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Emergence of Civil Society in  
Post-Mao China

GORDON WHITE

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discussion and critical comment

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## MARKET REFORMS AND THE EMERGENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN POST-MAO CHINA

Gordon White, Institute of Development Studies

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Any inquiry into the emergence of "civil society" in post-Mao China is bedevilled both by ambiguity of the term "civil society" itself and the complexity of the historical process it is used to describe. This problem extends far beyond the Chinese case, since the idea of "civil society" has been embraced by a broad spectrum of ideological persuasions and used to analyse a wide variety of countries in what used to be called the First, Second and Third Worlds. In the United Kingdom, for example, theorists of the right and left have argued for the crucial importance of "civil society" as a force for protecting social cohesion against the ravages of market forces or providing the organisational basis for an alternative form of democratic governance to the traditional bureaucratic state.<sup>1</sup> In Central and Eastern Europe, it was the experience of political struggle against communist regimes which gave "civil society" the enhanced currency it has enjoyed over the past decade and a half, particularly the experience of Solidarity in Poland.<sup>2</sup> In the developing world, many countries have been undergoing programmes of economic liberalisation which has led to discussion about the inter-relationships between (spreading) markets, (retreating) states and (emerging) civil society and their implications for the "Third Wave" of democratisation in the region.<sup>3</sup>

These discussions can help to throw light on the Chinese case. As a communist country undergoing social changes and political stresses, there is a clear resonance with Eastern European experience. As a developing country undergoing radical economic liberalisation and a redefinition of the character and role of the state, there is shared experience with other developing countries. Given the roots of the idea of "civil society" in Western experience, however, its utility in explaining processes elsewhere has proven patchy. China's distinctive historical trajectory and social character should prompt caution about the extent to which the concept can help us to understand contemporary processes of socio-political change there.

### A: The Search for "Civil Society"

#### (i) A Serviceable Definition of Civil Society

There has already been a good number of theoretical discussions about the intellectual pedigree and different meanings of "civil society", both in the general literature of social and political theory and in recent scholarship on China by both Western and Chinese scholars.<sup>4</sup> I shall spare the reader yet another one and concentrate rather on two main tasks: first, to distil the main ways in which the term is commonly understood in contemporary debate and, second, to use these meanings to guide an empirical inquiry into socio-political processes in contemporary China.

One can detect two conceptions of "civil society" which are often used interchangeably and contribute to the confusion which surrounds the term: they could be called a sociological and a political conception. The first, **sociological**, conception is that of an intermediate associational realm situated between the state on the one side and the building blocks of society on the other (individuals, families and firms), populated by social organisations which are separate from the state, enjoy some degree of autonomy from the state and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests or values. The second, **political**, conception, which derives

from the Anglo-American liberal tradition of political theory, equates civil society with "political society" in the sense of a particular set of institutionalised relationships between state and society based on the principles of citizenship, civil rights, representation and the rule of law. (Roberts 1987)

A good deal of the analysis of "civil society" in the Chinese context tends to run these two conceptions together by linking the emergence of "civil society" to pressures for (liberal) democratisation.<sup>5</sup> While there has been a clear historical relationship between these two processes in Western contexts, there is no need at this stage to superimpose this experience on the Chinese case by identifying civil society only with those organisations which favour or facilitate democratisation. One inevitably ends up trawling through different types of social organisation and trying to decide which ones are truly "civil", in terms of their political proclivities, as opposed to those which are temporarily or permanently "uncivil", "pre-civil" or "non-civil". In the Chinese context as elsewhere, the sociological universe of "civil society" is very diverse. Rather than adopt a more narrow notion of civil society, based for example on Habermas or Rousseau, I prefer to begin the inquiry with a hopefully complementary approach which tries to come to terms with the current diversity of associational life rather than directing attention to just one sector or dimension of it.<sup>6</sup> This approach would also attempt to "delink" the concept of "civil society" from any specific political or ideological tradition, avoiding thereby the "risk of getting involved in an ideological or teleological exercise" which Gu Xin (1993-4: 52) rightly warns about. However, we should also be prepared for the prospect that the very term "civil society" might make such an exercise unavoidable.

Using the sociological approach in the first instance would give us access to a broader picture of the social forces which might hinder as well as foster democratisation. In work on other developing societies, distinctions have been made between different types or sectors of civil society: for example, between "modern" interest groups such as trade-unions or professional associations and "traditional" organisations based on kinship, ethnicity, culture or religion; between those organisations with specifically political roles and those which are either outside politics or only intermittently involved; between formal organisations and informal social networks based on patrimonial or clientelistic allegiances; between legal or open associations and secret or illegal organisations such as the Freemasons or the Mafia; and between associations which accept the political **status quo** and those which seek to transform it by changing the political regime or redefining the political community (as in former Yugoslavia).

The relationship between the sociological and political conceptions of civil society then becomes a second-stage inquiry. The extent to which a specific civil society may or may not give rise to some kind of liberal-democratic political order is a fascinating area of inquiry in itself and would deal with important political variables such as the formation of a politically influential "public opinion", the issue of agreement between social elites on a coherent set of institutions and rules of the political game, the spread of a new political culture of citizenship and the institutionalisation of legal rights. One would expect that different categories of associations would vary in their attitudes to the prospect of democratisation, ranging from support to indifference, opposition and subversion. Any statement to the effect, for example, that a "strong" civil society is conducive to democratisation would be meaningless unless one went further to identify the precise political character of a specific civil society. As Bayart (1986: p.118) has argued in the African context, "The advance of a civil society which does not necessarily contain the democratic ideal does not in itself ensure the democratisation of the political system". Conversely, the statement that a "weak" civil society is not conducive to democratisation is equally suspect: witness the case of the Soviet Union where the main thrust towards democratisation came from within the Party/state apparatus and not from the pressures of civil society. As Rueschemeyer and his colleagues have pointed out (1992), civil

society is only one potential component of the political impetus towards democratisation. The others, which may be decisive in certain instances, are international pressures and the influence of domestic state-based elites.

I shall mainly be using the sociological approach to civil society in this paper. My main purpose is to focus on changes in the organisational structure of Chinese society: specifically to investigate the extent to which a new kind of intermediate stratum of social organisations has in fact emerged and changed the relationship between state and society. As evidence of "civil society", we would be looking for the development of social organisations which demonstrate characteristics of spontaneity, voluntariness and self-regulation in their constitution and activities. To the extent that our inquiry does reveal the existence of this new sociological phenomenon, we can then go on to reflect, albeit somewhat speculatively, about the political implications of this new social realm as a force for democratisation.<sup>7</sup>

A methodological caveat. Although we are guided by a notion of "civil society" as an ideal type, we also recognise that any specific organisation in the real world may be only be a partial reflection of the ideal. Moreover, though the ideal type "civil society" does suppose a separation between it and the state, in the real world the two spheres overlap and interpenetrate to varying degrees.

## (ii) The Dual Dynamic of Civil Society in Post-Revolutionary China

We are concentrating here on the development of civil society during the era of Chinese "market socialism" which began in 1978. To understand the formation of civil society during this period, it is necessary to set it within the broader dynamics of state-society relations in the post-revolutionary period. From this longer term perspective one can identify **a dual dynamic in the emergence of a civil society**. The first is a **political dynamic** which reflects the impact of totalistic political institutions on a society and the political tensions and conflicts to which this gives rise. In this context, civil society characteristically takes the form of resistance to state control on the part of organisations with explicitly political agendas. In context of the former state socialist societies, the classic case of this dynamic was that of Poland where Solidarity embodied a generalised political opposition to state control and waged a Gramscian "war of position" against it. This civil society impetus takes a variety of forms: an organisational challenge to create new political institutions to replace or undermine those of the **ancien regime**; an ideological challenge to the values of the Marxist-Leninist state religion mounted by critical individuals and institutions; and a cultural challenge through the spread of heterodox patterns of social belief and behaviour in opposition to the official system of social morality.

The second dynamic of civil society is a **market dynamic**, analogous to the "Great Transformation" wrought by the spread of market relations in Western societies. (Polanyi 1957) In this context, civil society is a consequence of a separation between state and society resulting from the rise of a market economy and the concomitant redistribution of social power away from the state to new strata which are thereby empowered to rein in and restructure the state. In the context of the former state socialist countries of East/Central Europe, the only case of this dynamic was that of Hungary where the spread of a "second economy" in the 1970's and 1980's led to what Hungarian sociologists called a "second society", an associational sphere which was organised in ways radically different from and increasingly counter to the state. In the Chinese case, we can hypothesise that market reforms have brought about socio-economic changes which have shifted the balance of power between state and society and reduced the capacity of the state to control and manipulate society. To the extent that these changes occur, they create the basis for a new sphere of social association which can be characterised as "civil society". This would imply a new relationship between social organisations and the state, moving away from a system of totalistic control to a more pluralistic one in which social organisations become more separate

and autonomous, representing the interests of their social constituencies rather than the control imperatives of the state.

In the Chinese case, one can argue that the **political dynamic** of civil society has been in operation since the imposition of the Communist system of rule in the 1950's. In retrospect, the organised upsurges which occurred during the Hundred Flowers Movement of 1956-1957 can be seen partially as the reactions of certain social groups against the imposition of the new system. In its early phases, the Cultural Revolution can also be seen in part as a political mobilisation of distinct social forces and interests against the Party/state, but operating within the ideological framework and institutional constraints of the Chinese Communist system at its "high" phase. The April 5 Movement of 1976 reflected widespread mass antagonism to the political hegemony of the radical left and the destructive political struggles of the previous decade and was based on the partially spontaneous mobilisation of popular social networks.<sup>8</sup> The Democracy Movement of 1978-1979 exploited the weakened condition of the Communist Party/state after the traumas of the Cultural Revolution decade and represented the first signs of a political opposition with a radically different programme political reform comparable to its counterparts in East/Central Europe.

The distinct character of the post-1978 reform era is that, for the first time, **both dynamics have been in operation**. This era has its own complex political dynamic of civil society, the peaks being the student movement of 1986 and the urban mobilisations of 1989.<sup>9</sup> While the post-1979 era has seen oscillations in the degree of political relaxation and control, the period as a whole has been one of relative political relaxation, characterised by a reduction in the degree of politicisation of everyday life and the expansion of areas of activity - cultural, economic and technical/professional - which are relatively free of political controls (when compared with the previous era of Maoist "politics in command").<sup>10</sup> At certain periods, particularly during 1988 and early 1989, the political atmosphere was relaxed to an extent which encouraged (and indeed almost promised to legitimate) the emergence of social organisations of the civil society type. (for a review of this process, see He Baogang 1993: pp.4-6) However, these political fluctuations were taking place within a rapidly changing socio-economic context in which the market dynamic of civil society was already well underway. We thus need to think of the development of civil society in the era of economic reform as a complex interplay between these two socio-political dynamics. In the pre-reform era, the Party/state ruled through a system of cellular encapsulation of society; in this institutional straitjacket, it was difficult for a political challenge from society to take organisational form and, if it did, the state retained the political wherewithal to repress it. However, when the logic of the command economy begins to change and members of society begin to assume control over economic and social resources as a consequence of market reform, the capacity of the state to reimpose control through traditional institutional means begins to weaken.

Thus the political dynamic and the market dynamic of civil society are interactive and reinforcing. In particular, the latter impinges on the former by weakening the ideological authority and organisational reach of the state, thereby reducing its generalised capacity to repress political alternatives. The institutions of market society offer recruits, allies and resources to the political opposition and provide bolt-holes if they fail. To the extent that the opposition offers political alternatives more conducive to the interests of the new strata arising from an emergent market order, the two sets of forces may ally to organise a political offensive against the state.<sup>11</sup>

## B: The Impact of Economic Reform on State-Society Relations: the Rise of an Intermediate Sphere

### (i) changes in state-society relations: the dual impetus

The social impact of the post-Mao economic reforms has been deep and accelerated in the nineties as China experienced a prolonged and unprecedented boom. The economy has diversified in both sectoral and institutional terms, particularly through the rapid expansion of various non-state and foreign-invested enterprises. In consequence, Chinese society has become more complex and differentiated. New groups and strata have emerged with their own distinct interests: for instance, "new rich peasant" households in the rural areas, private and "collective" entrepreneurs in both cities and countryside and more independent members of the "liberal professions". Although the vast proportion of the population have benefitted materially from the reforms, some have benefitted more than most and there is a widespread consciousness of growing **inequalities**, between regions and social strata. Measures to increase the autonomy of public enterprises, the rapid growth of the private and collective sectors and measures to deregulate markets in labour and capital have resulted in a redistribution of power in society: away from Party/state institutions to public-sector managers, private/collective entrepreneurs, household enterprises and individuals able to sell their skills in the labour market.

Reforms in both industry and agriculture - notably the **de facto** privatisation of agriculture in the early 1980's and the mounting pressure on state enterprises to adapt to the demands of a market economy - have weakened the key institutions which "encapsulated" the population in the pre-reform era - the "unit" in the cities and the "collective" in the countryside. Moreover, the previous control over population flows enforced through the system of household registration (**hukou**) was breaking down in the nineties. In consequence, Chinese society has become more fluid and dynamic in both geographical and occupational terms. Urban workers have left their jobs in the public sector to start small businesses; officials and professionals have left their secure but increasingly unrewarding jobs on the government payroll to seek their fortunes in the private or collective sectors (the phenomenon of "plunging into the sea"); peasants from rural hinterlands have left for local towns and cities creating a growing "floating population" existing within the interstices of urban life; people from poor regions have moved within and between provinces in search of a better life; and young workers have been recruited to work in the Special Economic Zones and other open areas along the coast.

The social changes brought about by reform have also led to feelings of insecurity and discontent among more vulnerable or disadvantaged sections of the population which has fuelled social unrest and instability, accompanied by a widely perceived decline in standards of public order and morality. In consequence, by the mid-1990's the Chinese state was facing a more volatile and assertive population and increasingly widespread social unrest in both cities and countryside which threatened to reach critical proportions.<sup>12</sup>

As we shall see below, these social changes and pressures have taken on organisational form as a wide variety of new forms of association have sprouted like bamboo after the rain. To this extent, one can talk of a powerful **societal impetus** towards the emergence of civil society in the form of new types of intermediate association representing the interests and aspirations of evolving social forces and seeking greater autonomy from, and influence over, the Party/state. At the same time, however, there has been a powerful **state impetus** whereby political and governmental institutions have sought to adjust to social change, ameliorate growing tensions between state and society, channel growing pressures for access and participation, and avert the political danger posed by a decline in governability and control.

This state response is many-faceted and involves multifarious realignments and implicit deals between state institutions/officials and emergent social forces.<sup>13</sup> Two aspects are particularly important for our inquiry: repression and incorporation. Certain organisational expressions of social opposition and unrest, particularly those resulting from the political dynamic of civil society, have been dealt with repressively, most dramatically in the Beijing Massacre on June 4 1989. As the conversations of CCP leaders published later reveal, they found the political challenge mounted by the demand from students and workers during this movement for voluntary and autonomous organisations free from the controls conventionally exerted on "mass organisations" by the Party/state particularly threatening. For example, Li Peng is reported as having said that "If we recognise the 'College Students Autonomous Federation' just because the students insist on it, then we will be most likely to recognise a solidarity trade union if the workers insist on their demands, won't we?". Yao Yilin allegedly added that "Peasants will establish peasants' organisations as well, then China will become another Poland. For this reason, we must never give in".<sup>14</sup> In this particular form, civil society levelled a rapier at the heart of the institutional logic of Marxism-Leninism.

If we focus on the nature of the state response to the market impetus towards civil society, however, efforts at incorporation have been predominant. Implicitly or explicitly, the Party/state authorities have sought to establish a socialist form of state corporatism.<sup>15</sup> The essential elements of corporatism have been defined by Schmitter as follows:

"Corporatism can be defined as a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organised into a limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognised or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports."

As we shall see below, the reform era has seen the emergence of a plethora of "social organisations" (**shehui tuanti**), whose establishment and relationship to state institutions embody the main elements of this corporatist pattern. Many of these, such as professional and academic associations, reflect the impact of a calculated political decision by the Dengist leadership to grant greater autonomy and recognition to professional expertise. Many reflect the process of sectoral differentiation in the economy and the rise of influential new economic forces such as individual, "new collective" and private business. The impetus towards corporatism has been haphazard and gradual. The first reaction to the challenge posed by new economic and occupational interests and the societal impetus towards their taking organisational form was the desire merely to control and regulate. This was particularly apparent in the aftermath of the Tiananmen events when there was a hasty effort to identify, discipline and monitor social organisations through a system of compulsory registration administered by departments of Civil Affairs. It was not the case that these organisations had been independent or unregulated before; indeed many if not most had been established under the sponsorship of state institutions at different levels of government and had been subject to sectoral, **ad hoc** or localised forms of regulation. The post-Tiananmen impetus was to impose a universal, codified and centralised system of regulation and control, ultimately intended to take legal form. Accordingly, a set of "Regulations Governing Registration and Administration of Social Organisations" was issued in October 1989.<sup>16</sup>

The major motive behind these Regulations was the desire to establish control over a potentially threatening social phenomenon, and in practice the registration process has operated as a powerful mechanism of subordination and exclusion of officially unacceptable forms of social organisation. However, another corporatist



motive has gradually emerged which emphasises the complementarity between social organisations and the state as components of a new system of socio-economic regulation. This idea, first articulated systematically by the economist Xue Muqiao in 1988 (Xue 1988), argued that, in the economic sphere, social organisations could "serve as a bridge between the state and the enterprises" in a new form of "indirect" regulation and direction of the economy which avoided both the previous deficiencies of Stalinist directive planning and the future dangers of anarchic markets. This idea has gained currency during the 1990's, particularly in the industrial sphere, as part of a general movement to "transfer the functions of government organs" (**zhuanbian zhengfu jiguan de zhineng**) whereby social organisations become in effect an intermediate level of economic governance.<sup>17</sup> Movement in this direction (notably the transformation of certain central light industrial ministries into "general associations") has brought China to resemble the pattern of state-business relations characteristic of other East Asian economies, notably Japan and South Korea. Indeed, Japan has been cited a positive model for emulation by Chinese policy-makers.

The overall result of this dual impetus from both state and society is a social scene characterised by a wide variety of intermediate organisations which have developed along with and as a consequence of the Dengist reforms. These organisations have different types of relations with a Party/state machine which it itself undergoing institutional change in an effort to create a stable relationship with a rapidly changing and potentially threatening socio-economic environment. The purpose of the next section is to paint this social scene using a broad brush.

## (ii) The "civil society" constellation

In contemporary China it is difficult to find an ideal-type "civil society" organisation which fully embodies the principles of voluntary participation, autonomy, separation from the state and self-regulation. Though organisations of this kind exist, they do so within the interstices or outside the realm of state controls. Within that realm, however, the principle of a fully autonomous and self-regulating social organisation has not been formally recognised. While the official regulations for the registration of social organisations do go some way towards granting them an institutionalised status by recognising them as "legal persons" (**faren**), the registration procedures and conditions are highly restrictive and interpretation is still left to administrative discretion. All officially recognised organisations are thus, to a greater or lesser degree, controlled by and dependent on state institutions. Outside that realm, there are organisations which are excluded from official recognition yet live a limbo life of informal activity; there are organisations which, while disapproved of officially, are nonetheless tolerated or winked at by the authorities; and there are underground organisations subject to repression. Yet each of these categories of social organisation embodies, to varying degrees, the associational characteristics of "civil society". This partial and patchy "civil society" is made up of a complex and rapidly changing social constellation with many layers and many different types of relationship with the Party/state.

If we categorise these layers in terms of the nature of their relationship with the Party/state, the range is from caging, through (various degrees of) incorporation, to (more or less intermittent) toleration and repression. Let us discuss each category in terms of this gradation.

(a) **the caged sector: the mass organisations** The old-style "mass organisations" (**qunzhong zuzhi**) of the pre-reform era, namely the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), the Women's Federation (WF) and the Young Communist League, had been subordinated to the Party as the three main "pillars" of its organised base of social control and support. As Leninist "transmission belts", they had virtually no organisational autonomy and any attempt to become more assertive, as in the case of the trade unions in the early and mid-1950's, provoked a backlash from



the Party.<sup>18</sup> However, the reform era's combination of limited political liberalisation and rapid socio-economic change provided opportunities and created pressures for these organisations to claim greater separation and independence from the Party/state.

In the case of the trade-unions and the women's federation, this movement was visible in the few years before Tiananmen and began to reappear with growing force in the mid-1990's. In a detailed study of the ACFTU and the WF over the entire reform era, the author and his colleagues found that there was a mounting impetus during the 1980's on the part of both organisations to assert greater operational autonomy by distancing themselves from the Party and attempting to represent their social constituencies more effectively (White, Howell and Shang 1995: Chaps. 4-5). However, the reassertion of political controls after the Beijing Massacre led them to strike a Faustian bargain with the Party, whereby they sacrificed greater autonomy for greater access to and influence over official policy-making at both national and local levels. By the mid-1990's, however, the accelerated pace of economic reform was already unravelling this compact. The legitimacy and influence of both organisations were being undermined, on the one side by the stresses and strains of the economic reform process and its ambiguous impact on their memberships, and on the other side by the increasingly debilitating constraints imposed by their continued dependence on the Party. Their dilemma was highlighted by the emergence of alternative organisations - illegal autonomous unions and workers' groups and informal women's groups - which could lay claim with much greater justification to the title of real representatives of their members and organisational expressions of civil society in the full sense.

As for the YCL, it suffered a great loss of political influence and social appeal during the reform era because the Party no longer regarded it as the crucial channel of political recruitment. Moreover, joining the Party was no longer the only way to make their way up in society, so the previous role of the YCL as a pathway to upward mobility was increasingly obsolete. Moreover, official policy encouraged the depoliticisation of youth and their involvement in activities - occupational, cultural and recreational - which they could increasingly obtain on the market and not through the good agencies of the Party or the YCL. In a local study of the changing role of mass organisations in a small city in Zhejiang province, we found that the local YCL cadres felt that they had been abandoned by the Party; indeed they described themselves as "orphans". Their institutional response was to try to attract young people through cultural and recreational activities, since there was no longer any interest in politics, but they were finding it difficult since these things were available on the market and they lacked the financial resources in any case (which led them to try to piggy-back on the local unions which had more money).<sup>19</sup> If this case is a straw in the wind, one can hardly expect that the YCL has any future whatsoever.

The situation of these three mass organisations is different in that the trade-unions, unlike the Women's Federation and the Young Communist League, has a guaranteed financial basis and an expanding constituency, particularly among workers in the burgeoning new collectives and foreign-invested enterprises who are becoming increasingly aware of the need for union representation and protection. Yet the three organisations are similar in that each has pressing reasons to try to bend the bars of Party control and establish themselves as more *bona fide* mass organisations. They are like birds which would like to escape from a cage and yet find it difficult not merely because the bars of the cage are still strong but because they have become accustomed to the advantages of cage life.

(b) **the incorporated sector: the new social organisations** A new stratum of officially recognised "social organisations" (*shehui tuanti*) has rapidly emerged at both national and local levels, including business and trade associations, professional associations, academic societies, sports, recreational and cultural clubs. Their numbers had already reached over 1,100 national and 100,000 regional/local ones by the time

registration regulations were introduced in October 1989 and, though the rate of growth slowed in the clampdown after Tiananmen, their numbers began to grow again in the early 1990's. By late 1993 there were over 1,460 registered national social organisations, 19,600 at the provincial level and over 160,000 at the county level. 20

As the key element in an emerging corporatist sector, these organisations are ambiguous and heterogeneous entities when viewed from a "civil society" perspective. Rather than constituting an associational sphere which embodies the growing power and assertiveness of social forces emerging from radical market reforms, they are an institutional terrain in which the interests and objectives **both** of increasingly influential social forces **and** of still powerful state institutions are interwoven. As such, they constitute a socially ambiguous institutional sphere which "braids" state and society in new and heterogeneous ways.

In spite of much misleading official vocabulary about their being "popular organisations" (**minjian tuanti**), closer inspection reveals a continuum of different mixes between what one might call the state and the societal element of each organisation. At one extreme, there are a minority of organisations which are totally controlled by the government (**guanban**) which are essentially extensions of the state machine. At the other extreme is a minority of organisations which are not considered important enough to be worth controlling on a continuing basis (usually recreational, academic or cultural groups). Most social organisations contained a mixture of both components, roughly called semi-governmental/ semi-popular (**banguan banmin**). Overall, as of 1993 at least, when this research was conducted, the state component was predominant within this mix.<sup>21</sup>

In practice, the state component implied not only the need for each social organisation to obtain formal approval by registering with the appropriate department of Civil Affairs, but also the requirement to "link up" (**guakao** or **guikou**) with a specific government agency which acted as its "superior department" or official sponsor.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, a social organisation might receive all or part of its finances from the state, and one or more of its key leaders might be appointed by the "linked" state agency which might also require it to carry out certain official "tasks". Conversely, the extent to which an organisation was self-financing, chose its own leaders and organised its own activities according to the wishes and interests of its members were indices of its societal or "popular" character. However, the "popular" dimension of a social organisation is reduced because of the official requirement - a central feature of corporatism - that only one organisation is allowed to represent each social group or economic sector within a given administrative area. So in any locality there will be one Private Enterprises Association, one Individual Businesspeople's Association, one Calligraphy Association, one Lawyers' Association, one Accountants Association and so on.

As studies of corporatism elsewhere have revealed, corporatist systems are hard to maintain and this intermediate sphere, which He Baogang calls "semi-civil society", is in flux and ridden with tensions. There is a constant tension between the regulations and the reality of social organisations as the latter acts to make the former obsolescent. For example, the requirement that there should be only one association of its kind in each area is often challenged. One local case in point was the contest for formal recognition by two competing associations of accountants in the north-eastern city of Shenyang being. At the national level, there was a similar competition between calligraphy associations which had to be solved by negotiation and merger. However, official regulations are applied "flexibly" at local levels, with local governments seeking to increase their freedom of manoeuvre as part of an effort to establish local corporatist systems involving collaboration between government agencies and local socio-economic interests, organised in the associations, to promote local development.

Moreover, the official policy of "transferring government functions" in the mid-1980's has led governments at all levels to think of ways in which former government activities could be transferred to associations as part of a semi-privatisation of governance. This role of associational governance has increasingly been built into law. For example, the law on "Protecting Consumers' Rights and Interests", promulgated in October 1993, contained a chapter defining the role of consumers' associations in "supervising commodities and services and protecting consumers' legitimate rights and interests". Similar provisions were made in the law on registered accountants issued at the same time.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, governments faced by severe fiscal constraints are also trying to reduce the burden of supporting social organisations, prompting the latter to make an effort to find their own finance and become more autonomous as a matter of institutional survival. This involves setting up their own businesses, exploiting any real estate at their disposal and providing paid services to their members. This in turn prompts them to be more sensitive to the needs and interests of their own social constituencies and, because less dependent on the state, less beholden to it.

At the same time as the direct role of government gradually recedes, moreover, the power of social interests is increasing, a phenomenon particularly visible in the spheres of private business and the professions. The rising role of trade associations is visible, particularly in the localities, in both the urban and rural areas. These can provide tangible benefits to their members in terms of access to state agencies, market information and promotion, business contacts, prevention of "unfair" competition, establishment and monitoring of standards, technical services, and the like. The rising power of the liberal professions is also visible: for example, lawyers are increasingly moving out of government service to establish their own private partnerships and the number of lawyers is expected to double (to 100,000) by the year 2000. Private medicine and education are also expanding rapidly.<sup>24</sup> Semi-official and private newspapers and journals have also proliferated over recent years, outrunning the capacity of the state to control and regulate them, and journalists have become increasingly vocal in agitating for greater freedom and legal protection.<sup>25</sup>

All of these trends may be gradually shifting the balance within social organisations away from the state to the society component and converting them into associations of a more "civil" nature. This operates directly through exerting pressures within the organisations themselves and indirectly through the threat or reality of alternative organisations arising to challenge their monopoly. It is to this "counter-world" of alternative organisations that we turn in the next two sections.

### **(c) the interstitial "limbo" world of civil society:**

Particularly during the period leading up to Tiananmen and the early-mid 1990's when the pace of economic reform accelerated, there has been a rapid growth of urban associations which have either not achieved formal official recognition or have achieved it through connections with sympathetic agencies or individuals. One dramatic example was the growth of "salons" of intellectuals in 1988-1989 which provided much of the thought and some of the organisational initiative behind the social mobilisation of early 1989. These operated through informal connections and meetings and intermittently through formal public events such as conferences and seminars. In the early 1990's, this form of informal association took a less explicitly political form, and operated through an increasingly dense system of networks of likeminded people (such as journalists, artists, rock musicians, homosexuals, artists, martial arts specialists), often focussing on specific locations such as clubs, karaoke parlours, dancehalls and bars as well as private homes. One particular area of expansion, for example, was that of women's groups. Some of these have found shelter as "second-level associations" under the formal auspices of an officially recognised social organisation (for example, the Women Journalists Association, the Women Entrepreneurs Association or the Women Mayors Association). Some of these have also been encouraged and protected by the official Women's Federation. But the early

1990's have also seen the emergence of informal, unrecognised women's groups without official sponsors, small salons which meet to discuss issues specific to women.  
26

Other associations include those in formation, which are intending to seek official recognition, those that are having difficulty obtaining registration and those that have failed the registration procedure. One example at the national level, observed in 1993, was the Green China Association, a small association devoted to environmental issues; at the local level, the Women Writers' Small Group in Xiaoshan city in Zhejiang province was in existence as of the time of our interview in mid 1991, but had not yet registered because of a fear on the part of the municipal Women's Federation that it would not pass the registration procedures.

On the urban scene, the growth of this interstitial world of semi-formal and informal forms of association was becoming denser in the mid-1990's, fostered by the social space and opportunities opened up by the breakneck pace of economic transformation during this period. Although this sphere is subject to periodic harassment, one can argue that the trend is becoming irreversible. Although much of this organisational activity takes non-political forms, yet (as in the case of cultural organisations before Tiananmen), it can become rapidly politicised in conducive circumstances and could form part of the basis for a repeated organisational upsurge along the lines of 1989. The key role in its expansion is being played by members of the intelligentsia and emergent professional strata, groups whose potential social influence is increasing as they become more integrated with the world of business through their growing propensity to "plunge into the sea" of commerce and industry.<sup>27</sup>

While the above phenomena would be characteristic of cities and larger towns, the rural areas have also seen a proliferation of semi-formal and informal associations throughout the reform era. These include traditional organisations based on lineage and clan, or ethnic group; Buddhist and Daoist religious groups based on existing, reconstructed and new temples and shrines; informal local "cliques" and brotherhoods; and local-place associations (**tongxianghui**), some of which have been transplanted to the cities where they provide an organisational basis for rural migrants.<sup>28</sup>

Some of these phenomena have caused concern to the local authorities: for example, when disputes between single-clan villages have led to armed fights between them;<sup>29</sup> when traditional religious practices have interfered with state policies (such as that of encouraging cremation over burial); or where local "cliques" and brotherhoods have become involved with gambling and other forms of crime. However, it is very common for local authorities, including Party officials, either to wink at the resurgence of these pre-revolutionary forms of association, or actively to support and even participate in them. Local officials may use these ties to strengthen their own authority and build up their locality. For example, Party officials in Moslem areas may promote religious revival to gain preferential policies from the state or to encourage potentially lucrative contacts with Islamic countries in the Middle East. Entrepreneurial local officials in coastal provinces with large migrant populations overseas use **tongxianghui** to encourage business contacts and attract capital from overseas Chinese.<sup>30</sup> These pre-revolutionary forms of social association do constitute a growing organisational sphere which embodies the basic characteristics of "civil society". However, as in the case of urban social organisations, the relationships between them and the local state varies a great deal, ranging from mutual suspicion and uneasy co-existence to active cooperation and mutual support.

#### (d) the suppressed sector: underground civil society

This sector of civil society is highly diverse, including a wide variety of political and social organisations as well as secret societies and other criminal organisations. The degree of official repression varies. In some case, it involves monitoring with

repression kept as an option in reserve. A document reportedly issued by the CCP in mid-1992, for example, drew attention to the rise of "spontaneous mass organisations which were neither officially reported to nor sanctioned by government organs" which required close surveillance. These included organisations such as the All-China Qigong Association, the National Alliance of Demobilised Servicemen of the Rural Areas, the Association of Urban Unemployed and the Association of Individual Households. While these kinds of organisation do not pose an explicit threat to the regime, they are perceived as potentially threatening because they have been organised independently and embody groups which could potentially cause trouble (notably demobilised soldiers who have a long history of self-organisation, going back to the Hundred Flowers Movement).<sup>31</sup>

Other organisations are classified as hostile agencies and are rigorously suppressed. Many of these are the heritage of the repression of June 4th. and its aftermath, when governments in Beijing and other cities took steps to identify and suppress organisations involved in the mobilisations of early-mid 1989.<sup>32</sup> However, there was already an accumulation of banned organisations before 1989 and others have appeared since. An internal document issued by the Ministry of Public Security in 1993 and leaked in the Hong Kong press, reported that, over the period from June 1986 to September 1992, the public security forces had banned 1,370 "illegal organisations of all kinds" and a further 69 had either voluntarily disbanded or surrendered to the police. In spite of these measures, however, the document reported that illegal organisations were still spreading "like a prairie fire". It directed particular attention to 62 "hostile forces opposing the socialist system", which included political and social organisations from the 1989 Democracy Movement (such as the National Autonomous Federation of Workers), and assorted "ultra-leftist reactionary" organisations, relics of the Maoist period, with names such as the Defend MaoZedong Doctrine Alliance and the Jiangxi Red Uprising Column. The list also included regional/ethnic organisations such as the Xinjiang Justice Party and the Independent Party of Inner Mongolia and religious organisations such as the China Christian Association and China Catholic Association.<sup>33</sup>

Religious sentiment spread rapidly in the early-mid 1990's in both urban and rural areas. Public opinion surveys reported an upsurge of interest in religion, particularly among young people. Religious organisations have proliferated in the early-mid 1990's - Christian, Islamic, Buddhist and Daoist - and the authorities responded with a mixture of repression, toleration and attempts to incorporate them into the officially recognised religious bodies. They have tried to crack down on "spontaneous churches", with limited success.<sup>34</sup> Regional policies towards grass-roots religious organisations have varied significantly, with authorities in Guangdong apparently showing more tolerance while other provinces such as Sichuan have been more repressive.<sup>35</sup>

There has apparently been a comparably rapid spread of secret societies and other criminal fraternities and gangs. A circular reportedly issued by the Ministry of Public Security in 1992 claimed that there were over 1,830 underworld organisations of various types, some of them having as many as 30,000 members and operating not only across regions but also internationally, particularly through cooperation with Triad organisations in Hong Kong.<sup>36</sup> These organisations are regarded as dangerous not merely because of their characteristic involvement in vice and crime, but also because of their overseas connections and their sporadic political involvements (for example, in smuggling Democracy Movement activists out of China after June 4).

In general, illegal organisations have spread rapidly in the early-mid 1990's and have clearly outrun the capacity or the inclination of the authorities to control them. While some of them, such as the criminal secret societies would be illegal under any form of political system, and some, such as remnant "ultra-leftist" and Democracy Movement organisations, represent a clear political challenge, the vast majority

represent the associational urges of a rapidly changing society which is increasingly restless and resentful of restrictions. The regime faces a Catch 22 situation: suppression is increasingly unfeasible and, even where effective, is often counter-productive; toleration will allow a widening range of organisations to increase their influence and exert stronger pressures for official recognition, thereby undermining the Party/state's capacity to maintain its institutional monopoly over society. This Catch 22 provides a powerful political dynamic towards not only the formation of civil society in terms of new social organisations, but also towards pressuring the authorities to change the political framework to provide some form of institutionalised guarantees for their existence and operational autonomy. How this might come about is one subject of our concluding section.

## C: CONCLUSIONS: THE NATURE OF CHINESE CIVIL SOCIETY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRATISATION

### (i) the utility of the concept of "civil society"

Using the sociological definition of "civil society" advanced at the beginning of this chapter, one can argue strongly that there is a strong and growing intermediate sphere of social association in China which embodies, in different ways and to differing degrees, the basic characteristics of a "civil society" - those of voluntary participation, self-regulation and separation from the state. It is equally true that this organisational realm is partial and incipient in the sense that very few of the organisations described embody these characteristics to the full, nor do they operate in a political context which guarantees them the right to do so. This emergent associational universe is very diverse, containing sectors which are both "traditional" and "modern",<sup>37</sup> urban and rural, national and grass-roots, political and non-political, progressive and reactionary, liberal and ultra-leftist, open and underground. They also vary widely in the types of relationship they have with the Party/state, ranging from the caged and incorporated sectors - the "mass organisations" and the new-style "social organisation" - through the interstitial, tolerated and monitored, to the suppressed. There is a kind of "core-periphery" arrangement with a relatively well-integrated core of caged and incorporated associations at the centre and a large and rapidly growing periphery of associations which are relatively fragmented and are kept so by the intervention of the Party/state.

Yet this sociological conception of civil society has its limitations. It tends to provide static "snapshots" of this complex social constellation and blind us to important elements of the reality. As a structural analysis, it tends to privilege formal association and needs to be set within the powerful social texturing of informal connections and networks which provides the underlying weave of Chinese social relationships across both state and society. It also needs to be related more explicitly to the changing nature of its basic institutional building blocks, particularly the traditional *danwei*, the new enterprises of the private, collective and joint-venture sectors and the proliferation of mass media.<sup>38</sup>

Yet to understand the development of civil society in contemporary China, we need to go beyond a structural analysis to investigate the dynamics of the process, as suggested in our initial distinction between the political and the market dynamics of civil society. The shifting constellation of intermediate associational life described above reflects the operation of both. The market dynamic opens up socio-economic space, endows social actors with resources and to power to use them; and makes state control over the socio-economic system more difficult. The political dynamic, operating in different ways according to the specific nature of the relationship between each sector or layer of social organisation and the state, draws strength from the social changes wrought by the market, operates within the increasing space created thereby and takes advantage of the diminishing capacities of the state to expand it still further. Each layer has its own dynamic: the balance of power within the incorporated layer is shifting gradually in favour of the societal component while the illegal layer is



worrying away at and weakening the coercive capacities of the Party/state. These movements suggest the image of tectonic plates shifting before an earth tremor.

In their different ways, these two dynamics are moving in a direction which presages major changes in the balance of power and the nature of the relationship between state and society in contemporary China. The Party/state's coping strategy - a combination of incorporation and repression - has channelled and staunched the rise of organised society, but was increasingly problematic as the pace of socio-economic change accelerated in the mid-1990's. As pressures from below have mounted yet not found adequate channels for expression and the tension between state and society has increased in consequence, the force of incipient civil society has increasingly taken on the form of spontaneous and sporadic bursts of activity - demonstrations, riots, protests, sit-ins, beatings and fights - in both urban and rural areas. This can itself be seen as an index of the lack of a fully institutionalised civil society in which organisations have the ability not merely to form and operate autonomously, but have the legally guaranteed right to represent the interests and concerns of their constituencies to the authorities. The image of a boiler building up a dangerous level of steam pressure is an apt one.

The dynamic of civil society in China is taking on the dimensions of an increasingly generalised contestation between state and society. Indeed, the intellectual paradigm of "civil society" owes much of its influence to the fact that it is an effective way to interpret this struggle for both analysts and practitioners alike. It is this very fact that "civil society" is an idea rooted in real political struggles which gives it its force but weakens its usefulness as a scientific concept. If we try to render the term serviceable as a social scientific concept, we drain it of its meaning. If we try to define it purely in sociological terms, the term becomes otiose and the social phenomena it refers to can equally well be labelled by some anodyne phrase such as "intermediate associations".

The sociological and political conceptions of "civil society" are in fact inextricable. Whether we approve of it or not, the very use of the term "civil society" involves us in an analytical exercise which may be both ethnocentric (qua rooted in expectations derived from the Western experience of civil society) and teleological (qua positing certain political consequences of a market economy and an intermediate associational sphere). As such, the idea has a heuristic value; rather than beating our breasts about ethnocentrism or teleology, it is worth embarking on an analysis of the politics of civil society, but with the awareness that our usual political expectations about the emergence of an intermediate associational sphere may be wrong or only partly right when applied to China.

## **(ii) Civil society and political change**

With this methodological caveat in mind, let us move to a discussion of the question we raised at the outset - the relationship between the rise of civil society as a sociological entity and the constitution of civil society as a political framework which legitimises the free operations of social associations through the rule of law and guaranteed civil and political rights (essentially some form of liberal democracy). Our analysis suggests that political change, when it comes, is likely to be an outcome of an increasingly intense and generalised struggle in an increasingly complex and conflictual society. This could lead in the direction of chaos and collapse rather than orderly transition to an alternative form of political society. Commonsense and comparative experience suggests that the latter transition - a process of political liberalisation or democratisation - can only be successfully achieved through political accommodation and agreement between key sets of political actors.<sup>39</sup> This partly depends on the availability of a reform leadership within the CCP which is willing to read the writing on the wall and come to terms with new socio-political forces through policy concessions and institutional changes. However, it also depends on the ability of influential social forces to come together and agree on the desirability of new political arrangements. This implies a capacity for social forces to play a **constitutive** role by



redefining the rules of the political game and underpinning their consolidation. Przeworski (1991: p.26) emphasises this point when he argues that "democracy is consolidated when compliance - acting within the institutional framework - constitutes the equilibrium of the decentralised strategies of all the relevant political forces".

However, the current character of China's incipient civil society makes such a smooth transition problematic because it is so diverse, fragmented and potentially anarchic. For example, while some of the underground political organisations may be in favour of liberal democracy, others advocate a return to Maoist politics or, in the case of ethnic separatist organisations, a break-up of the existing political community. Moreover, certain key potential counter-elites - most notably the new entrepreneurial class - have shown little interest in the prospect of radical political change because their interests are bound up with the stability of the current process of market reform under the auspices of an authoritarian regime with which they are deeply intermeshed.<sup>40</sup> In general, as Wang Shaoguang (1991) has pointed out, civil societies in general - and Chinese civil society in particular - are riven by conflicts and inequalities and have a potential for a wide variety of different types of politics, of which democracy is but one. The tendency towards idealisation, which pervades much of the intellectual and political discourse on civil society, must be resisted.

The ideological climate among political reformers in China has indeed moved in a more sober and conservative direction over recent years. After the radical political fervour of Tiananmen died away, there has been a gradually growing consensus that, if a process of political liberalisation and democratisation is to take place, it should be a gradual, managed process. This does not merely represent the desire of political elites either to cling to their power or go out gracefully (or at least comfortably). To a considerable extent it also represents the fears and conflicts of China's incipient civil society: the new entrepreneurial class worries that radical political change might lead to instability, mass rule or a recalcitrant labour force; the industrial working class fears that it might lead to a rapid erosion of its relatively privileged position in society, and greater insecurity and exploitation by capital; intellectuals fear that it could either lead to chaos or rule by an illiterate numerical majority. Paradoxically, considerations of this kind lead one to suspect that civil society in its current form may be an obstacle rather than an impetus to democratisation and that, like the Soviet precedent, a successful political transition, if indeed it can be achieved, will need to be sponsored and organised by reformist elements within the current political elite.

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## FOOTNOTES

- 1 For a recent example of the latter, see Paul Hirst (1994) who argues the case for "associative democracy". For a valuable review of the "civil society argument" by a United States political theorist advocating "critical associationalism", see Walzer (1992).
- 2 For a review of the role played by civil society in Eastern Europe and other communist countries in the 1980's, see Miller (1992).
- 3 I have discussed the relationship between civil society and democratisation in developing countries in White (1994).
- 4 A recent review by Ma (1994) contains references on most of the relevant theoretical discussions as well as providing a useful overview of the views of Chinese intellectuals. Gu (1993-94) provides a valuable overview and assessment of the debates over "civil society" and the "public sphere" in Western work on China.
- 5 For an example of this approach, see Whyte 1992.
- 6 The use of more theoretically focussed approaches can also prove valuable in throwing light on the political dynamics of the reform era: for example, Sullivan's use of a Rousseauian approach (1990) and the debate about the applicability of Habermas' notion of the "public sphere" in the special edition of the magazine **Modern China** edited by Philip Huang (1993).
- 7 This article draws on the findings of a collective research project (also involving Jude Howell and Shang Xiaoyuan) which investigated the market dynamic of civil society through fieldwork in China during 1991-93. The research focussed primarily on the urban sector and on two types of organisations - official "mass organisations" and new-style "social organisations". Our work on these two types of organisation has enabled us to come to a judgement about the analytical value of the civil society approach and has also led to a preliminary mapping of the broader constellation of associational life in contemporary China, pointing out directions for future research. For an analysis of our research findings by one of the team, see Howell 1994.
- 8 For an excellent analysis of the social dynamics of this movement, see Heilmann 1993-94.
- 9 For analyses of the rise of "civil society" in the Democracy Movement of early-mid 1989, see Ostergaard 1989 and Gold 1990. For a skeptical view about the significance of "civil society" in 1989, see Walder 1989a).
- 10 Over the entire post-revolutionary period, the political dynamic of civil society mobilisation has an ambiguous relationship with the oscillation between periods of political control ( **shou**) and relaxation (**fang**) which has characterised relations between state and society in post-revolutionary China. Some upsurges have come about as a response to prolonged periods of **shou** (the 1976 April Fifth Movement, for example) while others have been stimulated by periods of **fang** (notably during the Hundred Flowers Movement in 1956-57 and the Democracy Movement in 1978-79). The reform era itself has its own oscillations between **shou** and **fang**; for an overview of the dynamics of **shou** and **fang**, see Gold 1990.
- 11 Though there were elements of this alliance during the mobilisation of 1989, they were still fairly inchoate. However, the continuing spread of market relations lays the foundations for a repetition, in much stronger form, of this alliance in some future context of political turmoil.
- 12 During 1993 and 1994, warnings about mounting social unrest were mounting on all sides. For one account from an official youth journal, for example, see Liu Dafu, "The key to unshakeableness for 100

years is unshakeableness for 10 years", *Zhongguo Qingnian* (Chinese Youth), no.1, 1993, excerpts of which are translated in BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts: Far East* (hereafter **SWB:FE**), 1668.

13 To understand the shifting patterns of accommodation and adjustment between state institutions/officials and social forces/interests, we would need to trace both the dynamics of economic and cultural policy and the formation of informal networks linking the denizens of state and society along lines of common interest.

14 For an account published by the Hongkong press, see Lin Musen, "A CCP document reaffirms the Tiananmen massacre", *Cheng Ming*, 1 February 1992, in **SWB:FE**, 1305. Other, more reformist, CCP leaders such as Wan Li were allegedly more sympathetic to the idea of autonomous student organisations in 1989: for example, see Lo Ping, "Wan Li on the June 4 Lesson", *Cheng Ming*, 1 June 1993, pp.12-13, in **SWB:FE**, 1706.

15 For a thoughtful application of the notion of corporatism to contemporary China, see Unger and Chan 1993.

16 A text of the Regulations was published in *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily) on 9 November 1989 and is translated in **SWB:FE** 0621.

17 For a comprehensive report on the changing functions of industrial trade associations prepared by the Industrial Economics Association, see "Fully affirm the important status of industrial trade associations in a socialist market economic system", published in the journal of the Chinese Construction Industry Association, *Jiancunhui Bao* (Construction Association News), no. 6, 1993.

18 For an account of the fluctuations in the status of the trade-unions in the pre-Cultural Revolution period, see Harper 1969.

19 For a detailed analysis of this local case-study, see White 1993.

20 For these statistics, see "New regulations for registering social organisations", *Xinhua* (New China News Agency), 31 October 1989 and an interview with officials of the Social Organisations Management Office, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, Beijing, in October 1993.

21 For a detailed description and analysis of "social organisations", see White, Howell and Shang (forthcoming: chap.2).

22 If a social organisation is unable to secure an official organisation as sponsor, it is prevented from registering. For example, in the city of Shenyang, the Football Fans Association was unable to get the local Sports Association to sponsor its application for official recognition.

23 For English texts of these laws, which were adopted by a meeting of the National People's Congress Standing Committee on 31 October 1993, see **SWB:FE** 0308 and 0309.

24 For a report on the expansion of private schools in Beijing, for example, see the report in *Xinhua* (New China News Agency), 23 March 1994, in **SWB:FE**, 1984.

25 For a report on the demand for legal protection by lawyers in Guangdong province, see *Lian He Bao*, Hongkong, 10 December 1993, in **SWB:FE**, 1872.

26 For more detail on these groups, see White, Howell and Shang (1995), Chap.5.

27 For analyses of the relationship between intellectuals and the emergence of this new associational sphere, see Kelly and He (1992) and Bonnin and Chevrier (1991).

28 In Beijing, for example, a number of new "villages" have appeared, housing part of the city's estimated 1.5 million "floating population". They have names such as "Xinjiang Village", "Zhejiang

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Village" and "Henan Village" based on the regional origins of the migrants living there. ( **Xinhua**, 14 July 1993).

29 For example, an official in the Judicial Department of the Zengcheng county government in Guangdong province, interviewed in March 1994, admitted that fights between single-clan villages posed a threat to public order in the county.

30 This practice was recently observed by the author during a field-visit to Zengcheng county in Guangdong province in March-April 1994.

31 Yang Po, "CCP takes strict precautions against 'rebellion' by non-governmental mass organisations", **Cheng Ming**, 8 June 1992, in **SWB:FE**, 1409.

32 For a valuable survey of these organisations, see Walder (n.d.).

33 "On cases of underground illegal organisations cracked and banned or surrendering themselves to the police over recent years", reported in **Cheng Ming**, Hongkong, 1 January 1993, in **SWB:FE**, 1581.

34 For attempts to control national-level religious organisations, see Lu Yusha, "Tension in spring - utmost 'solicitude' is shown for national churches", **Tangtai**, Hongkong, 15 June 1994, in **SWB:FE**, 2028.

35 For the Sichuan case, see **Zhongguo Xinwenshe** (China News Agency), Beijing, 25 March 1993 (in **SWB:FE**, 1964) which reports a change of policy in the direction of religious liberalisation after a decade of conflict and repression.

36 "Circular on Resolutely Banning and Cracking Down on the Organisations and Activities of Secret Societies", reported in **Cheng Ming**, Hongkong, 1 May 1992, in **SWB:FE**, 1385.

37 The mention of "traditional" and "modern" raises the usual question about the extent to which currently emergent civil society represents something new or a resurgence of pre-revolutionary social forms. Some of the new organisations emerging in the countryside seem to be clear examples of resurgence, though some of them are being used for new purposes. Moreover, the incorporated sector of "social organisations", marking an interpenetration of the realms of state and society, is redolent of the "third realm" which Huang (1993) holds to be a perduring characteristic of Chinese social structure. This writer is skeptical of both the notion and the reality of the "third realm", but a proper discussion of this thesis is beyond the bounds of this paper. For a review of different scholarly positions on the issue of historical continuity, see Gu (1993-94: 42-47).

38 The **danwei** was an important matrix of social mobilisation both for the April 5th. Movement of 1976 and the Democracy Movement of 1989. For the changing nature of the **danwei**, see Hebel and Schucher 1991 and numerous pieces by Andrew Walder (for example 1989). For a thought-provoking analysis of a collective enterprise as part of an emergent civil society, analogous to my analysis of the dual character of the incorporated new-style "social organisations", see Yang 1989.

Many authors remind us, moreover, of the crucial role of social and political animator played by certain companies (notably the Stone Corporation) and research institutions in the pre-Tiananmen mobilisation (for example, Whyte 1992 and He 1993).

39 For comparative experience on the political dynamics of democratic transitions, see O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead 1986 and Huntington 1991.

40 This point is made cogently by Solinger (1992).





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