GOVERNANCE, DOMESTIC CHANGE, AND SOCIAL POLICY IN CHINA

100 Years After The Xinhai Revolution

Edited by

Jean-Marc F. Blanchard and Kun-Chin Lin

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Governance, Domestic Change, and Social Policy in China in Historical Perspective

Kun-Chin Lin and Jean-Marc F. Blanchard

Ending over two millennia of imperial rule, the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty, Puyi, abdicated on 12 February 1912, ceding sovereignty to the military strongman Yuan Shi-kai and to Sun Yat-sen who had been elected the first Provisional President of the Republic of China (ROC) the month before. One hundred years later, on 15 November 2012, Xi Jinping assumed the paramount leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the world's largest standing army, and the Presidency of the People's Republic of China (PRC) four months later. Commandeering the world's largest economy in gross domestic product by the end of 2014 (Fray 2014),[1] President Xi proclaimed a "China Dream" that boldly speaks for the average Chinese's in aspiring for improved life chances and quality of life, defended externally by projections of a strong nationhood and military (BBC 2012).

In the passing century of political interregnum, successive Chinese leaders and regimes have promised consistently to provide a better governance

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framework and more effective government support for the eternally challenging livelihood of the Chinese populace—from Sun Yat-sen's "Three Principles of the People"–inspired by the ideals of contemporary American progressive movement to build a modern administrative state to serve the common man–to Mao Zedong's brand of revolutionary politics and social mobilisation that aimed to transform the material basis of peasants and proto-working class under the Soviet model of industrialisation, to Deng Xiaoping's invitation to entrepreneurs and households to "get rich first" in reorienting the Chinese workforce to produce for global capitalism. After two and half decades of rapid growth, Deng's call for a "*xiaokang*" (moderately prosperous households) society was brought back into the core reform agenda of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, whose call for a "harmonious society" was predicated on improving social equity and justice against the rising tide of political privileges and market pressures (Zhao 2013). Although China had succeeded in lifting some 680 million people out of poverty between 1981 and 2010, by 2012 the country's Gini coefficient had reached 0.474 with one-third of the country's private wealth now concentrated in the hands of one per cent of its citizens (*The Economist* 2013; Kaiman 2014).

This volume offers original research and distilled reflections from the conference, "100 Years after the 1911 Chinese Revolution: Reflections and Forecasts," which we organised under the auspices of the Association of Chinese Political Studies (ACPS) and the King's China Institute, on June 17–19, 2011.[2] We adopt a historical approach in examining common social, political and environmental challenges, such as those mentioned above, between the contemporary period and the Xinhai revolution, through identifying similarities in how reformers addressed governance shortcomings and specific ways contemporary social organisations and policy entrepreneurs contributed to the institutional and policy adaptive process initiated by the ruling party and state apparatus at different levels of the administrative hierarchy.[3]

One Hundred Years of Domestic Governance in China

The bookends for China's post-dynastic century cannot be more different at first glance. Seven decades into the "century of humiliation" at the hands of encroaching Western and Japanese powers, China in 1912 faced imperialist threats, civil war, and a dysfunctional system of multitier bureaucracy

over an increasingly desperate population. The fragile Republic was hardly prepared to handle these challenges, paving the way for infighting within the ruling Kuomintang party (KMT), widespread discontent, and opportunities for the Communists to win hearts and territories. In 2012, the PRC was riding high in international market and political influence in the face of a declining West, had heralded in another bloodless leadership succession in the last great Leninist party-state, and showed numerous signs of "authoritarian resilience" in coping with domestic socioeconomic problems (Nathan 2003).

Underlying these differences, however, we argue that the leaders then and now confronted common challenges critical to modern state-building on the basis of dramatically changing state-society relations: national identity formation and regime legitimation, economic development, and demand for social equality and justice (Blanchard and Lin 2013).[4]

National Identity Formation and Regime Legitimation

Major scholars such as William Callahan, Orville Schell and John Delury, Susan Shirk, and Zheng Yongnian have underlined the continuing psychological trauma of the "one hundred years of humiliation" on the Chinese elite and masses (Callahan 2012; Schell and Delury 2013; Shirk 2008; Zheng 1999). To get rid of the chip on their shoulder, the Chinese pushed hard to achieve economic parity with the West and assert their own brand of ideological and political principles in ruling the world's largest population. Yet the continuity in a meta-narrative of national strengthening masks significant fluidities in notions of sovereignty, hierarchy in Asian interstate relations, China's status vis-à-vis the West, and popular nationalism. The fall of the Qing in 1911 ushered in the New Culture Movement which was to culminate in the May Fourth Movement of 1919, critically assessing China's cultural uniqueness and superiority, and opening up intellectual inquiries into cosmopolitan solutions to China's malaises (Mitter 2005; Spence 1983). Anti-imperialism and mass nationalism eventually took over the public discourse of the KMT and CCP, which Lucian Bianco and Chalmers Johnson have argued were critical to enable mobilisation for the CCP's success in civil war and the Communist revolution to follow (Bianco 1971; Johnson 1962; Mitter 2014).

Interestingly, whereas the KMT and CCP vied to appropriate the living memory of the May Fourth Movement, the post-Mao PRC government

has suppressed popular movements as witnessed in the 1979 Democracy Wall crackdown, the crackdown on student demonstrations in 1986–87, and the crushing of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. It subsequently banned in public discourse any serious reassessment of these events in terms of China's long-term political development.

In 2012, we arguably witnessed a further narrowing of the public debate over national identity broadly construed. With the "China Dream," Xi swept aside Hu and Wen's flirtations with neo-Confucian justifications for social obedience and bureaucratic allegiance within a patrimonial framework (Shue 2011: 751–72). Instead, a "Legalist" slant is reflected in Xi Jinping's anti-corruption purges and tightened control over the media and critical social groups (Fu 1994; Stockmann and Gallagher 2011). At the same time, the New Left has been muted with the dramatic downfall of Bo Xilai and the Chongqing experiment (Brown 2014).[5]

While China is not humiliated or facing extinction by colonialism today, it faces no less powerful external normative pressures, for example, international regimes and norms enforced by Western powers, triumph of neoliberal market economic ideology, and strong military alliances cordoning its periphery (Blanchard and Lin 2013: 151–7). The domestic debates over containment, leftist critique of marketisation and adaptation of Western models of law, corporate forms, citizenship and welfare provisions, and so on, echo the debates that divided public intellectuals and provoked a conservative backlash against reforms in Qing's final decades (Levenson 1958). Today, these normative pressures have somewhat lessened with the decline of the Washington Consensus and the economic malaise of Western powers (Halper 2010; Kennedy 2010: 461–77; Dickson 2011: 39–58; Ferchen 2013: 390–420). Nonetheless, a focus on the subjective experience expressed in the public discourse may draw a better historical analogy than an attempt at identifying objective similarities.

Looking outwards, a "triumphalist" foreign policy stance urged on by military interests and popular nationalist sentiments has fueled sovereignty and maritime territorial disputes with Japan, Philippines and Vietnam (Shi 2014). Moreover, while China's current capabilities enable it to move beyond its historically limited foreign policy options, Chinese policymakers remain bound to a long-term self-image and cultural identity which undermine its readiness to assume numerous roles as a responsible great power (Blanchard and Lin 2013: 145–69).

The CCP's attempt to exert leverage over popular opinion and social interests takes place in the backdrop of an unprecedented degree of global

influences. As in the first three decades of the 1900s, China is exposed on innumerable fronts. PRC's foreign trade dependency is higher in the twenty-first century than in the first two decades of Dengist reform. In the Republican era, Frank Dikötter (2008) documented an admirable cohort of great diplomats, lawyers and scientists who registered Chinese "soft-power" abroad, massive numbers of students studying overseas, and the exchange of ideas and debates on a large scale throughout China. Much the same is true today for foreign education-seeking Chinese youth and globetrotting academics. Institutionally, Chinese reforms borrow selectively from Western legal codes and corporate practices to achieve strategic benefits for domestic interests and maintain government's leverage over the social impact of a shift toward rule by law (Lubman 2012).

There can be no net characterisation of the complex effects of the multifaceted, trans-national interactions on popular political attitudes and policy pressures then and now. Assessing the past decade, Kerry Brown sees the overall trend as toward a lessening of the importance of elite opinions in the midst of the proliferation of different voices within and across China's national, ethnic, and political boundaries. If so–and as with Chiang Kai-shek's China–the domineering, restrictive instinct of an authoritarian regime would be significantly qualified. Of course, Hu Jintao shaped and Xi Jinping is shaping national identity and core values in the position of relative political unity and organisational strength vis-à-vis domestic and international challengers, rather than Chiang's position of domestic divisions and dependency on foreign support (Blanchard 2015: 1–16).[6] Yet, common to both, their success in legitimation depends not only on ideological persuasion or the charisma of the national leader, but also on the broader criteria of targeted coercion and cooptation, economic performance and social welfare delivery.

Pitfalls in Economic Development

Another important commonality between 1912 and 2012 is the elite agenda to seek a new model of economic development, deriving from a general consensus on the increasingly prohibitive costs of relying on the older model of growth and commercial success. Drivers and mechanisms of growth that had been seen as tried-and-true eventually became liabilities.

The dynastic Chinese political economy was marked by a long period of commercial success up to the eighteenth century, based on labour-intensive

household innovations in agriculture and handicraft production, a segmentation of the state-sponsored monopolies and family-organised private enterprises, and global trading networks organised by the Chinese diaspora and Western trading companies (Arrighi 2009). The Qing government's decline indicated the low extractive benefits and weak market competitiveness of this economic governance model compared to the rapid capital accumulation of industrialised Western and Japanese powers.

Having debated approaches to reform and opening in the immediate post-Mao decade, China once again finds itself reaching the limits of the labour-intensive, cost-based and export-oriented industrialisation with the government playing the role of profligate spending in support of large industries with low returns (Solinger 1993). In the twenty-first century, the financial repression at home is further linked to land-based revenue schemes of the local governments and to uneven human resource development due to low wages and flawed unemployment and retraining systems (He et al. 2014; Frazier 2006). Reflected in the regional and sectoral rebalancing in Hu-Wen's Five-Year Plans and in the focus on innovation and competition in state-dominated sectors in Xi-Li's new economic reform agenda, Chinese leaders are striving for a new growth model. Whether this desired change can be engineered or will come as an outcome of a series of policy failures is the central question in the numerous analyses of China's "soft-landing." As Dwight Perkins (2013) has pointed out, as other high-growth Asian economies have exhibited various systemic failures since the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, China has embarked on its unique departure from the common path, through a great leap or through stumbling along (Whyte 2009: 371–92).

Comparative studies of market transition have identified a neoliberal paradox that effective systemic reform requires a strong state (Pickles and Smith 1998). One could readily interpret state-market relations since 1993 through the same perspective. Through Zhu Rongji's banking reform, corporatisation and privatisation of state-owned enterprises, accession to the World Trade Organization, urban land reform, the launch of the welfare state, beefed up industrial policies in key sectors, a new framework to promote Chinese outward direct investment, and up to today's call for the internationalisation of the Renminbi, Chinese reformers have continually retooled the powerful legacy of state domination of the national economy (Yang 2004; Eichengreen 2011: 723–30; Lin 2012: 73–84; Blanchard 2013: 263–86).

At the same time, local governments have remained critical contributors to economic and social development. Consequent to the 1994 tax

reform, local states have faced constant pressures to engineer growth with relatively diminished revenue shares, leading to variations and distortions in policy implementation in key areas such as environmental protection, education, healthcare and welfare provisions (Shue and Wong 2008). One could even argue that the State Council's industrial policies have displaced local experiments and models as the dominant approach to sectoral upgrading and institutional innovations (Heilmann 2008: 1–26; Heilmann and Shih 2013). Yet it is premature to assign local states a passive role in terms of the degree of compliance to Beijing's preferences. The Maoist and Dengist legacies of rural mobilisation, bottom-up reform initiatives, and regional profiles in cultural and institutional templates for governance remain much in evidence per subnational political economic studies (Chung 2000; Chung and Lam 2010; Lin and Chen 2013: 171–98).

Recognising the centrality of inter-governmental relations in China's enduring and evolving multi-tier governance framework, and paying attention to informal dynamics at the different institutional levels as well between agency and structure over periods of decentralising or re-centralisation, enable us to make a strong and logical link between the Republican-era and China today. As Julia Strauss (1997: 329–51) has argued, the Republican era witnessed substantial state-building, in particular via relatively insulated, technocratic institutions in key functions of finance, water conservancy, and natural resource extraction. Concurrently, subnational governments kept alive public services and late-Qing reform agenda while the central government suffered political paralysis or arbitrary personal exercises of power (Remick 2004). These efforts did not depend on clear and stable federalist divisions or high-powered material incentives for local officials.[7] Even today, local officials are struggling to determine how to balance the demand of their political superiors with the needs of their constituencies, to find ways to finance public goods, to cope with the negative externalities of industrialisation and urbanisation, and to introduce mechanisms for political pluralisation and governmental accountability.

Social Equity and Justice

In 1912 and 2012, one could argue that the political likelihood for a "dual transition" in economic system and political regime has been undermined. In ceding the presidency of the Republic of China to Yuan

Shi-kai, Sun Yat-sen allowed conservative politics to determine the stability of the new republic. Although constitutional reform proceeded under Generalissimo Chiang, the systemic impact on electoral competition and broader enfranchisement was severely circumscribed. The consolidated elite political consensus after the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown similarly ruled out any political institutional change that posed significant risks to the party-state hegemony. Despite a lack of coherent ideology or clearly articulated political platform for securing popular legitimacy and representing social interests, Chinese leaders have regularly expressed commitments to improve social equity and justice for the general public. What remains unsaid—but crucial in engineering the necessary redistribution—is that these official promises are predicated on coercive measures to dis-embed preexisting state-society relations.

Wang Hui (2006) and Wang Shaoguang (2008: 15–47) among others have pointed to social issues as the Achilles' heel of the reform efforts of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao (Journal of Democracy 2003: 36–42; Lessons from the Progressive Era of the United States 2002). To the extent that Chiang largely disregarded the social bases of peasant misery and urban labour exploitation in Republican China, his economic policies had also perpetuated socioeconomic inequalities (Bianco 1971). Mao Zedong addressed regional inequalities in his attempt to move away from the Soviet model, but Deng effectively favoured coastal regions in shifting focus to light industries. Both leaders' preoccupation with rapid industrialisation produced an entrenched urban-bias in the developmental model. Rather than blaming marketisation for increasing income inequality, Kun-chin Lin and Tao Ran (2013) have identified recent sources of inequalities as endogenous to this urban-bias growth model, locked in with institutional rigidities such as household land tenure system and the local government control of land-use rights (Ogden, ed.). Popular resentment of increasing income disparity attributes blame to official abuses of power and to state-protected monopolistic firms, signaling a political critique of the strong state's management of economic transition. In other words, redistribution is not a goal that can be inserted into current central-local relations and broader governance arrangements without entailing fundamental tradeoffs. The Chongqing model under Bo Xilai–aborted, whether for its own sake or as collateral damage from the highest level of elite struggle–reflected a broader debate within the party-state hierarchy over acceptable departures from the precarious equilibrium.

STATIST AND SOCIETAL PROVISIONS OF GOVERNANCE

The central perspective of the volume is informed by the enduring agenda proposed by Joel Migdal, Atul Kohli, and Vivienne Shue in *State Power and Social Forces* (Cornell University Press 1994), of going beyond the state-and-society or state-vs.-society frameworks of statist and pluralist paradigms of politics. That volume proposed focusing on the interstices in state-society relations, as mediated by changing social and economic trends and typically piecemeal institutional mechanisms. In application to Chinese politics, the concept of interstices suggests four major expectations that are particularly applicable to comparative historical analysis:

1. Conflicts and compromises are struck in multiple arenas of contention, even between recognisable state actors and societal interests over a stable issue area such as welfare provision;
2. Organised social interests such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) do not intrinsically seek autonomy or resist extension of state leverages over their operations;
3. State power stems directly from the evolving social structures, hence the notion of the "state in society;"
4. Attempts by the state to carve out social spaces that it deems advantageous to its control imperatives often lead to unintended social responses.

Vivienne Shue (1990) has pointed out that historically these state-societal negotiations over overlapping jurisdictions and joint actions have led to the reframing and mobilisation of societal forces in unpredictable ways. Some pathways have led to nascent dynamics of a civil society; others may produce deleterious effects on social equality and substantive notions of equal citizenship such as factionalism or neo-traditional patron-clientelism. Subsequent development of this line of thinking emphasises the mutual constituting nature of statist and societal interests, which goes beyond the formal identifications and legal-legislative categories or even differentiations by socioeconomic structures. As Timothy Mitchell (1991: 78) argues: "the distinction must be taken not as the boundary between two discrete entities, but as a line drawn internally within a network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained."

How then, does one interpret outcomes of state-society interactions? To avoid functionalist explanations based on a simplifying

assumption of pragmatism driving the mutual agreement of statist and societal actors, it is important to situate the interactions in the changing structural context as well as to accept the failure of accommodation as a common outcome. Moreover, failure does not vindicate opposition. For example, the dismantling of the social patronage functions of the state-owned enterprises in the late-1990s and early-2000s had generated contentious politics that do not fall strictly along class lines. The direction and level of demand of welfare claims made by unemployed workers adapted to shifts in relative importance of the permanent labor force, changing contractual terms of employment, organisational changes within the firm, and different resource profiles of SOEs and local governments. Discontent workers deployed varied strategies including group protests, appeals, informal liaisons and lobbying of former managers, sabotage, and so on. Their inability to affect their livelihood in the short-run had little to do with the degree of open resistance to statist actions and ideological stances, and more to do with the limitations of these strategic options under the pressures of recentralisation of industrial relations and property rights by Beijing (Gold et al. 2009; Kuruvilla et al. 2011).

In short, it is essential to situate state-society relations within the changing governance order at national and local levels, while assessing the independent effects of varying mechanisms and networks for individual and group actions in altering relational possibilities within the order. The empirical chapters of this edited volume develop the above lines of inquiry. In addition, the analysis of state-society relations is placed in a unique historical context of modern China that explicitly juxtaposes the period around the collapse of the Qing dynasty with the recent phase of Chinese reform since the late-1990s. Our chapter authors share the focus on three related statist projects: First, the initiation of a government-sponsored system of social welfare provision commensurate with a renewed sense of social contract and citizenship, and instrumental to address the vast regional and class inequalities in China. However, the system would also sponsor traditional forms of philanthropy to enhance the legitimacy of social elites working hand-in-hand with the mandarins.

Second, in Jean-Louis Rocca's (2003: 1) terms, the post-Qing rulers and the contemporary Chinese reformers are engaged in the "societalization of the state … In other words, political life is more and more centered on 'domestic' problems (income, investment, employment, etc.) while the control of the state on society is gradually increasing."

The Republican government had a handful of challenges of macroeconomic and fiscal management, regional development, industrial and trade policies, infrastructure building, and reinforcement of social order. Today, problems deriving from rapid output growth and incentive misalignments at the local levels in an authoritarian political system have prompted Beijing to introduce measures of intra-party accountability and transparency, and promote broader societal stake-holding in the diverse forms of media liberalisation, self-regulating industries and associational life, and formal mechanisms of local elections and more assertive legislative bodies.

Third, sharing the mindset of the late-Qing and Republican reformers, the post-Mao Chinese decision-makers first saw regime survival as intrinsically tied to the central state's ability to forge new capacities to support rapid industrialisation and integration with the world economy. Over time, the elite achieved a more subtle and subversive understanding which suggests that economic performance alone cannot provide lasting legitimacy and social order. Additional coercive power is then desirable, couched in different applications of the regulatory state, the welfare state, the just state, and the fiscally responsible state with redistributive prowess. Our state-society perspective critical reflects on the emerging literature on the re-centralisation of state capacities since the late-1990s.[8] The empirical chapters find positive signs of state activism in crafting new social space and terms of engagement, at the same time they find social forces at work in parallel and in contradiction to the recentralisation momentum.

Our original empirical research fits into a productive line of historical and contemporary social scientific enquiries of China since 2000. Elizabeth Perry and colleagues have produced several precedent volumes for the Harvard Contemporary China Studies series, with the latest co-edited volume, *Mao's Invisible Hand* (2011) revisiting experiments in policy generation and implementation dating to the revolution and early PRC for the roots of contemporary methods of "adaptive governance."[9] In our chapters, we also suggest that current reforms in minimum livelihood guarantee, promotion of charities, mega-infrastructures that reshape the relationship of man and nature, and new forms of political competition and accountability all pick up where the Republican government had left off. This is not to suggest that current reformers are consciously following in their predecessors' footsteps, but rather that there are useful analogies to be drawn on the basic nature of challenges, sustainability of statist solutions, and effects on state-societal dynamics.

Chapter Synopsis

We push the historical analogies of the above state-in-society analysis through original studies on issue areas of basic livelihood welfare provisions, political institutional reforms, and natural resource and disaster management. Two chapters address each issue area, representing the dynamics of state action and societal response seen through reflections on both historical periods. It becomes clear that a central premise of today's institutional reform is that a more sharply delineated and more circumspect "reach of the state"–in Vivienne Shue's (1990) conception—is often desirable. Yet as the political patrons and bureaucratic supervisors espouse an ideology of mutual empowerment with political constituencies, philanthropic organisations and NGOs, the inner logic of the Communist party-state vitiates against a paradigm shift away from and reliable benefits for societal participation. The case studies in the volume consistently identify unintended consequences of state interventions and fluidity of the social bases for identification and action, leading to varying returns to state-led institutional innovations.

The Chinese Welfare State, Past and Present

The construction of the welfare state in contemporary China is a critical project for the survival of the Chinese Communist party-state, and would represent the historical completion of the central reform agenda of the Republican and Maoist government. It also deviates from the world historical trend in the dismantling of the European welfare states and failed start-up efforts in developing countries outside of the Asian region (*The Economist* 2012). Daniel Hammond's chapter examines conditions and motivations for central governmental interventions in welfare provision in the 1990s and since 2007, noting that a critical shift in the source of welfare provision from urban work units to the local government in the 1990s had resulted in variable and contentious outcomes, requiring Beijing's change of approach. However, it took a decade for the central government to get around fiscal constraints, exhaustion of other methods such as retraining of unemployed workers, and organisational and institutional barriers to assert a national welfare model of "minimum livelihood guarantee" (MLG). In the meantime, Shanghai and Guangdong had followed different trajectories in local experiments with MLG, leaving Beijing to "do the right thing" in compensating for free-riding local states

that have been laggards in putting up requisite resources for the MLG. An equilibrium might have been reached by 2008 with central-local state cost sharing stabilising at 50–50, which posed a fiscal limit on the expansion of the MLG coverage in times of economic downturn in 2009–11. In short, in recent years the recipient numbers seem to have been controlled in order to boost per capita welfare expenditure, given the very limited additional total expenditure increases. If so, Beijing's goal of standardisation of national provision could be undermined by rising disparities in individual and regional coverage.

The benefits of comparative historical and local state perspectives become clear in Hammond's discussions shifting official and societal notions of the deserved vs. undeserved poor–a public discourse carried over from the Republican era to today, with direct implications on varying definitions of the targeted group for state subsidies and the official measurements of the poor and needy. Moreover, as these public policy categories have not gained the entrenched political status and broad-based social consensus in European welfare states, Chinese welfare provisions across regions have been inconsistent and subject varyingly to contingent pressures such as urbanisation, inflation, local policy entrepreneurship and higher-level official championship, and local state administrative and fiscal capacities.

Even as the current welfare projects require primarily state agencies, Chinese reformers have leaned on the private sector to co-sponsor and mediate social relations, harking back to the historical record of societal self-organisation and philanthropy. Gerda Wielander makes a strong case for the relative autonomy of NGOs in various dimensions including ideological and institutional, even as they sought to comply with the politicians' call for the private sector to help the poor in the context of lackluster local official inputs and increasing burden on central financing. Wielander characterises NGO governance as being subject to control from above, but by selective agreement. The story of Amity, one of China's oldest charitable organisations, shows that one should not forget that NGOs are not just about pragmatism in dealing with the state, but also about adaptive ways–in various means of negotiated compliance with official goals, bureaucratic logic, notions of citizenship, and foreign influence–to sustain a non-state ideology that provides the fundamental inspiration for the founders. In this way, one can link the behaviour of social organisations in the 1920s to the *modus operandi* of independent Chinese publications in the 1980s. Both reference points provide evidence that overlap and

co-operation between official and non-official organisations as we see it in China today is consistent with previous Chinese approaches and is actively sought by social organisations to ensure the success of their projects.

Amity's 'NGO Training Centre' is a critical case study of contemporary attempts to bring grassroots initiatives within the realm of the state. The training centre incubates NGOs for registration with the Ministry of Civil Affairs to apply for government funding. While accepting the government agenda, the centre strives to apply it in ways that offer some autonomy and creativity for the activists engaged with local urban development or rural environmental protection and post-disaster recovery. At the same time, the centre develops expertise and grassroots networks, which will improve leverage with the government by creating value-added to their continuing relationship.

Do the historical continuities in state-society relations suggest a unique Chinese model of paternalistic state? As Nick Young (2004) pointed out, the amphibious nature of NGOs is not particular to China. But the consistency of the statist welfare project across post-dynastic regimes and its particular form of societal contributions *together* make for a distinctive experience.

Governing the Man-Nature Relationship

It has often been said that Chinese modernity has been most unkind to China's fragile ecology (Economy 2004; Elvin 2004; Ho 2003). Rapid industrialisation and the ever-growing need for power generation have particularly stressed its scarce water resources. Over the course of the twentieth century the Middle Yangzi region experienced three catastrophic floods, in 1931, 1954, and 1998. Chris Courtney's chapter uses these mega-floods as a prism through which to examine the changing practice, representation, and popular perception of disaster governance in Hubei Province. It describes how a lack of investment in the hydraulic network and a narrow focus upon military objectives weakened the official response to the 1931 flood. It examines archival evidence and oral history testimony to question the generally positive assessment that historians have of the 1954 flood, demonstrating that the disaster resulted in five times as many fatalities as has been acknowledged previously. Finally, this chapter argues that, although the response to the 1998 disaster represented a considerable improvement in governance, the flood itself was exacerbated by long-term unsustainable environmental policies. In other words,

Courtney finds continuity in human misery as the result of inadequate state provisions for flood prevention and disaster relief.

China's mega-dams and other grand infrastructure projects have received significant scholarly attention through the lens of bureaucratic politics and developmental prioritisation, but in recent years the focus has broadened to consider social group, corporate, and NGO influences in the policy implementation process (Mertha 2008; Wu 2003; Ho 2003: 37–59). Taking James Scott's incisive perspective on state projects, Sabrina Habich reconsiders whether the CCP had "simplified" the modernist justifications for dam projects upon assuming power, or if it had actually build on the templates developed by its predecessors. Her chapter helps us think about how the framing of functional-developmental goals of generating power for industrialisation matter to the transformation of local processes and outcomes in the balance of power between the state and society and among societal forces, the ideological barriers to the policymakers' internalisation of counter-claims of societal members, and how societal mobilisation and state-society accommodation have reflected these constraints and changes over time.

The Adaptive Authoritarian State

At the local level, the provision of social welfare and methods of dealing with externalities of economic development are typically "co-production" goods by state and societal actors (Ostrom 1996: 1073–87). One could argue that in most cases these adaptations actually do some good and alleviated sociopolitical tensions, but the primary logic of adaptation is probably not about getting the marginal mileage out of existing institutions and policies. Instead, the key dynamic in question is whether the statist forces–crudely put, the Leninist party's survival imperative–shaping the development of these state-society projects are the decisive agents in control of the possibility of a system collapse, or if societal forces and reactions can undermine the intended outcomes of adaptation.

Starting with the grassroots level of urban governance–neighbourhood committees or street offices–Stephen Trott examines innovations in rebuilding the basic units of social control and patronage, co-initiated by local officials and community activists. The scarcity issues in the provision of social welfare and public goods had delegitimised the Qing and Republican governments, but they have yet to post a systemic risk to the CCP's rule. Not that China today is stress-free–an

ageing population, massive layoffs resulting from the global economic downturn, fiscal decentralisation, and work-unit belt-tightening have heightened social demand for protection. Trott argues that these pressures have driven the development of urban community construction, yet at the same time these new organisations seem ill-equipped to handle these demands. He suggests that these organisations also play two important roles in addressing increasing social pluralisation and exclusion of marginal groups: First, channeling selective benefits to the group and neighbourhood with the most salient grievances; second, linking local demands to higher level political priorities.

If these community self-governance projects are experiments in enhanced statist leverage over specific constituencies, then one would expect their provisions of benefits to be selective rather than general. Which social groups do the community activists target—workers on the margin of the labour market or mainstream employees that are pillars of society? To what extent are urban residents at large engaged in these projects? What is the tension between broadening representation and maintaining a network focus and efficacy? How do the community organisations interact with other organisational actors, particularly the more coercive ones such as the Urban Administrative and Law Enforcement Bureau (*chengguan*)? Trott's chapter encourages us to ponder these and related issues.

The state-society relations in this process hinge on meeting mutual expectations and forging a shared conception of the desirable urban ecology. While top-down political patronage is a must to initiate the virtuous cycle of activities for self-governance, Trott notes that domineering local officials in Zhenjiang and Shanghai tend to stymie grassroots responses, as the nascent efforts deflated with leadership changes or rigid, exclusionary institutionalisation of self-governance structures, respectively. In contrast in Tianjin and Shenyang, local activists brought industries and communities into more open dialogues and flexible implementation processes. Trott further suggests that the national Ministry of Civil Affairs then legitimated and consolidated local initiatives–in the form of Document 23 in 2000-opening the door to further experimentation (Heilmann 2008).

However, the reassertion of the centre also brings back risks for local efforts. Through these urban development schemes, local states aim to deal with direct pressures of urban unemployment, house ownership and housing market shortages, an ageing population, and marginalised societal members such as migrants. These schemes tend to expose policy or

institutional failures to higher level governments in specific manifestations, for example, fiscal liabilities, petitions and protests, market distortions, overinvestment and inflationary pressures, and official scandals and abuses of power. Higher levels are then compelled to devise solutions or checks such as fiscal federalist mechanisms, financial market liberalisation, regulations, and occasional anti-corruption campaigns. In sum, new forms of governance generate a reiterative dynamic in reform.

The gradualist, adaptive nature of the institutional innovation process also brings its own set of risks. Trott notes that in a "layering strategy", activists craft disparate solutions to engage different stakeholders, leading to conflict of interests and institutional incoherence down the line. Some of the modestly liberalising elements of community construction, such as strengthening grassroots community self-management (*shequzizhi*) and citizen participation, fundamentally run counter to the Communist Party's ongoing efforts to tighten its control of grassroots governance.

Lastly, the fluidity in state-societal relations in above case studies does not necessarily imply instability at the aggregate level of the national political system. Shiping Zheng provides a stimulating chapter comparing China and other countries using a basket of indices of political stability. He suggests that China is not likely to meet the fate of the recent "jasmine revolution" in the Middle East and North Africa, for the somewhat anti-intuitive reasons that it has already gone through that historical experience and the societal expectation has moved away from revolutionary outcomes. Zheng's valuation represents an implicit critique of the Asia Barometer Survey approach that tries to measure elusive individual values and collective orientations which underpin political choices and institutions.

Given its ideational roots in the modernisation theory, conventional attitudinal surveys do not sufficiently appreciate how a nation's political development could best be understood on its own terms, such through historical and cultural analysis of continuities and changes (Shi and Lu 2010).

There are inherent methodological difficulties in pooling various indices of political stability. Characterisations such as "strong" and "fragile" are more subjective than a "regime stability" index based on the frequency of radical change in the political system, yet may capture nuanced dynamics that are important to China, which has not experienced a formal regime change since 1949. The ten databases considered by Zheng also make different assumptions about causes of instability and regime resilience–such as the casual relations of social protests or corruption to state strength.

Cross-national comparisons would be difficult if the relationships are not consistent across countries or exhibit non-linear patterns. An analyst would ideally handle separately factors with different timescales such as a country's political history, proximate destabilising factors such as popular discontent, or structural factors such as economic downturns or instabilities in neighboring countries.

Zheng makes an admirable effort in light of the above complexities to adjudicate between indices that assign different values to the Chinese political system. In finding that China is not worse or better among the BRICs in terms of political stability, he opens up further analyses of the key dimensions where China does better or worse as revealed by the sets of indicators, and why China is likely to remain in this range in the future as all these countries continue to evolve and deal with domestic challenges and global crises.

Understanding China Through Retrospection

Isabel Hilton (2011) has astutely noted that Chinese leaders downplayed the centenary of the overthrow of the last imperial dynasty in 2011, instead choosing to focus on the CCP's 90th founding anniversary. This book explicitly places contemporary debates in a well-defined historical reference of one hundred years since the collapse of dynastic China and within an established analytical tradition of state-society relations. The three general topics of social welfare, local political institutional reform, and social and environmental interests in major infrastructure projects are addressed in paired chapters, creating a more in-depth coverage and enabling a dialogue of contending perspectives.

A logical follow-up to our comparative historical analysis would be to systematically consider the reproduction mechanisms for the importance of history to current agents. Reproduction does not only imply continuity or constancy, but more generally continuing and evolving relevance. Is history best understood as a cognitive resource? Do policy makers think in terms of specific past events? Are they aware of being shaped by history, and accessing cultural toolkits that draw on historical resources such as founding myths, organisational templates, and powerful political analogies? Or are they simply agents subject to structural forces in periods of similar historical trajectories?

We have also contrasted explanations for positive governance adaptations. Does regime stability come with improved delivery of goods to

targeted social constituencies, the "correct handling of contradictions" between people and state, or a ratcheting up of coercive mechanisms of the party-state? Whether China will remain fragile or stable is influenced by complex factors and causal pathways that certainly cannot be captured in case studies and process-tracing or search for historical continuities.

We started with the broad historical inquiry asking: why have similar social, political and environmental challenges resulted in very different outcomes in 1912 and 2012? For most China watchers, the primary answer to the above "puzzle" would be the strong(er) state a century after the Xinhai Revolution. Instead of experiencing the involution, implosion or erosion which Andrew Walder, Gordon Chang, Pei Minxin and many others had predicted over a decade ago, the CCP and the state apparatus have developed over time methods to cope with changes, and individual agents and powerholders within the system have gained from economic development rather than become marginalised (Walder 1995; Chang 2001; Pei 2006). However, the antithetical "authoritarian resilience" literature does not adequately capture two aspects of the adaptive process: first, the cognitive dimension of how the elite have construed, problematised, and interpreted outcomes of reform; and second, the specific means or menu of options from which political powerholders engineer an opening up of the adaptive process to non-state agents (Nathan 2003; Li 2012; Landry 2012; Cai 2008; Wright 2010; He and Warren 2011). We noted that the strategic "reach of the state" exhibit enduring orientations such as the state stacking up capacity and resources, and conducting superior discursive discourses when admitting social forces to shape the agenda and solutions in governance. However, these capacities and resources find different usages by social actors, and do not always produce positive sum outcomes. Moreover, the mutually constituting nature of state-society partnership redefines boundaries that, paradoxically, often approximate earlier equilibria attained in past negotiations over the same issues.

Notes

1. IMF estimation of 2014 GDP adjusted for purchasing power parity.
2. We offer our thanks to Professor Keith Hoggart, Professor Xinzhong Yao, and Dr. Ralph Parfect at the King's China Institute (since then renamed the Lau China Institute), to the ACPS and Mr. and Mrs. S.H. Wong Foundation for their invaluable support of the conference.

3. We broadly follow the historical method of Arthur Stinchcombe (1978).
4. In a special journal issue published in 2013 we examined parallels between the "Xinhai Interregnum" (that is, the Xinhai Revolution and the periods around it) and now, with respect to China's foreign relations and further contemplated how the past weighs upon China's present foreign policy. See Blanchard and Lin (2013).
5. Kerry Brown (2014: 17) perceptively forecasts: Xi "opens up space to reintroduce idealism, and to start addressing the vexed issue of how to gain traction over a society of such vast complexity and internal difference…".
6. With respect to the construction of foreign policy, Jean-Marc F. Blanchard (2015: 1–16) critically reviews arguments about the drivers of Chinese foreign policy and the merits/demerits of a leader-centric model of Chinese foreign policy.
7. Similarly, see Cai and Triesman (2006: 505–35), for a critique of the "market-preserving federalism" thesis in the reform context.
8. On regulatory state, see Pearson (2008: 718–30); public sector finance, see Wong (2009: 929–52); reform of state-owned enterprises, see Lin (2008:49–79) and Nolan (2001); a convergence of opinions and interests of private entrepreneurs and the political elite, see Dickson (2008).
9. See publisher's website at: http://www.hup.harvard.edu/collection. php?recid=192 for an updated list of publications. The Routledge Contemporary China series has also developed a strong profile in addressing topics of social inequality and welfare-provisions, regime adaptation, and local administrative and political reforms. See updated list of titles at: http://www.routledge.com/books/series/SE0768/.

Historical Continuities in
Social Assistance in China, 1911–2011

Daniel Hammond

Introduction

The century anniversary of the *Xinhai* revolution offers a good point from which to survey the revolutionary changes which have been wrought on China's social assistance system. After 1911, the provision of assistance to those most in need has been an on-going concern for the state. Before 1949, efforts were patchy and ineffective but the establishing of the People's Republic of China (PRC) saw a government with the fiscal and administrative capacity to implement a system of social assistance. Social assistance now affects the lives of millions of urban and rural Chinese in the PRC and the changes made to the system from 1949 through to the 1990s have been radical and far reaching. The reform of the traditional category-based social assistance system, first established in 1949, began in the early 1990s with local innovations in funding, administration and delivery. By 2011 there were means testing systems operating nationwide in both urban and rural areas. In addition, there has been significant expansion in participation and the scope of assistance offered over the last 20 years.

This chapter seeks to trace the historical continuities and transformations in urban social assistance in China since 1911 and is structured to

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reflect this approach. First, social assistance in China from the late Qing to the early 1990s will be discussed. This will be followed by an examination of the emergence of the urban Minimum Livelihood Guarantee or MLG system (*zuidi shenghuo baozhang zhidu*), the longest running and most significant of the reform era social assistance programs. The next two sections will assess the state of the MLG in 2011, looking at both the available statistical records and discussing the current regulatory framework. Taken together these sections will provide a narrative analysis of social assistance in China from 1911 to 2011. The chapter concludes by drawing out the themes and offering some interpretations of social assistance in China 100 years after the 1911 revolution.

Social Assistance in China

In discussions of social assistance, social security and social welfare in the PRC the long history of some form of assistance being provided is mentioned as a basis on which the current system has developed. It is noted in some Chinese texts that the idea of social assistance has had a place in China for the last 2000 years, although there is little evidence or detail provided beyond the principles which guided such assistance, these being: great harmony or an ideal society (*datong*), benevolent government (*renzheng*) and finally, that it is based in the people (*minben*) (Zhong 2005). Wong (1982) highlights the importance of the system of imperial granaries in maintaining social order during the Qing Dynasty. Rowe (1990) does shed some light on what assistance might have been provided by society rather than the state. Benevolent associations (*tang shanghui*) and benevolent halls (*shang tang*) operated in the Ming and Qing dynasty respectively providing social services such as burials, food and winter clothing and medical care to those in need. Chen (2012) offers concrete examples highlighting the role played by institutions like the Hall of Universal Relief (*pujitang*) and the Shelter of Mercy (*gongdelin*) in Beijing. Both had existed for nearly 2 years and provided extensive relief to Beijing's poor including shelter, food and clothing. It is worth pointing out that these two examples were part of state efforts to ensure that Beijing's seasonal influx of the impoverished would survive the winter and the institutions received 'imperial subsidies' (Chen 2012: 31).

Subsequent efforts at reforming social assistance in early twentieth century China combined an intriguing mix of ideas, motives, and methods which predictably collapsed under the pressures of revolution,

war, and administrative incapacity and inefficiency (Chen 2012; Lipkin 2005, 2006; Stapleton 2000; Zhong 2005). Zhong (2005) credits the Republican and subsequent Nationalist governments with attempting to develop a system of social assistance based around workhouses, similar to what the English Poor Law evolved into. Lipkin (2005: 583) suggests that Nationalist efforts to reform social assistance, and by extension to reform the poor themselves, was a new development in the late 1920s. There is no doubt that her (Lipkin 2006, 2005) exhaustive studies of Nanjing between 1927 and 1937 demonstrate that the Nationalists introduced significant changes in policy as part of their efforts to eradicate begging, vagrancy, prostitution and slum dwelling; but, one of the main tools utilised, workhouses for the poor, had roots which predated the emergence of the Nationalists in Nanjing.

Chen (2012: 24) shows that from as early as 1903, the idea of introducing workhouses had taken root in China and by 1904 this was translating into the establishment of new institutions (Chen 2012: 25). An important point to note here is that the primary influence was Japan and a unique penal model of the workhouse. By 1905 poorhouses were being established in Beijing that built on this penal workhouse model and in effect social assistance was linked with incarceration and punishment as well provision of basic needs (Chen 2012: 31). In her study of urban reform in Chengdu, Stapleton (2000: 126) highlights the use of orphanages as well as workhouses by police as a means to 'treat' the urban poor who were caught begging. The workhouse model remained as the key approach to alleviating poverty in China up until the establishing of the PRC in 1949 (Chen 2012: 194).

This was not just a period of policy interventions in dealing with the question of China's poor and the role of social assistance, but also of new ideas and new motivations. Both Lipkin (2006: 17) and Chen (2012: 30) highlight the link between discussions of poverty, the urgency that something must be done in terms of social assistance, and how the international community viewed China at the time. The urban poor had not just become a negative in terms of how China was viewed internationally, but also intellectuals increasingly discussed them in negative terms. China was viewed as a nation of poverty and arguments were made that as part of the move toward strengthening and reviving the nation, the poor must be dealt with. At its most basic, this concern manifested itself in the idea that the poor must become workers, consumers, and producers, through training or coercion (Chen 2012; Lipkin 2005, 2006; Stapleton 2000).

Discussions of how to deal with China's poor did not focus exclusively on using workhouses. Arguments were made that distinguished among different categories of the impoverished. Some felt assistance should be provided to groups such as the working poor (Lipkin 2006: 51), while other groups, particularly the families of Manchu Banners (Chen 2012: 95) and men of learning (Chen 2012: 17) who produced little and would 'rather starve than work' (Chen 2012: 95), only merited scorn. Indeed, the latter groups were subject to the same derision as vagrants and beggars. The distaste with which the poor were viewed even extended to comparison with 'disease' although this ultimately justified intervention as a form of self-serving medication (Lipkin 2006: 50). Between 1911 and the 1930s, an attitude emerged that glorified labour as a virtue, a goal to which the poor should aspire. This frequently drove the linking of incarceration in an institution with training or work as a means for the poor to earn assistance and ultimately redeem themselves by becoming useful members of Chinese society (Chen 2012: 56; Lipkin 2006: 50 and 67; Stapleton 2000: 127). A final idea which is notable, for reasons which will become apparent when the MLG is discussed below, is that of using a definition of a minimum subsistence income to both identify and deal with poverty. This emerged in the 1920s as a result of the increasing influence of sociology in some of Beijing's universities and associated research (Chen 2012: 49).

The Nationalist government, during the Nanjing decade, did aspire to implement a national policy of poor relief in the 1930s. Chen (2012: 92) highlights that, in particular, the policy aimed to use the Interior Ministry and other 'relief committees' to oversee a move to 'active relief' in dealing with the poor. This active policy would train the poor and facilitate their development into productive members of society. The approach was reinforced by the 1931 Civil Code, but the actual implementation of the policy fell afoul of a combination of natural disasters, the war with Japan and the slow collapse of the Nationalist regime. In spite of these failings the efforts of the Nationalists and those who preceded them have been cited as influential in the reform of social assistance during the 1990s.[1]

With the end of the Anti-Japanese war and the expulsion of the Nationalists from the mainland, the PRC was established in 1949. As the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established itself in government there were significant policy changes throughout the system of government and the provision of social assistance underwent radical development during the first few years. A number of these changes were wide-ranging and had

significant impacts on multiple policy spheres in addition to social assistance. One such change was the introduction of the *hukou* or household registration scheme. By dividing the population into those with agricultural (*nongye*) and non-agricultural (*feinongye*) registrations the Chinese state introduced a division resulting in far-reaching policy consequences. The question of whether a citizen's registration was urban or rural had a profound impact on that individual. This covered where they could live, where they could work, and also what sort of social assistance, welfare, or security they might expect to receive.

Within the urban-rural distinction a second separation of the population developed with regard to the provision of social services that an individual or household might expect. The common theme was that social security and welfare was earned through labour in both rural and urban areas. The same principle applied to both rural and urban dwellers. However what people were entitled to and how it was provided was substantially different. By employing urban workers in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and absorbing surplus rural labour in the collectives, the PRC government managed, in the early 1950s, to arrive at a situation where the majority of the impoverished had employment, the benefits of social security and welfare provision, and subsidised food or housing. The situation remained problematic for those who were impoverished and did not have the ability to earn benefits through any form of labour. To resolve this problem the state developed an obligation to provide assistance for those who were 'without' or, as it became known, the 'Three Nos' (*Sanwu*). The Three Nos were: no ability to work, no income, and no caregiver or guardian. Typically it only covered a select group referred to as orphaned, old, and disabled (*gulaoyoucan*) (Zhong 2005; Wong 1998). A common distinction was drawn between the provision through an earned right and provision for those who were unable to earn. Also, the mechanics of policy varied between the rural and urban areas.

Although the focus here is on the urban provision of social assistance it is worth noting what policies were in place in rural areas to illustrate the differences, which existed before reform. In organisational terms rural areas were broken down into communes, collectives, work brigades and finally work teams as the smallest unit of production. All provisions in terms of social assistance were through the collective organisation and it was, therefore, subject to high degrees of variation among different areas. The common policy among all areas was the 'Five Guarantees' (*wubaohu*), which was in place for all those who could not earn entitlement to welfare

through labour, and provided food and fuel, housing, clothes, medical, and burial expenses (Leung and Nann 1995; Saich 2004). It should be noted that these were provided *in kind* and on a household basis rather than in cash or on an individual basis.

Urban provision again consisted of two strands based on whether the recipient could work or not. There were, however, significant differences in the system's functioning in rural areas. For those who could work, the so-called 'iron rice bowl' (*tiefanwan*) provided what was essentially a cradle-to-grave system of social service provisions centred on the individuals work unit. This provision provided benefits, which included subsidised food, housing, education, medical care, and pensions. The system was comprehensive because almost all urban employees and their families were included and it operated with the understanding that the state would support and absorb any costs in terms of provision. In contrast those who did not have the ability to earn their welfare through labour were subject to minimal state-provided assistance. To qualify an individual would need to be in one of the Three Nos. Individuals would be from very specific groups who had fallen out of the more comprehensive social security net constructed around the work unit. The funding and levels for social assistance during this period were not guaranteed and were subject to central Ministry of Finance and local finance department allocations. The allocations were then paid out through the local government and neighbourhood offices under the administration of the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA). At the administrative level the organisations can be understood to have had little control over how much could be paid and to whom; the system was extremely limited in scope and funds. The MCA also provided a number of additional elements which could be viewed as social assistance but are typically discussed separately as social welfare policies. These included managing welfare enterprises (*fuliqiye*) for the disabled to work in, care homes for some of the elderly, orphanages, and special payouts for those with family members who had either been injured or killed in military service (Leung and Nann 1995; Wong 1998).

Despite the tumultuous nature of the Mao period, this system of social assistance managed to be sustained throughout, with the exception of the most chaotic period of the Cultural Revolution. At this point the idea of social assistance became politically unacceptable and, as a result, funding and administrative capacity were cut. It should be noted that although the system in place was universal in provisions, on paper there were significant variations. The return of a relatively stable government in the 1970s saw

the reintroduction of an essentially unchanged system of provision (Zhong 2005). This continued into the early 1980s even though the process of reform and opening was being implemented by the coalition of reformers and conservatives under Deng Xiaoping. Dixon (1981, 1992) emphasises the importance of local responsibility and the role of the family in Mao era social provisions, which, in turn, meant provisions could be patchy and inconsistent across the country. Another issue with the system in urban areas, which began to manifest as the reforms began to deepen, was the link between work units (*danwei*) and the provision of many social services. These impacts ultimately led to a reassessment of the provision of not just social assistance, but the entire social security and social welfare system.

In the social assistance policy sphere the most immediate policy development of the transition from Mao to Deng was in the redrafted constitution of the PRC. This was approved in 1982 and provides a limited institutionalised commitment to social assistance in the form of Article 45, which states that:

> Citizens of the People's Republic of China have the right to material assistance from the state and society when they are old, ill, or disabled. The state develops social insurance, social relief and medical and health services that are required for citizens to enjoy this right. (NPC 1999; Guan 2000)[2]

This commitment did not change the policy of social assistance as it stood in the early 1980s, because it contained commitments from the previous three iterations of the Constitution and, as should be clear, does not include an outright commitment beyond the narrow limits of those who might be considered one of the Three Nos. What is of interest, however, is that Article 45 is the constitutional basis of the commitment and the structure of urban social assistance policy as far as officials are concerned.[3]

The provision of social assistance was distinguished, showing continuity with thinking from before the 1980s, by the inability to work. An assumption underpinning the pre-reform provision of social protection was that employment guaranteed extensive rights. The inability to work, essential if one was to fall into one of the Three No categories, meant being channelled into a less comprehensive system of support which, as will be shown, came under increasing strain throughout the reform period. Whilst the idea of the undeserving poor was not explicit, it was implicit in the division between those who could work and those who could not in the provision of assistance.

Developments in the area of social assistance, and social security and welfare more widely, began to occur as reforms in the structure and regulation of the rural and urban economy began to take effect (Saich 2004). It was in rural areas where the economic reforms began to have a significant impact, first with household responsibility contracts providing an incentive to increase agricultural production. By introducing a system where the household rather than the collective was responsible for production, this initial reform undermined the pre-reform system of social provision. The household responsibility contracts ultimately saw the de-collectivisation of the countryside. This had a profound impact on the already limited welfare provision in rural areas as the institutional basis of the provision disappeared and was not immediately replaced.

In urban areas reforms to the economic system were slower in being implemented but went on to have a significant impact. The first impact, which was significant to the provision of social assistance, was the introduction of greater labour flexibility with provisions on employment in 1986 (ILO 2011). At the basic level, this allowed managers to terminate workers' contracts and create, for the first time since 1949, a group who were technically unemployed. However, these powers were not used extensively until the 1990s. In addition State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) were gradually given both greater fiscal autonomy and fiscal responsibility. This responsibility, when coupled with the need to meet increasingly heavy welfare demands, spurred further reform of the SOEs and also the wider social security system in the 1990s.

The reform of the SOE sector in terms of both working practice and the provision of social security did not have an immediate effect on social assistance policy, as the system continued throughout the 1980s unchanged. However, by the end of the 1980s the decision to reform urban social policy provisions became apparent and this has been tied by Chinese scholars to three developments (Guan 2000; Tang 2003). The first of these would include those who were laid off or stood down from normal full employment at SOEs. These *xiagang* workers were not made formally unemployed and still received a basic living allowance and welfare provisions as their SOE could manage. Second, a growing number of pensioners whose pension payments relied on their former SOE, either did not receive their funds or received reduced payments. Finally, the introduction of the market and the corresponding reduction in the SOE sector created a new group of urban workers who might be capable of work but who were temporarily unemployed or employed with a very low wage. The introduction

of unemployment insurance and changes to the minimum wage policy aimed to alleviate these pressures, with some limited success.[4]

The rapid development of many urban areas saw significant increases in the standard and correspondingly the cost of living for all urban residents. New costs such as housing were being coupled with increasing costs and expectations in terms of the consumption of consumables. This led to a growth in the numbers of working and unemployed families who could be classified as living in poverty. These groups had previously been covered by the benefits of the old system and reforms of the social security system sought to address this (Saich 2004). The initial attempts at introducing new pension provisions, medical insurance, and also unemployment insurance went some way to solving these problems within a limited context, but that did not occur until later in the 1990s. In 1992 the first rumblings of what would go on to become one of the defining challenges to the Chinese leadership were, therefore, beginning to be heard. It was in this context that the MLG emerged in Shanghai.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE AND THE MLG IN CHINA

The MLG is a minimum income guarantee system that provides recipients with a cash transfer from the state ensuring a subsistence standard of living. This is achieved through a means test, which follows the application for support from a potential recipient. The recipient's household income is calculated as part of the application process and is then investigated during the means test. In order for applicants to receive the MLG they must demonstrate that their household income falls below the locally set MLG line multiplied by the number of householders. If the applicant's household income is below the line then they are entitled to a payment that brings the total household income up to the local MLG line. One of the key characteristics of the MLG is that it is calculated, funded and administered locally. There is, therefore, significant opportunity for local difference and this has been the source of both problems and new ideas that have been incorporated at a national level.

The MLG first appeared in Shanghai in 1993 following a developmental process that had started in the middle of 1992. It was, at this stage at least, developed in response to the growing inadequacies of the traditional social assistance system and fears that the renewal of the reform process would lead to unemployment and the rise of a so-called "new" poor that, in turn, might undermine social stability (Tang 2003; Yang 2003).

Why did the MLG appear in Shanghai? During fieldwork in the PRC the theories put forward by interviewees focused on Shanghai's position of being able to observe increasing social instability in other regions, particularly the northeast (Liu 1996), before reforming two particular industries, steel and textiles, which were expected to generate a wave of massive layoffs.[5] Shanghai occupied an interesting point in between the extremes of the rustbelt northeast and the booming southeast. Reform would hurt a large number of people, but the city was in the position, fiscally and politically, to implement policy to head off the potentially destabilising effects of SOE reform.

The programme experienced some early popularity. It was endorsed by both then MCA Minister Duoji Cairang and Premier Li Peng in 1994 and gradually spread to a small number of cities through 1994 to 1996. This was, I have argued elsewhere, a result of Duoji pushing the MLG on to the MCA bureaucracy through meetings, speeches and personal visits (Hammond 2013: 119–46). Duoji specifically linked the MLG with the reform project, CCP obligations to the masses and the CCP and China's own standing internationally. This explains the gradual spread but comparatively low take up (Hammond 2011b). In 1996 the MLG was incorporated into the Ninth Five Year Plan and in 1997 the State Council announced that the MLG would be implemented nationwide through a circular. The introduction of the MLG as a national policy at this point in time is of interest because there are many reasons for the timing. Perhaps most significant was the decision by Premier Zhu Rongji to finally reform the state owned sector (Fewsmith 2008). The MLG would provide the policy tool to catch those workers shed by failing SOEs and avert potential social instability.

The MLG faced some severe problems in implementation. This manifested in competing models of implementation, cities not funding the program sufficiently, game playing between city government, the provinces and the central government,[6] and the exclusion of particular groups from receiving subsidies. The latter problem quickly came to be referred to as the *yingbao wubao* problem, or the 'ought to protect, not protecting' problem. This issue and the reasons for it, lack of administrative capacity, political will or fiscal resources, were debated extensively, especially in the MCA's official journal *Zhongguo Minzheng* (Chinese Civil Affairs) throughout the late 1990s (Hammond 2010). The MCA itself was left to utilising the departmental newspaper *Zhongguo Shehui Bao* (China Society News) to name and shame cities into compliance whilst celebrating those areas which had successfully managed to implement the program.

By 1999 the State Council published the 'Urban Resident Minimum Livelihood Guarantee Regulations' and it was announced in late 1999 that the program had been successfully implemented in all cities in China. In 2001 and 2002 the MLG was expanded significantly. This was due to the intervention of then Premier Zhu Rongji who had become frustrated at the perceived failure of the re-employment service centres and the *xia-gang* basic living guarantee to reach the intended recipients. Instead, cash transfers to SOEs for these policies were seen as disappearing into either financing debts or other enterprise expenditures. Seeing the MLG as a means to break the connection between the SOEs and central government cash transfers the MLG expanded to over 20 million recipients and experienced a surge in expenditure, predominantly driven by central government subsidies to local government (Hammond 2011a, b). In 2007 and 2008 the ability of the MLG to provide a subsistence standard of living came under pressure from significant increases in the cost of food, particularly pork prices. This inflationary pressure was a concern for all China's citizens, but for those on the MLG, fluctuations in the price of food had a disproportionate effect. Local government did not respond promptly and this resulted in central government intervention in both summer 2007 and early 2008. It increased the MLG by a set amount to compensate for price increases (MCA 2007; MCA and MoF 2008).

The period after expansion was also characterised by an emerging discussion, and policy measures, addressing both the diverse nature of poverty in China and the concern that the MLG program might be given to those who do not need help or do not deserve it. This conflict between providing for the deserving poor whilst avoiding helping those who are deemed undeserving played out at the local level. In the city of Dalian, local Civil Affairs officials were proud of their record in providing additional support to specific target groups such as families and the elderly.[7] At the same time the local Civil Affairs Bureau experimented and ultimately implemented a policy program specifically designed to ensure that those receiving the MLG subsidy were seen to be earning the assistance through regular public work. The program was justified as a means to calm public concerns regarding the perceived laziness of MLG recipients and to avoid fraud (Hammond 2011a).

In addition to these developments in the administration of the MLG, there was also an expansion of the coverage provided by the social assistance system. Recognition of the complexities of poverty had previously manifested in local innovations, for example, in Dalian, Shanghai or Nanjing.

Since 2003 the social assistance system has developed additional provisions, provided to both MLG recipients and those who can demonstrate a need, which offer relief for medical costs, education costs, legal aid and housing. These developments marked a significant expansion of social assistance beyond the subsistence subsidy that the MLG provided. However, the original program remains the key element in providing for China's poor. These dramatic changes in the social assistance system manifested in the MCA drafting and proposing a Social Relief Law to the National People's Congress and State Council was a process which began in 2005 (Wang 2007). The MLG and wider social assistance systems have, therefore, gone through significant transformation since the initial changes to local provisions in Shanghai in 1993. If we take an even longer view looking back at the last century, the changes in social assistance have been revolutionary.

The Current State of the MLG: Numbers

Depending on how the total number of recipients of the MLG subsidy is viewed, the last seven years look very different. Figure 2.1 shows the recorded numbers as far back as the initial national implementation of the program in 1997. The last seven years look relatively stable when compared to the initial upheaval of national implementation in the late 1990s and subsequent intervention by Zhu Rongji in 2001 and 2002.

If we only look at development since 2003 (Fig. 2.2), then there have been some fluctuations in the number of people receiving the subsidy.
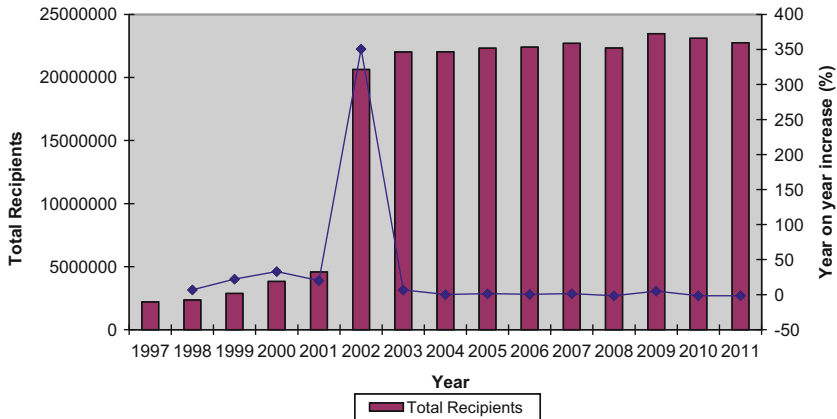
Fig. 2.1 Total number of MLG recipients and year on year increase (%), 1997–2011 (Dibao-Online 2012; Hammond 2010, 2011b)
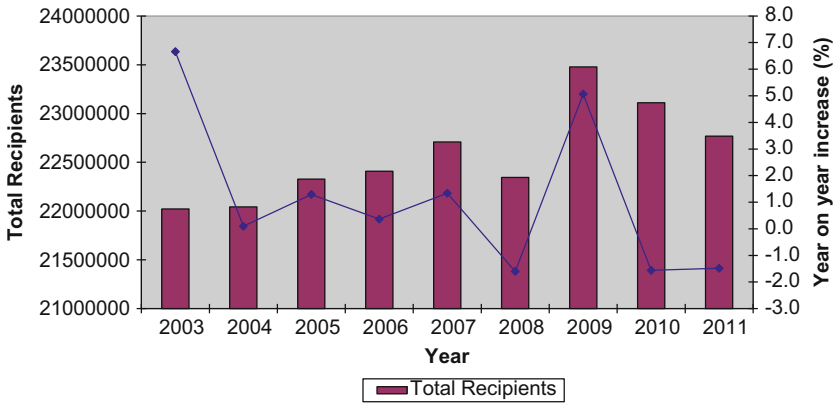
Fig. 2.2 Total number of MLG recipients and year on year increase (%), 2003–2011 (Dibao-Online 2012; Hammond 2010, 2011b)

Of particular note are the increase and subsequent decreases through 2007 to 2009 when the MLG was struggling to keep up with significant inflation in the price of basic foodstuffs. There does not appear to be any plateau in the numbers receiving the MLG. In spite of these fluctuations the MLG has been providing over 23 million people a basic standard of living since 2008.

The total expenditure on the MLG shows a similar pattern to the number of recipients. If we take a long view, from 1997 in Fig. 2.3, then there is a consistent increase from 2002 following significant fluctuations during the initial establishment of the MLG system. The major jump in 2002 can also be attributed to the intervention of Premier Zhu Rongji and subsequent campaigns (Hammond 2011b).

If the snapshot is only from the last seven years, Fig. 2.4, then two points become apparent. First, there has been a continuous increase in expenditure on the MLG. Second, although there has been a consistent positive increase in expenditure there have been fluctuations in the increase in MLG expenditure. Most notable was 2008 and this can be attributed to the intervention by the central government linked to food price inflation.

A final area related to the financing of the MLG is where the funds come from. This is a point I have highlighted previously because it is an inherent contradiction. Because the MLG is, according to all regulations that are currently in place, a locally managed and funded program, it should be funded according to local circumstances from the local government budget. This has been the case since 1997. It is unfortunate that
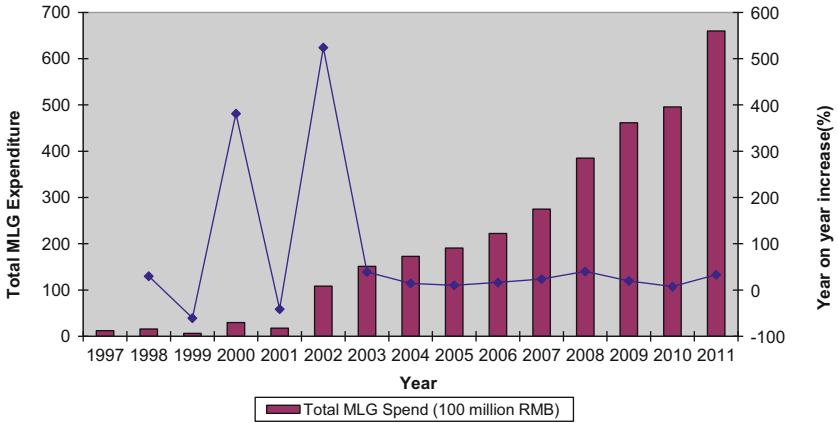
Fig. 2.3 Total MLG expenditure and year on year increase (%), 1997–2011 (Dibao-Online 2012; Hammond 2010, 2011b)
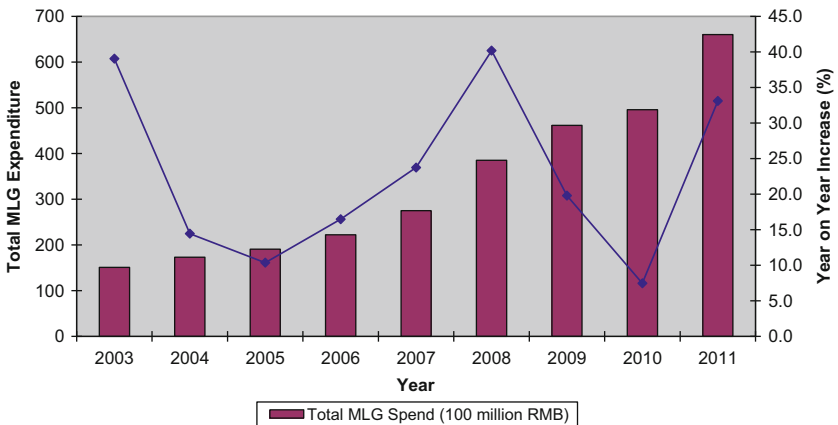
Fig. 2.4 Total MLG expenditure and year on year increase (%), 2003–2011 (Dibao-Online 2012; Hammond 2010, 2011b)

the available data currently only takes us up to 2007, but it is possible to see a trend.

Figure 2.5 shows that since 2002 the central government has become the main source of funding for MLG expenditure. It is notable that this has remained fairly stable throughout the years that the information is available.
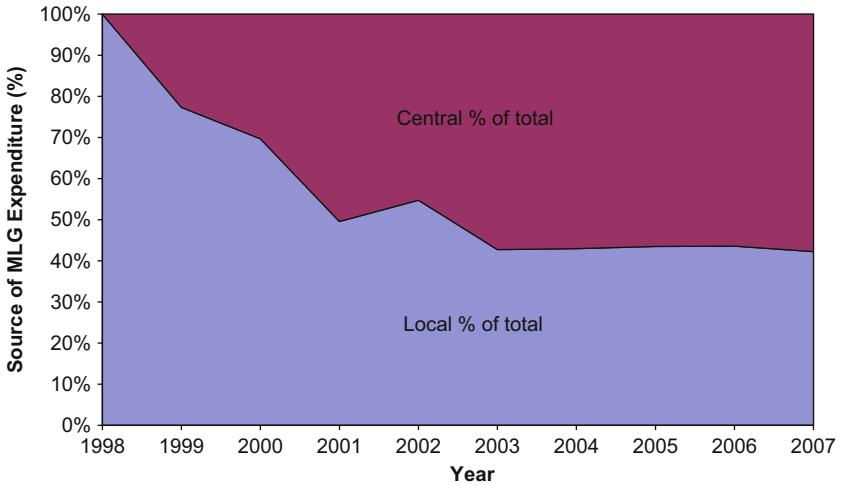
Fig. 2.5 Source of MLG expenditure (%), 1998–2007 (MoF 2005, 2007)

This takes the form of direct subsidies to local government, which has helped to expand and then sustain MLG expenditure. The reasons for this are fairly straightforward to explain. The main reason is that the central government has, since as early as 1999, forced the expansion and consolidation of the program by ordering increases in the MLG line or the number of people receiving the subsidy. The agreements supporting these subsidies are a mixture of verbal guarantees[8] or in the specific details of particular increases ordered through the State Council (Hammond 2010, 2011b). This has also helped to resolve issues of non-compliance and limited coverage. Given that the provinces which would have the greatest need for the MLG are also likely to be the most fiscally challenged, central government funding has been key to the success of the program, because the areas with the least capacity to implement the program have ultimately ended up being supported.[9]

The actual MLG line has shown a steady increase.

Figure 2.6 shows that the average MLG line for all cities has been going up steadily year on year. This is also true for the subsidy received by recipients. 2011 does appear to show a greater than normal increase which may be due to the new measures dictating calculation and adjustment.

Figure 2.7 shows the data drawn from 36 key cities whose MLG line is published regularly (annually since 2005 and quarterly since 2008). These
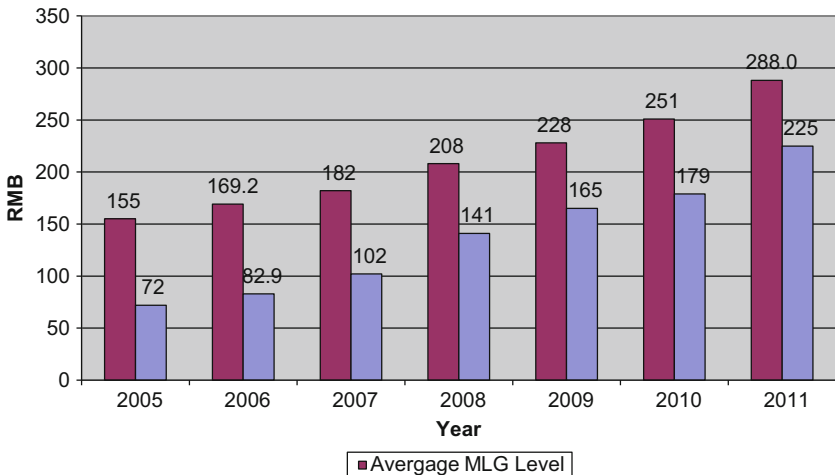
Fig. 2.6 Average MLG line and subsidy (Nationally) (Dibao-Online 2012)
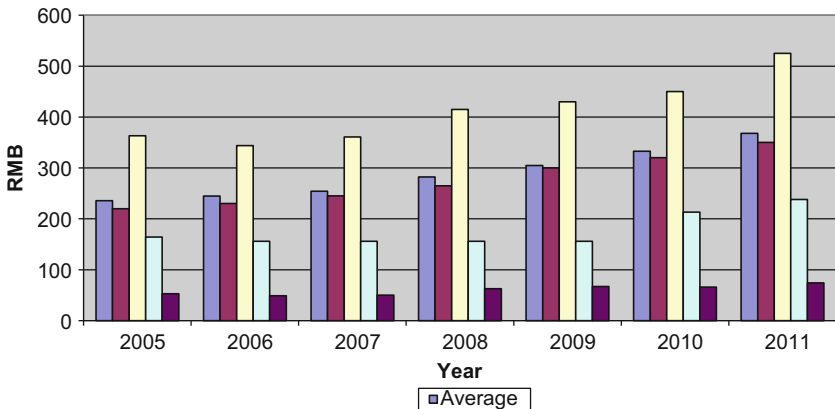
Fig. 2.7 Key 36 Cities MLG line analysis (Dibao-Online 2012)

36 cities, mostly provincial capitals plus the four self-governing cities and the *jihua danli eshi* (cities with independent planning status), offer a more detailed snapshot of the MLG line. We can see that their average MLG line is more than the national average for each year. In addition there is a steady increase across the average, median, mean, and maximum. It is

interesting to note that the minimum has fluctuated, falling from 2005 to 2006 and then remaining steady until 2010 when it again increased. It is perhaps notable, given what has occurred in Xinjiang in the recent past, that it was the city of Urumqi which had the lowest MLG line of the 36 until 2010 when it was replaced by Xining. The deviation is also of interest because it has not fallen into a particular pattern. The standard deviation between the 36 cities increased and decreased across the five years there were measurements available. However, in 2011 it was at its greatest at 76.9. This would suggest that although the overall picture appears positive, it is also apparent that between the different regions and cities there is variation in the level of local provision. This is to be expected given how the MLG is supposed to operate but the gap is significant and serves to highlight the different levels of development and possibly prioritisation of social stability between different regions in China.

Overall it appears that the MLG is still subject to some fluctuations in spite of the last seven years being much more stable than the initial five years of upheaval, which followed the national implementation of the program. Some of these developments are to be expected given the variation in prices for basic foodstuffs and the central government interventions in the program. What is perhaps most notable is that the number of MLG recipients has not been engineered to significantly increase again, given that MCA officials are quite open about there being an estimated 10 million urban residents that should be incorporated into the program because of their low incomes.[10]

The Current State of the MLG: Regulatory Framework

The MLG is currently governed by two pieces of regulation published by the State Council and a system of complimentary provincial and city level regulations. The key elements are the 1997 'Circular establishing a national urban resident minimum livelihood guarantee system' and the 1999 'Urban resident minimum livelihood guarantee system regulations' (State-Council 1997, 1999). The 1997 Circular was released to drive through the implementation of the MLG at a national level and the 1999 Regulations served the dual purpose of driving home the implementation through a new deadline and seeking to consolidate the basic operation of the MLG across China. Both these texts have been discussed elsewhere, but in short, provide a basic outline of the objectives of the MLG, some

limited guidance on the administration and funding of the program and also some guidance on how to calculate and adjust the MLG (Hammond 2011b). These two documents still provide the main guidance on the MLG despite there being a lack of specifics on calculation, adjustment and what the MLG should cover.

At the end of 2010 the development of the MLG, and social assistance policy as a whole, appeared to hit a significant snag with the continued delay of the Social Assistance Law, despite having passed through various stages of review within the MCA, via a small group, and discussion with other state organs, officials and researchers (Wang 2007). The proposed law, in brief, outlines the main elements of social assistance in China including the rationale for programs being implemented, what these programs are, some detail on the organisation, administration, funding and adjustment of these programs, and also the responsibilities of different levels of government, officials and citizens. The law was drafted as a piece of legislation which provides the 'backbone' for social assistance in China rather than providing the policy detail for each program. These details are supposed to be set out in the various regulations, circulars and local level pieces of regulation (Wang 2007).

The passing of the Social Relief Law will mark, as a legislative process at least, the completion of the reform process in social assistance. The fact that it has been delayed with no definite timetable apparent means that in terms of the regulatory framework and legislative process the social assistance system and MLG program can be viewed as still a work in progress. At the time the reasons for the delay in the State Council's approval of the Social Relief Law was not clear, but recent developments might shed some light on this.

On the 18 May 2011, a joint announcement by the MCA, National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), Ministry of Finance (MoF) and National Statistics Bureau (NSB) addressed establishing a 'dynamic adjustment system' in the MLG. The announcement dealt mainly with constructing a 'dynamic adjustment system' to meet the challenge of price inflation and continue the completion of the MLG system. The problem of how the MLG responds to price inflation has, as noted earlier, been a key challenge for how the program operates. In 2007 and 2008 the lacklustre response of local government to increasing prices resulted in the central government intervening to force increases in the MLG line and subsidies.

The announcement focused on an MCA document with the title 'Guidance on the further regulation of the urban and rural resident MLG

standard system and adjustment work' (*Guanyu jinyibu chengxiang jumin zuidi shenghuo baozhang biaozhun zhidu he tiaozheng gongzuo de zhidao yijian*) (MCA 2011). The document represents the first clear elaboration of how the central government sees the MLG working in both urban and rural areas, outside of references to the existing framework of the 1997 circular and 1999 regulations. It is, therefore, significant and worth reviewing briefly here. The first point that is of note is the work of local government setting the MLG line according to scientific decision making and subsequently adjusting the MLG line has 'met with some success,' but there is also recognition of problems. In particular, calculations in some areas are simply a reference to national averages and fail to reflect the needs of local residents. Another problem is that the MLG line is not adjusted in a timely manner to reflect local economic circumstances. The document extorts local government to unify thinking and approaches to calculating the MLG in order to improve and perfect the system. The two most important elements of the document are: first, it provides, for the first time, explicit methods on how to calculate the MLG line and, second, it offers guidance on the adjustment of the MLG line. In brief, the three methods outlined are: a shopping basket method (called the basic living expenses method), the Engels method and a consumption-expenditure ratio method. It is worth noting that these three approaches were presented together by Beijing as a means to calculate its MLG line in 2006 (Hammond 2010).

The guidance on adjustment focuses on principles rather than explicit methods. These principles are organisational: use scientific calculations for adjustment, use a standard procedure and finally strengthen guidance. The data that should be used to inform adjustment is set out and it is stated that it should be used in conjunction with one of the three calculation methods to assess the need for an adjustment. This is not as radical a development as the explicit identification of methods for the setting of the MLG line, but it does mark a significant shift in the direction of a formalised system of adjustment. For example it is only implicit that adjustments should be made annually, but, as the first half of 2007 demonstrated, inflation can have a significant impact on prices within this time frame (MCA 2011). The guidance marks a significant move towards a more unified and standardised MLG system, but given the continued vagaries in the adjustment of the MLG line and the always important issue of implementation, it remains to be seen what impact the guidance will have.

Historical (Dis)Continuities
in Chinese Social Assistance

Two major points emerge from the preceding discussion that can provide narrative theme for the history of social assistance in China between 1911 and 2011. The first point is that of consistent ideas straddling the historical narrative in spite of the upheavals and transformations wrought on the Chinese state and people. This is not that surprising, as the ideas and practices which come before a policy development frequently influence it, whether intentionally or not. Chen (2012) argues this particularly strongly in her examination of how China's poor, beggars and vagrants in particular, were dealt with between the early 1900s and the 1950s. It is, however, significant that ideas, motivations and actual policy shows continuity throughout the century after 1911 in spite of the significant changes which occurred. There are four areas which are worth noting.

The first of these is the idea of a minimum income line emerging in the 1920s as a means to measure and alleviate poverty and what ultimately appeared in the 1990s in the form of the MLG, which is a policy program based on the same idea and is also used by the Chinese government and some academics as a means to measure poverty. There is little which explicitly links the ideas of early Chinese sociologists like Tao Menghe and the MLG which appeared 70 years later, but the continuity is there and this is worthy of further investigation.

A second idea which emerges repeatedly is the linking of alleviating poverty with a positive perception of China by the international community. Chen highlights concerns regarding poverty and China's place in the world in the early twentieth century and Lipkin argues forcibly that poverty became an issue for the Nationalists because of their desire for Nanjing, and by extension China, to be viewed as progressive and developed internationally. The times and politics may have changed, but as I have highlighted here and elsewhere Minister Duoji Cairang linked the implementation of the MLG with how China and the Chinese system was perceived by the international community (Hammond 2011b).

Third, work as virtue and dependence as an evil permeate the debate and policies regarding social assistance from 1911 through to the present. The idea that if one can work then one should was fundamental to the transformation in China's attitude to poverty, in particular begging, and the attitude has persisted throughout the Nationalist and Communist regimes. It is worth noting that social assistance from 1949 to the implementation of

the MLG was only for those who fell into categories who could not work; there has been little sympathy or assistance for those who will not work. Despite the implementation of the MLG's means test there has remained a persistent assumption that if you work you should not receive assistance, although this is for reasons ranging from fiscal incapacity to opposition to the idea that the working should need assistance. The case of Dalian and the implementation of specific policies to deal with perceived undeserving MLG recipients illustrate how these concerns and perceptions regarding the virtue of work and the evil of dependence can find their way into local programs (Hammond 2011a).

At a more general level the Asian Barometer Survey of values shows that the foundation of this suspicion of the poor may be more complicated than a simple demonization of the undeserving poor. Whilst a majority of those questioned did not trust their neighbours (63.5 per cent), 77 per cent did trust their family members, and 85.2 per cent agreed with the statement that 'For the sake of the national community/society, the individual should be prepared to sacrifice'. This is balanced elsewhere in the survey with 87.5 per cent of respondents agreeing that 'By helping people in trouble today, someone else will help me when I am in trouble someday' (ABS 2012). There appears to be a wider issue of perceptions of those who receive help from the state or society being negative whilst, at the same time, the idea that help might be provided as a principle is strongly supported.

The final idea which has persisted is a tendency toward categorisation and this is still prevalent despite the MLG's means tested format. From the early twentieth century and the discussion of China's poor, the debate was dominated by categories of poor. These might be based on academic analysis, anecdote or invective, but the idea persisted through to the Communist era and the system of social assistance which emerged before the 1990s when a citizen had to fall into a category in order to receive help. Even in the present era of the MLG social assistance regulations still categorise groups who should receive the subsidy *in addition* to those identified through the means test. The categorisation of the poor and who is worthy of assistance has persisted throughout the period.

The second point is of an on-going tension between institutional innovation in social assistance and the state's incapacity to implement these innovations effectively. The only time this was sufficiently overcome was after 1949 and with any scope, after 1997 and the implementation of the MLG nationally. The studies of poverty and efforts at urban reform and

social assistance by Chen, Lipkin and Stapleton all highlight that in spite of there being strong motivation, developed ideas and political will to transform the lives and the plight of China's urban poor the fragmentation, instability and chaos of the Republican and Nationalist periods meant that success was all but impossible. Although it was war and civil war which had the most devastating effects on the ability of government to effectively govern, fragmentation resulting from China's size and the lack of administrative capacity to carry out policy were also significant problems. Whilst the post 1949 situation was less dramatic, in spite of the establishment of a strong central government, there has always been a disjuncture between the intentions of Beijing and what occurs in the provinces. The tensions within the MLG, particularly regarding funding and adjustment, show that this holds as much truth today as it did in the any other point of the post-78 era, the history of the PRC or even before the revolution. A great deal has changed since 1911, but the challenge of governing China remains.

NOTES

1. Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Fellow [interview by Daniel Hammond], Tianjin, 2006.
2. It should be noted that Article 45 of the 1982 Constitution was part of a continuation which goes back to the founding of the People's Republic. The 1954, 1975 and 1978 Constitutions all had an article with the same, or very similar, wording (China Law Information Online 2009).
3. Fieldwork Notes, Beijing, 2006.
4. Departmental official [interview by Daniel Hammond], Beijing, 2006.
5. Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Fellow [interview by Daniel Hammond], Tianjin, 2006.
6. Departmental official [interview by Daniel Hammond], Beijing, 2006.
7. Local Dalian official [interview by Daniel Hammond], Beijing, 2007.
8. Departmental official [interview by Daniel Hammond], Beijing, 2007, explicitly stated that Premier Zhu Rongji guaranteed the central funding which supported the increases between 2000 and 2002 but this was not consolidated in written form.

9. Departmental official [interview by Daniel Hammond], Beijing, 2006. Gansu was given as an example of a poorer province which resorted to 'playing games', through non-compliance and non-standard practices, to secure central subsidies which it deemed necessary to implement the MLG.
10. Departmental official [interview by Daniel Hammond], Beijing, 2007.

'As Plants Grow Towards Sunlight…: Amity Foundation's Social Function in Historical Perspective

Gerda Wielander

Introduction

Turning into Nanjing's Hankou Road, just north of the city's bustling Xinjiekou district, one is still reminded of the city's quieter atmosphere in the 1980s. The few cars that make it down the narrow two lanes struggle against cyclists, street vendors and pedestrians, who traverse this thoroughfare to get from one part of Nanjing University campus to the other. Having walked past the old University's South Gate, bearing its name in the calligraphy of its former president Kuang Yaming, one ends up in front of a handsome detached house standing behind a low wall displaying five Chinese characters in the same hand. This is the headquarters of Amity Foundation (Aide Jijinhui 爱德基金会), one of China's oldest and most successful charitable organisations.

This chapter looks at Amity's origins and critically analyses its cooperation with the government, using Amity's NGO Training Centre, one of its most recent ventures, as focal point. Rather than testing Amity's practices against Western social science theories, this chapter contextualises Amity's

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case study using historical reference points. The main reference point is the behaviour of social organisations in the 1920s; another is the modus operandi of independent Chinese publications in the 1980s. Both reference points provide evidence that overlap and cooperation between official and non-official organisations, as we see in China today, is consistent with previous Chinese approaches and is actively sought by social organisations (not just imposed from the top) to ensure the success of their projects. Amity's NGO Training Centre exemplifies this phenomenon today and showcases contemporary attempts to bring grassroots initiatives within the realm of the state.

SOCIAL SERVICE AND STABLE RULE

Sun Yat-sen, the father of the 1911 Revolution, is not generally appreciated for his theoretical contribution to Chinese political thought. His political doctrine is encapsulated in the Three People's Principles, *sanmin zhuyi* 三民主义 , a term he first used in 1905 and to which he returned in 1919, revising and reflecting upon it until his death in 1925. *Minsheng* 民生, most commonly translated as 'people's livelihood', is one of the three pillars of his ideology and the least well defined of the three. Sun likened it at various times to socialism as well as communism, although Sun's 'communism' needs to be understood as an interpretation of the traditional Chinese philosophical term *datong* 大同, as reinterpreted by Kang Youwei, rather than in Marxist terms. It is an ideal, a utopia, and by using the term Sun was trying to bring together the extremes within the Guomindang (GMD) or Chinese Nationalist Party as it existed at the time (Bergere 1998: 352–87; Myers 1989).

For Sun, the mainspring of social evolution was harmony, and the principle force in human evolution was cooperation, not conflict, which he abhorred. By trying to understand the origins of the various social conflicts, Sun thought it would be possible to draw up policies to ensure economic development for all social groups, and hence to preserve the environment and to restore social harmony. *Minsheng* was synonymous with subsistence and the driving force of social change in Sun's ideology (Myers 1989: 240).

The term *minsheng* is still in use in China today, although it has disappeared from core political vocabulary. Instead, the Chinese Communist state speaks of building a "harmonious society," a term with similar philosophical roots as *minsheng*. The amount of theoretical writings on this

new project far surpasses Sun's writing on *minsheng*. Nonetheless, one can detect some similarities. While Sun's *minsheng* served as a political tool in trying to bring together the factions within the GMD in the 1920s, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the twenty-first century is trying to create a new ideology with which a more and more diverse population may identify. Both are trying to construct a socially fairer state.

The GMD's attempts formed part of reconstruction efforts following revolution and civil war, while the contemporary CCP tries to counterbalance social inequality following three decades of reform. In both cases, social organisations play a pivotal role for the state: caring for people's livelihood is considered the foundation for stable rule, but neither the Republican state nor the CCP was or is able to deliver this care without the help of social organisations. Allowing the existence of such organisations, however, also potentially threatens stable rule, the worst being that they may turn into platforms of social protest and unrest. Therefore, control of the organisations, then and now, serves as the means to safeguard the foundation of stability (Lin 2009).[1]

Discussions on the nature and existence of civil society in China tend to circle around the question of independence and spend much time trying to determine whether the fact that the Chinese government, through its various regulations governing social groups, retains control over all social organisations in China, which would mean that the activities carried out by these varied groups do not fall within the scope of civil society as described by various Western models. Others consider the corporatist framework a more apt model to analyse the relationship between social organisations and the state, whether national or local. The fact that the Chinese state tries to control, organise and licence the various social groups and at the same time tries to incorporate them into the system, suggests that this framework is more useful in describing the reality of social organisations in China today (Hsu and Hasmath 2012: 204). However, this model does not allow for an analysis of the role state ideology plays in the control of social organisations (Hsu and Hasmath 2012: 39; Schulte 2012).

Defining an NGO in the Chinese context is not a straightforward matter and the task itself has produced a fair amount of scholarship.[2] Kang Xiaoguang (2010: 4) uses a functional rather than conceptual benchmark to determine whether an organisation is an NGO. Specifically, as long as an organisation, regardless of its background (be it entrepreneurial, social, official, or private) engages in the type of work an NGO would engage in, using the methods of an NGO, then it is an NGO. Mapping out the

history of NGOs in China, Nick Young (2004) is convinced that China will 'develop its own model, drawing on its specific history'. This chapter is an attempt to contribute to this particular approach by analysing the activities of one of China's most famous social organisations in a historical context.

The Amity Foundation

The sheer number of NGOs in China today is staggering. He Jianyu (2010) speaks of 1.3 million organisations in China, a figure that rises to more than 8 million if all mass organisations are included. Back in the 1980s the situation was very different; then only first tentative steps were taken towards the establishment of social organisations. Some of the first initiatives grew out of underground publications, which tried to establish a semi-official identity in the months and years before their inevitable closure. But initiatives also emerged on an official level and two of the most successful and longest standing social organisations today–Amity Foundation and Project Hope–saw their beginnings in the 1980s as a response to high level initiatives.

In Amity's case, it was the initiative of Chinese Christians, headed by Bishop Ding Guangxun (better known abroad as K. H. Ting), which led to the foundation of this organisation.[3] Starting out as a relatively unknown organisation with only three members of staff, Amity has grown into a well known national social organisation with a staff of nearly a hundred over the last 26 years. Amity enjoys a good reputation both inside and outside China as an efficient organisation able to deliver high quality projects.[4]

The organisation was heavily involved in relief efforts after both major earthquakes in Wenchuan and Yushu in recent years, but its projects extend well beyond the scope of disaster relief. It is also engaged in scholarships and fostering orphans, public health and HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, social welfare (including foster care projects and projects for the hearing impaired, the disabled and the elderly), community development and environmental protection and so on. The majority of these projects take place in remote regions of China, often inhabited by ethnic minorities. But there are also several projects in Nanjing including the Social Service Centre, which is comprised of various projects with disabled people, including the Amity Bakery.

Today Amity's Christian roots are not immediately apparent—a fact that is heavily criticised from within church circles. In response to such

criticism, Amity is quick to point to one focus of its development, which is cooperation with churches to develop their capacity for social services and that has led to the establishment of the Jiangsu Christian Fund for Social Service with an intention to strengthen the cooperation and contact between Amity and all churches in Jiangsu.

The Nanjing NGO Development Centre (or Training Centre for Social Organizations) is one of its newest, secular ventures. It was launched in November 2009 and is one of Amity's newest projects, in which it has entered into direct competition with the local charity market. The organisation is still young, but seems to enjoy great success and recognition. Only just over a year after its creation it was awarded a prize for social innovation in December 2010, and it was included in the top ten innovative social organisations out of 161 NGOs at an awards ceremony in Beijing. Of the seven organisations the centre is currently helping to develop; three are environmental organisations, one works with disabled people, one with elderly people, one provides educational material for disabled children and one is a travel agency.

In addition, Amity also has a very strong arm of publicity and resource development; Amity publishes a sophisticated newsletter, has a very well maintained website in Chinese and English, organises conferences and public debates, runs a volunteer centre, and has recently opened a 'charity gallery' in Guangzhou. It also organises education and international exchange programmes. Amity also has an office in Hong Kong, which helps with overseas links, fundraising, and volunteers (see Wickeri 2007).[5]

How did a faith-based organisation become one of the earliest NGOs established in post-Mao China? According to Amity, there were two catalysts for its establishment. One was the establishment of the Chinese Welfare Fund for the Handicapped in 1984. The other was the active encouragement by Hu Qiaomu for religious groups to undertake social welfare activities. As the churches themselves had few resources to engage in this kind of initiative in 1985, overseas churches were approached for their support which yielded a favourable response. Interestingly, a slightly different version is presented in Ma Jia's biography of K. H. Ting. According to Ma (2006), Amity was established because the official Protestant church could not very well be seen to accept monies offered by foreign churches at the time. There was therefore a need to establish an organisation outside the church to become active in Chinese welfare. In order to mitigate criticism that this would still go against the 'three-self' policy, individuals from outside the church, including many intellectuals

like Kuang Yaming, were invited onto the council of the new organisation (Ma 2006). Kuang himself was known to have a long-standing interest in religious and philosophical questions and had developed an appreciation of Christian ideas and the work of the YMCA in the 1940s. That he was known in Christian circles for his view that a 'true' Christian and a 'true' Communist both sought to serve the people in their own ways, made him an ideal candidate for this role (Wickeri 2007: 216).

Apparently, K. H. Ting personally came up with the Chinese name Aide 爱德, consisting of the two characters for love and virtue, which could also translate as 'the power of love'; the English translation 'Amity' was suggested by Janice Wickeri and was adopted as the official English name (Wickeri 2007: 271–9).

Twenty years after its foundation Amity's (then newly appointed) General Secretary Qiu Zhonghui did not once mention the word religion in his speech given at China's first national conference on Charity and Philanthropy held in Pujiang. Instead Qiu, who, like his Deputy, studied American and English literature at Nanjing University, presented an organisation based on the two equally important pillars of Western management practice and Christian values, if not faith. One of the five key principles he cited as lying at the heart of Amity's success was 'sincerity' which he considers crucial to gaining the trust of donors. In his view, 'honesty and sincerity' needed to embed in society in order to be able to develop a modern non-profit culture and a genuine spirit of public welfare in China, to attract talented young people willing to get involved.

Part of the attraction to get involved with Amity may lie in what Philip Wickeri, long term coordinator of the Amity overseas liaison office in Hong Kong (from 1985 to 1997), refers to as the 'Amity Spirit'. According to Wickeri (2010), 'Amity Spirit' draws on Chinese traditional culture, Chinese socialism, and Christian internationalism. It is not Christian and not religious, but many Christians and religious believers would see in it a reflection of their values. This constitutes a reflection of K. H. Ting's theology which aims to integrate socialist values and Christian values, and which, paradoxically, now appears to be of greater attraction to foreign donors than to Chinese Christians.

Today, Amity has ambitious plans for the future. It sees itself as a channel for social development resources of all kinds, a platform for learning and practice in social development, a bridge for the church to engage in social service, and a window for non-governmental exchange between China and the outside world. Regarding Amity's plans for the next five

years, Qiu Zhonghui puts the emphasis squarely on the domestic agenda. He wants to expand Amity's domestic donor and partner base and develop Amity into a much stronger and more recognisable brand in China. Qiu's aim is to create a healthy competition within the Chinese NGO market which, according to him, is currently dominated by GONGOs (a government organised non-governmental organisation), which enjoy an unfair advantage. Its NGO Development Centre has an important role to play in this.

Amity's NGO Training Centre

High up inside a quiet office block in Jianye, Amity's NGO Training Centre occupies a large open plan office, furnished with a number of desks and computers and decorated with colourful wall charts. Four young staff members are working with support from Amity, providing hands-on support for grassroots organisations that wish to grow into established organisations.

This new project is not without controversy, not just because Amity has to compete with other organisations, but also because Amity raises local funds for it. With an expenditure of just over 98,000 yuan in 2010 it constituted the smallest of Amity's projects in financial terms. Qiu Zhonghui justified this new venture as a necessity to share Amity's expertise, but it may also have had to do with the fact that the Nanjing government wanted all informal groups registered as a result of a change in the registration system.

The Jianye Centre was founded in collaboration with two local government organisations: the Jianye district government and the Nanjing municipal government. The model was first introduced by NPI (恩派), a big aggregation of several NGO supporting organisations founded in Shanghai in 2006. It launched the concept of the 'non-profit incubator' in the same year and has since been incubating about 30 new NGOs a year. NPI places high value on integrated branding, sharing of resources and complementary advantage.[6] By following NPI's example, both the local government and Amity have responded to developments in the 'charity market' and have pro-actively entered this growing field.[7] In 2012, NPI itself launched an NGO incubator in Nanjing.

The concept of the Development Centre is that of an incubator. Budding social organisations can submit proposals to the Centre for evaluation. If an application is considered viable, the Centre will agree

to incubate the budding social organisation for one year to prepare it for official registration. During this year, the Centre provides office space and computers at the Jianye office. It also lends support by providing help with the writing of applications for registration, checking if projects are sustainable (in terms of staffing for instance), if the project is strategically coherent and do-able and if it is financially viable. The Centre will also provide its expertise when it comes to writing funding applications.

According to its director, it is the aim of the Centre to support small NGOs and to help them with capacity-building and registration. They need to register in order to gain legal status and to get access to resources; whether an organisation will actually register therefore largely depends on its development target. According to Amity there are 14,000 NGOs in Nanjing alone; the fact that by their estimate about 90 per cent of them are unregistered raises a number of interesting questions.[8]

Co-operation with the Government

Establishing social organisations has become an important and recognised aspect of economic development. As the government does not necessarily realise what services social organisations can provide, the Centre has been set up as a bridge between budding organisations and the local government. The government purchases these services from society, but does expect certain standards to be met. Amity is the link that ensures the upholding of standards. The Centre's director insists that none of its incubated organisations could exist without government resources. Social organisations need the government more than the other way around, as they are dependent on the government for their legal position and space.[9]

While one would expect a certain degree of 'officialese' from an organisation so experienced and well connected as Amity, this does seem to be a view shared by smaller organisations. Inside the tiny, windowless room on the 16th floor of a grubby office block in central Nanjing, the manager of the local branch of Gospel Times, a web-based organisation, regards the idea that the state could be left out altogether as almost absurd. Gospel Times serves as a platform for Christian information communication and exchange and considers itself to be a truly independent NGO. Repeatedly referring to the 'special Chinese circumstances,' the young manager confirmed that they were indeed seeking a relationship with the government, if only to ensure that 'they have an understanding of what we are doing'.[10]

To be associated with Amity certainly confers a high degree of legitimacy in the local context of Nanjing, where Amity is extremely well known and well connected to the local government, lending it credibility and trustworthiness in the eyes of potential clients, donors and the general public. Carolyn Hsu (2012) refers to this type of relationship as 'institutional interdependence' while Lu Yiyi (2009) uses the term 'amphibious' to describe organisations whose leaders have one foot in the organisation and another in the state structure (by virtue of their own employment, for example) in order to ensure access to a whole range of resources. Amity's NGO Development Centre seems to provide an institutional basis for this 'amphibious' state.

Co-operation with the government in some form or other is written into the rules and regulations governing NGOs, at least those that want to be registered. There are advantages and disadvantages to being registered. Although the general consensus seems to be that it is better to be registered, the ratio of registered to unregistered organisations in Nanjing would suggest that many individuals with the desire and initiative to get engaged in a public project see no need to opt into a special relationship with the government. This also seems to be confirmed by the fact, that three years after its foundation, Amity's NGO Development Centre appears to have real difficulties in finding suitable organisations to 'incubate'. According to a spokesperson of the Centre, this is partly a result of the limited capacity the Centre itself has, but whether the Centre is prepared to work with a grassroots organisation also has to do with a number of factors. These include the personality of the individual in charge, the organisation's attitude towards the local government, and its function and definition, that is, which social sector it wishes to serve and where it intends to carry out this activity.[11]

The key question therefore is whether the close link with the government influences the choice of projects taken on by an organisation. Nelson Chow, a listed member of Amity's advisory board, reckons that Amity only gets involved in projects that are on the government's agenda. Were they to start more controversial projects, such as HIV/AIDS prevention, support for single mothers or presumably any prisoner re-socialisation projects, they would immediately run into trouble. He also considers this the main reason why Amity does not get involved in many urban projects, which are potentially far more sensitive. Working in the urban centres not only means working directly under the noses of the government, but the urban population is also more organised, more assertive, and less pliable

than the rural population. All this combined with the increased media coverage in the cities provides too sensitive a stage for Amity to carry out any bigger urban projects, according to Professor Chow.[12] Kang Xiaoguang's study would confirm this evaluation. He argues that any activity that may impact on social stability or economic growth will draw the government's attention, therefore in order to co-operate with the government (as Amity does), an NGO first needs to learn the value system of the government (or the government's agenda, in other words), and the NGO work will need to contribute to this (Kang and Han 2008: 9).

Others still see potential of ideological innovation within this framework. For example, environmental protection–ostensibly non-controversial and firmly on the government's agenda–appears to be a suitable field within which to elaborate concepts such as public participation, democratic decision making mechanisms, and local self-governance (Wu 2009). This also seems to be confirmed by Amity's experience in relief and reconstruction efforts following the earthquakes in Sichuan. During its village reconstruction work in Woyun Village, Amity worked with local committees consisting of the local party secretary and two representatives from each of the 16 actual villages they were working with. Amity insisted on female involvement by stipulating that one of the representatives of each village needed to be female. In Amity's experience, the committees usually started with the involvement of the party secretary, although the responsibility often drifted to other individuals. As one feisty woman villager told Amity, "We don't want the party secretary [on the committee], because we can't fire him!"[13]

All the projects taken on by Amity's NGO Development Centre in Nanjing concern non-controversial areas which are firmly on the government's agenda. One of the environmental organisations concerns itself with the clean-up of Mochou Lake, a historically famous lake in the centre of Nanjing, situated in a middle class area, surrounded by new apartment blocks. Apparently, the lake was badly polluted because of criminal negligence by the housing companies, who built the surrounding apartment blocks. The organisation, while still listed on Amity's website, is now independent, but continues to use the office space at the Jianye Centre.

The leader of this organisation has an official background and his connections help to raise resources. The combination of this factor together with Amity's support and Mochou Lake's national cultural significance mean that the organisation is awarded projects (that is: specific tasks to carry out) by both provincial and national governments.[14] Another

organisation, which has now 'graduated' from the Centre is an organisation concerned with reviving the traditional art of Kunju, the local Chinese opera. It operates mostly within universities and schools, raising interest in the genre through performances with the aim of raising a new generation of Kunju artists. Upon 'graduation' from the Centre, it was unable to afford its own offices, but was given an office free of charge by the university.

The Centre's director confirms that the decision as to which project gets supported is determined by the government's agenda. A spokesperson from Amity's NGO Training Centre in fact goes so far as to say that the biggest challenges are the high expectations the government has put on it and the speed at which it is expected to train social organisations to meet the "urgent needs of society," as specified in the government's agenda.[15]

Qiu Zhonghui, on the other hand, sees some opportunity for Amity to have an influence on that very agenda. He concedes that the co-operation with the government is a balancing act, but insists that the better Amity is understood, the more it is able to do. His strategy is to involve the government even more when potentially sensitive projects are concerned, as an exercise of building trust. He is adamant that Amity want to get more involved in local, urban projects. In such cases it is moving step by step, careful to avoid setbacks by taking too big a step at a time. If it is not possible to reach a consensus with the government, it puts the issue aside and revisits it at a later stage.[16]

Historical Continuity

Most studies of Chinese NGOs which use Western theory as their point of reference may be inclined to criticise the cautious and conciliatory approach described by Qiu. However, taking a look back into China's past may be more instructive in trying to understand the organisation and behaviour of Chinese social organisations today. We will therefore briefly return to Sun Yatsen's era, where we started this chapter.

In the Beijing of the 1920s, Sun's term *minsheng* was commonly used to refer to that part of the established social order which supported the material well-being of townspeople. There was a general sentiment running through public opinion at the time that philanthropic projects were necessary correctives to unregulated growth. Politically conscious Chinese recognized the value of state intervention both in coordinating social

peace and economic security, and in legitimising the existing social order (Strand 1989: 285).

The establishment of the Republic saw a big increase in the number of social organisations including charitable organisations; according to a YMCA survey, in 1923 there were more than 370 charities in Beijing alone (Wang 2010: 148). As the numbers grew, the associations became more organised and connected with one another. This institutionalisation was partly driven from within the organisations, partly it derived from an attempt on the side of the government to manage and control all these new associations as social welfare was put on the government's agenda.

Charity in Republican times had two trajectories: the development of modern, popular charities and the establishment of a state social welfare system. The popular charities were reasonably effective in their endeavours, greatly aided by the modernisation of transport and communication. The impact of modern newspapers on the charitable sector was considerable. The press published not only reports on disasters, but also on the relief efforts by the government and the people, which greatly increased public interest and awareness of these matters, which in turn fed the growth of popular organisations (Wang 2010: 62). A similar link between new media and public awareness and involvement can be observed following natural disasters in present day China.

During the Republican period, many of the newspapers and journals reporting on disaster relief efforts were published by professional and voluntary organisations set up independent from the government. These had seen a dramatic increase in numbers, especially after the May Fourth Movement. In addition there were also myriads of informal gatherings in public spaces which often grew into more formal organisations. Many of these organisations–be they local chambers of commerce or student unions–strove for integration into a nationwide system, recognising the need for the state to intervene as far as public services, economic and social stability were concerned. Voluntary organisations back then, just like today, actively sought cooperation with local government institutions and structures in order to maximise their benefits (Liu and Liu 1997; Dikoetter 2008). As David Strand (1989: 177) puts it "as plants grow towards sunlight, modern Chinese organizations grew toward political authority".

There is, however, one crucial difference to contemporary China, which Barbara Schulte (2012) points out. It relates to the nature of the state, with which organisations then and now seek integration. In Republican times, the state was weak, and in many cases entirely absent. The state,

into which organisations sought to be integrated during the 1920s existed more in the imagination of social activists than in actuality. The many social organisations therefore often fulfilled their function in lieu of an absent state, rather than on behalf of a strong state, as they do today.

In Republican times, professional association status (*fatuan*)–essentially a registered, legal status–allowed some organisations to accommodate a mix of self-regulation and government control. *Fatuan* were allowed to hold meetings and petition the government, but smaller organisations outside these were subject to a host of regulations and restrictions. The Republican state was also wary of social organisations in the form of voluntary associations and tried to exercise control over potentially subversive forces to the state and disruptions to social and political order. The co-opting of smaller organisations within the realm of established *fatuan* was common and had appeal for both sides; the smaller organisations gained legitimacy which aided their cause, while the established, elite organisations could claim a broader consensus and representation (Strand 1989).

But, as Xu Xiaoqun (2001: 155) puts it, "The statist agenda had to be circumscribed or balanced, because professions and professionals were indispensable for the modernising projects of the state." Professional organisations including chambers of commerce, educational societies and trade guilds were accepted as legitimate, because their members and their work were essential for the state apparatus. In today's China, too, the need for special expertise on the part of the government legitimises the existence of many social organisations and NGOs.

During the period of the Republic, the growing importance of the expert also strengthened the role of non-state organisations outside the realm of professional associations. Members of the Chinese Association of Vocational Education (CAVE), for example, were able to set the agenda and start new initiatives by virtue of becoming representatives of government organisations, short of turning into full-time politicians. In addition, members of one social organisation were often also members of other associations, thereby creating a network of interest groups and ensuring a horizontal flow of information (Schulte 2012: 28–33).

After the GMD's takeover of Shanghai, voluntary associations were controlled more fiercely and old terms like *fatuan* abandoned. In the decade following the Northern Expedition and up to the outbreak of the War with Japan, political focus was on reconstruction to enhance the people's livelihood, based on the belief that social welfare was linked to social peace. This was partly the result of the impact foreign philanthropy, delivered

by organisations like the Red Cross, the Salvation Army and especially the YMCA, had had on the Chinese people. A Social Welfare Bureau was established to administrate 'all social affairs'. Its functions included the role of a watchdog of public behaviour and the setting of proper standards of conduct through propaganda, that is, it combined the concepts of modern Western social welfare and the Chinese view of philanthropy as edification (Lin 2009: 165).

In Chen Jitang's Guangzhou, all charities were placed under government control. They had to apply for registration, and only with a licence could they get protection from the Public Security Bureau. A model philanthropic institution, the Hall of Benevolence, was established to set the standards for proper philanthropy, which enabled other charitable organisations to follow its lead and to achieve 'unity under one banner', an arrangement which benefitted both sides, and which bears a striking resemblance to the function of big organisations like NPI or Amity today (Lin 2009: 182–4).

Taking a leap into the relatively politically liberal 1980s, after more than three decades of tight control, some underground magazines were able to move into a semi-official sphere by employing certain strategies to ensure not only the survival, but also the widest possible reach of their circulation and the widest possible benefit. One of the ways in which unofficial magazines were able to come and remain in existence (until the moment of crackdown) was by using equipment, including printing machines, paper and ink, from government organisations, at which the magazine editors were employed. For example, when Jin Guantao and Bao Zunxin started to work on an independent book series in 1982, both were employed by academic journals or official publishing houses, just like many leaders of small NGOs in China today. One could say that their modus operandi was the precursor of what is today referred to as an organisation's 'amphibious' state.

Economics Weekly magazine, which was one of the most critical magazines on political and social issues in the 1980s, invited open-minded officials as consultants and recruited offspring of high officials as assistant editors in order to obtain the latest news on government policy and to keep the magazine protected. After a threat of closure in 1988, which was prevented only by the intervention of open-minded officials, the magazine had to add an administrative unit that consisted of sympathetic party officials, which also functioned as a protective umbrella for the magazine. To avoid censorship, Economics Weekly adopted a series of strategies hence

after. These included the publication of interviews with open-minded officials and other elites and the adoption of a moderate tone of rhetoric when discussing controversial issues, blurring the line between unofficial and official media. The magazine also sometimes let official magazines publish research it had conducted, especially where more sensitive issues were concerned, a practice still widely used among NGOs today (Shao 2015).[17]

The historical experience, and in particular the more recent one of the 1980s, must have informed the drafting of the rules and regulations governing social groups, and more recently China's new Charity Law. It is important to bear in mind that it was the magazines/associations which actively sought links with the government. Then and now, the founding of many NGOs would simply have been impossible without a certain form of government subsidy and support, where the government is understood in Kang Xiaoguang's sense and may simply refer to an individual within it.

NGO Influence

It is easy and indeed common practice, to criticise Chinese social organisations for their lack of independence. In some cases, especially among Western students and observers, this arises from a somewhat rose-tinted view of the status and degree of independence of NGOs in the West.[18] However, if one consults studies on the relationship between NGOs and International Governmental Organisations (IGOs), the parallels to the Chinese situation are often striking, especially when it comes to co-operation, mutual benefit and project implementation.[19] Nick Young (2004) in fact states very clearly that the GONGO phenomenon is by no means unique to China and that the Chinese government's fostering of its own NGO sector is not so different from international practice.

An important thing to bear in mind is that the Chinese government is not monolithic. There are differences in opinion and values among individuals and departments as well as various conflicts of interest between them, which create a space for manoeuvre for NGOs. In this space lies what Lu Yiyi (2009) refers to as Chinese NGOs' special skills. These can roughly be summarised as the ability to negotiate, lobby and manipulate in a system, where actual rules and regulations are often on paper only, and much more depends on personal relationship and 'face'. Having found friends or allies in the government, NGOs are able to serve as a bridge between a certain government bureau and segments of society which the government would otherwise not reach. Bringing together

social organisations, the government, enterprise and the media to facilitate communication between these different actors, for example, is one of the focal points of the Amity NGO Development Centre's work.[20]

Western criticism of China's NGO scene is at times also disingenuous. As Lu Yiyi (2009) argues, international donors to projects in China do not usually pay attention to the details of project implementation, as long as the NGO delivers. As a matter of fact, in Amity's case, foreign donors give to Amity precisely because of its good links with the government, not despite it. Most Chinese NGOs lack the organisational capacity to implement even medium size projects and they have to rely on the government's administrative network. On the other hand, this lack of interest by international donors also leads to government/NGO collusion; that is, NGOs, with the permission of the government, appeal to international donors, who are happy to give to an NGO, unaware that the project is ultimately implemented by the government. For the NGO this can result in a careful balancing act illustrated by the following example.

Barely two years on from the disaster in Wenchuan and having learnt some lessons from the vast and unexpected influx of donations at the time, the central government demanded that all NGOs hand over their donations to central government coffers in order to better co-ordinate and plan relief efforts in Yushu. Amity's Qiu Zhonghui refused to do so and offered up his resignation. He felt his responsibility was to ensure that the money went to the projects the (international) donors had intended rather than to hand it over to the government. With the support of the local government, he argued that handing over the donated funds would irreparably damage Amity's reputation and was hence not in the government's interest.[21]

Amity is adamant that its co-operation with the government constitutes an opportunity to shape the NGO scene and to influence policy. The latter happens in various different ways. Amity can create an awareness with the government as to what services are required at the grassroots, and can also show ways of delivering these services which are more effective and efficient than the government's. There is a perceived element of education involved, where the government's anxiety (read restrictions) is explained by a lack of understanding of NGOs. The assumption on the part of Amity and other NGOs is that the more they inform and involve the government, the more the government will understand (and hence allow).

Qiu Zhonghui is convinced that the government wants more NGOs and a stronger civil society in China and that Amity has an important role

to play in bringing this about. He uses the concept of a 'charity zone' to illustrate Amity's role in this process. Similar to the Special Economic Zones of the 1980s, Amity's (and presumably other organizations') 'charity zone' constitutes a space of social experimentation; what works can and will be extrapolated to wider society, what does not work can be contained and abandoned. What is of course quietly understood in this context is that the NGO will not do anything that goes against the government or is in any way politically sensitive (Saich 2000).

Anthony Tong, the Director of Amity's Hong Kong office, provides the following illustrative example of this type of influence. Anthony Tong explains that one of the difficulties to keep the village doctors in the villages lies in the fact that they only earn 600–1000 yuan a month, when they can earn double that amount in the cities. Their pay is made up of a small amount directly from the government, fees from patients and a 15% commission from the medicines they sell, that is, they are effectively subsidised by the pharmaceutical industry. While the government has a list of 307 basic medicines, which are very cheap and very effective, this pay system for doctors means that there is no incentive for doctors to prescribe these basic medicines. Amity has therefore started to subsidise the salaries of village doctors by about 500 yuan per month on the condition that they must prescribe the basic, cheaper medicines. It hopes that the government will realise the benefits of this arrangement and take over this approach from Amity by paying the doctors a higher direct salary on the same condition.

Still in the same context, there exists a government blueprint for the way new village clinics must be built: they must provide waiting areas, better privacy, and better hygiene. The government provides the land on which the clinic is to be built as well as software in the form of clean sheets and other utensils that could not be used in the old village huts which previously functioned as clinics. Amity has found a way to build the clinics for a third of the cost at which the government builds them. Its methods have now been copied and adopted by county governments, which follow Amity's model, but at their own cost. It is therefore important for Amity to work within the government's framework; although Anthony Tong stresses that it only works with 'open minded counties that show some initiative'. Only through this co-operation can it ensure maximum benefit; that is, not just the benefit of the immediate project, but the adoption by the (local) government of better methods with the potential of benefit on a much wider scale.[22]

Teresa Carino, Amity HK's previous long term director who worked as a consultant for Amity in Nanjing agrees with this approach. She considers Amity's close co-operation with the government good and important, and argues that Amity's very considerable expertise puts it in a very strong position to negotiate with the government. While the government now has all the hardware, in the form of state of the art hospitals, schools and equipment, it can and needs to learn from organisations like Amity about how to put it to good use and keep up the standard.[23] Still, it is quite clear that 'policy influence' in these examples really refers to nothing more than the spreading of good practice rather than actual agenda-setting and influencing of government policy.

CONCLUSION

Since its founding in 1985, Amity has become an important player in the domestic NGO scene with a strong reputation of competence and reliability. That it was able to build this reputation has in large part to do with its beginnings. As one of China's first NGOs, and with Christian roots, it appealed to foreign donors and partners, who chose Amity over other organisations which in turn enabled Amity to carry out and deliver impressive projects in China and build a reputation of reliability and competence in the domestic NGO scene. From the outset the link to and support of the government was a vital ingredient in Amity's ability to attract foreign donors, as the churches overseas were keen to ensure the viability of their projects and to reach as wide an audience as possible. Once the money was received, Amity, like all other organisations, worked with the Chinese government at different levels, in order to be able to successfully carry out the projects.

Amity has moved into the 2010s mindful of its background and heritage, and well adept at speaking to different audiences. In addition to the actual projects and work it carries out, it also functions as a bridge between the government and the grassroots. One could say that is has itself gone through an 'incubation period' in the eyes of the government and has now matured into a trusted, nationally recognised organisation. Its NGO Training Centre is a living example of how Amity on the one hand responds to the needs of the grassroots, who seek integration and approval of the local state, and on the other hand acts as agent of the same state by upholding standards and vetting projects and budding associations in China's NGO landscape. Its role can be likened to the *fatuan* of the

Republican period, which occupied a similar realm of approved existence, or Chen Jitang's 'Hall of Benevolence', as an upholder of government approved standards. Amity's emphasis on passing on its knowledge and expertise as well as its brand identity, is a contemporary incarnation of the Hall's 'unity of purpose under one banner.'

In Amity's case, historical continuity is not just provided in the way it facilitates integration with the local government, but also visually in the retention of Kuang Yaming's calligraphy for its logo. A man who straddled the 1949 watershed in his political career, Kuang represents a political generation that grew up under a diversity of influences, including Western and Christian influences, and strove to implement some of what he saw as beneficial in ways that his position as leading intellectual allowed.

Today intellectuals no longer need to become party members to fulfil ambitions of social involvement and leadership. The explosion in numbers of NGOs in Nanjing alone must in part be seen as a reflection of the sheer scale of ambition and desire on the part of mostly educated individuals to get involved in projects of a public nature, however small. The fact that this type of public engagement is tolerated, even encouraged, shows that a certain space has been granted for citizens to live out such ambitions, provided their activities remain within the framework of the government's agenda.

Traditionally, urban elites had worked within the administrative and normative context provided by the state; from what we know about NGOs in China, contemporary urban elites continue to do so. However, judging from the vast amount of unregistered organisations in Nanjing alone, the majority of individuals must be content to be involved in very small scale work at the grassroots level. It may be that the urban elites consciously resist the embrace of the local state, or that their initiative may simply be stifled by all the processes involved in obtaining official registration. The government's most recent move to abolish the need for an official sponsor within a government ministry as part of the conditions for official registration seems to indicate some recognition of the latter (Wang 2012). But one must also seriously consider the possibility that many grassroots initiatives take place in areas which are not declared urgent social needs by the government and hence do not stand a chance of either being registered or even incubated by umbrella organisations like Amity.

Wang Juan (2010: 222–5) points out that history has taught China that the basis for a good social welfare system is the mutual complementation and support of state structures and popular systems. This can only be facilitated if

the state takes a leading role in this by systematically managing the development of popular organisations through legalisation and institutionalisation. At the same time, the state needs to lend support to popular organisations in order to jointly promote a balanced distribution of social resources and a spirit of co-operation in the whole society. By stating that due to historical circumstances this was only an ideal during the period of the Republic, Wang Juan (2010) implies that it is a distinct possibility today.

In this context one must acknowledge how today's China differs from the Republican period. While it was possible for members and leaders of non-state organisations during the Republic to enter government bodies and thus actively influence policy, the relation between the state and non-state organisations in today's China is dominated by the state. It is the state, which determines the agenda of the NGO by defining what the most urgent social needs are that need to be addressed. It is only within this firmly established framework based on the political ideology of a strong state that NGOs today can exert some influence and spread good practice.

The ideal of social harmony as foundation for stable rule underpins both Sun's *minsheng* and the current state project of building the 'harmonious society'. Neither are attainable without the work of social organisations which equally subscribe to the two sides of the paradigm; integration with the state appears to be an unquestioned prerequisite that underpins it. But within this broad communality one must recognise a crucial difference. Sun Yatsen's concept of *minsheng* was one pillar of a tentative ideology in an attempt to create a modern state. Citizens involved in social organisations during this early period of the Republic subscribed to the notion of a strong state as an ideal, but operated in a reality which made it possible to influence policy and public agenda, conforming in broad terms to the concept of 'civil society' (Schulte 2012: 23). The moment the Republican state became stronger (under GMD rule) this arena also became more restricted. Today's social organisations operate not within an imagined strong state, but within a real and existing strong state, on whose behalf they take on certain functions and with which they must co-operate, if they wish to develop beyond the scope of small-scale grassroots operations.

Amity's behaviour and in particular its latest venture in the form of its NGO Development Centre thus follow a tendency prevalent among Chinese social organisations as early as the 1920s, constituting an institutional greenhouse within which budding social organisation can grow toward political authority. But while many seek to benefit from this

nurture and nourishment, there are also many more small saplings and weeds that come into life outside these greenhouses, whose growth (or decline) may be the real measure of China's social and political change.

Notes

1. This observation, made by Alfred Lin in reference to Chen Jitang's rule can be equally applied to contemporary China.
2. For the clearest explanation of the various organisations and regulations see Lu Yiyi (2009: 2ff).
3. K.H. Ting has been the central figure in the development of the (official) Chinese Protestant church in China since the reform era. He has developed a Chinese Christian theology influenced by socialism and whose central tenet is the notion that God is Love (not Faith).
4. See Qiu (2004: 213–20). Also Amity (2010).
5. For detailed information see Amity Foundation website at http://www.amityfoundation.org/eng/, also Amity (2010).
6. See http://www.npi.org.cn/english/aboutus_01.html, accessed 24 May 2011.
7. For more recent developments see also Shawn Shieh's blog entry on 5 December 2011 Available at http://ngochina.blogspot.com/2011/12/visiting-ngos-in-shanghai-and-nanjing.html, accessed 23 September 2011.
8. Tian Meimei [interview by Gerda Wielander], Nanjing, 23 November 2010. For a detailed chart of the incubation process see http://www.amityfoundation.org.cn/project/app/0032/webproject-02lv.aspx, accessed 9 May 2011.
9. Tian Meimei [interview by Gerda Wielander], Nanjing, 23 November 2010.
10. Song Tingyong [interview by Gerda Wielander], Nanjing, 24 November 2010. www.gospeltimes.cn, accessed 31 August 2011.
11. Zhou Liting [email interview by Gerda Wielander], 4 June 2012.
12. Nelson Chow [interview by Gerda Wielander], Hong Kong, 29 November 2010. Nelson Chow is Professor in Social Work and Social Administration at the University of Hong Kong.
13. Anthony Tong of Amity Hong Kong (2010) [interview by Gerda Wielander], 29 November 2010.

14. See http://www.amity.org.cn/article/view.aspx?id=3051. Additional information obtained from Tian Meimei [interview by Gerda Wielander], Nanjing 23 November 2010.
15. Zhou Liting [interview by Gerda Wielander], 4 June 2012.
16. Qiu Zhonghui (n.d.) [interview by Gerda Wielander], Nanjing 26 November.
17. I am indebted to Shao Jiang, PhD candidate at the University of Westminster, for his work on underground magazines for much of this information. See also Jin (n.d.) http://www.douban.com/group/topic/13298464/, accessed 18 May 2011; Tyson and Tyson (1995); Gu (1996).
18. In this context it can be very constructive to consult studies on the relationship between NGOs and International Intergovernmental Organizations. For example, Martens (2001).
19. IGOs are organisations that are made up primarily of sovereign states referred to as member states. The United Nations or the European Union are prime examples, but there are a myriad of such organisations. For a list of these see: http://www.libsci.sc.edu/bob/IGOs.htm, accessed 16 May 2010.
20. Zhou Liting [email interview by Gerda Wielander], 4 June 2012.
21. Qiu Zhonghui [interview by Gerda Wielander], Nanjing, 26 November 2010.
22. Anthony Tong [interview by Gerda Wielander], Hong Kong, 29 November 2010.
23. Theresa Carino [interview by Gerda Wielander], Nanjing, 26 November 2010.

Governing Disasters: A Comparative Analysis of the 1931, 1954 and 1998 Middle-Yangzi Floods in Hubei

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For thousands of years the governors of the Central Chinese province of Hubei have struggled to prevent floods. The Yangzi River descends from the Three Gorges in the west of the province and flows across vast alluvial plains. Over the course of this journey the river is engorged with great volumes of water from numerous tributaries, and forms a complex relationship with the thousands of lakes that dot its plains. In the east of the province the Yangzi meets the Han River, forming what Pierre-Étienne Will (1985) has described as an "interior delta". Clustered around the confluence of these two great rivers are the three historically independent municipalities of Wuchang, Hanyang and Hankou. Today these cities have been united into a sprawling metropolis known as Wuhan. This is not only the provincial capital, but also the economic and political centre of the Middle Yangzi region (Skinner 1977).[1] Eventually, having been transformed from a rapidly flowing river to a colossal watercourse, the Yangzi narrows in order bisect the Dabie Mountains that mark the border between Hubei and Jiangxi.

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The environmental characteristics of Hubei guarantee a high-level of natural flood risk. The province is located in a geological depression, which maximises catchment, and is bordered on the east by mountains, which limit the discharge of rivers (Yin et al. 2007). Hubei also experiences concentrated periods of summer precipitation, and is sensitive to fluctuations of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (Zhang et al. 2007). Yet whilst flooding is a natural feature of the environment, the degree of risk faced by the population has not remained constant throughout history. The frequency and severity of flooding has fluctuated both as a result of natural climatic factors and as a reaction to anthropogenic changes to the environment.[2] The local population exacerbated the natural risk of inundation in a number of ways. They have reclaimed lakes and wetland areas, diminishing the capacity of the landscape to absorb flood peaks. They have deforested highlands, increasing the silt-load of rivers. This has blocked discharge channels and further diminished the capacity of lakes and wetlands to regulate river flow. Finally they have constructed hydraulic networks such as dykes, dams, sluice gates, and drainage channels. These were designed both to expand settlements and ameliorate the consequences of regular inundation. These hydraulic networks have isolated rivers from their plains, preventing them from discharging silts, and eventually raising their beds above the adjacent plains (Yin and Li 2001; Yu et al. 2009).

These anthropogenic processes have contributed to a marked increase in the frequency and severity of flooding over the last millennium (Zong and Chen 2000; Zhang et al. 2007). Whilst this pattern has unfolded incrementally over the long-term trajectory of environmental history, human-activity also has had a discernible influence upon flood risk within a shorter-term socio-political timeframe. The level of political and economic stability within a particular period has helped to determine whether communities were able to respond effectively to the threat of inundation.[3] The willingness and capacity of the state to invest in hydraulic defence networks to prevent floods, and an infrastructure of relief institutions to ameliorate their consequences, has come to influence the genesis and outcome of inundations. Thus, in as much as geology, hydrology and meteorology have ensured that inundation remains a constant constraint upon governance in Hubei, the social, political and economic stability engendered by particular patterns of governance have also been able to constrain the worst consequences of these environmental fluctuation. Put simply, governance has become a key variable helping to determine whether *natural disasters* become *humanitarian catastrophes*.

The population of Hubei has long been aware of the importance of governance in relation to flooding. R. Bin Wong and Peter Perdue (1983) observed that Chinese governments frequently "withered in droughts and drowned in floods." Such disasters not only destroyed the agricultural base upon which governors relied for revenue, but also threatened the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of its subjects. Accordingly, governors not only paid significant attention to maintaining flood prevention and disaster relief infrastructures, but also to ensuring that affected communities were made aware of their efforts. Imperial historians wrote hagiographic accounts detailing official prevention and relief work. On occasions successful hydraulic administrators were even deified, their images enshrined in temples where they received posthumous veneration from grateful local populations (Dodgen 2001). In this respect the official representation of floods has a long and complex history.

In establishing an explicit link between good governance and successful flood administration, the state left itself vulnerable to accusations of mismanagement when catastrophes were not averted. In order to maintain legitimacy, the higher echelons of the imperial regime often attempted to deflect criticism, blaming the mismanagement of local administrators or the immoral conduct of disaster-affected communities (Elvin 1998). In spite of such obfuscations, local populations continued to blame governors for floods and droughts. Indeed, many of the major anti-dynastic movements that occurred in the late-imperial period were linked in some way to disasters.[4] Thus the official representation of floods has been in constant dialogue with popular opinion amongst disaster-affected communities.

Whilst there has been a significant shift in the understanding of the environment and disasters in China since the late-imperial period, floods have continued to be linked to the issue of governance. This chapter uses the example of flooding in Hubei as prism through which to examine how the practice, representation and understanding of disaster governance have changed over the twentieth century. The intention is not to provide a comprehensive analysis of changes to the system of governance over this long period, but rather to examine the three instances in which the governing infrastructure was most severely tested: during the Yangzi mega-floods of 1931, 1954 and 1998.[5] These three disasters provide an opportunity to compare Republican, Maoist and post-Mao governance, examining how successive regimes responded to a similar environmental hazard.

The comparison provided in this chapter takes three forms. Firstly it assesses the *relative success* that governors have had in dealing with the

humanitarian consequences of flooding. The 1931 flood has generally been recognised as the worst of the three disasters, a fact that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) publicised widely in order to criticise the failings of its Guomindang (GMD) predecessors. However, this chapter presents original archival evidence that suggests that the humanitarian impact of the 1954 flood was far more serious than has been previously admitted, killing over five times as many people as has been reported in official histories. It also argues that although the humanitarian impact of the 1998 flood was the least serious, the severity of the inundation itself was the product of long-term unsustainable environmental policies.

Secondly, this chapter compares the *official representation* of flood governance under each regime, examining official literature and propaganda published during the 1930s, 1950s and 1990s. This reveals much about both disaster governance and also the prevailing political atmosphere in each period. Finally, this chapter considers the *popular perception* of flood governance held by ordinary citizens of Hubei. Unlike the official literature, which if anything is overabundant, recorded accounts of the opinions of ordinary citizens are relatively rare. As such, in addition to a wide variety of written sources, including government reports, propaganda and journalistic accounts, this chapter also uses information from fifteen oral history interviews conducted with flood survivors, to uncover a glimpse of ground-level understanding of disaster governance.[6] The intention is not to posit such testimony as an authoritative history to counter the official narrative, but rather to examine the interaction between the reality and representation of flooding in Hubei, demonstrating the changing manner in which the state and its citizens have understood the governance of the environment.

1931: Heaven-Sent Disasters and Man-Made Catastrophes

One of the most commonly invoked journalistic clichés in 1930s descriptions of floods was the notion of "heaven-sent disasters and man-made catastrophes" (天灾人祸). This idiom was employed to refer to a period or area in which the populace suffered from both environmental and social disasters. In reality the boundary between these two maladies was often impossible to distinguish. Environmental and social disasters were locked in a deadly feedback loop, each exacerbating the impact of the other. One consequence of this mutual-interdependence is that so-called

"natural disasters" have often been used as an index to measure the effectiveness of human governance.

If the three Yangzi mega-floods of the twentieth century were to be employed in such an assessment, the simplest method would be to compare the environmental profile of each event with its humanitarian impact. Following this methodology, governance in the Republican-era (1911–1949) would certainly appear to be the least effective. In terms of its environmental profile, the 1931 deluge had the lowest maximum discharge and the shortest duration of the three floods, yet it inundated the greatest area (Yu et al. 2009). The core disaster zone was not limited to the Middle Yangzi, but also included the Huai River, the Yellow River and the Grand Canal, with minor flooding reported as far south as Pearl River and as far north as the Songhua and Yalu Rivers (Li et al. 1994). By the summer of 1931 much of Central China had been swallowed by a vast inland sea, approximately equivalent in size to England and half of Scotland, or the states of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut combined (National Flood Relief Commission [NFRC] 1932: 7).

The humanitarian impact was also by far the most severe of the three floods. Contemporary estimates put the disaster-affected population at 25 million (Ibid: 6), yet subsequent historians have suggested that the actual figure may have been as high as 53 million (Li et al. 1994: 231). The flood was also a major blow to the Republican Chinese economy, destroying an estimated $911 million of crops, and causing losses equivalent to one and a half years net income for the millions of affected families (Buck 1932: 12). One official report observed that the flood was "the greatest natural disaster this country has ever suffered. It is one of the greatest catastrophes from natural causes in the history of the world" (NFRC 1932: 4). Although every historian who has examined the flood has concluded that it is impossible to establish an accurate death toll, it is highly likely that over a million people died between 1931 and 1932 as a result of drowning, starvation and disease.[7]

The 1931 flood was the result of a complex interplay between environmental and social factors, and it affected a vast area and a huge population. As such, it would be misleading to suggest that any exclusive factor or section of society were responsible for its occurrence. If the discussion is confined exclusively to the area of governance, however, several key areas of mismanagement can be identified. One of the most important of these was the failure to fund and organise the flood-defence network. As the historian Zhang Jiayan (2006) observes, the mismanagement of the

hydraulic system was the primary determinant for the marked increase in the incidence and severity of flooding in Hubei during the late-Qing and Republican periods.

Hubei boasts a dual hydraulic system, consisting of larger dykes constructed parallel to the Yangzi and Han Rivers, and smaller polder dykes encircling communities. By the late-imperial period, the governing structure of these two forms of dyke had become extremely convoluted. The more important dykes tended to be managed directly by the state, whereas smaller polder dykes either fell under indirect state supervision or were managed entirely by local communities (Ibid). This complex governing structure belied Karl Wittfogel's (1957) crude image of the imperial state wielding absolute power through its rigid control of the hydraulic network. Rather, governance was organised through a delicate dialogue between the central state, local gentry and local communities (Will 1980; Perdue 1987; Zhang J. 2006).

Whilst the state may not have wielded despotic power, it played an important role in ensuring hydraulic stability. It did so both directly— through maintaining the "official dykes" (官堤) that were under its own auspices—and also indirectly through monitoring the development of communally managed "people's dykes" (民堤). A failure of both of these governing tasks contributed to the 1931 flood. Long-term problems with corruption and organisation meant that by the 1930s older official dykes had fallen into disrepair, whilst many newer ones were poorly constructed using substandard materials. Compounding this problem, a failure to control the development of private polders, which were often constructed illegally upon land squatted by agricultural settlers, placed unsustainable pressure upon the fragile hydraulic system. From the late-Qing, these governance failures led to a marked increase in the frequency and severity of flooding (Zhang J. 2006).

This does not mean that the history of flooding in Hubei can be reduced to a simple narrative of systemic decline. Although the broad pattern from the late-Qing was towards instability, good governance at both a local or central level could make a substantial difference to the safety of communities. Taking Wuhan as an example, by the mid-nineteenth century the city was suffering regular inundations, as poor hydraulic management had made both the Yangzi and Han Rivers more unpredictable (Rowe 1989). A failure to maintain embankments running parallel to the Han River meant that the frequency of inundations in the lower-basin increased. They struck with particular intensity at a narrow point near the river's confluence with the

Yangzi at Wuhan (Zhang J. 2006). By the mid-nineteenth century, with the marshland north of Hankou transforming into a vast lake every summer, the city faced low-level inundation on an almost annual basis. Backstreets and impoverished areas were flooded with 1.5 to 3 metres of water. Larger and more destructive floods struck Wuhan at least once a decade, forcing people to seek shelter on hilltops and other high ground areas (Rowe 1989).

Around the turn of the twentieth century the late-Qing reformer Zhang Zhidong invested significant funds in a complete rehabilitation of Wuhan's protective dykes. An extensive network was constructed in the north of the city (Pi 2006a: i). This provided protection from backwater inundation and facilitated the expansion of the city into the marshland to the north. In spite of the anti-dynastic fervour of the 1911 Revolution, the population of Wuhan still eulogised the former imperial viceroy Zhang Zhidong, recognising the vital contribution he had made towards their collective security and urban development.[8] Thanks to his reforms, when Republican administrators assumed authority in Wuhan, they inherited a city that was more securely protected from flooding than it had been for at least a century.

Over the next two decades Republican governors squandered this inheritance of hydraulic stability. They failed to fund and organise Hubei's flood defences adequately, leading the problem of inundation to grow intense once again. The hydraulic breakdown became particularly acute during the 1920s, when systemic decline was exacerbated by internecine conflict. Occasionally, militarists actually breached dyke networks deliberately, using the ensuing chaos as a military tactic to disrupt the activities of their enemies (Rowe 2007: 236). Far more destructive than these isolated acts, however, was the general neglect of the hydraulic infrastructure that resulted from the violence that had become endemic in Hubei during the Republican Period (Yan 2012: 300). This involved widespread predation on tax revenues, which diverted funds designed to maintain the hydraulic infrastructure to military spending or personal enrichment (Li et al. 1994: 208).

Under the late-Qing, fees designed to maintain dykes had become one of the most frequently embezzled sources of government revenue. Thousands of functionaries in Hubei's local administration became dependent upon such fees to bolster their declining incomes. Local communities that relied upon dykes had to contend with being overcharged, provided with inadequately constructed hydraulic defences, and even having fees extorted by fraudsters posing as government tax collectors (Zhang J. 2006). The structural dependence of local administrators upon dyke tax

revenues did little to encourage sustainable environmental management. Wetlands that had been illegally converted into arable land became additional sources of tax revenue, meaning that there was little incentive to prevent excessive land reclamation. Local governors in the early Republic failed to address these systemic problems. Even official reports acknowledged that only 60 per cent of dyke-taxes collected in Hubei were spent upon the actual maintenance of the hydraulic system (Ibid).

Widespread embezzlement, general neglect and endemic violence all took their toll on the hydraulic network. By 1926, the dyke network to the north of Wuhan had become so saturated that it almost collapsed. As Wu Peifu's soldiers braced themselves against an imminent attack from the forces of the Northern Expedition, local workers struggled to reinforce the ailing dyke network with rocks, sand bags and baskets of earth (Todd 1971: 51). By the autumn, the forces of the Northern Expedition had seized control of Wuhan. According to Oliver Todd (1971), the chief engineer of the China International Famine Relief Commission, the hydraulic governance of the new administration represented a marked improvement over its predecessors. Having designated Wuhan as the provisional capital in 1927, the GMD called upon the power of the newly unionised workforce to carry out improvements to the city's dykes. They also initiated limited attempts to rationalise the funding of hydraulic defence, using salt tax revenues to construct hydraulic networks (Zhang J. 2006).

Unfortunately this renewed interest in flood-defence proved ephemeral. Following the collapse of the Wuhan regime and the relocation of the national capital to Nanjing, local governance became mired in disputes over jurisdictional authority. In this context, neither provincial nor municipal authorities wished to assume control of the costly and onerous duty of maintaining dykes (Fang 2008). City governors led by Mayor Liu Wendao, working in close association with Sun Ke, were far more interested in ostentatious modernisation projects than they were in the pedestrian task of repairing flood defences (*Wuhan Shizheng Gongbao*, 5, 1929). As such, they channelled large amounts of revenue into the creation of a modern urban transportation network and paid little attention to dykes. When a powerful flood peak surged down the Yangzi in 1931, it easily overpowered dykes that had been weakened by years of inadequate governance. In Wuhan's rural hinterland the dyke network was in a similarly parlous state. In several areas dyke breaches were directly attributable to poor governance and the embezzlement of taxes designed to maintain hydraulic networks (Yan 2012).

The neglect of regional hydraulic defences was not the only factor that translated the 1931 flood into a large-scale humanitarian catastrophe. The failure of governors to address the problem of entrenched poverty increased the vulnerability of the population to the secondary risks associated with inundation. Although they lived in areas of predictable flood-risk, many people continued to construct houses using substandard materials that easily collapsed under the force of water (Buck 1932). The population also suffered poor food security and an absence of institutional support in times of crisis (Kueh 1995). This meant that rural populations were susceptible both to food availability decline and entitlement failure (Sen 1981; Devereux 2001). Communities wishing to rehabilitate their ailing agricultural systems struggled to do so despite internecine violence and near constant warfare (van de Ven 2003). Finally a lack of basic sanitation and access to health care left those displaced by floods exposed to a number of deadly vectors of infection (Yip 1992). Whilst each of these factors interacted in a complex matrix of vulnerability, ultimately they shared a common root in the endemic poverty experienced by many members of the Central Chinese population. The failure of governors to address such systemic issues was just as important as their neglect of the dyke networks in exacerbating the impact of the 1931 flood.

Through the late-spring and early-summer of 1931, Central China experienced unusually high-levels of precipitation and a number of powerful cyclonic storms, causing widespread flooding in rural areas (Buck 1932: 8). By mid-July, Wuhan had become host to a large population of rural refugees seeking shelter. In the early morning of August 1st, Wuhan's own flood defences collapsed, leaving an estimated 400,000 people homeless in the city (Xie 1931). The flood had destroyed much of the stored grain and summer harvest throughout Central China. Later it went on to prevent farmers from planting secondary harvests in the autumn (Buck 1932). Inundation also pushed millions of refugees into overcrowded settlements with little or no sanitation. Soon malnutrition and disease began to decimate the flood-affected population of Hubei.

The flood had created a seemingly insurmountable challenge for governors at a local, provincial and national level. In order to arrest the development of an unfolding humanitarian crisis, swift and decisive governance was required. Unfortunately the relief effort was undermined by the competing imperatives of differing governing factions. In Wuhan there was a concerted effort to address the humanitarian crisis. By early August an Emergency Relief Committee (急赈会), consisting of eminent local figures

and business leaders, had been organised. This committee arranged temporary shelters, soup kitchens, the distribution of steamed bread, and boats for transporting refugees. In Hankou alone, the local population raised $800,000 in private donations for refugees (Xie 1931; Zhang B. 2006: 87–90). Although previous English language studies that have mentioned the 1931 disaster have tended to focus upon national and international efforts to relieve the flood, these lower-level local initiatives were critical to the immediate survival of refugees. Indeed, the much-vaunted US wheat loans did not arrive in Central China until mid-autumn, several months after the flood had struck.

Whilst the Emergency Relief Committee concerned itself with the humanitarian crisis, other factions of Wuhan's municipal administration were more concerned with the potential threat posed by displaced people. In particular Xia Douyin, then serving as head of the Hankou garrison but soon to be promoted to Hubei Provincial Governor, maintained a myopic obsession with preventing a possible Communist insurgency.[9] Rather than commanding his troops to provide material assistance with disaster prevention or relief, he ordered them instead to patrol Wuhan's inundated streets on sampans armed with machine guns. Declaration of martial law empowered Xia's troops to execute anyone suspected of criminal or seditious activities. Eventually, despite vigorous protests, Xia removed all refugees from Wuhan at gunpoint, relocating them to the outskirt of the city (John Hope Simpson Papers 1932).

The governance of the 1931 flood in Wuhan, both in terms of its prevention and relief, reflected the highly fractious political nature of the period. Margherita Zanasi (2006) has characterised a contradiction between two factions of the GMD in this period. The "reconstructionist" faction were concerned with creating national prosperity by developing a strong economic infrastructure, whereas the "militarist" faction were concerned primarily with consolidating power through neutralising the threat of insurgency. On the local level, this contradiction manifested itself in the conflict between those who wished to provide humanitarian assistance and those who prioritised the maintenance of social and political order in Hubei. The tension between these two factions would continue to inform both local and national politics in years to come. The promotion of the Xia Douyin to the position of Hubei provincial governor in the immediate aftermath of the flood, suggests that although those providing humanitarian assistance might have gained the gratitude of the local population, those favouring military consolidation gained the immediate

tactical victory (on Xia's rise, see Rowe 2007). Later, however, Hubei's governors seem to have made an attempt to coordinate both militarist and reconstructionist strategies. The military commander Zhang Wanxin, for example, used the reconstruction of hydraulic networks as part of a broader attempt to win a propaganda victory over the Communists in rural Hubei (Yan 2012: 312).

This local dynamic was a microcosm of the national response to the flood. Those who favoured a military strategy, headed by Chiang Kai-shek, prioritised the destruction of the CCP over the provision of assistance to flood refugees. In contrast, those who favoured economic reconstruction, who in this instance rallied around Song Ziwen, sought to use the flood relief to win the hearts and minds of the population. They also saw the flood as an opportunity to reassert national sovereignty over the disaster relief infrastructure (Li 2007a). During the 1920s, international organisations such as the Red Cross and the China International Famine Relief Commission had come to play an increasingly important role in disaster governance (Mallory 1926; Nathan 1965). In this context, the NFRC created in 1931, was seen as a vehicle for renationalising China's disaster relief infrastructure.

To a large extent, the official representation of the 1931 flood reflected the contradiction between differing governing factions. The militarists described the disaster as a regrettable setback in the road to eradicating insurgency. In a remarkable address to refugees in Wuhan, Chiang Kai-shek declared, "My soldiers have killed almost all of the revolutionaries, and are continuing to do so...It is very unfortunate that at this stage when we have nearly eradicated them we have been struck by this natural disaster" (Xie 1931). The reconstructionists, for their part, argued that their response to the flood had strengthened official legitimacy, concluding that official relief had "brought forcibly to the notice of the affected population the fact that this National Government has been inspired by an interest in the well being of the common people". As a result of this, it was claimed that the "population now regards the Central Government with more interest and respect" (Ibid: 193–194). While official representations of the 1931 flood differed considerably, they each attempted to limit any association between poor governance and the genesis of the disaster. The NFRC report, for example, claimed "all scientific opinion concurs … no expenditure of money however large, no dykes however strong, could prevent the catastrophe" (National Flood Relief Commission 1932: 22). The overall assessment was that the government had managed an unavoidable

catastrophe as efficiently as possible, and in so doing had bolstered its legitimacy in the eyes of both the Chinese populace and the international community.

Yet this largely positive official assessment of governance did not necessarily accord with the opinions of those who lived through the 1931 flood. The sheer scale of the disaster precludes any attempt to suggest a singular popular understanding, even if the discussion is limited to Hubei. In addition to this, many of the sources describing popular opinion are highly problematic. Most were not firsthand observations of refugees themselves, but were, rather, recorded by literate observers who variously filtered and distorted them in accordance with their own political persuasions. Great effort was expended during the Maoist period to collect the testimonies of ordinary citizens, yet such accounts were highly dubious, seeming to have been designed specifically to discredit the GMD. A typical example was reproduced in a study written by Rewi Alley, one of the leading "foreign friends" of Mao's regime (Brady 2003). Whilst interviewing a relief worker surnamed Chou, Alley breached the topic of the 1931 flood. At this point his normally cordial informant provided a "savage" reply; "Pah, they had their gangster soldiers, and their opium smoking officers drove us to the dykes with guns. Then our families really starved. It was then that my parents died in the flood and two of my children starved to death" (Alley 1956: 58). Chou went on to recall an inhuman existence, in which he was forced to eat straw in order to survive. Whilst accounts such as this are by no means beyond the bounds of credibility, they bear the distinct imprint of Maoist propaganda, adhering to a narrative convention known as "speaking bitterness about the past to recall the sweetness of the present" (Anagnost 1997).

Contemporary reports written by Republican era journalists provide a somewhat more reliable, if no less politically mediated, impression of the opinions of local people during the 1931 flood. Educated journalists were often highly critical of what they perceived to be the "ignorance" and "superstition" of the disaster-struck population. Yet amidst their scathing invective, there remained rich descriptions of the everyday understanding of the flood. The Wuhan journalist Xie Qianmao (1931: 147), for example, described the scepticism that one refugee had when asked to accompany an official to a refugee camp. "You have come to cheat us haven't you? You say you will give us three meals, maybe you won't even give us one." Such distrust was often quite reasonable, as Xie also provides numerous accounts of soldiers abusing their positions and even inflicting violence upon refugees.

The opinion of the flood-affected population also seems to have been influenced by a culturally specific understanding of the environment and disaster causality. One refugee was reluctant to accept official relief, reasoning that "if we eat for free we are afraid we will encounter more disasters in the future" (Xie 1931: 149). This reflected a popular belief that human action could influence the environment, and that disasters such as the 1931 flood reflected human morality. Others drew their governors into a tangled web of morality and meteorology. The journalist Guan Xuezhai reported one Wuhan shopkeeper recalling that in the past officials had committed suicide following the collapse of dykes. This, he reasoned, was the best means for governors to "apologise to the people" (Hubei Provincial Archives 1999: 30). The shopkeeper's statement was revealing for a number of reasons. Firstly, it contradicted the official narrative that the flood was the consequence of aberrant meteorology, demonstrating that at least some members of Wuhan's local population blamed their governors for inundation; the flood was perceived as something for which governors needed to apologise. In later years the theme of official neglect would develop into a local legend, which pictured provincial and municipal administrators ignoring their responsibilities on the eve of the 1931 flood, being unwilling to disrupt a game of mahjong (Tu and Yang 2003: 2). Beyond highlighting the link between the genesis of the flood and poor hydraulic administration, the shopkeeper's statement also revealed how those dissatisfied with their administrators were drawing explicit comparisons with past modes of governance. Qing administrators were seen as better than, or at least morally superior to, their Republican successors.

There was a kernel of truth in the shopkeeper's observation about the suicide of officials. In late-imperial China, governors had sometimes become involved in extreme meteorological rituals designed to mediate with the heavens (Synder-Reinke 2009). These would occasionally involve elements of self-harm, and were even known to result in suicide. It is impossible to determine whether the shopkeeper was calling on his governors to commit suicide as a ritualistic act, or whether he demanded it simply as an act of contrition. Elsewhere refugees *did* explicitly call upon their governors to conduct religious rituals to combat the flood. One refugee recalled that in the past officials had kowtowed to floodwater and made it recede. Nowadays, they added, officials did not practice religion and refused to kowtow, meaning that the flood was prolonged (Xie 1931: 149). In this understanding, disaster causality was linked explicitly

to the secularization of governance in the early twentieth century, which had often been a traumatic experience for adherents of popular religion (Duara 1991; Nedostup 2010; Poon 2011). In this respect, the 1931 flood became a means through which to criticise changes to modes of governance, whilst, concurrently, religion became an idiom to criticise poor flood management. In both cases, those expressing discontent instrumentalised a nostalgic image of Qing administrators in order to criticise their successors.[10]

It is not difficult to see why members of Wuhan's population might be dissatisfied with their governors in the early 1930s. As Sabrina Habich describes in her chapter, prior to the GMD's rise to power in the mid-1920s, Sun Yat-sen had presented a grand vision for the rehabilitation of China's hydraulic system. Yet during their first few years in power, the party that ruled in Sun's name not only failed to implement these modernisation schemes, they actually proved less adept at managing traditional flood defence systems than their Imperial predecessors. Thus, whilst the GMD presented grand images of mega-dams constructed of reinforced concrete, they proved unequal to the task of managing simple dykes constructed of tamped earth and stone. The local population were well aware of this, and, according to Zhang Jiayan (2006: 97), were outraged that Republican hydraulic governance was even worse than the situation in the late-Qing.

Not only had the government failed to prevent flooding, but, when disaster struck, it undermined relief efforts by using draconian tactics to maintain order. Meanwhile the national administration also allowed military consolidation to dominate the agenda. In this context, it is not surprising that citizens of Wuhan looked back to the imperial system, albeit through the haze of memory, as one that seemed to function with a greater degree of efficiency and moral integrity. This rose-tinted view of the achievements of Qing governors, failed to acknowledge the fact that the trajectory towards hydraulic collapse had in fact begun on their watch. Interestingly, this somewhat misplaced nostalgia for past modes of governance would be a theme that re-emerged later in the twentieth century.

1954: Victory Over the Flood?

In the years following the 1931 flood, the population of the Middle Yangzi region continued to be subjected to regular inundations. It was not until 1954, however, that they would have to contend with

another mega-flood. The environmental profile of this event surpassed the 1931 disaster. The duration of the flood peak and the volume of water discharged were both considerably higher. The water level in the Yangzi was, in fact, the highest of the three twentieth century mega-floods (Yu et al. 2009: 213). In spite of this, it seemed as if the humanitarian disaster that followed the flood was far less devastating than it had been in 1931. The CCP, which had formed a national government in 1949, took this as incontrovertible evidence of the superiority of its leadership over that of the GMD. Its official report into the disaster prevention and relief work in Wuhan was entitled *The Party Leads the People to Victory Over the Flood* ("*Dang Lingdao Renmin Zhansheng le Hongshui*" WFZZ 1954).[11] The militaristic tone of this title pervaded all description of flood governance. Hubei's chief hydraulic engineer Tao Shuzeng argued that flood defence was a form of "combat" between humans and water (Tao 2005). Disasters had became part of what Judith Shapiro (2001) has described as Mao's "war against nature," and the CCP strived to ensure that it appeared more adept combatants than its Republican predecessors.

The immediate similarities between the 1931 and 1954 floods seemed to provide a compelling case for comparison. Each disaster occurred just a few years after a new regime had assumed national authority, in 1927 and 1949 respectively. In fact, the timing of a large flood shortly after the inauguration of a new regime was not unusual. Under the late-Qing, new emperors often had to contend with large floods shortly after assuming power. Far from being coincidental, this was a consequence of the neglect of hydraulic administration during the twilight years of the previous emperor.[12] This systemic hangover was certainly evident in 1931, as the GMD was saddled with a dyke network that had suffered chronic under-investment for decades.

The situation in 1954 was somewhat more complicated. The hydraulic defence network continued to suffer the signs of neglect from the previous administration. In particular the collaborationist government of Wang Jingwei had failed to fund any major reconstruction work (Vermeer 1977: 16). In addition to this, large sections of the network, including the dyke built by Zhang Zhidong that protected Wuhan, had been destroyed during the war (Wu and Wang 1986). Yet after 1949 the Communist Government was much better placed to rehabilitate flood defences than the GMD had been in the 1920s and 1930s. For one thing, reconstruction efforts were not undermined by warfare, as they had been during the

conflict between the CCP and GMD in the 1930s. The CCP also ben-
efitted from a number of improvements that had been initiated by their
predecessors following the 1931 flood. During this period, the GMD had
begun to rationalise the hydraulic network, placing more important sec-
tions under central control, and modernising the funding structure. They
had also invested in technological solutions to the problem of inundation,
including strengthening dykes and dredging discharge channels (Zhang
J. 2006).

Any nuances or subtleties surrounding the hydraulic legacy bequeathed
by the GMD were, however, lost upon government propagandists in 1954.
Instead they used a variety of representational techniques to posit the active
governance of the CCP as the exclusive factor differentiating between
the two floods. Oral testimonies, such as the one collected by Rewi Alley
described above, were used to present a simple dichotomy between the
"bitterness" of the past and the "sweetness" of the present. These were
published alongside photographs showing the inundated streets of Wuhan
in 1931 and their dry equivalents in 1954 (WFZZ 1954). Poems and songs
were used to reinforce the sense of 1949 as a key point of systemic disjunc-
ture. One poem, written by Li Ping, encapsulated both this sense of rup-
ture and also the militaristic approach to flood defence (Alley 1956: 37).

> Wuhan stands like some ship of war, unsinkable.
> Like some fortress, indestructible…
> Too long has this river claimed our tears; our blood.
> Now, in our new land have we forgotten how to weep?
> Never shall we add another tear to these waters that rush at us…

Whereas once Wuhan had suffered a deluge of tears, now it stood as a for-
tress against flooding. The message of such propaganda was unequivocal,
the Communist period had ushered in a new phase of disaster prevention
and relief.

Historians have come to treat such Maoist propaganda with a great deal
of scepticism. It is impossible to read hagiographic accounts of disaster
governance without reflecting upon the almost exclusive monopoly over
the dissemination of information enjoyed by the CCP in the early 1950s
(Nordin 2014). Whilst Republican China was hardly an oasis of press free-
dom, there was at least a wide variety of opinion available in a vast selec-
tion of periodicals. In contrast to this, the only alternative views available
in 1954 were those presented by the foreign media, which published at a

distance and relied almost entirely upon fragmentary evidence and specualtion (e.g., *Life* 23 August 1954: 26).

In spite of the dubious nature of contemporary reports, few historians have re-examined the 1954 flood. As with many such "natural disasters", it has not been considered a particularly significant historical event. As such, scholars have tended to reiterate the largely positive assessment of Communist governance. Mainland Chinese scholars, who remain subject to certain constraints in their discussion of this period, have highlighted the relative success the nascent regime had in managing the relief effort. Liu Dayu (2005) suggests that widespread social mobilisation adopted by the Communists helped to ameliorate the worst consequences of disaster. Li Qin (2003) argues that the relief effort was for the most part a success, in spite of the fact that there were a few areas in which the local government lacked sufficient experience.

The few historians who have researched the flood outside China have tended to frame their discussions in terms of institutional development rather than humanitarian impact.[13] Working with only very limited access to archival material, the historian Eduard Vermeer (1977) offered a fairly positive assessment of the government response to the flood, arguing that the Communist government had placed an "absolute priority" upon saving lives during the flood. Kueh (1995) argued that the flood represented the most serious obstacle to agricultural development in the early 1950s. He suggested, however, that the "institutional hedge" provided by the newly collectivised economy ensured that national agricultural instability remained considerably lower than it had been under the market economy in 1931. Thus, whilst historians today reject Maoist hyperbole, the consensus still seems to be that governance during the 1954 flood was broadly more efficient than it was in 1931.

This positive assessment begins to falter when the humanitarian impact of the 1954 flood is examined more closely. There has been a considerable disparity between the mortality figures presented by previous historians. Vermeer (1977) reported official estimates of only 15,551 dead, whilst speculating that the actual death toll was probably considerably higher. Figures printed in 1995 by the State Statistical Bureau of China suggest that 33,169 died during the flood (Zong and Chen 2000: 166) . Most historians (see, for example, Pomeranz 2009: 272) seem to base their mortality estimates upon this official figure. The highest figure yet published is Li Qin's (2003) estimate of 31,762 dead in Hubei alone. None of these estimates begin to approach the figure that was concluded by the Chinese government's own investigation in 1954–1955.[14]

According to internal party statistics published in the 1954 Hubei Province Disaster Area Investigation, a staggering 149,507 perished as a result of the flood in Hubei alone ("*Hubei sheng yijiuwusi nian shuizai qingkuang ji zaihou huifu qingkuang tongji*," [HPDI] 1954). That would suggest that in one single province of several affected almost five times as many people died than has been acknowledged previously. Given the fact that the flood actually affected four provinces in addition to Hubei, the total magnitude of the disaster would seem to be several orders higher than even this stark estimate.[15]

If the magnitude of the 1954 flood was as large as the HPDI suggests a question arises as to how the government managed to perpetuate an image of efficient flood management. This can explained, in part, by their rigid censorship and control over the dissemination of information. Indeed, the far greater calamity that occurred following the Great Leap Forward at the end of the 1950s remained largely hidden from the outside world until the 1980s (Ens et al. 2011). Another clue as to why the magnitude of the flood has been underestimated lies within the statistics themselves. Unlike the 1931 flood, the major disaster area in 1954 was located in relatively isolated areas of rural Hubei. Indeed, the government made much of the fact that Wuhan—which remained the strategic, economic and political centre of the region—had been saved from inundation.

The minimisation of flooding in Wuhan certainly had been an impressive feat of hydraulic planning. It had been achieved by the timely construction of several large sluice gates in the Jingjiang and Dongting dykes that ran parallel to the Yangzi River in central Hubei. The government had undertaken this flood diversion project in 1952 adopting an idiosyncratically monumental approach, which involved 300,000 labourers completing a project stretching 920 km² in just a few months. Official literature in the 1950s represented the construction of these sluice gates as a highly modern innovation (WFZZ 1954; Alley 1956). In reality, this form of hydraulic intervention actually mimicked aspects of the original Song Dynasty dyke design, albeit now fortified by steel and concrete. Far from instituting a novel hydraulic strategy, Communist engineers, guided by Soviet advisors, were merely rectifying mistakes made by Ming Dynasty administrators, who had allowed gathering silt to render the original sluice gates inoperable (Will 1985).

The rehabilitation of Hubei's ancient river control system by the Communists in 1953 proved a timely intervention. On 22 July 1954, as Wuhan was threatened by inundation, the government opened the new sluice gates, releasing huge volumes of water onto upstream floodplains

north and south of the Yangzi. On two further occasions during the summer they repeated this strategy (Han 2010). By flooding rural areas, the government quite consciously prioritised the protection of urban industry over agricultural production. The inundation of Wuhan, which had devastated the economic base of the whole region in 1931, was to be avoided at all cost. The countryside was to be sacrificed to protect the city.

The humanitarian consequence of this sacrifice was evident in the mortality statistics. Over 70 per cent of overall mortality in Hubei was recorded in the Jingzhou region, the area in which the Jingjiang flood diversion was located (see Fig. 4.1).[16] An earlier internal report estimated

Area	Flood Affected Population	Death Rate				
		Total	Exposure and Starvation	Suicide	Disease	Other Flood Related Deaths
Hubei Total	9,904,801	**149,507**	69	2,010	142,427	5,001
Huanggang	2,606,130	11,260	5	109	10,152	994
Xiaogan	2,435,999	31,699	9	516	29,692	1,482
Jingzhou	3,873,335	104,598	54	1,349	101,637	1,558
Yichang	248,957	829	-	25	683	121
Xiangyang	598,814	889	-	1	163	725
Enshi	108,629	107	-	7	-	100
Huangshi City	32,937	125	1	3	100	21

Fig. 4.1 1954 Hubei Province Disaster Area Investigation Death Statistics (See endnote 14)

that between July and November 1954, Hubei had lost 132,221 people as a result of the flood, 96 per cent as the result of disease. The flood diversion area had suffered a disproportionately high-level of disease mortality, losing 72,350 people compared to 36,812 in areas where dykes had collapsed, and 17,775 in waterlogged areas (*Hubei sheng yijiuwusi nian fangxun kanghong dang'an xuanbu*, [HFK] 1998: 280). These epidemics represented the human cost of the conscious decision to sacrifice the countryside to save Wuhan.

Little evidence remains regarding how the disaster unfolded in the flood diversion area, as the information offered by official investigations tends to be largely statistical in nature. Writing years later, an engineer who worked on the flood diversion named Feng Ziqiang (2010) offered a hint as to one of the major problems. Apparently many of those who lived in the flood diversion area were reluctant to leave their homes, and remained in their villages even after receiving the news that the sluice gates were to be opened. Eventually the military resorted to firing guns and artillery onto waste ground near villages, and shouting the names of well-known "bandits" in an attempt to intimidate local people into leaving. The fact that an evacuation plan had not been thoroughly planned alongside the construction of the flood-diversion area shows a fundamental problem with disaster governance. Furthermore, the high-rate of disease mortality experienced by displaced people implies a lack of hygienic and medical organisation during the emergency relief phase. It may also demonstrate the inadequate provision of nutrition, as disease often acts as a proximate cause of death for those who are actually suffering from starvation (Devereux 2001).

Recognising the devastating humanitarian consequences of the flood diversion, it may be tempting to condemn the government for opening the sluice gates. Yet such condemnation would assume a counterfactual, in which inaction would necessarily have caused less misery. In reality it is impossible to determine what the outcome of the disaster would have been had the government chosen not to intervene. If a large flood peak had continued to flow downstream inundating Wuhan, as it had in 1931, great harm would not only have been inflicted upon urban citizens, but also the rural refugees seeking shelter in the city. Had the epidemics that decimated the population of the flood diversion area in 1954 spread to densely populated urban areas, then the mortality rate surely would have been far more catastrophic. Not to mention the impact upon the regional economy during the recovery period. The memory of the 1931 flood

possibly influenced the brutal utilitarian logic employed by those who took the decision to open the sluice gates in 1954. The consequences of their actions did not so much precipitate a humanitarian catastrophe, but rather concentrated its impact upon a specific region. Governors were not culpable for the crisis in the same sense that they were during the catastrophic famine following the Great Leap Forward (Ens et al. 2011). They were neither heroes nor villains, but rather the arbiters in a bitter zero-sum calculation of hydraulic governance.

Whilst it may not be appropriate to blame Hubei's administrators for the genesis of the 1954 flood, when the dynamics of the humanitarian disaster are appreciated, the triumphal propaganda promulgated by the CCP takes on a much more sinister aspect. One particularly pernicious distortion was the suggestion that those living in flood diversion areas had "sacrificed" their communities "voluntarily" in order to save Wuhan. A typical example of this narrative was contained in an official report describing the opinions of a refugee from the flood diversion area who sought shelter in the city. He was described as being very enthusiastic to undertake flood defence work around an important industrial area. "My home town is my life," he apparently remarked, "but the factory is my life source (命根). Only when I save my greater life source can I save my lesser life"("Wuhan fangxun zhihuibu Hanyang qu zhihuibu fangxun gongzuo zongjie baogao" [HFB] 1954: 49). For rural communities, the suggestion that a unilateral decision made by the government to destroy their houses and systems of subsistence was in fact their own conscious choice must have seemed like a final insult.

The duplicity of propagandists in this instance is further compounded when the supposed "victory" over the flood in Wuhan is subjected to closer scrutiny. Whilst it was true that Hankou and Wuchang had been successfully protected, Hanyang, the smallest and least prosperous of the three Wuhan cities, had been inundated for several months. Whilst its sister cities boasted concrete flood defences, in 1954 Hanyang was still protected by dykes constructed using traditional materials, such as tamped earth, clay, and coal slag (HFB 1954). These materials were simply unable to withstand the rapid rise of rivers and lakes in 1954. After supplies of earth ran out in July, municipal governors made a strategic decision to concentrate their efforts on preventing the inundation of key industrial sites. In doing so, they effectively surrendered vast swathes of residential housing to water (HFB 1954). In order to obscure this failure, official accounts of the flood relief in Wuhan focussed exclusively upon the experience of Wuchang

and Hankou, whilst totally ignoring Hanyang (WFZZ 1954; Alley 1956). Acknowledging the unfortunate experiences of the population living in this city would not only have admitted unwanted nuances into the narrative of the victory over the flood, but would also have questioned the efficacy of the flood diversion, which in spite of its humanitarian cost, clearly had not provided a comprehensive solution to urban flooding.

Given the severe constraints over public discourse, it is even more difficult to gauge the opinions of members of the public in 1954 than it was in 1931. When ordinary citizens appeared in the state media, their role was to heap praise upon Communist governance. Yet even within the official literature it is possible, on occasions, to catch a glimpse beyond this façade. The *Changjiang Ribao* reported that one Wuhan citizen named Lu Changqing "…not only refused to take up the anti-flood duty as every citizen should, but instead spread rumours in an attempt to mislead the people. According to the law, he was sentenced to a half-year of imprisonment" (Vermeer 1977: 21). Elsewhere, a number of grain merchants were executed both for speculating upon prices and also, tellingly, for "making up rumours to cheat the masses" (Pi 2006b: ii).

Both of these cases indicate that counter-narratives were proliferating. It is unclear whether such rumours once again reflected a religious conception of disaster causality, as many had in 1931. Rewi Alley (1956: 83–84) suggested that by 1954, the inhabitants of Hubei no longer countenanced such religious explanations for disasters, noting that an Iron Ox placed near the Yangzi, which was once believed to prevent flooding, was now neglected by the human population. Citizens of Mao's China, according to Alley, chose to place their faith in the technological intervention made by the CCP rather than religious icons. Yet there is substantial evidence from other areas of China that contradicts Alley's picture of a secularising society. Steven Smith (2006) has demonstrated the extent to which popular religious rumours continued to thrive under the Maoist state, in spite of being proscribed as "superstitious" and often "counter-revolutionary". Zhou Xun (2012) catalogues numerous instances in which local populations sought popular religious explanations for their misfortunes during the famine of the late 1950s. It would seem that these culturally specific understandings of the environment proliferated in particular during periods of acute distress. Whilst it is impossible to determine the nature of the rumours that circulated in 1954 from the fragmentary evidence available, what is clear is that those caught circulating them could expect

harsh reprisals. This demonstrates the extent to which governors sought to prevent citizens from contravening the official narrative.

Had there not been at least a degree of dissent from the official line, then it would not have been necessary for the Party to conduct vigorous public education campaigns amongst the refugee population (HFB 1954; WFZZ 1954). One official report into conditions in Wuhan noted that tea-houses were full of young men who were engaging in conversation when they should have been helping with the flood relief. It also noted a degree of tension between rural refugees and urban workers, suggesting that the Party needed to concentrate more on remoulding the "thought" (思想) of the people (HFB 1954). These hints of discontent in internal reports, suggest that all was not quite as harmonious as the official literature would have its readers believe.

The fact that most written accounts of the 1954 flood were in some way politically manipulated makes it difficult to gauge any true sense of the popular view of governance. Fortunately, however, many citizens of Hubei living today are still able to recall the events of that year. Their oral testimonies are hardly free from distortion, being influenced by the exigencies of half a century of subsequent experience. Nevertheless, their memories offer an alternative to relying upon official literature. Overall, the assessment of those living in Wuhan, interviewed during the course of this research, was that flood governance was conducted in a highly efficient manner.[17] Even those living in Hanyang, who had become refugees as a result of the flood, suggested that they had received exemplary care. One interviewee went so far as to suggest that his experience in a refugee camp was *more comfortable* than his ordinary life at the time. Whilst living on Turtle Mountain (龟山), he received a daily ration of steamed bread from the authorities. This was more than he was guaranteed in non-crisis periods, living as a rural migrant in a reed matt shed on the outskirts of Hanyang. Whilst this testimony offers a positive view of disaster management in 1954, it is also an indictment of the general poverty experienced by many citizens of Wuhan in the early 1950s. Another interviewee reiterated the positive view that citizens had regarding flood governance at the time. In 1931, refugees in Wuhan had to be coerced into taking part in flood relief work, eventually finding their rations dependent upon labour. In 1954, by contrast, much of the relief effort was organised by work units. Those picked to participate were considered to be the most "enthusiastic activists" (积极分子). The positive political implications of being

designated amongst such a select group ensured that the position of a flood relief worker soon became highly coveted.

Those who lived in rural Hubei did not echo the largely positive assessment of flood governance offered by their urban counterparts. One rural resident described working ceaselessly for three days to try and prevent the collapse of her local dyke. Eventually the members of her work group became so hungry that they were forced to leave the dyke to find food. When they returned they found a large breach, meaning they were forced to seek refuge in Wuhan. Another farmer described the desperate conditions his family faced following the collapse of their local polder dyke. With their farm inundated they were forced to row the family boat to a local hillside. Here they constructed a shelter from materials they could salvage. Having been stranded on various hillsides for a number of months, they returned to find their farm destroyed, their livestock drowned and their harvest ruined. They were then forced to endure a bitterly cold winter with little shelter and a dwindling supply of food.

For this family, as for millions of others, the flood had brought untold misery. In the oral histories of those living in rural areas, the government was mentioned far less frequently than within the testimony of citizens of Wuhan. Countryside communities seemed to have had to rely upon their own resources and extended kinship networks for support. The absence of active disaster governance in these rural narratives, demonstrates the extent to which experiences of flooding differed depending upon place of residence. It is little wonder that citizens of Wuhan considered that they had been well cared for during the flood; their safety had been guaranteed by sacrificing the countryside.

1998: The River Inundates the People

Following a number of relatively wet decades of the mid-twentieth century, China experienced a decline in disastrous floods during the 1960s and 1970s. From the 1980s onwards the frequency of floods began to increase once again. During the warm 1990s China was struck by seven major inundations, culminating in the 1998 Yangzi mega-flood (Zhang et al. 2007). This had a comparable environmental profile to the disasters of 1931 and 1954, and inflicted considerable material damage, causing economic losses of 166,600 million RMB and destroying 4,970,000 homes (Zong and Chen 2000). In spite of this, however, the humanitarian

impact of the flood was considerably less severe than those experienced in the earlier twentieth century. The official mortality figure for the 1998 flood was 1,320 (Ibid: 166). Although this may be an underestimate, there is no evidence to suggest that the government concealed mortality to the extent that they had in 1954.

Using a simple comparison of environmental profile and humanitarian impact, it would seem that disaster governance in 1998 was far more proficient than during the previous two mega-floods. However, this conclusion is somewhat complicated when considering the role that governance has played in exacerbating *flood-risk* since the 1950s. During this period the government encouraged a pattern of environmental exploitation in the Middle Yangzi region, in which a utilitarian calculation of immediate gain has almost always been allowed to dominate considerations of sustainability. To a certain extent, this pattern of environment management merely represents a continuation of the long-term trajectory of ecological exploitation in China over the last few millennia (Elvin 2004). However, environmental degradation escalated rapidly under Maoist rule, and has continued apace in the post-Mao era (Shapiro 2001; Economy 2004). The ever-increasing human encroachment into the ecosystem has had a profound influence upon the hydrology of the Middle Yangzi, resulting in an increase in the frequency and severity of flooding.

Whilst anthropogenic processes have increased the risk of floods occurring, the management of subsequent disasters has improved significantly, as is indicated by the declining mortality rates. Thus, natural disasters have become *more* volatile whilst their humanitarian impact has become *less* severe. The complexity of this situation belies a simplistic assessment of contemporary Chinese flood-governance as either positive or negative; dramatic improvements in the sphere of disaster reaction have not been matched by the development of a sustainable approach to environmental management and disaster prevention. The government has used its improved record in disaster prevention to justify a greater centralisation of the prevention and relief infrastructure. During the Republican era, dyke networks often remained under local autonomous management through the polder system. In the 1950s these polders were replaced with production brigades, and the entire hydraulic network was gradually absorbed by the state (Yan 2012). This has facilitated greater coordination of disaster response, but in non-crisis periods, it has also contributed to a pattern of hydraulic governance in which the imperatives of economic development

have all too frequently been allowed to dominate local environmental and social concerns. The deleterious environmental consequences and huge social distress caused by the Three Gorges Dam project is perhaps the most iconic representation of this pattern (Habich, this volume). Yet it is emblematic of an underlying culture of governance in which large-scale hydraulic interventions have been pursued regardless of social and environmental consequences.

Human activity increased the flood risk in the Middle Yangzi during the late twentieth century in a number of ways. Probably the most profound impact has been the reclamation of lakes and wetlands for agricultural purposes. Hubei was once known as the "province of a thousand lakes" (千湖之省), but now the area of water coverage has been dramatically reduced. This has the effect of diminishing the flood-storage capacity of the landscape (Zhang et al. 2007). In addition to this, deforestation of upland areas, conducted without adequate soil retention policies, has led to an increase in the silt load transported by rivers (Zhang J. 2006). The problem has been exacerbated by the extension of hydraulic networks, which have prevented silts from being deposited on flood plains. The impact of this reckless pattern of environmental management upon flooding in 1998 so shocked the government that it prompted it to halt the logging of old-growth forests in upland areas (Marks 2012: 249). The cumulative impact of this pattern of environmental management has been a significant increase in the stream-flow of the Middle Yangzi (Zhang et al. 2007). This was evident during the 1998 flood, when both the volume of precipitation and the river levels were lower than in 1954, yet the stream-flow was far greater. It has also resulted in a significant decrease in the periods between when the maximum water in the basin is discharged (Zhang et al. 2007; Zong and Chen 2000). Stated simply, environmental management in Hubei has made floods more frequent and more volatile.

If the problem of flooding has become more intense, the question arises as to how the humanitarian impact of disasters has declined. Certainly one contributory element has been improvements to the hydraulic system. By the 1990s, the organisation and financing of Hubei's dyke network was considerably more efficient. As early as the 1930s the GMD had made attempts to rationalise hydraulic organisation, which had previously been dominated by local elites, who passed on management and taxation as a hereditary privilege and responsibility. They created a National Water Control Commission responsible for integrating the hydraulic defence

network and created four national water-control zones. A Yangzi River Control Commission was established in order to develop a solution to the problems facing the population of Hubei (Yan 2012). However, these early efforts at reform were hampered by the warfare and social disruption that gripped China from the late 1930s (Zhang J. 2006).

After 1949, the traditional elements of hydraulic management structure that had managed to survive GMD reform and the chaos of warfare became targets of the revolutionary state. In 1950, the new government re-established the Yangzi River Control Committee to co-ordinate the management of the basin (Yan 2012). Traditional dyke management positions, which had been appointed through the lineage system, were condemned as "feudal" by the Maoist regime and replaced by production units (Vermeer 1977). The reorganisation of dyke management contributed to the relatively coordinated social response to the 1954 flood (Ibid). It also meant that the role of local governance became far less influential. Between the 1950s and the 1990s the hydraulic network became fully centralised under the Ministry of Water Resources, which took responsibility not only for flood defences, but also for large-scale engineering projects designed to improve water control (Yan 2012: 347).

Organisational rationalisation was augmented by technological innovation. Traditional dyke building materials were replaced with concrete, which increased the strength and height of both polder dykes and also parallel-river dykes (Zhang J. 2006). Improvements to dykes and drainage systems contributed to what Kueh (1995) describes as the "technological hedge", which by the 1990s had begun to insulate the population of Hubei from the consequence of disasters. Many of those interviewed during the course of this research, described such technological improvements as *the* major factor that has transformed collective security. Their opinions seem to be corroborated by the statistical record, which indicates that, despite having the largest stream flow, the 1998 flood inundated the smallest area of all three floods (Yu et al. 2009). One of the most potent symbols of the improvements to the flood defence system was the experience of Wuhan in 1998. Whereas in 1931 the city had suffered large-scale inundation, and in 1954 much of Hanyang had been flooded, in 1998 Wuhan suffered no major inundation, with damage limited to waterlogging (Zong and Chen 2000).

In addition to improvements to the hydraulic defence network, by 1998 there had also been a marked decrease in vulnerability that communities suffered to the secondary risks associated with flooding. This included

an impressive increase in the level of food security, resulting in part from significant improvements in the economic organisation of agriculture. Post Mao-era governments have regulated the grain market carefully, maintaining reserves, controlling the import-export market, and exerting pressure upon provincial administrations to prevent declining production (Li 2007a). Increased food security has also resulted from the introduction of nitrogen-based chemical fertilizers, which, since the 1970s, have facilitated an extremely large increase in crop yields (Smil 2004). The improvement to basic nutrition was matched by an equally impressive decrease in the level of infectious disease. This was precipitated by greater access to prophylactic and emergency health care (Wagstaff et al. 2009). Endemic conditions such as malaria and schistosomiasis have declined following extensive environmental interventions, in which the populations of infected mosquitoes and water snails have been significantly reduced (Yan 2012; Yip 2009). Whilst many people in Hubei were still vulnerable to inundation in 1998, and issues surrounding nutrition and health care were far from resolved, they were far less likely than their ancestors to starve or succumb to epidemics as a result of flooding. Thus, although the 1998 flood had a profound impact on the economy of the region, and caused the tragic loss of more than a thousand citizens, its humanitarian impact could not compare to the catastrophic floods of 1931 and 1954.

This is not to suggest that all of the humanitarian aspects of flooding had been resolved. Indeed, with the improvement of post-disaster nutrition and health care, scholars began to turn their attention to some of the less obvious negative consequences of flooding. One of the most serious of these was the psychological impact that flooding had upon its victims. One extensive study, conducted amongst flood-affected communities in Hunan, found that 9.7 per cent of people displayed some symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Feng et al. 2007). The highest prevalence was found amongst groups exposed to various forms of rapid-onset inundation. As with numerous other disaster-affected communities around the world, those who lived through the 1998 Yangzi flood found that even after their homes and lives had been reconstructed, they continued to suffer severe distress manifesting itself in a number of debilitating symptoms (Feng et al. 2007).

The terrible psychological consequences of flooding were evident during earlier disasters. In 1931, witnesses described numerous instances of people committing suicide, both individually and in groups. One foreign correspondent noted that everywhere people were "hopelessly, apathetically

killing themselves" (*Time*, 31 August 1931). The historian Li Qin (2007) has described how the floods in Hubei in the 1930s created a "psychology of fear", based upon the deep insecurity felt by populations under perpetual threat of death and destitution. The 1954 flood seems to have had a similar psychological impact. According to the HPDI (see Fig. 4.1), some 2,010 people committed suicide in Hubei following the 1954 flood. There were, in fact, many more deaths from suicide than there were from literal starvation. This statistic should be treated with a degree of suspicion. It being possible both that people chose to kill themselves rather than succumb to starvation, and that "suicide" was used as a euphemism to obscure politically sensitive deaths. Yet the high suicide rate may also attest to a form of psychological epidemic that took root in Hubei following the 1954 flood. Such evidence suggests that one of the major issues that those governing disasters will have to address in the future is attending to the psychological needs of affected communities.

Whilst the governance of floods had changed dramatically over the latter half of the twentieth century, the official representation still contained many of the same elements. Propagandists in 1998 were far less abrasive and duplicitous than their Mao-era predecessors, yet they continued to employ a number of the same techniques. In particular, they retained the heavily militarised rhetoric that had been used in 1954. Once again, the flood defence effort was described as a "decisive victory" that was achieved through a "military spirit"(Zhao and Li 1998). During the 1954 flood, emphasis had been placed upon volunteerism and the collective action of the peasantry and proletariat, in 1998 the flood relief effort was portrayed as a far more professional undertaking, conducted primarily by the People's Liberation Army. The 15,000 soldiers drafted in to help with disaster prevention were described as an "indestructible" force (Ibid).

To personalise the sacrifice made in 1998, one official account printed a story of a soldier who had delayed his marriage in order to participate in the relief effort. When his wife came to find him, she discovered he was suffering with a fever. She insisted that they be married immediately, and then she stayed to help protecting the dykes (Ibid: 24–25). Such stories of exemplary workers had long proliferated in the official literature, and could be found in abundance in the propaganda used to publicise the 1954 flood relief effort (WFZZ 1954; Alley 1956). So too could stories of flood defence martyrs, who were described as laying down their lives to protect communities from inundation. In 1998, such flood martyrs included seventeen soldiers who were killed whilst protecting dykes (Zhao and Li 1998).

Although much had changed between the 1950s and 1990s, there remained a degree of continuity between the eras in terms of the mode of representation used to describe disasters. In particular, humans were still envisaged as locked in conflict with nature. This combative view of environmental management was hardly unique to China. Indeed, it must be understood as a local expression of a global modernist discourse, which posits the environment as a disruptive force to be tamed by human action.[18] In the short term, this combative approach may have had a positive effect in terms of consolidating collective action during times of crisis. However in the long term it informed the highly utilitarian approach to environmental management, which was ultimately responsible for exacerbating flooding.

Whilst in 1998 the Chinese government was still perpetuating tried and tested propaganda techniques, many ordinary citizens were now more openly cynical about official accounts of flood governance. This cynicism manifested itself in a joke told by Hubei residents. According to one interviewee, around the time of the flood, people began to take note of the fact the characters in the name of the former President Jiang Zemin (江泽民) could be literally understood to mean "the river (江) inundating (泽) the people (民)."[19] Similarly, they noted that the first character in the name of the recently promoted vice president Wen Jiabao was a homophone for a term meaning "pestilence" (温 and 瘟). Such puns are a hugely popular form of humour in China, and are often employed as a form of satire to ridicule official discourse (Nordin 2014). Following the 1998 flood, puns were used to undermine the official representation of flood-governance, allowing the people to express a subversive re-reading of the events.

The cynicism displayed by ordinary citizens in 1998, echoed a more general dissatisfaction that many interviewees seemed to have regarding governance in the post-Mao era. Although they were hardly unaware of the material privations of the revolutionary period, they nevertheless associated their earlier lives with a greater level of equality than that which existed in contemporary Hubei. The Mao-era formed a nostalgic counterpoint that allowed ordinary citizens to criticise growing inequalities.[20] This narrative of personal and collective history informed the way that interviewees viewed the floods they had experienced in their lifetimes. Even those who lived in Hanyang, whose homes had been destroyed by the 1954 flood, spoke positively about 1950s flood governance. They used their experiences as evidence to indicate the greater official compassion for the ordinary people. In contrast to this, governors in 1998 were

often described as uncaring and even corrupt. The general impression was that governors at all levels were less attuned to the needs of the "ordinary people" (老百姓). Even when the central state did attempt to provide assistance, its efforts risked being subverted by corrupt local governors. One interviewee, for example, claimed that rations received by villagers consisted of one packet of instant noodles per person, with the majority of the funds designated by the central government being pocketed by local officials.

As during the 1931 flood, nostalgia for a deposed system of governance was being used to criticise contemporary rulers. Whilst the critiques offered by Republican citizens were infused with religious understandings of disaster causality, those who experienced the 1998 flood tended to frame their criticisms in terms of secular theories of politics and economics. In spite of these key differences, critics from each era shared a common belief that governors had lost their moral integrity.[21] Discontented refugees under the Republic employed an image of local Qing governors as efficient and morally unimpeachable. Those who felt dispossessed by economic reforms in the post-Mao era looked back to collectivism as a more just form of governance. In both instances, this was predicated upon a highly partial historical narrative, which either consciously or unconsciously ignored the numerous failings of Qing and Mao-era flood governance. Such narratives were often less to do with flooding than they were to do with a general dissatisfaction regarding societal change on both a local and national level. In both the 1930s and 1990s, ordinary people used such comparisons instrumentally to express a high—some would argue healthy—level of scepticism about the official discourse to which they were exposed.

Conclusion

The historian William Cronon (1992) observes that when scholars describe human interactions with the environment they tend to adhere to two distinct narrative conventions. The first emphasises the progressive elements of the relationship, focussing upon the advance of human communities and the technological mastery of nature. The second emphasises tragic or "declentionist" elements, highlighting the deleterious consequences of environmental exploitation. These two narrative conventions—which each smuggle a particular teleology into their understanding of environmental history—have long underscored the way that both the state and its citizens represent flood-governance in Hubei. During each of the three

twentieth century mega-floods described above, the official literature tended to posit a progressive narrative, highlighting the success that governors had preventing disasters and ameliorating their consequences. These positive assessments not only served to obscure the true humanitarian impact of flooding, but also helped to establish a highly combative view of the human relationship with the environment. Ultimately this helped to foster an ideology in which sustainability was sacrificed in favour of utilitarian exploitation. Through celebrating victories over inundation, progressive narratives validated a pattern of environmental exploitation that, somewhat ironically, exacerbated the underlying flood risk.

In contrast to the official literature, when ordinary citizens of Hubei sought to explain flooding, they often highlighted elements of systemic decline. Floods were seen as indicative of general political and moral problems; they were the environmental expression of bad governance. The political and moral failings of the various regimes that governed Hubei throughout the twentieth century became manifest in heaven's wrath, collapsing dykes and embezzled relief funds. Whilst such declentionist narratives formed a vital counter to the malignant distortions of official literature, they also posited an overly nostalgic view of past governors, which was often no less inaccurate than the official narrative. In order to condemn contemporary administrators, critics exonerated their predecessors.

In reality, neither progressive nor declentionist narratives capture the complex dynamic of flooding in Hubei. Whilst floods have increased, the humanitarian impact of flooding has diminished considerably. Yet declining death tolls do not mean that governors can afford to be complacent. If the long-term history of Hubei has taught us anything, it is that seemingly stable systems can easily break down. During the high-Ming and high-Qing periods, significant investment in hydraulic defences gave the illusion that the major problem of flooding had been addressed. Yet time and again this stability proved ephemeral, and the hydraulic cycle completed its revolution towards systemic collapse (Will 1980).

Since the 1950s the Chinese government seems to have addressed many of the failings of past flood management. Its growing confidence has led it to invest in grandiose projects such as South-North Water Diversion Project and the Three Gorges Dam. Yet whilst such projects seem to fulfil the promise of hydraulic modernity that was first promulgated by Sun Yat-sen, they have also saddled future generations with a heavy burden of maintenance.[22] Rather than considering alternative hydraulic strategies, such as sustainable floodplain management (Wong and Zhao 2001), the government has,

for better or worse, "locked" the population of the Middle Yangzi into a dependence upon hydraulic solutions based upon monumental engineering schemes (on "technological lock-in" see Elvin 2004). As a result the security of the population of Hubei is now more reliant than ever upon the maintenance of economic and political stability. With scientific evidence mounting to support the theory of anthropogenic climate change, which will have a concomitant impact of further increasing the volatility of floods in the Middle Yangzi (Zhang et al. 2007), it seems likely that Hubei's hydraulic system will face even greater pressure in the future. As such, the issue of flooding is likely to continue being one of the most fundamental challenges faced by those governing this disaster-prone province.

Notes

1. For simplicity, this article uses the somewhat anachronistic collective name Wuhan to describe the three historic cities of Hankou, Hanyang and Wuchang throughout.

2. On the role of climatic change in the Yuan and Ming, for example, see Brook (2010).

3. The relationship between social stability and flooding is complex. One of the most sophisticated attempts to explain this dynamic is the notion of the "hydraulic cycle." This posits a complex non-linear relationship between political and hydraulic stability, demonstrating how the security of flood defences mirrored the fortunes of the state. During both the mid-Ming and mid-Qing periods it seemed as if the state had achieved an optimal governance structure, in which floods were well-regulated through a strong devolution of power to local actors. However, the success of flood governance in both periods encouraged unsustainable policies of environmental management, eventually leading to hydraulic collapse. In this sense, even seemingly efficient systems of governance could act to exacerbate flooding if they failed to respond to the changing pattern of risk. See Will (1980) and Perdue (1987).

4. On links between famine and the Taiping Rebellion see Crossley (2010: 104). On links between famine and the Boxer Rebellion see Cohen (1997).

5. Here the term "mega-flood" is used to describe a large basin-wide inundation, usually caused by the simultaneous flooding of the Yangzi and its tributaries see Will (1985).

6. The author conducted fifteen semi-structured oral history interviews with citizens of Wuhan and its rural hinterland in 2009–10 and 2013. Interviewees are not referred to by name in order to preserve their anonymity.

7. The State Statistical Bureau of China gives a death toll of 145,000 for the 1931 flood (Zong and Chen 2000: 166). This refers to an estimate of the number of people who *drowned* in the first 100 days of the flood provided by a Nanjing University survey (Buck 1932). This estimate does not account for the much higher incidence of disaster-related starvation and disease in the months following the flood. For a full discussion of mortality estimates in 1931 see Courtney (2013).

8. See for example, the Republican era bamboo branch poem "后湖堤" (Luo 2001: 6).

9. For descriptions of violence enacted by soldiers in 1931 see Xie (1931). For a detailed description of Xia's anti-communist activities in the 1920s and 1930s see Rowe (2007). For a description of Xia's activities in Wuhan during the 1931 flood see Courtney (2013: 68–71).

10. The journalist Chen Gengya (1987) reported a similar incidence of this mode of critique during the 1935 Yangzi Flood. Whilst carrying out an investigation in the Jinyintan area of Wuhan, Chen struck up a conversation with a local boatman. The journalist was asked, to his surprise, whether Zhang Xueliang, a powerful member of the Nanjing government who was at that time charged with governing national flood relief, was the son of Zhang Zhidong. The boatman went on to describe a rumour that suggested that, unlike other governors, Zhang Xueliang was defying religious prohibitions by allowing local people to perform "spirit operas" (神戏), designed to assuage the wrath of flood dragons. The boatman suggested that such behaviour was fitting for the son of the man who had constructed Wuhan's dyke network, which remained the city's most important flood defence system. Chen informed the boatman that there was no kinship relationship between the two Zhangs, and later recalled this incident for his readers merely in order to highlight the ignorance displayed by members of the ordinary population. It reveals the extent to which imperial governors still cast a shadow over their Republican successors, even if just as a vague cultural memory.

11. The term "flood disaster" 水灾, which was regularly used in 1931, was never employed in relation to the events of 1954, which were

instead referred to using more neutral terms for "flood" such as 洪水 or 大水.

12. Lillian Li (2007a: 31) describes this pattern as a "reign cycle", with floods marking the assumption of power of the Kangxi, Yongzheng, Qianlong, Jiaqing, Daoguang, and Tongzhi emperors. Li argues that these floods acted as a "wake-up call" prompting new emperors to invest heavily in the hydraulic infrastructure. However, as this investment was never sustained, by the end of each emperor's reign flood defences would once again fall into disrepair. The "reign cycle" can be understood as a microcosm of the larger dynastic "hydraulic cycle" (see note 2).

13. Kenneth Pomeranz (2009: 140) mentions the three twentieth century mega-floods briefly, arguing that the declining death tolls demonstrate an incremental improvement in the security of Chinese populations from flooding.

14. Each area provided statistics separately. The figures were taken from the period between the start of the flood until February 1955. Other flood-related deaths include those who drowned, were crushed to death or suffered other abnormal deaths.

15. The HPDI was not calculated through retrospective analysis of demographic data, but rather through a detailed investigation carried out by the party members at a district and county level. Unlike the vague aggregate death toll provided in most studies, its findings are categorised by area and cause of mortality. This suggests at least a degree of systematisation in the collection of statistics. Finally, given that this was an internal party investigation, there would seem little incentive to exaggerate the death toll; if anything investigation teams would be under pressure to underestimate the figure. All indications would seem to suggest that this death toll represents a more accurate estimate than those previous published. Presumably it was not disseminated more widely as it directly contradicted the wholly positive image of disaster governance presented by the CCP.

16. This death toll accounts only for the Jingjiang flood diversion that inundated areas of rural Hubei north of the Yangzi. It is possible that a similar level of destruction was wrought by the southern Dongting flood diversion in Hunan. For a historic view of the problem of flooding in the Dongting Lake area see Perdue (1987).

17. It might be tempting to assume that interviewees were avoiding discussing a politically sensitive topic with a foreign researcher. However,

some spoke frankly about issues such as the political failures that led to the Great Famine in the late 1950s. Many were also critical of the current government's treatment of ordinary citizens. Such frankness does not support the assumption of self-censorship in relation to the 1954 flood.

18. This combative view of human-environmental relations has informed the exploitation of nature in a diverse range of global settings. It has tended to find a particularly extreme expression in political settings that lack mechanisms of democratic accountability, such as the Soviet Union and Maoist China (Shapiro 2001: 198–201). It should not be understood as hegemonic within the Chinese context. Historically there has been a range of different approaches to environmental management, informed by a rich diversity of influences, which include Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism and Soviet Communism (Shapiro 2001: 198–201). In relation to water-control specifically, there has been a long-standing debate between interventionists and non-interventionists, with each faction finding ample justification for their positions within China's diverse philosophical traditions. See Yan (2012) and Elvin (2004). In contemporary China those opposed to hydraulic intervention remain vocal in their criticism of plans such as the Three Gorges Dam. See Dai (1998).

19. By 1998 Jiang Zemin had been replaced by Zhu Rongji as premier. As the transferral of premiership in China is often a protracted and somewhat opaque process, it is possible that ordinary citizens continued to associate Jiang with governance during the flood. Alternatively they may simply not have wanted to waste a good pun.

20. David Davies (2007) notes a similar form of selective nostalgia in his examination of a photograph exhibition detailing the lives of youths sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. In this instance nostalgia was deployed both as context "re-evaluating a variety of conflicting interpretations about the past" and also to highlight "emerging social and class distinctions" (Davies 2007: 168). On postsocialist nostalgia in a non-Chinese context see Boym (2001).

21. Several interviewees did refer to religion as a possible factor in flooding, yet none drew an explicit link with governance.

22. Whilst Middle Yangzi flooding was often cited as one of the justifications for constructing the Three Gorges Dam, the evidence that this dam has contributed to hydraulic stability is far from conclusive (Hayashi et al. 2008).

Reasons to Dam: China's Hydropower Politics and Its Socio-Environmental Consequences

Sabrina Habich

INTRODUCTION

China's rapid economic growth has led to a dramatic increase in electricity demand. While the majority of this demand is still being met by the country's coal industry (Rosen and Houser 2007), the government has been looking towards less polluting alternative energy sources. This is one of the reasons why China—despite the fact it already obtains more electricity from hydropower than any other country—intends to double its hydropower capacity by 2020 (EIA 2010; Magee 2006). The 12th Five-Year Plan states that the development of hydropower resources has to be actively pursued (China New Energy Net, 11 April 2011).

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One hundred years ago, the first hydropower plant started to generate electricity in China. The installed capacity of the Shilongba Dam near Kunming was 480 kW. Since then, China has constructed tens of thousands of dams within its borders, making up a total installed hydropower capacity of 200 million kW in 2010—a number that has doubled since 2005 and is planned to reach 300 million by 2015 (People's Daily 2010). Within the past 100 years, the reasons for and the political climate surrounding hydropower development has been in constant flux, influencing the way dam projects have been planned and carried out. Looking at the numbers above and the growing size of hydropower plants, it does not come as a surprise that controversies surrounding these projects have grown. While back in 1910, discussions surrounded the question as to whether the Shilongba Dam should be financed with national or foreign capital, today, debates about hydropower development raise social, environmental, political as well as economic questions (Ma 2000). This chapter traces these developments over the past century with a special focus on the changes that have taken place over the past three decades of reform and opening up. This chapter specifically aims to answer the question why—despite recent economic and political changes in China—large and socially as well as environmentally unsustainable dams are still being built.

To provide an answer, the chapter applies the framework for large-scale development schemes developed by James Scott (1998) in his book *Seeing Like a State* and adapts his analysis to the current process of dam construction in China. During the Mao era, planning and implementation of large-scale development projects were in line with Scott's four main elements—namely, state simplification, a high modernist ideology, an authoritarian state and a weak civil society. Recent scholarship on the policy process in China, however, suggests that we need to consider new actors and influences such as business associations (Deng and Kennedy 2010), policy entrepreneurs (Bragg 2003; Zhu 2008), think tanks (Zhu 2011) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Schwartz 2004; Xu et al. 2005).

Mertha (2009) has described this new phenomenon under the framework of 'fragmented authoritarianism 2.0', which pays attention to the roles and policy preferences of previously excluded societal actors in the Chinese policy process. This body of research illustrates the sociological turn in the field of China studies, formerly dominated by studies on the political elite. Under the heading of 'state–society relations', works in this new sub-field document not only social changes brought about by reform and opening, but also the consequences that these changes have for the

Chinese policy process. A particular focus here lies on the activities of environmental NGOs (Büsgen 2006; Cooper 2006; Ho 2007; Yang 2005).

Although these studies provide us with an in-depth understanding of the increased pluralisation of the Chinese policy process, the literature nevertheless has a few limitations. For instance, while existing studies document increasing activism on the side of civil society, and explain how this activism impacts certain statist projects such as dams (Mertha and Lowry 2006; Mertha 2008), a number of them focus on a single point in time. For example, in the case of the Dujiangyan Dam in Sichuan province, the plan to construct the dam was abolished when policy entrepreneurs, together with the media and several government officials, successfully reframed the issues surrounding hydropower development, and mobilised the public against the project (ibid.). Beyond the fact that the Chinese policy process in the area of hydropower development seems to be more pluralised than in the past, such studies do not illuminate the direction which the industry might take in the future, nor do we learn about past trajectories. Instead, we merely understand the factors that have led to policy change during a single event (see also Habich 2016).

This chapter represents an advance because it traces the factors that have caused the Chinese government to construct gigantic dam projects over time and also shows how these factors have evolved over recent decades. Moreover, apart from investigating the role of civil society actors and a fragmented authoritarian state in hydropower politics, it shows how China's central government has been moving away from simplified development projects and a highly modernist ideology, a phenomenon which one must grasp in order to understand China's hydropower development and infrastructure construction more generally.

While previously, all four aspects of Scott's framework collectively contributed to the unsustainability of development projects, in the adapted framework presented below certain elements fostering sustainability—such as an increasingly vocal civil society—are offset by other elements, such as the marketisation of water resources and the professionalisation of China's hydropower bureaucracy. In other words, a gradually institutionalised hydropower bureaucracy does not leave much room for civil society organisations which—despite actively engaging with the topic of large dams—are marginalised in their efforts to protect China's rivers and local communities.

The chapter is divided into three main parts. The first introduces Scott's framework for large-scale development projects. The following

part briefly illustrates water politics during Republican China and shows that while Sun Yat-sen was interested in modernising China with the help of hydropower, the ideological turn towards large-scale engineering projects occurred only after 1949. This historically informed view illustrates the changing context and goals surrounding hydropower development and shows how these affect the statist project. The third part describes hydropower development under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the changes that have taken place since the beginning of the reform period. The increased, although limited, role that civil society, a reformed state and the private sector play during the policymaking process is analysed with the aid of Scott's framework.

Seeing Like a State and the Construction of Large Dams

In *Seeing Like a State*, Scott describes how the pre-modern state gradually began to manage its citizens and natural environment, and why various development schemes such as Soviet collectivisation and Tanzanian-forced villagisation have failed. Scott (1998) argues that these social engineering projects have caused tragic consequences mainly when the following elements dominated statist development efforts:

1. State simplification: government officials transform complex, dynamic and illegible local practices into standardised, logical and legible grids. These simplifications do not adequately represent reality, but support the state in ordering and controlling society and nature. Per Scott, state simplification provides the capacity for large-scale development projects.
2. High modernist ideology: a strong belief in scientific and technological progress, and in the unchallenged legitimacy of the two as instruments for solving social and environmental issues. States with a high modernist ideology believe that it is possible to completely master (human) nature and comprehensively organise human settlements and production so as to bring about social and economic progress. These utopian visions are not dangerous in themselves. In liberal political systems, they can be useful for political planners to drive reform. However, in authoritarian regimes, they oftentimes provide the basis for unsustainable social and environmental engineering.

3. Existence of an authoritarian political regime: this is another element contributing to tragic consequences in large-scale social development projects. Authoritarian states have the will to translate these highly modernist schemes into reality and they have the coercive power to do so.
4. Weak civil society: Scott regards the existence of a *weak civil society* as a necessary condition for large-scale development projects to bring about detrimental social consequences. A civil society that is not organised well or that is prostrate because of recent political turmoil such as war or revolution does not have the capacity to resist the state's plans, or might even support them due to desperation.

One type of development project that often leads to detrimental effects for humans and the natural environment, and at the same time, fits into the highly modernist view of policy planners is the construction of *large* dams (Scott 1998: 5).

Hydropower Development in Republican China

The aim of Sun Yat-sen and his fellow Nationalist modernisers was for China to become a modern, unified and cohesive nation and society. Sun presented his plan in his three-volume *Outline of National Construction* (建国方略). By building up a national communication infrastructure, Sun sought to prevent the division of the country and foster national unity. Modern infrastructure development, he argued, would not only promote economic growth, but also nurture a sense of national community and thereby turn China into a strong nation (Ye 2010: 76).

Since Yu the Great, dynastic leaders based a significant part of their legitimacy on their ability to regulate China's rivers and Sun Yat-sen was no different. *The International Development of China*, one of the three volumes of Sun's *Outlines*, illustrates Sun's grandiose plans for national reconstruction. Apart from his aim to build a huge nationwide railroad network, he proposed to construct three big harbours, control the five great rivers (the Yangtze, Yellow, Huai, Pearl and Hai rivers) and to develop river navigation, hydropower and irrigation (Sun 1922). His aim to govern the Yangtze river was tightly connected to another of his gigantic development plans designed to promote his vision of a strong and unified Chinese nation—namely, the creation of 'Great Wuhan', an urban planning project that intended to merge the cities of Wuchang, Hankou

and Hanyang, and turn this merged entity into the hub of a national river and railroad transportation network (Ye 2010).

Although the Nationalists were not able to finish their vision of 'Great Wuhan', a look at the planning stages of this visionary project already reveals the Western-trained officials' neglect of traditional city planning, and the blind faith in scientific knowledge. The consequences of this neglect revealed themselves during the great Yangtze flood in 1931, which witnessed the flooding of Wuchang due to the excessive and improperly executed reclamation of land around Wuhan (Ye 2010). This is only one example showing how Sun Yat-sen and his fellow Nationalist modernisers attempted to build a strong nation by remoulding their physical environment according to scientific standards.

In a comment on the importance of water power for China's development and the third of his Three Principles of the People—the doctrine of livelihood—Sun's admiration for massive hydro schemes becomes evermore apparent:

> [N]ew cheap electricity is generated by water power. In many countries, waterfalls and rapids are now being used to drive dynamos that generate an enormous amount of electricity, *costing next to nothing*.[…]Engineers have estimated that the Wen River in the northern part of Kwantung could generate tens of thousands of electric horsepower, sufficient to supply the *entire city* of Canton with electric light and electric power for *all* factories, and even to electrify the Canton-Hankow Railway by adopting the latest foreign method of railway engineering. Moreover, the water in the Kuei Gorges of the Upper Yangtze is enormous. The water power in the stretch of river between Ichang and Wanhsien, it is estimated, could generate over 20,000,000 electric horsepower larger than the total production in any single country at present. This immense power would not only supply *all* railways, electric lines, and factories in the country, but it would be used to manufacture an enormous amount of artificial fertilizer.[…] Great, indeed, are China's natural resources! (Sun cited in Hsü 1933: 452–3, emphasis added)

This passage illustrates that Sun dreamed big when it came to waterpower. He regarded dams as a cheap way to generate electricity not only for cities, but also for the whole country. However, while believing in the positive contribution of waterpower for China's development, Sun did not consider the negative impact his grandiose plans might have on the environment and local people. As will be shown, this modernist ideology behind hydropower development was also apparent during the Mao era, and to a certain degree, continues to be a factor driving large dam projects to this day.

Although Sun's grandiose plans in the field of water resource development were hindered by an unstable political climate in China, they nevertheless encouraged Western-trained intellectuals to revamp China's water resource industry (China Water Research 1989: 370). Until the 1930s, river governance was decentralised in a way that planning efforts ended at provincial boundaries. Each province had separate river commissions for rivers on their territory. Due to a lack of coordinating efforts between these commissions, an integrated governance system was lacking and water resource projects did not bring expected benefits.

Under Chiang Kai-shek, inter-provincial river basin commissions responsible for controlling and planning the development of major rivers on an inter-provincial scale were created (China Water Research 1989: 401; Zheng et al. 1970: 342). Pietz (2002) shows that these bureaucratic changes illustrate a willingness of the national government to build a centralised and modernised 'administration based on a faith in technology, industry, and international cooperation'. This was reflected mainly in the introduction of Western hydraulic science to China, the inflow of foreign capital to support water resource projects as well as newly established institutions for training domestic engineers who were subsequently endued with substantial policymaking authority (Pietz 2002: xvii). In addition to university study programmes, the National Economics Council (全国经济委员会) set up the Central Hydraulics Research Institute (中央水工试验所) in Nanjing, which in turn, established subsidiaries in Yunnan, Sichuan and Shaanxi to strengthen water resource development in China's west (China Water Research 1989: 371–84).

Nevertheless, in line with the goals of river management formulated by industrialised countries at the time and the necessity of preventing major floods in China, control plans for China's major rivers were directed at multipurpose river development rather than primarily electricity generation. This focus is reflected in the scale of dam construction during the Republican era. In 1949, the total installed capacity of hydropower was only 360,000 kW, most of which was developed by the Japanese after 1937 (China Water Power 1991: 2482).

Hydropower Development Under the CCP

The Mao era represented a continuation of, rather than a turn away from, the Nationalists' grandiose development plans (Ye 2010). From the beginning, New China's leaders acknowledged the importance of electricity for the centrally planned economy, and in many aspects, institutional

and policy innovations of the Nationalist government facilitated successful water resource politics during the first years of the People's Republic (Pietz 2002: 123). The years between 1949 and 1957 are considered the initial period of hydropower development in the People's Republic of China (PRC), with the new government revamping the water resources bureaucracy based on the achievements of its predecessor. Principles and the direction for development were formulated, plans for dam projects along small- and medium-sized waterways were drawn up, and in August 1950, the Department for Water Power and Electricity Generation Projects (水力发电工程局) was set up (Zhou 2010: 52–8; China Water Power 1991: 2484).

During the time of the First (1953–57) and the Second Five-Year Plans (1958–62) the majority of dams constructed were small- or medium-sized and intended for rural electrification. The central government mainly relied on small-scale, decentralised energy systems. While Beijing provided small funding and technical support for dam construction, rural communities were supposed to develop and run their own energy systems. This trend continued when a major campaign for rural electrification through hydropower was carried out during the Great Leap Forward (1958–61) (Yeh and Lewis 2004).

In addition to these decentralised efforts of electrification that mainly employed small-scale traditional technologies, Beijing developed large-scale projects that were highly centralised (Fu 1998: 18–20). This was a function of Mao's desire to boost China's industry and the recognition that this required lots of energy. Furthermore, by building large dams, China could not only reach the production targets laid out in the First Five-Year Plan, but also prove its engineering capability. Early on, Mao stated the aim of building the largest dam in the world in China (Kenneth and Lieberthal 1988). Interestingly, he embraced Sun's idea of constructing the Three Gorges Dam in Sichuan province which was to become just one of several projects first proposed by Sun and later implemented by the CCP (see also below).[1]

The Communists shared the Nationalists' vision of modernity that was to be achieved through gigantic construction projects and a centralised state. However, in contrast to the Nationalist era when corruption and political instability hampered development plans, after the First Five-Year Plan under Mao, it was Communist ideology and a disregard of intellectuals that jeopardised industrial development. Whereas Sun's blind trust in natural science led to his belief in China's ability to engineer nature as

well as to his neglect of the consequences this might have for the natural environment, Mao ignored the laws of natural science right away—an ignorance which caused 'foolhardy schemes that ultimately destroyed the natural environment' (Shapiro 2001: 21).

The repression of hydraulic engineer Huang Wanli during the anti-rightist movement is a case in point. Huang, who had received his university education in the USA, opposed the construction of the Sanmenxia (三门峡) Dam, which he believed would have negative consequences for the local population and the natural environment. While Huang was stifled for challenging Soviet and Maoist orthodoxy, the dam was built, ultimately leading to the prospected environmental damage and human tragedy (Shapiro 2001: 22).

Apart from that, these large-scale dams built during the time of the Great Leap Forward/GLF (1958–61) did not follow prescribed plans. The government did not conduct prior assessments of project sites or costs and impacts related to hydropower plants. This frequently caused high economic losses as projects had to be abandoned in the middle of the construction process due to unforeseen circumstances such as a sudden lack of capital or technical problems caused by inappropriate site selection (Shapiro 2001: 2–3; Zhou 2010: 117–9).

The situation improved slightly when, in 1962, Zhou Enlai expressed his concern about China's water conservancy projects and called for a more comprehensive approach to water resource management (Fu 1998: 21). In the following years, research departments for hydropower development were set up, and project design and construction were separated institutionally so as to give equal weight to planning and construction processes. However, the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) reversed this trend. Left-wing factions criticised and persecuted intellectuals and experts in all kinds of fields including hydropower, preventing research and design departments from carrying out their work (Zhou 2010: 122–3). Nevertheless, dams continued to be built. Mao's Third-Front plan turned Sichuan province into an important location for large hydropower projects, initiating a shift away from small-scale dam projects (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988: Chap. 6; Zhou 2010: 125–6).

On the whole, during the period of central planning, spurred by Communist ideology, China's leaders tended to rush into large infrastructure projects without calculating economic and social risks. Planning phases were short and oftentimes conducted simultaneously with the

construction process. Furthermore, the state was integrated and controlled by the energy sector. The situation only changed after the start of political and economic reforms in 1978, when institutional structures for hydropower development re-emerged. For instance, in 1982, the government merged the Ministry of Water Resources (水利部) and the Ministry of Electric Power (电力部), which had been separated in 1979, and gave the merged entity responsibility for China's overall hydropower development planning (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988: 95–6; Zhou 2010: 128–9).[2]

In addition, the Administration for Water Resources and Hydropower Construction (水利水电建设总局) and the Planning and Design Institute for Water Resources and Hydropower (水利水电规划设计院) were established to carry out the planning of large- and medium-sized hydropower projects and their preliminary construction works. Around the same time, the governmental work report produced during the Fourth Session of the Fifth National People's Congress reiterated the importance of (in particular small-scale) hydropower development for both clean and efficient electricity generation. Furthermore, the government began to separate government functions from business activities. In 1987, the State Council announced reforms of the power sector. Apart from the separation of government and business functions, the state began the devolution of responsibilities to provincial governments, the unification of the electricity grid and energy provision, and the accumulation of capital for energy projects (Zhou 2010: 133).[3]

Figure 5.1 shows that the largest share of China's electricity demand is still being met by the country's coal industry (Rosen and Houser 2007).[4]

However, as mentioned above, in 2010, China's State Energy Bureau has announced plans to double its hydropower capacity by 2020 (EIA 2010). Moreover, the newly published 12th Five-Year Plan states that the development of hydropower resources has to be actively pursued (China New Energy Net 2011). After all, China has the greatest hydropower potential of any country on earth, with an estimated total capacity of approximately 400 million kWh (People's Daily 2010).

Dam Construction in Southwest China: *Seeing Like a State*, a Market and a Society

The sections above have described the trajectory of hydropower development over the past century in China. In the following sections, Scott's framework is adapted to the current situation of dam construction in
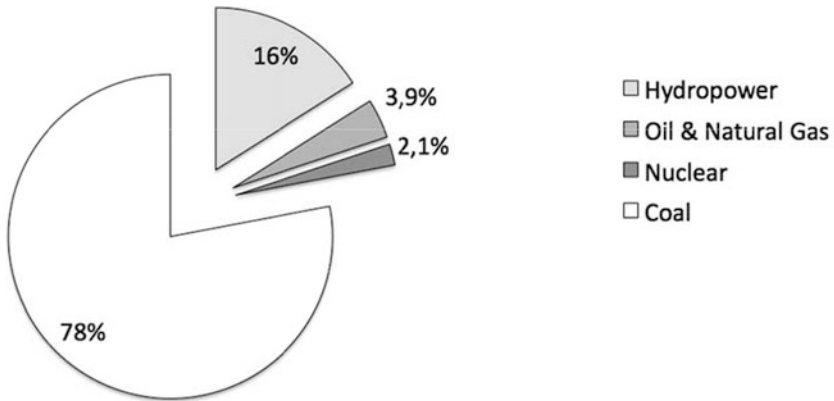
Fig. 5.1 Electricity generation by fuel type.
Source: Adapted from Rosen and Houser (2007).

China and applied to the various controversies surrounding hydropower development in southwest China. This analysis shows how the policy-making process has evolved over the last decades and how elements of China's reform process have shaped this evolution in the hydropower sector.

Less-Simplified Planning

Dams and reservoirs have the potential to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, thus providing an opportunity for China to generate clean energy and address the country's severe problem of air pollution and appalling coal industry workplace safety record (New York Times 2011; Wang 2006). Research indicates, too, that in some parts along dammed rivers, there is an increase in water availability and improved irrigation for agricultural production (Lerer and Scudder 1999). However, as mentioned above, there are negative ecological, economic and social impacts attached to hydropower development.

In order to avert these negative effects or keep them to a minimum, development planners have to get a clear picture of the impacts prior to the construction process. During the planning and construction stages of the Three Gorges Dam impact assessments only analysed economic

benefits rather than social and environmental effects. Since the early 1980s, negative social and ecological consequences of large dam projects were acknowledged, but impact assessments largely remain symbolic (Zhang 2000).[5]

At the central level, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) decides whether dams are constructed, depending on China's economic development and energy situation. In addition, the Ministries of Agriculture, Land and Resources, Environmental Protection, and Water Resources have to approve pre-feasibility and feasibility studies, design plans and the Project Application Report of each dam project. Depending on the size of the project, the water resources bureaus at different administrative levels also may be involved in the approval process (Hensengerth 2010: 4).

At the central level, the seven basin commissions under the Ministry of Water Resources are responsible for managing river projects along China's major rivers that cross provincial boundaries. The commissions develop basin plans including their hydropower potential. The revised Water Law of 2002 requires project developers to submit their project plans to one of the commissions depending on the region in which the dam is to be built. Since 2002, five state-owned companies (China Huadian Group, China Huaneng Group, China Sanxia Group, China Guodian Group and China Datang Group) have the right to build hydropower stations along China's major rivers. Their plans for hydropower development have to comply with the basin plans drawn up by the basin commissions and have to get approval from the latter. Next, the basin commission sends its decision to the NDRC for further approval. Once a project gets approved, the energy companies employ one of the design institutes from the China Hydropower Engineering Consulting Group (Hydrochina) to develop a detailed plan for the dam, including dam site and size as well as the details of resettlement. At the same time, the energy companies hire agencies to carry out the feasibility studies, which have to contain information on technological, economic, environmental and social aspects. Once all studies have been approved, the company can compile the Project Application Report, including the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report, which is conducted by a certified EIA agency (Hensengerth 2010: 5–6; Mertha 2008).

Despite the elaborate web of bureaucracy regulating hydropower development in China today, negative consequences for the environment as well as ecologically inadequate dam locations are oftentimes not considered. Geologists argue that the consequences of this neglect might be particularly

dire in the case of the Nu River Project, which lies on a fault line at risk of earthquakes. Earthquakes in the region are not only strong, but their frequency has also increased recently due to strengthened tectonic movement. Although public protests by local as well as international NGOs were able to halt the project in 2004, China's energy bureaucracy and power companies intend to move on with the project, neglecting the warnings of geologists and environmental specialists (Interview II, 2 August 2011; Liu 2011).

There are two reasons for this lack of environmental concern in China's hydropower strategy. The first is the continuing weakness of China's environmental protection bureaucracy. Although in 2008, the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) finally became a ministry-level agency (since then referred to as the Ministry of Environmental Protection, MEP), China's environmental protection bureaucracy is still relatively new and oftentimes overshadowed by other ministries as well as by the NDRC. The dominant position of the NDRC is the second reason why environmental concerns continue to be neglected. China's energy bureaucracy and the NDRC focus on economic and hydropower development, with the powerful and ideological NDRC focused on quick rather than sustainable development (Mertha 2008).

A newly published regulation regarding environmental impact assessments of hydropower projects exemplifies how the NDRC attempts to take control of such assessments. The 'Provisional Measures Regarding the River Hydropower Project Report and the Planning of Investigating the Environmental Impact Report' (河流水电规划报告及规划环境影响报告书审查暂行办法) not only grant the NDRC the right to select the organisation responsible for developing the environmental impact assessment, but also stipulate that the NDRC together with the MEP are responsible for convening the group of people responsible for investigating the environmental impact assessment report. While the measures require that at least half of the people of the investigation group have to be experts from various fields such as environmental impact assessment, hydrology, ecology and biodiversity, the MEP is not allowed to make changes to this group without consulting with the NDRC (NDRC and MEP 2011). Holding the right to control the group of people who conduct and investigate environmental impact assessments, the NDRC can prevent any negative reports that could potentially threaten a project's feasibility.

Finally, consultants who are inclined towards approving the feasibility of a dam mostly assess dam project applications. This bias comes partly from their professional training as engineers, who have been trained to

believe in the necessity of dams without appreciating their ecological, social and economic consequences (McCully 2001: 252).

Thus, when it comes to environmental and social impacts of large dam projects, the Chinese central government is now demanding more detailed and comprehensive planning processes, in order to keep negative consequences at a minimum. The leadership has built up an elaborate bureaucracy that is much more regulative when compared to the Mao era. However, this bureaucracy is dominated by agencies heavily biased towards large hydropower development. These agencies, especially the NDRC, have the ability, as noted above, to push potentially unsustainable project applications forward. The environmental protection bureaucracy does not offer a counterbalance as it is too weak to defend its mandate aggressively.

Modernist Ideology

Simplified planning processes are often spurred by overly modernist ideologies. In the case of hydropower development, during the Nationalist era, the neglect of social and ecological consequences of large-scale dam projects was driven by China's desire for economic development and modernisation, and later under the Communist Party, also by the effort to reshape the human and nonhuman world. The most intense surge of dam projects was stimulated by the GLF when officials pursued 'technological grandiosity' (Dai 1998), so as to follow Mao Zedong's command to aim for high economic targets. The results of these hasty efforts were the 1975 Henan flood and other floods (Shapiro; McCully 2001: 19).

During the reform era, this highly modernist ideology has slowly given way to more coordinated and less utopian development efforts. The concept of building a 'Socialist Harmonious Society' and the 'Scientific Development Concept' illustrate Beijing's shift towards more pragmatic development initiatives that address the various social problems confronting Chinese society at the beginning of the new millennium and that are to prove the continued legitimacy of CCP rule (Holbig 2007: 34–8).[6] During the 18th National Congress of the CCP, the Chinese leadership further highlighted the importance of 'ecological progress' that is to accompany economic growth and which was integrated into the revised Party Constitution (Xinhua 2012).

In the case of hydropower development, the State Council acknowledged the problems that the Three Gorges Dam caused. After a cabinet

meeting held in May 2011, the government released a statement promising to increase efforts to reduce negative environmental and social impacts in areas affected by the dam. It was pointed out that the government would undertake efforts to curb water pollution, promote biological diversity and raise the standard of living of relocated residents, by 'stick[ing] to the principle of putting people first and promoting sustainable development in post-construction work' (Xinhua 2011c).

This is not to argue that dam construction in China now adequately represents the interests of all stakeholders. Despite being a product of nature, water is now increasingly privatised, industrialised and marketised, which leads to the formation of public–private partnerships in the development of water resources, involving the state and private corporations, but neglecting the local population (Interview II, 2 August 2011).

Although Chinese leaders do not aim to transform nature anymore, they nevertheless do not shun large dams. In fact, the 12th Five-Year Plan advocates a 'Great Leap' in dam building (Hilton 2012), reminiscent of both Sun's vision of electrifying the entire country through hydropower and Mao's grandiose development schemes. If we look at the specific case of the Nu River, we see the continuing focus on dams. In 2011, a senior NDRC official was quoted as saying 'hydropower development [along the Nu River] is a must'. Further, a report assessing hydropower projects along the Nu describes the development as 'unstoppable' (Meng 2011). Previously, former Premier Wen Jiabao had given in to environmentalists and geologists arguing against the cascade of dams when he ordered the suspension of the project in 2004 and 2009. However, the NDRC now lists the Nu River dams as a key energy project.

The reasons behind this retreat is tied to China's macroeconomic and political goals. Apart from the economic interests of China's hydropower corporations elaborated below, these include the reduction of carbon intensity by 17 per cent by 2015 (compared to 2010 levels); the increase of non-fossil energy consumption; the development of renewable energy resources; the acceleration of coordinated regional development, including large-scale development of western China; and the expansion of west-to-east power transmission among others (Xinhua 2011a).

What has changed since the end of the Mao era is the ideology surrounding hydropower development and the variables driving large dam projects. China's past dam-building efforts were deeply influenced by ideological-political campaigns, such as the aforementioned Cultural Revolution, which have vanished from the scene. In terms of causal factors,

the central leadership no longer craves Soviet-style utopian development schemes and has instead begun to address issues such as sustainability and social impacts of large-scale construction projects. At the same time, macroeconomic goals such as providing energy to the country's east, carbon emission reductions and the modernisation of China's provinces continue to cause the government to support large dam projects. This is directly related to what has been said about 'less-simplified planning', as the above goals contribute to the NDRC undermining environmental protection efforts, and to the fact that the environmental protection bureaucracy has so far failed to become a stronger actor within the policy field of hydropower development.

Market Economy and a Fragmented Authoritarian Regime

While China's economy has become much more liberal than it had been before the start of the reforms, state officials continue to drive almost all significant decisions—a situation which Lieberthal (2003) calls a 'negotiated economy' in that economic outcomes are determined through negotiations involving local officials who act without instruction from the centre (Lai 2006).

This complex relationship between governments and private as well as collective enterprises at central and local levels also applies to the hydropower sector. The most important actors within China's hydropower bureaucracy advocating dam construction are the Ministry of Water Resources, with its seven water commissions responsible for managing river projects along China's major rivers, and the corresponding Water Resource Bureaus at the local level; the Development and Reform Commissions at the national and local levels; and the aforementioned five big power generation companies, which own majority stakes in companies responsible for hydropower development on China's major rivers.[7] Importantly, each of these power companies has sought to build up its business as quickly as possible. To do so, they have gone to the underdeveloped southwest of China, where local governments have been eager for development (Habich 2016; Mertha 2008; Sun and Zhao 2007: 132–3).[8]

Although the State Council has assigned each of the five big electricity companies with the development rights of one river basin, the distribution of these rights along rivers is not clear-cut. This is because this assignment of river basins does not stipulate each power station to be developed within each basin, which means that the authority to do so still rests with

the provincial Development and Reform Commissions (Caijing Magazine 2011b). While Huaneng and Huadian currently own the largest shares of development rights along rivers in Yunnan, other companies are trying to catch up. In March 2011, China Datang Group and the Yunnan provincial government signed an agreement in which they stated their aim of strategic cooperation in the fields of hydropower development and new energy resource development. The provincial governor, Qin Guangrong, has highlighted Datang Group's role in Yunnan's development and has promised that the provincial government and the provincial party committee will provide a good environment and excellent services in exchange for Datang's efforts (Habich 2016; Yunnan Net 2011).

Cooperation between provincial governments and hydropower companies often goes even further. Due to the recent rush towards southwest China's rivers and the fierce competition among hydropower companies, the latter tend to go to a region and build a dam without getting required approval from relevant upper-level governments. Local governments tend to not interfere with these efforts, because they want to increase local gross domestic product (GDP) and tax revenue. This situation leads to the unsustainable development of water resources, in that environmental impacts of dams and social implications for resettled people are not assessed correctly (Interview II, 2 August 2011; Interview, 12 August 2011).

According to the chair of China's environmental committee, some localities uphold less than a third of Beijing's environmental laws. The challenge of coordinating law enforcement across multiple administrative layers is not unique to China, but exacerbated by the fact that local environmental protection bureaus are under the control of the local government and depend on the latter for their budgets. Furthermore, Chinese lawyers do not have a tradition of filing actions against the government to enforce environmental laws (Lieberthal 2003; Larson 2008).

Apart from the objective of increasing local GDP, local governments want to get as many benefits from development projects as possible during their own terms in office and are reluctant to grant the benefits of these projects to their successors. This is why local officials tend to develop hydropower as quickly as possible. An office term normally lasts for about ten years, while the construction of a dam takes between eight and ten years. In order to benefit as much as possible from hydropower development, local officials order the simultaneous development of several large projects. The large amount of investment connected to these projects can normally not be provided by just one company, which is why other

companies attempt to secure development rights, and promise local governors to simultaneously develop as many dams as possible, causing an unsustainable development rush (Caijing Magazine 2011b).

Local governments try to maximise their benefits (i.e., taxes and fees) accruing from contracts with hydropower companies. However, this is only possible for the local government with which the company registers for a particular project. If it is registered with another locality, the largest share of the money made through dam construction goes to that other locality. The issue can become complicated if the river to be developed crosses regional boundaries. Then different local governments vie with each other for the company's registration (Caijing Magazine 2011a).

The above example illustrates the power that local governments have over hydropower development companies. Their power is greatest when the dams are not large, which means that they have to be approved and can be controlled by the local government (Interview I, 2 August 2011). This is why, in recent years, in addition to the mushrooming of large dam projects, a high number of small dams are being built mostly by private companies. While these dams have the potential to improve electricity provision in China's countryside without causing the resettlement of a large number of people and with a much smaller environmental impact, the recent development frenzy of small dams brings its own set of problems. Apart from the fact that small dams only produce electricity when there is enough water available, the capacity of the local power grid is not endless, which is why overdevelopment of small dams does not necessarily lead to more electricity in the absence of an expansion of the power grid which does not automatically happen (Interview, 3 August 2011).

Another problem brought about by the rapid expansion of small dams is the reduction of water resources available for irrigation projects. While the MWR and the Water Resources Bureaus are responsible for irrigation, they nevertheless do not prevent the exploitation of water resources for electricity generation. The reasons for this are threefold, involving power dynamics within the government and the ministry's own interests. First of all, the close connection between China's power companies and the government prevents the water resources bureaucracy from interfering with the power industry's business interests. Second, electricity generation is an important element of China's development strategy, which the water resources bureaucracy does not dare to undermine. Third, electricity generation is a profitable business that brings additional revenues into government coffers (Interview, 29 March 2012).

While in the case of small dams, the locality has the decision-making power over the construction project, even in cases in which a locality does not have the primary responsibility for approving a project, it still tries to remain influential and increase its benefits. Apart from demanding between five to ten per cent of shares from the companies that intend to construct a dam in their locality, local governments are reported to pressure development companies towards fulfilling their demands by encouraging protests by the people to be resettled due to dam construction. This is why sometimes the protesters making the loudest noise against dam projects are relatives of local governors who try to satisfy their own interests and demands from hydropower companies (Caijing Magazine 2011b).

Thus, while China's policymakers have attempted to improve planning processes for hydropower projects, the incentive structure of local officials oftentimes undermines this effort. Although there exist a number of opposing voices to hydropower development, which emanate from within the government, these are mostly too weak to topple a project. Just like at the political centre in Beijing, the Development and Reform Commissions at the local levels have a higher standing than those bureaucracies that are largely opposed to dam construction such as the cultural relics bureaucracy, the seismology departments, the infrastructure bureaucracy and especially the MEP (Mertha 2008). This power asymmetry adds up to the incentive structure of local governments further contributing to the dam-building frenzy.

The politically well-connected power companies are not the only ones to take advantage of this asymmetry for their own benefit.[9] The fragmented state of China's authority also allows new social groups (such as environmental NGOs) that have emerged during the reform process to tap into the conflicting interests of various state agencies and to form a coalition with some of them at the expense of others. By doing so, these NGOs cooperate with some parts of the fragmented state and gain the opportunity to influence the policymaking process more efficiently than would be possible within a more unified authoritarian state. We now turn to the topic of NGOs, civil society and dam building.

Increasingly Vocal Civil Society

Civil society organisations are becoming increasingly vocal in defending the interests of the public against coercive policies of the state or profit-seeking companies. In China, environmental activism began in the 1990s

and since then environmental activists and their organisations monitor development and environmental projects. One of these projects is the Three Gorges Dam, which, due to its huge impact on the environment and people, has become one of the most controversial construction projects in China's history. The project has provoked the establishment of a number of environmental NGOs and has created environmental awareness among China's public. Although their campaigns were not able to change government policy, they have laid the foundation for subsequent campaigns against dam projects (Lin 2007).

There are various cases in which activism of different civil society groups against dam construction has led to suspension or even abandonment of construction. In June 2009, the MEP discontinued two hydropower plant construction projects along the Jinsha River (Li 2009). In Sichuan along the Min River, the successful cooperation of officers from the Cultural Relics Bureau, the local World Heritage Office, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Seismological Bureau and media representatives led to the abandonment of the Dujiangyan hydropower project by the provincial governor in August 2003. This was the first time in the history of the PRC that an engineering project of such magnitude, which had already been approved, got abandoned (Mertha 2008: Chap. 4).

Although NGOs and governmental dam opponents make up the weaker coalition in the struggle over China's hydropower policies—as opposed to the alliance between power companies and governmental pro-dam forces—several factors are contributing to occasional success stories for China's environmentalists. One of them is the fragmented state of China's authority, which allows activists to join forces with governmental units opposed to dam construction. For civil opposition to succeed, cooperation between NGOs and government agencies opposing hydropower projects is necessary. NGOs have to understand the goals that different state representatives are pursuing and how these goals can be brought in line with the aims of the organisation without threatening the overarching theme of political stability (Interview II, 2 August 2011).

Another factor is tied to China's less-simplified planning processes and the increasing amount of rules and regulations designed to govern infrastructure development. Although many of China's ambitious central-level rules are far from being genuinely implemented by local states, they at least legitimise protests by NGOs and affected citizens, and allow them to leverage project developers and local governments. At the same time,

government officials cite these same rules as reasons for why NGO activism against hydropower development is redundant. Due to an increasingly elaborate bureaucracy governing hydropower development and its socio-environmental consequences, the state regards itself as capable of handling negative consequences of dam construction on its own. During interviews with government officials and academics engaged in resettlement policy-making, NGOs are frequently referred to as troublemakers that attempt to foment unrest and undermine national development policies (Interviews, 4 March 2013; 7 March 2013).

This is why, despite having achieved some successes in their bottom-up fight for socially and environmentally sustainable hydropower development, NGOs are mostly excluded from decision-making processes at the central level (Interview, 8 March 2013). For example, the Kunming-based NGO Green Watershed has been very active when it comes to protecting the interests of those resettled due to dam building and to raise awareness about environmental issues involved in hydropower development. After the construction of the Manwan Dam in Yunnan, the NGO compiled a 180-page report about the negative effects that the dam has had on the local population and the environment. This report was handed to the State Council to raise awareness about local issues surrounding hydropower development (Interview, 29 March 2012). However, officials in the Ministry of Water Resources responsible for policymaking in dam-induced resettlement have been relying on their own investigations on resettlement, rather than on those prepared by NGOs which are frequently regarded as exaggerated and uninformed (Interview, 7 March 2013).

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed water resources and hydropower development in China over the past century. Under the Nationalist government, river management was characterised by several trends including the introduction of Western hydraulic science to China, the establishment of a centralised water resources bureaucracy that promoted liberal economic ideas, the development of educational institutions for training domestic engineers and an inflow of foreign capital into local construction projects. While during this time a diversity of regional interests, as well as financial constraints, and shortcomings in the administrative authority of the Nationalist government limited the realisation of grand development schemes, GMD administrative efforts laid the foundation for successes

in water resource development during the early years of the People's Republic (Pietz 2002).

The split away from former trends in river management only came with the onset of the GLF when planners were supposed to be Red instead of expert, and the national water resources bureaucracy got dismantled subsequently. During that time, China's decision-making process regarding hydropower politics was greatly simplified and driven by a highly modernist ideology. In the face of a weak civil society and the active mobilisation of labour and resources, China's authoritarian regime had the power to implement large-scale development schemes, which often had devastating consequences, as witnessed during the GLF.

In recent decades, China's water resource bureaucracy has again become increasingly market-driven and decentralised, in many ways resembling bureaucratic structures developed by the Nationalist government. Not only China's hydropower industry, but also its government is now staffed with a high number of technocrats, many of whom have a background in hydroelectric engineering, advocating the construction of large dams. When compared to the Nationalist era, several discontinuities can be discerned, contributing to the recent trend of large dam projects. First of all, the Nationalist government received international support for the construction of large water resources projects. While this was again the case during the early stages of the reform period, in recent years, international organisations like the World Bank have cooperated with Chinese hydropower actors in developing social and environmental protection measures for dam construction processes. Financial sources, which were lacking during the Nationalist era, are now provided for by powerful hydropower companies that are ready to invest in large domestic as well as international dam projects.

Second, under Chiang Kai-shek, not only financial but also political constraints limited the development of water resource projects. Although today, there are divisions within the policy field of hydropower development, these have emerged between the weak environmental protection and the cultural heritage bureaucracies on the one hand, and powerful hydropower advocates within the MWR and the NDRC on the other hand, with the latter leaving almost no room for the former. Under the Nationalist government, large dams were a luxury that political leaders contemplated. The CCP's quest for continued economic development, and its newly inscribed goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promotes the construction of large hydropower projects. Therefore, under

current circumstances, the Chinese leadership spares no effort to use the country's water resources to the fullest.

At the same time, when compared to the pre-reform era, the Chinese policy process is more politically heterogeneous as reflected in Scott's framework of large-scale development schemes. On the whole, the policy process underlies less-simplified plans and—at least at the centre—pays more attention to sustainable development goals. At both central and local levels, an increasingly vocal civil society makes use of China's fragmented authoritarian state in order to defend the interests of the public against coercive policies of the state and profit-seeking companies, which particularly at the local level work closely together in damming China's rivers as quickly as possible.

Nevertheless, in order to understand to what extent 'political pluralism can take place–indeed, influence–the policy process in single-party, authoritarian China' (Mertha 2008: xv) it is worth looking beyond the actions of NGOs, the media and peripheral officials that are against large dams, and scrutinise underlying ideologies and administrative dynamics of dam construction in China as well as the important role of state-owned enterprises in hydropower development. Despite an increase in political pluralisation, policy in China continues to be driven by statist actors with only limited input from society. This applies, in particular, to the policy field of hydropower development. Hydropower is officially framed as a clean and efficient way to produce energy. Social and environmental costs of large dams are seen as inevitable, but can be kept at a minimum by newly introduced policies. As already mentioned, the hydropower bureaucracy is powerful both in financial and political terms. While political actors aim to secure clean energy for the country's growth, China's hydropower companies seek to increase their profitable business along major domestic and international rivers. It is not only the environmental protection bureaucracy that has difficulties in keeping its foot in the door, but civil society actors are even more marginalised.

Hence, when it comes to the Chinese hydropower policy process, Mertha's purported fragmented authoritarianism 2.0 is shifting towards including large business interests rather than the media, peripheral officials and NGOs. Interviews conducted for this project confirm that especially the latter are regarded as lacking understanding of the technical details and benefits of hydropower development, disqualifying them from being a trustworthy policy entrepreneur.

Some of the five elements of Scott's revised framework described above (less-simplified planning; a less modernist ideology; a market economy

and a fragmented authoritarian state; and an increasingly vocal civil society) are mutually reinforcing. While less-simplified planning processes go hand in hand with less modernist and more sustainable development goals, economic and political reforms as well as the existence of a fragmented authoritarian state allow civil society to organise itself and increase its influence. At the same time, political decentralisation and local state corporatism have the potential to further the unsustainable development of dams, and to counter initiatives to regulate the industry.

NOTES

1. Another project was the creation of "Great Wuhan" mentioned in the previous section, see Ye (2010).
2. In 1958 and in 1982, the Ministry of Water Resources and Electric Power was created out of the previously existing Ministry of Water Conservancy and Ministry of Electric Power. Although the Chinese name continued to employ the term shuili (水利), the official translation of the ministry changed from Ministry of Water Conservancy to Ministry of Water Resources and Electric Power (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988: 95–6).
3. For analyses of China's electricity market reforms, see Cherni and Kentish (2007), Magee (2006) and OECD (2009).
4. Currently, China's coal industry accounts for about 78 per cent of the country's electricity generation, while 16 per cent is being met by hydropower development, 3.9 per cent by oil and natural gas, and 2.1 per cent by nuclear energy (see Fig. 5.1).
5. For analyses of the social and environmental impacts of the Three Gorges Dam, see, for example, Jackson and Sleigh (2000), Dai (1998) and Andrews-Speed and Ma (2008).
6. For an in-depth analysis of these two development concepts, see Lam (2006: 41–5, 251–3). Heike Holbig (2007: 49–53) conducts an analysis of the changed party statute of the CCP.
7. Huaneng is responsible for development along the Lancang River and is the biggest of the five companies. Huadian is involved in the construction of the Nu River Project, Sanxia holds the rights for building dams along the lower reaches of the Jinsha River, while Guodian and Huaneng are entrusted with planning hydropower plants along the upper reaches of the Jinsha. Finally, Datang has the development rights only on the Guanyin Dam on the middle reaches of the Jinsha River

within the "Three Rivers" region where all other companies also oper-
ate (Mertha 2008; Yunnan Net 2011).

8. For thorough analyses of China's hydropower bureaucracy, see Mertha
(2008) and Hensengerth (2010).

9. An example of this connectedness is China Huaneng Group, whose
manager was Li Xiaopeng, son of China's Ex-Premier Li Peng, who
himself has been an ardent supporter of the Three Gorges Dam (Mertha
2008; Sun and Zhao 2007: 150).

CHAPTER 6

Grassroots Governance Reform in Urban China

Stephen Trott

In the first decade of the new century, China's political system struggled to deliver sustainable, effective governance capable of managing tensions pervasive in a period of transformational change. The government was shaken by the challenges of unprecedented integration into the global economy, intensified political and economic domination by rent-seeking elites, and frequent mass incidents. The reform period meant to bring the country into a new era had created new classes of winners and losers, and the ability of central authorities to defuse tensions between them was made more difficult by the increased autonomy provinces had gained in recent decades. Intensifying these challenges were new modes of communication enabling unprecedented flows of information—including greater communication between critics of the regime—further undermining its once hegemonic moral authority.

That these observations could describe both the first decades of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries underlines the common— and ongoing—search for political institutions able to deliver effective,

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sustainable governance (Mitter 2011:1009–20). However China's respective rulers in the early twentieth and twenty-first centuries adopted distinctly different political strategies to reform the political system to accommodate the intense social, economic, and political changes taking place. In the decade leading up to 1911, informed by the examples of Japan and some Western powers, the Qing government introduced far-reaching social and political reforms which opened up unprecedented new paths to power and influence—ultimately undermining the regime's own political base (Thompson 1995). The reforms included the replacement of the traditional education and bureaucratic examination system with modern technical schools, the dismantling of ancient imperial boards in favour of modern-style line ministries, and the successive opening of elected provincial, then local assemblies. While these dramatic political reforms were intended to save the imperial regime by transforming it into a constitutional monarchy, they did not succeed. Indeed, the very reforms meant to save the regime arguably accelerated its demise (Bianco 2007: 35–8).

In contrast, by 2011, China's Communist Party (CCP) had presided over three decades of historically transformative economic reform, while successfully maintaining its monopoly on power through a deliberate strategy of incremental (barely perceptible to some observers) political reform. The immense wealth generated by economic reform had reshaped society, lifting 500 million Chinese out of poverty and creating a new urban, educated, "well-off" middle class (World Bank 2009). However the rapid emergence of new social groups (white-collar professionals, a commercial class, entrepreneurs, pensioners, the unemployed and rural migrants), the shifting balance of power between them, drastically increased income inequality, and seemingly endemic corruption have applied intense pressures on the political system. China's existing political institutions, designed for top-down socialist transformation, may not have effective channels of communication and mechanisms of resolution to reconcile the increasingly diverse demands and interests within a rapidly modernising society (Huntington 1968; Huntington and Nelson 1976; Gobel and Ong 2012; Europe China Research Advice Network).

Despite the significant governance challenges faced by the regime, and in contrast to the Qing's wholesale replacement of old institutions with new ones inspired by foreign models, China's communist regime has doggedly avoided Western governance models. Instead, it has preserved the core of its Leninist institutional apparatus, composed of the CCP's political monopoly, and its penetration and control of all state institutions.

Modest political adaptation has been achieved by gradually layering onto the Leninist core elements of a legal system, technocratic administration, more open policymaking, and more competitive grassroots and intra-party elections.[1]

China's contemporary governance challenges are particularly evident at the grassroots level, as it is a microcosm of a country's problems. For example, China's urban community leaders may simultaneously have to address the challenges of laid-off or unemployed workers living in their midst (including more volatile youth), the interests of homeowners in newly built residential estates pursuing more gentrified lifestyles, rural migrants seeking employment, housing, services and acceptance, and the elderly needing support services and accessible community infrastructure. The policy response to these simultaneous challenges at the grassroots level, known as urban community construction (*chengshi shequ jianshe*), has included the introduction of new community services, new community governance institutions, strengthening of grassroots administrative capacity, and bolstering of Party influence at the neighbourhood level.

These community construction policy initiatives have exemplified the gradualist approach to political reform by proceeding through a process of incremental layering of new functions and processes onto existing institutions and practices. Comprising a progressive, iterated policy dialogue between numerous stakeholders in different localities and those at the political centre, the process combines innovations born of local experimentation and central ministry, government and Party political guidance, to generate flexible, adaptive policy solutions. While avoiding the pitfalls of implanting foreign institutions as seen in the late Qing, the community construction case study will also reveal the limitations of the layering strategy, as disparate components introduced by different stakeholders may come into contradiction and lead to institutional incoherence. In particular, some of the modestly liberalising elements of community construction, such as strengthening grassroots community self-management (*shequzizhi*) and citizen participation, are countered by the Party's efforts to tighten its control of grassroots governance.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

The first phase of China's urban community construction policy emerged from the social and economic changes of the first decade of post-Mao reform. Demographic changes combined with early reform policies put strains on

urban neighbourhoods, which some communities responded to by developing community services targeted towards vulnerable groups. In the 1980s a surge of graduating Chinese baby boomers coincided with the return to the cities of 17 million sent-down youth, nearly doubling the number of job seekers, causing urban youth unemployment to explode in (Naughton 1995). At the same time, an ageing population and workforce prompted new reform policies to rejuvenate the workforce, while also removing some Cultural Revolution activists from their posts. These pressures led off a decades-long retirement boom, ending the Cultural Revolution practice of working until incapacitated. China's 3 million urban retirees in 1978 were soon joined by 20 million others by 1990, with numbers topping 50 million by 2005 (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, various years). The surge in youth unemployment and retirements occurred just as work units (*gongzuo danwei*) were beginning to scale back their social welfare responsibilities. Throughout the 1980s, urban sub-district street offices (*jiedao banshi chu*) and residents' committees (RCs, *jumin weiyuanhui*), partly on their own initiative and partly cajoled by higher leaders, took on the new task of organising activities, support services or jobs for these exploding populations (Lei et al. 2001: 104).

Over time, increasing numbers of residents working in the growing private sector also required various community services such as childcare, personal services such as haircuts, food preparation, coal delivery, recreational, cultural activities, and others, since they could not rely on the state-sector work units that usually provided such benefits. In addition to these pressures, the new ideological climate and commodity economy allowed residents' aspirations for a more comfortable life to come to the fore, raising the bar of expectations demanded of their service providers.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA), responsible for providing welfare services to the disadvantaged who had no family, no ability to work, and did not belong to a work unit, as well as responsible for overseeing social organisations and grassroots governance organisations, began to play a role in promoting more comprehensive grassroots community services to respond to the increasing demand. By 1986–87, MOCA was actively promoting a community services (*shequ fuwu*) policy nationwide, using symposia and publications to disseminate best practices and popularise this class of policy initiatives among local authorities (Tsering and Li 2001: 91). As the numbers of non-state-sector employees grew and needs intensified, the community services that were being developed and delivered became more diverse and complex, requiring sophisticated management and operations. MOCA promoted a system of networked services and comprehensive planning to eliminate gaps and inefficiencies. By

the end of 1991, there were nearly 90,000 community service facilities in Chinese cities, a 29 per cent increase since 1988 (MOCA 2003).

As the community services initiative matured, however, new challenges became more apparent. First was the weak capacity of existing organisations, street offices, and RCs, to undertake such a complex and important new task (Tsering and Li 2001: 94). These organisations, moulded by decades of Leninist practice, were adept at reading signals and implementing policies handed down from above, but commonly lacked the skills needed for successful innovation, service delivery, and management, particularly in response to changing residents' needs. While the street offices had undoubted administrative capacity, the RCs in particular were weak, as they had in previous decades become a marginalised institution effectively responsible only for the very small numbers of residents who did not belong to a work unit. They were commonly run by elderly women, often with limited literacy and managerial and professional skills (Benewick and Takahara 2002: 1–18). Compounding this was an explicit policy of "societisation" (*shehuihua*) of services, offloading them from the government to a weak society or a fledgling market in services. Social organisations, which often carry much of the burden of delivery of community services in other countries, were very weak and lacking in capacity in China, if not totally absent in some areas (Wei 2003: 169–70).

Furthermore, community services were largely self-funded, which highlighted disparities between communities where residents had and did not have disposable income to invest in new services such as childcare, fast food stands, appliance repair, physical and cultural activities, and so forth.[2] Fees had to be charged for many services to subsidise others; however, this led to perverse incentives as street offices and RCs began to focus more on profit-making than on serving residents' needs. They also clashed over the distribution of rents from such enterprises, and corruption was not unheard of (National People's Congress 1989). MOCA and local governments began to encourage local enterprises to contribute resources to support community services, which added another dimension of coordination for community officials.

The Emergence of Community Construction: The Governance Challenge

By the 1990s, the challenge of harnessing and coordinating the diverse energies and capacities of state, market, and society had become acute, particularly as the roles and functions of each of these were changing through the intensifying reforms. In urban neighbourhoods and districts,

new forms of leadership and consultative committees were established to this end, bringing together key stakeholders. These included street offices, RCs, but also local work unit representation to promote more coordinated community development. While RCs were included in these arrangements, being traditionally appointed by street offices, representation of residents' views in these arrangements was interpreted through the filter of street office and district government interests. New functions of broader planning and coordination, service design and delivery, and economic management were also layered onto the existing functions of RCs. Cities such as Tianjin, Hangzhou, and Beijing experimented with innovative arrangements, and began to expand the scope of the services they provided. Increasingly, urban districts began to offer community health services, education, cultural programming, public security patrols, monitoring, and other services requiring higher-level local governance and coordinative capacity.

Catching sight of these local initiatives, MOCA saw many reasons to support and promote them. They gradually filled an ever-growing niche of community services demanded by residents; they were the product of local initiatives, as grassroots actors in different jurisdictions navigated the local political waters of their own accord to build political support for their initiatives (in Tianjin, such support came at the municipal district level; in Hangzhou, it came at the municipal Party and government level); and they fell under two areas of MOCA responsibility: community services/welfare, and grassroots governance. Minister of Civil Affairs Cui Naifu named this group of initiatives "community construction" in 1991, and MOCA officials began to promote it nationwide.[3]

MOCA organised a series of national conferences in 1992 and 1993 to review cases of community construction from across the country, and to develop a more coherent theoretical framework. The conferences succeeded in establishing a rough division of labour in a complex, multi-player game. Urban district governments were to take the lead in planning, coordination and management of the subordinate line departments involved. These departments were to provide guidance in their areas of specialisation such as health, security, culture, and education. Sub-district street offices were to take the lead in community construction, acting as local organisers and initiators of specific initiatives. Local organisations such as schools, hospitals, enterprises, and social groups were called upon to contribute resources (personnel, facilities, some funds) to support community construction activities organised by the street offices. And finally,

local Civil Affairs departments were to provide guidance, knowledge, and specialised expertise to help develop community construction work at the grassroots level (MOCA 1992).

However, at the lowest level, the role of RCs remained somewhat unclear (Wang et al. 2001: 14). Rather than reiterating their constitutionally and legislatively stipulated role as quasi-autonomous, self-governing mass organisations, one conference resolution ambiguously called on them to "play their proper role" in community construction, without specifically defining it. This ambiguity was one instance of the continued resistance among municipal officials, including district government and street offices, to the implementation of the 1989 Organic Law on Residents' Committees. Passed shortly after the bloody suppression of the popular protests in Tiananmen Square that spring, the law provided the legal framework by which RCs would exercise their constitutionally mandated role as self-governing mass organisations. However, relying heavily on these bodies to implement numerous government policies, municipal and district governments (and by extension their street offices) viewed this greater autonomy as undermining their ability to carry out their functions (MOCA 1990: 2).

This dispute also affected views on defining the territorial extent of urban grassroots communities (*shequ*). The bureaucratic efficiency view was to conflate *shequs* with existing administrative divisions—namely, the sub-district street office (*jiedao*)—to take advantage of its existing administrative powers. The large scale of street office jurisdictions (an average of 50,000+ residents) would mean a significant concentration of resources to support community construction work. The grassroots autonomy view held that communities should cultivate an intimate sense of belonging and active participation on the part of residents, and that community affairs should be led by "the masses," not by government. Such a view implied having residents participate in the design and delivery of community services (self-service), learning (self-education), and management (self-management), actualising residents' "democratic rights." Proponents of this view suggested that combining two or three RCs to form a *shequ* would achieve a balance between community intimacy conducive to democratic self-administration and marshal sufficient resources to be effective in the delivery of services to residents (Huang 2002: 16–7).

The MOCA conferences were successful in raising interest in community construction across the country, as increasing numbers of cities began to experiment with different grassroots service and management models.

However, at this critical juncture for the fledgling policy initiative, central leadership faded. The CCP's 14th Party Congress in late 1992 ushered in a dramatic new policy direction for the country: that of creating a socialist market economy and pursuing marketising economic reform with renewed vigour. A new Minister of Civil Affairs took office in 1993, bringing new priorities and close alignment of Ministry objectives with the new economic reform mandate.[4]

At the community level, this meant commercialising community services, and MOCA playing a less prominent role in the promotion of community construction.

Local Experimentation

Momentum for community construction thus shifted to local jurisdictions, ushering in an extended period of innovative local experimentation, leading to the emergence of an array of diverse "models" of community construction in different cities and urban districts. The success of a number of these experiments eventually recaptured the attention of national-level leaders in Beijing, drawing a favourable response and leading the centre to actively re-engage in community construction by developing national guidelines and encouraging broader implementation nationwide.

Tianjin

Tianjin, with a population of 5.8 million, was cited by the Minister of Civil Affairs in 1991, when he coined the term community construction. Tianjin's community construction evolved gradually from an active community services programme in the 1980s. The programme was largely led by district and sub-district authorities rather than the municipal government, thereby producing many different models (Zhishen 1993). As an old industrial centre with a large state sector (62 per cent of the workforce in 1991), the city had a rapidly growing number of workers outside the state sector (19.4 per cent) and a high proportion of retirees (9.7 per cent of the population) in 1991 (State Statistical Bureau 1992). Combined with broad urban management reforms and a wave of urban reconstruction in the early 1990s which uprooted many traditional neighbourhoods and work units, Tianjin's community construction had to rely more heavily on citizen participation for the delivery of services. Tianjin established China's first formal volunteers' association in 1989 (Tsering and Li 2001: 92).

Community services targeted at disadvantaged groups evolved into a broader array of convenience services for the entire community.

Eventually community projects such as environmental beautification, building management, residential heating system refurbishment, and installation of phone lines and cable TV emerged. These projects, and heavy reliance on volunteers in general, required significant coordination and mobilisation of resources at the grassroots level. Residents' representative committees were formed for more direct consultation and consensus building. In Hexi District, an innovative "dual representation" system was introduced, bringing resident representatives and local enterprise representatives together to manage discussion of local issues, suggestions, raising of funds, and mobilisation of residents for community initiatives. The sub-district street office director was to report to this committee on community construction work (Chen 1993).

District governments encouraged the new communities to draw on and share the resources of local enterprises and other organisations. However, seeing the positive effects of the community construction projects on urban development and social stability, they gradually began to channel district renewal funds for such purposes (Li 1993), despite a generally weak fiscal situation.[5] This explains the heavy reliance on volunteers, whose numbers reached 600,000 by 1999 (6.7 per cent of the population) (Wang and Liu 2004:102). Different districts in Tianjin experimented with different methods, with some establishing large, street office–level communities (with tens of thousands of residents), and other districts establishing them between the street office and the RC level, encompassing an area of a few thousand residents.

Zhenjiang

Smaller cities also experimented with community construction. Zhenjiang municipality in Jiangsu province became a prominent leader in this area, due to the fact that a senior MOCA official Li Baoku was seconded to be Vice-Mayor of the city in 1994 (Yan 2002: 43). As a rapidly industrialising mid-sized municipality (population of 2.6 million in 1992), Zhenjiang needed to manage the social problems of rapid growth rather than state-sector decline and ageing. Zhenjiang's challenges included socio-economic polarisation, rising crime and vice, social fragmentation, and commodification (Wang and Liu 2004: 85). Vice-Mayor Li thus launched a community construction programme which emphasised community education in

order to build "civilised communities" (*wenming shequ*). The overall programme combined five elements: community education, public safety initiatives, community services robust enough to begin forming a grassroots social security system, development of the tertiary sector, and democratic self-management and coordination (Wang and Liu 2004: 86–7). This last point proceeded mainly through implementation of the provisions of the Organic Law on Residents' Committees, which limited administrative offloading, strengthened capacities, and opened space for more grassroots deliberation, decision making, and "societized management" of grassroots issues (Wang 1990: 3).

These elements were to some extent grafted onto pre-existing programmes, such as "civilised workplace" programmes, but extended them beyond work units and into the community to handle the large influx of residents who did not belong to a work unit. This degree of incrementalism helped build grassroots support for the policies. Furthermore, having a vice-mayor as champion meant community construction in Zhenjiang benefited from strong support from the municipal government and Party Committee. In 1994, a joint municipal Party–government circular was promulgated promoting "civilised community construction," and a Comprehensive Community Construction Group and small local leading groups were established to lead the process (Wang and Liu 2004: 87, 99). All leading grassroots cadres received systematic training in social work, and a three-year plan was drafted for systematic implementation of the measures over three years. However, the robust municipal leadership proved to be a two-edged sword, for the strong push faded and community construction had stalled by 1998 as changes in leadership led to different policy priorities (Wang and Liu 2004: 88).

Shanghai

Shanghai began to establish itself as a key model in community construction work from 1995 onwards. Its grassroots urban governance reforms, like other cities, grew out of an expanding community services programme, which eventually required more effective representation and coordination of stakeholder interests at the grassroots level. Shanghai's path was strongly *dirigiste* in this regard, with strong leadership and investment of resources from the municipal government, rather than the more decentralised, self-sustaining participatory models seen in Tianjin. To provide better community services and urban management in the face of the rapid

socio-economic transformation of the 1990s, Shanghai mobilised its substantial local state power to launch a systematic reform of its urban management system (Wei 2003: 70–1). Clearly differentiating the functions of different levels of government and administration, "two levels of government, three levels of management, and four levels of network" became the Shanghai model's slogan.

In line with this state-led approach, communities in Shanghai were established at the street office (*jiedao*) level in order to leverage existing administrative powers. However, this administrative efficiency meant some sacrifice of resident engagement and participation, given the very large size of the jurisdiction and emphasis on government leadership. The slogan "government leads, society supports, citizens participate" expressed the order of priorities (Wang and Liu 2004: 129). Within these new community street offices, four new committees were established (urban management, public safety and comprehensive governance, finance and economy, and social development). A number also established community management committees, community development coordination committees, and some community residents' representative assemblies. These representative assemblies, as well as local work units, social organisations, and resident and self-management organisations formed a community construction "support system," clearly playing a subordinate role to the dense nomenclature of government administrative organisations (Wei 2003: 71).

At Shanghai Party Secretary Huang Ju's suggestion in 1996, CCP strengthening (*shequ dangjian*) at the grassroots community level became a central component of the Shanghai model of community construction (Wang and Liu 2004: 130). Thereafter, the Party's leading role in community construction was explicitly highlighted, again mitigating the capacity of ordinary residents to play a leadership role in community affairs. Nevertheless, this framework of firm Party and government leadership perhaps gave Shanghai the confidence to be one of the first cities to experiment with direct election of community residents' committee (CRC) members in 1999. Shanghai was innovative in establishing a professional corps of full-time community cadres who would support elected leaders who did not necessarily have professional management expertise. Furthermore, consultation meetings (*ting zheng hui*), community cadre review meetings, and coordination committees provided further channels for resident feedback on the government's community management (Wang and Liu 2004: 132). Shanghai's model became quite well-known

across China due to its effectiveness in delivering quantifiable results (more service delivery points, more infrastructure, and so on). The municipal government poured resources into community infrastructure and programming due to its strong fiscal capacity (with 2592 *yuan* government spending per capita, nearly five times Tianjin's 538 *yuan* and three times Shenyang's 874 *yuan*) (State Statistical Bureau 1996), expanding office space, staff salaries, and capital and operating budgets.

Shenyang

In contrast to Shanghai's model of firm Party and government leadership of community construction, Shenyang (population 6.7 million in 1995) developed in the later 1990s a more autonomous and strongly participatory model. As an ageing industrial city in China's Northeastern rust-belt, hit hard by the downsizing of state-owned enterprises, Shenyang struggled with high levels of unemployment (officially 6.1 per cent in 2000) and retirees (9.9 per cent of the population in 2000). In response to these challenges of urban governance, Shenyang's municipal government sought to bolster its RCs (*jumin weiyuanhui*) in the hope of providing support to the elderly and the unemployed. However, the limited capacity of RCs was soon apparent: as administrative units they were too small, weak in capacity, and focused more on satisfying bureaucratic superiors in the sub-district street offices than satisfying residents' needs (Wang and Liu 2004: 165).

To address these challenges, Shenyang's Municipal Party Committee and government focussed on systematically developing a policy programme which had as its goal the creation of urban grassroots communities focused on collective belonging, with procedures to safeguard the pursuit of autonomous, collective management. To this end, new communities were created by merging two or three existing RCs, bringing the average population up from 523 households to 1264 per community. The larger scale meant a better resource base to support self-contained community functions such as services, education, policing, healthcare, and activities.

Finally, Shenyang's most prominent achievement was the establishment of new representative organisational structures. These included a Community Residents' Assembly constituted of residents and local work unit representatives, holding decision-making power within the community; a Community Management Committee acting as standing executive

body, responsible to the residents' assembly and with open recruitment of members, to be selected by the Residents' Assembly, to work mainly on community services, education, management, and supervision; a community consultative committee of local notables with significant powers; and new community party organisations to develop a grassroots leadership stratum (Zhang 2003; Li 2003: 38–52). In contrast to Shanghai, Shenyang's community construction did not explicitly insist on centralised Party leadership, with society following. Instead, the emphasis was strongly on autonomous self-management, in which the Party participates and plays a leading role. Reflective of this emphasis on community autonomy was the right accorded to Shenyang's new communities by the municipal party committee and government to refuse onerous tasks imposed on them by street offices or other higher-ranking government bodies.

Re-assertion of the Centre

These and other local initiatives produced concrete reforms addressing some of the pressing problems of grassroots urban governance in the 1990s. Together, they began to form a body of tested policy options from which could be built a coherent agenda for grassroots political reform in China's cities. Components included service delivery enhancements such as volunteer corps, larger jurisdictions to better share resources, new coordinating and consultative bodies which brought together a broader array of stakeholders to address new shared challenges, and new experiments in electoral processes to strengthen the legitimacy of local institutions and their decisions. Community service provision itself had changed over the preceding decade, evolving from services targeted at vulnerable groups to universally accessible services. The number of service facilities providing targeted services, such as for the elderly, the disabled, or the unemployed, grew by 102 per cent from 92,946 in 1993 to 187,888 in 2000. However, the growth of universal access "convenience services," such as convenience stores and food stalls, far outpaced them, growing by 166 per cent from 169,503 in 1993 to reach 451,567 by 2000 (MOCA 2011). While part of MOCA's mandate is to provide targeted assistance to vulnerable groups, the faster development of universal services is a product of the years of decentralised development of community services, and the influence of market pressures.

By the mid–late 1990s, local initiatives were beginning to attract the attention of top-level leaders in Beijing, who saw the potential for the

reforms to mitigate some of the new challenges in urban administration. Reform of the state sector and mass layoffs of workers, reform of government administration to better suit a market economy, management of growing rural migrant populations in cities, addressing the emerging issue of urban poverty, and preserving overall social stability in the face of political pressures (including the formation of the Chinese Democracy Party in 1998 and Falun Gong's growing assertiveness) were all pressing policy challenges for which top-level leaders sought effective solutions.

In 1996, Jiang Zemin placed community construction back on the central party and government policy agendas by calling for vigorous promotion of the initiative, and fully utilising the potential of grassroots governance organisations (Wang and Liu 2004: 7; MOCA 2001). This call endorsed much of the local experimentation which had gone on throughout the decade. The CCP's 15th Party Congress in late 1997 called for political reforms to support deepening economic reform, including the strengthening of grassroots democracy and reforming government administration, including the urban management system.[6] The 1998 reorganisation of government ministries gave MOCA a new responsibility for formally promoting and developing community construction. Then Vice-President Hu Jintao, citing the success of rural self-governance (which includes village elections), mandated MOCA to develop a similar model for cities within one to two years. These exhortations brought community construction to the top of the central policy agenda.

MOCA immediately designed a process to identify key community construction initiatives from across the country along with their most effective elements. Successfully innovating cities applied for certification as national model sites. MOCA selected 26 urban districts in 22 cities as national-level community construction experimentation sites (*shequ jianshe shidian*).[7] Provincial authorities also began promoting their own provincial-level models, with over 100 under way by 2000 (Cairang et al. 2003).

Document 23 [2000]: Promoting Community Construction Nationwide

MOCA synthesised these models to produce a national set of guidelines in 2000. Among the many models, MOCA chose key elements of Shenyang's autonomy model as most viable for nationwide propagation. Shanghai's state-led model was rejected because of its reliance on a strong local state and ample resources, conditions which were not widespread

across China. Many localities, particularly in inland China, faced severe resource and capacity constraints.[8] Arguably, MOCA also leaned towards the more autonomous and participatory model of community construction because it is also in line with the ministry's mandate to draw up and implement policies to actualise the autonomous, self-managing grassroots governance called for in the constitution.

MOCA thus outlined a moderately liberalising vision in a policy document, which presented community construction as an effective remedy to pathologies of the existing political system. Challenges included the bureaucratisation of grassroots governance organisations (community affairs had traditionally responded mainly to bureaucratic authority from higher offices); low levels of resident participation in community affairs; lack of authority of RCs; unclear responsibilities; tiny jurisdictions; ageing unskilled personnel; and poor working conditions.

Strengthening the community's self-governing organisations and capacity was the key message spelled out in the ministry's document. This included establishing new boundaries for communities for more efficient delivery of community services, more effective mobilisation of community resources, and the development of self-governance by community residents. New consultative bodies were to be established, including community residents' assemblies and consultative committees for various constituencies. Residents were to hold democratic elections to select members of their new Community Residents' Committees (CRCs), and conduct self-management, self-education, self-service, and self-supervision under Party leadership. These functions could only be carried out with younger and more skilled personnel working in the community, in contrast to the traditional elderly neighbourhood leaders with little work experience and formal skills training. Professionalisation was to be achieved through open and competitive hiring of community workers, and election of officials. Communities were encouraged to hire laid-off workers, to alleviate the pressures of unemployment, but also to redeploy skills from the state sector into the community.

The policy was founded on five basic principles to empower more grassroots autonomy. These were: (1) people-centred services (*yiren weiben*, *fuwu jumin*), according to residents' actual needs; (2) the sharing of resources and efforts in building a better community; (3) better alignment of powers and responsibilities for more effective management; (4) expansion of grassroots democracy and self-management using the "four democracies": democratic elections, decision-making, management, and supervision; and (5) respecting local conditions (*yindi zhiyi*) in the

development of policies. If followed, all these represented significant steps forward from the moribund status quo in many places.

The Party Central Committee and State Council approved MOCA's policy in November 2000, and circulated it nationally as central Document 23 [2000]. This provided an immense boost to community construction across the country, resulting in rapid advances in planning, investment, and organisational reform. RCs nationwide began to merge into larger communities (*shequ*) with CRCs to better marshal community resources and more effectively deliver community services. The number of urban RCs nationwide fell by 35 per cent from 120,000 in 1998 to 78,000 by 2004 (MOCA 2011). The total number of RC members dropped by 22 per cent in the same period, from 508,000 to 397,000, indicating that many old members were shuffled out of the system. Community services facilities also expanded rapidly, with increases ranging from 22 per cent to 100 per cent depending on the type of facility. These figures represented significant new investments by local governments in community services infrastructure, and numbers of paid service staff exploded from 670,000 in 1999 to 2.4 million in 2007 (Ministry of Civil Affairs 2008).

In line with the tone of Document 23 (2000), participatory reforms also advanced across China. Some urban communities had begun experimenting with direct elections (one person, one vote, open nomination) for CRCs as early as 1998. By the mid-2000s, such elections had spread sporadically to hundreds of urban districts across China, introduced by innovative local leaders willing to take risks and who believed in the stabilising, rather than destabilising, potential of open elections (Trott 2006; Li 2005). While the democratic nature of such direct elections has been questioned (Read 2012: 67–92), they have nevertheless advanced processes such as more open nominations, multi-candidate ballots, expanded individual franchises, and secret ballots. In an increasing number of urban communities, governance training programmes are also offered to local cadres to teach them everyday processes of open and consultative governance, also under the patronage of progressive local leaders (Trott 2008).

Bringing the Party Back In: The Limits to Community Liberalisation

While the Shenyang autonomous participatory governance model aligned with MOCA's mandate to strengthen self-managing grassroots governance to produce the moderately liberalising Document 23 [2000], other

forces were driving community construction policy in other directions. When Jiang Zemin first expressed his support for community construction in March 1996, it was on hearing about Shanghai's *dirigiste* model.[9] This model, in particular, was under the leadership of the Municipal Party Committee,[10] and promoted strengthening of the Party's capacity to lead the process of community construction. However, party organisations were frequently weak or in disarray at the community level, in many cases either having no organisation with too few or only elderly members, or with members but no organisation (Han 2012). In 1998, only 69.9 per cent of RCs nationwide had party cells (Benewick and Takahara 2002: fn17). By 2001, this had risen to 87 per cent (Dong 2002). In 2004, as part of its efforts to strengthen the Party's capacity to rule, the Central Committee called for bolstering community party organisations. By the end of 2006, 98.5 per cent of urban communities had set up a party organisation (*Renmin Ribao* 2006). This was part of an explicit campaign of community party building (*shequ dangjian*).

While in Document 23 [2000], the goal of strengthening the Party's capacity was to enable it to *support* the development of grassroots autonomy, and to expand grassroots democracy, the balance clearly shifted in the ensuing decade. Party construction has advanced rapidly in those years, while direct elections for CRCs have not, with only 22 per cent of communities holding them by 2007 (MOCA 2008). Efforts to increase the influence of Party members on CRCs have also borne fruit: In 2010, 55.7 per cent of RC members nationwide were Party members, up from 48.2 per cent in 2006. A stable 43 per cent of RC directors are simultaneously party secretary of community party cells, and 80.6 per cent of CRC directors were Party members in 2010.

This process of tightening Party control of the grassroots is a hallmark of "harmonious community construction" (*hexie shequ jianshe*). Shifting away from rhetoric highlighting grassroots autonomy and participation, harmonious community construction emphasises the importance of grassroots communities in maintaining social and political stability. This is in response to the ongoing sense of social crisis in China in recent years. A survey-based MOCA report on community construction in 2005 noted that social management was increasingly complex, and residents' demands increasingly urgent. It concluded that urban *shequs* had a more prominent role to play in maintaining social and political stability (Ministry of Civil Affairs 2005). Persistently high unemployment levels in cities following the mass privatisation of state-owned enterprises, followed by

further unemployment from the 2007–09 global financial crisis, increasing socio-economic disparity, the 2008 Beijing Olympics, violent Tibetan and Uyghur protests, the Charter '08 dissident movement, Lü Xiaobo's Nobel Peace Prize in 2010, and the Arab Spring of 2011 all contributed to the newfound emphasis on social management.

Formalising this shift was Document 27 [2010]. Again drafted by MOCA and approved and disseminated nationwide by the Party's Central Committee and the State Council, Document 27 [2010] highlights the urgency of social management, social stability, and ongoing services to residents (MOCA 2010). Rather than reaffirming the five principles of Document 23 [2000] (people-centred services, shared resources and efforts, alignment of powers and responsibilities, expansion of grassroots democracy, and respecting local conditions), Document 27 [2010] lists affirmation of Party leadership, people-centred services, government leading and society participating, and respecting local conditions as its guiding principles. These represent a significant shift in tone, which is mirrored by substantive provisions in the document, including formally assigning the Party responsibility for (read: control of) the electoral process for community elections, including proposing and vetting candidates (MOCA 2010).

Conclusion

Incremental adaptation of political institutions continues in twenty-first-century China, through the regular policymaking process. The community construction case demonstrates the mechanism of this process. Community construction has emerged through a lengthy, ongoing, iterated process rather than a short burst of reform. This long duration has meant a multifaceted approach, with different actors emerging as policy leaders or innovators at different points in the reform, depending on factors such as resources, proximate political support, and prevailing economic and social conditions. These factors have permitted an extended local experimentation phase, a high-level analysis and synthesis of existing experiments, top-level political backing for policy diffusion, and the incorporation of numerous different viewpoints into the resulting policies. The layering of new elements such as direct elections onto existing institutions lowers the costs of reform by building gradually on earlier consensus rather than pursuing disruptive, wholesale changes. While much criticised, contemporary China's creeping political reform has not coincided with regime collapse and social disarray.

In its final attempts to reform its political system, the late Qing regime was compelled to introduce radical changes to make up for its earlier reluctance to gradually adapt to changing circumstances. However, by the time these reforms—including local elected councils—were introduced, the Qing didn't know how to cultivate the support of the new classes it was driven to strengthen by means of its wide-reaching reforms (Bianco 2007: 35–7). Basing its reforms on Japanese and Western models, these changes were unable to stave off regime collapse (Thompson 1995: 156–7). Ironically, the Qing court rejected home-grown innovations in local governance models in favour of its hasty attempt to introduce Western and Japanese-style elected councils. To this day, contemporary Chinese leaders appear to remember this lesson, as seen in their adamant refusal to introduce "Western models" such as liberal democracy.[11] While such reluctance clearly serves the short-term interests of an entrenched CCP elite, it nevertheless also recognises the longer-term dangers of rushing into major system changes, lest the careful balances sustaining the polity be irrevocably upset, as they were in 1911 for the Qing.

Nevertheless, the gradualism inherent in the layering process also appears to come at some cost. Successive iterations of policy adjustment led by different political actors at different times means that some changes can cancel out or contradict earlier changes. The tightening of Party control over grassroots urban governance puts a significant damper on the earlier objective of bolstering communities' capacity for more autonomous decision-making and action. This is particularly true when the objectives of new layers (such as more citizen autonomy and participation) contradict the principles of the Leninist core institutions (monopoly in political leadership by the ruling Party) at the heart of the political system.

Notwithstanding these limitations, it remains to be seen whether the long-term effects of incremental political reforms, such as China's urban community construction, will be able to penetrate and transform the Leninist core. There is a possibility that these and other political changes might act like China's early market reforms, as described by Barry Naughton (1995), which initially grew on the margins of the planned economy to eventually surround it and fundamentally transform it. Whatever the path, China's long search for sustainable, effective governance will continue for many years to come.

NOTES

1. Institutional layering refers to the attachment of new elements to existing institutions in ways which may gradually alter their status and structure. See Streeck and Thelen (2005).
2. Ministry of Civil Affairs Official [interview by Stephen Trott], Beijing, July 2005.
3. At the time, Minister Cui's remarks were not widely publicised, but reported only in an internal MOCA bulletin. See Ministry of Civil Affairs, Grassroots Government Construction Branch (1991), [Minister Cui Naifu's remarks on work of building grassroots urban organization]. Later MOCA histories of the community construction policy trace its origin back to the Minister's comments on the afternoon of May 31, 1991. See, for example, Zhang (2003: 69).
4. MOCA official [interview by Stephen Trott], Beijing, July 2005.
5. Tianjin had among the lowest levels of per capita spending by Chinese municipal authorities in 1995. Its 538 *yuan* per person was only 38 per cent of the average for large cities. State Statistical Bureau (1996).
6. Jiang Zemin, "Hold high the banner of Deng Xiaoping Thought, and fully carry the task of promoting the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics into the 21st century," (Report of the General Secretary to the 15th Congress of the Communist Party of China).
7. Beijing district Party official [interview by Stephen Trott], Beijing, November 2004. The national models included Beijing, Chongqing, Haikou, Hainan, Nanjing, Qingdao, Shanghai, Shenyang, Tianjin, Wuhan, and Xi'an, some of the models outlined in detail above.
8. MOCA official (2005) [interview by Stephen Trott], Beijing, July 2005.
9. "*Xiandai shequ zai dangdai zhongguo de fazhan licheng* (historical development of modern communities in contemporary China)," http://www.szrtvu.com.cn/files/zt/sqjyw/zxgk/zs/zxgk_zs04.htm.
10. MOCA official [interview by Stephen Trott], Beijing, July 2005.
11. For example, in his 2004 speech commemorating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the National People's Congress, Hu Jintao proclaimed that China would resolutely not introduce Western political models; Xinhuanet (2004).

China's Political Stability: Comparisons and Reflections

Shiping Zheng

INTRODUCTION

Throughout most of the twentieth century, China suffered huge economic and human losses due to political instability. Many decades of social rebellions, political divisions, civil wars and foreign invasions resulted in a country that was poor, weak and underdeveloped. It is only in the most recent decades that the Chinese people have managed to live with political stability. The economic benefits of political stability can hardly be overstated.

Yet, China's political stability is by no means assured. A careful reading of the news about China provides many reasons to worry. Unemployment is on the rise, the real estate bubble is in danger of bursting and government debt at the provincial and local levels is becoming increasingly unsustainable. China's Gini coefficient, which measures the income gap between the rich and poor, is now at 0.47, well above the warning level of 0.40 set by the World Bank (Chen 2010). There have been pockets of protests and social unrest in many parts of China because of land dispute, labour management issues, environmental concerns, or power abuses by local officials and police. Given China's long list of problems, one is tempted to assume China is a tinderbox waiting to explode.

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Moreover, as a rising power and the largest emerging economy, an increasingly unstable global system raises many challenges for China's stability. Thanks to globalisation and information and communication technologies, what is happening outside China almost inevitably creates a ripple effect of varying degrees on the social and political stability inside China.

Little wonder then that when social and political upheaval spread from one country to another in North Africa and the Middle East, China's future also was on many people's minds. Some wondered whether the "Jasmine Revolution" would eventually come to China while others questioned if China would become the "next Egypt."[1] As the turmoil in the Arab world was unfolding, there were at the same time massive protests in India, the USA and many European countries as well. It is clear that not only was the Arab world angry, but so was the entire world. However, while many countries were most concerned about the ripple effect of the Arab revolt on their external relations, China's leaders seemed more nervous about the ripple effect of the Arab revolt on the country's domestic political stability. In March 2011, the Chinese central government reportedly approved a budget for internal security that exceeded its budget for national defence (*The Economist* 2011: 48). Since then, "social management," a code phrase for maintaining stability, has become the new buzzword in the Chinese official language (People's Daily 2011).[2] Stability has been given such a high priority that numerous preventive or proactive measures have been taken by the government and security forces at various levels to deal with real as well as potential threats. So much so that one commentator in the USA went so far as to suggest that "China might be the most paranoid nation on Earth" (Brinkley 2011).

Others, however, have taken a different view. For instance, *The Economist* magazine (2011: 46) listed three reasons why China would not become the "next Egypt": its "record of three decades of stunning economic growth"; no "obvious hate figure exists to blame, if things are not going well; and the efficiency of China's extensive internal-security apparatus and armed forces." One researcher at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research has declared that "China's version of the Arab world's 'Jasmine Revolution' was a complete failure" (Swartz 2011: 1). Commenting on the shock wave from Egypt, Thomas Friedman (2011) even credited China, along with "Twitter and 20-Year-Olds," for being part of a powerful engine of change behind the Arab revolt. It is not that China provided a model of democracy or a way of democratisation

that inspired the young in the Middle East, but that China's success in economic development and global competitiveness made the young, poor and unemployed or "the educated unemployables" in Egypt, Jordan, Yemen and Tunisia more frustrated with their own governments.

The debate about China's stability is not limited to the news media or has not arisen just because of the recent turmoil in the Arab world. Indeed, long before the Arab revolt in 2010–11 or the collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1990–91, many scholars and policy analysts focused their attention on China's political stability because of its relative absence. Put bluntly, every decade since the collapse of the ruling Qing dynasty in 1912 has borne witness to political instability. Looking at the 1920s, the 1930s, the 1940s, the 1950s, the 1960s or the 1970s, any student of Chinese history and politics can easily come up with a long list of cases and examples of political instability.

Of late, the concern has been about the persistence of China's stability rather than the persistence of instability. Gordon Chang's 2001 prediction of China's "Coming Collapse" garnered a huge amount of attention, though more serious analysts have been pondering the question of China's political stability for years (Shambaugh 2000; Bremmer and Zakaria 2006). In addition, words such as "instability," "crisis," "risk" and "fragility" have also found increasing popularity in reference to China. For instance, some have argued that while China may become a superpower, it will only be a fragile one (Shirk 2007). Some have suggested that the "Chinese miracle," which is following the Japanese miracle of the 1960s and 1970s and the miracle of the four East Asian economies in the 1980s to 1990s, has high fragility (Jha 2009). There are also those who have concluded that while China's economic development in the recent decades has been extraordinary, its financial foundation is fragile (Walter and Howie 2011). In short, China is an "awakening giant with clay feet" (Bardhan 2010).

As serious as these studies can be, analysing China's political instability at a time when the Chinese people have actually enjoyed their most stable decades in recent Chinese history inevitably risks being speculative. One can carefully and consciously identify major social and economic problems that would threaten political stability or point to serious institutional weaknesses that would destabilise the regime, but one can never be certain when or if social and economic instability would necessarily turn into political instability or when or if the regime in question would inevitably fall. Analysing political instability is not rocket science.

On the other side of the debate are those who have argued that China today is not under threat of a social revolution and the regime is not in danger of disintegration. In their 2004 book *Holding China Together*, Barry Naughton, Dali Yang and others suggested that since the Tiananmen crisis of 1989, China's authoritarian regime has proven quite resilient. This is because the Chinese leaders have modified and reinforced the key institutions of political integration and economic control and adapted policies to changing circumstances (Naughton and Yang 2004). In her recent book *Accepting Authoritarianism*, Teresa Wright argues that China's major socio-economic groups (private enterprise owners, workers and managers at state-owned enterprises, workers employed in the private sector, professionals and students, and farmers) have benefited from their relationships with the regime, which gives them incentives to opt for the political status quo by accepting and supporting the authoritarian rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Wright therefore believes there is no imminent "anti-government volcano" in China, a view also shared by Martin Whyte (2010) in his recent study.

It would appear easier to explain why China has been politically stable in the recent decades.[3] In truth, though, sorting out various factors responsible for China's political stability is no less challenging than sorting out the various sources of China's political instability. Not only do we run a certain risk of defending China's party authoritarianism, which should be the least of the concerns for scholars, but we will have to establish, beyond reasonable doubt, the causal relationship between one set of variables on the one hand and China's political stability on the other: correlation is not causation as the cliché goes. Perhaps the greatest challenge is to figure out what may constitute the necessary and, ideally, sufficient conditions for China's political stability.

The ongoing debate about China's stability is not likely to be decided anytime soon, but studying and assessing its political stability is of great significance not only because it is now the world's second largest economy, but also because whatever happens in China affects almost 1.4 billion people directly and, indirectly, many more in the Asia-Pacific region and the rest of the world. If we are deeply concerned about how many people's lives are being adversely affected by the revolt in the Arab world, we just need to remind ourselves that the entire population of the Arab world (350 million) is only about one quarter of the Chinese population. Egypt, by the far the most populous nation in the midst of the Arab revolt, has a population of 80 million, smaller than the population of each of China's three largest provinces, Guangdong, Shandong and Henan.

Global Scale of Comparison

Stability is, of course, a relative term. Granted, some countries are more stable than others, but few can claim to be absolutely stable. Moreover, no countries, especially emerging economies and rising powers, are free of concerns about real or potential threats to their social, economic and political stability, both from within or from the global environment. Nevertheless, more stable countries do have something in common: they are institutionally capable of handling all sorts of crises and tensions and absorbing shocks from all sources, both internal and external. Similarly, while there is no universally accepted definition of what constitutes "fragility," many analysts have often described fragile states as incapable of assuring basic security, maintaining rule of law or providing basic services and economic opportunities for their citizens. For instance, a key document produced by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2007: 2) defines fragile states in the following way: "[S]tate structures lack political will and/or capacity to provide the basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development and to safeguard the security and human rights of their populations." In addition to characterising fragility in terms of how the state performs functions necessary to meet citizens' needs and expectation, some analysts have stressed legitimacy as a key defining characteristic of fragility, stating that "fragile states often experience crises of legitimacy in the sense that citizens may not accept the state's basic right to rule" (McLoughlin 2010: 55).

Is China stable or fragile? As the ongoing debate suggests, this seemingly simple question is quite complicated to answer. Our study hopes to shed some new light on the ongoing debate by placing the issue of China's political stability in a global, comparative context. We have selected and focused on a total of six sets of publicly available indices measuring political instability and state fragility (see Table 7.1). Put together, these indices offer reasonably comprehensive and balanced assessments.[4]

Global comparisons can be helpful because we believe that if China is compared only with the poorest countries in the developing world, it would most likely look politically stable. On the other hand, if China is compared only with the advanced industrialised countries, it would most likely look politically unstable. It is therefore more meaningful to compare China with both advanced and developing countries.[5]

Not only should China be compared with all the others, we also believe it will be particularly illuminating to compare China with the other four

Table 7.1   List of fragility/instability indices

#	Name	Organisation	Year
1	State Fragility Index (SFI)	Center for Systemic Peace; Center for Global Policy, School of Public Policy, George Mason University	2009
2	Country Indicators for Foreign Policy (CIFP)-Fragility Index	Carleton University	2007
3	Index of State Weakness in the Developing World	Brookings Institution	2008
4	Failed States Index (FSI)	Fund for Peace and Foreign Policy	2012
5	Peace and Conflict Instability Ledger-Risk of Future Instability	Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland	2010
6	Political Instability Index (PII)	Economist Intelligence Unit	2009–10

countries comprising the BRICS; that is, Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa. Given these five countries are the largest emerging economies, are located in four different continents (South America, Eurasia, Asia, and Africa) and have much in common when it comes to development opportunities, challenges and risks, comparisons among the BRICS countries may help better understand how China has been doing.

The five members of the BRICS, however, do have noteworthy differences. For one, three of them have experienced significant regime change in the past three decades (Brazil in 1985, Russia in 1991 and South Africa in 1994) whereas the same political regime has endured in India since 1947 and in China since 1949. If only measured in terms of recent regime change, India and China appear much more stable. Moreover, according to the Democracy Index (2011) developed by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), the five members of the BRICS group belong to different types of regimes: South Africa, India and Brazil are "Flawed Democracies" while Russia and China are "Authoritarian Regimes."

Although the main content of the six sets of indices is political instability/state fragility, the publishers or sponsoring organisations include three universities (Carleton University, University of Maryland and George Mason University), one think tank (the Brookings Institution), one independent educational, research and advocacy organisation (the Fund for Peace) and two magazines (*The Economist* and *Foreign Policy*).

All the indices have covered the four conceptual dimensions: security, political, economic and social, with the exception of the EIU's Political Instability Index, which focuses on the political, economic and social

Table 7.2   List of definitions

Indices	Definition
State Fragility Index	State Fragility: "A country's fragility is closely associated with its state capacity to manage conflict; make and implement public policy; and deliver essential services and its systemic resilience in maintaining system coherence, cohesion, and quality of life; responding effectively to challenges and crises, and continuing progressive development."
Country Indicators for Foreign Policy-Fragility Index	State Fragility: "the extent to which a state can or cannot provide the basic functions of governance to its population."
Index of State Weakness in the Developing World	Weak States: "countries that lack the essential capacity and/or will to fulfill four sets of critical government responsibilities: fostering an environment conducive to sustainable and equitable economic growth; establishing and maintaining legitimate, transparent, and accountable political institutions; securing their populations from violent conflict and controlling their territory; and meeting the basic human needs of their population."
Failed States Index	State Failure: "the loss of physical control of its territory or a monopoly on the legitimate use of force; the erosion of legitimate authority to make collective decisions, an inability to provide reasonable public services, and the inability to interact with other states as a full member of the international community."
Peace and Conflict Instability Ledger	Instability: "a wide variety of event types, including revolutionary wars, ethnic wars, adverse regime changes, and genocides or politicides." "The onset of any one of these events signals the arrival of a period in which government's capacity to deliver core services and to exercise meaningful authority has been disrupted, threatening its overall stability."
Political Instability Index	Social and Political Unrest or Upheaval: "those events or developments that pose a serious extra-parliamentary or extra-institutional threat to governments or the existing political order."

dimensions. Moreover, the Country Indicators for Foreign Policy also includes a fifth dimension: the environment, an indicator that is not present in the other five indices.[6]

All the indices here are agglomerated variables based on numerous other variables (for a list of definitions and composite indicators, see Tables 7.2 and 7.3). Designers of these six sets of indices sometimes create them on the basis of secondary sources, which may, at times, overlap. To minimise overlap, we have chosen not to include in our study the World Bank's World Governance Indicators (Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and Absence of Violence, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, and Control of Corruption) as a separate index because these

Table 7.3   Summary of composite indicators

Indices	Total indicators	Indicators or categories of indicators
State Fragility Index	8	* Security (Effectiveness and Legitimacy) * Political (Effectiveness and Legitimacy) * Economic (Effectiveness and Legitimacy) * Social (Effectiveness and Legitimacy)
Country Indicators for Foreign Policy-Fragility Index	83	* Governance (12 indicators) * Economics (24 indicators) * Security and Crime (10 indicators) * Human development (17 indicators) * Demography (10 indicators) * Environment (10 indicators)
Index of State Weakness in the Developing World	20	* Economic performance (5 indicators) * Political performance (5 indicators) * Security performance (5 indicators) * Welfare performance (5 indicators)
Failed States Index	12	1. Mounting demographic pressures 2. Massive movement of refugees or internally displaced persons 3. Vengeance-seeking group grievance 4. Chronic or sustained human flight 5. Uneven economic development 6. Poverty, sharp or severe economic decline 7. Legitimacy of the state 8. Progressive deterioration of public services 9. Violation of human rights and rule of law 10. Security apparatus 11. Rise of factionalised elites 12. Intervention of external actors
Peace and Conflict Instability Ledger-Risk of Future Instability	5	1. Regime consistency 2. Infant mortality 3. Economic openness 4. Militarisation 5. Neighbourhood war
Political Instability Index	15	* Underlying vulnerability (12 indicators) * Economic distress (3 indicators)

indicators, especially the indicator of "Political Stability," have been the main source of data for measuring political stability in two of our indices (the Country Indicators for Foreign Policy and the Index of State Weakness in the Developing World).

Finally, it is important to point out that three of our indices (the State Fragility Index, the Country Indicators for Foreign Policy-Fragility Index

and the Index of State Weakness in the Developing World) are assessments of government performance in four key areas (political, security, economic and social). In other words, they are report cards on the current status—how the state has been performing or functioning in recent years. The other three indices (the Failed States Index, the Peace and Conflict Instability Ledger and the Political Instability Index) are assessing and measuring the likelihood of conflict, instability and state failure in the future, although, as the authors of the Failed States Index caution us, "these ratings do not necessarily predict when states may experience violence or collapse. Rather, they measure vulnerability to collapse or conflict."

How Does China Measure Up?

How does China fare on a global scale of measurements? The following are the results from a survey of the six sets of indices.

State Fragility Index (SFI)

The SFI is compiled by the researchers at the Center for Systemic Peace and the Center for Global Policy at George Mason University and is published in the *Global Report* series. According to the authors of the SFI (2009: 31), "[a] country's fragility is closely associated with its *state capacity* to manage conflict; make and implement public policy; and deliver essential services and its *systemic resilience* in maintaining system coherence, cohesion, and quality of life; responding effectively to challenges and crises, and continuing progressive development."

The 2009 SFI assesses each country in terms of "effectiveness" and "legitimacy" in four performance categories. The "effectiveness" category includes "security effectiveness," "political effectiveness," "economic effectiveness" and "social effectiveness." The "legitimacy" category includes "security legitimacy," "political legitimacy," "economic legitimacy" and "social legitimacy." There are a total of eight component indicators and all indicators are given equal weight.

Among the 162 countries covered by the SFI, China ranked 80th.[7] On a scale of 1 (least fragile) to 25 (most fragile), China, with a score of 8, tied with Russia in terms of state fragility, both considered to be more fragile than Brazil (with a score of 5), but slightly less fragile than South Africa (with a score of 9). India received the worst score (13) for state fragility among the BRICS countries. In terms of two categories of composite indicators, China, with an "effectiveness score" of 4, is tied with

Table 7.4 Breakdown of 2009 State Fragility Index (BRICS only)

Country	State Fragility Index	Effectiveness Score	Legitimacy Score
China	8	4	4
India	13	8	5
Brazil	5	1	4
Russia	8	4	4
South Africa	9	4	5

Note: Composite indicator scale: 0 = "No fragility"; 25 = "Extreme fragility"

Russia and South Africa and therefore is considered much less effective than Brazil (with a score of 1), but far more effective than India (with a score of 8). China also received a score of 4 for "legitimacy," which ties it with Brazil and Russia, making all three slightly better than India and South Africa (see Table 7.4).

Country Indicators for Foreign Policy (CIFP)

The CIFP-fragility index developed by the researchers at Carleton University aims at measuring "state fragility," which is defined as "the extent to which a state can or cannot provide the basic functions of governance to its population." "Fragile states lack the functional authority to provide basic security within their borders, the institutional capacity to provide basic social needs for their populations and/or the political legitimacy to effectively represent their citizens at home and abroad" (Carleton University).

The CIFP-fragility index relies on a total of 83 composite indicators grouped in six categories: governance (12 indicators), economics (24 indicators), security and crime (10 indicators), human development (17 indicators), demography (10 indicators) and environment (10 indicators). This is the only one of our six indices that includes the category of environment. All categories are given equal weight and all indicators inside their given categories are given equal weight as well.

Among the 192 countries covered by the CIFP-fragility index, China ranked 103rd, a very low and unfavourable ranking. Among the BRICS countries, the CIFP-fragility scores (from 1.00 as least fragile to 10.00 as most fragile) ranked China (5.06) more fragile than Brazil (4.63) and South Africa (4.84), slightly more fragile than Russia (5.04) but less fragile than India (5.71).

Table 7.5   Breakdown of 2007 CIFP-Fragility Index (BRICS only)

	China	India	Brazil	Russia	S. Africa
Composite Indicator	*Score*	*Score*	*Score*	*Score*	*Score*
Governance	5.98	4.41	4.61	6.15	3.75
Economics	4.25	5.31	4.92	4.49	4.57
Security and Crime	6.09	7.32	4.39	7.57	4.19
Human Development	4.69	6.42	4.51	4.51	5.52
Demography	4.62	5.63	4.9	3.38	5.14
Environment	5.71	5.51	4.19	5.43	6.27

Note: Composite indicator scale: 1.00 = least fragile; 10.00 = most fragile

As Table 7.5 shows, China scored the best on one indicator (economics), the second best on another indicator (demography), the third on two indicators (security and crime, and human development) and the worst on two indicators (governance and environment).

Index of State Weakness in the Developing World

The authors of this index at the Brookings Institution believe that a state's strength or weakness is a function of its effectiveness, responsibilities and legitimacy across a range of government activities. Weak states are thus defined as "countries that lack the essential capacity and/or will to fulfil four sets of critical government responsibilities: fostering an environment conducive to sustainable and equitable economic growth; establishing and maintaining legitimate, transparent, and accountable political institutions; securing their populations from violent conflict and controlling their territory; and meeting the basic human needs of their population" (Rice and Patrick 2008: 3).

The index uses 20 indicators to measure the state weakness of developing countries according to their relative performance in four critical spheres: economic, political, security and social welfare. Referred to as "baskets", each of these four categories of core government functions contains five indicators. All indicators are given equal weight.

Among the 141 countries covered by the index, China ranked 68th. Among the BRICS countries, China ranked third, performing better than India and Russia, but not as well as South Africa and Brazil. On a scale of 0 (worst) to 10 (best), China received a score of 6.41, lower than South Africa's 7.50 and Brazil's 7.22, but slightly higher than India's 6.28 and Russia's 6.20.

Table 7.6 Breakdown of 2008 Index of State Weakness in the Developing World (BRICS only)

Composite Indicator	China	India	Brazil	Russia	S. Africa
Economic Basket	6.89	6.72	6.72	7.14	6.89
* GNI Per Capita	1.76	0.66	4.27	5.24	4.88
* GDP Growth	5.98	5.22	3.4	4.62	3.84
* Income Inequality	5.65	7.73	3.57	7.09	3.41
* Inflation	7.93	6.95	6.56	5.98	7.07
* Regulatory Quality	6.11	6.21	6.58	5.48	8.22
Political Basket	3.69	6.72	6.42	3.81	8.07
* Government Effectiveness	6.34	6.26	6.05	5.13	8.65
* Rule of Law	5.79	7.33	5.56	4.39	7.52
* Voice and Accountability	1.78	7.5	7.56	4.03	8.22
* Control of Corruption	4.01	5.08	4.67	3.29	7.56
* Freedom	0.83	7.5	8.33	2.5	8.33
Security Basket	6.85	4.87	7.32	4.83	7.72
* Conflict Intensity	9.41	4.43	10	4.45	9.51
* Gross Human Rights Abuses	2.37	3.25	2.37	2.37	4.91
* Territory Affected by Conflict	9.29	6.32	10	6.8	9.56
* Incidents of Coups	10	10	10	10	10
* Political Stability and Absence of Violence	5.92	4.83	6.57	5.06	6.62
Social Welfare Basket	8.21	6.79	9.01	9.04	7.33
* Child Mortality	9.27	7.56	9.05	9.6	7.78
* Access to Improved Water and Sanitation	5.21	5.09	7.88	9.03	7.15
* Undernourishment	8.69	7.59	9.38	9.93	10
* Primary School Completion	9.7	8.69	10	9.2	9.83
* Life Expectancy	8.38	6.49	8.25	6.94	2.89
Overall Score	6.41	6.28	7.22	6.2	7.5

Note: Composite indicator scale: 0 = worst; 10 = best

As Table 7.6 further reveals, in three of the four baskets (economic, security and social welfare) China consistently scored third. It is in the "Political Basket" that China is scored as last, with an overall score of 3.69 compared to Russia's 3.81, Brazil's 6.42, India's 6.72 and South Africa's 8.07. More specifically, in the "Political Basket" China only received a score of 1.78 for "voice and accountability," lower than Russia's 4.03 and much lower than India's 7.50, Brazil's 7.56 and South Africa's 8.22. Similarly, China received a score of only 0.83 for "freedom," lower than Russia's 2.50 and much lower than India's 7.50 and Brazil's as well as South Africa's 8.33.

Failed States Index (FSI)

The FSI developed by *Foreign Policy* magazine and the Fund for Peace measures a country's risk for internal conflict. The key concept, "state failure," is defined as "the loss of physical control of its territory or a monopoly on the legitimate use of force; the erosion of legitimate authority to make collective decisions, an inability to provide reasonable public services, and the inability to interact with other states as a full member of the international community" (Foreign Policy). The FSI is based on a total of 12 indicators of vulnerability in three categories: 4 are social, 2 are economic and 6 are political. All indicators are given equal weight.

Among the 177 countries covered by the FSI, China ranked 102nd, a very low and unfavourable ranking, suggesting that China is more vulnerable than 101 other countries in the world and less vulnerable than 75 other countries. Not surprisingly, among the BRICS countries, China is viewed as the most vulnerable. The FSI score is by far the most negative assessment China receives out of all the six sets of indices. On a scale of 20 (most stable) to 120 (failed states), China's FSI score stands at 78.3 in comparison to India's 78.0, Russia's 77.1, South Africa's 66.8 and Brazil's 64.1.

Table 7.7 presents a breakdown of the FSI, which uses a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being the best and 10 being the worst for each indicator. First, we can see that China, following South Africa, faces more "mounting demographic pressures" than Russia, Brazil and India. Second, China, along with Russia and India, received the worst score for "vengeance-seeking group grievance," suggesting that the likelihood of social unrest is high. Third, as the largest emerging economies, four of the five BRICS countries (South Africa, China, Brazil and India) received pretty bad scores for "uneven economic development". Fourth, China, along with Russia, received the worst score for "legitimacy of the state". Finally, China received the worst score for "violation of human rights and rule of law." On the other hand, China, along with Brazil, received the second best score for "intervention of external actors," suggesting that the likelihood of foreign intervention in China's domestic affairs is low.

Peace and Conflict Instability Ledger (PCIL)

The PCIL-Forecasted Risk of Future Instability Index is developed by the researchers at the University of Maryland. It aims at assessing the future likelihood of state instability, which is defined as a wide variety of event

Table 7.7 Breakdown of 2012 Failed States Index (BRICS only)

Composite Indicator	China	India	Brazil	Russia	S. Africa
Social Vulnerability	6.75	6.65	5.32	6.08	6.03
* Mounting demographic pressures	7.9	7.3	7	6	8.1
* Massive movement of refugees and internally displaced persons	5.9	5.5	3.9	5	6.4
* Vengeance-seeking group grievance	7.9	7.9	6.2	7.9	5.6
* Chronic or sustained human flight	5.3	5.9	4.2	5.4	4
Economic Vulnerability	6.1	6.95	6	5.65	6.9
* Uneven economic development	8.3	8.4	8.4	7.3	8.2
* Poverty, sharp or severe economic decline	3.9	5.5	3.6	4	5.6
Political Vulnerability	6.53	6.25	5.13	6.92	4.83
* Legitimacy of the state	7.9	5.5	5.6	7.9	5.2
* Progressive deterioration of public services	6.3	6.9	5.5	5	5.8
* Violation of human rights and rule of law	8.6	5.8	5	8.1	4.5
* Security apparatus	6	7.5	6.2	8.2	4.8
* Rise of factionalised elites	6.9	6.8	4.9	8	5.9
* Intervention of external actors	3.5	5	3.6	4.3	2.8
Total FSI Scores	78.3	78	64.1	77.1	66.8

Note: Composite indicator scale: 0 = best; 10 = worst

types, including revolutionary wars, ethnic wars, adverse regime changes and genocides or politicides. "The onset of any one of these events signals the arrival of a period in which government's capacity to deliver core services and to exercise meaningful authority has been disrupted, threatening its overall stability" (Hewitt et al. 2010: 5). The index includes five categories of composite indicators: regime consistency, infant mortality, economic openness, militarisation and neighbourhood war.

Among the 162 countries, China ranked 47th, a very favourable assessment. Among the BRICS countries, China received the best assessment, contrary to the worst assessment it received on the FSI. On a scale of 0 (low risk) to 40 (highest risk), China's risk score stands at 1.2, which places China in the "low-risk" group. Brazil (6.6), Russia (6.7) and South Africa (8.1) are placed in the "some-risk" group, while India (12.0) is placed in the "high-risk" group.

China ranked the best among the BRICS countries because it received the best assessment for "regime consistency" and better-than-average assessments in three other categories (infant mortality, economic openness

and militarisation). Only in the category of "neighbourhood war" did China receive a worse-than-average assessment mainly because China is located in a region full of security risks: 12 of China's 14 neighbouring countries, ranging from Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Myanmar, and Laos to Mongolia and North Korea, receive the worst assessment in this category. The only two exceptions are Vietnam and Kyrgyzstan.

Political Instability Index (PII)

The EIU's PII based on a survey of a total of 165 countries assesses the likelihood of social and political unrest, which is defined as "those events or developments that pose a serious extra-parliamentary or extra-institutional threat to governments or the existing political order. The events will almost invariably be accompanied by some violence as well as public disorders. These need not necessarily succeed in toppling a government or regime. Even unsuccessful episodes result in turmoil and serious disruption" (The Economist Intelligence Unit).

The overall index has two composite indicators, rating each country for its underlying vulnerability to unrest and economic distress. The indicator of "underlying vulnerability" includes 12 sub-indicators: inequality, state history, corruption, ethnic fragmentation, trust in institutions, status of minorities, history of political instability, proclivity to labour unrest, level of social provision, a country's neighbourhood, regime type and regime, and factionalism. The indicator of "economic distress" includes three sub-indicators: growth in incomes, unemployment and level of income per head.

Among the 165 countries covered by the index, China ranked 41st, which suggests that China is politically more vulnerable than 40 other countries, but less vulnerable than 125 countries. All things considered, this ranking puts China in a very favourable position.

Among the BRICS countries, China is considered as politically less vulnerable than South Africa, Russia and Brazil, but slightly more vulnerable than India. On a scale of 0 (no vulnerability) to 40 (highest vulnerability), China's political instability score stands at 4.8, compared to South Africa's 7.0, Russia's 6.5 and Brazil's 5.4 or India's 4.5. A closer look at the PII's two composite indicators ("underlying vulnerability to unrest" and "economic distress") actually indicates that, if measured only in terms of "underlying vulnerability to unrest," China (4.6) actually is the least vulnerable among the BRICS countries, followed by India (5.0), Russia

Table 7.8   Breakdown of 2009–2010 Political Instability Index (BRICS only)

Country	Political Instability Index Score	Underlying Vulnerability Score	Economic Distress Score
China	4.8	4.6	5
India	4.5	5	4
Brazil	5.4	5.8	5
Russia	6.5	5	8
South Africa	7	7.1	7

Note: Indicator scale: 0.0 = no vulnerability; 10.0 = highest vulnerability

(5.0) and Brazil (5.8), while South Africa (7.1) is the most vulnerable (see Table 7.8).

At the end of our global survey, it is important to point out that no system of assessment is perfect and each index undoubtedly has its own weaknesses, flaws or bias, but questioning and challenging the research or survey methodologies of each and every set of the indices is simply beyond the scope of this study.[8] Suffice it to say that from the survey of the six indices, it is clear that democracies receive much better scores than other regime types although the causal relationship between regime type and political stability is by no means linear. Not surprisingly, on such indicators as "legitimacy," "human rights," "voice and accountability" and "freedom," China scored much worse than democracies in the BRICS group. This is particularly evident in the Failed States Index and the Index of State Weakness in the Developing World. On the other hand, on such political indicators as "regime consistency" and "government effectiveness" or economic indicators as "economic openness" or social indicators as "infant mortality" and "life expectancy" China usually scored much better than other countries in the BRICS group and better than average on a global scale of comparisons.

Summaries and Reflections

Through global comparisons, our study has found that on three current status "report cards," indices that assess how the state has been performing recently in four key areas of state functions (political, security, economic and social), China has received a better-than-average ranking on one index (the Index of State Weakness in the Developing World), an average ranking on one index (the State Fragility Index) and a worse-than-average ranking on one index (the Country Indicators for Foreign Policy-Fragility Index).

Table 7.9   Rankings of China in the world

#	*Indices (total countries)*	*China*
1	State Fragility Index (162 countries)	80th
2	Country Indicators for Foreign Policy-Fragility Index (192 countries)	103rd
3	Index of State Weakness in the Developing World (141 countries)	68th
4	Failed States Index (177 countries)	102nd
5	Peace and Conflict Instability Ledger-Risk of Future Instability (162 countries)	47th
6	Political Instability Index (165 countries)	41st

Note: Some indices rank countries, from the best to the worst, in ascending order while others rank them in descending order. To be consistent, adjustments have been made so that all the rankings presented here are in ascending order. In other words, the smaller ranking number, the better; that is, more stable or less fragile

In terms of the likelihood of conflict, instability and state failure in the future, China has received a better-than-average ranking on two indices (the Peace and Conflict Instability Ledger-Risk of Future Instability Index and the Political Instability Index), but a worse-than-average ranking on one index (the Failed States Index) (see Table 7.9).

Table 7.10 presents a summary of the scores for the five BRICS countries on all the six sets of indices. These numbers suggest that China is ranked the best by one index (the Peace and Conflict Instability Ledger-Risk of Future Instability) and the worst by one index (the Failed States Index). On the rest of the indices, China is placed second on two indices (the Political Instability Index and the State Fragility Index), third on one index (the Index of State Weakness in the Developing World), and fourth on one index (the Country Indicators for Foreign Policy-Fragility Index).

These global comparisons as well as the select comparisons among the BRICS countries do not give the Chinese regime reasons for celebration or reasons for paranoia. The findings from the six sets of indices have presented what might be best described as a "mixed picture." This mixed picture, however, seems much closer to reality: China has indeed been facing multiple sources of threats or challenges to its political stability, but it is no more politically unstable or fragile than many other countries in the world. Ignoring or underestimating the ripple effect of any destabilising world event will do China no good, but overreactions also serve China's interests poorly as fear or paranoia can be highly contagious.

To be sure, none of the political stability/state fragility indices we have analysed offers any degree of certainty with respect to predicting whether the CCP will definitely fall or not in the future. To the extent that the

Table 7.10   Summary of risk scores of BRICS

#	Indices	China	India	Brazil	Russia	S. Africa
1	State Fragility Index 1 = least fragile 25 = most fragile	8	13	5	8	9
2	Country Indicators for Foreign Policy –Fragility Index 1.00 = least fragile 10.00 = most fragile	5.06	5.71	4.63	5.04	4.84
3	Index of State Weakness in the Developing World (Overall score) 0.00 = worst 10.00 = best	6.41	6.28	7.22	6.2	7.5
4	Failed States Index 0.00 = most stable 120 = failed states	78.3	78	64.1	77.1	66.8
5	Peace and Conflict Instability Ledger –Risk of Future Instability Risk Score: 0.0 = low risk 40.0 = highest risk	1.2	12	6.6	6.7	8.1
6	Political Instability Index 0.0 = no vulnerability 10.0 = highest vulnerability	4.8	4.5	5.4	6.5	7

collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 or the fall of several authoritarian leaders in North Africa between 2010 and 2012 surprised many, one can never rule out any possibility of a sudden collapse of an authoritarian regime. Here, the advantage of democracy over authoritarianism is that sudden and unpredictable regime change is less likely in democracies because of regular and institutionalised leadership changes through elections where sudden and unpredictable regime change is always a possibility in non-democracies because of lack of electoral mechanisms through which unpopular leaders may be removed from office.

During the first half of the twentieth century, China experienced the longest and bloodiest social revolution not only in its own history, but also in the history of the world. Today, however, another social revolution, "Jasmine" or otherwise, seems unlikely, despite many dire predictions.[9] Compared to the Soviet Union in 1991, the Chinese regime has not

been suffering from any so-called imperial overreach and Beijing's overall political and social control over a vast land with so many people is seriously challenged, but not necessarily paralysed or ineffective. Compared to those North African authoritarian leaders who controlled power for three or four decades, the Chinese regime in the post-Mao Zedong and post-Deng Xiaoping years has established certain procedures for selecting China's new top leaders.

What is even more important perhaps is that the Chinese dynasty around the turn of the century was on the descent whereas China today is on the ascent. A declining power creates a power vacuum where competing forces, both internal and external, rush in to pick up the pieces of a crumbling central authority. A rising power, on the other hand, creates a bandwagon effect and everyone wants to benefit from the opportunities associated with a rising power.

Nothing is more evident than the fact that the Chinese economy has been doing well for the past 20 years. It is no coincidence that Chinese economic success looms large among *The Economist* magazine's listed reasons for doubting the potential for a "Jasmine Revolution" in China. This is also confirmed by several sets of indices that rank China favourably when the indicator of economic performance is included. When the economy is doing well, most people do not want to "rock the boat," so to speak. Consequently, the current regime is not experiencing any major crisis (the breakdown of a unified and centralised authority with its administrative and enforcement mechanism), a structural condition that Theda Skocpol has found to be necessary for social revolutions to come.

If China's political stability now mainly depends on relatively high economic growth, it begs the following questions: What if the economic growth slows down dramatically? Would a major economic crisis likely trigger a chain of reactions that would significantly destabilise the regime? Some social science theorists like Samuel Huntington, Skocpol and Francis Fukuyama would expect that to be the case (Huntington 1968; Fukuyama 2011). Historians and area specialists, on the other hand, have found their structural-determinist explanations somewhat detached from reality or inconsistent with historical details. They have offered fascinating accounts of how the twentieth-century Chinese revolution was mainly attributable to the CCP's successful mass mobilisation of rural society. While the circumstances—discontent and the bankruptcy of rural society, the Japanese occupation and the Nationalist government's unwillingness or inability to deal with the basic needs of the people—created new

opportunities for mobilisation, in the end, it was the CCP's organisational innovation and flexibility in strategies and tactics that turned these opportunities into a successful revolutionary movement (Bianco 1971; Chen 1986; Wou 1994; Tsou 2000).[10] If that explains why and how China had a social revolution in the twentieth century, it would suggest that, even if China were to experience some serious crises of instability in the future, a social revolution is unlikely to take place in the absence of an organisational alternative to the CCP.

The regime of party authoritarianism has thus paradoxically become China's political Achilles' heel and its source of political stability at the same time. If one places greater emphasis on such factors as "voice and accountability" or "freedom" as some of the instability/fragility indices do, China appears to face serious threats to its political instability, especially if the economic growth slows down dramatically. On the other hand, if one places greater emphasis on such factors as "regime consistency," "capacity" or "effectiveness" as other instability/fragility indices do, the Chinese regime would seem still quite capable of handling major crises, economic, social, political or otherwise.

NOTES

1. "The popular uprisings in the Arab world are shaking Beijing," declared one commentator (Tatlow 2011).
2. "CPC urges improvement in China's social management," (*People's Daily* Online 2011); "Senior Chinese leader urges efforts to improve social management," (*Xinhuanet* 2011); Cohen (2011).
3. One is reminded of an old saying made famous by John F. Kennedy in 1961: "Victory has a hundred fathers, but defeat is an orphan."
4. There are several other indices measuring political instability in regions other than Asia, such as *The Economist*'s "Arab League's Index of Unrest," more commonly known as "The Shoe-Thrower's Index," the World Bank's Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA), Harvard Kennedy School's "Index of African Governance" and Mo Ibrahim Foundation's "Ibrahim Index of African Governance." Because these indices do not include China in their surveys, they are not directly relevant to our study.
5. One of our indices—Index of State Weakness in the Developing World—covers the countries in the developing world only, but the developing world here includes as many as 141 countries. Although

China's total gross domestic product (GDP) makes it the second largest economy in the world, with a GDP per capita at $7,600 (in terms of purchasing power parity), it is still part of the developing world.

6. Our study does not include sovereign financial rating agencies such as Moody's and Standard & Poor's or global commercial rating services such as Global Insight's Global Risk Service, iJET's "Country Security Risk Ratings" and the PRS Group's "International Country Risk Guide" because the main focus of our study is the overall political instability/state fragility, not financial instability or fragility of any sovereign fund.

7. It is important to note that the State Fragility Index as well as some other indices have listed Taiwan or Hong Kong as a "country" separate from China. We have interpreted "country" referred to in such cases simply as a unit of analysis. It does not necessarily imply sovereignty or independence.

8. Readers who are interested in the methodologies of some of these indices may want to consult Mata and Ziaja (2009); McLoughlin (2010).

9. For the sake of convenience and familiarity, we have adopted Skopol's (1979) definition: "Social revolutions are rapid and basic transformation of a society's state and class structures."

10. Tang Tsou (2000: 212–19) suggested that the CCP's organisational innovations include the peasant-based revolution, the strategy of surrounding the cities from the countryside; subordinating military affairs and action to politics, the mass line and the united front.

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