability.

The lack of an outside focus comparable to the Dalai Lama made Xinjiang
simpler than Tibet for China in the period before 1990. The PLA easily took
over Xinjiang in 1949. Demobilized Han troops were the basis of a peculiarly
Xinjiang body, the Production and Construction Corps, which aimed to
develop the region economically and secure its position within China. It also
effected large-scale Han immigration into Xinjiang from the 1950s on. The
Cultural Revolution saw the same repression of religion and traditional cul-
ture as everywhere else in China, but the aftermath witnessed major restora-
tion of the traditional faiths and cultures of Xinjiang's ethnic minorities,
Islam reviving with special vigour.

Unlike in Tibet, the 1990s saw quite a few disturbances in Xinjiang. A
major study on the Uyghurs lists all the 'organized protests and violent events
in Xinjiang' from 1949 to 2005, about half taking place in the 1990s
(Bovingdon 2010: 174–90). One factor of great significance was the decline
and collapse of the Soviet Union. There was, for instance, serious ethnic
conflict in the Tajikistan capital Dushanbe in February 1990, with the final
Soviet disintegration at the end of the following year. It is likely that the
Dushanbe conflict was one contributor to a two-day armed uprising in Baren
Township, South-western Xinjiang, in April 1990. The uprising's leader, who
appears to have espoused holy war Islamist (*jihadi*) ideology, was killed but
the influence of the event persisted. Among a series of incidents in the 1990s,
a particularly serious one was a riot in February 1997 in Guldja (Chinese:
Yining) in the northwest, not far from the border with Kazakhstan. China,
Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan had begun annual meetings
at presidential level in April 1996 in an attempt to counter Islamist and other
destabilizing influences, and in June 2001 added Uzbekistan at a meeting that
formed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The September 11, 2001 incidents impacted on Xinjiang. China and the
United States had common interests in attacking Islamist terrorism. In 2002,
the United States accepted China's claim that a body it called the East Tur-
kestan Islamic Movement was terrorist in nature, the United Nations follow-
ing suit. The first few years of the twenty-first century saw China keeping a
more watchful eye for separatism and extremism in Xinjiang, and there were
in fact far fewer incidents than in the preceding years. At the same time, the
Uyghur diasporic groups strengthened their organization and in 2004 united

to form the World Uyghur Congress. Although it presented itself as entirely secular and condemned terrorism and violence, this body contains elements that advocate independence for Xinjiang, giving it the name East Turkestan.

### Disturbances in 2008 and 2009; resultant and following trends

The relative calm that had obtained in the Tibetan areas since the 1990s was broken in March 2008. Protests by monks commemorating the 10 March 1959 uprising remained peaceful, but were followed by serious ethnic rioting on 14 March in Lhasa. For several weeks, disturbances flared all over the Tibetan areas, some of them violent. Estimates of casualties varied greatly depending on the source, with Chinese officials claiming 27 deaths and the TGIE 220.

These protests differed greatly from those of the late 1980s in several respects. Two stand out. One is that they took place all across the Tibetan areas, not just in the TAR, let alone only in Lhasa. Secondly, whereas the overwhelming majority of protests in the late 1980s were led by monks or nuns, with comparatively few laypeople involved, less than a quarter of those in 2008 were by monks or nuns, with 17 per cent being student protests and most being by mixed or lay groups, including farmers, workers and students (Barnett 2009: especially 11–13).

There were numerous causes for the disturbances, both internal and external. The former included a widespread feeling among Tibetans of being marginalized in society, which included a lack of appreciation for their culture and a sense that they were not doing nearly as well from economic development as Han immigrants. The external causes are linked with the international dimension of the Tibetan disturbances, which we now briefly consider.

The Beijing Olympic Games were about to start on 8 August 2008. Because this was the first time they were held in China, they mattered greatly to the overwhelming majority of Chinese people. Human rights activists in the West declared their intention to use the occasion of the Olympic Games to turn the spotlight on China's human rights abuses, especially in Tibet. At the same time, various groups had announced they would lead a 'Tibetan People's Uprising'. To this end, a march of monks began on 10 March in Delhi and, although the Indian police stopped it quite soon, it was among the factors giving the Chinese authorities grounds for putting the blame on the 'Dalai clique', meaning not only the Dalai Lama himself but also his many followers. The Olympic torch proceeded from Olympia in Greece late in March to many world cities, becoming involved in anti-Chinese protests connected with the disturbances in the Tibetan areas, especially in a scuffle in Paris.

These Tibetan disturbances were followed by riots in July 2009 in Ürümqi. Initially sparked by reports that Han men had murdered two Uyghurs, falsely rumoured to have raped Chinese women, ethnic rioting flared on 5 July, attackers being mainly Uyghurs and victims Han and Hui. The Han counterattacked two days later. According to official reports, the riots cost the lives

of 197 people, with about 1600 injured, most of the victims being Han. The next month, there were attacks against ordinary people with syringes. In the event, these do not appear to have been infected, but syringe attacks of this kind cannot fail to spread rumours, fear and panic.

As with the Tibetan disturbances, there were internal and external causes of these riots. Of course the situation had changed over the sixteen months or so since March 2008. The Olympic Games were over, and the global financial crisis had weakened the world economy, including in China.

The disparities and sense of marginalization were factors for the Uyghurs, as with the Tibetans, and levels of wealth, health and education were considerably lower among Uyghurs than Han. The proportion of Han in the Xinjiang population was considerably greater than in the Tibetan areas, let alone the TAR itself, and the resentment felt by the Uyghurs from seeing the Han do better from economic growth possibly even greater.

The Chinese authorities put the blame for the riots on the World Uyghur Congress, an anti-China international body set up in 2004, and its president, former businesswoman Rebiya Kadeer. I remain sceptical of the evidence I have seen for pinning all the responsibility on her. However, the World Uyghur Congress was probably happy at the embarrassment China suffered from the riots. Moreover, there is little doubt that Islamist forces outside Xinjiang try to influence what happens inside the autonomous region, with quite a few local Uyghurs happy to answer to them.

Both sets of disturbances had an impact on the Chinese leadership, inducing them to re-examine policies. In January and May 2010 there were high-level central meetings on the Tibetan areas and Xinjiang respectively. In both cases, the main panacea offered was enormous investments aimed at raising the standard of living, improving infrastructure and carrying out further modernization programmes in the hope that these would reduce discontent and increase the incentives of the Tibetans and Uyghurs to remain part of the PRC.

Despite general similarities, there were also some differences in approach. For instance, the communiqué following the meeting on the Tibetan areas included the phrase, 'Chinese characteristics, Tibetan flavour' (*Zhongguo tese, Xizang tedian*). This could potentially suggest more appreciation of Tibetan culture, especially as Premier Wen Jiabao's speech at the closing session made a laudatory reference to the 'material and intangible cultural heritage of Tibet'.

In the case of the meeting on Xinjiang, the centre directed that billions of yuan should go towards strengthening Uyghurs' command of the Chinese language. The idea is not only to teach the language as a major subject but also to use it as the medium of instruction from the earliest grades in all classes other than those teaching Uyghur language to Uyghur children. Just as before 2010, classes in Uyghur aim to ensure the maintenance of Uyghur literacy among Uyghur children.

The Tibetan areas did not see any repetition of disturbances on anything like the scale that had characterized the year 2008. However, another form of

protest raising very serious questions for both supporters and opponents of Chinese authorities began early in 2009. This was a series of self-immolations by Tibetans, mostly monks but including quite a few nuns and members of the laity. The number had reached nearly 140 by the end of 2014, of which 85 were in 2012. The reasons were not always clear, but they certainly represented desperation, resentment against Chinese rule, and demands for better treatment of Tibetans and Tibetan culture and for the return of the Dalai Lama. Chinese authorities have blamed the Dalai Lama and outside interference for these self-immolations. The Dalai Lama himself has been hesitant to praise these self-immolations because he cannot be seen to be encouraging such an obviously agonizing form of suicide, virtually no form of which is anyway in line with Tibetan Buddhist thinking or practice. Neither can he condemn the self-immolations, because they evince such desperately strong support for his person and his cause.

In political terms, these self-immolations have failed to change the substance of Chinese policy; if anything they have increased surveillance aimed at stopping further suicides and protests. Indeed, the failure of these self-immolations to shake the determination of the Chinese government may be symptomatic of the bigger picture of the decline of the Tibetan campaign against China since 2009. Chinese representatives are successfully undercutting the influence of the Dalai Lama. In 2011, the Tibetan diaspora elected Harvard-trained lawyer Lobsang Sangay as leader of the TGIE. However, his success in persuading the international community to support his cause against China has been very limited indeed.

On the other hand, opposition to central authority among Uyghurs has intensified since the 2009 disturbances, while ethnic relations in Xinjiang appear to be worsening substantially. (For a major study of Uyghur-Han relations in the twenty-first century see, for instance, Finley 2013.) Terrorist incidents in Xinjiang involving Uyghur attacks against the Chinese state and against the Han show no signs of declining either in number or severity. Moreover, several incidents involving Uyghurs have taken place outside Xinjiang, with extremely serious implications not just for Xinjiang but for the whole of China.

For example, in October 2013, a car was driven into a crowd in front of the Gate of Heavenly Peace (Tiananmen) – right in the heart of Beijing – bursting into flames and killing five people, including the three people in the car, all of them members of a Uyghur family. More ominous still, an Islamist group calling itself the Turkestan Islamic Party released a Uyghur-language message from its leader, called Abdullah Mansour. In it he said that the attack was a *jihadi* operation by holy warriors, which was no more than the beginning of attacks on Chinese authority: 'O Chinese unbelievers, know that you have been fooling East Turkestan for the last 60 years, but now they have awakened. The people have learned who is the real enemy and they returned to their own religion', he said (Maclean 2013).

China's official response to the worsening situation in Xinjiang was expressed in its Central Work Forum on Xinjiang held late in May 2014. In essence, this maintained the emphasis on social stability and economic development, but also increased pressure for interethnic contact of various kinds. The Forum's communiqué talked of the need to 'strengthen interethnic contact, exchange and mingling' (*jiaqiang minzu jiaowang jiaoliu jiaorong*) (cited in Leibold 2014: 4). Examples included more interregional migration, including by Uyghurs to areas outside Xinjiang, and bilingual education of the kind that will encourage Uyghur youth to understand China's national language and culture. It also includes a new emphasis on interethnic marriage, with the state offering financial incentives for interethnic marriages in Xinjiang. The long-term aim of such measures is to reduce interethnic conflict.

At the same time, authorities are tightening surveillance against ideological dissent among Uyghurs. The most notable among several examples of this was the case of Ilham Tohti, economics professor at the Minzu (Nationalities) University in Beijing, who in September 2014 was sentenced to life imprisonment for separatism. Most Western observers regard Tohti as moderate in his advocacy of Uyghur rights; reaction was to regard the sentence as unfair and its severity as extremely shocking.

## Conclusion

In some ways, China's handling of ethnic problems has been successful, in other ways not. The country is probably better integrated than it used to be, with less likelihood of splitting up or a separatist movement succeeding. Its people, including its ethnic minorities, are much more prosperous and their living standards higher. It appears to be on a path towards reasonably successful modernization. Minority traditions that harmed particular groups of people, especially women, are weaker now than they used to be. In most places, ethnicity is not a marker when it comes to relations among people.

On the other hand, there are respects in which success is much less obvious. In the Tibetan areas and Xinjiang, ethnic relations are still tense and have probably worsened over the decades since the Cultural Revolution. These poor relations and hostility to the state have erupted into violence on occasion, especially in 2008 in the Tibetan areas and 2009 in Xinjiang. The situation has been most serious in Xinjiang, where Han-Uyghur tensions are the most serious that China has experienced in the twenty-first century, more so than those involving the Tibetans. Ethnic cultures and languages appear to have declined in strength as the country has modernized. Almost all minority languages are now quite weak in the public sphere, and the signs are that they will weaken still more in the coming decades.

Few countries in the world have been truly successful in handling ethnic issues. Complaints about racial and ethnic inequality and discrimination have loomed large in societies across the world. Considering its history, ethnic and territorial diversity, and the enormous problems it has faced, China would

probably not come off too badly in a fair transnational comparison on the handling of ethnicity.

> ### Box 9.1  List of ethnic groups mentioned in this chapter, together with populations in China (2010 Census)
>
> Han, 1,220,844,520
> Hui, 10,586,087
> Manchus, 10,387,958
> Miao, 9,426,007
> Mongolians, 5,981,840
> Tatars, 3,556
> Tibetans, 6,282,187
> Uyghurs, 10,069,346
> Yao, 2,796,003
> Yi, 8,714,393
> Zhuang, 16,926,381

## Glossary of terms

**'Chinese characteristics, Tibetan flavour' (*Zhongguo tese, Xizang tedian*)**  Policy adopted towards the Tibetan areas following the 2008 disturbances
*Huaxia*　Ancient term for China's majority ethnic group, now called Han
**Inner Mongolia**　An autonomous region within the People's Republic of China
*Jihad*　Islamic holy war waged on behalf of religion
*Minzu*　Nationality, ethnic group, a community of people with a shared history, territory, language, economic life and culture
*Minzu diqu*　Ethnic areas
*Minzu tuanjie*　Ethnic unity, the unity of the nationalities
**Outer Mongolia**　Once part of China but now the independent Republic of Mongolia
*Sanminzhuyi*　Three people's principles, the guiding ideology of the Republic of China, developed by Sun Yat-sen
*Shaoshu minzu*　Minority nationality
**'Strengthen interethnic contact, exchange and mingling' (*jiaqiang minzu jiaowang jiaoliu jiaorong*)**　Policy adopted by May 2014 Central Work Forum on Xinjiang in response to ethnic problems there
*Youhui zhengce*, **'preferential policies'**　Policies of affirmative action on behalf of the ethnic minorities in China
*Zhonghua minzu*　The Chinese nation, term often used for the combination of the Han and ethnic minorities
*Zizhi qu*　Autonomous region

## List of abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| CCP | Chinese Communist Party |
| PLA | People's Liberation Army |
| PRC | People's Republic of China |
| ROC | Republic of China |
| TAR | Tibet Autonomous Region |
| TGIE | Tibetan Government in Exile |

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# 10 Transformation of work in post-Mao China

*Yi-min Lin*

With one-fifth of the human population on earth, China has the world's largest workforce, which totaled 770 million in 2013 (National Bureau of Statistics 2014). Some 33 percent of these working people were farmers or undertook related economic activities, where the family constitutes the primary organizing unit. Some 67 percent of the workforce was employed in various non-farm sectors. Public institutions and organizations, including various government agencies and political establishments, only accounted for about 15 percent of the workforce in these sectors, whereas domestic private enterprises, self-employment, and foreign-invested companies constituted the sources for 85 percent of the non-farm jobs.

The economy that employs China's enormous workforce has been undergoing fundamental transformation since 1978. Perhaps the most remarkable change is the decline and fading away of state socialism and the rise of capitalism as the basic mode of economic organization. This transformation has taken place thanks to three mutually reinforcing developments: marketization, internationalization, and privatization. It has also been accompanied by accelerating processes of industrialization, urbanization, and demographic transition, as well as profound technological advancements, breakthroughs, and diffusion. Along the way, the organization of work has been redefined and restructured, with far-reaching implications for the economy and society.

This chapter highlights some important aspects of the remaking of the Chinese workplace, focusing primarily on non-farm economic organizations. It begins with an overview of the pre-reform system in urban and rural China. That will be followed by a brief account of the major areas and processes of economic institutional change since 1978. The ensuing sections discuss the ramifications of such change for economic organizations

## The organization of work under Mao

When the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power in 1949, China was a predominantly agrarian economy, in which the rural sector absorbed some 92 percent of the workforce (National Bureau of Statistics 1987: 5) and the family was the basic unit of both social and economic organization.

Within the short span of 10 years, the government eliminated private owner-ship and established a totally state-owned and controlled economy. The organization of work in that economy was significantly influenced by the development strategies of the CCP. In view of China's economic under-development, CCP leaders regarded accelerating industrialization as a top priority. Yet they faced severe resource constraints. During the Korean War (1950–53) Western countries cut off their economic ties with China. While Soviet aid during the early to mid-1950s played a vital role in broadening China's industrial base, it quickly diminished as the relationship between the two countries deteriorated toward the end of the decade. With limited domestic supply, CCP leaders decided to concentrate the allocation of resources in what they considered as strategically most important sectors for the country's long-term development, namely, producer goods industries.

An important implication of such a strategy is that the absorption of the rural work-age population into the urban workforce could not grow at a very fast rate because of the capital-intensive nature of producer goods industries. From 1958 to 1978 the share of the rural sector in the total workforce went down only slightly from 80 to 77 percent, whereas the share of the industrial sector in total gross domestic product (GDP) rose from 32 to 44 percent (National Bureau of Statistics 1987: 5; National Bureau of Statistics 1998: 56). To facilitate the official strategy of development the government created a pecking order of resource allocation biased towards urban industries, and stratified economic organizations according to that order. Under the central planning system there were three basic types of economic organization: state-owned enterprises controlled by national, provincial, and city/county autho-rities; urban collective enterprises controlled by sub-provincial authorities; and people's communes under the purview of county governments. State-owned enterprises and urban collective enterprises were the main carriers of non-farm economic activities. The level of direct supervising authority over an enterprise signified the importance that the government attached to it. With the same level of direct government control, capital goods producers tended to enjoy higher priority in resource allocation than their peers produ-cing consumer goods or providing services. People's communes were at the bottom of the system by both criteria.

To squeeze out more resources for capital-intensive industrial development and limit the demand for consumer goods and services, wages were main-tained at very low and stagnant levels; the supply of essential daily necessities was rationed through a rationing coupon system; and for urban employees and their families the provision of basic social services, such as housing, health care, and old age support, was internalized or administered at the level of each formal organization, known as the *danwei* or work unit, whereas rural citizens had only minimal health care benefits under a cooperative medicine system. Closely coupled with such an employment practice was a household registration (*hukou*) system (Cheng and Selden 1994). It classified citizens into urban and rural categories with spatially fixed residential status and strict

restrictions on inter-category change, extra-locale employment, and even inter-locale travel such that the allocation of human resources and their means of living could be centrally planned and extra-plan provision and distribution of consumer goods and services (including transportation services) for working people and their families could be minimized.

What resulted from the implementation of these measures was a socialistic moral economy, where the working people had job security as well as the most essential in-kind provisions for themselves and their families. But there was no freedom of choice regarding employment and mobility. The standard of living was low and stagnant. And, ironically, there existed systematic inequalities among employees of different types of organizations and especially between urban and rural sectors (Solinger 1999). This was due to the trickle-down effects of the government's stratified resource allocation policy: more resourceful organizations provided relatively better pay and fringe benefits for their employees than less resourceful ones, and urban citizens also benefited from the overall better physical and social infrastructure of cities, where industrial activities concentrated.

Accelerating industrialization, however, was not the only imperative that shaped the way work was organized. CCP Chairman Mao Zedong (1893–1976) believed that a socialist society could not be built without true believers of socialism and that the workplace was not only the venue for producing goods and services but should serve the function of transforming the mind and behavior of citizens and mobilizing them to participate in political campaigns and events orchestrated by central leaders. In accordance with this view, a CCP cell, often known as a party branch (in work units of small size and low rank) or committee (in work units of large size and high rank) and led by a party secretary, was installed in each and every formal organization as the center of decision-making and behavioral control.

A major mechanism of behavioral control by the CCP is the so-called personnel dossier system. Under that system a biographical file was maintained for the vast majority of citizens, including all adults as well as students. Not accessible by the person concerned and kept by the personnel office and (in the case of CCP members) the CCP cell of his or her work unit, it contained cumulative information about his or her family background, school records, work history, professional qualifications, results of periodic behavioral assessments by pertinent authorities, and the person's own political confessions and manifestations. The information was used in decisions about work assignment, transfer, and promotion or demotion. It also had ramifications for the family members of the person concerned, as cross referencing was a common practice in important personnel decisions.

There was, however, no consensus among CCP leaders on the strategies to control and drive employees for the implementation of the party-state's many-sided agendas. Mao was against extensive use of material incentives to motivate work efforts, which was nevertheless emphasized by his political rivals within the CCP. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) when Maoist

radicalism prevailed, the party-state relied heavily on political incentives and tactics to shape workplace behavior. According to Walder (1986), the typical urban work unit featured three intertwined mechanisms of behavior control: institutionalization of urban citizens' total dependence on state-allocated jobs and related benefits, extensive use by management of politically particularistic incentives and divisive tactics to foster loyalty and compliance, and alignment and co-optation of informal social relations and networks with the formal organizational agendas defined by the party-state.

In rural areas the commune organization provided a similar tool of party-state control. Encompassing and administering the area of several traditional villages, each commune contained a dozen or so production brigades. Each brigade contained several production teams. Each team contained dozens of households and functioned as the basic unit of daily work organization and accounting. The CCP dominated decision-making at all three levels. Production was collectively carried out, and agricultural wages were determined using a work point system that emphasized presence at work and physical faculty rather than actual work efforts and outcomes. But the distribution of grain for consumption was egalitarian and based on household size; and in most farming communities each family was allotted a small plot of public land to grow supplementary food items for self-consumption. Despite collectivization of farmland, housing remained private in the countryside. Although formal kinship organizations were abolished, kinship relations persisted in rural communities; so did the social networks, differentiations, and divisions anchored in such relations. The paucity of resources allocated to the rural sector also limited the incentives and abilities of rural officials to carry out party-state policies as forcefully as in urban work units.

## Highlights of post-Mao transformations

The first important change in the post-Mao economic reforms is the decollectivization of agriculture in 1979–83. It replaced the commune system with a family farming arrangement based on publicly owned land contracted out by local authorities (for a fee) to individual households. Along with this change is the increase of freedom for farmers to make economic decisions, including those concerning the deployment of human resources. An important consequence of the decollectivization of agriculture is the diversification of rural economic activities into industry, construction, and services. Between 1978 and 2008 the share of entities undertaking such activities in rural GDP increased from 17 to 72 percent and their share in the rural workforce rose from 9 to 33 percent (Gao 2009: 99; Gan 2003: 5, 7; National Bureau of Statistics 2010: 38, 117). The forerunners of these entities were the non-farm work units under the people's commune system, known as commune and brigade enterprises. During the mid-1980s they were renamed township and village enterprises (TVEs) in that their property rights were transferred to township and village authorities that replaced the communes and brigades

and subsequently played a much more active role in promoting the expansion of non-farm economic activities. In the meantime, these public enterprises were joined by increasing numbers of private non-farm entities. Initially organized as self-employment establishments, these private entities gradually grew and eventually overtook TVEs in the 1990s as the leading force in the transformation and development of the rural economy. Unlike public enterprises in the urban sector, employees of TVEs and rural private enterprises have only earned a wage income reflecting labor market conditions, and they have not been provided with housing and other essential social service benefits.

In addition to family farming and employment in the fast-growing local non-farm enterprises, rural working people have gradually gained a third occupational choice: migration to other locales, especially major urban centers of industry and commerce, for work. This first took place during the process of agricultural decollectivization, which freed the rural workforce from the commune system. The initial push factor of migration was economic hardship and shortage of income-earning opportunities in many rural communities. Underdevelopment of the service sector in urban areas under central planning and, more importantly, the rising demand for cheap labor in manufacturing as a result of the inflow of foreign capital in the coastal region provided the main pulling force for such migration. In view of the economic benefits brought about by rural-urban migration, many local governments in the destination locales bent centrally imposed restrictions and tolerated the presence of migrant workers who had no permanent local resident status. In 1984 the central government lifted the ban on temporary economic migration and thus opened the gate for free rural–urban flow of workforce. The number of migrants has since increased, totaling some 166 million in 2013 (National Bureau of Statistics 2014).

When a migrant resides in a locale away from his or her place of origin for more than six months, he or she is classified as a local resident in official statistics. But this resident status does not confer on the migrant the same rights as those enjoyed by permanent local residents (Solinger 1999). They are second-class citizens in that they are excluded from the provision of local public goods and services, such as education for children, health care subsidies, low income housing, subsistence allowance for extreme economic hardship, and other social welfare benefits administered by the local government. They are not eligible for permanent jobs in local government or government-funded establishments, and their applications for business licenses may face more stringent scrutiny than those from permanent local residents.

The most important employers of migrants are foreign-invested entities. In 1979 the Chinese government reopened the door for foreign trade and investment – especially foreign direct investment that involves direct ownership and management by foreign investors of the entities where the investment is made. Initially, most foreign-invested entities were joint ventures with controlling stakes held by their local partners, which typically were public

enterprises. Since the mid-1990s, however, wholly foreign-owned ventures, joint ventures dominated by foreign investors, and joint ventures with domestic private owners have become increasingly important. There are also many Chinese firms that undertake processing or assembly work for foreign companies through various subcontracting arrangements, where *de facto* control oftentimes lies in the hands of foreign company representatives and quality control personnel. As a result, foreign influence has increased in the organization of work.

With the deepening of the reform process initially led by the rural and foreign economic sectors, traditional public enterprises in urban areas have also experienced important changes. The early theme of these changes was marketization. Starting in the mid-1980s, SOEs and urban collective enterprises shifted the focus of their operations from fulfilling government-imposed output plans to profit making. They were granted increasing freedom to make decisions in response to market conditions on both the input and the output side. Over time, micro-management and protection by the government decreased and competition intensified for the vast majority of them. Along with TVEs in rural areas, these marketized public enterprises in the urban sector showed some improvement in economic performance during the late 1980s and early 1990s. But the financial health of both groups of public enterprises subsequently deteriorated, mainly due to the growth of internal and external governance problems. The ballooning of their losses and financial liabilities left the government with no choice but to close down or privatize most of them, retaining for restructuring only a small number of very large enterprises in strategically important sectors such as banking, telecommunications, energy, air and rail transportation, public utilities, tobacco, and defense. The tipping point came in 1997, when the central government implemented a policy called "hanging onto the big ones and letting go of the small ones". Massive privatization followed and resulted in the layoff of large numbers of former employees of these enterprises, especially in urban areas.

Before the massive layoff of public sector employees in the late 1990s, the government had started a series of reforms to shift the provision of essential social services away from government-controlled organizations. Starting from 1986, urban public enterprises adopted employment contracts for all new hires, which marked the beginning of the end of the lifetime employment system implemented under central planning. Into the 1990s experiments were carried out to restructure the ways pension, health care, unemployment benefits, and housing were provided in the public sector. The essence of these reforms was to establish specialized funds for the provision or financing of these benefits, which would be based on contributions from employers and employees, with the government serving as the backup. The reform was started in the public sector but extended in the late 1990s to all formal economic organizations in urban areas, covering both employees with permanent urban resident status and migrant workers. Since then contributions to pension, health care and unemployment funds have become mandatory for urban employers

and employees, though many problems remain, such as inadequate contributions, barriers to inter-locale transfer of benefits, poor quality of service, and lack of coverage of the rural sector.

The decline of public enterprises has been accompanied by the rise of the private sector, which has now absorbed the vast majority of the employees laid off by public enterprises and become the main provider of jobs for new entrants into the workforce. The resurgence of private economic activities started in the late 1970s, when the government relaxed restrictions on self-employment in rural and urban areas. But the government limited the size of private economic entities to no more than seven people. That limit was lifted in 1988, though private enterprises continued to face discrimination and restrictions, especially in the wake of the June 4th Incident in 1989. It was not until 1992 that the political climate started to change. In the mid- to late 1990s the government gradually relaxed the restrictions on the private sector so as to address the two policy imperatives that public enterprises failed to address: employment and revenue. In 1999 a constitutional amendment was made to formally recognize the private sector as an "important integral part" of China's "socialist market economy". Since 2001 the CCP has even welcomed and indeed encouraged private business people to become party members. In 2007 the National People's Congress enacted the *Property Law*, which proclaims equal protection to public and private property rights. As a result of these changes in the institutional environment, the private sector has steadily grown and become the leading producer of economic output and main provider of employment.

## Organizational implications of economic institutional change

The economic institutional change highlighted above has had far-reaching implications for the organization of work. The once all-encompassing, CCP-dominated work unit system has faded into history. In the meantime, tension and conflict have grown, partly as a result of the adoption of exploitative, proto-capitalist labor practices in some parts of the economy. Yet such practices also face increasing constraints as further changes unfold in the evolving political and economic environment of work organization.

### Decline of direct party-state control of work organization

The deepening of economic reforms has shaken loose the foundation of state socialist economic organization. The rise of family farms, non-farm self-employment, domestic private enterprises, and foreign-invested companies has crowded up the economic space that used to be dominated by public ownership. Gone with its dominance are the various behavioral control instruments that the CCP relied upon. The vast majority of working people no longer depend on jobs directly allocated by the government. The rationing coupon system declined and eventually became defunct in the late 1980s to early

1990s, when bureaucratic allocation of essential daily supplies gave way to rising markets of consumer goods and services. While the household registration system has yet to be abolished, it has been delinked from employment rights and related benefits. As the public sector shrinks, the personnel dossier system has also lost its grip on most working people, and the CCP is unable to maintain its presence and dominance in most private business organizations. Even in the remaining public enterprises, the CCP has retreated from daily decision-making, as the focal agenda has shifted from bureaucratic and political imperatives to profit making.

With direct bureaucratic and political control in decline, work-age citizens have gradually expanded their choice sets. Occupational and spatial mobility has significantly increased. Along the way, labor markets have developed and spread throughout the economy. The relationship between employers and employees has increasingly become a contractual arrangement, both outside and within the shrinking public sector. Human capital has become an important factor in influencing the direction and destination of workforce movement, the level of remuneration and benefits, as well as the resultant inequalities among working people.

### Tension and conflict

China's transition from state socialism to capitalism has been accompanied by increasing contentiousness in industrial relations. Labor disputes have been on the rise, as have been various other forms of complaint, protest, and resistance against employers, the government, or both (Lee 2007; O'Leary 1998; Pun 2005). Three developments have been identified as the main contributing factors. The first one is the growth of economic insecurity in terms of employment, health care, housing, old age support, and education of children. Such insecurity is perhaps most strongly felt by SOE employees who used to have the highest degree of security but have seen rapid dissipation of such security with the deepening of reforms. Under the Maoist system, they were more "privileged" in terms of income, benefits, and status than employees in urban collective enterprises and people's communes. But the decline of bureaucratic allocation of jobs and related benefits, the onslaught of competition, and the deteriorating performance of public enterprises during the 1980s and 1990s led to a steady worsening of their economic situation. The most difficult time came during the mid- to late 1990s, when massive layoffs took place in the public sector.

The most vulnerable workers were those who joined the workforce after the start of urban economic reforms. When the downsizing of SOEs began, they were employed on contract terms and did not have the kind of employment protection, housing, and retirement benefits that older workers had. Already in their middle age and with poor education and limited skills, they were ill-equipped to compete on the job market. Making matters worse was the fact that many of their employers had failed to contribute to the newly established

pension, health care and unemployment funds due to poor financial performance. Unlike migrant workers from rural areas who in the event of unemployment in cities can return to their home villages to survive on the farmland that their families have leased out from local authorities, these urban workers had nowhere to turn upon losing their existing jobs. It is not surprising that many of them felt betrayed by the state and were among the most determined protesters against the government during the restructuring of SOEs around the turn of the century.

A second contributing factor to labor insurgence has to do with perceptions of injustice, especially with regard to systematically created and maintained inequalities and failures of government officials to enforce formal rules to protect the basic rights of working people. The treatment of migrant workers as second-class citizens in cities has been a major issue that spawns resentment and protest. A widespread practice adopted by urban employers is not to make legally required contributions on behalf of migrant workers to local pension, health care, and unemployment funds, resulting in the exclusion of these workers from pertinent benefits. This is often condoned by local authorities, which depend on business organizations for revenues and employment of permanent local residents and tend to have cozy relationships with them. The tolerance of such practice has therefore become a major trigger for collective protests by migrant workers seeking to gain equal rights (Lee 2007).

A third source of growing tension and conflict in the workplace is poor and sometimes inhumane treatment of workers by their employers, especially those in the private sector and some foreign-funded enterprises. Long work hours, poor working conditions, exposure to work-related hazards, verbal and physical assault or abuse, arbitrary imposition of punishment, unreasonable firing, under-compensation, pay delays, and even wage nonpayment, are some of the common problems that are present in work organizations where labor relations experience serious disharmony. When such treatment becomes unbearable to the workers, resistance, protest, or even more drastic reactions (such as strikes) may result.

### Governance of the new workplace

With the state socialist system of work organization fading into history, new patterns of authority relations have emerged. But what exactly they are remains an issue awaiting close examination. Considerable media and analytic attention has focused on one particular type of internal organization – the so-called "sweatshop" labor practice – in the new economy. As discussed above, it has been, among other things, a major source of tension and conflict.

A sweatshop may be defined as a workplace where authority is arbitrarily used without substantive legal and/or contractual safeguard for the basic rights of employees and where coercion and intimidation are the main form of behavioral control (Lin 2006). It is a proto-capitalist practice that tends to be prevalent under conditions of poor state protection of labor,

underdevelopment of labor markets, concentration of economic activities in low tech and self-contained labor processes, weak social pressures, and disorganization of collective action on the part of workers. There are numerous accounts of widespread use of this practice in certain parts (e.g. labor-intensive industrial enterprises funded with foreign or domestic private capital) of the economy (Chan 2001, 2011; Lee 1997; O'Leary 1998; Pun 2005), especially during the early years of reform. But the conditions conducive to its adoption and persistence may have been weakening due to the growth of constraints.

To curb the erosion of its political legitimacy and fend off criticisms about its pro-capital approach to economic development, the CCP-led state has been trying to reinstitute labor laws and regulations and improve their implementation. Further integration of China into the global economic system has also increased international pressures on the government to do more in terms of both labor-related legislation and enforcement. After much internal debate, for example, the National People's Congress enacted the *Labor Contract Law* in 2008. It represents an overhaul of the inadequate *Labor Law* enacted in 1996 and contains a number of clauses that define labor rights more clearly, impose more limits on grey areas of compliance, and make it more difficult and costly for employers to unilaterally terminate employment contracts. Although it remains unclear how closely the new law has been enforced, it does set more limiting boundary conditions for employers' labor practice and provide a clearer benchmark for workers to gauge and struggle for their legal rights.

In the meantime, labor markets have become more developed. A key facilitating factor for this development is the accessibility of information about alternative jobs. In the early years of reform the poor abilities of many workers to access and evaluate such information in a clear and timely fashion made them easy prey of exploitative employers. This has dramatically changed since the late 1990s, when the telecommunication revolution began in China. The cost of owning a mobile communication device has sharply decreased in both absolute and relative (to income) terms, making it affordable to ordinary working people and thereby greatly expanding their choice sets. Such diffusion has been coupled and reinforced with the rise and spread of the internet and the broadening of information dissemination through further extension of the reach of conventional mass media, especially the television. Clearer contrast and comparison between different workplace practices enable workers to vote with their feet more effectively, making it difficult for exploitative employers to maintain their old ways of labor control.

The sectoral distribution of work organizations has experienced structural change too. While industry has remained China's largest economic sector and home to many sweatshops, in terms of both output and employment it is the tertiary sector (services) that has seen the fastest growth in the reform era, with its share in the total workforce rising from 12 to 36 percent during 1978–2012 (National Bureau of Statistics 2013: Table 4.3). The frequent interactions between front-line service providers and customers (whose business holds a

key to profitability) make it counter-productive and even self-defeating to subject these employees to extremely abusive treatment, hence limiting the use of sweatshop practice. The upgrading of technology in many industrial processes poses another constraint, as the functionality of some technologies imposes more stringent requirements for the quality of the work environment (e.g. in terms of temperature and dust control, ventilation, storage and handling of hazardous materials) and concentration of attention among workers, and as the use of expensive equipment runs the risk of heavy financial losses resulting from damage rendered deliberately or carelessly by disgruntled workers.

Social pressures on abusive labor practice have also increased over time. While media organizations are still subject to official censorship, they have gained greater freedom and faced intensifying competition in reporting, including social reporting. Negative publicity creates a deterrence effect on employers, especially with the expansion and multiplication of the channels of mass communication and social media. The composition of foreign investment has changed too. In the early years of reform, small and medium enterprises from neighboring economies in Asia, which tended to be more reliant on cost cutting through sweatshop-type practices, led the inflow of foreign capital. Since the early 1990s, the role of multinational corporations, especially those from Western countries, has greatly increased. The domestic and international pressures for them to fulfill corporate social responsibility outside their home economies have forced many of them to not only pay closer attention to and demonstrate better compliance with local labor regulations than their forerunners but also to require their local transaction partners to do the same. Coupled with the development of labor markets, their regulatory compliance thus may have had a ripple effect on the foreign sector as a whole and beyond.

There have been changes in the organization of collective action among workers as well. With better education, higher expectations and stronger networking skills than their parents, workers from the post-1980 cohorts tend to be more active in pooling efforts to fight for their rights and interests. Mass diffusion of information technology has enabled many workers to mobilize and organize collection more effectively, and to share and coordinate strategies to struggle against abusive employers in ways that were not possible before. An example of the growing role of information technology in this regard can be found in the outbreak and spread of large-scale strikes at Honda and Toyota plants in multiple locations in 2010 (Barboza and Bradsher 2010). Improved channels of communication also more effectively connect collective labor actions in China with international labor movements and the foreign media, though official restrictions and surveillance remain a significant limiting factor.

There are likely spatial and temporal variations in the intensity of the constraints highlighted above and across organizational boundaries (Chan [2011], for example, offers revealing accounts of the persistence of abusive labor

practices in Walmart China and its local supply chains). Systematic empirical investigation is needed to ascertain this and to explore whether, where and how stronger constraints may have led to a decline of sweatshops. Even if one finds significant affirming evidence, however, it does not necessarily imply effective solutions to the wide-ranging labor problems in China's new economy. Nor does revealing what accounts for the rise and fall of sweatshops in itself offer a clear view of other coevolving patterns of authority relations and where and why their presence tends to be weak or strong. Further research is necessary to address these issues. What the foregoing discussion of the constraints on sweatshops suggests is that such research needs to consider, among other things, the roles of technology, globalization, and in particular the historical legacies from the era of state socialism. An issue among such legacies that has received prominent analytic attention but needs to be further investigated is the possible impact from changes in gender relations.

China's reform era has seen the continuation of a development that started immediately after the revolution, i.e. erosion of male centrality in the family and to a lesser extent in society despite remaining gender gaps. Among the contributing factors are the gender egalitarian policies of the CCP since the enactment of the *Marriage Law* in 1950 (which abolished, among other things, patrimonial ownership of family assets), active workforce participation by women (and resultant growth of economic independence), rising marriage age for women (partly as a result of the marriage deferral policy in the 1970s), improvement in female educational attainment, active involvement of women in family business and migration since the start of economic reforms, and the one-child policy under which significant numbers of urban singletons are female (Lin 2010). The implications of the greater presence of women in the workforce and even in business decision-making are yet to be more fully explored, though. Some ethnographic studies have documented "gendered practices" of labor control that are tailored or adapted to the social and physiological characteristics of women in factories hiring large numbers of female workers, as well as unique ways or strategies of resistance and protest among female workers (Lee 1997; Jacka 2006; Pun 2005). While these accounts are very revealing, further efforts are needed to produce more systematic evidence concerning their findings, to broaden the focus of analysis from unidirectional (female-centered) "gendered" behavioral control measures and responses to those that are male-centered or gender-neutral, and to explore the causes and consequences of all three types of practices and responses in different organizational contexts.

## Conclusion

Within less than a decade after 1949, the communist government eliminated private ownership of economic resources and monopolized the allocation and employment of the country's workforce. In the ensuing twenty years, the organization of work was carried out through a system that combined

economic, political, and social control of behavior under a unitary authority structure of the party-state. Despite variations among different strata, across space and over time, the system featured a considerable degree of structural uniformity in terms of the basic mechanisms of governance.

Such uniformity has become increasingly unsustainable in the post-Mao era, when the rise of markets, migration, economic internationalization, and privatization have all eroded the foundation of bureaucratic job allocation and work organization. In the process of such change, however, labor relations have become more contentious. While this is symptomatic of early capitalist development, the underlying driving forces are more complex than those in the direct transition from agrarian to capitalist systems in the West and the developing world, as the re-emergence of capitalism in China has taken place on the institutional remains of state socialism and in an era of profound technological revolution and globalization. Understanding such historical context helps illuminate the forces that condition the rise, decline, and longevity of proto-capitalist labor practices as epitomized in the ideal-typical "sweatshop". Questions remain, though, as to what other patterns of work organization have emerged in parallel or tandem, and what are the causes and consequences of these patterns.

## Glossary

*Danwei*   The short form for *gongzuo danwei* in Chinese, also known as the work unit. It refers to public-sector work organizations in the old economy, especially those in urban areas, through which citizens were not only made totally dependent on the state for income and benefits but subjected to tight political control. This generic term was widely used in the Mao era (1949–76) and the early years of economic reform. With the rise of then labor market and the decline of the public sector since the mid-1990s, however, its usage has faded.

*Hukou* **system**   Also known as the household registration system. It was introduced in the early 1950s and institutionalized in 1958. Under this system the domicile status of the population was classified into two categories: rural (farming) and urban (non-farming). Spatial and occupational movement between these categories was strictly restricted before the start of economic reforms. Such restriction has been gradually relaxed since 1984. The two classes of citizenship were also coupled with different provisions of rationed daily necessities (through the mid-1980s), public goods and social welfare benefits, which were significantly biased in favor of urban areas. This difference has persisted in the post-reform era. The government has recently introduced measures to phase it out in small and medium-sized cities. A further difference is that as a collateral result of agricultural decollectivization only rural residents are eligible for the allotment of collectively owned farmland on lease from village authorities.

**Migrant workers**   Working people who have been away from their govern-
ment-designated places of domicile for an extended period of time. The
vast majority of these people are of rural origin and thus have also been
called *nongmin gong* or "peasant-workers". Their number has sub-
stantially increased in the reform era, largely as a result of the attraction
of economic opportunities in urban areas and the relaxation of govern-
ment restrictions on spatial and occupational movement since 1984.
Under the household registration system, however, migrant workers do
not have the right to settle permanently in the urban places where they
work, nor are they eligible for access to a variety of public goods and
opportunities available to permanent urban citizens, such as public school
for children's education, subsidized health care, public housing, government
jobs, and subsistence allowance.

**One-child policy**   The policy was introduced by the government in 1979 and
institutionalized in 1980 as a measure to cope with growing population
pressures in face of economic underdevelopment. Under this policy each
married couple is allowed to have only one child, though the limit for
ethnic minorities (which make up some 8–9% of the population) is two.
The policy has been administered by local governments, which impose
fines and other penalties for violations. Enforcement has been stricter in
urban areas than the countryside, where a married couple has often been
allowed to have a second child if the gender of the first born is
female. In the past decade many provincial authorities have relaxed the
general rule for singletons who are from one-child families and get mar-
ried. In November 2013 the central government formally modified the
policy by allowing any married couple with at least one spouse being
singleton to have up to two children.

**People's commune**   The basic form of work organization for collective farm-
ing in rural areas 1958–1983. It was also the rural center of political and
social control by the state, with wide-ranging authority that encompassed
the entire countryside. The commune system was established after pea-
sants were deprived of privately owned farmland and other economic
resources during the cooperativization campaign in the early to mid-
1950s. It was abolished in 1984 after agricultural de-collectivization,
which restored the household as the basic organizational unit of farming.
At the same time township governments were established to take over
and expand the functions of people's communes in rural political and
socioeconomic governance.

**State-owned enterprise (SOE)**   A category of public enterprise. It was given
higher priority in resource allocation than other enterprises in the public
sector under the central planning system from the early 1950s to the mid-
1990s. Depending on their relative importance, SOEs have been placed
under the direct purview of different levels of government authority and given
different allocative and regulatory treatment according to the rank of
their immediate supervising authority. SOEs moved away from central

planning to markets during the mid-1980s to mid-1990s. The vast majority of them were privatized or closed down around the turn of the century. The remaining ones have been reorganized and consolidated into very large corporate groups in strategically important economic sectors, such as banking, telecommunications, utilities, energy, airlines, railway, tobacco, and weaponry.

**Urban collective enterprise**   A category of public enterprise with lower status than SOEs. Enterprises in this category were initially created as a result of the absorption of small private industrial and commercial concerns into the urban public sector during the socialist transformation in the mid-1950s. They were all controlled by sub-national government authorities, especially those at city and county levels. Mostly producers of consumer goods, they received lower priority in resource allocation than SOEs under the central planning system. Like SOEs, they became market players during the 1980s and early 1990s. Very few of them survived the massive privatization around the turn of the century.

**Township and village enterprises (TVEs)**   Public enterprises established and controlled by township governments and village authorities in rural areas. Their forerunners were the so-called "commune and brigade enterprises" that undertook mainly non-farm economic activities under people's communes. Growing from the fringes of the old economic system, TVEs played an instrumental role in the diversification of the rural economy and in the marketization of the entire economic system during the first two decades of economic reforms. But most of them were privatized in the following decade.

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# 11  Urbanization and its impact in China

*Hong Yu*

In the pre-1978 period, Mao's policy on capital-intensive heavy industrialization and the tight control of rural-to-urban migration led to stagnant urbanization in China (Chang 1994). Urbanization in China has accelerated remarkably since the late 1970s, in terms of both scale and pace. Urbanization in China reached a historic high of 51.3 per cent in 2011, and as a result China's urban population has since exceeded its rural population. China's rapid urbanization and spectacular economic growth have attracted scholarly attention and media coverage in the last decade (Wedeman 2000; Kam 2010; Yew 2011; Zhan 2012; The Economist 2013; Rithmire 2013; Lan 2014; Ong 2014; Tao and Lim 2014). Many of the previous studies have touched upon the various issues and problems associated with the urbanization process, such as local governments' role and behaviours in urban sprawl, institutional barriers impeding rural migrants from accessing urban welfare benefits due to the rigidity of the *hukou* registration system, the soaring local government debts due to urban infrastructure construction, and local government dependency on extra-budgetary revenue. These problems are a reflection of uncompleted urbanization in China.

This chapter discusses the issues relating to China's land-centred urbanization strategy, such as injustice to rural migrants, local fiscal dependency on land revenue, local government debts, and the emergence of ghost cities, followed by a case study of Chenggong in Kunming, Yunnan Province. Chenggong is located in the underdeveloped western region, where the level of urbanization is lower than in the more prosperous eastern region or the national average. In 2012, the urbanization rate in the eastern region reached 65.4 per cent, whereas the corresponding figure in the western region was 44.3 per cent (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2013). Local governments in the western region have aggressively pushed for urbanization through infrastructure construction and urban sprawl. Government investments in urban infrastructure and large-scale land expropriation for urban growth are adopted by local governments to drive GDP growth under their jurisdiction, which accounts for why they have promoted the pro-development and pro-business urbanization strategy. The case of Chenggong can help readers understand

the impact that state-led, land-centred urbanization has had on the local economy and how it has turned it into a ghost city.

## The urbanization drive in China

Accompanying China's world-beating economic growth and industrialization, there has been a massive flow of rural migration to the urban regions since 1978, especially in the eastern coastal cities. The 2010 census estimated the total number of rural-to-urban migrants at around 221 million. This figure may be an underestimate given the difficulty in collecting migrant population statistics. Rapid economic growth as well as technological changes and institutional reforms of the household responsibility system in rural China have contributed to rural population mobility and freed millions of farmers to seek non-agricultural jobs in urban areas. Millions of migrant workers have powered China's booming export-orientated labour-intensive manufacturing industries, while others have worked in construction or service industries such as restaurants, cleaning, shops and small retail businesses.

Urbanization in China has been accelerated at an extraordinary pace since the late 1970s. According to official data, the urban population increased from 191.4 million in 1980 to 711.8 million in 2012, and the urbanization rate rose from 19.4 per cent in 1980 to 52.6 per cent in 2012 (Figure 11.1). To accompany the rapid increase of urban populations, the number of cities has grown dramatically during this period, particularly in terms of mega cities of over 10 million and large cities with a population between one million and
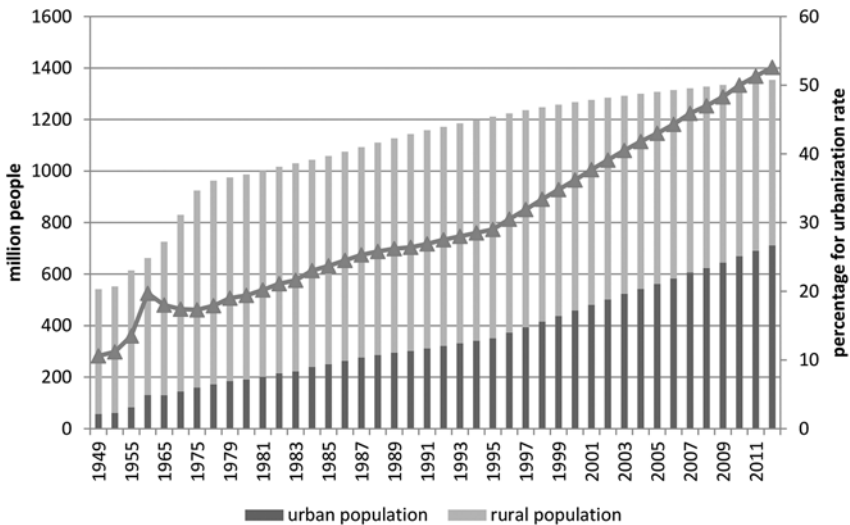


*Figure 11.1* Levels of urbanization in China, 1949–2012
Source: National Statistical Bureau of China 2013: 95.

five million (Table 11.1). China has undergone the largest urbanization process in human history, and this process has become a metaphor, in terms of its scale and pace, for the Chinese economic miracle.

The Chinese government has identified urbanization as a key strategy and an engine for China's future economic growth. Urbanization is also an important element in China's transformation from an export-orientated economy to one that is more dependent on domestic consumption as it can unleash rural consumer demands and create demands for new infrastructure (transport, water supply, power supply, and waste treatment), housing, schools, hospitals and services, etc. Prime Minister Li Keqiang has advocated this type of people-centred urbanization. At a national urbanization conference held in December 2013, Li emphasized that urbanization was the only way to achieve integration between rural and urban areas and coordinated regional development, thereby boosting domestic consumption in China (*People's Daily* 2013).

## Injustice to migrants: Social and political exclusion

The surge of rural-to-urban migration has been a prominent feature of China's urbanization. However, millions of migrants have not obtained permanent residency status to work and live in urban areas, largely due to the long-held strict control of rural-to-urban movements imposed by the *hukou* (household registration) system. This system has impeded population mobility and deprived rural migrants of permanent city residency rights and urban welfare benefits; it has also impeded the pace of urbanization in China.

In China, rural migrants are considered by the government and residents with urban *hukou* as transients or temporary residents with no right to stay in cities permanently. They are known as the 'floating population' (*liudong renkou*) or 'rural migrant workers' (*nongmingong*). Migrants have faced two-fold barriers to settling in cities: institutional exclusion and cultural prejudices and discrimination by urban residents (Lan 2014). If the residents without urban *hukou* are taken into account, the genuine urbanization rate in China

*Table 11.1* Changes in the number and size of Chinese cities, 1978–2010

| Year | 1978 | 2010 |
|---|---|---|
| Cities with population over 10 million | 0 | 6 |
| Cities with population between five million and 10 million | 2 | 10 |
| Cities with population between one million and five million | 27 | 124 |
| Cities with population less than one million | 164 | 518 |
| Total number of cities | 193 | 658 |

Source: National Development and Reform Commission of China 2014.

was merely 35.3 per cent in 2012, which was far lower than the official urbanization rate (52.6 per cent) based on the number of urban residents (Figure 11.1 above). Due to biased institutional arrangements, migrant workers and their families are excluded from access to welfare benefits in urban areas (Kam 2010), which include medical care, education, housing, pensions, etc. They face various forms of discrimination and make up a vulnerable and underprivileged urban group. As a result, there is a dual social structure within China's cities, comprising two segregated communities of rural migrants and residents with urban *hukou*.

Furthermore, large-scale migrant communities have settled in *chengzhongcun* (poor urban villages, which are an illegal form of urban settlement) because they cannot afford to buy or rent. *Chengzhongcun* has caused concerns among local authorities over social disorder, chaotic use of urban space, and social instability. Some scholars regard the existence of *chengzhongcun* as an innovative agency to meet the migrants' housing demands, and a means of assimilating rural migrants into cities (Zhang et al. 2003). The central and local governments have since the 1990s tried to do something about the problems related to *chengzhongcun*. However, the central and local governments have yet to take a fundamental step of reforming the *hukou* system. Hence, migrant communities remain largely deprived of the rights and entitlements of permanent city residency.

## Land-centred urbanization and government dependency on land revenue

To promote China's industrialization and urbanization, the government has taken over vast tracts of agricultural farmland that were formerly collectively owned, for use as factories, urban real estate, infrastructure construction and other non-agricultural purposes in the last two decades. The supply of state-owned construction land for factories, real estate development, infrastructure construction and other commercial uses increased almost two times from 0.36 million hectares in 2009 to 0.73 million hectares in 2013 (Figure 11.2). Land requisition/supply policies and the creation of new cities/towns (*xinchengzheng*) are two salient features of China's urbanization. Local governments have aggressively expanded their urban territory through land requisition and the conversion of farmland to urban construction land under the land expropriation system, without offering adequate compensation to the dispossessed peasants (*shidi nongmin*) or integrating them into cities. Meanwhile, the state's compensation of dispossessed peasants is much lower than the market value.

Almost all local governments in China's cities have formulated grand plans for urban development and territorial expansion. They have power over land requisition/supply and the right to change the nature of land for urban development (Rithmire 2013). Land has become the primary commodity and major source of revenues for governments (Yew 2011). In 2013 alone, taxes paid by the real estate industry and incomes from land lease premiums and
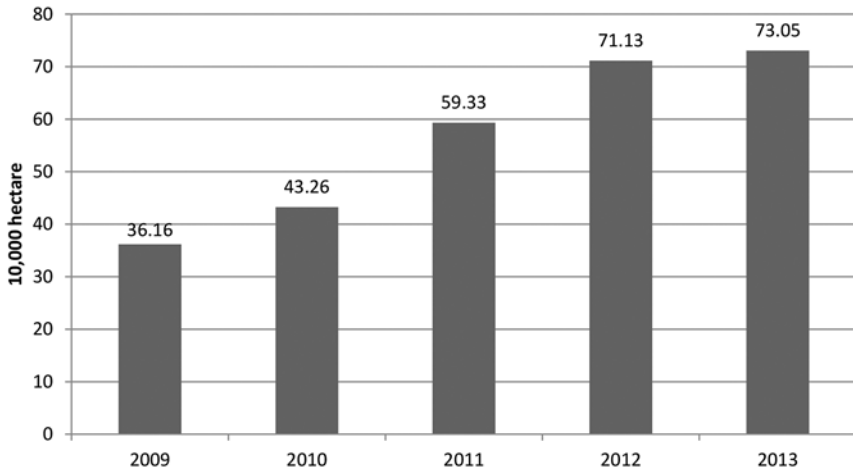
*Figure 11.2* Changes in the supply size of state-owned construction land, 2009–2013
Source: Ministry of Land and Resources 2014a: 6.

charges for urban land usage amounted to over 2.3 trillion yuan, accounting for nearly 20 per cent of the total national fiscal revenue (Ministry of Finance 2013).

To capitalize further on the appreciation of urban land values and boost the premiums from the lease of land use rights, local governments engage in various practices such as the expansion of areas under their jurisdiction, set-ups of new cities, turning rural counties and county-level cities into districts of large cities, converting village residents' committees to urban residents' committees, etc. As a consequence, many rural places have been reclassi-fied as urban areas. The nationwide land area for urban construction increased from 11,608 square km in 1990 to 45,751 square km by 2012 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2013).

The land-centred urbanization strategy promoted by the local governments has caused real estate speculation and soaring housing prices. More impor-tantly, land-related issues such as illegal land grabbing, forced housing demolition and eviction, and inadequate compensations to displaced peasants have created major flashpoints, triggering massive confrontations between local officials and ordinary citizens and impacting on state-society relations in China. According to the Ministry of Land and Resources (2014a), the total cases of illegal land grabs increased to 83,450 in 2013 from 72,940 in 2009; while the involved size of land grabs was up to 41,051 hectares in 2013 from 37,973 hectares in 2009 (Ministry of Land and Resources 2014a: 33). Many peasants have been removed from their rural homeland and native villages due to 'urbanization'. One study estimates that the total numbers of displaced rural peasants were around 52 million between 1987 and 2010 (Ong 2014). For these peasants, their land constitutes lifelong insurance and their

homeland; but for local governments, land is a profit-making commodity and a revenue source. Table 11.2 illustrates the importance land revenue has assumed in generating fiscal income for local governments. The local governments have aggressively converted agricultural farmland (which refers to cultivated land, forest land, grassland and garden land) to non-agricultural use in order to line their own pockets and benefit from rising land lease premiums and soaring real property prices.

Local government behaviour has been partly influenced by the fact that they have to shoulder an increasing responsibility for local expenditures on welfare, public service provision, transportation and other infrastructure improvement because of the substantial reduction in the central government's financial support to local governments since 1978. The 1994 Tax Reform increased the allocation of budgetary revenues (e.g. value-added tax) to the central government. At the same time, a large portion of property and land-related taxes was designated as local taxes. Since 1993, the central government has dramatically strengthened its fiscal power at the expense of local governments' fiscal capability. As Table 11.3 shows, the central government's revenue rose sharply from 95.8 billion yuan in 1993 to 5,617.5 billion yuan in 2012. During the same period, the central government revenue in relation to the total national revenues increased from 22 per cent to 47.9 per cent, whilst local government revenues in relation to the total national revenues decreased to 52 per cent in 2012 from 78 per cent in 1993.

Also, the central government has transferred more local expenditure responsibilities to local governments; for example, since 1994, local governments have been responsible for public security, public housing, education, social security and healthcare and other general public service provision (Qian 2013) that were funded centrally before 1994. Local government contributions to the total national public expenditures increased from 71.7 per cent in 1993

*Table 11.2* Contribution of land to local government revenues (billion yuan)

| Year | Land revenue | Fiscal income of local governments | Land revenue as a percentage of fiscal income of local governments (%) |
|------|------|------|------|
| 2004 | 589.4 | 1,189.3 | 49.6 |
| 2005 | 550.5 | 1,510.1 | 36.6 |
| 2006 | 767.7 | 1,830.4 | 41.9 |
| 2007 | 1,300.0 | 2,356.5 | 55.2 |
| 2008 | 960.0 | 2,864.5 | 33.5 |
| 2009 | 1,591.0 | 3,258.1 | 48.8 |
| 2010 | 2,939.4 | 4,061.3 | 72.4 |
| 2011 | 3,347.7 | 5,240.0 | 63.9 |
| 2012 | 2,888.6 | 6,107.7 | 47.3 |

Source: Zhou 2014: 6.

Table 11.3 Revenues and expenditures of the central and local governments

| Year | Revenues | | | | Expenditures | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Central government (billion yuan) | Local governments (billion yuan) | Ratio of central government revenue to total revenues (%) | Ratio of local governments' revenue to total national revenues (%) | Central government (billion yuan) | Local governments (billion yuan) | Ratio of central government expenditure to national expenditures (%) | Ratio of local governments' expenditure to national expenditures (%) |
| 1990 | 99.2 | 194.5 | 33.8 | 66.2 | 100.4 | 207.9 | 32.6 | 67.4 |
| 1991 | 93.8 | 221.1 | 29.8 | 70.2 | 109.1 | 229.6 | 32.2 | 67.8 |
| 1992 | 98.0 | 250.4 | 28.1 | 71.9 | 117.0 | 257.2 | 31.3 | 68.7 |
| 1993 | 95.8 | 339.1 | 22.0 | 78.0 | 131.2 | 333.0 | 28.3 | 71.7 |
| 1994 | 290.7 | 231.2 | 55.7 | 44.3 | 175.4 | 403.8 | 30.3 | 69.7 |
| 1995 | 325.7 | 298.6 | 52.2 | 47.8 | 199.5 | 482.8 | 29.2 | 70.8 |
| 1996 | 366.1 | 374.7 | 49.4 | 50.6 | 215.1 | 578.6 | 27.1 | 72.9 |
| 1997 | 422.7 | 442.4 | 48.9 | 51.1 | 253.3 | 670.1 | 27.4 | 72.6 |
| 1998 | 489.2 | 498.4 | 49.5 | 50.5 | 312.6 | 767.3 | 28.9 | 71.1 |
| 1999 | 584.9 | 559.5 | 51.1 | 48.9 | 415.2 | 903.5 | 31.5 | 68.5 |
| 2000 | 698.9 | 640.6 | 52.2 | 47.8 | 552.0 | 1,036.7 | 34.7 | 65.3 |
| 2001 | 858.3 | 780.3 | 52.4 | 47.6 | 576.8 | 1,313.5 | 30.5 | 69.5 |
| 2002 | 1,038.9 | 851.5 | 55.0 | 45.0 | 677.2 | 1,528.1 | 30.7 | 69.3 |
| 2003 | 1,186.5 | 985.0 | 54.6 | 45.4 | 742.0 | 1,723.0 | 30.1 | 69.9 |
| 2004 | 1,450.3 | 1,189.3 | 54.9 | 45.1 | 789.4 | 2,059.3 | 27.7 | 72.3 |
| 2005 | 1,654.9 | 1,510.1 | 52.3 | 47.7 | 877.6 | 2,515.4 | 25.9 | 74.1 |
| 2006 | 2,045.7 | 1,830.4 | 52.8 | 47.2 | 999.1 | 3,043.1 | 24.7 | 75.3 |

|  | Revenues | | | | Expenditures | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | Central government (billion yuan) | Local governments (billion yuan) | Ratio of central government revenue to total revenues (%) | Ratio of local governments' revenue to total national revenues (%) | Central government (billion yuan) | Local governments (billion yuan) | Ratio of central government expenditure to national expenditures (%) | Ratio of local governments' expenditure to national expenditures (%) |
| 2007 | 2,774.9 | 2,357.3 | 54.1 | 45.9 | 1,144.2 | 3,833.9 | 23.0 | 77.0 |
| 2008 | 3,268.1 | 2,865.0 | 53.3 | 46.7 | 1,334.4 | 4,924.8 | 21.3 | 78.7 |
| 2009 | 3,591.6 | 3,260.3 | 52.4 | 47.6 | 1,525.6 | 6,104.4 | 20.0 | 80.0 |
| 2010 | 4,248.8 | 4,061.3 | 51.1 | 48.9 | 1,599.0 | 7,388.4 | 17.8 | 82.2 |
| 2011 | 5,132.7 | 5,254.7 | 49.4 | 50.6 | 1,651.4 | 9,273.4 | 15.1 | 84.9 |
| 2012 | 5,617.5 | 6,107.8 | 47.9 | 52.1 | 1,876.5 | 1,071.9 | 14.9 | 85.1 |

Note: The expenditure of central and local governments refers to the expenditure disbursed by the central government and local governments only.
Source: National Statistical Bureau of China 2013: 328.

to 85.1 per cent by 2012, whereas central government contributions decreased from 28.3 per cent to 14.9 per cent during this period of time.

Consequently, there is a serious mismatch between local government revenues and expenditures, resulting in a situation whereby local governments have insufficient financial resources to carry out infrastructure construction and public service provisions. To fulfil their fiscal expenditure responsibilities and execute policies imposed by the central government, local governments have been left with no choice but to rely on off-budgetary incomes as a main source of local revenues. From the 1980s till the early 1990s, the local governments resorted to the use of illegal funds such as *san luan* (three arbitraries), which refer to three types of arbitrary taxation: arbitrary levies (*luan shou fei*), arbitrary fines (*luan fa kuan*) and arbitrary apportionments (*luan tan pai*), as the main sources of their extra-budgetary revenues (Wedeman 2000).

Since the late 1990s, land-related budgetary (land lease tax) and extra-budgetary revenues (land transfer premiums and fees and rent charges for land users) have become a major financial resource for local governments in financing public service provision and infrastructure construction (Zhan 2012). The central government has noted this practice and adopted measures to deal with it (Zhan 2009). However, the local governments have continued their dependency on land revenues derived from land lease premiums and taxes from land-related transactions since they do not have an alternative source of fiscal revenues.

In addition, local government leaders are pro-active in land-centred urbanization because it can boost local GDP growth, which is regarded by the central government as a key political achievement. The real estate sector and urban infrastructure construction have together been a main pillar of local economies and a driving force behind China's economic growth in recent years. Real estate investments alone made up 12.5 per cent of the GDP in China in 2012 (International Monetary Fund 2013). The real estate sector and urban infrastructure construction have contributed to China's economy also because of their linkages with both upstream and downstream sectors, such as cement, steel and iron, petroleum, furniture manufacturing and service sectors.

The Ministry of Land and Resources and other relevant central ministries have attempted to regulate land requisition, curb the establishment of new cities/towns, and strengthen the central supervision over land conversion (Tao and Lim 2014; Ministry of Land and Resources 2014b), yet they have not been very successful so far. The proliferation of 'new cities' and the uncontrolled land development have been rampant and seemingly unstoppable. For example, the Henan provincial government set up 16 new city built-up areas between 2010 and 2013 (Wenxuecity 2014), and 144 Chinese cities across twelve provinces in China are actively planning 200 new cities/towns according to *Economist* (2013). These plans are a cause of anxiety because they would lead to huge and costly urban development and infrastructure construction projects. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's data, fixed

asset investment accounted for 46 per cent of China's GDP in 2012, and the State Development Bank of China estimates that investments of up to 25 trillion yuan will be required in order to meet the demand arising from various urbanization projects in 2014–2016 (People.cn 2013).

How can local governments afford these projects? They have borrowed heavily from banks with local government investment vehicles (LGIVs 地方政府融资平台). This debt-financed investment model is widely practised in China. The National Audit Office of China (NAO) report indicated that more than 50 per cent of local government debts were incurred due to investments in urban transportation and other infrastructure constructions. As a result, many local governments are heavily in debt. According to the latest audit report by the NAO, local government debts, which include those incurred or guaranteed by local governments and those for which local governments may have some liability, have reached over 10.57 trillion yuan by June 2013, up by 3.86 trillion yuan from the 2010 figure, which represents an annual growth of nearly 20 per cent (National Audit Office of China 2013). Concerns over local government debts have intensified in recent years, and the debt-financed development model adopted by local governments begs the question whether this debt time bomb is about to explode. According to a document issued by the central government, local governments will no longer be allowed to borrow money from banks through LGFVs or other corporate channels (Xinhua News Agency 2014b). It is uncertain whether this policy would be effective in curbing local government debts and changing the debt-financed development model.

## The emergence of ghost cities

The term 'ghost city/town' refers to these built urban areas that have very few residents and are littered with unoccupied newly built residential properties and uncompleted construction projects, which is the result of the ill-planned land-centred urbanization strategy implemented by local governments. Chenggong New District is a case in point. Chenggong, which is about 20 kilometres south from downtown Kunming, was an agricultural county but is now a new city in making. Its development can be traced back to May 2003 when the Yunnan provincial government issued a strategic plan, *Modernize New Kunming* (*Xin Kunming Jianshe*), designating Chenggong as the future geographic centre of government, education, industrial development and culture for Kunming and incorporating plans for alleviating traffic and living congestion in Kunming city. To promote industrial development and attract domestic and international private investments in Chenggong, the Kunming government offered preferential treatment to potential investors in terms of corporation tax rebates and waivers of various local administrative fees such as construction enterprise management fees, local administrative levies, and license fees. These plans marked the start of the construction of Chenggong as a new city.

Partly to implement these plans, fixed asset investments by the Kunming government increased from 26.4 billion yuan in 2001 to 270.1 billion yuan in 2011, falling slightly to 234.6 billion yuan in 2012. In particular, Kunming's fixed asset investments rose substantially between 2009 and 2011 (Figure 11.3), partly to fund the construction of Chenggong. The Kunming government has provided huge capital investment for construction and improvement of local transportation, housing, power plants, water and other critical infrastructure in the past few years. In addition, the Kunming government expropriated 47,200 mu (3,147 hectares) of land for this project between 2008 and 2012.

The Kunming government built a grand government compound in Chenggong, with 13 magnificent buildings clad in marble tiles, and transferred the headquarters of the municipal government and all of its administrative departments and civil servants there in 2013 as one of the steps to develop it as the new administrative centre of Kunming. In addition, the Kunming government has built a massive 20,000-mu (1,333 hectares) state-of-the-art university town in Chenggong, and all the major local universities have set up new campuses there, currently housing a total of 180,000 students. The relocation of government offices and universities from Kunming to Chenggong was a key strategy of the Kunming government, and exemplifies the common practice among local governments of building huge and impressive public buildings and constructing infrastructure to push up land prices and increase their revenues.

However, the high-rise housing apartments found throughout Cheonggong are to this day still largely deserted. There are few vehicles passing by or people walking in the streets, while the eerie light of the street lamps conveys a strong sense and feeling of a ghost town. The Kunming government has not been very successful in enticing people to move to this new town. The
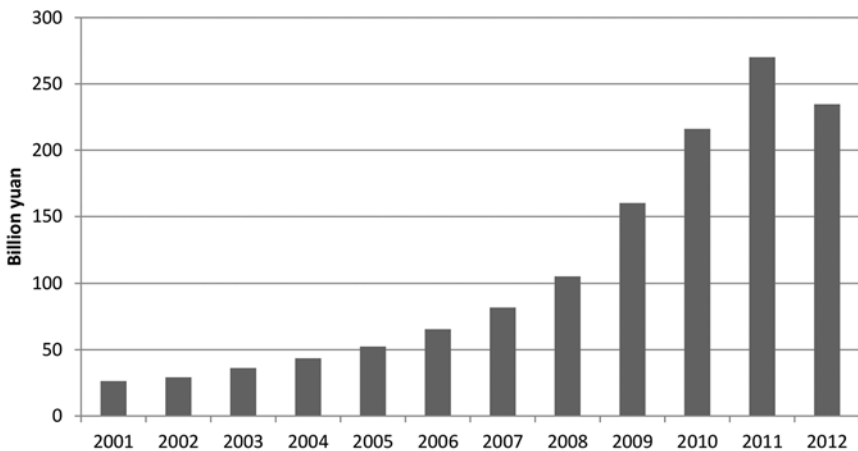


*Figure 11.3* Fixed asset investment by Kunming, 2001–2012
Source: Kunming Statistical Bureau 2013: 57.

government plan for Chenggong is apparently a failure. Although the local government has relocated all municipal departments and spent billions on infrastructure projects, no more than 250,000 people work and live in Chenggong, only a fourth of the government's projection of one million residents. The government's plan for Chenggong was over-ambitious and ill conceived, and Chenggong's emergence as a ghost town is an example of many incomplete urbanization projects in China. Chenggong 'dedicated bus lanes without routes assigned to them, taxi stands with no taxis' (Krambeck 2010). Chenggong may be the biggest ghost town in Asia (BBC News 2012).

Like many other ghost cities in other parts of China, Chenggong is short of people and lacks vibrant manufacturing and service industries. Limited employment opportunities and poor public service provision have discouraged people from settling down in Chenggong. For example, in a big housing development project that was invested in by Zhejiang businessmen and completed in 2010, merely 10 per cent of the flats were sold and occupied. Around 80 per cent of the housing units in Chenggong are empty. Some were sold but have remained unoccupied, while others are unsold or uncompleted. According to local sources, Kunming government officials and university teachers as well as contracted employees working in local state-owned enterprises were allocated cheap 'discounted' flats in Chenggong, but few have moved into them.

However, in the view of local officials in Kunming, the building of such a new city was a much-needed forward-looking infrastructure investment which would lay the foundations to stimulate future economic growth. A senior Kunming official commented:

> Although the cost of new city building is high, the local government believes that this new city will bring higher returns for long-term economic growth. Underdeveloped western regions such as Kunming badly need to improve their transportation and other infrastructure through huge capital investments … The once unoccupied housing units will be in full use in few years later after the completion of light rail lines and relocation of the Kunming municipal government there.

However, after municipal government offices were relocated to and light rail started to operate in Chenggong, few passengers have used this transport facility due to relatively high fares and a lack of routes and connections between downtown Kunming and Chenggong (Sina News 2013). The wide tree-lined streets and roads stand deserted in the afternoon sunshine, waiting to be populated by cars and residents. As there is no real industry in Chenggong to create jobs, there is actually no real reason for people to live there. But this is not a major concern to top local officials, as they will walk away from the accumulated debt burdens and be transferred to a different city or promoted after a few years.

The Kunming government has borrowed huge loans from state-owned banks using land as collateral through the government-controlled LGFVs. Under the 1994 fiscal law, local governments are not allowed to directly borrow money from banks or issue bonds. The Kunming government has circumvented this restriction by setting up LGFVs to fund local infrastructure projects, including roads, bridges, power plants, and railways. A serious problem is a lack of operational transparency and absence of effective supervision of their business activities in these LGFVs (Ong 2014). This is partly why it is difficult to estimate the scale and amount of local government debt.

The Kunming government has not released the total amount of its debt. It may have the largest debt burden among all the same administrative-level local governments in China. According to a local informant, by 2013 the Kunming government debt reached over 130 billion yuan, while government fiscal revenues were 45.1 billion yuan. The Kunming government therefore has a ratio of outstanding debt to annual fiscal revenues of above 280 per cent. As shown in Table 11.4, Kunming's local budgetary revenues have consistently fallen short of local budgetary expenditures in recent years, while there has been a steady increase in budget deficits. It does not have the capacity to pay off its debt and is on the brink of bankruptcy. The Kunming government has borrowed from banks and private channels to pay off old debts. But this model is unsustainable and the Kunming government will eventually default on debt repayments unless the central government bails it out. Kunming is now paying a very high price for its infrastructure development and GDP growth.

## Conclusion

The Chinese government has faced a daunting task of amending the nation's current land-centred urbanization model and dealing with the financial problems associated with this model. These problems have been accumulated and remained unaddressed and have now reached a tipping point. It would not be possible for China to pursue sustainable development if it continued with the land-centred and GDP-first urbanization model exemplified by the

*Table 11.4* Public finance in Kunming (billion yuan)

| Year | Local budgetary revenue | Local budgetary expenditure | Deficit |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2008 | 17.5 | 23.3 | 5.8 |
| 2009 | 20.2 | 27.1 | 6.9 |
| 2010 | 25.4 | 34.6 | 9.2 |
| 2011 | 31.8 | 44.2 | 12.4 |
| 2012 | 37.8 | 52.6 | 14.8 |
| 2013 | 45.1 | 58.6 | 13.5 |

Sources: Kunming Statistical Yearbook 2013, p. 6; Kunming Statistical Yearbook 2014: 6.

Chenggong project. It should replace this flawed urbanization model with one that is more inclusive, sustainable and people-centred, focus on urbanizing rural migrants and achieve rural-urban integration, and provide equal rights and welfare for rural migrants.

To address the problems of land-centred urbanization, and in particular those relating to local government debts and the 'ghost cities', the central government has to show clear commitment and formulate effective policy measures. The land-centred urbanization model has highlighted many institutional problems, including the *hukou* registration system, taxation, and the system for assessing local cadres' performances. The Chinese government should introduce comprehensive and systematic reforms. Such policies will take time to implement and will face opposition from vested interest groups which have benefited from land-centred urbanization. But without addressing the *hukou* registration system and providing local governments with sufficient financial resources to align their expenditures with revenues, it will be difficult to reduce cash-strapped local governments' behaviours of relying on off-budgetary land sales and land transfer premiums to boost GDP growth rates and to meet their mandated expenditure responsibilities for local public infrastructure, housing construction, education, medical care and other public goods provision. Without changing the central government's GDP-first performance evaluation model for local officials, it will be impossible for local governments to exercise control over land sales or for them to stop building new cities/towns to pursue local GDP growth rates.

In March 2014, the central government released a long-anticipated National New Urbanization Plan (2014–2020). This Plan (Xinhua News Agency 2014a) is a reflection of Chinese leaders' commitment to promoting a new type of urbanization through implementing institutional reforms in the areas of *hukou* registration, land, taxation and real estate. It aims to have an overhaul of the existing land-centred and property-led urbanization model and to tackle the problems attributed to this model. The Plan has categorized 18 assessment indexes in respect to urbanization rates, infrastructure development, basic public services provision, and resource conservation and environmental protection. It has also set an urbanization rate of 60 per cent by 2020, based on the size of the urban population. However, whether the new reform measures proposed by the Chinese government are effective remains an issue. It is still too early to tell if this new urbanization plan can be successfully implemented.

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# 12  Mass media in China

*Xiaoling Zhang*

The economic reform in China since 1978 has brought about a radically changed communication landscape shaped by unprecedented growth in the number of newspapers, TV stations, and satellite channels, and Internet expansion. It has become more pluralized, commercialized, and liberalized. Changes in China's media sphere during this period are not the result of a single event, but the consequence of a number of overlapping and interrelated factors and forces, including commercialization, the new global and regional structure and environment, pluralization which partly (but not exclusively) results from commercialization, China's multifaceted interactions with the outside world, and the advancement of new information and communication technologies (ICT). More importantly, all these changes are happening in the context of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) wanting to manage the whole process and to stay ahead of the unwanted consequences of the reform. These overlapping and inter-related factors and forces constitute the backdrop of the transformation of mass media, although the backdrop itself is in continuous flux. This chapter starts with a brief review of the history of China's communist communication, which serves to provide the context within which the country's media reform and the fast-moving social transitions in the reform era have been occurring. It then introduces the transformation of mass media as a result of accelerated commodification, globalization, rapid advancement of media technologies, and intensified ideological and social struggles. This chapter serves to improve our understanding of the continuities and changes in China's mass media after the economic reform. It finishes with challenges both the Party-state and the media industry face in furthering the development of mass media in China.

## Mass media in Mao's era

China's philosophy of media was derived from the Marxist theory whose central theme is that media and communication is an ideological state apparatus, and that their first and foremost function is to reflect the regime's point of view on ideological issues. As a party that came to power as much through the power of the pen as through the barrel of the gun, the CCP leaders knew

all too well the importance of ideological domination and the use of mass media as part of the Party's ideological apparatus for social mobilization.

Mass media in the CCP history before 1978 could be divided into three periods. The first period began in 1921 when the CCP was founded and ended in 1949 when the CCP under the leadership of Mao Zedong founded the People's Republic of China (PRC). The CCP leaders from the start had been highly sensitive and attentive to the political role of the media, which played an important role in communicating to the Chinese people the ideas and values that the CCP believed to be crucial to their revolutionary objectives. Many newspapers and periodicals were developed to make ideological preparations for the founding of the new China by promoting Marxism and the views of the CCP (Chang 1989: 13). During the Anti-Japanese War and the Civil War in the 1930s and 1940s, the CCP developed its own journalistic institutions, successfully organizing and mobilizing the people. With increasingly rich experience of using the media to promulgate the CCP's guidelines and arousing people's political awareness, the CCP gradually developed its own theory of the media that emphasized the Party principle with three components: that the media must accept the CCP's guiding ideology as its own; that they must propagate the CCP's programs, policies, and directives;and that they must accept the CCP's leadership and stick to the CCP's organizational policies and the press policies (Zhao 1998: 19).

The second period ran from 1949 to 1965. After it took power in 1949, the CCP quickly took over the entire mass media. By the early 1950s all private newspapers, radio stations, and publishers had become state-owned. The mass media system was thus integrated fully into the CCP-led government and became focused on contributing to system maintenance by teaching the attitudes, values, aspirations, and behaviors the nation's leaders considered desirable (e.g. Schramm 1973; Chu 1983). Since the media system was built on the Soviet model, the media was considered the vehicle for social and political control. It had to be run by the CCP and became the CCP's 'loyal eyes, ears, and tongue' (Chang 1989: 163). Because of its important role, media in the early years of the PRC grew rapidly.

In the late 1950s came the Great Leap Forward, during which campaign the CCP's chairman Mao Zedong hoped to rapidly develop China's agricultural and industrial sectors. The media exaggerated production figures and concealed famines and crop failures. Ironically, those who invented this news fabricating machine started to believe in the reports themselves. Famine and disaster followed as a result of miscalculation and blind pursuit of industrialization. During the last few years of this period, a view emerged in the top leadership that a general cleansing and a restoration of the revolutionary spirit were essential (Starck and Xu 1988). The reawakening was the Cultural Revolution, which started the third period of the media industry in Mao's era.

Mass media during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 were characterized by complete control by the CCP, single-minded expressions of opinion, politicization to the extreme and personal cultism of Mao Zedong

(ibid.). The *People's Daily,* for instance, was under direct control of the CCP's top leadership. It was used against Mao's enemies, and copied verbatim by every other newspaper in the country. By the end of the Cultural Revolution, the media had lost much of its credibility (Fang, Chen and Zhang 1982).

When Mao died in 1976, the media he left had served as propagandist, agitator, and organizer. They were taken as part of the ideology and super-structure of China's socialist economy, designated to define the objectives and philosophy of the CCP and the government. The media were also regarded as weapons in class struggles against the CCP's enemies (White 1990; Chu 1994). The media had generally focused on the communication of goals rather than reality (Chu 1986). The flow of information was decidedly top-down, and emphasis was placed on constructing a mass-media and telecommunications system that could relay orders hierarchically from Beijing to every corner of the country, and from the state to society. The mass media were used by the CCP to the greatest possible extent to create a 'total institution' and to impose ideological hegemony on society (Lee 1990).

## Mass media during the reform era

The CCP launched the economic reform in 1978, which, pragmatic as it seems, was necessary to salvage the CCP from the brink of losing its legiti-macy after the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese economy has since then grown dramatically, which has in turn brought an unprecedented proliferation of media outlets and diversification of media sources, thus changing the communication landscape in China for ever.

Marketization of the media industry has also given rise to globalization. Different from the Maoist period when China was economically autarkic and culturally sealed off from the outside world, China has increased its interac-tion with the world. The period from 1980 to the late 1990s is characterized by China as a recipient of influence from global media companies. Because of the proliferation of media outlets, there was a severe shortage of domestic content provision. As a result, China Central Television (CCTV) alone imported 30 percent of its programs from abroad, and one-fourth of the TV dramas throughout the nation were imports. As China's economic growth remains strong, every major international media player wants a toehold in the Chinese market. In the past decade, however, another trend has set in: as it grows more confident, China has been building up its international networks to air its views, in an effort to break the Anglo-American monopoly, enhance China's international influence, and showcase its rise as a great power in a non-threatening and non-confrontational manner.

Marketization has also stimulated other important changes to the field of mass media such as the rapid development of technological advances, including television and recorded movies in the 1980s, the Internet and the Internet-enabled social media such as microblogging and Wechat from 1994. For example, the number of Internet users in China has been growing at an

exponential rate. Within twenty years, the number of users has expanded almost 300 times from a mere 2.1 million in 1998 to 632 million by June 2014 (China Internet Network Information Center 2014). Numerous netizens, the urban youth in particular, prefer to express opinions, exchange ideas, and share information with their peers on the Internet.

## More refined and sophisticated management from the Party-state

In spite of the reform they have launched, the CCP leaders have inherited from Mao a clear understanding of the importance of mass media in dominating society. It is therefore not surprising that as the CCP struggles to manage all aspects of the reform since 1978, it has vested high stakes in mass media, accelerating and strengthening its efforts to occupy the 'commanding heights' (Zhao 2008: 101), including strengthening structure to enhance regulating capacities.

The institutional communication system extends from Beijing to the lower administrative levels and can be largely divided into two broad categories, namely government agencies and CCP organizations. For both categories, there is the horizontal sector coordinating system and the vertical four-tier (national, provincial, prefectural, and county) linkage. At the horizontal government level, the key government organizations under the State Council enforcing laws related to information flow within, into, and from China include those shown in Table 12.1, each responsible for the regulation of certain sectors in the media industry. Each media sector at different tiers is owned, regulated, and operated by the corresponding level of government.

However, all these government agencies are subject to the directives of the Central Department of Propaganda (DOP), which reports directly to the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CCP, the most powerful decision-making body in China. It answers for the information and cultural networks of institutions, and coordinates with different government agencies to make sure content remains consistent with Party doctrine. Parallel to the state media institutions, the DOP also has the four-tier local units. Thus, activities in the lower level media organizations are circumscribed by the local DOPs, answerable to the Central DOP in Beijing.

*Table 12.1* State organs responsible for regulating and monitoring the mass media

| The State Council | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and TV (SAPPRFT)* | *The Ministry of Culture* | *The Ministry of Information Industry (MII)* | *The State Council's Information Office (SCIO)* |
| Newspapers, magazines, publications, radio, TV, film, animation (incl. those on the Internet) | Art, entertainment | Telecom., wireless service, broadband | Online media, the Internet |

The development of mass media in China after 1978 can be divided into three stages known as marketization, conglomeration, and capitalization, each reflecting the Party-state's efforts at maintaining control of the reform process and dealing proactively with unintended consequences.

## Marketization

The first period started in the late 1970s when Deng launched the sweeping reforms covering the country's economy, politics, ideology, culture, and mass media. Three critical policies marked this period. The first one was in 1978 when the government issued a policy removing the rein on media advertising. Before 1978, the government owned, controlled, and financed all media outlets. In 1978, the financially stressed state started to progressively withdraw direct subsidies from media organizations, particularly those at local level. This policy marked the beginning of the whole process of marketization. Since then advertising has become an increasingly important source of income for all kinds of media.

In 1983, central government issued another important policy, which stated that the media system henceforward would have four levels: central, provincial and autonomous regions, prefectural cities, and county-level cities. It allowed governments at different levels to establish, finance, and operate their own media outlets. The primary purpose of this policy was to improve the effectiveness of the media as a medium for the dissemination of Party-state policy initiatives and as its 'eyes and ears'. It also resulted in the four-tier media structure.

In late 1992, another policy was issued as part of a concerted plan to dislodge inefficient state enterprises. It required all newspapers to be financially independent by 1994 except a few major CCP organs such as the *People's Daily*. The state acknowledged the economic significance of non-political coverage and no longer required afternoon and evening publications, news digests, culture and lifestyle papers, and trade journals to carry ideological propaganda (Lee 1994: 12).

These three policies resulted in an unprecedented proliferation of media outlets. At the beginning of the reform period, China only had a handful of media. In the 1980s newspaper titles multiplied at a great speed, with one new title published every one and a half days (Chang 1989: ix). At the same time, general and interest papers also increased their page numbers. TV stations increased rapidly from 47 in 1982 to 366 in 1987 (Zhu 2009: 203). By the end of the 1980s, China had developed a rather elaborate media network.

Although the crackdown on the pro-democracy movement in 1989 suppressed discourses on political liberalization and re-imposed tight political control on the media, market forces gained momentum again after Deng Xiaoping gave his personal approval to more aggressive economic reform in 1992. Media organizations, like much of China, responded to the opportunity

by embracing the market economy in an unreserved way. As a result the Chinese media expanded enormously in the 1990s.

The proliferation of media outlets also led to the diversification of media products. In sharp contrast to the pre-1978 media landscape that had been dominated by a few newspapers and journals published by central government, a network of central, provincial, and municipal 'People's Radio Stations' and TV stations which had carried more or less the same ideologically charged reports and commentaries about national and international events, a myriad of new types of newspapers, journals, magazines, and radio and TV programs/channels burst onto the media scene. They varied widely in content and style, catering to different interests such as economy, sports, health, culture, and environment, and served specific groups of people, such as business people, legal professionals, youths, retirees, and women. In addition, the Internet since 1994 introduced to the Chinese public even greater varieties of information and entertainment. By the end of the twentieth century the communication system in China included all the advanced modern media.

An accompanying change with marketization was a redefinition of the political role of the media. The CCP, while retaining ultimate control over politically sensitive information, wanted the media to play a major role in the promotion of a market economy, consumerism, and the nationalistic project of building a 'wealthy and powerful' nation. The media aired people's desires and grievances in an effort to act as the channels with which the CCP has reinvented and reconnected itself with the public.

While marketization of the media launched by the Party-state led to the transformation of the whole media landscape, it also brought about unintended consequences. Take the press, for example. First of all, marketization gave rise to an unprecedented expanding array of media outlets, which posed a threat to the dominant position of central and provincial CCP organs both in terms of number and overall circulation. For one thing, CCP organs had mandatory propaganda topics to cover and had to reach CCP functionaries at the village level, while market-oriented mass-appeal papers were less bound by requirements of that kind. They targeted urban consumers, which rendered them far more attractive advertisement vehicles.

Second, commercialization transformed political restrictions into economic assets, thus weakening the Party-state's control of the media content. For example, in book publishing, only officially approved publishers had the right to grant the license to publish a book. These licenses became valuable commodities that could be bought and sold; similarly, no newspapers were to be set up as independent businesses – all must be assigned an official rank and must be registered under a recognized institutional publisher or sponsor. Obviously the financial interests of media organizations and the government and CCP organizations that owned them were often best served by collaborating with anyone who could provide marketable content and effective distribution. Not all these sponsoring institutions or individuals were keen on the communist ideology of the products.

Third, the four-tiered media structure led to the rapid growth of local media. In the broadcasting sector, for instance, TV stations mushroomed, especially at county level, which increased dramatically from hardly any in 1980 to 60 in 1985, and then to 1,262 in 2001, accounting for nearly 80 percent of the total number of TV stations in China (Yuan 2004). These television stations created tensions between local and central interests: the state insists on local stations transmitting CCTV's National News at 7 p.m. as a 'political task' – after all, it was the Party-state's main means to broadcast its propaganda and ideology to the vast regions and diverse ethnic groups of the country. Local stations, while relaying the national news as a political mission, created more channels with a commercial interest, thus attracting audiences away from CCTV with 'soft' news and various entertainment programs.

## Conglomeration

The second stage from the mid-1990s to 2002 saw the Party-state not only deepening the market logic but also determined to maintain control of the commercialized media industry. From the mid-1990s the government started to curb the proliferation of media outlets by tightening the issuing of licensing. In the second half of 1995 it stopped issuing new licenses completely. In 1996 the state decided to encourage the formation of media groups, which were believed to be ideal organizational forms for optimal integration between control and business by matching enterprising media outlets with its own regulating organs. Only those centrally approved media papers that met a series of operational criteria could take other papers. The first media group in China – *Guangzhou Daily Group* – was established that year. By July 1998, China had officially set up six national and regional press groups.

Today there are around 40 press groups in China, a blend of media outlets and government regulators. However, media conglomerates have not been commercially as successful as the CCP and the state policy-makers have wished. The commercial failure is largely due to the fact that they were more for the maximization of ideological control over media for political stability than for the maximization of profits. This means although they were financially independent and were expected to rationalize production and take advantage of economies of scale, the groups were not officially incorporated as independent businesses, nor were they registered with the government's industry and trade bureau. Rather, they were affiliated with the DOPs at different levels, and their publishers and editors-in-chief were appointed by and accountable to their affiliated CCP committees.

## Capitalization

The third stage saw a new reform program for the Chinese culture sector. In July 2003 the government started to substantively differentiate the concept of public cultural institutions from commercial cultural enterprises and attribute

to each clear-cut missions and different means and ends of development. There are many reasons for this move. First, in line with the state's policy adjustment towards more balanced development and social harmony, cultural development in this way entails equalizing cultural opportunities for all fragments of society. Second, it re-conceptualizes culture as a commercial industry, thus making culture including the media a new site of economic growth and a strategic site for the development of both economic power and cultural or 'soft' power in a competitive global context. Finally, this concept displaces media reform as a key component of political reform within the broad agenda of cultural system reform, making media reform part of China's economic reforms.

Following this new policy, different organizations in the media sector have separated into two sub-sectors: the public service sector and the commercial sector. All of the mainstream state-owned media entities like the CCP organs, be they press groups, broadcasting groups or publishers, are public service units. They provide political information including news and current affairs. Other entities such as advertising, printing, and distribution and transmission are open to non-state investment and ownership. This move shows the state's determination to maintain control over political information but at the same time to allow the commercial sector to flourish. This move also authorizes state capital to monopolize media heavyweights but to exit gradually from medium and small ones through asset sales and transfers, mergers, and bankruptcy.

However, to ensure that these medium or small media companies keep their 'socialist' nature, they are not fully left to private capital, domestic or foreign. A further distinction is thus made between the editorial and business operations of these organizations: the operational sectors may be split off from the editorial sectors and restructured into shareholding or limited commercial companies, which can open up the service-related value chains such as printing and publishing, retail, and information transmission and distribution to investment from non-media state-owned enterprises (News Front 2002). Although these domestic investors from non-media sectors are shareholders, they are barred from intervening in content delivery and asset management of the company. The same holds true for foreign investors whose sphere of influence is for the time being contained within the publishing sector only. The editorial sectors, on the other hand, must remain state-monopolized and no overseas and private investment would be allowed. The government takes full responsibility for their functioning. Similarly, although the production of TV programs and the distribution of publications can absorb overseas and private resources, the state must be the majority shareholder in order to stay in the dominant position. With the state capital no less than 51 percent and its control of the final editorial rights, the dominant owner in this state–private partnership is obvious.

## Social and political implications

### *Marketization*

Scholars and observers are divided in their assessment of the political and social impact of marketization. Many hold the view that marketization has turned media organizations into self-interested economic entities, which in turn has motivated the media to challenge the CCP control. The logic is simple. Severance of the state subsidies to the media would unleash media practitioners' energy to meet intense market competition. To satisfy the preference of an ever more demanding public and compete with one another to win sizable market shares, different media outlets would have to distribute content that attracts the media publics advertisers want. Therefore, while the headlines may still be dominated by CCP content, a substantial portion of the content would focus on social problems that used to be taboo subjects such as poverty, unemployment, crime, and corruption. Mundane issues that used to be unworthy of news reporting, such as traffic congestion, family relationships, consumer information, and entertainment programs of various shades as well as celebrity gossip, which used to be viewed as a manifestation of unhealthy bourgeois taste and sentiment, are now daily recipes. Those who believe in the liberating force of the market hold that the regime is far less able than before to wield financial leverage over the media, which have increasingly become self-supporting through advertising revenues and circulation.

Not everybody subscribes to this view. Some scholars have regarded marketization as a double-edged sword. It may give media organizations incentives to challenge CCP control in order to pursue commercial profits, but it can also lead to the reorientation of the content provided by the media on the one hand and self-censorship on the other. Some even believe that marketization has actually helped the government reach the public faster and in greater numbers as the media tries to deliver the largest number of media publics to advertisers. The media is believed to have not only gone from mass propaganda to mass entertainment but also continued to operate within the orbit of the Party-state as they are still owned by or affiliated to CCP and government organs which have given them enough interest to stay within the Party-line. They argue that, although there are exceptions, by and large media marketization has contributed to the entrenchment of state control in the media.

### *Globalization*

Many observers have taken globalization as a strong force that would inevitably increase pressure for political reform in China. First, Beijing's domination of the circulation of political information is eroding as it cannot prevent the broadcasts of such broadcasters as VOA and BBC from entering the country's

communications networks. Second, transnational satellite television such as the Chinese language services of CNN has significantly expanded its reach in China. Third, the government cannot easily block the borderless Internet transmissions. Competition from outside mainland China also impels domestic media organizations to improve their attractiveness to the public by providing content that is more diversified and critical.

China's membership in the WTO has added another force for further liberalization of the media market. Under the WTO agreement, China agreed to allow foreign investment in China's advertising market and the participation of foreign companies in the printing and packaging of publications and in the retail and wholesale of books, magazines, and newspapers. China also agreed to import a growing number of foreign films each year. The introduction of transnational capital into the previously state monopolized media sector will help establish a more financially rational and professionally constructive media system.

As China opens up to the world, freer policies, albeit ad hoc, such as the Regulations on Reporting Activities in China by Foreign Journalists during the Beijing Olympic Games and the Preparatory Period, give foreign journalists wider freedom to conduct their work in China. The large numbers of foreign journalists who have enjoyed the freer policy and the foreign-invested and foreign-owned advertising companies along with their clients will have an impact on Chinese media and media publics.

However, some people have had concerns over the considerable degree of ideological convergence between global capitalism and 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. China has adopted a pragmatic, partial opening-up policy, aiming at absorbing Western capital and know-how, and very few Western capitalists can resist the temptation of the Chinese media market's huge potential. This mutual need lays the foundation of corporatism. These observers also point out that on the final negotiations over China's entry into the WTO, the Chinese government only committed itself to opening up certain sectors of its audio-visual market to foreign investment – the broadcasting market was excluded (Dudek and Xu 2002). Neither do China's WTO agreements bind it to content liberalization. The partial opening of the media sector should be therefore considered an initiative by China to absorb capital and advanced technology. In addition, Beijing has applied some carefully planned devices to ensure control of foreign content, such as rigorous censorship prior to distribution.

With China's rise as not only an economic power but also a political power in recent years, some observers start to notice China's influence on the rest of the world, especially with China's soft power. China has greatly increased its investment in building its international communication capacity. Organizations such as CCTV, the Xinhua News Agency, and *People's Daily* could reportedly receive up to RMB 15 billion respectively for ambitious schemes geared toward enhancing China's international influence (Lam 2009).

*Advances of new media technology*

From the very beginning, Internet technology has been seen as overcoming authoritarian restrictions on information flow and posing an insurmountable threat to the regime. In the face of a mounting number of netizens with easier access to alternative sources of information, the state would have to adjust and refine its institutions and methods of governance to remain in the dominant position. Being interactive and reciprocal by its nature, the Internet is also believed to be able to constrain negative consequences resulting from the old format of one-way communication between the state and the society. It is even believed that new media such as the 'blog-sphere' make the debate over state control or interference irrelevant as bloggers find other ways to get their news and information.

Indeed, the Internet in China has become an important forum for public opinion. When major events occur, intensive and extensive discussions suddenly emerge on websites, placing high political pressure on the authorities, and pushing the latter to change existing policy practices. For example, China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology announced that all computers produced or sold in China would have to be installed with some filtering software (known as Green Dam) from July 1, 2009. The purported intent of the Green Dam software was to filter violence and pornographic content on the Internet. Critics, however, slammed the move as a means for the government to keep tabs on Internet users who visit politically sensitive websites. In the face of intense public opposition, much of it online, the authorities have postponed the installation of this controversial software (Xinhuawang 2009).

Of course, opposing views are as strong. They argue that the Internet is not a force that by itself can topple or even change the current Chinese regime. There is only minimal evidence that dissidents have been able to make effective use of the Internet. Neither is there evidence that any dissident group is using the Internet to mount a credible threat. Furthermore, similar to incidents of social protest such as riots and demonstrations that happen in the real world, protests on the web typically have no leaders or political objectives and are characterized by un-institutionalized and chaotic patterns of political participation. The institutionalization of government transparency and citizen participation lag far behind government efforts to strengthen and refine methods of control and governance. Indeed, the establishment and growth of the political control regime has led to various pessimistic conclusions regarding the impact of the Internet on political change in China: since 2003, the Ministry of Public Security has led the operation of the so-called 'Golden Shield Project', more commonly known as the Great Firewall of China, with 30,000 employees screening out information sent from specific Internet addresses. It seems that China has experienced phenomenal Internet growth without the government losing much control. Although the countervailing

strategies of Internet users are outstanding in China, the regulators appear to have the upper hand so far.

Some also argue that in the long run, the Internet may hasten the process of democratizing in China by exposing users to alternative ideas and views. However, the democratizing effect of the Internet should not be exaggerated, given the dominant role the CCP plays in Chinese politics and the fact that there are still many in China who have no access to the Internet. Though the penetration rate is rising continuously, compared with developed countries, China's Internet penetration rate is still low: as of June 2014, China's Internet penetration rate was 46.9 percent, with rural users taking up 27.5 percent of the total netizen population by the end of 2013.

Most importantly, Chinese leaders have not treated the Internet as an evil monster but rather as an engine for economic and social growth, and have therefore adopted a proactive policy to develop the Internet. 'The authoritarian state is hardly obsolete in the era of the Internet' (Kalathil and Boas 2003), because the state plays a crucial role in charting the development of the Internet and in conditioning the ways it is used by societal, economic, and political actors.

To summarize, opinions differ on the implications of the changes in the Chinese media, but nobody disagrees that China's economic reform and opening up have resulted in pluralization within the media. Chinese citizens are much less dependent on official sources for information than they were before 1978. Even if the diversity is not directly political, it greatly reduces the direct influence of the state over the private spheres of social life greatly. Chinese citizens no longer need to consume the offerings of the central media outlets. The symbolic environment that is created and managed by the Party-state alone is changed forever.

However, the widely different views also indicate that the link between changes in Chinese media and political reform is complex. Take the Internet, for example. On the one hand, the Internet may well have an enormous impact on how and what information circulates through Chinese society and may eventually require profound adjustments in the way the state regulates information and legitimates itself, yet on the other the balance of evidence and opinion indicates that no new technology will create an ideal public sphere. A study of online activism in China shows neither the triumph of total control on the part of the Internet-control regime nor of resistance by Internet users and activists (Yang 2009: 62). It shows that technology matters, but so do institutional and individual interests.

## Conclusion

The development of the media at different stages shows that as the CCP introduces reform to the media sector, gradualism has been the key which enables the CCP and the political system to evolve and to adapt to new political and social realities. So far the CCP has stayed in control of the

reform. However, over the long run, a nation's media can influence popular attitudes only to the extent that the media is believed and trusted. Thus, both the CCP and the media face the intertwined dilemma of control, autonomy, and credibility in furthering the development of the media industry.

As the media have undergone dramatic change since 1978, instead of playing the traditional instrumental role only, they are now expected to perform multifaceted functions: to create an environment favorable for political and social stability, to construct a good image of the Party-state, to harness popular support for the government, to compete with transnational media corporations for the global flow of information, and to be commercially successful in a very crowded marketplace. These expectations of the media by the Party-state, sometimes conflicting but always interrelated, cannot be fulfilled unless China's media become more independent of the state. The authorities in China know the need for press freedom but are worried about opening the door to the type of freedom that could lead to the regime's downfall. The nature of the political system in China means that complete media autonomy is highly unlikely to materialize in China in the near future: such autonomy would require the removal of the CCP's authority to supervise the media. Moreover, constitutional guarantees of press freedom and individual political expression and a thoroughgoing overhaul of the government-controlled judiciary would be required for a genuinely independent media sector to emerge in China. And yet without autonomy, the Chinese media will continue to lack credibility and popular trust in the media will not rise. How to balance control, autonomy, and credibility is therefore a dilemma both the Party-state and the media in China have to face in the foreseeable future.

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# 13  Environmental protection

*Vic Yu-wai Li*

China's exponential economic growth since the late 1970s has taken a huge toll on its natural environment. Freshwater sources are depleted at an alarming rate, with some 75 per cent of the country's rivers and lakes polluted; and 16 per cent of surface soils contain toxic chemicals and one-fifth of farmlands are no longer suitable for arable production. Air pollution remains unabated in nearly every major city, with levels of harmful particulates far exceeding international health standards. Indeed, some estimates suggest that the health costs of air and water pollution alone amount to at least 6 per cent of the country's annual GDP. This figure would invariably be much higher if one were to take into account the wide array of environmental challenges China confronts. These challenges include the explosive growth of municipal waste, desertification, biodiversity loss and greenhouse gas emissions, to say nothing of the health and social impacts of the rampant development the country is experiencing (Economy 2010; Shapiro 2012).

Whereas the rapid industrialisation and massive urbanisation of the post-1978 reform period are clearly the culprits, understanding China's responses necessitates an examination of the transformations of the roles of the Chinese state and society and their interrelations within environmental affairs. Contrary to the gross neglect of environmental impacts during the mass line campaigns of the Mao Zedong era of 1949–1976, the post-1978 period has witnessed several interrelated developments resulting in remarkable advances in environmental protection. The introduction of a sustainable development agenda into the state apparatus in the 1980s marked the beginning of good environmental governance in China. Regulations and laws were introduced and an environmental bureaucracy took shape, which made possible the many top-down regulatory actions of the state authorities to address pressing challenges like industrial and household pollution. This development, however, met resistance from local officials, pro-development officials in the central government, and enterprises and resulted in implementation deviation and sometimes outright non-compliance. In response, since the mid-1990s there has been a surge of green activism within Chinese society, championed by environmental NGOs (ENGOs), activists and local communities that have supplemented the state's endeavours. These societal forces and state

authorities have been gradually exposed to green values and standards that have been promoted by transnational ENGOs. China's corporate world has also shown increasing concern regarding industry environmental standards.

This chapter starts with a brief discussion of the pre-reform situation, providing the necessary context for understanding the changing roles and relations of the state and society in the reform decades as outlined earlier. It concludes with an assessment of whether social forces are able to transform themselves into a strong safeguard of China's environment.

## Environmental (non-)protection in the Mao era

The Mao era of 1949–1976 arguably marked the darkest chapter in the environmental history of contemporary China. Not only was national economic development seen as the prime concern, environmental degradations were overlooked by the ruling elites and wider society also failed to counter any of the perverted influence of mass campaigns. There was low environmental consciousness in the Mao era, best exemplified in the famous slogans 'Man must conquer nature' and 'Battling with Nature is Boundless Joy', which reflected an essentially anthropocentric outlook and an instrumentalist perception of natural resources. Efforts to boost crop yields and steel production during the 1958 Great Leap Forward led to enormous environmental degradation. The entire campaign, as Shapiro (2001) observed, was essentially driven by a sense of urgency to achieve a socialist utopian vision that was not informed by any scientific analysis nor checked by dissenting views within the political system. Soil erosion and deforestation worsened dramatically as trees were cut to fuel backyard furnaces. The plunge in food supplies as the farmland and rural labour force were deployed to industrial production tragically coincided with droughts and floods in the late 1950s, resulting in the 'Great Chinese Famine' between 1959 and 1961, which led to some 15 million deaths according to the official estimate (or, based on some researchers' findings, triple that amount). Nevertheless, the tragic lesson was ignored and the situation was not improved in the post-1958 era: the country lost 33 per cent of man-made forest areas between 1957 and 1964, and about 29 million hectares of farmland between 1957 and 1977. Scientists' warnings about the explosive post-war population growth in China went unheeded by central and local officials (Shapiro 2001: 13, 82).

During the Cultural Revolution of 1966–76, the government carried out the Grain First campaign (*yi liang wei gang*) and 'Learn from Dazhai' movement. Leaders in many localities overlooked local practices and contexts and attempted to promote the uniform application of a few selected farming practices across China. This further enervated agricultural productivity and wreaked havoc on available soils. The migration of millions to the hinterlands and frontiers, as part of the war preparation campaign in the late 1960s, introduced massive heavy industrial activities to western and south-western China, causing unprecedented air and water pollution and habitat destruction

that destroyed nearly all grasslands, rain forests and water tables in the area (Ho 2003; Shapiro 2001). When Mao Zedong passed away in 1976, both nature and the masses were exhausted. Not only was the country left with a complete void in its environmental management system, Mao's reckless development policies damaged environmental consciousness in Chinese society.

## The state of national environmental governance

The Chinese government since 1978 has taken up the environmental challenges inherited from the pre-reform era, greening the states from the top down. The constitution adopted in 1978 made explicit reference to the state's responsibility for environmental protection, with Article 11 stating that the government shall 'protect the environment and natural resources and prevents and eliminates pollution and other hazards to the public'. The environmental protection law (EPL) was passed in 1979 for trial implementation, superseding the defunct regulation and State Council leading group put in place in the early 1970s. This laid down the legal basis for creating China's environmental bureaucracy (McElwee 2011: 24–5).

The greater priority of economic development, however, continued to take precedence over environmental protection during the early reform period. There was a lack of environmental awareness or proper sense of the rule of law critical to restoring the ruined environment, and economic growth became the predominant state goal and a vital source of political legitimacy for the party-state. As they were disillusioned by the political campaigns and had suffered from the shortage of consumer goods in the pre-1978 era, both the masses and officials raced for economic development at the expense of huge ecological damage. Environmental issues entered the official agenda but were ancillary to the larger developmental imperative and placed under the portfolio of the Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction. It was only in 1988 that the environmental unit spun off into a separate National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA), which was promoted a decade later to State Administration of Environmental Protection (SEPA), the predecessor of today's Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP). Local environmental protection bureaus (EPBs) were created at provincial, municipal and county levels, making up China's environmental bureaucracy at the subnational levels. They were tasked with implementing and enforcing national and local environmental policies/regulations and monitoring local environmental qualities (Economy 2010: 99–101).

Following the Rio Summit of 1992, sustainable development entered the official discourse when Beijing released China's Agenda 21 in 1994. It was subsequently integrated with the Ninth Five-Year Plan of National and Social Development and subsequent planning cycles. In response to widespread environmental problems that were poised to erode the party-state governing legitimacy and galvanize public discontent, central leaders, such as Hu Jintao,

drew on sustainable development rhetoric, with notions like 'scientific development' and 'ecological civilization'. Against this backdrop, more fiscal resources and manpower were given to NEPA/SEPA, which was promoted to cabinet-level MEP in March 2008. Environmental investment as a share of annual GDP rose from 0.72 per cent to 1.5 per cent between the mid-1980s and 2012. Manpower working in 3177 EPBs and 5617 supervisory organs and monitoring stations grew from about 88,000 to 205,000 between 1995 and 2012 (He et al. 2012: 28; Ministry of Environmental Protection, various years).

The fledging environmental bureaucracy unleashed many top-down regulatory initiatives that focused on pollution control and prevention, such as discharge permits, environmental impact assessments (EIA), and the 'three synchronizations' that required installing pollution control measures during the design, construction and operational phases in any industrial project. EPL was amended and re-enacted in 1989, complementing specific laws that dealt with almost every kind of pollution and resource use, together with some 1500 regulations and standards (McElwee 2011). At the same time, through formal agreements between SEPA/MEP and provincial governors, who in turn entered into similar agreements with city mayors and county magistrates (i.e. the 'target responsibility system'), local cadres assumed primary responsibility for environment protection within their jurisdictions. Urban environmental quality was also brought under annual assessment from 1989 when SPEA launched the Quantitative Examination System on Comprehensive Control of Urban Environment comprised of 21 performance indicators of environmental quality, pollution control, urban infrastructure and socio-economic development (Francesch-Huidobro, Li and Lang 2009). With the coverage of nearly every Chinese city, annual reports are made publicly available, with cities ranked according to the score they attained in the exercise.

Since the late 1990s, SEPA has expanded its focus from simply tackling pollution to a larger sustainable development agenda with an emphasis on integrated ecosystem management. Several model building campaigns were introduced in which local governments would be conferred model status and their experiences promoted nationwide if they could satisfy the technical requirements stipulated by SEPA/MEP, including the National Model City of Environmental Protection (NMCEP) programme (the first incentive-based initiative introduced in 1997), the ISO14000 National Demonstration Region (1999), Environmentally Friendly Towns, Villages and Enterprises (2002/3), and the Ecological Province, City & County (2004/5). These departed from the heavily politicized campaigns in the pre-reform era with designated models for the entire nation and presupposed near-universal participation. The authorities also turned to market-based measures like emissions trading, and certification and disclosure schemes (He et al. 2012). Since 2010, MEP has promoted 'good governance' for local environmental affairs, opening up possibilities for community participation like public hearings and

consultation. Yet, as Johnson (2014) argued, these seem to have been moves to depoliticize the booming environmental groups and activists and subdue dissenting views from within society that might challenge the authorities' legitimacy.

## Limits of top-down environmentalism

Notwithstanding the expanding repertoire of policy levers available to the environmental bureaucracy, in reality it still faces many challenges. MEP remains relatively weak in the central government and can seldom go ahead with its own initiatives without encountering resistance from, and the necessary give-and-take with, its pro-development bureaucratic peers, like the Ministries of Water Resources, Agriculture, Science and Technology and the National Development and Reform Commission (the super-ministry with a wide-ranging policy portfolio that includes energy and resource uses). Its pilot environmental accounting program (or green GDP, as it is commonly known) met resistance from a coalition of pro-growth local governments and the Statistical Bureau on ostensibly technical grounds leading to an abrupt end of the initiative (Li and Lang 2010). Moreover, many top-down and incentive-based mechanisms proved no panacea for the endemic implementation and enforcement problems at the local level in China. MEP has had to count on its local units, which report not only to the environmental bureaucracy but also to the local governments that provide the local EPBs with most of their budgets and resources and have a say over personnel matters like promotion. This dual authority relationship inevitably constrains local EPBs and has resulted in many instances in which their policy-making and implementation process has been side-tracked by pro-development local elites and/or functional bureaus (Economy 2010: 113–17).

Although local officials have shown an increasing environmental awareness, policy actions have often presupposed maintaining an economic growth critical to their career advancement (Tong 2007). The frequent rotation of mayors and party secretaries every few years has encouraged the local cadres to pursue 'paths of least resistance', seeking short-term quick fixes to environmental concerns rather than envisioning lasting changes (Eaton and Kostka 2014). With the implementation of mandatory energy efficiency targets stipulated by the central authorities in the late 2000s, local governments drew associations between energy saving and emissions reduction with pressing local industrial upgrading in order to retain their political legitimacy (Kostka and Hobb 2012). Further, local governments tend to maximize their parochial interests by playing the central ministries off against each other, shifting the blame to their neighbours, or 'stealing' resources if loopholes exist in central regulations and monitoring capabilities, effectively stalling the environmental mandate (Moore 2014).

Large-scale environmental crises like the decade-long Huai River pollution that turned a large segment black in 1995 and the spill of highly toxic

benzene into the Songhua River in November 2005 vividly demonstrate these perilous political dynamics. In the latter case, the local governments concealed the true extent of water contamination for two weeks, posing substantial health risks to the 3.4 million Harbin residents downstream. After a flurry of rumours, confusion and blame-shifting between local authorities, SEPA finally acknowledged the presence of benzene at a level 108 times above the national safety standard. This was followed by a series of enforcement actions that targeted the upstream petrochemical firm in Jilin that had been leaking the chemical. The remedial actions, however, simply undermined public confidence in the state as a guarantor of environmental well-being and the credibility of the state environmental bureaucracy (McElwee 2011: 29).

## Nascent green activism

Beyond the state machinery, Chinese society has seen growing activism as ENGOs of all kinds have proliferated and public participation in bottom-up campaigns has risen. This trend, however, has been compromised by persistent state controls in the social sphere and a still incipient environmental consciousness in China.

### Environmental groups

Unlike Western societies where green activism was propelled by a constellation of relatively autonomous societal actors, such as ENGOs and local communities, the Chinese context witnessed the extension of the state's authority into the social realm. Nevertheless, the gradual greening of the Chinese central state has gradually increased its tolerance of the development of environmental groups. From early on they have been sanctioned permissively and sometimes encouraged by the central government to operate alongside the state environmental agencies, promote public awareness and involve themselves in government campaigns (Ho 2001; Yang 2005).

The universe of environmental groups has encompassed different kinds of organizations of varying legal statuses in China. Government-organized NGOs (GONGOs), including hundreds of scientific and corporate associations, are affiliated with the state apparatus, sponsored or created to carry out mandates prescribed by the authorities. Besides GONGOs, registered NGOs are legally recognized social organisations or social enterprises operated on a non-profit basis. High school and university student environmental associations, a subset of the registered breed, are parts of campus Communist Youth Leagues (the party unified-front organ), and are perceived (and claim to function) as ENGOs. There are also university research centres that offer technical and research expertise to the public. Finally, thousands of unregistered voluntary groups and web-based groups operate without legal standing, representing the less visible (but presumably much larger) realm of the ENGO sphere in China (Yang 2005).

Among these strands, GONGOs are situated between the government and society and have extended the state's reach. They are born to serve a number of policy/political goals that include responses to the internationalisation of environmental issues, serve as the platforms to address environmental degradation at home and conduits to obtain international assistance, and tap the expertise of the international research community. The Chinese Society for Environmental Science, the first environmental GONGO, was created in 1978 in order to manage the growing internationalisation of environmental issues. The Chinese Society for Sustainable Development was similarly galvanised by the release of *Our Common Futures* by the UN World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, which defined and popularised the notion of sustainable development (Wu 2003: 38–9).

Despite their official backgrounds, some GONGOs have gone beyond their default roles in carrying out the state's mandates and transformed themselves into intermediaries between stakeholders and facilitators of resources. Those with a high level of autonomy are associated with better self-governing capacities and access to international networks that are crucial to project implementation, driving innovation of solutions and shaping policy outcomes. Their leaders also tend to distance themselves from the affiliated government bodies and are more sympathetic to grassroots environmental groups (Wu 2003). For example, the Chinese Renewable Energy Industries Association has become a hub for capitalising on industrial expertise at home and abroad and promoting technological innovation and transfers of renewables. This puts them on a par with ENGOs without official backgrounds (or 'grassroots ENGOs', as some researchers refer to them), which show extensive diversity in scale and activism. Between 1994, when the Friends of Nature (the first registered ENGO) was formed, and 2001, the number of such organisations jumped to 71. Another survey in the 2000s found a similar uptrend. Of the 3,539 environmental groups, GONGOs continued to occupy a majority (1,309 or 36 per cent of the total), but the number of grassroots ENGOs doubled to 508 between 2005 and 2008, and there were also 1,382 student green groups, climbing dramatically from less than 190 in the early 2000s (Yang 2005: 50–1; All-China Environment Federation 2009: 3–4).

The phenomenal growth of environmental groups has attracted research interest regarding the implications for China's environmentalism, civil society development and longer-term prospects for political change (Ho 2001; Tang and Zhan 2008; Zhan and Tang 2013). Evidence so far has been mixed, however. On the one hand, more ENGOs have secured stable financing sources, recruited manpower and tapped the expertise of foreign counterparts and donors. This has contributed to an overall increase of the ENGO's expertise, organisational capacity and networks, and expanded their reach beyond public education. While this has remained the primary focus of most ENGOs, some have shifted gear and found policy advocacy opportunities from both central and local governments. In 2006, 56 ENGOs formed an alliance, calling for the stringent enforcement of local power plants and firms failing to

meet environmental impact assessment requirements (Zhan and Tang 2013). Some ENGOs have sought to overturn hydropower station projects in campaigns backed by the media and EPB officials (Mertha 2008).

GONGOs and grassroots ENGOs have been enlisted by the MEP as partners to challenge 'local protectionism' that neglects the environmental degradation of local development projects (Ho 2001). They serve as a watchdog of local governments and businesses and help implement initiatives with local EPBs. The central authorities have guided the ENGOs to launch campaigns against local government malpractices and helped hold the local governments accountable for pollution incidents and projects leading to severe ecological impacts. ENGOs based in Guangdong, for example, have worked with the provincial EPB in the disclosure of pollution information and complaints (Wu 2013). The Centre for Legal Assistance to Pollution Victims at the Chinese University of Political Science & Law offers legal advice to pollution victims, supports litigation, and trains lawyers and judges with regard to environmental protection. Over the years it has taken 30 cases and won half of them with official support or the approval to take legal actions (Yang 2005: 53).

Yet these findings are not without caveats. The extent to which ENGOs can bring about policy changes and are acknowledged by the state as partners is contingent on a number of factors. As with other social organisations in China, the survival of an ENGO depends on the political backing of the authorities, which includes the sponsorship and registration requirements of civil affairs bureaus. Nationally registered ENGOs are prevented from setting up local chapters and raising funds through advertising channels, posing tremendous constraints on their mobilisation and financing capacity. The partnership-like relations with environmental officials are also not without boundaries. Connections with them open doors for ENGO's leaders to shape policy agendas and advocate policy changes (Zhan and Tang 2013). But many local governments have maintained an ambivalent posture, causing environmental groups to experience a 'wavering between official control and informal toleration' and to negotiate with the authorities from time to time with regards to their legal status (Ho 2001: 915). Operating in such an uncertain political environment, most ENGOs have steered away from politics and avert any antagonism with government officials. The symbiotic and non-oppositional relationships help secure their continuing presence and growth, provide access to policy makers and create space for policy advocacy through collective campaigns permitted by the state (Zang and Tang 2013). As the All-China Environment Federation, itself an ENGO affiliated with MEP, summarises, China's ENGOs are there 'to assist not to complicate, to participate not to intervene, to supervise not to replace solutions not to break the law' (cited in Sima 2011: 483).

ENGOs activism flourishes in the areas such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong and Yunnan, where environmental groups have access to a wide range of financial resources, including donations from foreign ENGOs and governments, and/or are more integrated with local civil groups. Guangdong

has been relatively successful because the province's level of economic openness has enabled resourceful and well-networked ENGOs to emerge in the 2000s. Environmental officials in these regions have relatively high standing within the local governments, which helps local ENGOs directly or indirectly. Those based in other parts of China, by contrast, are less effective in mobilising the public and shaping policy making.

In addition to the delicate power play with the state, ENGOs, especially the grassroots kind, have had difficulty in expanding their reach to the public. A recent analysis of China General Social Survey reveals that only 1 per cent of respondents had ENGOs memberships although over 60 per cent of them showed an interest in joining in the future, and their willingness was primarily driven by instrumental concerns like personal benefits (Munro 2013). Some ENGOs were formed by middle-class professionals for purposes other than environmental protection. While the ENGOs direct public attention to environmental issues and organise campaigns, they also provide ENGO members with political and business ties that can ease their business transactions. A study in Guangdong provides an interesting account of how running environmental groups helped expand the founders' social connections within the community and created access to local officials and business executives, and some ENGO activists appear to be in the 'vanguard of *guanxi* (connection)-seeking, but laggard in promoting environmental protection and civil society activism' (Tsang and Lee 2013: 155). Such self-serving considerations likely reinforce the tendency of ENGOs to stay mute regarding existing political constraints, and suggest caution should be taken when assessing their endeavours.

### Citizen actions and grassroots campaigns

There have been, in addition to environmental groups, environmental campaigns at the grassroots level since the 1990s. Protests against industrial pollution and infrastructure projects have grown 29 per cent annually since 1996 according to an official estimate, clearly indicating a surging outrage toward environmental hazards and risks (Wu and Wen 2015: 113). While this development apparently suggests increasing opportunities for the public voices to be heard, it can be more appropriately seen as the inability of the states and ENGOs to cope with simmering discontent about the deteriorating environment. Indeed, differently from the experiences of Korea and Japan, where grassroots environmental campaigns have been strengthened by the material and organisational supports of ENGOs, there is a visible absence of ENGOs, particularly those close to the authorities and enjoying high standing, in most recent citizen campaigns in China (Wu and Wen 2015).

Public participation gained a legal footing subsequent to the introduction of EIA Law and Administrative Licensing Law in 2002/3, which has created limited room for citizens to get involved in the EIA process and to attend public hearings when government's licensing decisions would have negative

impacts on public interest. For most major infrastructure and construction projects, however, the central and local authorities have stayed away from committing to open and transparent public engagements unless facing strong popular pressure (Li, Liu and Li 2012). Although some 130 specialised courts and tribunals were created to handle environmental cases between 2007 and 2013, these judicial platforms have been tightly embedded within local bureaucracies, carrying mostly symbolic value and appearing to be instruments for local officials to signal their commitment to environmental protection and diffuse public discontent. Often, the courts have welcomed cases in order to divert local outrage away from the government, then turned cautious and declined to follow up when local power holders are involved. They shy away from serious environmental crimes and concentrate on minor issues like small-scale pollution and damage resulting from negligence. Such selective treatment has been reinforced by some environmental lawyers who do not take politically sensitive cases and by ENGOs which avoid controversial issues. They have usually sought monetary compensation, rather than restorative initiatives that would minimise the environmental damages or preventive measures (Stern 2013, 2014).

The public has yet to develop a strong environmental consciousness critical to successful bottom-up campaigns. Admittedly, public surveys have pointed to a general rise in environmental awareness in Chinese society, but there seems to be a disjunction between problem recognition and commitment to individual and collective action (Harris 2008). Public participation in environmental protection is conditional on other socio-economic factors. Educational attainment is found to be a strong predictor of individual environmental consciousness in China, which in turn is reinforced by affiliation with the Communist Party (Xiao, Dunlap and Hong 2013). Villagers suffering from pollution-induced health risks are sometimes deterred from engaging in protests due to economic dependency on the polluting firms. The environmental protests of recent years in China's urban areas that have sidetracked incinerator and chemical firm projects were motivated not only by potential environmental harm but also by worries about personal health and property values in the vicinity of construction sites (Lang and Xu 2013). While instrumental concern has been successful in mobilising intensive public inputs even in face of government repression and the lack of ENGO's support, they have exhibited a distinguished not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) mentality. In every instance, the official rhetoric about the rule of and by law is invoked in order to draw attention and support from beyond the local community. But this is carried out with little care for whether the state authority would honour its promises. Invariably a campaign loses momentum once there is an official concession to postpone or cancel projects. Accordingly, the localised victories do not bode well for a strongly rule-based environmentalism in China (Johnson 2010). The extensively studied mass 'strolls' in May/June 2007 against the construction of PX firm in Xiamen is one such case in point. The government conducted a public hearing and decided to call

a complete halt to the plan. At the same time, in Zhangzhou, a city not far away from Xiamen, local campaigns against the firm were largely ineffectual and found little sympathy and support from Xiamen residents (Johnson 2010: 439–41).

Institutional hurdles or NIMBY mentality are not insurmountable. Disgruntled public and grassroots environmental groups have been empowered by the internet as their staging ground and networking hub. Web portals and social media platforms like *China Dialogue*, *China Digital Times* and microblogs (*weibo*) have complemented and amplified the reach of traditional media outlets, which have been in close alliance with grassroots ENGOs with in-depth reporting of environmental problems that have generated public attention and debates (Sullivan and Xie 2009). The grassroots groups have demonstrated an increasing sophistication of strategy beyond information campaigns. Some have conducted undercover investigations, borne witness, and carried out supply-chain analyses in order to hold firms accountable for their malpractices and press for government intervention. They have named and shamed the wrongdoers on the internet, contributing to the emergence of a 'counter-public sphere' in cyberspace (Shapiro 2013; Sima 2011).

On a related note, successful bottom-up changes are dependent on how key issues are framed by environmental activists. In addition to lining up support for domestic and foreign ENGOs, mass media, and sympathetic environmental officials, the way the coalitions of these diverse actors articulate local grievances has played an important part in countering the pro-development discourse perpetuated by the government. In the anti-damming campaign of Dujiangyan, Sichuan, for example, local activists succeeded in bringing on board ENGOs, local EPB officials and the world heritage office, and presented a clear oppositional framing grounded on the preservation of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, resulting in a reversal of the national and provincial government decision to build a hydropower plant in the area (Mertha 2008). As another example, rural residents have 'piggybacked' on politically salient issues like land rights to help legitimise their protests against firms that caused potential health problems and to deflect repression attempts by local cadres (Deng and Yang 2013). Parochial community interests have been subdued with sustained exposure to the issues and networking, displacing the NIMBY mentality with a more public-interest perspective among campaigners (Johnson 2013).

## Globalising environmentalism

The burgeoning environmental activism in China has been reinforced by the ENGOs and corporate worlds' exposure to environmental values and standards that have been promoted by transnational environmental groups. Firms have also responded to foreign market pressure and seized the opportunities to upgrade their environmental performance in order to stay competitive in the global marketplace.

## *International ENGOS in China*

A primary source of foreign environmental ideas for China has come from international ENGOs. After the Beijing office of the Ford Foundation opened in 1988, environmental protection has become one of the most 'globalised' issue areas with the most transnational relations between China and the world. From some eleven international organisations/agencies operating in China in 1994, the number had reached 90 by 2008, including renowned groups such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Nature Conservancy and Greenpeace (Chen 2010). Though international ENGOs are formally registered with the authorities, they have managed to achieve more reach than their domestic counterparts. They have constituted important funding sources and networking partners for grassroots ENGOs in China, offering them a disproportionate share of financial resources, technical expertise and advice in mobilizing for support. Friends of the Earth, for example, had at least 60 per cent of its annual budget coming from international ENGOs and foundations. Numerous other green groups at home have gained overseas exposure and obtained knowledge and insight through foreign visits, attending global NGO events and hosting collaborative activities at home (Chen 2010: 510; Spires, Tao and Chan 2014).

International ENGOs have also spearheaded projects with the Chinese government, such as the WWF's 2003 campaign to incorporate environmental education elements into China's primary and secondary school curriculum and Natural Conservancy's assistance to the National People's Congress in the drafting of Protected Area Law for national parks. Others provide training sessions for central and local officials on global environmental laws/agreements and arrange visits abroad (Chen 2010). To some degree, these have helped ease the state's concerns about the presence of international ENGOs and empowered the local ENGO community. Active groups like Greenpeace have succeeded in bringing about some remarkable changes. It mobilised broad-based political support in response to the notorious digital waste problem in Guiyu, Guangdong (Zhang 2009), and scored a mixed success in combating the illegal logging practices of Asia Pulp and Paper (APP) in Yunnan. The Greenpeace-organised boycott campaign was joined by hundreds of domestic ENGOs and student green groups, as well as an open investigation by the State Forestry Administration, forcing the company to admit the problem and curtail its activities.

## *Commitments from the corporate sector*

Global environmental standards have gained gradual acceptance in China's corporate sector. Exporting firms are increasingly sensitive to practices expected by their lead export markets (the US and Europe) and come under the scrutiny of international ENGOs and corporate social responsibility (CSR) groups. The number of Chinese firms issued ISO14001 certificates, the

most widely accepted global benchmark of firm-level environmental management, skyrocketed from nine in 1996 to 12,683 a decade later and reached 35,416 in 2009. Most of these firms were located in export-oriented provinces like Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Guangdong, and took up the ISO framework in production processes because of stakeholders' pressure, particularly that of foreign customers (Qi et al. 2011). They have also abided with other voluntary initiatives, like eco-auditing of supply-chain partners and Total Quality Environmental Management, that emphasise improving the eco-efficiency of in-house operations. Some have adopted product regulations and standards of foreign governments and mimicked the best practices adopted by global industrial players in an effort to stay competitive in the global market. These Chinese firms appear to be more responsive to international forces than to regulatory and market pressures at home (Zhu, Cordeiro and Sarkis 2012).

The state-owned enterprises (SOEs) have not been immune to the greening pressures. The State Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC), the custodian of central-level SOEs, issued CSR guidelines for SOEs in 2008 and released CSR reports for hundreds of firms after 2010. The Shanghai and Shenzhen stock exchanges echoed SASAC's initiative and recommended that listed firms voluntarily disclose environment-related information. This boosted the numbers of Shanghai-listed firms releasing CSR reports from 8 to 290 in 2008 and 399 in 2014. This represented 40 per cent of the listed companies, with a considerable portion being the publicly traded SOEs (Lu and Abeysekera 2014). In the Shenzhen bourse (which is populated with private enterprises), the number went up from 209 in 2010 to 282 in 2014, or 17 per cent of the listed companies. However, there appears to be a divergent track record of SOEs and private enterprise, as evidenced by the environmental performance scores of CSR indexes formulated by researchers at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences: for three consecutive years (2010–12), the top 100 SOEs had outperformed their private counterparts by wide margins and prepared their CSR submissions by following the Sustainability Reporting Guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiatives, a non-profit transnational network of environmental groups promoting corporate transparency (Peng and Zhao 2012).

The pioneering roles of the SOE suggest a complex picture of corporate environmental behaviours. Whereas the central SOEs are engaging in a 'race to the top', local SOEs and private firms are largely beyond the scrutiny of SASAC or indifferent to foreign market pressures. Recent studies, however, have postulated some plausible ways this might be addressed. Multinationals could leverage their market power to suppliers and (sub-)contracting firms by working with transnational ENGOs and CSR groups when monitoring the corporate environmental performance (Tan 2014; Shapiro 2013).

## Some greening of the Chinese states

Despite the perennial tension between the environmental bureaucracy and other ministerial units, and the implementation gap within the Chinese state, China has gained exposure to environmental ideas and practices through exchange with the overseas research community that has linked up with Chinese think tanks, in addition to formal conduits like engagement with foreign environmental officials and ENGOs. Since the 2000s, the discourse of ecological modernisation and the extent that this might appropriately prescribe the greening of states, society and the corporate sector has no longer been the preserve of the Western academic circle, but has found acceptance among Chinese environmental researchers and officials. Scholars and public policy researchers have joined forces with environmental scientists in driving the scope of public discussion beyond mere technical assessments of environmental issues and the perilous effects of unsustainable development. They have drawn the interest of the environmental bureaucracy, think tanks and ENGOs towards broader concerns like the relationship between society and the environment and the perception of environmental risks and environmental justice (Mol 2006)

In 2006, the Chinese Academy of Science published the Ecological Modernisation Report which identified ten challenges China confronted and enumerated a number of strategic options for the government, including recommendations for institutional reforms and industrial upgrading towards green innovation. While the impacts of these scholarly contributions are difficult to gauge, they helped justify and presage some of the important initiatives that the central authorities introduced during the late 2000s, including the creation of MEP, nationwide promotions of the circular economy and ecological city model, as well as the 'ecological civilisation' notion introduced by Hu Jintao (Mol 2006; China Centre for Modernisation Research 2006).

The greening of states has also reached the subnational level with some local governments showing strong interest in environmental protection. Some are working in tandem with ENGOs in introducing transparency initiatives, making available information like EIAs, and paying considerable attention to the domestic and international ENGOs' ranking and assessments of their performance (Li 2011; Tang 2014). Cities exposed to global economic flows have been motivated to ratchet up their environmental standards by participating in the voluntary campaigns of SEPA/MEP and obtaining the model city titles discussed earlier. In the 2000s, the county-level governments of Suzhou, for example, have raced to become NMCEPs and ecological cities. The neighbouring cities of Jiangsu and Shangdong have also competed for these honour statuses and clusters of cities with top-notch environmental standards have emerged (Li, Miao and Lang 2011).

These changes have reflected the new strategies of economic development adopted by local leaders. After their low-end manufacturing activities were relocated to other areas with lower labour costs, they started an upgrading

campaign to attract foreign investment and firms engaging in high value added production activities that require compliance with global environmental best practice (Li, Miao and Lang 2011). Similar green quests have been driven by local authorities to foster the development of emissions reduction projects under the Clean Development Mechanism framework of the Kyoto Protocol. Through setting up technical centres and offering advisory services to local firms and foreign investors, they have facilitated hundreds of project developments, drawing millions of investments and the transfer of green technologies from foreign parties (Schröde 2012).

## Conclusion

China's post-1978 experience of responding to environmental degradations shows that there have been many advances at state and societal level. On a positive note, both central and local authorities are greening over time, putting in place regulatory measures and mass campaigns, and are increasingly receptive to environmental ideas promoted from below and abroad. Chinese society has witnessed a surge in environmental groups and a rise in environmental activism among the public. There are hopes of a longer-term change that would set China on a greener course after decades of resource intensive growth and unchecked environmental degradation. China seems to bear some resemblance to some textbook cases of the ecological modernisation paradigm, showcasing a commitment to environmental challenges and undergoing transitions from economic to ecological rationality in many domains of society (Mol 2006).

Yet, as the earlier discussion shows, progress to date has been grossly uneven across the country, with significant variations dividing government agencies, provinces and industries. The strengthening of the environmental bureaucracy is counterbalanced by the pro-development agencies and has encountered resistance within the state machinery. Only parts of China's large corporate world have acted on the greening opportunities. Further, the role of societal actors in environmental protection is limited. Whereas recent research has shed light on their virtuous interaction with other stakeholders and a capacity to galvanise changes in government and corporate behaviour, many of their successes have been contingent on the policy and political parameters delimited by the state. The public's awakening to environmental challenges and their collective responses to health and environmental risks have been constrained by an enduring NIMBY mentality and the institutional deficits of participation channels. This points to a scenario quite the opposite of the modernisation perspective, under which the impulse of maximising economic gains ultimately prevails over the greening forces, and China finds little escape from an ever-running 'treadmill of production' in its ongoing quest for reform and development.

Hence, whether or not China will become a more sustainable society remains an open question. Which way the balance between the

environmentalists and developmentalists tilts will not only depend on the maturity of various social forces, but also which way the authoritarian state turns the key in the making (or breaking) of China's environmental future. Maintaining its present stance toward the burgeoning bottom-up pressures and seeing these as ready partners providing immediate remedies of environmental problems without shaking up the political process into one that is inclusive and participatory, China will hardly be able to take its role as the guardian of the natural environment. As Stern (2013) argues, the state of China's environmental protection is characterised by a 'political ambivalence' that has been deliberately maintained by the state. As greening progress is made, other priorities, like social control and economic growth, set in. In view of these conflicting outlooks, society would continually live under the shadow of 'authoritarian environmentalism,' constantly exploring leeway and innovation within the state's confines (Gilley 2012).

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# 14  Civil society in a birdcage

*Kam-yee Law*

The 2008 Sichuan earthquake shocked the world with the heavy damage and casualties it inflicted on the Wenchuan area. The tragedy was quickly turned into an opportunity for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to participate in subsequent rescue efforts (Lo 2015). Many of them raced to the disaster-stricken areas to launch rescue efforts at almost the same pace as the Chinese army, and the amount of charitable funds they raised was record-breaking. Their efforts enhanced public awareness of NGOs, and many NGO organizers believed they had finally found a balance between the future growth of civil society and party-state control over society. In the past, the meaning of 'voluntary work' was purposely twisted and subjected to interpretation by the state. During and after the Sichuan earthquake, the public gained a better understanding of NGOs from a new perspective.

What the NGOs did in the aftermath of the 2008 earthquake showcases the social capital accumulated in Chinese society during the pre-2008 era; therefore, 2008 has been generally regarded as the 'Year of Civil Society' (Shieh and Deng 2011) and a watershed event for the Chinese associational sphere. However, as the immediate impact of the earthquake faded away and public order resumed, the Chinese government ordered the NGOs to withdraw from disaster relief work. For example, less than two weeks after the earthquake, the Sichuan NGO Joint Relief Office, which had coordinated around 160 NGOs for the rescue work, was abruptly investigated by the police for alleged 'illegal fund-raising activities'. Government officials took over the Office, and a few days later it was forced to stop work due to unfounded anxiety among government officials that NGOs might take control and challenge communist rule. Teets (2009) argues that this episode shows how weak civil society was and how much distrust the state felt for NGOs in China.

This chapter examines whether civil society has emerged in China and the leeway for growth it has enjoyed since 1978. Referring to several major studies in this field (Chen 2010; Hildebrandt 2013; Kuah-Pearce and Guiheux 2009; Ma 2006; Wang 2011, 2009; Zheng and Fewsmith 2008), the chapter focuses on the contested freedom of association and government constraints on social movements to show the growth and limitations of civil society and

review the changed and unchanged characteristics of state-society relations in post-1978 China.

## Chinese society before the end of totalitarianism

The social organizations in China during the late Qing dynasty (1644–1911) are considered proactive, even in the areas beyond their immediate interest. The decline of imperial state power allowed opportunities for guilds, chambers of commerce, intellectual associations, etc., to influence various aspects of public affairs, including constitutional reforms (White, Jude and Shang 1996). This societal force persisted into the early Republic Era (1912–49). Unfortunately, war and political chaos during much of the Republic Era allowed no further possibilities for the growth of civil society. Nevertheless, the lessons and experience gained during this era are valuable to NGOs and activists even today (Ma 2006).

During Mao's regime (1949–76), the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) imposed the institutions of a monolithic party-state on society and eradicated all social organizations outside the state in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The ability of the CCP to rule was enormous, as it carried out extensive and effective brainwashing through re-education, coercive persuasion and thought control/reform. Furthermore, the Party controlled the machinery of coercion, the economy and revolutionary mobilization. It also established the *danwei* system, which allocated necessities (e.g. schooling, housing, medical care, food, provision of special goods, etc.), basic services, and life opportunities among urban residents, thus enabling *danwei* leaders to restrict the choices of their employees regarding friends and marriage partners (Rosenbaum 1992; Vogel 1989).

Therefore, there was no leeway for civil society to exist in China, and unofficial social organizations were regarded as a dissident force and eliminated as soon as possible. The government formed some 'people's groups' and offered institutional, human and financial resources for these groups as part of its united front policy for its diplomat activities abroad and efforts to win the political loyalty of overseas Chinese. Fewer than a hundred such groups at central government level and around 6,000 local organizations existed on the eve of the Cultural Revolution of 1966–76. Generally speaking, China under the Mao regime was literally a country without civil society (Zang 2011).

## Market transition and the rise of the middle class

Post-1978 market reforms have changed state-society relations in an important way, leading to questions about the possibility of civil society in China. Using the experience of Eastern Europe and Russia, scholars have argued that state control over citizens and the ability of the state to infiltrate society in Eastern Europe and Russia weakened during and after marketization. As a result, society has gained a relative degree of autonomy. The growth of social

space has provided social actors an opportunity to liaise with one another. This in turn has led to the growth of civic organizations and social movements, influencing government policies through collective activities. Social activists have worked with NGOs to demand that the government respond to various issues. The market transition has created suitable conditions for the growth of civil society because it has nurtured a sense of autonomy and competition and invoked the spirit of contract among people. This trend can be regarded as a prelude to the transition to democracy (Petrova and Tarrow 2007).

Do the above arguments apply to China? The post-1978 market transition has produced diverse forms of ownership – such as state-owned, collective and individual proprietorship, joint ventures and foreign investment – increased productivity and the standard of living and become an important cause of the rapid growth of civic organizations. Massive space has appeared for free-moving and pluralistic stakeholders, alongside possibilities for the formation of civic organizations (Yu 2002). Moreover, although the state economy has declined, the new market system has not yet matured, leading to the 'double failure' of the state and the market, as neither is able to take care of all social arenas and social problems. The 'double failure' has thus widened the leeway for the growth of societal forces (Xing and Ma 2005). Finally, according to modernization theory, restructuring social resources and power relations during economic reform could give rise to a 'middle class' that would participate in politics and social life, making it the driving force of an emerging civil society in China (White 1993).

However, in reality, the characteristics and social functions of the new middle class in China are different from those of the middle class in the West, and the party-state has maintained its dominance over society in China. Members of the middle class in China maintain close ties with the party-state for business success and are politically conservative. The middle class and the party-state share common interests rather than feeling animosity towards each other (Goodman 2014). Some scholars thus argue that a middle class has yet to emerge in China (Sun 2004).

## Post-1978 social organizations

Despite the above discussion, by 2013 nearly 290,000 social organizations, 255,000 private non-enterprise units and more than 3,500 non-profit foundations were legally registered in China (Table 14.1). A high-ranking official in the Ministry of Civil Affairs claimed that in 2011, social organizations hired about six million workers, with capital assets valued at nearly RMB 190 billion (Hou 2012).

These social organizations do not exist without being closely monitored and controlled by the party state. In October 1998, the PRC State Council amended the 'Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organizations' and issued the 'Registration of Private Non-enterprise Units

*Table 14.1* Social organizations in China

| Year | Social enterprises (10,000) | Private non-enterprise units (10,000) | Non-profit foundations for charitable purposes |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1988 | 0.4 | | |
| 1989 | 0.5 | | |
| 1990 | 1.1 | | |
| 1991 | 8.3 | | |
| 1992 | 15.5 | | |
| 1993 | 16.8 | | |
| 1994 | 17.4 | | |
| 1995 | 18.0 | | |
| 1996 | 18.4 | | |
| 1997 | 18.1 | | |
| 1998 | 16.6 | | |
| 1999 | 13.7 | 0.6 | |
| 2000 | 13.1 | 2.3 | |
| 2001 | 12.9 | 8.2 | |
| 2002 | 13.3 | 11.1 | |
| 2003 | 14.2 | 12.4 | 954 |
| 2004 | 15.3 | 13.5 | 892 |
| 2005 | 17.1 | 14.8 | 975 |
| 2006 | 19.2 | 16.1 | 1,144 |
| 2007 | 21.2 | 17.4 | 1,340 |
| 2008 | 23.0 | 18.2 | 1,597 |
| 2009 | 23.9 | 19.0 | 1,843 |
| 2010 | 24.5 | 19.8 | 2,200 |
| 2011 | 25.5 | 20.4 | 2,614 |
| 2012 | 27.1 | 22.5 | 3,029 |
| 2013 | 28.9 | 25.5 | 3,549 |

Source: The PRC Ministry of Civil Affairs 2013; Social Organizations in China 2005.

Provisional Regulations'. In March 2004, it promulgated the 'Regulation on Foundation Administration and Management'. The CCP has relied on these three regulations to control social organizations in China. The regulations include several key points (Simon 2013), as listed below:

i   A social organization must be monitored and controlled by two 'hosts' – one host is the local civil affairs department in charge of registration and management, and the second host defines and monitors the professional scope of the social organization (e.g. academic discipline, religion, sport, social welfare/charity, etc.)
ii  The government will not allow an organization to be set up when there is already an organization with the same or similar business scope in that administrative district; this is known as the 'One District, One Business, One Organization' rule.

In other words, the government has absolute control over the establishment, operation, and development of social organizations. The government has also required a sum of 'registered capital' for setting up a social organization. The regulation provisions allow a national-level organization to initiate operations as long as it can raise RMB 100,000, and for local and other types of social organization, the required capital is over RMB 30,000. Without the required sum, no registration can take place, and no donations can be made if the registration process is not complete. As a result, many grassroots organizations are reluctant or simply unable to register. For example, when the Ministry of Civil Affairs held the 'National Conference for Developing Rural Professional Economic Associations' in 2004, nearly 100,000 organizations were present nationwide, but only 10,000 of them had registered with national and local civil affairs departments. Some associations were unable to register because they did not have the required 'hosts' mentioned above and were therefore not 'legal' organizations (He 2008). Under the current conditions, the primary task of social organizations is survival, fighting for autonomy is the secondary task and participating in the public domain to influence government policy a future mission: most grassroots social organizations in China are currently preoccupied with the first task.

In addition to the above regulations and the incredibly high monetary registration requirement, the government has also placed many strict restrictions on the financial resources, scope and content of activities organized by social organizations. It has skilfully implemented macro-adjustments over social organizations. If the number of civic organizations grows too fast during a period of time or when changes occur in the domestic political arena, the CCP releases policies in a timely fashion to check the growth of social organizations. For example, in the years 1984, 1989, 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2004, the CCP issued policy documents in order to cool down the rapid growth of civic organizations at those times.

## The party-state as the 'birdcage' of social organizations

At present, social organizations in China can be divided into two types: the first is government-organized NGOs (GONGOs), which are part of or closely associated with the government (see Chapter 15). GONGOs include guilds, chambers of commerce, and foundations. The progress of the market economy reform and the rapid development of the private economy have generated a need for chambers of commerce and guilds. The government has encouraged the creation of these organizations and actively managed and monitored them partly because it can derive benefits from them. The GONGOs are often big business. For example, guilds formulate, approve and certify industry standards. Guilds are also tasked with the supervision and certification of brands and quality of various products, training for professional certification, certification of product originality, and so on. Thus, guilds and other types of market intermediary have become money-making machines for some government agencies and created the conditions for official corruption (Hildebrandt 2013).

Although some GONGOs do not engage in market dynamics, they rely on the administrative network of the government and information regarding policies for survival and operation. For many GONGOs, close ties with the government and government officials are the most important element – even more important than the vulnerable and disadvantaged people they are supposed to serve (Lu 2008). One example is the Anti-Domestic Violence Network (ADVN), which is a member of the Women's Federation. ADVN activists have access to the Federation's national network of organizations and to opportunities to promote their agendas for legislative change. These activities resulted in the inclusion of the clauses on domestic violence in the revised Marriage Law of 2001 and the revised Women's Rights Protection Law of 2005. ADVN was also involved in the drafting of the Anti-Domestic Violence Law in 2012 (Tamara, Kipnis and Aargeson 2013).

Nevertheless, it is premature to say there is 'civil society' in China because many social organizations are GONGOs and are collaborators or partners with the government. The 'authentic' NGOs are mainly grassroots organizations that are involved in environmental protection, healthcare and hygiene, welfare of migrant workers, rights of women and children, and so on. The number of these NGOs is estimated to be in the millions; unfortunately, few of them have legal status (Wang 2009; Zang 2011). The development of these organizations is subject to government regulations and constraints. In Anhui Province and Shenzhen, registered civic organizations account for only 5 per cent to 8 per cent of the total number of associations, and registered private non-enterprise units account for only 8 per cent to 10 per cent of the total number (He 2008). Similar to the 'birdcage economy' in the early 1980s, in which the newborn 'market economy' was firmly controlled by the regulatory regime and ideological lines of the CCP, the present status of grassroots social organizations can be described as struggling in a 'birdcage society'. For

example, during the Hu Jintao administration (2002–12), some social organizations involved in environmental protection could enjoy a certain ideological leeway for their activities because of Hu's 'Scientific Outlook on Development' advocacy. Yet among thousands of social organizations on environmental protection during the early stage of Hu's administration, only around 20 per cent were relatively active (Bentley 2003). Overall, the influence of these environmental NGOs is limited, and most of them have only limited access to less sensitive areas such as educational work.

Generally, the government judges and decides the value and utility of a social organization by asking two questions: (i) Does it offer economic and social services to help its governance of Chinese society; and (ii) Does it have the potential to mobilize collective action and undermine regime stability. The government is more concerned with the potential of a social organization to pose a threat against the regime than with the social and economic services a social organization can provide.

International NGOs in China are treated differently by the government. Since the party-state has reduced its control over society during the reform period, a significant gap has developed between societal needs for social services and the services provided by the government. Therefore, foreign assistance is deemed desirable to fill in the gap (Tan 2008). The new 'pro-NGO international norms' have encouraged the governments of developing countries to receive and support the missions of international NGOs. Unsurprisingly, China has opened its door to these international NGOs, but the government has made sure that they do not get to do everything they want to do. For example, although many of these international NGOs are concerned with human rights, religious freedom and democratic governance, their participation in these areas is extremely limited because of government control over and restrictions on their activities. Different departments of the Chinese government have had different attitudes toward international NGOs. As a result, much of the work done by these NGOs has been narrowed down into 'safe' areas such as poverty alleviation, environmental protection, and education and health.

## Social movements: Bottom-up challenge to the state?

The *Blue Book of China's Society 2005*, published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences under the authority of the State Council, states that during the early stages of Hu Jintao's administration, the incidence of social unrest (often referred to as 'mass incidents' in Chinese) increased from 10,000 in 1993 to 60,000 in 2003, and the number of participants in the incidents increased to 3.07 million. The *Oriental Outlook Weekly* (an official magazine of the Chinese news authority) claimed that up to the late Hu administration, the number of mass incidents had doubled from 96,000 (8.2 million participants) in 2006 to over 180,000 incidents in 2010 (Sun 2011). It is estimated that of the mass incidents that occurred in 2005, 35 per cent were due to

peasant resistance, 30 per cent to worker resistance, and 15 per cent to resistance by urban inhabitants (Yu 2010). The 2010 *China Crisis Management Annual Report* published by Shanghai Jiaotong University reported an average of one major crisis every five days in China in 2010 (Sun 2011). A small accident can unpredictably and quickly escalate into a large collective action against the riot police.

At present, social movements in China are mostly bottom-up protests, different from the ones organized under Mao through top-down political mobilization with the aim of building a socialist state or defending the purity of socialism (e.g. the 1958 Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution). Unlike those in Mao's China, post-1978 social movements are protests against corruption or to defend the right of survival. In terms of protest tactics, the 'weapons of the weak' (e.g. perfunctory work-skipping or slacking) and 'hard resistance' protests, such as street protests, strikes and commotions and attacks against government buildings, are all used as outlets of citizen dissatisfaction and frustration. A more detailed analysis shows that there are two types of protest in China. The first type includes protests to protect the rights of homeowners, urban workers, migrant workers, and peasants. The second type is the struggle for autonomy or even independence by ethnic minorities in Tibet and Xinjiang.

Most protests in China do not attack government buildings or challenge party rule. They are nonviolent and rely on peaceful means (e.g. emails and phone calls, collective 'strolls' in populated streets during holidays, etc.) to put pressure on the government. This approach is called 'soft resistance'. Chen (2011) argues that the tactics are 'troublemaking' but not disruptive to get what protesters want from government officials.

## The state as a warden of social dissent

In Michael Mann's (1993) definition, state power has two forms: 'despotic power' and 'infrastructural power.' In terms of despotic power, the CCP has always relied on armed coercion to maintain its dominance since coming to power in 1949. Hence, the army, the armed police, the public security bureau and the judicial system play a crucial role in suppressing social protest partly because, for the CCP, the cost of repression is less than the cost of tolerance or concessions when facing collective protest. Infrastructural power emphasizes a soft approach, which refers to the coordination of people's lives through organizational construct and policymaking. When Hu Jintao came to power, he declared his ambition to build 'a moderately prosperous society (全面建设小康社会)' in China. Deng Xiaoping's cat theory and his slogan 'Economic development is everything (发展才是硬道理),' which had focused exclusively on economic growth, were replaced by the 'Socialist scientific outlook on development (社会主义科学发展观)' and 'Building harmonious socialist society (建设社会主义和谐社会),' which targeted a balanced coordination of economic growth and social development with a humanitarian

touch. These changes have been manifested through the different policies proposed, such as balanced regional development and 'Building new socialist villages.' In response to the growing number of social protests, the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2011–15) aims at strategic adjustments and more public services to support social stability and a harmonious society through an improved social security net (Cheng 2012). In addition, the Chinese government has made attempts to pre-empt or contain social movements – including controlling social organizations and monitoring the media and the internet – to cut off the resources and information that enable protests to take place. As a result, successful social movements have been rare.

The political attitude of the middle class also has some responsibility for the low frequency of successful social movements in China. The middle class in the West and other democratic societies is a key to the formation of group alliances for collective action, whereas the new middle class in China is not a major catalyst of social protests, as mentioned above. In fact, some members of the middle class support the party-state more than members of other social groups (Chen 2013) and cannot be relied on for the future development of civil society in China. Nor can much hope be placed on the large population of active 'netizens' in China (Table 14.2), although cyber space is an important outlet for free expression and mass mobilization for collective action. Indeed, according to Yang (2012), both the internet and civil society have grown rapidly and followed a co-evolutionary path over the past decade, with major impact on Chinese society. The government has reacted to this development with a proactive strategy to control cyber space with various political, administrative, technological and legal measures. Government control is exercised not only on the virtual reality of cyber society but also over the actual industry of internet services and content providers, and internet users (Ngok and Cheng 2011). The CCP has aggressively promoted official ideology and values in cyber space, as demonstrated by the increasing online presences of party-state leaders' statements and policy documents.

Moreover, over 2,000 micro-blogs in China are set up as either part or associates of government agencies (Liu 2012), with page contents that are politically correct. The government has had different attitudes to online posts over which it does not have direct control. Although the majority of online posts related to foreign policy or national security are highly chauvinistic, they are usually tolerated, if not welcomed, by the government. In comparison, the posts on democracy, freedom of religion and general freedom of speech tend to be taken down within a day or two after publication by some 30,000 government censors (Klimburg 2011). Alternatively, public criticism directed at the government is immediately rebutted by 'internet commentators' recruited and supervised by the CCP.

Many grassroots NGOs have contributed little to civil society in China and are not the prime movers of resource mobilization for organized opposition, although they have nurtured awareness of rights and helped create new a social identity in Chinese society. This is partly because they cannot do

*Table 14.2* Netizens in China (million)

| Year | Internet Users | Internet penetration rate | Mobile internet users | Micro-blog | Social networking website users |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 2013 | 618 | 45.80% | 500 | 280 | 278 |
| 2012 | 564 | 42.10% | 420 | 309 | 275 |
| 2011 | 513 | 38.30% | 356 | 250 | 244 |
| 2010 | 457 | 34.30% | 303 | | |
| 2009 | 384 | 28.90% | 233 | | |
| 2008 | 298 | 22.60% | 118 | | |
| 2007 | 210 | 16.00% | | | |
| 2006 | 137 | 10.50% | | | |
| 2005 | 111 | 8.50% | | | |
| 2004 | 94 | 7.20% | | | |
| 2003 | 80 | 6.20% | | | |
| 2002 | 59 | 4.60% | | | |

Source: The China Internet Network Information Center 2014.

without close ties with the state, as mentioned above, and have adopted a 'rational' approach in their dealings, in that they seek cooperation with the state. They seek legal redress for protesting citizens, mending the weakest link in the political system without opposing the state (Froissart 2009). In other words, the state has constructed a group of 'controllable' social organizations to strengthen its rule. The political report of the Seventeenth CCP National Congress held in 2008 proposed that the state should use the power of the NGOs in expanding mass participation and reflecting the aspirations of the masses to enhance the self-management of Chinese society. The Vice Minister of Civil Affairs repeatedly emphasized that 'guidance and support should be given to those highly rated social organizations to enhance their self-construction, so as to fight for a group of celebrated social organizations which have distinguished service, high competence, strong credibility, and are influential' (Song 2008). In other words, the government has attempted to create state-built civil society or state-led civil society (Frolic 1997), and many advocacy groups are indeed co-opted by the government and persuaded to bargain with the state on a cooperative rather than contentious basis. The NGOs have helped the party-state move toward a consultative Leninism and contributed to integrating previously excluded social groups within the framework of an increasingly sophisticated authoritarian regime (Froissart 2009).

## Conclusion

Although many aspects of a typical totalitarian regime have faded away, the PRC state has preserved its basic structure, including the one-party system and its dominance over political and social organizations, news media, and the armed forces. The Chinese authoritarian regime is similar to the 'developmental state' in newly industrializing East Asian economies (e.g. the 'Four Little Tigers'), which stresses both regime stability and economic growth and reduces the leeway for the growth of civil society. Civil society is not the same as democratization, and civil society emerges after the democratic transition according to the experience of South Korea and Taiwan. In Singapore, civil society is weak because the NGOs are 'self-handicapping' due to the political manipulation of the party-state. Thus, the interaction between civil society and the state in East Asian countries is different from the experiences and outcomes of Western societies (Schak and Hudson, 2003). China is unlikely to be an exception as the state has actively constructed 'civil society'. The CCP views NGOs as useful tools to knit society together. By co-opting NGOs into the political system, they may strengthen the dictatorial hold of the CCP and assist it in solving its challenges in governance. Xi Jinping, the new leader of China (since 2012), appears to think that the CCP can encourage the expansion of NGOs without relaxing its political grip (*The Economist* 2014). In his efforts to promote ideological unity, Xi has labelled foreign ideas as dangerous and unacceptable. Beijing has banned academic research and teaching on seven topics, including the rights of citizens and civil society (Economy 2014). Xi is changing China by scrapping the 'rule by consensus' and targeting civil society (Marquand 2014). Since Deng launched the reform in the late 1970s, CCP leaders have long struggled to find a balance between reformist economic policy and political conservatism. The way that Xi has moved to establish his conservative ideological credentials has alarmed Chinese civic activists, and the next stage of civil society development is full of uncertainty.

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# 15  Government and changing state–society relations

*Xiaowei Zang*

This chapter provides a brief history of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) before 1949, the socialist transformation of China in the Mao's era of 1949–76, and the post-1978 market reforms. It then examines the system of government, describing its institutional components, the principles by which they operate, and the way in which the CCP controls the government. Next, it discusses the changing state–society relations in the People's Republic of China (PRC) since 1978. While there has been continuity in the major government institutions and the persistence of one-party rule in China, there have been significant political changes in the post-1978 era due to the receding role of the state in society, the imperatives of market reforms, and the open door policy. This chapter shows some recent political developments and the move toward a stronger 'society' in China.

## A brief history of the CCP and the PRC

The Qing dynasty, which had governed China since 1644, was overthrown in the Revolution of 1911 and replaced by the Republic of China in 1912. Regime change did not bring about peace and prosperity as the country soon fell prey to the political ambitions of warlords. It was not until the late 1920s when Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) temporarily unified China. Yet the peaceful time did not last long as the Japanese Army started to invade China in 1931. A brutal and protracted war between China and Japan broke out in 1937 and did not end till 1945 when the Japanese government surrendered to the Allied Forces in which China was a member state. The end of the Sino–Japanese war was followed by a large-scale civil war in which Generalissimo Chiang and his Nationalist government fought with the CCP for the right to rule China (Bailey 2001).

The CCP was established in 1921 and was supported by the USSR in its struggle to remove 'three maintains' (imperialism, feudalism and crony capitalism) from and build a socialist country in China. Mao Zedong moved to the centre of decision-making in the CCP in 1935, established his leadership in the party in the early 1940s, and led the CCP's victory over Generalissimo Chiang and his Nationalist government with the founding of the PRC in 1949

(Bailey 2001; Karl 2010). The 1949 communist revolution was genuinely welcomed by the vast majority of Chinese people, as it promised to end the poverty and humiliations that Chinese people had suffered for almost a century. The CCP enjoyed widespread support and was able to carry out mass campaigns in the next three decades (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of the reforms the CCP carried out in the 1950s and 1960s).

In the 1950s, the PRC was allied with and received massive aid from the USSR. The PRC followed the 'Soviet model' as its development strategy in which economic life was governed by a powerful bureaucracy, market transactions were replaced by central planning in the form of a series of 'Five-Year Plans', production and investments were prioritized over consumption, heavy industry was promoted at the expense of light industry and subsidized by surplus squeezed from rural areas, natural and production resources were nationalized, and the role of technology and science in development was emphasized (Bernstein and Li 2010; Lowenthall 1970; Wilber 1969).

Maoism sought to replace the Soviet model to be the dominant development strategy after the relations between the PRC and the USSR fell apart in the late 1950s. Maoism was similar to the Soviet model in that the state controlled natural resources, production prevailed over consumption, and the divide between urban and rural areas was maintained. Maoism deviated from the Soviet model in its emphasis on mass mobilization through revolutionary struggle and politics in command. Mao had a bias against expertise and bureaucracy and a strong belief in mass initiatives. He launched the Great Leap Forward campaign in 1958 so that the industrial outputs from China would surpass the UK in ten years and the USA in twenty or thirty years. Mao wanted to substitute capital and technology with sheer hard labour from workers and peasants, which led to the disastrous famines between 1959 and 1962 (Chan 2001; Dikötter 2010; Li and Yang 2005). The failure of the Great Leap Forward emasculated Mao's position in the CCP (Shih 1994). Liu Shaoqi replaced Mao as the chairman of the PRC in 1959. He worked with Deng Xiaoping and other leaders to rescue the Chinese economy with pragmatic policies and experiment with limited economic liberalization. By 1963 the Chinese economy started to grow again, which bolstered Liu's prestige among the CCP apparatus at Mao's expense. Mao started the Cultural Revolution in 1966 to reclaim his power and re-assert the supremacy of Maoism in China. He launched a surprise attack at and defeated his political rivals in the CCP. However, the triumph of Maoism during the heydays of the Cultural Revolution triggered its ultimate demise. This was partly because endless political mobilization and violence created massive political chaos and undermined economic life. The most horrifying aspects of the Cultural Revolution were the torture and killing of innocent people. Many CCP leaders indifferent to Maoism such as Deng Xiaoping were thrown out of office and subject to violent 'struggle meetings' (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006; Karl 2010).

The Cultural Revolution ended with the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. At that time, the Chinese economy was on the brink of collapse. The CCP was on the way to lose its mandate to govern given the colossal economic losses and immense suffering during the Cultural Revolution (Ding 1994). Deng Xiaoping came back to power in 1978 to restore the CCP's legitimacy by reforming the Chinese economy. Economic growth was to be achieved through measures such as expanding rural incentives, improving state enterprises' profitability, reducing central planning, encouraging foreign investment, etc. These measures have enhanced China's economic competitiveness and integrated the country into the global economic system. As a result, the post-1978 era has seen healthy economic development in China. China overtook Germany to become the world's largest exporter in 2009 and surpassed Japan as the world's second-largest economy in the first half of 2010. Its economy is more than 90 times bigger than when market reforms were launched in 1978, and there have been substantial gains in poverty reduction in China.

Post-1978 market reforms have also generated undesirable outcomes such as rampant corruption, growing inequality, and environmental degradation. There have emerged the 'new three mountains on people's back' (i.e. the costs for education, housing and health care). There are other social and political issues. Part of the reasons for social problems and malaise is the slow political liberalization. Deng and his successors have insisted on 'building socialism with Chinese characteristics', i.e. market liberalization must be implemented under political dictatorship, and have not hesitated to resort to force to defend one-party rule in China. Deng suppressed the demands for democratization by student demonstrators in Beijing in 1989. Liu Xiaobo, the winner of the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize, was tried on suspicion of 'inciting subversion of state power' and sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment in December 2009. The CCP has resisted the calls for democratic reforms and has continued one-party rule in China. The government institutions, to be discussed below, have remained largely unchanged since 1978.

## Government institutions

The organizational structure of the PRC follows the Western style of the division between legislature, administration, and judicial systems. However, the division is arranged in such a way that it goes along with one-party rule in China, as discussed below. The real power is in the hands of the CCP, which is led by its general secretary and the Politburo (currently 24 members) of the Central Committee. The Central Committee has about 300 members, is in theory the highest authority within the CCP, and nominally appoints the Politburo. In reality, the Politburo is self-perpetuating and appoints the Central Committee. As discussed below, the members of the Politburo simultaneously hold leading positions within the government and the armed forces of the PRC and are in charge of personnel appointments in central and local

governments and CCP branches. Local CCP leaders similarly monopolize political, legal, financial and personnel power in their jurisdictions.

Notwithstanding, according to the PRC Constitution, the primary organ of state power is the National People's Congress (NPC). It has over 3,000 members, elected for five-year terms. The current chairperson of the NPC is Zhang Dejiang (张德江), who is concurrently a member of the Standing Committee of the CCP Politburo. NPC deputies are elected by the people's congresses of China's 23 provinces, five autonomous regions, four municipalities directly under the central government, the special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macau, and the armed forces. In theory, provincial people's congress deputies are elected by prefectural people's congresses. Prefectural people's congress deputies are elected by the deputies to people's congresses of counties, cities, municipal districts, and townships, who are elected directly by their constituencies for five-year terms. It is possible for an individual to campaign for and be elected at these levels of people's congresses, and this has happened occasionally. But it is practically impossible for a person to be elected to a provincial or national people's congress. In fact, the membership of each level of the people's congresses is determined by CCP leaders. Unsurprisingly, election campaigning is rare. Candidates do not make house calls, distribute leaflets or publicize their platforms to their constituencies. Many Chinese citizens are simply not familiar with terms such as electoral participation, campaign budgets or campaign offices. Popular participation in politics is actively and publicly banned. No political party can be formed without the approval of the government. A career in politics goes nowhere unless one joins the CCP.

The NPC and all the local people's congresses meet once each year. The standing committee of the NPC and every local people's congress exercises legislative authority in its jurisdiction when the full congress is not in session. In theory, a local people's congress has the constitutional authority to recall the heads and deputy heads of the government at provincial level and below. In reality, the local people's congresses are not independent of control by the local CCP organs. The vast majority of the deputies are CCP members and some local CCP leaders are also the chairpersons of local people's congresses. For example, the current chairperson of the Hubei Provincial People's Congress is Li Hongzhong (李鸿忠), who is concurrently the head of the CCP Hubei Provincial Committee, and the current chairperson of the Fujian Provincial People's Congress is You Quan (尤权), who is concurrently the head of the CCP Fujian Provincial Committee.

The candidate for the chair of a local people's congress is chosen by higher-level CCP leaders before the people's congress session and is often the only candidate for the post. The CCP also handpicks a minority of people's congress deputies who are women or intellectuals or from ethnic minorities or minor political parties. These individuals are selected because they are politically reliable and have some influence in society, serving the CCP's argument that the essence of people's democracy is the representation from different

social groups in the people's congress rather than procedural justice (i.e. how deputies are elected). For this reason the CCP has from time to time promoted rhetoric that women share equal social worth with men, so there must be an increase in women's presentation in the people's congress (female representation in the NPC deputies has been around 20 per cent). Nevertheless, the majority of the deputies are men in or near their retirement age since the people's congresses have become a *de facto* haven for retired government officials and CCP cadres rather than an elected legislature.

Also, in theory, the NPC is the legislative branch of government and passes laws and appoints the president of the PRC. While deputies have the right to send their proposals to the people's congress organizing committee, only those that are supported by the CCP can pass the legislation and be enacted as laws later. Similarly, only the candidate nominated by the CCP can become president of the PRC. The president is the head of state and the office was created by the 1982 Constitution. The current president is Xi Jinping (习近平), who has held this office since March 2013. Dr. Xi has been the general secretary of the CCP since November 2012.

The president of the PRC nominates the president of the Supreme People's Court and the procurators-general of the Supreme People's Procuratorate for approval by the NPC. The term for each office is for five years. The Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate represent the judicial branch of government in China. The nominations have never been turned down by the NPC, and all the candidates for these posts are top CCP leaders. The current president of the Supreme People's Court is Zhou Qiang (周强). He has held the post since March 2013. The current procurator-general of the Supreme People's Procuratorate is Cao Jianming (曹建明), who has held the post since 2008.

The president of the PRC also nominates the State Council, which is the executive branch of government in China. The State Council is led by the premier, vice premiers, state councillors (protocol equal of vice premiers but with narrower portfolios), and ministers and heads of State Council commissions. The term of each office is for five years. The current premier is Li Keqiang (李克强), who has held this office since March 2013. Most top leaders are men in their late fifties. The State Council maintains an interlocking membership with the top levels of the CCP. For example, Mr. Li is concurrently the second-ranked member of the Standing Committee of the CCP's politburo. There is also an interlocking membership among the executive, judicial and legislative organs of government at the provincial, prefectural, city and township levels. The leaders of local governments are always CCP members. So are the judges and the procurators.

The State Council oversees 22 provincial governments and their counterparts in the five autonomous regions, four municipalities directly under the central government, and two special administrative regions (Hong Kong and Macau). The provincial-level governments (except those in Hong Kong and Macau) oversee local governments at the prefectural, city/county, township

and village levels. Each provincial-level government, prefectural government, city/county government and township government is manned and overseen by a parallel group of local CCP leaders. For example, the provincial governor is often a deputy secretary of the provincial CCP committee, and sometimes is himself or herself the secretary of the provincial CCP committee. Similarly, a county magistrate is often a deputy secretary of the county CCP committee and sometimes is himself or herself the secretary of the county CCP committee. Not surprisingly, virtually all positions of significant power in the government structure are occupied by members of the CCP and are appointed by the CCP. It is however interesting to note that the PRC has enacted the 1998 Organic Law of the Village Committees, promoting elections for village leader in selected rural areas. Elections now reportedly occur in about 650,000 villages across China.[1]

Most township leaders and officials at the county level and above are not subject to elections. They are recruited and promoted if they are politically reliable, have connections with the powerful, and have credentials. The majority of them are university graduates. This pattern of recruitment was first established in the early 1980s and has persisted into the twenty-first century (Zang 2004). The recruitment policy and the centralization of power ensure that dissent in the government bureaucracy is rare, and if dissent happens it leads to resignation or outright dismissal. One example is Zhao Zhiyang, who was dismissed as general secretary of the CCP and under house arrest from after the Tiananmen Square incident to his death in January 2005 due to his disagreement with Deng Xiaoping and other CCP leaders on how to handle the pro-democracy movement in Beijing in 1989. Nevertheless, in reality, there is low turnover of officials in both the State Council and local governments (Zang 2005).

## Major changes in political life

Although the government institutions have remained largely unchanged since 1978, there has been significant political transformation and changes in state–society relations in China. In the pre-1978 era, the CCP created the socio-economic dependence of individuals on the state with its control over daily necessities, housing and the job market (Walder 1986). The CCP also ruled with political pressure on individuals, surveillance, and political campaigns and mass mobilization (Bennett 1976; Bernstein 1991). It effectively penetrated Chinese society, leaving few buffers between individuals and the state. It was so powerful that it was able to weaken family ties and turn personal relations into 'comradeship' for the struggle for communism in China (Gold 1985). The PRC was not simply a totalitarian state, it was also a mobilization regime. Both the Great Leap Forward campaign of 1957–58 and the Cultural Revolution of 1966–76 demonstrated how successful the state was in political mobilization, which was the combined outcomes of organization, political indoctrination and popular support for the CCP and the

evidence of the dominance of the state over society. Mao's China can be viewed as a homogeneous, monotonous and atomized society in which individuals depended on the state and absolute obedience to authority was the norm.

Gone is the Maoist system of control in the post-1978 era. While some scholars argue that China has apparently moved slowly at best in political democratization (Yang 2006), there has been a consensus on the magnitude of political changes in the country. Because of the openness to the outside world, economic growth and labour-market diversification, post-1978 Chinese society has become increasingly heterogeneous. In the post-1978 era, the CCP has cut down welfare programmes and reduced its financial responsibility to society. As a result, the CCP has lost its absolute control over society due to the reduced dependence of citizens on the state for their livelihood, the reduced capacity of the state to collect information about individual behaviour and thoughts, and the reduced ability for the state to reward politically desirable behaviour and punish politically undesirable behaviour (Guthrie 2006). Chinese people are increasingly empowered to make their own economic decisions and pursue their own life goals. Major social developments include volunteering, citizen participation in local governance, ethnic unrest, religious revival, the emergence of interest groups such as autonomous homeowner associations, and articulations of individual interests and demands in YouTube, blogs and twitter feeds. The post-1978 developments have reshaped political and social discourse and challenged the CCP to innovate in order to maintain one-party rule in China.

### The retreat of the state

These dramatic developments have taken place thanks to the combined forces of the receding role of the state in society after 1978, market reforms and China's open door policy. First, as noted, Deng started market reforms to rebuild the legitimacy of the CCP and one-party rule in China. Deng realized that the state did not have the resources to govern every aspect of social life in China and that the perpetuation of one party rule must be based on domestic political stability, which required sustained economic development. The CCP had no choice but to focus on economic growth and promised to cope with other social and political issues later (Yang 2006; Zheng 2010).

As a result, the CCP has changed itself from a revolutionary party to a governing party in the post-1978 era. A revolutionary party fights for total power and aggressively seeks to remodel society with the indoctrination of communist ideology, whereas a governing party is largely a defensive actor, whose main interest is to legitimize and maintain its rule over society for as long as possible. Unlike a revolutionary party, a governing party acknowledges its limited capacity to govern and does not have the ambition to conquer every corner of social space. As noted, the Cultural Revolution undermined the legitimacy of the communist ideology in China (Ding 1994).

Thus, like leaders in some governing parties in East Asia, Deng and his successors have chosen to legitimize one-party rule with economic growth, which relies on the growth of a market economy. This in turn requires the retreat of the state from the daily management of the economy. Once the CCP has loosened its grip on the Chinese economy, it has inadvertently opened up social space for the growth and articulation of individual interests and collective action in China.

### The imperatives of market reforms

Second, the imperatives of market reforms, which aim at competitiveness, efficiency and profitability, have further weakened the CCP's control over Chinese society. To achieve the market reform imperatives, the CCP has shifted the responsibility of provision in jobs, public health, pensions, education, elderly care, etc., from the state to ordinary citizens and laid off a large group of workers in money-losing state enterprises. The state has emerged from the reforms stronger in terms of its fiscal capacity, but there have been consequences: market reforms have reconfigured Chinese society. In the pre-1978 era, Mao promoted economic egalitarianism in an effort to eliminate the 'three great inequalities' – between worker and peasant, between city and countryside, and between mental and manual labour. China had become one of the most equal societies in the world in the 1970s. In 1978, China's Gini coefficient was 0.22, one of the most equal ever recorded (Adelmen and Sunding 1987). After thirty years of market reforms, China became one of the most unequal countries in the world. One report claims that the Gini coefficient in China was around 0.30 in 1980, but by 2012 it had nearly doubled to 0.55, far surpassing the level of 0.45 in the United States (Xie and Zhou 2014). Another report asserts that the Gini coefficient in China was in fact 0.73 in 2012 (Zhang 2014). Although many people have improved their living standards in the post-1978 era, reform programmes have generated widespread suffering and life disruptions, affecting many social groups. While the CCP has awkwardly identified capitalists, entrepreneurs and the other types of the 'new rich' as its new-found allies, many of its former supporters such as farmers and workers have lost their faith in the regime (Yang 2006; Zheng 2010). The CCP has recognized these social issues and has adopted policies to improve its capacity to govern. Its policy package has included measures to improve social security and healthcare, efforts to build an 'eco-friendly society', the initiative to build a 'socialist harmonious society', and the recent campaign to 'build a socialist new countryside' in China.

Yet these measures and campaigns are far from adequate. Post-1978 market reforms have sharpened disparities between urban and rural areas, among the professions, and between the coast and interior regions, although the CCP still spouts a socialist rhetoric. These developments have accentuated the sense of unfairness and sharpened social cleavages in society as demonstrated in the widespread 'hatred of the wealth' in China (Zang 2008). Inequality has

generated widespread discontent and anger among the poor, the weak and the dispossessed, which has been unequivocally directed toward the state for its failure to safeguard social justice. The CCP's support base has been reduced significantly since the winners of market reforms are the minority of the population, which has led to the decline in the state's legitimacy and governing capacity. It has become increasingly difficult for the CCP to direct citizens toward the path it wants them to take. While the state has forced citizens to be financially self-reliant, it has inadvertently made them socially independent, thereby producing potential agents of resistance and other forms of collective action. The post-1978 era has therefore witnessed repeated worker and farmer demonstrations against the loss of jobs and social displacement. Everyday resistance occurs in diverse and innumerable ways, including cynicism, conversion to cult religions, underground political movements, and blog discussions (Lewis and Xue 2003).

### The open door policy

The third key aspect of post-1978 reforms is to open China up to the rest of the world. Deng and his successors hoped that the open door policy would upgrade the Chinese economy since it would attract foreign investment, technology and management skills from the West. They understood that Western values and norms would also enter China but felt confident that they would be able to contain these undesirable exports from the West. Unlike some other reform policies such as price reforms, state enterprise reforms and housing reforms in the 1980s and early 1990s (Zang 1999), the open door policy has not met strong resistance and has been implemented consistently since 1978. This is partly because the open door policy has not infringed the interests of the dense networks of collusive and cartelistic organizations that made up the Chinese socialist economy. In fact, these narrow interest groups have been the first beneficiaries of the open door policy given their strategic position in the Chinese economy and political system. This partly explains why conservative leaders suspended most reform policies right after the 1989 Tiananmen incident to protect socialism, yet they left the open door policy alone. 'The Tiananmen event in 1989 did not interrupt the process; instead, it unexpectedly became a powerful motivation for the Chinese leadership to open the country's door even wider to the outside world.' China has become one of the world's most favoured destinations for foreign investments. Driven by large-scale foreign investments, the PRC had become the world's foremost manufacturing base and largest export economy (Zheng 2010: 800, 804).

While Deng and his successors have correctly calculated the economic benefits of the open door policy, they have seriously underestimated its social and political implications for Chinese society. 'Openness produces distributive conflict among different social groups and regions. Some groups and regions have benefited more than others with some becoming winners and others losers.' Openness has been a major driving force behind China's rapid

transformation. At the domestic level, it creates an institutional environment in which different existing factors reorganize themselves, thus providing new dynamics for change. At the international level, it links China and the world together, and the interplay between China and the world produces an external dynamism for China's internal changes (Zheng 2010: 800, 804).

More concretely, openness has generated the heterogeneous social landscape in China and engendered daunting governance challenges to the CCP. Openness has provided Chinese people with a vital source of information about and models of good governance. Information is power. The internet and the rapid development of YouTube, blogs and Twitter have increased citizen access to information. In 1994, China was connected to NSFNET (the internet). By the end of June 2014 it had 642 million internet users, more than the combined total in the next three countries, i.e. United States, India and Japan (China Internet Watch 2014). Chinese netizens have aired their opinions on various issues on domestic politics. The CCP has expressed a strong desire to restrict Web freedom following the democratic revolutions in the Middle East (Buckley 2011; Lococo 2011); it remains to be seen how effectively it can achieve its goal.

Increased exchanges and interaction between China and the rest of the world have steadfastly exposed Chinese people to what democracy is and how democracy works, thereby increasing their social and cultural capacity in their effort to reconstruct state–society relations. For example, good governance has been conceptualized and promoted in Western democracies. It has gained increasing popularity in the discourse on government and social development among internet users and citizen activists in China. In particular, they have used concepts such as transparency, accountability and social justice in their struggle for political change in China. Since they understand well that they cannot openly ask for democracy and will not get it even if they ask, they have demanded good governance. The demand has created a challenge to the CCP because one-party rule is not consistent with the demand for social justice, transparency and accountability. But the CCP has found it difficult to put down the demand because its official mission is to promote social progress, economic growth, good government and equality, which are more or less consistent with good governance. Netizens and citizen activists have thus exploited the consistence to challenge one-party rule. While the CCP have emphasized economic growth and political stability to promote good governance, netizens and citizen activists have emphasized transparency, accountability, and social justice to promote good governance, and have used these concepts to justify their moral high ground vis-à-vis the state. They have questioned government politics, evaluated the performance of government officials, and criticized officials who fail to meet the standards of good governance. The demand for transparency, accountability and social justice has empowered internet users and citizen activists at the expense of the state power and made it increasingly difficult for government officials to be autocratic and conduct government business in an arbitrary and unaccountable

way. Mobilizing public opinions, netizens and citizen activists successfully forced the court to change the 2009 verdict on the Deng Yujiao case that occurred in Badong county, Hubei province and the 2010 verdict on the Shi Jianfeng case in Pingdingshan in Henan province. Transparency, fairness, the incompetence of judges and unaccountable behaviour have been used to mobilize mass protests.

Another example is the rapid growth of NGOs in China. Learning from abroad, the government has fostered NGOs to mobilize societal resources to supplement its spending on welfare and to take over some of its burden of service provision. The government requires that NGOs be registered with the government and must have a sponsoring government agency before registration can be requested. The sponsoring government agency is in charge of overseeing the activities of its NGOs. There were about 100 national social organizations in China before 1978. By 2005, there were nearly 315,000 registered NGOs. Yet a large number of both foreign and domestic NGOs without a legal status exist in China. The total number of NGOs would be around 8.8 million by 2003 if nonregistered NGOs were included (Zheng 2010). These NGOs have not been registered because they have engaged in activities that are not approved or endorsed by the government. The government's attitude towards them is one of 'no recognition, no banning, and no intervention', as long as they do not harm state security and social stability. Such hidden rules provide not only an implicit political and social framework for such NGOs to operate but also exert influence on their modes of operation and the direction of their future development (Deng 2010). Nevertheless, many unregistered NGOs have refused to limit themselves to the provision of social welfare. They have represented a major aspect of political activism in society and worked on areas such as labour rights, civic rights, environmental protection, action against HIV/AIDS, etc. The fact that this large group of nonregistered NGOs has existed and done things not endorsed by the CCP shows the growing strength of society vis-à-vis the state in China. For a more detailed discussion of the NGOs, please refer to Chapters 13 and 14.

## Conclusions

This chapter reviews the political development since 1949 and discusses the changing state–society relations in the PRC. While there has been continuity in the major government institutions and the persistence of one-party rule in China, there have been political changes in the post-1978 era due to the receding role of the state in society, the imperatives of market reforms and the open door policy. Some scholars have complained bitterly about the slow process of political liberalization in China. This chapter shows the considerable extent of democratic reforms in China – after all, democratization implies 'the shift of political power from the state to social forces' (Zheng 2010: 804). One-party rule may persist into the foreseeable future, yet it will become increasingly difficult for the CCP to exercise dictatorship in both

social and political life in the face of growing and increasingly assertive society.

This chapter concludes this textbook and provides important contextual material for readers to reflect their understanding of aspects of contemporary Chinese society discussed in Chapters 2–14, such as ideas of continuity and transformation in work and the mass media, aspects of family planning, divorce and gender, the impact of government policy on ethnic relations and religion, and the notion of relative hierarchy in China.

## Note

1  See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights_in_the_People%27s_Republic_of_China#cite_note-134.

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# Chronology of the People's Republic of China

| | |
|---|---|
| 1949, Oct. | The Foundation of the People's Republic of China. |
| 1950, May | New marriage law bans polygamy and arranged marriages. |
| 1950, Feb. | China and the Soviet Union sign 'Sino–Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance'. |
| 1950, June | Agrarian Reform Law. Land of landlords is redistributed to poor peasants |
| 1950, Oct. | Chinese People's Volunteer Army entered Korean Peninsula to support their North Korean allies against the USA. |
| 1950, Nov. | The People's Republic of China takes control of Tibet. |
| 1951, Sept. | The Vatican and China break off diplomatic relations. |
| 1953–1957 | First Five-Year Plan focusing on Soviet-style development of heavy industries. |
| 1956–1957 | 'Hundred Flowers' campaign misleads intellectuals into complaining about problems. |
| 1957–1958 | 'Anti-Rightist' Campaign is used by Mao to eliminate critical intellectuals. |
| 1958 | Farmland is collectivized and farmers are organized into People's Communes. |
| 1958 | Beginning of the 'Great Leap Forward' campaign. |
| 1959 | Sino–Soviet relations deteriorate dramatically. |
| 1959–1961 | 'Great Leap Forward' triggers largest famine in human history with an estimated 14–30 million casualties. |
| 1959, March | Tibetan population revolts against Chinese occupation were suppressed with 'iron fist'. |
| 1960, July | Khrushchev recalls Soviet advisors and technical experts in China. |
| 1961–1965 | Readjustment and recovery: 'Agriculture First' policy. Food situation improves. |
| 1962 | Border conflict with India over areas in the Himalaya. |
| 1962–1972 | In the 1960s China's population growth peaks. Between 1962 and 1972 some 300 million babies are born. |
| 1962–1972 | High population growth (average of 26.7 million birth per year) in the late 1960s increases pressure on natural resources. |

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|---|---|
| 1964, Oct. | Test of first nuclear bomb in China. |
| 1965 | Tibet becomes autonomous region. |
| 1966–1976 | During Cultural Revolution China's jurisdiction essentially ceases to operate. |
| 1966–1968 | Destruction of 'The Four Olds': Old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits. |
| 1966–1976 | During the Cultural Revolution, religious practice is condemned as feudalistic. |
| 1967, June | Test of first nuclear fusion device in China. |
| 1969, March | Clash with Soviet troops at Damanskii Island (Zhen Bao) of the Ussuri river (Wusuli Jiang). |
| 1969, April | Mao Zedong anoints Lin Biao as his heir apparent. |
| 1970, April | First satellite launch ('Long March'). |
| 1971, July | Henry Kissinger secretly visits China. |
| 1971, Sept. | Lin Biao is killed in airplane crash while fleeing China. |
| 1971, Nov. | The People's Republic replaces the Republic of China (Taiwan) in UN Security Council. |
| 1972, Feb. | Visit of US President Richard Nixon to China. Normalization between US and China begins. |
| 1976, Jan. | Death of Premier Zhou Enlai. |
| 1976, July | Massive earthquake (7.8 Richter scale) devastates the city of Tangshan (Hebei Province). At least 270,000 people die. |
| 1976, Sept. | Chairman Mao Zedong dies at the age of 82. |
| 1978, March | The 1978 Constitution of the People's Republic of China guarantees freedom of religion with a number of restrictions. |
| 1978–1979 | 'Democracy Wall' in Beijing with pro-democratic posters. |
| 1978, June | State Council establishes a new 'Birth Planning Small Leading Group' to strengthen family planning. |
| 1978, Sept. | E-mail link is established between Germany and China (CSNET protocol). First message from China: Sept. 20. |
| 1979, Jan. | Diplomatic relations are established between the US and China. |
| 1979 | Introduction of the 'Household Responsibility System' in agriculture. |
| 1979 | Introduction of China's strict 'One-Child' family planning program at provincial level, in 1980 at national level. |
| 1979, Feb. | China invades Vietnam (for 29 days) after Vietnamese troops had ousted the pro-Beijing Pol-Pot regime in Cambodia. |
| 1980, Aug. | First Special Economic Zones are established in Shenzhen. |
| 1981, Sept. | Successful launch of three satellites (SJ-2, SJ-2A, SJ-2b) on one rocket into orbit. |
| 1982 | China's population surpasses 1 billion people. |
| 1982, Dec. | The Fifth National People's Congress adopts a new constitution for China. |
| 1986, April | The Sixth National People's Congress adopts new Civil Law. |

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|---|---|
| 1987 | Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) comes to China. |
| 1987, Jan. | General Secretary of the CCP, Hu Yaobang, is forced to resign. |
| 1988 | Excessive economic growth, with rampant corruption and out-of-control inflation of 18.5 per cent. |
| 1988, Nov. | TV series 'River Elegy' is criticized as 'wholesale Westernization' and banned. |
| 1989, April | Hu Yaobang dies. |
| 1989, June | Crack down on Tiananmen Square demonstrations with military power (official death toll: 200); Jiang Zemin replaces Zhao Ziyang as CCP General Secretary. |
| 1989, June | In Madrid (Spain), the European Council of Ministers agrees to an EU-wide arms embargo against China. |
| 1989, Dec. | Stock markets are opened in Shanghai and Shenzhen. |
| 1991 | First McDonald's restaurant opens in Beijing. |
| 1992 | Deng Xiaoping accelerates market reforms to establish a 'socialist market economy'. |
| 1992 | Falun Gong religious movement was founded by Li Hongzhi from Changchun, Jilin province. |
| 1994 | China connected to NSFNET (Internet). |
| 1994, Dec. | Start of the 'Three Gorges Dam' project. |
| 1995 | Educational legislation stipulates a nine-year compulsory education. |
| 1997, Feb. | Death of Deng Xiaoping. |
| 1997, July | China gets control over Hong Kong's sovereignty. |
| 1998 | Microsoft and Intel corporations establish high-tech research facilities in Beijing. |
| 1998 | Worst flooding in years – 230 million people affected and 3,656 dead. |
| 1998 | Zhu Rongji follows Li Peng as China's premier. |
| 1999 | The Falun Gong movement is declared illegal in China and a threat to national security. |
| 1999 | Cooling of US-China relations after NATO bombs Chinese embassy in Belgrade. |
| 2000 | Government consolidates Internet regulations for mainland China. |
| 2000, Oct. | The Vatican canonizes 120 'saints' that were 'martyred' in China. |
| 2001 | Beijing is awarded the 2008 Olympic Games. |
| 2001, Nov. | After years of negotiations, China becomes a member of the World Trade Organization. |
| 2002, Sept. | Kentucky Fried Chicken opens China's 700th KFC restaurant. |
| 2002, Nov. | Hu Jintao replaces Jiang Zemin as head of the Communist Party. |
| 2003, March | Hu Jintao is elected president by National People's Congress. |

| 2005, June | China has at least 103 million Internet users, 45.6 million computer hosts, and 677,500 websites. |
| 2005, Oct. | Two astronauts sent into space, circling earth with 'Shenzhou VI space capsule'. |
| 2006, March | The Chinese inaugural edition of *Rolling Stone* magazine is immediately sold out. |
| 2006, June | China surpasses the United States in carbon dioxide emissions. |
| 2007, Dec. | Number of Internet users in China reaches 210 million. |
| 2007, Nov. | Yahoo! accused of having provided information that led to imprisonment of civil rights activist in China. |
| 2008, March | Most violent ethnic protest in years erupts in Lhasa, Tibet. |
| 2008, May | Earthquake strikes Sichuan province: death toll reaches 69,016, with more than 18,000 people still missing. |
| 2008, Aug. | China welcomes the world to the Beijing 2008 Olympic games. |
| 2008, Nov. | The government announces a $586 billion economic stimulus package. |
| 2009, July | Almost 200 people die and over 1,700 are injured in ethnic violence in Xinjiang. |
| 2009, Aug. | China surpasses the United States as the world's largest producer of household garbage. |
| 2009, Nov. | China is now the largest automobile market in the world. |
| 2010, March | Google stops its Chinese Internet search engine and re-routes mainland Chinese users to its Hong Kong site. |
| 2010, Oct. | Jailed Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo wins 2010 Nobel Peace Prize. |
| 2010, Oct. | Xi Jinping is appointed a vice chairman of the CCP's Central Military Commission |
| 2011, Jan. | President Hu Jintao pays a state visit to the United States and meets US President Barack Obama. |
| 2011, Aug. | US Vice President Joseph Biden pays an official visit to China and meets Vice President Xi Jinping. |
| 2012, Jan. | China's urban population outnumbers its rural population. |
| 2012, Nov. | Xi Jinping is elected general secretary of the Central Committee of the CCP in the CCP's 18th National Congress. |
| 2012, March | Bo Xilia is dismissed as Chongqing party chief and subsequently found guilty on accepting bribes and abuses of power and sentenced to life imprisonment in September 2013. |
| 2012, June | China sends three astronauts, including the country's first female astronaut, Liu Yang, into space for the nation's manned space docking mission. |
| 2013, March | Xi Jinping is appointed Chairman of the CCP's Central Military Commission. |
| 2013, March | Li Keqiang is appointed premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China. |

| 2014, May | US charges five Chinese army officers with industrial cyber-espionage. |
| 2014, May | China signs a 30-year deal worth an estimated $400bn for gas supplies from Russia's Gazprom. |
| 2014, Sept. | Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba's market value is measured as US$231 billion on the date of its historic initial public offering. |
| 2014, Sept. | Protests against Beijing's plans to vet candidates for elections in 2017 grip Hong Kong. |

The above information is derived from:

www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13017882;
www.china.org.cn/world/2012-01-05/content_24328924_4.htm;
www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-12/29/content_16068453.htm; and
www.china-profile.com/history/hist_policy_1.htm.

# Index

Entries in *italics* denote figures; entries in **bold** denote tables and boxes.