

# Heirs of Lei Feng or Re-organised Independence? A Study of Individualisation in Chinese Civil Society Volunteers

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By

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# Abstract

This dissertation explores the ways in which individualisation processes guide and inform individual involvement with Chinese civil society organisations. It ties together three well-identified trends in reform-era China; the growth of civil society, the rise of volunteerism, and the development of revised and stronger notions of individuality. By viewing volunteer engagement through the lens of the ‘individualisation’ thesis, this study represents an original examination of how stronger notions of Chinese individuality are promoting pro-social involvement in civil society and leading to the formation of new social forms and commitments.

The research is based upon interviews conducted in 2011-2012 with fifty individuals volunteering in civil society voluntary organisations in one city in southwest China. Using the individualisation thesis developed by Beck, Giddens *et al* as a conceptual framework, the dissertation explores the trajectories of the interviewees’ accounts of volunteering. It shows that strongly individualistic conceptions of ‘self’, ‘dis-embedding’ processes, and desires for ‘re-embedding’ played central guiding roles. It re-positions the civil society organisation as a conduit that offers individuals opportunities to develop their individuality and express new conceptions of social commitments. In doing so this study conceives Chinese civil society growth as partly resulting from the individualisation processes.

This dissertation also highlights the importance of recognising revised notions of individualism and collectivism in the study of contemporary Chinese society. Although most of the volunteers discussed in this study belonged to the ‘我一代’ (the ‘me-generation’) and had strongly individualistic tendencies; they were not selfish, hedonistic, or ‘money-seeking’. Nor could they be accurately described as ‘disciples’ or ‘heirs’ of Lei Feng (雷锋传人) guided by the Party-state; or nationalistic ‘angry-youth’, volunteering for national glory. Instead they displayed a balanced conception of individualism and collectivism, harmonising the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ in a reciprocal balance that is absent from most portrayals of the modern Chinese individual.

# Acknowledgments

It is possible to complete a PhD by choosing a relatively straightforward subject. Many times over the last three and a half years I have wished that this was what I had chosen to do. However, the decision to pursue a project that was guided by interest rather than achievability has, I believe, resulted in a stimulating and, most importantly, an original piece of work. Viewed from atop the wreckage of my once vibrant social life, this is a significant consolation.

First of all I would like to dedicate this troublesome thesis to my un-troublesome family, especially to my mother and father, who have always fully supported me during the PhD, and during the long and winding path that led me to the PhD. Special thanks also to my sister Naomi who provided valuable insight on her long visit to China, and to my grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins; your constant support was much appreciated. Also, thanks to Ruby and Hetty, both fervent enthusiasts of my work. Secondly, I would like to thank all of the people whose co-operation, ideas, and above all else, friendliness, facilitated the collection of the data for this study. Although none of you can be named, I thank you for making my long period of fieldwork such a rich and rewarding experience. I would also like to thank my supervisor Professor Xiaowei Zang for providing me with great support throughout the course of my entire PhD; your suggestions and encouragement drove this thesis. Furthermore, I would also like to thank Dr Marjorie Dryburgh at SEAS and Dr Jeremy Taylor at Nottingham for guiding me before and during my PhD. From SEAS and WREAC I would also like to thank Kylie Wheeler for her thorough support and amusing anecdotes, and also the SEAS office staff; Lynne, Michelle, Susie, Lisa, and Katherine for always being so kind and helpful. A significant thankyou also to the ESRC for providing the research grant and other assistance. Last but certainly not least, thanks to all of my other friends: your support has been unswerving. Special thanks to Adam and Russell in Essex for providing much needed distraction. In Sheffield; special thanks also to Kamal, Arve, Vishal, Tony, and Benson for providing constructive and destructive stimulus; and to Stuart, Rob, Ra, Paul, and Shiyang for their PhD comradeship. In China thanks to Xiaofeng, Joel, Dustin, Toby, Chenyu, Shengren, Qizhen, and many, many more for your invaluable friendship and, perhaps above all else, for providing the opportunities to play a lot of football.

# Notes

Chinese names are given in pinyin, with their surname first and their given name second. Significant figures in pre-1949 China have their names written in the most common form (e.g. pinyin for Liang Qichao, but Wade-Giles for Sun Yat-sen).

Both pinyin and simplified characters have been used to highlight a language point when it adds meaning to a translation. Sections of interview quotations have been underlined to add emphasis. All translations have been carried out by the author except where stated.

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# List of Abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCYL	China Communist Youth League
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CYV	China Youth Volunteers
ENGO	Environmental Non-Governmental Organisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GONGO	Government-Organised Non-Governmental Organisation
IMS	Instant Messaging Service
MOCA	Ministry of Civil Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China

# 1. Introduction

This dissertation is first and foremost a study of individualisation (which should not be confused with ‘individualism’). It uses the individualisation thesis of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens *et al* as a conceptual framework to undertake an original analysis of the processes that guide and inform individual involvement with Chinese civil society voluntary organisations. Through doing so it gains new insight into how social commitments and new social forms are conceived in China’s ‘reflexive modernity’ and draws new connections between three significant and well-identified trends: the rise of civil society (see Johnson, 2003; Lu, 2007), the rise of volunteerism (see Rolandsen, 2008; Xu and Ngai, 2011), and the impacts of recent modernisation on Chinese notions of collectivism, individualism, and social commitments (see Cao, 2009; Yan, 2009; Hansen and Svarverud, 2010).

Why use the individualisation thesis? The individualisation thesis is a broad theoretical attempt to examine the significant shifts in social relations that impact the individuals place in society in ‘reflexive modernity’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 202). Through its core processes of ‘dis-embedding’, ‘re-embedding’, and the ‘the reflexive project of the self’ it describes the gradual loss of dependence on historically-ascribed social forms and social relations, the subsequent focus on individual choice and the rise of the ‘reflexive project of the self’, and the related move towards new social forms and commitments. As will be shown in the next chapter, these shifts are all well-observed in contemporary China and a careful application of the individualisation thesis, one that is closely informed by China’s historical socio-cultural context, can provide a conceptual framework and toolkit to understand the shifts holistically (Yan, 2010, 35). Through connecting changes in the position of the individual to shifts in their social relations and commitments, it reconceptualises involvement in civil society organisations as acts of ‘dis-embedding’, ‘re-embedding’, and ‘biographical identity construction’.

Why focus on civil society volunteers? As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, 161) write; the shift towards fluid, non-linear, and individual-focused social commitments that individualisation results in “*may indeed collide with the party apparatus, but [...] certainly make sense in the forms and forums of civil society*”. In this sense, and as will be explored in the next chapter, civil society is a recipient of individualisation because it provides social spaces that are more suited to the individualised individual. Furthermore, the act of volunteering itself is a reflection of societal norms and trends, as Anheier and Salamon state “*volunteering is part of the way societies are organized, how they allocate social responsibilities, and how much engagement*

*and participation they expect from citizens*” (1999, 43). In the Chinese context, to be a volunteer in a civil society organisation represents a *significant* break from both traditional and Mao-era ‘allocations of social responsibilities’, ‘societal organisation’, and ‘expectations of engagement and participation’. These were, as will be discussed in the next chapter, (and very broadly speaking) aligned towards the family in traditional China and dominated by the state in the Mao-era. However, civil society is neither aligned to family or to state. Therefore a study of civil society volunteers represents an interesting site to study how Anheier and Salamon’s ‘responsibilities’, ‘organisation’ and expectations of ‘engagement’ and ‘participation’ are organised in the reform-era. The individualisation thesis provides the conceptual framework and toolkit to examine these re-arrangements from the individual perspective, in a manner that is closely informed by China’s historical socio-cultural context.

This dissertation therefore connects the theory of individualisation with the core social science concept of civil society whilst focusing on volunteers from contemporary Chinese society; with the aim that to do so will produce valuable insight into all three. For many, there would seem to be little connection between the growth of civil society and volunteering, and revised and stronger notions of individuality; all trends in reform-era China. Revised and stronger notions of individuality are commonly portrayed as having a *negative* impact on civil society and volunteerism (see Putnam, 1995, 2000) and an atomising, ‘anti-social’ impact in China (see Zhuo 2001; Wang 2002; Cao, 2009). Indeed, this is one of the riddles that initially drew the researcher to this subject: how can *pro*-social volunteering and civil society be growing rapidly in China at the same time as many widely decry the widespread rise of *anti*-social ‘individualism’? However, the individualisation thesis allows us to re-examine these links, showing how recent reflexive modernisation results in stronger conceptions of individuality, revised alignments of social commitments, and a desire to re-embed in social spaces that resemble ‘civil society’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 161, 2010; Yan, 2009).

This thesis will conduct a social-constructionist examination of a sample of individuals that are all engaged in voluntary activity within a civil society organisation<sup>1</sup> but are also, according to the spatial and temporal variables of the individualisation thesis, at the forefront of ‘Chinese individualisation’. Through exploring the trajectories of their volunteering it explores the primary research question: *How have individualisation processes guided and informed*

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<sup>1</sup> That by Chinese standards can be deemed to be ‘civil society’ (Ma, 2002, 2006; Brook and Frolic, 2008). This issue will be addressed fully in chapters two and three.

*involvement in Chinese civil society organisations?* Within this broad question lie the following subsidiary questions:

- *What evidence of individualisation's core features ('dis-embedding', 're-embedding', and 'the reflexive project of the self') are there in the volunteer's self-constructed trajectories of volunteering?* This question will be answered throughout the thesis.
- *How have stronger notions of individuality affected perceptions of the role of the volunteer?* This question will be addressed in chapter four through looking at re-conceived ideas of 'sacrifice', scale, reciprocity, and mutuality.
- *What role does civil society volunteering play in constructing self-identity?* This question will be addressed in chapter five through looking at the role that lifestyle, life-politics, and 'searches' play in motivating the individual to volunteer.
- *What key themes enabled the interviewees to achieve an identity as a civil society volunteer?* This question will be looked at in chapter six by focusing on the roles of education, modernisation, the internet, and the Wenchuan earthquake in the interviewee's trajectories of volunteering.
- *Are individualisation and participation in civil society mutually strengthening processes?* This question will be focused on in the final analysis chapter by looking at the ways in which civil society organisations allow for an active involvement of the individualised self.
- *How has individualisation affected the reception of the state volunteering narrative?* This question is a necessary reflection of the primary research question, because in the Chinese context one must ask; why were the volunteers *not* operating within the state structure? This question will be analysed throughout this thesis but will be focused on in the final chapter.

This introductory chapter will introduce these key themes whilst demonstrating how the thesis aims to synthesise them into a useful and original angle of enquiry.

In using the individualisation thesis as a conceptual framework this dissertation is tying civil society and volunteerism to the impacts of modernisation on the individual. In this sense it is building upon work by Ronald Inglehart linking volunteering to modernisation (1997, 2003), work by Lesley Hustinx on individualisation and volunteering (2010; Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2000; Hustinx and Meijs, 2011), work by Yunxiang Yan on Chinese individualisation (2003, 2009), and work on Chinese volunteers by Rolandsen (2008) and Fleischer (2009). A full definition of individualisation will be given in the next chapter but it can be broadly described as

*“a concept which describes a structural, sociological transformation of social institutions and the relationship of the individual to society”* (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 202). Its central processes stem from the modern individual’s ‘dis-embedding’ from the ‘*historically prescribed social forms and commitments*’ that previously delineated an individual’s life-course in a traditionally linear fashion (Beck, 1992, 128). There is a limited institutionalised ‘re-embedding’ of the dis-embedded individual in the market economy, and state bureaucracy and welfare systems, but the social relations and self-identity of the individual, and the assignment of meaning and values to actions and objects, are largely left to the individual to construct themselves (De Beer and Koster 2009, 53-56). This process signifies the beginning of ‘reflexive modernity’ (the current period) in which the individual constructs their life-course in a fluid, temporal manner, reflexively incorporating new values and lifestyle choices into the ‘reflexive project of the self’ (Beck, 1992, 192; Giddens, 1994). At a social level this results in desires to ‘re-embed’ in spaces and commitments that are more suited to the individualised individual (Beck, 1992, 192). The voluntary, pluralistic, and small-scale nature of civil society organisations are said to align well with their requirements (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 161).

These processes were originally observed through looking at Western societies and, whilst many of the developments that they analyse can be found across all 21<sup>st</sup> century societies, it is clear that the position of the Chinese individual has its own unique set of circumstances. As Yunxiang Yan (2010, 35) states; individualisation *“introduces a useful lens for observation and a powerful tool of analysis, providing that we keep in mind that the Chinese path to individualisation is different in a number of important ways, thus warranting more systematic study”*. Chinese individualisation is tied to the huge 20<sup>th</sup> century changes that swept across the country in waves of revolution and radical upheaval. These had significant impacts on an individual’s life-course and how they interacted with others around them in the greater gathering of ‘society’. However, in terms of individualisation, it is the reform-era micro-level shifts in social relations that perhaps have a greater significance for the individualisation process than all the vast meta-level political and economic structural shifts that occurred in the tumultuous Chinese 20<sup>th</sup> century. In traditional China ‘meta-frameworks’ of ideology and philosophy – strung out on a frame of Confucianism but containing many other elements as well – placed the Chinese individual in deference to the collective (Fei, 1948; Hsu, 1948; Pye, 1991; Cao, 2009). The Maoist ideology that aimed to eradicate these traditional ways of thinking, whilst ‘improving’ the individual’s position in some ways, also tied them, often forcibly, to a sacrificial relationship to the collective (Vogel, 1965; Parish and Whyte, 1978; Lu, 2004) and created

Walder's 'organised dependency' (Walder, 1986)<sup>2</sup>. In both traditional and Maoist China therefore, the 'I' was subordinate to the 'we'. However, in the 21st Century these subordinating frameworks have gradually collapsed around the individual. The 'how' and the 'why' are increasingly no longer pre-attached to actions, objects, and choices. The things a person does, the people they meet, and the choices they make, are being progressively left to the individual. These transformations have been so recent and so rapid that their impacts are only now beginning to be measured. These are the processes that constitute the core of the individualisation thesis.

Significant differences remain between individualisation in Western societies and individualisation in China. One major distinction is that the political superstructures are dissimilar. In the West they currently give greater expression and support to the individual (Yan, 2009). The contemporary topography of the Chinese political system also means that the state relies on a high degree of societal collectivism and remains wary of individuals associating in forms that are outside of state control (Wang, 2002). Chinese civil society - the domain of the non-state, non-family, and non-business - is also finding it hard to form a relationship with individuals because of the historically dominant positions of the family and state (Ma, 2006). And yet, in many ways, the situation in China is not too dissimilar to that in other societies. All over the globe, the 'dis-embedded' individual has new resources to empower them such as communications technologies, social media, improving welfare, and rising standards of education and living (Inglehart, 1997, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). How this new 'stronger' individual negotiates the tensions that exist in China, with its particular context, is one of the underlying questions that this thesis sets out to address.

The individualisation thesis "*shows how, as modern society develops further, it is becoming questionable to assume that collective units of meaning and action exist*" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 14). With China's close historical and cultural relationship with 'collective units of meaning and action', this aspect makes the study of Chinese individualisation particularly interesting. The post-Mao retreat from radical ideology, coupled with the legacy of decades of denigrating Confucianism, has left a much talked about 'ideological vacuum' (Wang, 2002; Ci, 2009). Over the past decade or so there has been much discussion of how negative 'hedonistic' individualism has begun to dominate. China's young adults receive a lot of negative press; they are alternately labelled 'spoilt' 'money-orientated', 'shallow', and 'uncreative' (Guan, 2007; Lehre, 2012; Palmer, 2012). Critics say that the relationships between the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Chinese individual and other individuals, society, and the state, are in danger of disintegrating entirely (Wang, 2002; Ci, 2009). Atomisation is given as a possible result, and the state gives re-

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<sup>2</sup> The title of this thesis is a rearrangement of Walder's term.



integration in the traditional and/or Maoist frameworks as the dominant solution (Eckholm, 2001; Tomba, 2009). This thesis tries to take the debate away from this discursive trend; away from the portrayal of China's young generations as wallowing in a moral vacuum, and towards how changes in notions of collectivism, individuality, and individual-society-state relations can instead produce something constructive and new. A further aim of this thesis is to locate these tensions in the greater global context of dealing with new modernities. The discourse on individualism and modernisation described above is far from unique to China. Similar concerns regarding an 'amoral youth', atomisation, and societal disintegration can be found in all modernising societies across the globe (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 2010). The prescriptions given to 'cure' these problems may be different – outside of China they may focus more on religion for example – but the direction is similar: re-capture the individual in a more collectivist framework.

In the West, new individualities have more freedom to express themselves in new social forms and commitments that are more suited to the new individual. In China this freedom remains somewhat constrained. Nevertheless, organisations that are based around chosen membership and voluntary action and association have increased dramatically since the end of the Mao-era (Ma, 2002, 2006; Deng, 2009). Scholarly analysis of this Chinese 'civil society' tend to focus on the state's attempts to co-opt organisations, or on how the organisations negotiate the limited space that the state provides (Saich, 2000; Brook and Frolic, 2008; Spires, 2011). These analyses tend to use traditional civil society theories, and are therefore inevitably drawn towards a diametric opposition between state and society (Ma, 2002; Lu, 2007; Luova, 2011). Media analyses of Chinese civil society tend to focus on *activist* individuals and organisations who push the limited space that the state provides (Bannister, 2012). This study will take a different approach. It will examine individuals operating in those organisations, with weak or no links to the state, that are tolerated by the state because they do not engage in politically sensitive activities (Saich, 2000; Spires, 2011). These organisations, numbering several million, offer up social settings that are relatively new in China because they are non-state and non-family (and in this study non-religious). Within them operate millions of 'everyday' volunteers who, whilst not being Chen Guangcheng-style activists pushing state boundaries, are still 'quietly' realigning and re-defining social relations. These 'building blocks' of civil society (Dekker and Halman, 2003), reflect societal norms and trends of commitment, responsibility, and organisation (Anheier and Salamon, 1999, 43). In a society that is becoming individualised they are nexuses of the individualisation processes; exploring the ways in which the 'stronger' individual is re-embedding and searching for a "*co-operative or altruistic individualism*" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 212).

Most studies of Chinese volunteering emphasise that it is ‘state-led’ in a similar way to how Chinese civil society is described as being ‘state-led’ (Frolic, 1997; Hustinx *et al*, 2012, 62). As will be shown in this thesis, the state is attempting to co-opt the individual volunteer by tying the concept of volunteering to the Mao-era exemplar figure Lei Feng. However, whereas state attempts to co-opt organisations are often successful, this study shows that they are less successful at co-opting the individual volunteer, whose individualised values fail to align with Lei Feng’s anti-individualism, state-guided stances. One way to view civil society growth in China is therefore to view it as a recipient of the individualisation processes, viewing involvement as attempts to re-embed and to ‘grow’ the individual ‘self’ in social spaces that are more suitable than those provided by the state (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 161). The volunteers in this study were therefore not involving themselves with non-state organisations because they ‘opposed’ the state. They were getting involved because the organisation offered better opportunities for them to explore and expand their notions of self, and to express their notion of citizenship in a way that they personally defined as correct (rather than the state definition). Analysing civil society in this way draws the focus away from the binary opposition between state and non-state organisation, and towards what the organisation can offer the individualised individual.

The volunteers that were looked at in this study were also at the forefront of redefining what being an individual in China means today. They were re-capturing the individual from its long ideological demonization, redefining the ‘I’, and re-creating the ‘We’. They were not the ‘disciples’ or ‘heirs’ of Lei Feng (雷锋传人) as the Chinese state suggests (Xing and Zhang, 2006; Luova, 2011; Hustinx *et al*, 2012). They were not nationalistic ‘angry youth’ (愤青) as is often talked about. Nor were they Chen Guangcheng-style activists, as the Western media concentrates on. However despite the absence of these qualities, it would be difficult to describe them as having fallen into moral depravity. They were not the amoral, hedonistic ‘往钱看’ (‘looking towards money’<sup>3</sup>) individuals (see Palmer, 2012; Sinica, 2012). Whilst they were certainly members of the ‘我一代’ (the ‘me generation’) and individuality was at the core of their narratives, they were pro-social; harmonising (to use a much-loved state anti-individualism phrase) the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ in a reciprocal balance. This stands in contrast to common accounts that emphasise that the ‘Chinese individual’ is either overly collectivist, or overly individualistic (Pye, 1991).

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<sup>3</sup> This was a phrase popularized in the 1990’s that altered the saying “look towards the future” (往前看) by replacing ‘future’ (qián 前) with its homonym ‘money’ (qián 钱).

The next chapter of this dissertation will analyse the literature that has previously addressed the issues discussed above, focusing on three core fields; individualisation, civil society, and volunteering. At the end of the chapter it will review the gaps in the literature that have been discovered and lay-out the approach of this study (including the research questions). Following on from this, the third chapter will detail the theoretical foundations of this study – including the epistemological and ontological positions – and describe the theory and methods that informed the collection and analysis of data. The data that was used in this study was primarily in-depth interview data that was analysed using thematic content analysis. Chapter’s four to eight will discuss the main themes that were identified in this analysis. The first analysis chapter (chapter four) will look at how the interviewees’ notions of volunteering and social commitments incorporated ideals of ‘sacrifice’, scale, reciprocity, and mutuality which were at odds with both traditional portrayals of Chinese society and the contemporary state narrative. The second analysis chapter (five) will look at how the civil society organisation (CSO) offered the individual volunteer opportunities to construct their biography, express ‘politics of the self’, explore and discover ‘the new’, and develop self-constructed notions of a ‘meaningful life’ (有意义的生活). Chapter six will discuss four of the key themes that occurred in the interviewees volunteering narratives; education, modernisation, the internet, and the Wenchuan earthquake. It will discuss the role that each of these four played in the interviewees’ construction of volunteer identity. The final analysis chapter looks at how involvement in a CSO changed the individual by reinforcing the individualisation process, and also discusses evidence of ‘flow’ from state organisations to non-state organisations. This ‘flow’ was not conceived as resulting from an ‘active opposition’ to the state, but a ‘passive’ one; resulting from the state organisations being less suitable for the individualised individual. Concordantly it also describes the state’s attempt to dominate the volunteering narrative and discusses how the state account is unsuitable for the individualised individual<sup>4</sup>. The conclusions from all of these trends, themes, and issues are then brought together in the final concluding chapter.

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<sup>4</sup> Whilst this thesis looks directly at CSO volunteers, it is crucial to have a thorough understanding of the state’s position on the subjects being discussed. To ignore the state would be unthinkable in any study of Chinese society, even a study that is focusing on ‘non-state’ civil society (see Ma, 2002; 2006). This is why significant sections of this dissertation (especially chapter seven) deal directly with the state.

## **2. Individualisation, Civil Society, and Volunteering in China: A Review and Synthesis of Literature and Theory**

### **2.1. Introduction**

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This dissertation asks the question *'how have individualisation processes guided and informed involvement in Chinese civil society organisations?'* To facilitate an empirical analysis of this question this chapter will address the literature and theory surrounding three fields of study: 1) the study of individualisation in China, 2) the study of Chinese civil society, and 3) the study of volunteering in China. Through doing so it will establish the lacunae in the literature that this dissertation aims to fill and set down the theoretical foundations required to fully understand the methodology of the fieldwork and the resulting data that will be analysed in chapters' four to nine. A theoretical discussion of the individualisation thesis is included at the beginning of this chapter (rather than in the methodology) because it provides the conceptual 'glue' that ties the literature review together. The epistemological and ontological positions and theoretical 'tools' that were used to analyse individualisation will be addressed separately in the next chapter.

This chapter will begin by establishing how the individualisation thesis – with its core components of dis-embedment, re-embedment, and the emergence of the 'reflexive project of the self' - represents a useful framework to study the disintegration of established social forms and commitments, and the subsequent shift towards the emphasis on the individual. It will then move towards the study of civil society in China, showing how it is in need of new conceptual frameworks to shed fresh light on its growth and development. It will then shift the aspect of study back towards the individual by looking at the 'building blocks' of civil society; volunteers. It will show how the study of Chinese volunteering is underdeveloped and also encounters difficulties when Western-developed theories are applied to China, with its unique history of volunteerism. The final section will review the scholarly gaps that have been discussed throughout the chapter and detail how this dissertation represents an original angle of study. Whilst doing so it will set out the research questions and lead the reader into the methodological chapter. Through tying together the issues of volunteering, civil society, and individualisation in China, this chapter will ultimately demonstrate how the individualisation thesis offers a useful

and intriguing conceptual framework to analyse shifts in social relations in civil society volunteers.

## **2.2. Individualisation**

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This first section of the literature review will define the core processes of the individualisation thesis. A key motivation for a *thorough* definition of the individualisation thesis is to differentiate it from other concepts that may sound similar. It is not synonymous with ‘individualism’, nor with the neo-liberal individual of Rand or Thatcher (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, xxi). In the neoliberal model the individual is autonomous, held back by institutions such as the state, and only fully realising his potential when he is able to act independently. In contrast to this, the individualisation thesis views the state as playing a key role in the transformation of the individual and their limited re-embedding (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Furthermore, and crucially for this study, individualisation also details how revised notions of individuality can create new ways of associating, resulting in tensions with the old.

The individualisation thesis, developed mainly by Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, but also by Scott Lash, Zygmunt Bauman, and others, broadly details the structural and sociological changes of ‘reflexive modernity’ that result in a weakening of collective and traditional ties, and a subsequent shift towards an individual-focused assumption of responsibility. In this sense the thesis is nothing new; Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, and other more recent figures such as Norbert Elias, focused much of their work around similar issues (Brannen and Nilsen, 2005, 414-415; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007, 2). However, the individualisation thesis, is focused around transformations that disrupt ‘ontological security’ (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2010, xiv). It forms one part of the theory of ‘reflexive modernisation’ that represents a transition from an earlier form of modernity to a new form of ‘reflexive’ modernity. As will be discussed in later sections, although the West can be seen to be predominantly entering ‘reflexive modernity’ China has aspects of different modernities occurring simultaneously as ‘compressed modernisation’ (Yan, 2009, xvii).

From a review of the literature surrounding the thesis (Giddens, 1991a, 1999; Beck, 1992, 192, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; De Beer and Koster 2009, 53-56), its principal components can be said to be: the ‘dis-embedding’ of the individual from traditional social forms and commitments; the continued presence of outdated ‘zombie categories’ aligned with the traditional social forms and commitments; the emergence of the ‘reflexive project of the self’; the limited institutionalised ‘re-embedding’ of the individual in social commitments determined by

the state and market economy; and the desire of the individualised individual to re-embed in new, more suitable social forms and commitments. These core processes will provide the conceptual framework for this dissertation and will be more fully described below.

## 2.2.1. The Core Features of the Individualisation Thesis

### *Dis-embedding*

Beck (1992, 128) defines dis-embedding as two main processes:

- The shedding of “*historically prescribed social forms and commitments in the sense of traditional contexts of dominance and support*”. This he terms the ‘liberation dimension’.
- The loss of “*traditional security with respect to practical knowledge, faith and guiding norms*” This he terms the ‘disenchantment dimension’.

These shifts occur in the transition from ‘first modernity’ to ‘reflexive modernity’ (also called ‘late modernity’). The period of first modernity is itself said to have emerged out of the ‘traditional period’, when, as Giddens (1991, 48-49) and Bauman (2000, 16-52) write, tradition pre-ascribed value and meaning to most objects, roles, and actions, and an individual’s place within society was largely pre-determined (see also Triandis, 1995; Hofstede, 2001; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Tjosvold *et al*, 2003; Cao, 2009). According to the reflexive modernisation thesis, the traditional period began to transform into ‘first modernity’ (in the West) during the renaissance and enlightenment periods when the traditional institutions began to be contested (Calhoun, 1993, 270-71; Seligman, 1995, 15-16; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). During this shift life-choices began to be slowly bureaucratised, religion began to be questioned, and loyalty began to be professed to the state (rather than to the family, the clan, or the feudal lord) (Giddens, 1991; Strange, 1996; 66-87; Beck *et al*, 2003, 3-6). It was also during this time that the modern (Western) notion of ‘civil society’ (discussed later on in this chapter), began to emerge (Hall, 1995; Seligman, 1995, 27; Edwards, 2009). As Lash (2001, xii) describes, during first modernity there was a limited degree of individualisation, but as the traditional structures began to fade, they were replaced by new structures. Life remained structured and linear (Bauman, 2000), based on ‘standard biographies’ (Beck, 1994, 13) and, as functionalists would say, on *ascribed* ‘roles’ and ‘status’ (Ferrante, 2012, 184).

Dis-embedment occurs in the transition from these two periods to the new period of ‘late modernity’ (which is usually described as being the post-World War Two period in the West). It is during this period that the institutions of first modernity have been increasingly contested (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). As Inglehart (1997) shows, established religious and political systems have lost legitimacy, and as Triandis (1995, 66), Barber (2001), and Macfayden *et al* (2004) all describe; rapid advancements in communications technologies have enabled the individual to consume, produce, collaborate and distribute information at unprecedented speeds. Whereas in the traditional and first modern periods structured frameworks of traditional ‘forms’ and ‘commitments’ (Beck, 1992, 128) delineated the past, present, and future choices of an individual; the late modern individual is largely left to arrange their own lives – including their social lives - by themselves<sup>5</sup>. ‘Reflexivity’ emerges as a dominant feature of an individual’s subjective interpretation of identity and social relations, because an individual must rationalise their actions in ways that no longer rely on tradition (Beck *et al* 1994, 174-183, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 35). Giddens says that reflexivity in the late modern period “*consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character*” (Giddens, 1990, 38-39).

Something similar to ‘anomie’ - famously described by Emile Durkheim (see Marks, 1974) – results from dis-embedment (Beck, 1992, 128). However, and as Bauman (2000) describes, when Durkheim composed the concept of anomie he was describing the transition from *structured* tradition to *structured* modernity; there was a continuity of structure and lineation (Bauman, 2000). Late modernity is non-linear (Lash, 2001, xii) and characterised by fluidity (Bauman calls it ‘liquid’). Therefore the dis-embedment of late modernity, detailed by the individualisation thesis, is from structure to *flow*. Despite this, something similar to Durkheim’s anomie does occur (Beck’s ‘disenchantment dimension’) because dis-embedment results in the significant loss of established norms and relations (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 40-41). However, the way that this is interpreted by the individualisation thesis is not in a necessarily negative sense, instead it describes how the dis-embedded individual becomes a ‘creator of self’ and life becomes a ‘reflexive project’ (Giddens, 1991, 82-83).

## ***The ‘Reflexive Project of the Self’***

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<sup>5</sup> It is also important to remember that the dis-embedment processes are not equally spread. Within a society there may be sections that remain embedded in traditional structures because the ties are particularly strong (such as ‘faith’ communities) or values are particularly ‘engrained’ (such as older generations) (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

The result of the structural and sociological shifts described above is that the individual is increasingly left to assign meaning and value to objects, actions, and choices because the established norms and institutions of first modernity no-longer pre-assign them (Giddens, 1994). Individuals have to pick and choose ways to live their lives (sometimes called ‘lifestyle’ choices) (Giddens 1991b, 75) resulting in the ‘reflexive project of the self’ (also called the ‘DIY biography’ by Beck) which “*consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives*” (Giddens, 1991b, 5)<sup>6</sup>. Construction of identity becomes a fluid, temporal project as the self is shaped and re-shaped by the incorporation of new values and lifestyle choices (Giddens, 1991b, 75; Hall 1996, 4). In this way ‘standard biographies’ are replaced by ‘choice biographies’ (Beck, 1994, 13). Reflexivity becomes integral to identity and the individual regularly self-examines their life, in order to see which new directions to take it in (Giddens 1991, 76). As Calhoun (1994, 20) points out; ‘self-improvement’, and a measuring of an individual’s ‘project of the self’ against those of other individuals, becomes important. Viewed from this perspective, an act like ‘volunteering’ becomes a conduit for the individual to generatively express their notions of self, whilst reflexively developing their identity. Furthermore, as Thompson (1995, 220-223) describes, examples of alternative values and lifestyles – such as ‘role models’ (e.g. Lei Feng in this dissertation) - become important because they represent values and ideas that can potentially be adopted into the individual biography as a ‘strategy of self’.

## ***Zombie Categories***

As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, 202-213) describe, another key feature of reflexive modernity is ‘zombie categories’. These describe the forms and institutions of the traditional and first modern periods that remain but no longer occupy the prominent role that they once did (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 30). ‘Zombified’ categories cover such areas as established religion, family, class, and politics. As is made clear by a casual glance at any sociology textbook; in many Western societies religious attendances are falling, class-based systems are disintegrating and traditional politics are flailing (Giddens, 1994). As Beck (1995, 34) and Inglehart and Norris (2003) describe; the traditional family unit, formed during first modernity, is well-known to be under strain as divorce rates increase, hybridised family-forms emerge, and

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<sup>6</sup> This key component will also be discussed in the theoretical section of the methodology because it informs the epistemological and ontological approach of this thesis.



women are freed from their traditional subjugation. Concordantly, established forms of work are also being contested; for example the ‘job-for-life’, that created so much meaning and organisation in first modernity, is fast disappearing (Inglehart, 1997; Meister, 2012). All of these institutions and categories, formed during the traditional and first modern periods, are fragmenting but the terminology and categorisation that describes them remains as an outdated ‘zombie category’.

## ***Re-Embedding***

Beck (1992, 128) describes ‘re-embedment’ as “*a new type of social commitment*”)” that aims to draw the disembedded individual back into the social sphere. There are three different processes of re-embedment that are detailed in the individualisation literature. The first is what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) term ‘institutionalised individualisation’, and describes how the state (in the West) has expanded to embed the individual in a limited, skeleton framework of bureaucracy, welfare, and the labour market. This entrenches the individual as the core unit in society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 22-29) but is only a limited embedment because the individual is largely left to generate meaning and value themselves, and also to arrange their social lives in ways that they define.

The second process of re-embedment is the attempt to re-impose (sometimes forcefully) old social commitments from first modernity (Beck’s ‘control’ element, 1992, 128). Beck describes three strategies<sup>7</sup>: values-based “*the possibility of what might be called a transcendental consensus*” (this could be something like religion); nationalism; and economic, “*an integration founded on joint material interests*” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 17). All of them, Beck says, are no longer suitable because the issues that the individualised individual is interested in, the values they hold, and the ways that they express them, will cross and re-cross the boundaries of the traditional social and political spectrum. As Giddens (1991; 1994) writes, grand ideologies are no longer suitable for the individualised individual, instead they are interested in ‘self-politics’ and ‘small pictures’. This puts them at odds with the institutions of first modernity; for example in the West it produces the appearance of political apathy (Beck and Beck, 2002, 159).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to observe that all of these strategies have been employed by the reform-era Chinese state (see Lam, 2006; Shambaugh, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Although Beck also makes the important point that by ignoring traditional political institutions, the individual is actually acting politically.

The third form of re-embedment is in new social forms and commitments that are more suited to the individualised individual. This is where civil society comes in because, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, 161) state; the fractured (by the standards of the traditional and first modern periods) sets of values, and the stronger emphasis on self-determination and expression that individualisation results in, “*may indeed collide with the party apparatus, but [...] certainly make sense in the forms and forums of civil society.*” Therefore civil society in late modernity becomes a suitable re-embedment space because it represents a pluralised set of social forms and commitments that align well with the more fluid and diverse values and aspirations of the individualised individual.

This contrasts with the views of those (including neo-Tocquevillians<sup>9</sup> such as Robert Putnam) who draw strong causative links between a ‘declining’ civil society and increasing ‘individualism’ (Putnam, 1995, 2000; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 2010). These critics view individualisation as resulting in *anti*-social behaviour and a successful re-embedment as therefore being limited to traditional collective-focused social forms and commitments (described above as the second form of re-embedment)<sup>10</sup>. Significantly for this dissertation, most of the research that draws these links has been done on Western civil societies; Putnam’s work, for example, focuses almost entirely on the US. Furthermore, work by others such as Robert Wuthnow (1991, 1998) and Ronald Inglehart (1997, 2003; Inglehart and Baker, 2000) contradict the neo-Tocquevillian causative link. Wuthnow (1991, 18-49) shows that for around three-quarters of the American public (which the individualisation thesis would depict as being heavily individualised), pro-social attitudes were just as important as individual-focused aims. Similarly, Inglehart’s cross-cultural studies (1997, 2003) show a *positive* correlation between modernisation and civic participation<sup>11</sup>. He details two aspects of cultural change linked to modernisation: “*a shift from traditional to secular-rational values*” and “*a shift from survival values to self-expression values*” (2003, 56-57) and says that although the first is non-conducive to increased civic participation, the second *is* conducive.

In the individualisation thesis the kind of individual that Wuthnow and Inglehart describe is alternately termed the ‘altruistic’ (Beck, 1997, 14) or ‘co-operative’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 212) individual. They position individual concerns alongside pro-social commitments in a mutually-strengthening balance focused around equality, reciprocity, and

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<sup>9</sup> Following Alexis de Tocqueville’s reading of civil society, which will be discussed in section 2.4.

<sup>10</sup> For example, the Church of England’s call to stem a ‘moral crisis’ (Telegraph, 2009) and the Republican Party’s drive for ‘family values’ (GOP, 2012). As will be discussed in the next section, the Chinese equivalent could be seen to be calls to ‘re-introduce’ Confucianism and/or religion (Sinica, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Inglehart also criticises Putnam’s work for focusing almost entirely on the US (2003, 70).

mutuality. The emergence of new social spaces that incorporate the stronger notions of individuality that individualisation bring about is therefore possible. In this dissertation, and following on from Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, 161), it will be argued that in the Chinese context a very strong example of such a space is the civil society organisation (CSO), because the realigned values and commitments that result from Chinese individualisation “*make sense in the forms and forums of civil society*”.

### **2.2.2. Contextuality**

Is the conceptual framework above suitable for China? Individualisation theorists argue that the processes are global but have increasingly acknowledged that the patterns of individualisation will differ depending on context (see Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2010, xiii-xx; Yan, 2010, xv-xxxviii). The thesis originally focused on Western Europe with its democratic political system and strong welfare state; both institutions fought for and established during the relatively linear progression of European ‘first modernity’. The situation in China is different. Its modernisation has been ‘compressed’ and distinctly non-linear<sup>12</sup>. Democratic ideals and state-welfare have developed differently. As Yan (2009, xvii) describes, the Chinese situation has features of the periods of traditional, first modernity, and late modernity all occurring simultaneously. In China the structural changes to political institutions that occurred in a linear fashion in the West over the past two centuries or so have not occurred, or have only occurred to a limited degree and are gradually being established. This certainly creates a different context for individualisation but it does not preclude it from occurring (Yan, 2009, 2010; Beck 2010).

Furthermore, alongside a different experience of modernisation there are also significant cultural dissimilarities. At the core of the individualisation thesis is a shift from a collective identity towards a stronger individual identity; “*the theory shows how, as modern society develops further, it is becoming questionable to assume that collective units of meaning and action exist.*” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 14). In Inglehart’s study of modernisation-induced value shifts, China falls between the ‘Confucian’ and ‘ex-Communist’ categories and has similarities with both (Inglehart, 2003, 57-60). Both categories represent a degree of collectivism that is generally agreed to be much greater than that in Western societies. Cao (2009, 43), citing work by Triandis (1995), Smith (1998), and Tjosvold *et al* (2003), lists the four main differences between individualism and collectivism as:

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<sup>12</sup> This idea of ‘compressed modernity’ has been applied to several East Asian societies; see for example Chang, 2010.

- *“The definition of self is interdependent in collectivism and independent in individualism.”*
- *“Group goals have priority in collectivism and personal goals have priority in individualism.”*
- *“Social behaviours are guided by norms, obligations and duties in collectivist cultures; attitudes, personal needs, rights, and contracts are the focus of social behaviours in individualistic cultures.”*
- *“An emphasis on relationships is common in collectivist cultures, while rational analysis of that relationship is common in individualistic cultures.”*

Hofstede (2001, 209) gives the individualism-collectivism dichotomy as one of his five dimensions of culture saying that it has *“many implications for values and behaviours”*. A greater degree of collectivism therefore has significant implications for the individualisation processes.

However; Triandis (1995), Hofstede (2001), and Tjosvold *et al* (2003) portray shifts from collectivism to individualism as resulting from factors growing out of economic development; including increased affluence, a shift in the modes of production, improved mobility, increased travelling and education, and an expanded mass-media. As Cao (2009, 45) points out; the link between these factors and amplified individualism is related to increased choice: *“The more choices one has, the larger the I-factor becomes”*. As will be discussed in the following section, reform-era China displays all of these trends and a shift from collectivism to individualism is a commonly referenced phenomenon (see Yan, 2003, 2009, 2010; Cao, 2009; Hansen and Svarverud, 2010; Palmer, 2013). Whilst not ignoring the fact that there are negative aspects of this shift, this thesis takes an alternative view of it by conceiving it within the frame of the individualisation thesis. It is the individualisation thesis that provides a fuller depiction of the collectivism to individualism shift, drawing stronger conceptual links between transformed notions of individuality and revised social commitments.

## **2.3 Chinese Individualisation**

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### **2.3.1. The Chinese Traditional Period: ‘Da wo’ over ‘Xiao wo’**

In order to examine Chinese individualisation it is important to first examine what constitutes the Chinese ‘traditional period’ (the first period of the reflexive modernisation thesis). In China, as in

the West, traditional frameworks of institutions and beliefs delineated the life-course of the individual. As Fei (1948) Hsu (1948), Schwartz (1985) and King (1985) all describe; the values of actions, objects and choices were defined by an over-arching Confucian framework infused with Buddhist and Daoist teachings. This created a strict hierarchy of relationships: men were more important than women; the old were more important than the young; family were more important than non-family (Hsu, 1948, 1985; King, 1985). Within this framework, the identity of the individual came from their position within the collective (Pye, 1991). As Fei (1948) and Hsu (1985) describe, this was exemplified by the concepts of ‘大我’ (*da wo*, greater self) and ‘小我’ (*xiao wo*, smaller self). The ‘smaller self’ was the individual, which was meant to be sacrificed to the ‘greater self’ (society or humankind). An over-expression of the ‘smaller self’ was linked to deviance and sin because it was perceived to come at the expense of the ‘greater self’ (the collective) (Cao, 2009, 45). Whilst it is important not to overstate the exceptionality of this (individuality has been linked with deviance in all other cultures; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 27), nor to exaggerate the dominance of the collective over the individual (Fei, 1948; King 1985; Hwang 1987), most studies stress that traditional Chinese culture placed a greater emphasis on the collective over the individual than many other cultures (King, 1985; Pye, 1991; Liu, 1995; Triandis, 1995; Hofstede, 2001; Tjosvold *et al* 2003; Moore, 2005; Cheng & Bunnin 2008; Cao, 2009).

Traditional Confucian ideology also stressed kinship, and that the family and filial piety were important above all else (Weber 1968; Baker 1979; King 1985). As studies by Madge (1974) and Tang (2005) point out, relationships between the individual and other individuals were dominated by an emphasis on family and close friends; outside of this sphere was the ‘stranger’. Associational activity was dominated by kinship networks and aligned towards the traditional hierarchical relationships (Yang 1965; Freedman, 1966). As both Pye (1991) and Hsu (1985) describe; the long-established dominance of familialism meant that extra-familial associations were often viewed with a degree of suspicion. With the emphasis on the collective and an under-developed notion of the individual, the help-trajectory was often seen as one-way and zero-sum: if help was directed towards a non-family organisation then the family was seen to be losing out. Pye (1991, 452-453) also points out that an individual’s membership of non-familial organisations tended to be both ‘ascriptive’ and ‘passive’; based on birthplace and family. By the four measures of the collectivist-individualist dichotomy described in section 2.2.2., traditional Chinese society therefore certainly bears all the core features of a collectivist society; interdependent definition of self, group goals, social behaviour guided by obligations, and an emphasis on relationships (Triandis, 1995, Hofstede, 2001, Tjosvold *et al* 2003; Cao, 2009).

This system, of course, worked well in traditional times, where an individual's life-course tended to be relatively static, but notions of individual-collective relations began to change as the traditional frameworks were challenged. As Liu (1995, 77-102) and Schwarz, (1986) show, reformists linked the repression of the individual to the broader 'decline' of China and a positive re-evaluation of individuality began to be seen as a means for China to modernise and 'catch-up'. The reformist Liang Qichao described the familial domination of the individual and the lack of non-family associations as creating a lack of citizens: "*In such societies, there are no associations outside of the family [...] Thus I once said that there are only members of the family (zhumin), but no citizens (shimin) in China*" (Liang, quoted in Cheng & Bunnin 2008, 31). However, the restructurings that reformists campaigned for were cut short by war and then radically re-envisioned by the communists.

### **2.3.2. Chinese First Modernity: Organised Dependency**

The rise of post-1949 Maoist China dis-embedded the individual in a series of short sharp shocks that, instead of gradually undermining the traditional frameworks, aimed to obliterate them utterly. As studies by Vogel (1965), Parish and Whyte (1978), Madsen (1984), and Ci (1994) show, both 'tradition' and familialism were continuously attacked by Maoist policies. Lu (2004) notes how the aim of these attacks was that the state would replace the family as the primary orientation of an individual's 'sacrifice'<sup>13</sup>. As both Parish and Whyte (1978, 180) and Yan (2003, 42-63, 217-35) point out; for many individuals, the less-radical side of this dis-embedding was 'liberating' (Beck's 'liberation dimension' 1992, 128), at least at first. The position of many rural individuals was greatly improved, women were emancipated, and new space was created outside of the family for young people to associate in; the key ingredient for the development of a 'youth culture'. As Vogel's study (1965) shows, the insular hegemony of the family was broken and relations between individuals were redefined: individuals became 'comrades' and family members, friends, and most significantly strangers, also became comrades. The Maoist period therefore contains elements of the core aspects of individualisation: dis-embedding (structural and de-traditionalising) and re-embedding (Yan, 2010b, 493). This could be interpreted positively, as it was by Joseph Needham in his obituary of Mao: "*one of [Chinese society's] failures (as Sun*

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<sup>13</sup> The radical extreme of this forced realignment came during the Cultural Revolution when children were encouraged to denounce their own parents and sing "*Father and Mother are dear, but dearer still is Chairman Mao*" (Lu, 2004, 106)

*Yatsen saw) was excessive family loyalty. This is what Mao's China has broken through*" (Needham, 1976).

However, whilst the individual was to some extent freed, the dis-embedded individual was *forcefully* re-embedded in the socio-economic structures dictated by the now dominant state. Those who didn't give up their businesses were imprisoned; those who didn't join the collectives and work-units were denied a livelihood; those who didn't praise the Party were punished (Vogel, 1965; Parish and Whyte, 1978; Walder, 1986). A system of political classes was imposed by the state, attached to the individual, to be inherited by their children, and, as Kraus (1981) shows; an individual's class label had a huge impact on the choices that they made and the opportunities available to them. In 1958 the Household Registration System (the Hukou system) was introduced to restrict the provision of welfare and basic necessities to the place of birth, therefore hugely restricting the ability of the individual to act independently of state associations (Worden *et al*, 1987; Des Forges, 1997). Private earning-mechanisms were gradually abolished (Walder, 1986) and as Worden *et al* (1987, 121) write: work-unit membership became "*the single most significant aspect of individual identity in contemporary China*". Life within these work-units was forcibly socialised and the individual became dependent on the unit (and their attached cadres) to create what Walder (1986, 1–122) terms 'organised dependency'<sup>14</sup>. As Delman and Yin (2010, 98) point out; the 'biography' of the Mao-era individual was therefore shaped by the state.

Individualism was also demonised (Yan, 2009, 174-175) and tied to being 'bourgeois' and 'Western' (Liu, 1990, 16; Cheng, 2009). An extract from Wu Yunduo's popular 1952 book 'Dedicating everything to the Party' encapsulate this: "*The individual is merely a drop of water in the sea. Only when numerous drops come together can we form a great torrent. The moment it is separated from the sea, the drop dries out immediately*" (quoted in Cheng, 2009, 76). These lines could have been written during Confucian times, but the difference was that the Maoist subordination of the individual to the collective was guided by the Party, as a Mao Zedong quote demonstrates: "*we must affirm anew the discipline of the party, namely: (1) the individual is subordinate to the organisation (2) the minority is subordinate to the majority (3) the lower level is subordinate to the higher level (4) the entire membership is subordinate to the central committee.*" (Mao Zedong, 1968 quoted in Mühlhahn, 2010, 226).

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<sup>14</sup> However as Pye says: "*In driving out the old the Party introduced new units of collective identity which were more administratively binding and less rewarding than those of the traditional society*" (1991, 455). The key difference between these new (and forced) social arrangements and the traditional ones was the originator of their imposition. The Hukou system, the class system and the work-unit system were imposed on the individual by the newly formed state. In contrast, the traditional arrangements were delineated by millennia old Confucian ideas and values that were culturally engrained within society (Madsen, 1984; Ci, 1994).

### 2.3.3. The Increasingly Individualised Individual

As the above sections illustrate, viewed from the perspective of individual expression and self-control, Chinese individuality did not change that greatly with victory for the communists. As with the transition from tradition to first modernity in the West, it was a transformation from linear structure to linear structure (although a far more rigid one). By the four measures of the collectivist-individualist dichotomy described in section 2.2.2., society remained collectivist (interdependent definition of self; group goals; social behaviour guided by obligations; and an emphasis on relationships). State and Maoism merely replaced family and Confucianism; the individual remained subservient and 'sacrificial' to both. Choices - acknowledged by many scholars to be a core component of individualism (e.g. Triandis, 1995; Hofstede, 2001; Cao, 2009) – were defined by the state.

However, since the death of Mao this situation is one that has significantly changed. Many studies of reform-era China, such as Pye (1991), Garrott (1995), Barber (2001), Yan (2003, 2009), Allik and Realo (2004), Stanat (2005), and Cao (2009), all detail a shift towards a stronger individualism. Central to this transformation have been the 'dis-embedding' processes of the individualisation thesis, although with China's 'compressed modernisation' (Yan, 2009, xvii) the processes are different (and arguably more intense) than those depicted in the original thesis (described in section 2.2.). One difference is that, as Beck (2010, xiii-xx) describes; whilst in the West the individualisation processes occurred after a long period of prosperity, Chinese society in the 1980s and 90's was still relatively poor. Furthermore, the state-directed reforms designed to increase prosperity played an instrumental role in the individualisation process to the extent that Yan (2009, xxxi) calls it "*managed individualisation*". Indeed, the role of the state in reform-era societal transformation is often emphasised, as Davis and Harrell write: "*state power and policies have been the creators, not the creations, of a transformed society*" (1993, 5). Nevertheless, whilst the Chinese state played an instrumental part in initiating these transformations, today the individualisation processes are far from dominated by the state.

Firstly, the state has required a limited amount of individualism in the economic sphere to power economic growth (Yan, 2010). Therefore the individual has become dis-embedded from the socio-economic arrangements that they were forcibly re-embedded in at the beginning of the Maoist period, leading to a gradual end to Walder's 'organised dependency'. At the beginning of the reform-era, expressions of economic individualism were risky (Delman and Yin, 2010) but gradually private enterprise began to be encouraged (Zhou, 1996). Many of the Maoist control systems - such as the Hukou, the work-unit, and the class system - have also become examples of Beck's 'zombie categories'; increasingly seen as redundant and in need of drastic reform (Zhang,



2001). As Yan (2010, 502-506) shows, the state has relinquished much of its control over the private sphere of the individual. The choices open to the individual about the way that they live their life are increasingly free. The family structure has radically transformed (Yan, 2009, 57-84) and, as Rofel's (2007) study shows; notions of love and sex have changed to place the individual as the decision-maker.

A key cause of these significant transformations has been rapid urbanisation (WSJ, 2012). In the modern Chinese city the individual comes into contact with other individuals from many different of backgrounds, with a broad spectrum of ideas. The individual is increasingly left to arrange their social groups themselves, not based upon the limited choice of the village, the confines of the family, or the personnel lists of the state work-unit. As Beck says, urbanisation can result in atomisation, but not necessarily: "*It may also mean, however, that self-selected and self-created hierarchies and forms of stratification develop in relationships with acquaintances, neighbours and friends.*" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 35). Chang's study of migrant workers shows how they re-establish their identities in new urban work spaces (Chang, 2008). Urban-living is conducive to intensified individualisation and urban China should be more individualised than rural China, and yet this trend should not be overstated. As recent studies by Yan (2009, 109-132) and Hansen and Pang (2010) have shown, the Chinese village, a place that one might expect to be a bastion of the un-individualised individual, is also increasingly becoming individualised.

Secondly, the resources of the individual have also been strengthened in other ways, and it is important to note that despite lacking certain key features of the Western experience, because of its later 'start' the Chinese experience has the added influence of other forces. Advances in communication technologies mean that the 21<sup>st</sup> century Chinese individual has a far greater connectivity and access to information than 1980's and 90's Western European individuals had (the group that the original individualisation thesis looks at). These technological resources are important for individualisation (see Barber, 2001; Macfayden *et al*, 2004) and enable the individual to establish multiple new links between individuals, between individuals and organisations, and between the individual and 'society'<sup>15</sup> (see Yang, 2003, 2011; Tai, 2006; Kuhn and Wu, 2007; Lo *et al*, 2008). The forces of globalisation are also stronger today than they were in earlier periods and, with exponential increases in information availability and transfer, the contextualisation of China's global position is easily possible (see Fong, 2004a, 2004b). As Wang

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<sup>15</sup> This view contrasts with work by neo-Tocquevillian's such as Robert Putnam, who often describe technological "individualising", and tend towards viewing technology as negative, atomising, and disruptive of traditional social relations (Putnam, 1995).

(2002), Shambaugh (2008), and Ci (2009) show, Chinese society is therefore increasingly capable of both circumventing the ideological control that dominated Maoist society, and accessing alternative narratives. As Lam (2006), Shambaugh (2008), Jacka (2009), and Tomba (2009) describe, the CCP has set about refashioning its legitimation narrative and has also introduced new patriotic campaigns to induce cohesiveness, as Zhao (1998) and Gries (2004) studies show.

However, as a result of the above changes, the horizons and alignments of the younger generations have significantly altered. Thornton and Fricke (1987, 755-758) show how education offers the reform-era individual opportunities to develop networks outside of the dominant familial spheres. Garrott (1995), Barber (2001), Moore (2005), and Stanat (2005) all study the post-1980's generation, finding that they have strongly entrenched individualistic attitudes. The individuals in their studies were independent, sometimes rebellious, and orientated towards the self, in a way that strongly contradicts the traditional and Maoist readings of the Chinese individual. Fong (2004b) shows how younger Chinese individuals want to re-create the modern lives that are presented to them online and in the media, and are increasingly inclined to see older generations as 'backwards'. As Thompson (1995) writes role models and media are important because they present values and ideas that can be incorporated into the 'reflexive project of the self'. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Chinese individual has new role models, such as the popular blogger Han Han, who says: "*it is my choice to do whatever I want and to go wherever I want*" (TIME, 2004). Rofel (2007) discusses the rise of the 'desiring self', showing how personal emotional and material desires in China have emerged to replace the previous state domination of the individual self. Gold (1993) describes how in the early-reform era, Hong Kong and Taiwanese pop songs appealed to mainland youth more than the Party-sanctioned songs because they meant more to their lives. Frammolino (2004) describes how 21<sup>st</sup> Century individuals now turn to professional help for psychological support, instead of seeking support from family and friends as they would have done previously. Hooper (2005) and Palmer (2006) both describe how consumer rights consciousness has grown since the beginning of the reform era. O'Brien and Li (2006) and Lee (2007) show how the poorer strata of society have formed workers' rights movements. Hanser (2001) talks about the rise of the 'enterprising self', showing how young job-seekers assume increased responsibility for their working lives. Steele and Lynch (2012) study subjective well-being, concluding that "*the Chinese are increasingly prioritizing individualist factors in assessments of their own happiness and life satisfaction thus substantiating descriptions of their society as increasingly individualistic*".

This transformation has also created a widely-identified 'generation gap'. As one 26 year old says in Palmer's survey of the 'post-80s' generation: "*It's not just a generation gap. It's a values gap, a wealth gap, an education gap, a relationships gap, an information gap*" (Palmer,

2013). As Yan (2009, 109-132) shows, older generations, who spent their formative years in the Mao-era, sometimes see modern youth as ‘troublesome’. Concordantly, these shifts in values have led to the new individualism being negatively portrayed as amoral, materialistic, and anti-social (see Guan, 2007; Ci, 2009; Lehre, 2012; Palmer, 2012). Critics who have a vested interest in the maintenance of collectivist thinking (i.e. the Chinese state) portray stronger individualism as ‘egoism’ that results from ‘spiritual pollution’ (Ci, 1994)<sup>16</sup>. Wang (2002) shows how the CCP must continue to demonise individualism if they want to retain socialist legitimacy (2002, 16). Furthermore, alongside maintaining their ties with socialism, the state has also recognised that old pre-communist frameworks of thought – such as Confucianism and religion – can be re-encouraged to re-embed the individual (Sinica, 2012; Telegraph, 2012). The state also continues to use the Mao-era role model figure of Lei Feng to promote collectivism (CBRC, 2012; Xinhua, 2012b; SMH, 2012; Guardian, 2013) and Luova (2011) shows how the frequency of articles about Lei increased greatly after 1989<sup>17</sup>. It is important to also remember that there are still many limits in place that the state controls. Delman and Yin (2008) describe how entrepreneurs are disciplined when they engage in politics. As Mühlhahn (2010) points out, the institutionalisation of individual rights was a key foundation of the individualisation in the West, and its relative absence in China represents a significant hurdle for individualisation<sup>18</sup>.

Significant structural limits therefore remain that regulate the Chinese individual to a greater degree than those in place in the West. Furthermore, as Furlong and Cartmel (2007, 1-2) point out, it is important not to exaggerate the ‘break’ with the past that individualisation represents. Some studies, such as Michailova and Hutchings (2006) and Lu and Gilmour (2004) do stress the continued collectivism of Chinese society. However, it is difficult to ignore the fact that there has been a general shift towards the individual becoming a social unit in reform-era China (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2010, xiii). There has also been a growing reflexive re-evaluating so that roles, relationships, acts and choices have all been re-assessed to have new

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<sup>16</sup> Although, viewed from an individualisation perspective, it could be said that it is the state’s structural limits that induce an amoral ‘anomie’ because as Yan (2009, 2010) points out; they reduce the options available for the individualised individual, pushing them towards a purely economic individualism. This results in materialist pursuits, whilst, as Beck (2010) puts it; significantly ‘castrating’ their creative engagement in cultural and political pursuits.

<sup>17</sup> . In 2011 the CPC Central Committee issued the call for the “*permanent implementation of the campaign to learn from Lei Feng*”, only the third time that senior CCP leadership have promoted the campaign (CPC Encyclopedia)The first call to ‘Learn from Lei Feng’ came in 1963 when Mao was facing criticism after the disastrous Great Leap Forward (CPCE). The second was in 1989 after the Tiananmen Square incident (Eckholm, 2001; CPCE).

<sup>18</sup> However, as Yan (2010) shows, the legal system is gradually being reformed to give more and more rights and protection to the individual. In doing so it is entrenching individualisation and re-defining the individual as a legal unit.

value and meaning attributed to them by the reform-era individual. This impacts their social relations and commitments, which leads this discussion towards the next section which will examine the study of civil society in China. The traditional and Mao-era denigration of the individual produced a disinclination towards both self-governance and non-familial, non-state association (Pye, 1991), as Yan (2010b, 493) says: “*The individual–society relationship was weak and secondary in traditional China and remained so under Maoist socialism*”. However, the processes described above have brought about a shift in values and notions of individuality, association, and social relations that alters Yan’s ‘individual-society relationship’. As described in section 2.2.1., the new values and alignments that individualisation results in “*make sense in the forms and forums of civil society*” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 161).

## **2.4 Civil Society and China: A Problematic Relationship**

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### **2.4.1. Introduction**

Although much debated, the simplest definition of civil society is that it is all the voluntary associations that exist outside of the state, economy, and family (LSE, 2004; Hall, 1995; Seligman, 1995; Edwards, 2005). The full definition that will be used in this dissertation (as will be discussed further in the methodology chapter) is the commonly used LSE Centre for Civil Society one:

*“Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power”* [emphasis added] (LSE, 2004).

This definition retains the same areas of ambiguity that cause the study of the concept many problems, especially when it is taken out of the Western context (Hall, 1995; Seligman, 1995; Solinger, 1995; Baker, 1998; Cox, 1999; Van Til and Ross 2001, Alagappa, 2004; Ma, 2006; Edwards, 2009). The distinctive topography of China’s history, culture, and political arrangements cause the dominant Western approaches to civil society many problems when they are applied (Lu, 2007; Luova, 2011). This has caused some critics to question the validity of a

search for a ‘Chinese civil society’ (see Huang, 1993; Chan, 1997) and others to concentrate on framing the Chinese case as ‘exceptional’ (Brook and Frolic, 1997; Ma 2002, 2006).

Solinger (1995, 92), Van Til and Ross (2001, 122), and Edwards (2005) point out that the foundational civil society theories can be used to support widely differing definitions and it is possible to identify three broad strands of discourse that inform the modern reading of civil society. The first dates back to the Western ‘Enlightenment’ period<sup>19</sup> when thinkers such as Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, and David Hume saw civil society as a way in which to organise society with a greater emphasis on plurality and individual freedom (Hall, 1995; Seligman, 1995, 27; Edwards, 2009). As Calhoun puts it; the emergence of the market economy; new opportunities arising in recently discovered lands; and the questioning of the absolutist and theological ordering of society, “*brought into question the idea of the social order as external to society*” (Calhoun, 1993, 271; Seligman, 1995, 16)<sup>20</sup>. The second strand is focused on Alexis de Tocqueville who stressed the concept of ‘associational mobilisation’ (de Toqueville, 1968; Hall, 1995) and viewed civil society as key to a functioning democracy and a vital bulwark against autocracy (Cox, 1999, 6). For de Tocqueville civil society did not represent any particular set of ideals or values (such as individualism or pluralism), instead, just by existing civil society was an *ideal* to be aspired to (Seligman, 1995; Edwards, 2005). The third strand of discourse is the Marxist perspective which, in complete opposition to the earlier thinkers, views civil society as an individualistic, *fragmentary* force rather than a cohesive one. Marx viewed civil society as an instrument of the ruling classes (Marx, 1978; Hall, 1995; Cox, 1999, 6) and those engaged in civil society were “*separated from other men and from the community ....isolated and withdrawn into themselves*” (Marx, 1978, 41-42). Antonio Gramsci was heavily influenced by Marx although his notion of civil society was “elastic” (Cox, 1999, 4-5), viewing it as a politically *neutral* area that could be potentially utilised to both undermine *and* support a state (Bobbio, 1979; Seligman, 1995).

As shall be detailed in the subsequent sections, it is the Tocquevillian vision of civil society that most influences Western conceptions of civil society today (Berman, 1997; Cox, 1999)<sup>21</sup>. However it is the Marxist vision of civil society, one that is wholly at odds to the

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<sup>19</sup> Concordantly a resurgence of interest in the notion of civil society came in the 1970’s and 80’s, another time of immense social upheaval in which existing structural delineations were contested, broken down and in some cases not rebuilt. In both periods civil society was seen as a way to re-construct society.

<sup>20</sup> These correspond with some of the core processes described by individualisation, and in the Chinese context the ‘contribution of markets’ has been instrumental in the transformation of notions of individuality.

<sup>21</sup> Studies of civil society overwhelmingly concentrate on the Tocquevillian democratic focus (Edwards, 2009), automatically starting from the perspective that civil society is a ‘panacea’, a magic bullet that can burst the bubble of totalitarianism, consolidate democratic values in newly established democracies; and strengthen democratic participation in failing democracies (Juknevicus and Savicka, 2003, 127; Tusalem, 2007, 365). Neo-

Tocquevillian reading, that influenced the Maoist perspective and continues to influence the contemporary Chinese state (Babiuch-Luxmoore, 1994; Brook and Frolic, 2008). This thesis, whilst being informed by both of these two strands, will also contest them. Instead, broadly speaking, it moves towards the concerns of the enlightenment thinkers (the first strand of discourse); questioning “*the idea of the social order as external to society*” and re-arranging society along more individualistic and pluralistic lines. Shifting the focus in this way also helps to circumvent the plethora of other issues that hamper the search for a Tocquevillian-style Chinese civil society.

### **2.4.2. The Search for Civil Society in China**

After the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, Chinese civil society received much attention. Many scholars saw the protests as evidence of a recent growth of Tocquevillian-style anti-autocracy, pro-democracy civil society (see Strand 1990, Gold 1990). Barrett, Su and Xiao (1992) for example, posited that the 1989 Tiananmen incident was part of a growing civil society movement dating back to the late Qing and viewed the communist takeover as a mere detour on China’s long road to democracy. In contrast, sceptics emphasised that the movement lacked cohesiveness and common cause (Chamberlain, 1993). Others identified a change in relations between the individual and the collective behind the movement, that is more in keeping with this dissertation; “*Students and workers alike were now identifying their individual, personal will with the national interest*” (Sullivan, 1990, 136). Since 1989, Chinese non-state organisations have remained heavily regulated and sporadically suppressed but, as many studies point out (e.g. Ma, 2002, 2006; Johnson, 2003; Kuhn and Wu, 2007; Xu and Zhao, 2010), there are growing numbers of organisations and associations that have weak or no connections with the state. Whether these are the roots of a growing civil society in the Western sense, a ‘Chinese-style’ civil society, or are not civil society at all, has been the subject of much debate.

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Tocquevillians, such as the very influential Robert Putnam (1995; 2000), emphasise that a strong civil society generates the social capital, civic association and political awareness that makes for a strong democracy (2000, 19; Ma, 2006, 106) Many studies do support this linkage, and not just in Western societies (see Weigle and Butterfield, 1992; Varshney, 2001; Alagappa, 2004; Karatnycky and Ackerman, 2005). However, the dominant Tocquevillian view of civil society is heavily disputed by those making the Gramscian or Marxist critique (e.g. Linz, 1978; O’Donnell, 1979; Diamond, 1994; Berman, 1997; Bermeo and Nord, 2000; Brysk, 2000; Warren, 2001; Valenzuela, 2004).

## ***Criticisms***

Hall (1995, 7-15) lists five ‘enemies’ of civil society:

- 1) ‘Despotism’: this creates an environment saturated by fear which prevents non-state social groups from coalescing and weakens ‘social trust’.
- 2) ‘Republican civic virtues’: this leads to tendencies towards militarism and authoritarianism.
- 3) ‘Socially-homogenous nationalism’: this leads to an exclusive definition of society and endangers an inclusive civil society.
- 4) ‘Statist ideologies’: “*late development tends to be the enemy of civil society*”.
- 5) ‘Collectivist cultural ideals’: these lack the desire to “*balance the state and to respect individualism*”.

As the following discussion will show; *all* of Hall’s ‘enemies’ have been strong in both traditional and Maoist China<sup>22</sup>. This has understandably produced sceptics of a Chinese civil society.

As many studies show (e.g. Pye, 1991; Bergere, 1997; Brook and Frolic, 1998), in traditional China the dominant positions of the family and the state meant that there were relatively few associations between the family-sphere and the state-sphere. Some studies of 19th century China do emphasise the autonomy of local elites and merchants working outside the direct control of the state (see Rankin, 1993; Rowe, 1993), and others describe non-state business associations, criminal gangs, and secret societies (see Huang, 1993, Des Forges 1997). Huang’s study draws our attention to interaction between the Imperial state and society in his ‘third realm’; often a mediation between the two conducted by local gentry and state officials (1993, 226-228). However, the dominant theme running through most of the descriptions of traditional China is the relative strength of the state and family, and relative weakness of organisations that were non-state and non-family. Indeed some (e.g. Strand, 1990; Wakeman, 1993) stress how even those organisations that could be tentatively described as being part of an ‘autonomous’ civil society, remained strongly influenced by the state.

This relative paucity of non-state, non-familial associations also continued during the Mao-era because the intrinsic conflict between the central foundations of the Maoist state and the

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<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, as has been hinted at, and as will be discussed in the rest of this thesis, all of them are weakening.

defining traits of civil society meant that the two could not co-exist (Babiuch-Luxmoore, 1994, 242; Bergere, 1997; Juknevičius and Savická, 2003, 131). As work by Chen (1997), Guo (2003), and Holbig (2006) shows; civil society (as power, organisation, and information outside of the state structure) would have threatened to contest utilitarian performance and state legitimisation narratives. The Maoist state therefore attempted to eradicate or co-opt formally non-state organisations and, using Habermasian terms, the post-1949 state achieved a degree of ‘stateification’ of society that the Imperial state never achieved (or needed) (Habermas, 1991; Brook and Frolic, 2008). As Guo (2003, 9) describes, under Maoist thinking, distinctions between state and society were blurred and, with the ‘mass-line’ concept, decisions made by the CCP were theoretically by the people and for the people. To autonomously organise and operate outside of the state was therefore effectively being ‘anti-people’. In these circumstances to organise autonomously was to risk persecution by the state and the ‘voluntariness’ of association and action was significantly threatened.

As many studies show (e.g. Ma, 2002, 2006; Brook and Frolic, 2008), since the end of the Mao-era there has been a growing number of ‘non-state’ organisations in China. However, some scholars remain critical of a search for a Chinese civil society, especially those who supported the ‘Asian Values’ debate of the 1990’s. They posited that the Confucianism of Asian countries – with its emphasis on collectivism over individualism, single-party rule over pluralism, and preference for social harmony over individual expression<sup>23</sup> - meant that civil society, as it was identified in the West, was unlikely to take root in Asia (Alagappa, 2004; Cao, 2009; Barr, 2012)<sup>24</sup>. They accused those who searched for ‘civil society’ in China of being ethnocentric: of looking for ‘Western-style’ developments, and also, in doing so, implicitly looking to induce and endorse them (see Ding, 1994; Chan, 1997; Barr, 2012). Chan, writing in 1997, dismisses scholars who search for Chinese civil society as an “*avalanche of lemmings*” (242) implying that civil society and Confucianism cannot co-exist and accuses scholars such as Solinger, Rowe, and Wakeman of being influenced by their “*ideological baggage*” (245-247).

Other scholars have argued that China is unsuitable for a *Western-style* civil society. Wakeman argues that any civil society that emerges in China will be one that remains intricately connected to the state (1993), Frolic uses the term ‘state-led civil society’ (1997, 46-67) and Cooper (2006, 113) talks of a ‘local state associational model’. Many studies emphasise how, in contrast to Ferguson and de Tocqueville’s ‘bottom-up development’ of civil society, the growth

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<sup>23</sup> These issues will be further explored in section 2.5 of this chapter.

<sup>24</sup> This is similar to the arguments of those, such as Samuel Huntington (1996), who doubt that democracy is suitable for traditionally Confucian countries.



of what is often termed ‘civil society’ in China was co-ordinated by the state (Tian, 2004; Hustinx *et al*, 2012). The Social Origins Theory of Salamon *et al* (Salamon and Anheier 1998; Salamon and Sokolowski, 2003) details how socio-cultural differences affect the growth and development of a ‘civil society’. Their theory supports the views of Brook and Frolic (1997b), Ma (2002) and Unger (2008) by characterising China as being ‘state-corporatist’, distinguishing it from the ‘liberal’ or ‘social-democratic’ (or ‘hybrid’ type) models that the foundational civil society theorists (such as de Tocqueville) all studied. As studies by Chen (2001), Ma (2006), Brook and Frolic (2008), Unger (2008) and Simon (2009) points out; contemporary Chinese CSOs remain heavily constricted by state regulations and organisations that have developed from the bottom-up are forced to tie themselves to the big state GONGOs (Ma, 2006, 64).

### ***Dual Civil Society in State-Corporatist China***

Many scholars therefore emphasise not that civil society is inherently unsuitable for China, but warn against universalising the Western-defined, de Tocqueville-inspired, euro-centric definitions of civil society. Madsen (1993, 90), Seligman (1995, 202-203), Baker (1998, 86), and Weigle and Butterfield (1992, 1-2) all stress the importance of recognising the impact of socio-cultural differences and different experiences of modernisation on the development of civil society. Many studies, including Huang, (1993, 225), Lu, (2007, 203), Ma (2006, 9, 46-47), Hsu (2010), and Luova (2011, 773-774), make the important point that a revised reading of Chinese civil society should avoid a conceptualisation of the relationship between civil society and the state as a Tocquevillian binary opposition. These studies stress that Chinese CSOs tend to feel that they are complimenting the state position rather than opposing it<sup>25</sup>.

Nevertheless, within state-corporatist China, and despite strict regulation, there is undoubtedly an increasing number of organisations that have weak or no links to the state (Frolic, 1997; Saich, 2000; Ma, 2002, 2006; Brook and Frolic, 2008; Xu and Zhao, 2010; Spires, 2011). Frolic (1997) draws our attention to a “*dual civil society*” in which a nascent non-state civil society (in the Western sense) co-exists alongside a state-dominated ‘civil society’<sup>26</sup>. Official figures give registered social organisations at more than 400,000 (an increase from just over

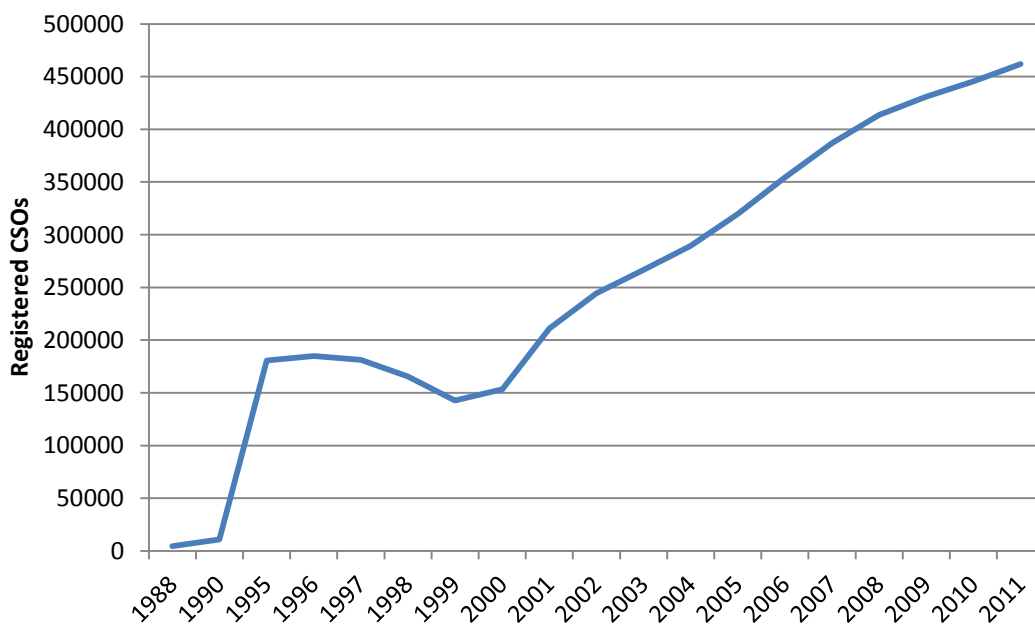
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<sup>25</sup> Although other studies (such as Foster 2001; Saich 2000; Ma 2002; Wu 2002) nevertheless make a Tocquevillian-style democratic link, by showing that even organisations with close state links have the possibility of opening up democratic space.

<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, this thesis will conceive of civil society in China as Frolic’s “*dual civil society*” operating within the state-corporatist model.

150,000 in 2000), but it is widely believed that the actual number of organisations (including un-registered ones) is between 3-4 million (Xu and Zhao, 2010). Whilst statistics for membership are unavailable, total membership of non-state CSOs in China can still be considered to be much lower than for state organisations. However, it can certainly be deemed to be growing in-line with the increase in organisations<sup>27</sup>.

**Figure 1.1. Growth of Registered CSOs in China**



Source: China Statistical Yearbook 2012

As studies by Saich (2000, 131-132), Ma (2006, 71), Holbig (2009) and Xu and Ngai (2011) all point out, the contemporary state’s relationship with this non-state civil society is stretched between two conflicting standpoints: on the one hand it sees the possibility of it filling in the gaps that have been left as the state structure has retracted and society has diversified; on the other hand, it views any non-state organisation as threatening its domination of the political structure and undermining its claims to utilitarian legitimacy. Many studies of this relatively autonomous civil society focus on how the organisation negotiates this complex situation (e.g. Saich, 2000,

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<sup>27</sup> If, for example, it is considered that there are three million unregistered and registered CSOs with weak links to the Chinese state (a relatively conservative estimate) and it is estimated that each organisation has, on average, five volunteers, that still produces a figure of 15 million individuals engaged in civil society; a not inconsiderable total.

125; Zhuang, 2009, 45). Spires (2011) talks about how grassroots CSOs are tolerated in a ‘contingent symbiosis’ whilst Tang (2009) describes how state suppression is guided towards only those organisations engaged in politically sensitive activities. Others (Cooper, 2006; Luova, 2011) stress the importance of not over-emphasising state power, some emphasising the pluralistic attitudes of the local state towards non-state organisations (e.g. Ma, 2006, 6).

Other studies emphasise that it is also important not to under-estimate the power and resources of a contemporary CSO. With the rise of the middle classes<sup>28</sup> there is a growing segment of the Chinese population that has the time and resources to actively participate (Jacka, 2009; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2010; Cheng, 2010). Concordantly this socio-demographic also has an ever greater ability to communicate and mobilise (Tai, 2006; Chiu *et al*, 2012; Hjorth and Arnold, 2012). Some, following Chan’s Asian Values critique, might take the position that this does not matter – that Chinese culture is inherently disinclined to form autonomous associations and engage in anything close to an autonomous civil society. However, the discussion of individualisation above would indicate that this is no longer the case (for significant sections of the population) because substantial value-shifts have taken place in recent years. Furthermore, CSOs also have access to a huge new resource: the internet. Studies of Chinese CSOs’ use of the internet hint at the potential for ‘synergy’ with a modernising society with Yang (2011, 443) concluding that “*It is no longer possible to imagine Chinese citizens and civic groups expressing their opinions or organizing for action without using the internet*”. Studies by Tai (2006), Shi (2012), Kuhn and Wu (2007), Zhang (2009), Shi (2012) Luo (2012), Sullivan and Xie (2009) look at the ways in which CSOs utilise the internet, stressing the widespread uptake of internet resources and the high connectivity of Chinese society. Luo (2012) studies internet NGOs’ that exist primarily on the internet and their utilisation of the internet to interact with society whilst Wang and He (2006) describe how opportunities to engage in online associational activity can turn to physical association.

Furthermore, whilst most studies focus on how Chinese non-state CSOs negotiate the limited space that the state provides, it is important to remember that most organisations are focused on non-politically sensitive activities and are therefore tolerated by the state. These organisations, numbering several million (Spires, 2011), provide Chinese individuals with new social forms and commitments. As other studies emphasise (e.g. Calhoun, 1993, 278; Ma, 2002, 2006) it is therefore important to remember that even within China’s state-dominated civil

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<sup>28</sup> When the word ‘middle-class’ is used in this thesis it refers to a growing, loosely-defined social group that has access to greater education, information, and wealth (Tomba, 2009). Estimates as to the size of this group vary greatly, and depend of course on the measures used to count them (see Li, 2011, 13-17).

society, opportunities to engage in civic association, and thus potentially facilitate the cultivation of new ideals and values, remain. As Saich recognises; the over-emphasis placed on how the state manages to tie down any non-state organisation in a corporatist manner (2000, 124) can sometimes obscure the less obvious relationships that a CSO can form with its peers or with society itself (2000, 140). As Calhoun (1993, 278) says: studies “*commonly focus on the mere presence of institutions outside the realm of the state rather than on the question of how social integration is accomplished and whether those extrastate institutions have substantial capacity to alter patterns of integration or the overall exercise of power*”. Huang (1993, 225) says something similar: “*If we speak of a child only in terms of the influences of its parents, we can easily be drawn into a simplistic argument over which parent's influence was greater. In so doing, we fail to observe what is truly important: growth and changes within the child itself*”. In her 2006 article Cooper writes: “*Just as de Tocqueville notes of American society in 1835, ‘Nothing, in my opinion, is more deserving of our attention than the intellectual and moral associations of America’, so too, in looking at reform-era China, is nothing now more important than a parallel study of the nation’s civic life.*” (134). It is clear therefore that more bottom-up studies of civil society in China are needed. It is also clear that these studies should not focus on searching for a replication of Tocquevillian-style civil society. As the above discussion has aimed to demonstrate, new perspectives are needed that are not tied up with a state vs. non-state dichotomy. One such perspective shifts the angle of study towards the individual, the building block of civil society, and, as the discussion of individualisation above has demonstrated, a unit of organisation that is increasingly self-directed.

## **2.5 Volunteers: The Building Blocks of Civil Society**

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### **2.5.1. Introduction**

Although some larger organisations have a core of paid employees, volunteers form the ‘building blocks’ of civil society (Dekker and Halman, 2003; Deng, 2009; Inglehart 2003; Juknevičius and Savicka, 2003; Hustinx *et al*, 2012). There are two traditional strands of literature that can inform our understanding of volunteering; civil society literature and volunteering literature. Both strands often fail to coalesce (Deng, 2004), as Dekker and Halman (2003, vii) point out: “*although volunteering as a topic of research is far from new, studies that specifically place volunteering in a civil society perspective are more rare*”. Definitions of volunteers will be looked at again in the methodology but will be briefly outlined here. The key aspects of

volunteering are that it is a) non-obligatory, b) unpaid, and c) conducted in order to benefit others, to produce what is sometimes termed a 'public good' (Dekker and Halman, 2003, 1-2; Wilson, 2000, 216). The International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) defines volunteering as: *“work which is undertaken: by choice and from free will, without financial reward, for the benefit of others and the wider community [and] in association with others for a shared goal or purpose”* (IAVE). The inclusion of such nebulous concepts as 'choice', 'free-will', and 'benefits' instantly make the definition problematic (see Cnaan et al 1996; Handy et al, 2000) and these questions are addressed by the volunteering literature in two main approaches. The first is the more subjectivist search for 'motives' that *“assumes a complexity in the constitution of the person while treating the context as background”* (Wilson, 2000, 217-218). The second is a more 'behaviourist' approach that *“assumes that actors are rational and that the decision to volunteer is based largely on a weighing of costs and benefits in the context of varying amounts of individual and social resources”* (Wilson, 2000, 217-218). No all-encompassing theories of volunteering dominate (see Dekker and Halman, 2003; Hodgkinson, 2003), and this dissertation will focus on the first 'subjectivist' approach, whilst not losing sight of the importance of the second.

### **2.5.2. Theories of Volunteering: Why do People Volunteer?**

As Wilson (2000) describes, the subjectivist approach to volunteering is informed by discussions of 'motives' and 'values' (both of which are significantly affected by individualisation). Whilst the measurability of motives and values is disputed by sociologists (Dekker and Halman, 2003; Wilson, 2000, 218) they play an important role in the subjective validation of an individual's actions and commitments (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Fischer & Schaffer, 1993; Broadbridge and Home, 1996, 259). Much of the volunteering literature attributes great importance to values and volunteering (e.g. Sokolowski, 1996; Clary *et al*, 1998), finding that socio-demographic factors cannot explain volunteering alone (Dekker and Halman, 2003, 6; Kearney, 2001, 6). However, as Dekker and Halman, (2003, 4) point out is very difficult to distinguish between types of motives, and values often fail to predict involvement because volunteering takes many different forms and organisations work towards widely different aims (see Wilson & Janoski, 1995; Galston and Levine, 1997; Smith, 1998, 39). Furthermore an over-emphasis on values and motivations can ignore structural (Price, 2002, 126) and cultural (Sundeen & Raskoff, 1995) variables, and also fail to acknowledge how motivations change through engagement with volunteering (Pearce, 1993, 62; Dekker and Halman, 2003, 5). Wilson (2000, 218) concludes that the use of values is flawed but useful as a subjective measure: *“In general, then, values are less important in helping*

*decide who volunteers than in helping decide what volunteering means to the people who do*".

The approach of this dissertation corresponds with Wilson's evaluation.

Human capital is another useful lens to analyse volunteering, with the general finding being that the greater the human capital, the increased likelihood that a person will volunteer (Wilson, 2000; Dekker and Halman, 2003). Many volunteering studies (e.g. Brady *et al* 1995, 285; Herzog and Morgan 1993, 137; McPherson and Rotolo 1996, 181; Sundeen and Raskoff, 1994, 392) emphasise the importance of education and economic resources, and Edwards sees equal access to these as being important in the generation of an egalitarian civil society (Edwards, 2005, 2009). However, studies find that education (Okun & Eisenberg, 1992; Omoto & Snyder, 1993), socio-economic resources (Janoski & Wilson, 1995), and types of work (Stubbings and Humble, 1984; Markham and Bonjean, 1996; Herzog & Morgan 1993, 140; Wilson & Musick, 1997) fail to account for the vast differences in types of voluntary work (Wilson, 2000). On the whole therefore, using human capital to analyse volunteering provides an incomplete and contested picture. As Wilson (2000, 222) notes, it mainly just predicts that higher human capital increases the likelihood that a person will volunteer; it does not show *why* and *how* they do so.

Exchange theory predicts that individuals recognise that the act of volunteering is a two-way exchange and are more likely to stop volunteering if they fail to receive benefits, such as recognition (Field & Johnson, 1993). Studies by Andreoni (1989), Kincade *et al* (1996), Freeman (1997), and Wuthnow (1998, 149) all find that people volunteer because they themselves have benefited from voluntary help or because they predict that they will require it in the future. However, whilst exchange theory certainly sheds light on certain aspects of volunteering, it again provides an incomplete picture. Exchange theory deals with the individual in isolation, ignoring the context and the social environment that they are embedded in (Wilson, 2000, 223), and over-emphasising quantifiable costs and benefits whilst neglecting the less-easily calculable factors (such as social skills) (Brady *et al*, 1995). As both Hart *et al* (1996) and Chambre, (1991) show it also ignores the importance of identity; if a person self-identifies as a 'helpful person' then they may be inclined to enter into an exchange that exchange theory might be less-inclined to view as two-sided.

Finally, many studies show that the greater the size of an individual's social resources (social capital, social networks) the greater the likelihood that an individual will volunteer (McPherson *et al* 1992, 157; Smith, 1994, 255), some (e.g. Wilson & Janoski, 1995; Herzog and Morgan, 1993, 136; Hodgkinson, 2003) emphasising that this is because they are more active members of more organisations. Dekker and Halman (2003, 5) point out that "being asked" is often the main reason that volunteers give for involvement, Midlarsky & Kahana (1994, 219) emphasise the importance of face-to-face interaction, Freeman (1997) describes how people feel

socially pressured to volunteer, and Brady *et al* shows how expansive social ties increase integration and trust (1999, 162). However, solely using social capital to examine volunteering again provides an incomplete picture. Studies show that media (Omoto & Snyder, 1993, 167), family ties (Snyder *et al*, 1999) and religion (Anderson, 1996) are better predictors of involvement for certain types of volunteering than social resources. Although one of the core elements that links volunteering with social capital is ‘trust’ (Wilson, 2000, 225), the level of trust depends on demographic and human capital factors. It can be a *lack* of trust – both interpersonal (Oliver, 1984) and institutional (Kohut, 1998) - that induces people to volunteer. Furthermore, social capital as a predictor of volunteering may also be less useful in analysing civil society in non-Western contexts because the idea of social capital is different (Wagner, 2004, 284; Mustafa, 2005; Xu and Ngai, 2011, 249-250).

### **2.5.3. Volunteering in China: Towards a Socio-Cultural Reading**

It is clear therefore that both subjectivist and behaviourist approaches to volunteering are useful but that volunteering patterns differ significantly across societies and cultures due to social, historical, cultural and economic differences (Dekker and Halman, 2003; Hodgkinson 2003; Wilson, 2000). In his study of volunteering and modernisation Inglehart concludes that “*cultural change seems to play a major role in shaping participation in voluntary associations*” (70). However, as many studies (Salamon and Anheier, 1999; Wilson, 2000; Hustinx *et al*, 2003; Dekker and Halman, 2003) point out, the volunteering theories listed above were mainly developed in, and applied to Western societies. As Hustinx, Handy and Cnaan say “*While many of the theoretical frameworks for volunteering have been developed and empirically tested in the West, our understanding of volunteering in non-Western countries, such as China, is relatively limited*” (2012, 55). Zhuang (2010) echoes this statement, saying that “*research on volunteerism is dominated by Western analyses and there is a paucity for studies concerning Chinese society*”. As Salamon and Anheier (1999, 43) point out, the role of the state significantly affects volunteering and in a recent study, Hustinx *et al* write that “*volunteering in China fundamentally differs from [the] standard definition in that much of the impetus comes from the state*” (2012, 57). Therefore, whilst the volunteering theories discussed above can inform our understanding of Chinese volunteering, they run the risk of failing to account for both the vastly different structural conditions and, most significantly for this study, the different cultural and social understanding of volunteering brought about by its incongruent historical development.

There are an increasing number of studies that look at volunteering outside of the West (e.g. Hodgkinson, 2003; Inglehart, 2003; Salamon and Anheier 1998; Salamon and Sokolowski, 2003) and these can enhance our understanding of the Chinese context by demonstrating the impact of non-Western socio-cultural factors. For example Butcher's study of volunteering in Mexico (2003) shows that even though volunteering is not part of Mexican culture (which Butcher defines as being 'paternalistic'), changing societal attitudes, including increasing levels of 'trust' of civil society organisations and the impacts of globalisation, has led to rising numbers of volunteers. Studies of post-communist countries can particularly help to enhance our understanding. Kuti (1996), Salamon *et al* (1999) and Hodgkinson (2003) all find that in ex-communist Eastern European societies, the association of volunteering with state-directed 'involuntary' volunteering can actually prompt people *not* to volunteer. Voicu and Voicu's study of Romanian volunteering (2003) find that a continued high degree of state control, low levels of education and high levels of poverty are key factors for a weakly developed civil society and low levels of volunteering. Juknevičius and Savická's 2003 study of post-communist Lithuania details the transition from communist-style 'compulsory' volunteering to civil society volunteering, concluding that it is linked to a "*strengthening of civil consciousness*" (2003, 141).

### ***Historical Roots of Volunteering in China***

As Luova (2011, 775) notes, whilst much of the Chinese terminology for volunteering is relatively recent, the core philanthropic aspects of volunteerism have a long history (see also Schwartz, 1985; Fleischer, 2009; Zhuang, 2010). As with societies outside of China, philanthropic action was entwined with the same religious-philosophical ideologies that assigned meaning to all the other acts and choices of the individual (Pye, 1991; Shue, 2006; Ai, 2007). Notions of voluntary action were tied-up with the religious ideas of 'charity' in China, much as they were in the West (Brilliant, 1995; Leung, 1997; Zhuang, 2010). People donated resources (time, energy, possessions) in concordance with the same religious-philosophical thinking that granted the ruler the divine right to authority (Schwartz, 1985; Pye, 1991; Shue, 2006). As Ai (2007) writes, the important Confucian concept of 'yi' (义) depicted the 'civilised' person's moral responsibility to help others and to serve society (166-167). As Luova (2003, 774-775) notes, religion (particularly Buddhism) prescribed the desirability of helping others outside of kinship groups (Luova, 2003, 774-775). Philanthropy was also aligned with the dominant familial focus (Fleischer, 2011) and most often the individual gave help, through a religious intermediary, to those living around them who were usually related or well known to the individual (overseas



Chinese, for example, are famous for donating money to help the communities from which they left). As Xing's 1991 study shows, in China's traditional neighbourhoods (the 'hutongs') community self-help groups called 'linli huzhu' (邻里互助) have a long history of being set up to help locals in need.

In the communist system the only possibility for formal voluntary action was through organisations controlled by the state to pursue aims defined by the state (Bergere, 1997; Juknevičius and Savicka, 2003, 130-31). Mao-era individuals were 'mobilised' to participate in mass activities, explicitly 'voluntary' but implicitly compulsory, with each work-unit selecting individuals to 'volunteer' (Fleischer, 2009; Luova, 2011) in a similar way to the compulsory volunteering in the USSR that Juknevičius and Savicka describe (2003, 131-132). As Luova (2011, 775-776) discusses, 'volunteering' terminology became more widely used with terms such as 'yiwugong' (义务工) and 'zhiyuan gongzuo' (志愿工作) describing the compulsory type of volunteering. As Zhang (1999) and Cheng (2009) show; central to the state promotion of these 'voluntary' acts was the model-citizen figure of Lei Feng who, importantly for this dissertation, not only embodies the Mao-era state perspective on volunteering, but also their perspective on individualism and the individual-society-state relationship.

As Cheng's study (2009, 48-126) describes, Lei Feng became one of the best known 'model' exemplar figures of post-1949 China. Comrade Lei's diary, portraying his selflessness, altruism and devotion to the People and Party (entwined concepts), was 'found', copied, and disseminated (Jacobs, 2012)<sup>29</sup>. Ding (2005) describes how March 5th became 'Learn from Lei Feng Day', when students and workers were detailed to engage in 'voluntary' activities. Zhang's study of Lei Feng (1999, 112-115) shows how he personified the ideal socialist man; fully collectivist, devoting his altruism and sacrifice to the Party. Jacobs (2012) notes how one of Lei's most famous quotes was "*my only ambition is to be a rust-free screw for the great cause of revolution*". This "screw spirit" (螺丝钉精神), calling for collectivist devotion to the indivisible concepts of the Party and 'the People', was concordantly promoted by the state (Cheng, 2009)<sup>30</sup>. Lei's style of volunteering was not an *activist* type; he did not get involved in labour rights, human rights, or environmental action. Instead he mended shoes, helped old people across the road, and gave away train tickets (*CPC Encyclopedia*). Even Lei's death was low-key, dying after being hit by a falling telegraph pole (*CPC Encyclopedia*). Lei Feng therefore

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<sup>29</sup> The truth behind Lei's life and acts are heavily disputed and contribute to the scepticism with which the Lei Feng message is received today.

<sup>30</sup> As Cheng (2009, 76) shows, this 'screw spirit' was similar to Soviet exhortations for individuals to become 'iron nails'.

represents the authoritarian vision of voluntary action; non-political, state-directed, and addressing the small-scale apolitical needs of the people (in this dissertation this will be termed ‘leifengism’). It was therefore not a nation of *activist* volunteers that the Maoist state was promoting but a nation of passive ‘little screws’ (Jacobs, 2012). Furthermore, whilst the importance of the collective remains dominant in the version of Lei Feng presented to society, it was the importance of the greater whole (with the Party at the apex) rather than that of the smaller collectives of a pluralised society (i.e. ‘civil society’). ‘Leifengism’ therefore has very little to do with the dominant Western-style conceptions of civil society or volunteering. The Party saw the promotion of *leifengism* not as a means to empower society, but as a *Gramscian* means to channel societal action into the constituent parts of passive homogeneity.

### ***The Reform-era Volunteer***

As White (1990) shows, in the reform-era mass-mobilisation campaigns remained important (see also Ding, 2005). Some of the old mass organisations were turned into volunteering organisations in which involvement was voluntary (Fleischer, 2009). As Lu (2003) and Pulver (2009) detail, the state has also funded a large expansion of campus-based volunteering groups - primarily focused on environmental work - and in most contemporary surveys university students are usually given as the demographic that volunteers the most in China (Hustinx *et al*, 2012). As Rolandsen (2008) and Zhuang (2010) write, the term ‘zhiyuanzhe’ (志愿者), with its emphasis on individual aspiration, began to emerge in common usage. ‘Volunteering’ – to become a ‘zhiyuanzhe’ - has also become increasingly popular (Wei & Cui, 2011): “*China is experiencing a wave of volunteering. It has become a social trend to volunteer in communities, in schools and in corporations.*” (UNV, 2011, 32)<sup>31</sup>. Recently three large volunteering surges came after the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the 2010 Shanghai Expo, and the 2010 Asian games (Zhuang, 2010).

Total numbers of volunteers are difficult to judge because non-state civil society organisations are excluded from surveys. In some cross-cultural studies China is given as having

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<sup>31</sup> A lot of this is done through the state voluntary organisations although the number of volunteers in non-state organisations is increasing in line with the rapid increase in organisations (UNV, 2011; Wei & Cui, 2011). It is impossible to give a figure for the number of non-state ‘civil society’ *volunteers* because there are no surveys of the total number of registered and unregistered organisations. However, as most of these organisations will rely on volunteer manpower (UNV, 2011) it is safe to assume that the number of civil society volunteers has increased as the number of civil society voluntary organisations has increased.

high levels of volunteering<sup>32</sup>, and this is because of the inclusion of large numbers of government-directed and work-unit volunteers (Dekker and Halman, 2003; Hodgkinson, 2003). The state-directed CCYL reported that in 2008 29.5 million young people volunteered in China through their own programs<sup>33</sup> (Chinaview, 2008), whilst Ding and Jiang's 2001 study claimed that 769.57 million Chinese adults (85.2% of the adult population) 'volunteered' in 2001. However, when compulsory-style volunteering is excluded, volunteering rates plummet; Long (2002) gives a rate of just 11% whilst Li (2003) gives just 4% (figures quoted in Deng, 2009). In Ding and Jiang's survey most respondents did not volunteer frequently and 81.3% said that they were required to 'volunteer' by their work-unit (Fleischer, 2008). Similarly a more recent 2006 survey by the China Youth Development Research Center found that 55.4% of young people surveyed would get involved with volunteering if they were required to do so by their work-unit, but only 11.6% said that they would do so on their own (Fleischer, 2009, 5). Chen and Lin's survey of older volunteers (2002) found that 53% said that a command from the CCP was a necessary pre-condition for them to volunteer whilst only 23% said that a request from a friend was important.

As Deng (2009, 4) points out; contemporary studies of Chinese volunteers are limited, although growing in number, with most Chinese ones focusing on state-directed volunteering and discussions of policy. As studies by Xing and Zhang (2006), Luova (2011, 777), and Hustinx *et al* (2012, 65) show, state policy aims to tie volunteering tightly to the figure of Lei Feng, labelling volunteers '雷锋传人' ('heirs' or 'disciples' of Lei Feng) (see Zhang, 2012). Symbolic of this co-optation was the decision in 1999 to officially re-name the March 5th holiday, previously known as 'Learn from Lei Feng' day, as 'National Volunteers Day' (Ding, 2005). This *leifengist* co-optation of volunteering is entwined with the state's aim to control individualism and voluntary action and association (and more broadly; 'civil society'). In her survey of community volunteer associations Luova (2011, 775) concludes that "*the overall objectives were the maintenance of social stability and the legitimacy of the Party*". As Lam (2006), Shambaugh, (2008), Deng (2009), Jacka (2009), and Tomba (2009) describe, the state's vision of volunteering is contained within its revised legitimation meta-narrative<sup>34</sup> that is based around the ideas of

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<sup>32</sup> In one survey it has a volunteering rate of 77%, compared to just 16% for Japan and 66% for the US (Hodgkinson, 2003, 39).

<sup>33</sup> The CCYL associated China Youth Volunteers (CYV) is by far the biggest voluntary organisation in the country and retains strong links with the Party structure and ideology. It has chapters in most of China's 2000+ higher education institutions and at the end of 2011 had more than 33 million registered members (Xinhua, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> Meta-narratives are discussed in the methodology chapter.

‘*Xiaokang Shehui*’ (‘Moderately well-off Society’, 小康社会), *Hexie Shehui* (‘Harmonious Society’, 和谐社会<sup>35</sup>), *Xiao Zhengfu Da Shehui* (‘Small Government Big Society’, 小政府大社会), and high-*suzhi* (‘quality’, 素质) citizens.

As Tomba (2009), Luova (2011), and Jacka (2009) describe, these concepts are all interconnected: high-*suzhi* citizens are intended to live in harmonious communities (和谐社区) which in turn will be the “strategic spatial units” (The Peoples Daily, quoted in Tomba, 2009) of the harmonious society that will drive the country forward towards the realisation of *Xiaokang* society. Volunteering fits nicely within this framework because, from a state perspective, it ticks many of the right boxes. As Zhang (2012) points out; at a structural level it fills the gaps created by both the retraction of state welfare and a rapidly changing society. As such, it is a fundamental part of the state’s ‘big society’ and recognised by the government to be an important constituent of the *socialisation* of social welfare (Xu and Ngai, 2011). However, the state’s vision of a ‘big society’ is not a Tocquevillian civil society contesting or restraining the power of a smaller state but of a *bigger* society supporting a more efficient, streamlined state through the assumption of state-delegated apolitical roles. At a moral level volunteering is important for the encouragement of collectivist and socialist values, and the fostering of patriotism; high-*suzhi* ideals that are central to the state’s definition of ‘good citizenship’. At an individual level, volunteering is an acceptable outlet for the increasing pluralism and expanding capacity of the 21st century citizen with their steady income, rising standards of living and increasing leisure time<sup>36</sup>.

Therefore, and as many studies such as Wei and Cui (2011) and Xu and Ngai (2011) describe, the idea of volunteering has increasingly been promoted by the state and personally endorsed by recent leaderships (see CRI, 2006; Peoples Daily, 2011)<sup>37</sup>. Most of the few studies of contemporary Chinese volunteerism emphasise the *dominance* of the state in Chinese

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<sup>35</sup> Harmony is a key concept in Confucian thinking, defining the ideal relationship between individuals, state and society (Hsu, 1948). The phrase ‘Harmonious Society’, massively popularised by the state since 2005 (Shambaugh, 2008, 151), emphasises the importance of maintaining proper moral and ethical relations within society whilst economic growth is occurring. In practise, the ‘maintenance of harmony’ has been used to justify the suppression of transgressions resulting from individualisation and pluralisation, famously resulting in the popularisation of the phrase ‘河蟹’ ‘river crabs’ (because it is a homonym of 和谐 (harmony)) to obliquely refer to the state’s ‘harmonising’ efforts.

<sup>36</sup> Furthermore it is also a constructive outlet for the expression of potentially disruptive nationalism. Compare the situation just prior to the Wenchuan earthquake, when nationalism potentially threatened to derail the Beijing Olympics, to the situation after the earthquake; when destructive xenophobic nationalism was turned inwards into compassionate and constructive patriotism (see Bannister, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Chapters 38 and 39 of the most recent Five Year Plan (which began in 2011) dealt with volunteering (and CSOs) and included aims to build a “*comprehensive community service platform*”, and turn 10% of urban residents into community volunteers. From <http://www.britishchamber.cn/content/chinas-twelfth-five-year-plan-2011-2015-full-english-version>.

volunteering. Hustinx *et al* talk of “*state-led volunteering*” (2012, 62) - in a similar way to how civil society theorists such as Frolic (1997) talk of “*state-led civil society*” - and analyse contemporary Chinese volunteerism “*through the lens of theories of post-revolutionary mass mobilization*” (2012, 66). Studies by He (2009), Xu and Ngai (2011), and Xu (2012) also stress the importance of recognising the legacy of Mao-era mass-mobilisation and strict state control when studying contemporary attitudes to social participation.

Another strand of scholarship highlights issues of trust, in a similar way to Kuti (1996), Salamon *et al* (1999) and Hodgkinson (2003) (discussed in the previous section). Chen and Lin (2002), Ren and Liu (2008), and Deng (2009) all point out that the Mao-era legacy of state-directed volunteering has generated scepticism towards volunteering today, leading to low-participation rates once the compulsory aspect of involvement has been lifted. As Deng (2009, 6) notes in his study of ‘crowding out’ and Chinese volunteering after the Wenchuan earthquake: “*the dominance of government and extended family in Chinese society has exacerbated the crowding out effect. The result was the lack of voluntarism and widespread cynicism*”. However, despite this scepticism, as Deng (2009, 4) points out that “*the low volunteering rate should not be inherent to Chinese culture*” and “*social and political background*” are more important. In support of this point, Long’s study (2002) shows that whilst volunteering rates in Shenzhen were just 0.5%, across the border in Hong Kong rates rose to 20%.

As Rolandsen (2008, 102-103) describes, recent Chinese research on volunteering in China has also begun to focus on how the individual can gain from volunteering. Ran *et al*’s study of young Beijing volunteers (2005), Tan’s study of Shenzhen volunteers (2001), and Tan *et al*’s study of volunteering in small-medium sized towns (2002) all focus on the human and social capital issues discussed in the previous section. However, there are also a handful of recent studies that move the focus towards a values-based, subjectivist approach that views volunteering within frameworks of historically-induced social relationships. Fleischer’s small-scale study (2009) explores the recent volunteering phenomenon by looking at motivations in volunteer groups in Guangzhou. He underlines the volunteer’s “*desire to break out of their strict routines, to engage in meaningful activities, to meet and interact with more people, and to contribute to China’s development*” (1). He also emphasises a dynamic and weaker link with government aims, concluding that “*volunteerism is not simply the reflection of a new ‘governmentality’ but an encounter in which the very relationship between state and society is constantly negotiated.*” (1). Similarly, Rolandsen’s 2008 small-scale study of individuals involved with the state-directed China Youth Volunteers emphasises that the political capital that individuals gain through volunteering is a secondary concern. What is more important to the volunteer is being part of a group whilst being recognised as individuals. Both Rolandsen (2008) and Fleischer (2009)

therefore move the site of study away from a behaviourist approach and organisational perspective, and towards a subjectivist approach and an individual perspective that incorporates China's particular historical-social context. In this way (as discussed in the previous section) it "assumes a complexity in the constitution of the person while treating the context as background" (Wilson, 2000, 217-218). It is this approach that this dissertation will take.

## **2.6. Conclusions, Gaps, and Research Questions**

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This chapter has detailed the broad currents of research that cover issues of individualisation, volunteering, and civil society in China. It has shown how the Chinese individual has become increasingly individualised through a progressive dis-embedding from existing social forms and commitments. This causes the individuals relationship with society to shift, resulting in new social alignments, as Yan (2009, 284) writes "*how to interact with individual strangers has become both a feature of the individualizing society and its new challenge*". Individualisation leads to pluralised and dynamic value-sets that "*may indeed collide with the party apparatus, but [...] certainly make sense in the forms and forums of civil society.*" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 161). However, the discussion above has also shown how new forms of association find themselves in opposition to the 'party apparatus' in China. It also showed how volunteering in China has had a very distinctive evolution and whilst also forming the 'building blocks' of Chinese civil society, volunteers also form building blocks in the state-legitimation project. The contemporary state tries to co-opt both the concept of 'volunteering' and non-state organisations that develop from the 'bottom-up'. These organisation are commonly viewed through 'civil society' frameworks that focus on organisational dynamics and get bogged-down in the diametric opposition between state and non-state - Huang's "*simplistic dichotomisation*" (1993, 225) - that is at odds to the Western-originated theories (Ma 2002, 2006; Wong and Jun 2006; Brook and Frolic 2008b; Hustinx *et al*, 2012). However, the above discussion also showed how, although it remains important, state dominance should not be over-emphasised (Luova, 2011, 774) and there are opportunities for society to organise from the bottom-up, and also to engage in new forms of social commitment within the civil society that is tolerated by the state (Saich, 2000; Ma, 2002, 2006; Cooper, 2006).

It has also identified several gaps in the literature and theory. Firstly, the individualisation scholars identify that i) the recognition of individualisation is the first step to a greater understanding of it (see Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 2010; Yan, 2009, 2010a, 2010b), ii) the individualisation thesis has been under-applied to China (Yan, 2009, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2010), and iii) studies of individualisation in non-Western contexts would

substantially develop the understanding of its core processes (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2010, xv). Similarly, many sinologists also make the call for a much-needed reappraisal of Chinese notions of individuality (e.g. Pye, 1991; Yan, 2009). From a civil society perspective, many scholars state that civil society that develops in non-Western contexts needs to be studied more, using new conceptual lenses (Weigle and Butterfield 1992, 1-2; Madsen 1993, 90; Seligman, 1995, 202-203 Baker; 1998, 86). Concordantly, most scholars who analyse Chinese civil society (e.g. Saich, 2000; Cooper, 2006; Lu, 2007; Xu and Ngai, 2011; Hustinx *et al*, 2012) issue the call that new perspectives are needed to enrich its study. From a theoretical perspective, another noteworthy gap is the lack of studies that combine approaches to civil society with approaches to volunteering (Dekker and Halman, 2003; Juknevičius and Savicka, 2003, 128). Similarly, many theorists issue the call that new conceptual approaches to civil society (Weigle and Butterfield 1992; Madsen, 1993; Seligman, 1995; Baker, 1998) and volunteering (Dekker and Halman 2003; Hodgkinson, 2003; Hustinx *et al*, 2012, Wilson, 2000) are needed that take into account cultural, social, and historical differences and disparate experiences of modernisation. Concordantly there is also a lack of research looking at motivations once a volunteer is engaged with an organisation (Dekker and Halman, 2003; Pearce, 1993). Moving back towards China, any casual glance at the small but growing volume of literature on Chinese volunteering makes it apparent that new approaches, and a focus on civil society volunteering rather than state-directed volunteering, would significantly enrich the field.

Following on from the discussion above this study will ask the primary research question: *How have individualisation processes guided and informed involvement in Chinese civil society organisations?* By shifting the focus to the individual volunteer in this way, it will take a subjectivist, values-based approach to volunteering to gain insight into “*what volunteering means to the people who do [it]*” (Wilson, 2000, 218). Individualisation leads to self-constructed value-sets that may orientate the individual away from traditional conceptions of individual ‘responsibility’. As the discussion in the middle part of this chapter aimed to show; values are important at determining levels of volunteering at a societal level and are important as ‘guidelines’ for individual volunteering (Dekker and Halman, 2003, 6-7). Volunteers are therefore sites in which established social commitments are reflected, as Anheier and Salamon state “*volunteering is part of the way societies are organized, how they allocate social responsibilities, and how much engagement and participation they expect from citizens*” (1999, 43). From the perspective of individualisation, volunteers are therefore nexuses in which many of the individualisation processes converge, and in which many of the resultant tensions are dealt with in new ways. As has been shown in this chapter Anheier and Salamon’s ‘social responsibilities’, societal organisation, and expectations of ‘engagement’ and ‘participation’ were

aligned towards the family in traditional China and dominated by the state in the Mao-era. In the Chinese context, civil society volunteers, as vectors of 'help' that are aligned away from both traditional (the family) and Maoist (the state) orientations of values, are at the forefront of redefining new notions of individual-social commitments and in doing so, creating new socialities as well. By looking at volunteers in the post-Mao era, this study is therefore exploring how social relations have been re-aligned, a question that remains unanswered. In this way, this study is also following on from work by Lesley Hustinx, who has applied the individualisation thesis to Western European volunteering (Hustinx and Lammertyn 2000; Hustinx, 2010), finding that *"volunteering is no longer naturally inscribed in collective patterns of behaviour. The decision to volunteer is dependent on personal considerations in the context of highly individualised situations and experiences."* (Hustinx and Meijs, 2011, 8).

As Dekker and Halman, (2003, vii) point out; studies that place volunteers in a civil society perspective are rare. A qualitative study that places Chinese volunteers in a civil society perspective (such as this one) will better incorporate China's particular socio-historiographical context because it will circumvent the traditional civil society theories that have trouble grasping associational life within an 'unreformed' (i.e. non-democratic) political superstructure. In contrast, individualisation *can* occur within an unreformed political system. The 'under-development' of welfare and human rights, both key to the individualisation processes of Western Europe, do not prevent Chinese society from feeling individualisations effects. As Yunxiang Yan concludes: *"it is possible for a society to undergo the individualisation process without political liberalism and classic individualism because this reconfiguration of social relations can be carried out by other mechanisms, as revealed in the Chinese case"* (Yan, 2010b, 508-509). As detailed in this literature review, these 'other mechanisms' (including urbanisation, state-directed economic reform, greater access to information technologies, changes in human and social capital, globalisation, and, as this thesis will argue, the opportunity to associate in new socialities) occur despite the fact that the political system is not democratic, the welfare system is basic, and the rights accorded to the individual fail to offer them adequate protection (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2010, xiii-xx).

From a civil society perspective, this study examines the 'building blocks' of CSOs (Dekker and Halman, 2003; Juknevičius and Savicka, 2003; Hustinx et al, 2012). As has been made clear in this chapter, this focus is not representative of the 'average' act of Chinese volunteering. As discussed in the sections above, state-organised volunteering activities claim a membership of several hundred million (this includes work-unit volunteering) and the largest state voluntary organisation, the CYV, had a membership of 33 million in 2011 (Xinhua, 2011). In contrast, whilst there are no statistics available, the number of individuals engaged in non-state



volunteering must be considerably lower. However, the number of individuals volunteering in non-state organisations will have presumably increased in-line with the rise in organisations, therefore this study can be said to be analysing a growing trend. Furthermore, by focusing on the individual, it explores how the individual negotiates the space provided by the organisation, rather than on how the organisation negotiates the space provided by the state (the focus of most civil society studies). Viewed in this way, CSOs are conceived as spaces for the individualised individual to dis-embed, re-embed, and to express new conceptions of social relations and commitments. The state-CSO relations that so concern many analyses (often Western), may be of mere passing interest to the individual volunteer. What may concern them more are what the organisation can offer the individualised individual: can it enable them to expand their social groups? Can it enable them to express and develop their individuality? Can it allow them to help those that they define as ‘needing help’ in the ways that they define as ‘correct’? This point of departure follows on from studies by Rolandsen (2008) and Fleischer (2009). As Rolandsen’s study of state-directed volunteers shows: “*Today, volunteers in China are individuals who choose to give of their time for their own reasons*” (Rolandsen, 2008, 102). It also builds upon the ‘values’ strain of volunteering theories discussed above; as Dekker and Halman write: “*altruism may be one of those values [that induce a person to volunteer], but so may solidarity, reciprocity, beneficence, injustice, equality and inequality*” (Dekker and Halman, 2003, 6).

This chapter detailed three recent social trends in China; the rise of the individual, the rise of civil society, and the rise of the volunteer. The link between these trends is intriguing (Fleischer, 2009), especially in China with its long tradition of familial-focused collectivism (Hsu 1948; Madge 1974, Tang 2005), its recent experience of state-focused collectivism (Parish and Whyte 1978; Walder, 1986; Lu 2004), and recent narrative of ‘amoral’ rising individualism (Zhuo 2001; Wang 2002; Chandler, 2004). As looked at in section 2.2., although the founding civil society theorists – Ferguson, Smith, and Hume – all tied the idea of individualism to the development of civil society, latter theorists, influenced particularly by de Tocqueville, began to take the view that an over-developed individuality comes at the expense of pro-social attitudes. Indeed, de Tocqueville viewed the individual as inward-facing saying that ‘individualism’ “*disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself*” (1968, 506). For critics like de Tocqueville (a fervent supporter of civil society), the processes that underline the individualisation thesis would therefore be seen as having a *negative* effect on civil society (and society as a whole). Many today, following de Tocqueville, take a similar view; for example interpreting trends of declining donations and volunteering as resulting from increasing individualism (e.g. Bellah *et al* 1985; Putnam 1995;

WVW, 2007). However, whilst the problem of ‘atomisation’ is undoubtedly a tangible one, these assessments are caught up in the neoliberal definition of the individual as purely egotistical and self-serving (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 258-263); and subsequently view voluntary activity as ‘sacrificial’ and aligned solely towards the collective (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 160). The individualisation thesis gives us another perspective, bringing us towards observations made by Wuthnow (1991) that: “*being intensely committed to self-realisation and material pleasure did not seem to be incompatible with doing volunteer work...People who were the most individualized were also the most likely to value doing things to help others*” (1991, 22). In this way, a proper understanding of individualisation, through an exploration of the transformation of relations between the individual and society, serves to provide a more rounded picture of Chinese ‘individualism’.

Lester Salamon famously stated that we are in a “*global associational revolution*” (1994, 37). A further aim of this thesis is to locate the tensions discussed above in the greater global context; linking modernisation with civil society, volunteering, and revised notions of individuality. In this way this thesis is following on from work by Inglehart (1997, 2003) whose cross-cultural work on modernisation and volunteering contests the rising individualism-declining civil society link, especially in non-US contexts. Using the individualisation thesis to study the ways in which the Chinese individual is associating helps to place Chinese modernisation in a comparative perspective; making it easier to locate the numerous similarities that exist between the position of the Chinese individual and the position of the non-Chinese individual; and avoiding the common tendency to over-exceptionalise the Chinese case. The following chapter will detail the theoretical implications of taking the approach that has just been outlined. It will then go on to describe the methods employed to gather the data that was used to answer the research questions.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Introduction

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This chapter will discuss the theoretical and methodological foundations of this study. It will start by detailing the process of theoretical enquiry and the theoretical toolkit that was used. It will then go on to delineate the fieldwork sites and the methods used to collect and analyse data. As Bryman (2008, 537-564) makes clear, generalisation can be a problem with qualitative research when the processes of data analysis are not made explicit by the researcher. Therefore the data sampling, collection, and analysis methods will be fully discussed in this section. The final section will detail the ethical issues that arose during and after the period of data collection. Addressing all of these issues is important for the research to retain relevance and comparability.

### 3.2. Theoretical Approaches

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#### 3.2.1. Initial Enquiries

The broad focus of this research has remained the same from beginning to end: volunteers operating within Chinese civil society. The researcher's initial interest was generated by the conundrum that although civil society and civil society volunteering are relatively new concepts for Chinese society, both are growing<sup>38</sup>. The question that this generated was therefore; what is making the Chinese individual get involved with this new type of activity and organisation? However, the angle with which the author approached this subject has changed considerably and a great deal of reflexivity and iterativeness was involved in the process of research design. As discussed in the previous chapter, the author was eager to move away from the top-down, organisational focus that most studies of Chinese civil society take (see Saich, 2000; Hsu, 2010;

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<sup>38</sup> It was also sparked by the author's first-hand experience of the *social* aftershocks of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. Having been working in China at the time of the earthquake the author was interested to study the localised responses of his colleagues and students i.e. collecting donations. This interest was transformed into a Master's degree dissertation on how the earthquake affected the legitimacy of the state (Bannister, 2009).

Luova, 2011)<sup>39</sup>. The perspective of the individual was what most intrigued the author; examining how the individual fitted into the Chinese civil society puzzle. Looking at it in this way shifts a civil society focus towards how individuals negotiate organisations, not how organisations navigate the state. The author also did not want to look at ‘activists’ because these are unrepresentative of individuals operating in Chinese civil society: for every Chen Guangcheng there are a hundred thousand volunteers quietly working within voluntary organisations (Bannister, 2012). These ‘quieter’ volunteers are gently changing society but also steadily re-defining what it means to be an individual and to associate as an individual.

The author therefore chose to examine the smallest unit of civil society, without which it would not exist: the individual volunteer. However the exact questions and theory that would be used to examine the individual volunteer eluded the author for a long time. Marshall and Rossman (2006, 23-41) say that flexibility should be built into qualitative research and the author accordingly set off on his long period of fieldwork with a flexible research design; a set of rationale for choosing the site and type of organisations (discussed in the next section), and a basic semi-structured interview framework looking to examine subjectivist narratives of volunteering. The interviews were conducted and the data explored for initial codes and themes (this is discussed in section 3.4.) (Bryman, 2008, 544). It was during this initial period of exploration that the processes of individualisation - the importance of the individual in the narratives of volunteering as well as issues of ‘re-embedment’ and ‘disembedment’ – all emerged as prominent themes. After recognising this, the author read more literature on the individualisation thesis and applied the thesis as a conceptual framework to analyse the data that had been generated in the interviews. This study therefore contains both deductive and inductive elements because the researcher embarked with a broad research question that was used to gather the initial data, but the theoretical framework used to analyse the collected data was generated out of the collected data.

### **3.2.2. Individualisation, Constructionism, Identity and Narrative**

The main analytical lens used in this thesis is therefore Beck and Giddens *et al*’s individualisation thesis. It’s core features of ‘disembedment’ (incorporating ‘de-traditionalisation’), ‘re-embedment’, and the emergence of the individual as the creator of their own life course, provides

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<sup>39</sup> This road could have easily been taken: looking at the organisational dynamics of NGOs; their structures, activities, and funding. For example, by comparing their activities in post-Wenchuan China with that of pre-Wenchuan China, and looking for shifts in their level and orientations of activity.

a conceptual framework with which to examine an individual's account of operating in Chinese civil society. As described in the previous chapter; 'dis-embedding' refers to the gradual loss of '*historically prescribed social forms and commitments*'. This results in 'reflexive modernity' in which the individual is left to reflexively construct their own identity in the 'reflexive project of the self'. They experience a limited re-embedding but are largely left to arrange their social relations based on their own self-constructed value sets (Beck, 1992, 1992; Giddens, 1994; Beck and Beck 2002, De Beer and Koster 2009, 53-56). To examine these features this dissertation will refer to issues surrounding 'self-identity' and 'narrative'. For self-identity it primarily uses the work of Anthony Giddens, which is central to the individualisation thesis, and for 'narrative' it is informed by Somers (1994), as well as Bourdieu (1977, 1990) and Giddens (1991a, 1991b). As can be guessed, ontologically this study uses a constructionist perspective to knowledge and the formation of social reality, and epistemologically it uses the position of interpretivism. Approaching the data from these theoretical positions allows for an exploration of the volunteer's construction of self, and the position of volunteering within their 'trajectory of self'. By identifying and analysing the social constructions that they make, and reflecting upon them using the knowledge discussed in the literature review, it is possible to answer the research questions detailed in the previous chapter.

### ***Constructionism, Self-Identity and the DIY Biography***

Constructionism is an ontological position that states that social phenomena, and the meanings that attributed to them, are continuously produced by individuals and groups of individuals (Berger and Luckman, 1971; Bryman, 2008, 19-23); "*Social reality is not separate from us, [...] social realities and ourselves are intimately interwoven as each shapes and is shaped by the other in everyday interactions*" (Cunliffe, 2008, 124). Instead of being conceived as a biological or natural phenomenon, the individual understanding of the issues that are looked at in this thesis – such as self-identity, volunteerism, the 'non-state' - can therefore be viewed as resulting from a combination of history, socio-cultural norms, and individual experience. The related epistemological position of interpretivism emphasises subjective understanding and is therefore concerned with how each individual understands their own actions, and those of the social world around them (Bryman, 2008, 15-18).

The effects of individualisation are focused on subjectivity; with the ways in which an individual interprets the structural changes around them and re-forms their life-course (sometimes referred to by Giddens and others as 'biography'). There is no longer a shared experience of

reality and the identity of each individual no longer comes pre-formed by tradition; as Giddens says: there has been a disruption of ‘ontological security’ (Giddens, 1991). For the individualised individual, meaning is created through the individual’s self-constructed value-sets which give form to what Giddens refers to as a ‘reflexive biography’ (1991b, 75) and Beck and Beck Gernsheim refer to as a ‘do-it-yourself biography’ (2002, 41). The data that was being gathered in this dissertation was focused on this ‘biography’; on how the individuals “*put together the pieces of life’s jigsaw*” (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007, 7). Specifically it was focused on how the interviewee’s put together the pieces of their volunteering ‘jigsaw’. Through the interviewee’s construction of a narrative of their own volunteering experience, the researcher could use an interpretivist epistemological position to understand volunteering through the interpretations of its participants. In this way the different trajectories of each interviewee’s interpretation of their volunteering experiences could be plotted against one another. To complement this data there was also an ethnographic participant observation element to the study in that the researcher personally took part in many different volunteering activities as a means to both meet potential interviewees and gatekeepers, and to personally experience the processes of volunteering (this informs the case studies and proved particularly enlightening for discussing the ‘feedback groups’ examined in chapter seven).

As discussed in the previous chapter, reflexivity (in the sense of ‘going back on itself’), is a core part of the individualisation process and the resultant shift towards the individual construction of biography (Beck, 1994). Giddens describes something called the ‘reflexive project of the self’ (Giddens, 1991) that is part of a broader trend towards the academic re-visualisation of individual identity. The traditional view of an individual’s identity is that it is fixed and consistent (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005), as Potter and Wetherell (1987, 95) describe: “*an entity and, like any other entity or natural physical object, it can be described definitively once and for all*”. However this conception has been challenged over the past few decades so that it is now increasingly common to view self-identity as fluid and constructed largely by the individual (Potter and Wetherell 1987, 102), as Berger and Luckman state; “*man constructs his own nature ... man produces himself*” (1971, 66-67).

In individualisation’s ‘reflexive modernity’, identity is increasingly no longer prescribed by tradition, and it is left to the individual to assign meaning and values to objects, actions, and choices within their biography (Giddens, 1994). Therefore Giddens’ approach to self-identity, whilst not ignoring the importance of structure and agency in the ‘trajectory of the self’ (1991a, 7), brings the focus onto the individual’s own conceptions of their influence. Life-choices are no longer clearly delineated in neat linear progressions of childhood, education, work, family, and retirement. Construction of identity is also a temporal and fractured process; the self is developed

over time, (Giddens, 1991b, 75); “ *constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions*” (Hall 1996, 4). Concordantly, there is also an element of ‘self-improvement’, a desire to be ‘recognised’ by others, a theme that will be looked at throughout this thesis (Calhoun, 1994, 20). At the same time, increased ‘responsibility’ is placed on the individual, as Giddens states; the self is “*a reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible... We are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves*” (Giddens 1991b, 75). Involvement and action within a CSO therefore contributes to this process of identity formation because an individual’s actions and their conceptions of their own identity are conceived as being in a generative, symbiotic relationship; actions developing identity, and identity producing actions.

## ***Narratives***

As work by Bourdieu and others describes; narratives can be understood as frameworks that aim to produce a coherent understanding and organisation of experiences (Bourdieu 1977, 86; Somers 1994, 617; Taylor, 1989, 51). From the individualisation perspective a narrative-understanding informs and guides an individual’s future actions and the way in which they conceive their past actions and the actions of others (Bourdieu, 1990, 67). Narrative-understanding produces symbols and metaphors - that Bourdieu terms ‘symbolic capital’ (1990, 112-121) - that justify the selection of one narrative over another. In the reflexive project of ‘the self’ described in the above section, identity therefore becomes based around the maintenance of a coherent biographical ‘narrative’ that is continuously revised as value-sets fluctuate and new choices are made (Giddens 1991b, 5).

Somers (1994, 617-619) lists four kinds of narratives that play a role in the construction of identity; ‘ontological’, ‘public’, ‘meta-’, and ‘conceptual’. Ontological narratives are related to Giddens’ ‘reflexive project of the self’ that is described above; “*ontological narratives are used to define who we are; this in turn can be a precondition for knowing what to do*” (Somers, 1994, 618). Alongside these are ‘public narratives’ that are “*cultural or institutional formations larger than the single individual*” (Somers, 1994, 619). In the context of this study these refer to narratives attached to a social category such as a ‘volunteer’, or even to larger formations such as being ‘Chinese’. An individual positions their ontological narrative within certain ‘public narratives’ in order to locate their relationship with the others around them. In this study the civil society organisations provided the interviewees with the public narrative of being a volunteer, or a member of a CSO. Somers’ third narrative is the ‘meta-narrative’, which is a “*master-*

*narrative*” that encodes theories and concepts. Some of the examples that Somers gives of these are “*communism vs. capitalism*”, “*the individual vs. society*”, and “*modernisation*” (1994, 619). These three examples appear as ‘meta-narratives’ throughout this thesis, as do others such as ‘Confucianism’, ‘East vs. West’, ‘state vs. non-state’, as well as the narrative employed by the Chinese state to refashion their legitimation. Somers’ fourth narrative is the ‘conceptual narrative’ which is the framework that the social researcher uses to place the first three narratives in relation to one another, for example by using terms such as ‘actor’, ‘society’ and ‘culture’ (1994, 620).

### ***Some Limitations of the Qualitative Approach***<sup>40</sup>

The ‘conceptual narrative’ described above is of course informed by the background of the researcher. The issue of bias, or ‘positionality’ - the researcher’s socio-cultural background, political orientation, and preconceived attitudes towards the subject they are researching – was therefore a potential issue that affected this study (Marshall and Rossman, 2006, 30). The researcher in this study was not from a similar ethnic or cultural background to those being researched (although he was of a similar age to most of the interviewees, which is arguably just as important, especially in the individualisation context). However, having similarities - ethnic, cultural, demographic - with the researched does not necessarily prove to be an advantage in qualitative research (see Parker, 1995) Indeed it can also be seen to create its own bias because it can cause the researched to assume a fixed identity (see Francis and Archer, 2005). Bias is also a product of prior experience of the subject and this ‘background knowledge’ is usually viewed as beneficial and often seen as essential for qualitative research.

The view of the author is that bias should be recognised but is ultimately unavoidable in any qualitative research. Indeed, all of the dimensions surrounding any interface between researched and researcher affect the interaction itself (i.e. time, setting, weather etc). Therefore the way in which ‘bias’ affects the researchers qualitative analysis should not fatally detract from the value of the analysis; it is merely another area of ‘bias’ affecting the way in which an observation is eventually related to a reader (see Bryman, 2008, 130-133 for a discussion of political bias). Issues surrounding the ‘presentation of the researcher’ were also a potentially important issue in the interviewing process. As DeWalt and DeWalt put it: “*if the researcher expects informants to tell the truth, at least as they see it, the researcher must also be prepared to tell the truth*” (2002, 40). As such, throughout the course of this study the author never knowingly

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<sup>40</sup> Other limitations are discussed in the rest of this chapter and also in the concluding chapter.



misled the informants at any times and also emphasised the point that anonymity would be maintained. This hopefully not only allayed any fears but also kept informants behaviour as 'normal' as possible.

This study is constructed around qualitative data that demonstrates each individual volunteer's subjective understanding and representation (during the interview) of their volunteering experience. Not only might there be significant gaps between the subjective perception of events and 'what actually happened' but there may also be a tendency towards underplaying the importance of structure in the interviewees' biographies (Brannen and Nilsen 2005, 423; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007, 7). Therefore, whilst focusing on the individual's actions and conceptions of those actions, this thesis aims to fully recognise that they take place within frameworks of social relationships and practices (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007, 6-7). As such this thesis will devote a large amount of time (a non-China specialist may wrongly conceive of it as an excessive amount of time) to analysing the role of the Chinese state, especially its discourse on individualism, collectivism, volunteering and civil society. As was made clear in the literature review, the role of the Chinese state is significant in all three areas of individualisation, volunteering and civil society, and therefore its influence in this study cannot be ignored.

### **3.3. The Sites of Enquiry**

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#### **3.3.1. Rationale for Choice of Site**

Having determined *what* to study the question turned to *where*? It is not proposed that the individualisation processes occur evenly within a society, in the same way that they do not occur equally across transnational society. They are expected to progress quicker in urban environments and in younger generations because, as discussed in the literature review, urban ways of living and the experiences of the younger generations hyper-accentuate many of the core dis-embedment processes. Whilst this study did not set out to specifically analyse individualisation processes, the original rationale for the choice of site was informed by the understanding that a) civil society is expected to grow more quickly in urban areas (Ma, 2002, 2006), and b) for the ease of data-collection the city provides a well-delineated unit of analysis. It was therefore decided to limit this study to one urban area. In China there are different types of urban area: first-tier cities, second-tier cities, third tier cities, and towns (CNBC, 2011). It was decided by the author not to choose a first-tier city (generally considered to be Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen) as these (in the researcher's opinion) are somewhat over studied. For ease of

access and greater potential access to more civil society organisations it was decided to choose a second-tier city, which (although there is no firm definition, see CNBC, 2011) is generally considered to be a provincial level city. The exact second-tier city - one in southwest China<sup>41</sup> - was chosen because the author had both prior experience of it and already-established CSO contacts within it.

Therefore, and in common with most qualitative research, this study cannot claim to provide a statistically representative sample of the (very large and diverse) Chinese population. It looks at a small sample of fifty volunteers from a single second-tier city in southwest China. Regional differences give cultural and ethnic variations to the demographic topography of China. There are also differences that affect civil society volunteering as well. The depth of civil society organisations is unequal, as provincial and local governments across China have different policies that alter their potential for growth (see Cooper, 2006; Ma, 2006, 6). Similarly, local governments also have different approaches to the promotion of state-directed volunteering that is discussed in chapter four. Furthermore, as discussed in the literature review, most Chinese volunteers are those that volunteer for state organisations. It could also be argued that large events, in particular the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake (discussed in chapter six), may have had stronger psychological effects on volunteers in the southwest of China because of its closer geographical proximity.

However, in defence of the rationale for the selection of the sites of enquiry, it is important to remember that since the reform-era began China has experienced rapid urbanisation. In 1976 only one-in-five individuals lived in a city; by the end of 2011 more individuals lived in cities than in rural areas (WSJ, 2012). Most of these urbanites live in second and third tier cities (CNBC, 2011). Furthermore, most volunteers in China are young adults, with most having first got involved at university (Hustinx *et al*, 2012) and urban Chinese are both anecdotally and theoretically the most likely to get involved with CSOs (Wilson 2000; Cooper 2006; Lo *et al* 2008; Edwards 2009; Fleischer, 2009). The depth of CSOs in China is also more likely to be greater in urban areas (Ma, 2002, 2006). Therefore whilst this study does not in any way claim to be representative of the whole of China, and particularly not rural China, it has examined an area (urban) and demographic (predominantly post-80's generation young adults) that represent the strongest receivers of the individualisation process<sup>42</sup> and, according to the limited data available, are statistically most likely to volunteer and become involved in civil society. With this

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<sup>41</sup> The name of the city will not be disclosed to provide maximum protection of anonymity for the participants in this study.

<sup>42</sup> Du Bois Reymond 1998; Furlong and Cartmel (2007, 7) and Lash and Urry (1994) all point out that the individualisation processes are most concentrated in those with more socio-cultural advantages; du Bois Reymond (1998) calls them 'trendsetters' and Lash and Urry call them 'reflexive winners' (1994, 143).

knowledge in mind, it can therefore be said to be a study of a growing trend of urbanites engaging in volunteering and involving themselves in civil society and also of individuals that are at the advance end of the individualisation processes.

### 3.3.2. Rationale for Choice of Organisations

Having chosen the city, the question then turned to; which organisations to select to search for potential interviewees? As discussed in the literature review, it is clear that how to define and delineate Chinese ‘civil society’ is extremely difficult (this is one of the primary reasons why it was decided to focus on individuals instead of organisations). In China, as in every context, a unique set of factors impact the delineation of the constitution of organisations and associations, although how to define ‘civil society’ is made more difficult because of the level of state involvement.

According to Yaziji and Doh, the alignment of NGOs can be roughly split up by activity; ‘service’ or ‘advocacy’, and beneficiary; ‘self’ and ‘others’ (Yaziji and Doh, 2009). According to Cousins they can also be divided up into four levels of operation; ‘community-based’, ‘city-wide’, ‘national’ and ‘international’ (Cousins, 1991). Cooper (2006, 121-123) identifies five different types of *Chinese* NGOs. Firstly there are the big state-dominated GONGOs such as the CCYL or the ACWF (All-China Women’s Federation) which have a very low level of autonomy. These organisations are relics of the Mao-era and now form the umbrella-‘NGOs’ that are supposed to regulate all the other NGOs in China. The second type is a semi-GONGO which often work closely with state organisations but have a higher level of dynamism and autonomy (although their funding comes chiefly through the umbrella organisation). The third type is the ‘business-NGO’, which has registered as a for-profit organisation to avoid the more difficult and more-stifling route of registering as a non-profit organisation. Although this may be an easier route it also means that it will have to pay taxes and that its operations will be subject to the normal regulations involving business operations. The fourth type of NGO is the ‘working NGO’, which is registered as a not-for profit organisation. These types of NGO are often reliant on international funding. The last type of NGO that Cooper identifies is the ‘underground NGO’ which is not legally registered and is therefore more of a network of ‘like-minded individuals’. As it is not registered it is unable to legally acquire funds.

The line between state and non-state in China is therefore more blurred than it is in other contexts. As already stated; the LSE definition of civil society is broad enough to incorporate this ambiguity; *“the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and*

*institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power*” [emphasis added] (LSE, 2004). As discussed in the literature review, whilst the ambiguities of definition undermine many civil society studies, they have less of an impact on this study because it is not a study of organisations. Instead, the individual is the site of study, voluntary action is the focus, and it is the individual’s *perceptions* of the relationships between state and CSO that matter most. Nevertheless, suitable organisations still had to be chosen. In China the largest voluntary organisations are those dominated by the state (Cooper’s first ‘type’); the biggest one by far is the China Youth Volunteers (as studied by Rolandsen, 2008). As the focus of this study was on *civil society* volunteers, organisations were chosen that were not these national GONGOs, instead looking at one’s that had little or no connection with the state; Cooper’s fourth, and fifth ‘types’.

In sum, the following boundaries were used to delineate the organisations that were selected to be the source of the interviewees:

- 1) The LSE definition of civil society was used to determine which organisations to look for because it recognises the ‘blurring of boundaries’, making it suitably inclusive to use in a study of China.
- 2) The CSOs that were chosen were small-scale volunteer organisations, either registered as not-for profit organisations or unregistered (Coopers’ fourth and fifth types).

Having entered China with this framework, suitable organisations were gradually (and reflexively) selected that fitted the above delineations. A total of thirteen organisations were encountered in this study and the details of these organisations are included in appendix 11.2. At least two volunteers were selected from each organisation. Two volunteers were also from a high school organisation that was not profiled. Fifteen of the interviewees were involved with multiple organisations; several of these were involved with two or more of the organisations that were profiled, others were involved with an organisation (or organisations) that were profiled as well as with an organisation (or organisations) that was not profiled.

Sampling a relatively large number of volunteers (for a qualitative study) from a relatively large number of organisations was an active strategy. As already stated; the individual volunteer was the focus of this study. Whilst the specifics of the organisation were not ignored, having a sample from different organisations that worked in different fields, enabled the researcher to compare and contrast the motivations and experience of a volunteer working in, for example, an environmental organisation, with one working in an organisation that helped the elderly. It also helped to plot the trajectories of those volunteers who were engaged in multiple organisations; looking at how ‘flow’ developed between organisations. In this way it allowed the

researcher to discover the trends that are looked at in the last couple of analysis chapters; such as the ‘lifestyle volunteer’. For the lifestyle volunteer it was not the alignment of the organisation that was important but the space that the organisation provides. Indeed, as discussed in chapter seven, many of the interviewees said that they would be happy to get involved in CSOs working in vastly *disparate* fields. For many of the volunteers it wasn’t the field that mattered, it was the opportunity to become a ‘volunteer’. It was the act of volunteering - enabling the individual to disembed, ‘re-embed’, and develop the ‘reflexive project of the self’ – that was more important than the alignment of the organisation. Viewed through the individualisation lens, the alignment of the organisation is not as important as the opportunities, processes, and spaces that the organisation provides the individual.

### **3.3.3. Rationale for Choice of Individuals**

Having chosen suitable organisations, how were suitable ‘volunteers’ selected? The International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) describes volunteering as: “*work which is undertaken: by choice and from free will, without financial reward, for the benefit of others and the wider community [and] in association with others for a shared goal or purpose*” (IAVE). As discussed in the literature review, aspects of this definition generate ambiguity; how do you detect ‘free-will’? Is it a ‘financial reward’ if the indirect benefits of volunteering are to improve your CV and thus gain a more highly paid job? What exactly is the ‘wider community’? And how do you know that the ‘goal or purpose’ is really ‘shared’ between volunteers? In order to clarify matters it is important to differentiate between formal and informal volunteers. Formal volunteers work through an organisation, whether it is a small CSO, a large CSO, or even the volunteering side of a big corporate entity. Informal volunteers engage in acts of reciprocal help between individuals in a community (Wilson, 2000; Dekker and Halman, 2003; IAVE). This study focus entirely on ‘formal’ volunteers. Another issue to consider was that in many CSOs there are paid members who form the core of the CSO management. In this study it was decided to interview ‘ordinary’ un-paid volunteers – the ‘ground-troops’ - and these form the vast majority of the sample. As the interviewing process went on the researcher also decided that it would be beneficial to interview a small number of paid (both full and part-time) staff as well as those engaged in internships, in order to gain their perspectives as well (these individuals are marked in appendix 11.1).

Furthermore, another aspect to consider in the sampling process was that the degree of volunteer activity can be highly variable (Wilson, 2000; Dekker and Halman, 2003). Some volunteers may volunteer once a month, once a week, or give an hour every day to work for the CSO. Some volunteers may spend more time working for a CSO than they do for their paid job.

Others may work so occasionally at the CSO that they are only on the periphery of the volunteer work-force. For this study it was decided to aim to interview volunteers that were at varying stages of commitment; some who had just started volunteering, others who did it intermittently, and some who had dedicated a large part of their life to volunteering. This psychological and temporal variation of commitment enriched the data because it meant that young, inexperienced volunteers, with fresh recollections of initial motivations, could be compared with older, experienced volunteers, whose motivations and values may have been transformed through the experience of volunteering.

In light of the discussions above; the defining characteristics of a ‘volunteer’ for the purposes of this study were:

- Their nationality was PRC Chinese.
- They contributed to the activity of an organisation (that fits the definition detailed in the previous section).
- They were un-paid.
- They had ‘voluntarily’ become involved with the organisation.
- They volunteered ‘formally’.

## **3.4. Data Collection**

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### **3.4.1. Sampling Technique**

This study uses information from in-depth interviews conducted with fifty volunteers and volunteer co-ordinators. The method that was used to select interviewees was the ‘snowballing’ technique, which allowed the author to gain awareness of potential participants in a linear progression from the initial gatekeepers. It was also flexible enough to respond to developments as they emerged, which maximised the efficiency and effectiveness of the interviewing process. As theorists, such as Taylor and Bogdan (1984, 17), constantly point out, it is important to successfully react to unanticipated turns during the research. Furthermore, as Marshall and Rossman emphasise (2006); building flexibility into the research plan is also of great importance. As discussed above, this study aimed to get a purposive sample of CSO volunteers who were urban, predominantly young adults. However, during the process of the data collection it was decided that a number of older interviewees should also be selected in order to provide an

interesting contrast with the younger sample (the details of these individuals are included in appendix 11.1).

Initially a provisional target of thirty interviews was set but the process of selecting interviewees was iterative and the collected data was constantly reviewed for ‘initial codes’ (Charmaz, 2006). Eventually a total of fifty formal interviews with volunteers and volunteer organisers were achieved as this was the point where the researcher deemed that the collected data had reached a saturation point (Bryman, 2008, 542). In total there were twenty-nine females and twenty one males<sup>43</sup>. Three were of high-school age, eighteen were aged 18-22, twenty-one were aged 22-30, and eight were aged above 30. Occupationally; three were at high school, eighteen were currently at university, and twenty-nine were in full or part-time employment. All of them were involved with at least one CSO, although some of them had multiple roles and some belonged to multiple organisations.

The sample technique therefore resulted in an unintended gender bias<sup>44</sup>. The author cannot say whether this is representative of the broader civil society volunteering picture in China (surveys of Chinese volunteers, all of which focus on state-directed volunteering, show a roughly equal male/female ratio, e.g. Ding, 2005). Although through participant observation and personal experience the researcher can state all of the CSOs that were surveyed did appear to have a higher ratio of women involved. However it was probably more likely that the gender bias was a result of the snowballing sampling technique.

### **3.4.2. Gaining Access**

Gaining access to the target-group of the study was the most important first-step of the data-collection. Going about this in the ‘right-way’ proved to have innumerable advantages as the period of fieldwork continued. The permission of each CSO leader was gained before getting involved with each group, and the verbal consent of each individual interviewee was gained before interviewing<sup>45</sup>. A good relationship with both the organisation and the individuals being researched was crucial in facilitating both the immediate research and the ‘snowballing’ process (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998, 45). As such, every effort to ‘fit-in’ and be as in-obtrusive as possible was made, and the author made efforts to find common ground with each interviewee by

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<sup>43</sup> The demographic and biographical information of each individual is listed in appendix 11.1.

<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, as Brannan and Nilsen (2005, 413) point out, ‘gender’ differences are not seen to be important in the individualisation thesis.

<sup>45</sup> A form was handed out to each individual which made clear the ways in which the data would be handled, and emphasised the voluntariness of the participation.

emphasising his personal experience as a fellow volunteer (UREC). In allowing the researcher to conduct their observations each organisation facilitated a crucial part of this study and each group was offered full access to the findings of the research and any potential benefits or recommendations derived from those findings. Furthermore, the researchers own help was offered to each group and individual interviewee in exchange for co-operation (where appropriate). Overall, a good relationship with each of the organisations and individuals involved in the study was achieved and contact was maintained long after the fieldwork period had ended, facilitating easy follow-up communication to clarify certain points.

### **3.4.3. Collecting the Interview Data**

The main part of the data was collected through the use of an in-depth semi-structured interview (included as appendix 11.3). Employing this technique allowed the interviewee to fully express themselves in a near-natural form whilst the fluid structure avoided the problem of inflexibility found in a fully-structured interview. The ‘three-phase’ interview technique was used to further improve the fluidity and continuity of the interview and allowed the interviewee to steadily condense their thinking down to the core elements of the issues being discussed (see Bryman, 2008, 435-445). It included primary questions to guide the interview and ‘probe questions’ to prompt a fuller response. The same questions were used in all of the interviews in order to standardise the collected data and allow comparability. The relative lack of structure allowed the author to respond to the interviewee, and also gave the interviewee great opportunity to respond to the questions using ‘natural’ and full answers.

One disadvantage of the face-to-face interview is that the data collected is very sensitive to the environment that the interview takes place in (Bryman, 2008, 440-445). Furthermore, the interviews were carried out at one particular time in one particular place, and were between thirty minutes to an hour in length. How an individual chooses to answer the questions on the day of the interview and within this limited time-frame clearly affects their answers. The majority of the interviews in this study were conducted face-to-face in a public establishment decided upon in advance. Most of them were done in a café or a tea-house, in an area and at a time in which the establishment was not crowded with people. Several interviews were conducted in the private office space of the interviewee at their request. This should minimise the degree to which both the interviewer’s questions and the interviewee’s answers were affected by pressure from other individuals around them. Through following the points discussed above, the author therefore considers that despite limitations, by analysing the way in which a sample of fifty interviewees



chose to detail their biographies at the time of the interview, this study gained useful insight into the interviewee's volunteering experience.

#### **3.4.4. Analysing the Interview Data**

The interview data that was collected was analysed in an iterative and reflexive process that began during the fieldwork period itself. Two core methods were used to analyse the data: narrative analysis and thematic content analysis. Narrative analysis was used in the first phase of scrutinising the data, with the aim to reproduce the interviewee's 'ontological narrative', as discussed in section 3.2. In this way the interview transcript was seen as a linear progression of "*sequence and consequence*" (Riessman and Quinney, 2005, 394). This produced a 'story-like' account of how the interviewee conceived their volunteering experience, enriching the analysis of their volunteering trajectory by contextualising each of their answers to the interview questions. In this way the author aimed to retain the narrative flow of each interview by avoiding a 'fragmentation' of data through a loss of context (Bryman, 2008, 553). These narratives later informed the thematic analysis and appear individually in the thesis as the 'case-studies' which appear in each chapter to illustrate the thematic discussions.

The second phase of exploring the data used thematic content analysis which is "*a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data*" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 79). This was the main method used and resulted in the structuring of this thesis; each chapter addressing one of the main broad 'themes' that were identified. There are no fixed methods associated with thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 77; Bryman, 2008, 554-555) and for this study the coding process that was used to identify the themes was informed by different techniques, including those used in grounded theory content analysis. The first few recordings were listened to in order to re-gain familiarity with the content. 'Initial coding' was generated from these early analyses (Charmaz, 2006) which produced many new codes based on "*concepts, categories and properties*" (Bryman, 2008, 544). After enough interviews had been initially analysed, the coding process then turned to indexing the data based around broader 'themes' which had been identified as key strains of discourse that ran through the first batches of interviews. In this way the initial coding was turned into 'focused coding' which required "*decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorise your data incisively and completely*" (Charmaz, 2006, 57-58).

Using these core themes a focused coding template was created to use for all of the recordings (Mason 2005, 154-161). In this way the coding was done iteratively so that the "*researcher's interpretations of data shape[d] his or her emergent codes*" (Charmaz, 2000, 515).

Using this coding template, every interview was analysed several times (a minimum of three times for each recording) so that the new codes that occurred were applied to the whole set of data. This process continued until further reviewing was deemed to be unnecessary (Bryman, 2008, 542). Thoughts and ideas were also recorded on each of the interviewee's coding templates, including those notes that had been made during the interview itself, as well as qualitative 'impressions' of each recording.

### **3.4.5. Secondary Data and Participant Observation**

Alongside the interview data, there was also an ethnographic participant observation element to this study, as well as secondary data analysis. The author of this study personally took part in many volunteering activities during the course of the 2010-2012 fieldwork period (see Bannister, 2012 for an ethnographic account of one experience). This not only facilitated access to gatekeepers, identification of potential interviewees, and gaining trust from organisational leaders, it also greatly enriched the collection of interview data by enabling the researcher to gain "*a foothold in social reality*" (Bryman, 2008 465). Through experiencing the activities of the volunteers first-hand, the researcher was better informed. Although the researcher had extensive experience working with CSOs, this was mainly in the UK. Gaining extensive experience in Chinese CSOs, especially in the initial stages of the data collection, enabled the researcher to ask more informed questions in the interview, and better contextualise the answers when analysing the interview data.

In order to further enrich the data collected through the interviews, secondary data was also collected. A significant part of this was the methods that the CSO used to communicate to the volunteer its objectives: pamphlets, brochures, leaflets, websites, and social media. Another noteworthy part was the communication methods that the volunteers used to communicate with the organisation, with each other and with non-volunteers. Much of this consisted of data generated from the social-media platforms used by the groups, primarily QQ and Weibo. This data has been included in the dissertation in the form of descriptive text or inserted into the thesis as screenshots or photos. Another significant batch of secondary data consisted of speeches and policy documents that were gathered to illustrate the state narrative. This data was used mainly in chapter four.

## **3.5. Ethical Considerations**

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Ethical concerns were important to consider in designing this research. The particular position of the foreign researcher in China and the sensitivities surrounding civil society study meant that special considerations had to be made with regards to protecting the interviewees, organisations and the researcher. This research gained approval through the University of Sheffield's Research Ethics Committee after submitting an ethics review that was based around the discussions below.

### ***Cross-cultural concerns***

Cross-cultural communication can prove problematic for gaining the consent of participants in qualitative research. As the ESRC says: "*In cases of international research or work that relates to non-majority culture, the conventional meaning of informed consent may be problematic*" [emphasis in original] (ESRC, 2012). It was considered that both the language skills and the prior-experience of living in China meant that the author of this research was able to effectively carry out the fieldwork and that cross-cultural concerns did not become an ethical issue. All the interviews were conducted in mandarin Chinese and the researcher made sure to phrase issues of 'consent' and 'permission' carefully so that the research retained its ethical purity.

### ***Anonymity and Data protection***

The University of Sheffield guidelines state that "*Wherever possible data should be collected, stored or handled in anonymous form*" (UREC). This study followed this rule strictly, at no point recording the personal details of the participant (exact age, name, address). In the writing of this thesis the author was careful to also anonymise the names of the CSOs by restricting the detail given about them. Code names were given to all of the organisations and informants used in this study to ensure that a maximum degree of confidentiality and anonymity was maintained throughout. Audio-recording equipment was used to record the interview data, and consent was always gained from the interviewee to record their interview (all of the interviewees consented). The author was also careful to store the interview recordings in anonymised form and to back-up the files in a careful manner.

### ***Transparency***

The author of this study was careful not to mislead participants regarding research objectives and it was ensured that all participants were fully aware of the aims of the research and the way in which the data they provided would be used. The aims and objectives of the study were carefully outlined to each participant and information was provided to them about the author's position and institution. The ESRC guidelines state that "*There should be no coercion of research subjects to participate in the research. Consent has to be freely given in order to be valid*" (ESRC, 2012: 25). The researcher followed this maxim and obtained the proper, and freely given, consent of each leader of the CSOs and each of the individual participants. This was done through gaining the interviewee's verbal consent and it was made clear to each participant that they could choose to withdraw their data after the interview had been concluded. Each participant was given a consent form before each interview that they read and verbally acknowledged (included as appendix 11.5).

## ***Safety***

Although the research was not intrusive and did not overtly cover politically sensitive issues, the safety of the researched *vis a vis* the Chinese state was an issue. Through strictly following all of the points discussed above, it was considered that safety issues concerning confidentiality and anonymity were nullified. Furthermore it was made clear to all interviewees that they were encouraged to remain silent and not answer an interview question if they did not want to. The researcher's personal safety was also considered at all times and risk assessments were carried out at each stage of the fieldwork.

## 4. Individualised Volunteering Identities

### 4.1. Introduction

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This chapter will examine how the interviewee's notions of individuality and social commitments created a revised, bottom-up generated identity of volunteering and voluntary association. This revised identity incorporated ideals of 'sacrifice', scale, reciprocity, and mutuality which were at odds with both traditional portrayals of Chinese society and the state's *leifengist* volunteering narrative. As discussed in the literature review, notions of volunteering are based on how society perceives social commitments, responsibilities, and engagement (Anheier and Salamon, 1999, 43; Dekker and Halman, 2003). In traditional China, associations of individuals outside of the family were often shunned, and individualist action and association was deemed to come at the expense of the family (Hsu, 1948; Madge 1974; Tang, 2005). In Mao-era China the state replaced the family, non-state associations were co-opted or destroyed, and individualism was deemed to come at the expense of the people and the state (Kraus, 1981; Walder, 1986; Pye, 1991; Delman and Yin, 2010). The Mao-era volunteer was formed out of these ideas and exemplified by the self-sacrificing, Party-worshipping, Lei Feng. It is *leifengism* that the modern state continues to tie the idea of volunteering to (Luova, 2011).

However, individualisation results from 'dis-embedment' from '*historically prescribed social forms and commitments*' (Beck, 1992, 128), which disrupts 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1991). In 21<sup>st</sup> Century China the increasingly individualised individual no longer defines themselves solely in relation to others in the collective (Yan, 2009; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2010). They have more freedom to organise and associate in ways that they themselves define, and which incorporate the new individuality that they feel (Giddens, 1991). In China the political system complicates the process (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2010) and the space available for the individual to reconstruct the social in newly suitable ways is more restricted than elsewhere. This leads to stagnation and atomisation because the only available outlet for new notions of individuality is a self-centred pursuit of wealth (Guan, 2007; Lehre, 2012; Palmer, 2012).

Despite this, there are still many signs of new notions of association and social commitments. Numerous 'sub-cultures' are taking root across society and many studies reference 'interest groups' and 'pluralisation' (see Holbig, 2006; Li, 2010; Palmer, 2013). These new

groups are formed around the mutual interests of individuals with diverse views<sup>46</sup>. Integral to these developments are changing notions of how groups should be organised and the way that individuals interact with other individuals within a social setting. It also involves new reconfigurations of the individual's relationship with other groups that they may not consider themselves a member of. Ideals of reciprocity, equality, and pluralism all play key roles in these re-alignments. There is also a re-orientation of the collectivist 'sacrificial' relationship between the 'I' and the 'we' towards a new affiliation that incorporates the individual rather than persecutes it. The civil society volunteer represents the nexus of all these shifting realignments.

## 4.2. From Sacrifice to Win-Win

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### 4.2.1. The Ideal of Sacrifice

A sacrificial relationship is common to collectivist societies across the globe because collectivists regard the individual as subordinate to the collective (Morris *et al*, 1994; Triandis, 1995; Cao, 2009). As Smith (1998, 352) writes, they tend to "*be more willing to sacrifice personal interests for the attainment of the collective interest*". As discussed in the literature review, there has long been an element of 'sacrifice' in the relationship between the Chinese individual and the collective (see Fei, 1948; Hsu, 1948; Pye, 1991). In traditional China the individual was expected to sacrifice their individual good for the greater good of the family. For the man; the filial son was the exemplar of this, 'sacrificing' himself for his parents. For women; the faithful wife was the model, 'sacrificing' herself for their husband and mother-in-law (Baker, 1979; Thornton and Fricke, 1987). Maoist China severed this familial domination (Vogel, 1965) but the Mao-era individual was expected to transfer their self-sacrifice from the family to the 'greater good' of 'the People' (led by the Party-state) (Pye, 1991, 448; Lu, 2004). Lei Feng was the exemplar *par excellence* of the Maoist idealisation of self-sacrifice. He was placed by the state in diametric opposition to the demonised individualism of the 'rightists' and 'bourgeois' who were said to strive only for self-gratification (Zhang, 1999). In many ways therefore this was a continuation of what had occurred in the traditional period: collectivist sacrifice of the 'I' for the 'we' (Madsen,

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<sup>46</sup> Some of these are advocacy groups, often pejoratively portrayed as 'NIMBYism'<sup>46</sup>, with purely localised concerns (O' Brien and Li, 2006; Cui, 2011). However, even NIMBYism can represent a corollary of individualisation: a sign that the individual is taking their own life into their own hands. NIMBY protests are a sign that de Tocqueville's 'idea' ("*The more government takes the place of associations, the more will individuals lose the idea of forming associations*") (Hodgkinson and Foley, 2009, 124) is no longer 'lost'.

1984). As Pye (1991, 449) says, this continuity partly explains the relative acceptance of the Maoist top-down imposed structures: “for a people to be able to suspend disbelief to such a degree suggests that they must have been presented with material which conformed to their social expectations”.

However, despite this continuity there was a problem with the Maoist configuration of the sacrificial relationship (Pye, 1991, 455). In its traditional form the sacrificial individual could hope to gain material benefits from the family. Furthermore, this family-focus arrangement seemed ‘natural’; helping blood-relatives is a feature of human association that has existed from the dawn of humanity. In Maoist China the benefits were, especially during periods of high radicalism, non-material, and the associations could seem ‘unnatural’. When ideological belief dimmed, the urge to ‘sacrifice’ was therefore absent. In today’s China, where ideological belief has dimmed, the Chinese state wants to retain this element of sacrifice because it is crucial to their legitimation (Wang, 2002). State organs therefore continue to tie the concept of voluntary action to *leifengism*: for the state, to be a 志愿者 (volunteer) is also to be a 雷锋传人 (disciple of Lei Feng).

#### **4.2.2. The Greater Importance of the Individual**

In concordance with the sacrificial relationship described above, the dominant ideologies of traditional and Maoist China often portrayed the individual-collective relationship as zero-sum, overlooking the possibility that there could be individual-gain alongside collective-gain (Pye, 1991). To act for the individual good was to take something away from the greater good (the family and the state respectively) and, because the group defined the individual, ‘sacrifice’ came naturally. In Maoist China the state’s definition of individualism was underdeveloped, as the famous dissident author Liu Binyan (who was labelled an ‘individualist rightist’) said: “*The first political term we learned was bourgeois ideology, which we were told was synonymous with individualism - although nobody could ever explain to me where natural self-interest ends and selfishness begins*” (Liu, 1990, 16). However, in today’s China notions of individuality have changed and the relationship with the collective is increasingly re-defined (see Yan, 2009; Hansen and Svarverud, 2010).

These shifts have been recognised, to a limited extent, by the state as well. As Xu says of state-directed community volunteering activities:

“[...] *in a Maoist participation style that inherently disavows the self; one had to give up one’s self interest totally for the public interest (altruism)[...]In today’s call for citizens’ participation, participation is considered good for the public, but also for self-realization: hence, the motto or slogan, “I help others; others help me” [renren weiwo, wowe renren]. [emphasis added]*” (Xu, quoted in Rolandsen, 2008, 125).

The modern term used for volunteering, ‘志愿者’ (zhiyuanzhe), is also itself indicative of a change. Previously, something similar was termed ‘义务’ (yiwu) which had implications of duty and sacrifice, but ‘志愿’ (zhiyuan) “*implies something that is ‘not forced’ but springs out of the ‘wishes’ and ‘aspirations’ of the individual.*” (Rolandsen, 2008, 110).

These shifts manifested themselves extraordinarily clearly in the interviewee’s self-constructed trajectories of volunteering. For example, the interviewee Wenqian repeated the phrase that Xu uses; ‘人人为我，我为人人’ (‘I help others, others help me’), using it to best sum up his volunteering motivations. However, most of the interviewees moved far beyond this, towards notions of individuality with which the Chinese state may be less comfortable with. The interviewee Zhenping gave an assessment of priorities that would be at great odds to interpretations of the Chinese individual based on Mao-era or traditional-era readings. When asked about the ‘position’ of volunteering in his life, Zhenping said that ‘No.1’ was himself and that his priority was to “make myself better”. ‘No. 2’ was his friends and family, and ‘No. 3’ was helping others through doing things like volunteering. The interviewee Qiuye said that the basic of volunteering was that you “*help yourself first, then help others*” and that therefore if she became unemployed she would stop volunteering because she would have to concentrate efforts on helping herself, not others.

Overall, the volunteers talked of individuality as something positive, not something negative that had to be repressed under the ‘shadow’ of the collective<sup>47</sup>. However, they were not describing individualistic egoism, nor a zero-sum relationship between the ‘I’ and the ‘we’. Instead they were talking about something different: an individualism that was balanced with collectivist concerns. The interviewee Meixiu talked about this balance, focusing her conception of volunteerism around the individual’s self-constructed values, rather than on the values and obligations imposed on them by others:

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<sup>47</sup> Hsu entitles his 1948 book “*Under the Ancestors’ Shadow*”.



*“My understanding of the modern concept of ‘volunteer spirit’ is that it needs to come from the individual, they need to instinctively turn themselves into an expert citizen. It is not that they go forth and help others because they rely on what someone or something else says. Rather, they give a contribution to society because they themselves attach importance to helping others. In that way they can solve many problems in a more balanced way”*

In a similar way the interviewee Luli talked about the importance of the recognition of the ego in ‘volunteer spirit’ (志愿者精神):

*“‘Lei Feng spirit’ and ‘volunteer spirit’ have similarities but one dissimilarity is that Lei Feng spirit isn’t about the person who is giving the help – for example you don’t tell the receiver of help that you have helped them. Today’s volunteer spirit is more about communication, and part of that is telling others about the help that you are giving. This is important because it makes the volunteer feel happy and makes them continue to volunteer. It also spreads the idea of volunteering and in this way influences more people.”*

This is similar to Andreoni’s “warm-glow” benefit (1989) discussed in the literature review, however it also incorporates a significantly revised notion of the sacrificial element that is inherent to Chinese understandings of volunteering (and therefore does not appear in discussions of Western volunteering).

### **4.2.3. Moving Away from Leifengist Sacrifice**

One of the questions in the interview directly addressed ‘Lei Feng spirit’ (雷锋精神)<sup>48</sup>, asking the interviewee to contrast it with ‘volunteer spirit’ (志愿者精神). It was striking how *all* of the interviewees said that there was a difference between the two, and many emphasised that the difference was great. Hongmei, critical of many things ‘state’, jokingly called Lei Feng a ‘变态’ (a perverted or abnormal person). She described Lei Feng spirit as being all about sacrifice, in contrast to ‘volunteer spirit’ which, she said, was about “*helping yourself first and then helping others*”. Many of the other interviewees talked about how Lei Feng had been idealised,

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<sup>48</sup> The term ‘Lei Feng spirit’ is a slogan that is commonly used by the Chinese state to promote *leifengist*-style volunteering (see Renminwang, 2012; Zhongguo Fangtan, 2012; Xinhua, 2013). It will be discussed further in chapter seven.

emphasising the unrealistic aspirations of Lei Feng spirit. Wenling said that “*Lei Feng spirit is more noble (高) than volunteering, Lei Feng has been turned into a god. Volunteering (志愿者) is far more real*”. Shihong said something similar: “*Lei Feng was more pure, he wouldn’t think about himself when he went to help people*”. In contrast with this, she goes on to say that the concept of volunteering is “*more balanced; it’s about making the volunteer themselves happy*”.

Overall, discourse about moving away from *leifengist* sacrifice to a more reciprocal, ‘helping others to help yourself’ arrangement was extremely common in the interviews. This is significant because it demonstrates a revised idea of the ‘Chinese volunteer’, and a re-assessment of social commitments that goes beyond the individual-collective ‘sacrificial’ dichotomy. Phrases emphasising mutuality and reciprocity were frequently used by the interviewees to describe modern ‘volunteer spirit’. One of the most commonly used ones was the term ‘双赢’ (win-win). Zhangsui said that Lei Feng spirit and ‘volunteer spirit’ had some similarities but delineated a clear difference: “*Today it is win-win (双赢), it’s about helping others to help yourself, improving your own skills, getting happiness from it. Whereas before it was about sacrificing (牺牲) yourself to help others, today it’s win-win*”. Zhilan used a similar phrase “*双面方*” (double-sidedness): “*because I think that whatever you do it is double-sided; when you give out things you also get something back*”. Zhenyi also drew a clear line between Lei Feng spirit and ‘volunteer spirit’:

“*Lei Feng spirit was a kind of selfless sacrifice (无私奉献) but today’s volunteers are absolutely not about selfless sacrifice. Because today’s volunteers have requirements and needs, whether its to make yourself feel better (寻求自我安慰), or if it’s they want to make friends, expand social circles or improve one’s own consciousness (思想意识). Lots of different aspects and ways of thinking are all ok. It’s different to the selfless sacrifice of before.*”

The interviewee Xiaoxiao mentioned Lei Feng a lot and said that his catchphrases have influenced her. However she was quite clear on her reading of modern-style volunteering as being different and mutually beneficial: “*Now I realise that volunteering can be divided up into three directions: the first is towards others, helping other people. The second is towards yourself, helping yourself. The third is towards happiness, about spreading happiness*”. Later on in the interview she clarified her view of the reciprocal nature of volunteering:

“*It’s not all about what things you can give other people, it’s actually more about what things other people can give you. For example we go to a primary school to help the children, I think*”

*that personally I myself can only bring them a very small amount of help, of happiness, but they can give us a lot. When you go to volunteer you shouldn't go expecting to teach, you should go expecting to learn".*

Overall, in the interviewee's conceptions of the volunteer identity there was little evidence of the sacrificial relationship that marks out a collectivist society, as described by Morris *et al* (1994), Smith, (1998) and Cao (2009). Pye writes of the Mao-era that "*Self-sacrifice is glorified to such an extent that the safest rule for the individual is to pretend always to selflessness*" (Pye, 1991, 448). However, for the interviewees, no-one was even 'pretending to selflessness' and a *leifengist*-style selfless approach to volunteering was criticised. Instead a volunteering identity was created that was non-sacrificial, based on mutuality and reciprocity, and with the individual at the centre.

### **4.3. From 'Big' to 'Small'**

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#### **4.3.1. Moving Away from 'Weida'**

The exponents of the individualisation thesis talk about the unsuitability of grand ideologies for the individualised individual. These can no longer capture the pluralised and self-constructed value-sets of the DIY biography. Instead, Giddens (1994) talks of the 'small pictures' that are far more achievable and suitable for the individual. Many of the interviewees used similar expressions of scale when they talked about the ways in which they had begun to re-conceive voluntary action and association. Many of them talked about previously conceiving it as being a 'big' unachievable thing, but now considering it to be something 'small' and achievable. For many of them, this was because action and association had moved from something that only the 'big' state was capable of, to being something that they could contribute and direct at a 'small', individual level.

Concordantly, many of the volunteers described the politicised, ideology-saturated *leifengist* volunteering as being 'big' or '伟大' (*weida*, grand or great in scale), contrasting it with the 'smallness' of today's more balanced, reciprocal volunteering. The interviewee Wangmei said that Lei Feng was focused too much on noble ideals: "*[Lei Feng] is too much about 'finding happiness in helping others' (太助人为乐). Today's volunteering is not like this; it's all about doing a little, doing what you can*". Lingzhu said something similar: "*even if it's small then you can make a difference*". Huangzhi also emphasised the 'smallness' of today's volunteering:

*“Today’s ‘volunteer spirit’ is about helping others for free but also about helping these people from their own perspective and not imposing your own ideas on them. ‘Lei Feng spirit’ was all about sacrificing your own interests to help others, and doing it selflessly, without attracting attention..... ‘Lei Feng spirit’ is too grand (weida, 伟大). Today’s volunteer spirit doesn’t emphasise personal sacrifice. It’s all about: ‘if you have the ability to do something then you can’. There’s also no emphasis on anonymity like there was with Lei Feng.”*

Yangmei also talked of *leifengism* being greater in scale and therefore less achievable. For her it was concerned with things at a national level:

*“Lei Feng was at a national level, i.e. he was all about doing things for the country, doing things for the whole society; thinking ‘I want to make a contribution to my country’. However, volunteering today is about helping a specific group of people, for example volunteer teaching is for helping the poor children, and environmental work is for the animals. It’s not at such a high-level as Lei Feng”.*

The interviewee Wangmei talked of how she had reconceptualised volunteering but others had not. From her perspective, this led to some people being sceptical of her aims and involvement: *“There are always people who think that what I am doing is really grand (weida), but I think ‘whats grand (weida) about what I am doing?’ If you can help people just help them, what’s so grand (weida) about that?”*. Kewen talked a lot about the differences between ‘Lei Feng spirit’ and ‘volunteering spirit’ (even before the interview questions addressing Lei Feng came up). He talked about how his parents’ generation were the recipients of Lei Feng spirit:

*“My parent’s generation, and the generation before my own; they were taught Lei Feng spirit. It emphasises a kind of fearless spirit (无畏精神) which implies that you should sacrifice yourself (自己牺牲) to help others. However, my generation understands volunteering as ‘do one’s best’ (尽力而为), that is, to help others to the best of your ability. This is the modern understanding of it.”*

In this sense the interviewees were conceiving of volunteering at an individual level that was more akin to Giddens’ ‘small pictures’ than with the grand ideologies of socialism. This theme will be returned to in chapters five and seven.

### 4.3.2. New Expectations of Equality

An important factor in the transformation of notions of individuality has been the growing influence of new ideas of equality that re-shape an individual's perception of their position in relation to other individuals around them. Much has been written about how there has been a growing awareness of the rights accorded to the individual in China (see for example O'Brien and Li, 2006; Mühlhahn, 2010). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim talk about this in relation to women and call it a 'rhetoric of equality' (2002, 102). An increased flow of information is crucial to generating exposure to this 'rhetoric of equality'. Opportunities to contrast individual experiences with that of others, in different positions, places, cultures and societies, alters the individual perception of entitlement<sup>49</sup>. New methods of communication also contribute to this re-conceptualising. Commenting on blogs and 'liking' posts has long been an integral part of social media. This democratised form of communication places the individual in a position of importance. The listener is equal to the speaker and the roles can be reversed. Through ways like this an entitlement to *choice* is gradually becoming ingrained in the individual: increasingly they feel that it is their right to be able to choose.

The interviewee Bozhen talked of this change emphasising that before volunteers saw themselves as superior but now they place more importance on equality and mutual help:

*“Before I think lots of people probably thought that to volunteer or be philanthropic was like giving alms to the poor (施舍). They thought that they were superior (高人一等). However today's volunteer spirit is based around ‘以生命影响生命’ (one life influencing another life). Because everyone is the same but their situation is different, so sometimes people need help. Every person gets happy, sad, and angry, and every life is equal (平等的). You have the ability to help others, it does you no harm so you can go and do it. So therefore I think that today's 'volunteer spirit' places more emphasis on equality and mutuality”*

As Ziqing says in the case study below: *“This kind of thinking had a big influence on me. Made me think that I'm helping people but that I'm not sacrificing myself to help people. That I'm probably the same as them anyway and that we are facing the same problems. We will solve*

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<sup>49</sup> A good example of how this increased awareness (resulting from a greater flow of information) alters conceptions of individual entitlements came in 2012 when someone on Weibo compared US school policy and Chinese school policy on school etiquette. The collectivist, 'sacrificial' strain that ran throughout the Chinese school policy was roundly lambasted when compared with the more liberal US policy that recognised an individual's entitlements (Sinica, 2011).

*problems together. This had a deep effect on me.*” This re-conceptualisation of entitlement also affects notions of self-improvement. As Lucian Pye says of traditional China “*There was a hierarchy of moral achievement in which only the elite could strive for self-development while the mass of the people were ruled by example.*” (Pye, 1991, 446). This unequal potential was engrained in the frameworks that delineated the lives of the individual. From the evidence provided by the interviewee’s in this study, this has changed. Self-improvement in traditional times was directed towards the family. In Maoist times it was directed towards the state. There was neither recognition of the individual as an *aim* for self-improvement, nor an acknowledgement of rights of the individual that could *not* be transgressed in the drive for self-improvement (Schwartz, 1985, 136-139). However, with individualisation ‘self-improvement’ is open to new interpretations: the goal remains but the previous frameworks that delineated the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of that ‘improvement’ no longer exist (this will be explored in the next chapter). The case study below depicts a self-constructed ontological narrative of volunteering<sup>50</sup> that illustrates these issues.

### ***Case study: Ziqing***

Ziqing was an extremely enthusiastic and dedicated volunteer. He came from north-western China but had moved across the county volunteering for different organisations and working in diverse fields. He had previous experience volunteering with environmental protection, education, and LGBT organisations. He was dedicated to CSO work and admitted that “*volunteering is my life*” and that “*actually it takes up too much of my time*”. When his interview was conducted he was involved with an ENGO (CSO9).

He first got involved with volunteering when he was in the first year of university. He had been tasked to write an essay and he got information for it from a local CSO. He said that he was ‘curious’ (好奇) about the organisation: “*[at the time] I didn’t know what a volunteer or an NGO was*”. He later became involved with the same organisation. When asked to sum up his motivations for volunteering he said that “*it makes me feel that I exist, that I am alive. I have experienced a lot in society, Society and I have changed together*”. He said that he likes working with young people who are “*similar to [him]*”, and that through CSO work he has met a lot of

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<sup>50</sup> In this way (and as discussed in sections 3.2.2. and 3.4.4.) viewing involvement as a linear series of “*sequence and consequence*” (Riessman and Quinney, 2005, 394).

people who have influenced him and exposed him to new views and ideas. He talked about how his conception of volunteering had changed through meeting other people and through his own experiences:

*“At first I thought of it as benevolence (慈善), as being grand (weida), that I was giving lots of my own time and energy to help people and that those people should recognise this and respect me. But they didn’t! Sometimes they didn’t understand what we were doing and sometimes they even got annoyed and they swore. But a friend told me something, he said that you shouldn’t look at it as if you are doing something that is worthy (做好事) you should look at it as if you are doing something well (把事情做好). This kind of thinking had a big influence on me. It made me think that I’m helping people but that I’m not sacrificing myself to help people. That I’m probably the same as them anyway and that we are facing the same problems. We will solve problems together. This had a deep effect on me.”*

Ziqing talked about Lei Feng without prompting, saying that because of him Chinese people were aware of the concept of volunteering. But he noted a significant distinction between Lei Feng-style volunteering and his own experience and conception of volunteering. For Ziqing, Lei Feng was all about the government, volunteering was all about the individual:

*“[Lei Feng spirit] is more about the government taking the lead, it’s less about the actions of the individual. Every year the government runs campaigns to get people to ‘Learn from Lei Feng’ and encourages people to become ‘top-students’[...] so it’s like the government is using volunteers as unpaid labour to accomplish government aims, I think this is the opposite to ‘volunteer spirit’. Volunteer spirit is more about yourself, more about whether you are willing to do something, this is where volunteer spirit is different to Lei Feng spirit”*

Overall, Ziqing was pessimistic about the state of volunteering in China. However he did say that even though he thought that Chinese people still weren’t volunteering in large numbers, CSOs and CSO volunteering were becoming more visible and better understood. For Ziqing a key part of this change was a generational shift caused by a greater flow of information “*of course, this had a big effect on the post-80’s generation; it’s changed their outlook on life (人生观)*”. He also noted a growing divergence between *leifengist* notions of volunteering and new conceptions of volunteering, that was based on increased understanding: “*Before, everyone equated volunteering*

*with Lei Feng, you know what Lei Feng represents right? Now more and more people know what proper 'volunteers' do, so their opinion of volunteering has changed."*

## **4.4. Changing Views of Society**

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### **4.4.1. Towards a Re-conceptualisation of 'Snow-Sweeping Responsibilities'?**

Integral to individualised notions of volunteering and association is a transformed view of society, and it is this subject that will be discussed in this section. As Dekker and Halman (2003, 6) write: *"feelings of solidarity as a reason for volunteering have to do with notions of identity and concern for others in society and it is reflected in an individual's willingness to contribute to the good of a person or social group"*. As discussed in the literature review, the dominant traditional frameworks delineated who were 'strangers' and 'outsiders' and how to deal with them. In Confucian thought, despite the emphasis on family, individuals were supposed to be welcoming and accommodating towards non-family and friends (Schwartz, 1985). In practice however, the family dominated and a lack of compassion and concern for those outside the individual's circles of family and friends has been a common criticism of Chinese society. The renowned sociologist Fei Xiaotong critiqued a famous Confucian proverb to say that in the Republican-era: *"The person who only sweeps the snow from his own door is still regarded as having high social ethics"* (Fei, 1992, 60). The Mao-era altered these dynamics, although it is commonly noted that the periods of extremism, in particular the Cultural Revolution, destroyed bonds of social trust (Parish and Whyte, 1978; Worden *et al*, 1987; Pye, 1991) creating a cultural scepticism towards pro-social engagement today (Chen and Lin, 2002; Ren and Liu, 2008; Yan, 2009; Deng, 2009).

Many of the volunteers mentioned this when asked about the opinions of other people towards their volunteering. They also referred to a perception of arrogance that surrounded 'helping others'; a 'who do you think you are?' scorn of the do-gooder (that can be found in many societies across the globe). The interviewee Huangzhi said that other people were often condescending towards her volunteering, saying: *"why are you volunteering? do you think you are special?"* Zhenping said that: *"sometimes people think that if you volunteer then you are being false, that you shouldn't harm others but that you shouldn't help them either"*. Xiuying talked about the traditional 'mistrust' of non-familial organisations that Pye (1991) discusses:



*“Loads of times people think that for me taking part in volunteering is for the organisation to take advantage of you (被组织利用). Lots of people consider that I am making a sacrifice (摆供) to help other people. They say that other people will take advantage of you. I have often come across this attitude. However when you take part in an activity then you can see whether the activity or the organisation can help you. If it can help you then you can establish a win-win situation. (双赢的局面), so I think why don't you just do it?”*

The interviewee Hongmei was very critical of the traditional disinclination towards helping non-family members:

*“Chinese traditional culture attributes importance to doing good deeds, but if you do too much for others then your family won't appreciate it because you are ignoring them. It's the same if you have money but you spend it on others – then you will be criticized by your family [...]. However I think that this attitude is changing, that maybe this generation or the next generation will change this.”*

When Hongmei was asked about whether she thought that there were many volunteers in china she said 'no', because:

*“The Chinese just care about their families, they don't care about others. It's a cultural reason. I don't like how important blood ties are to Chinese society, I have lots of family that I don't really like. They try and take advantage of their relatives. Chinese people don't trust others, they only trust their family. I remember when I was young we were poor, I had to sell cigarettes on the street with my mother. Then, my father came into some money and suddenly all our relatives asked for his help.”*

Many also cited a generational difference that corresponds with the 'generation gap' described in the literature review (see Palmer, 2013). Ruojian talked about the continued influence of familialism affecting the way his parents viewed his volunteering: “my parents are a negative influence. They think that I should just look after myself, and ask me; why am I thinking of other people? They do not approve of my volunteering”. When asked 'why?' he replied: “I think it's because they are influenced by Chinese culture, family reasons, a generational thing, also a work thing”. Although some interviewees emphasised that their parent were supportive of their volunteering, the majority said that they were either indifferent or outrightly opposed. Chenguang's statement was typical: “My parents want their child to do something that is, from

*their point of view, meaningful for their future, helpful for their future. And they ask: why are you spending time and effort helping other people, not yourself? I think that this is the kind of attitude that my parents often have*". Liuhua expressed similar sentiments, referring to her parents preference for 'traditional' patterns of work (or 'standard biographies' as Beck, 1994, 13 would say):

*"I have often experienced disapproval, especially from my parents. My father works for the government and my parents hope that I will go into a government position (从政) or work in a company. They think that my volunteering work will affect my studying so they don't really approve [...], they want me to follow a traditional kind of pattern. I guess that's because our ways of thinking are different"*

Some of the interviewees said that even though other people might praise their volunteering involvement, they wouldn't get involved themselves. Yangguang said that this was because they thought that it was "none of their business". However, whilst many of the volunteers were critical of traditional attitudes towards helping 'the other', most, as Hongmei states above, believed that these attitudes were beginning to change. Qiuye talked about a change in the 'societal atmosphere':

*"I think that development has something to do with it. From before up until the present day China has had a big problem with people being willing to help others. For example, recently there was this old woman who fell down, and people came to help her, but those people were forced to pay for her care. So there is this social atmosphere where to help somebody is too much bother. However I think that if more and more people get involved in volunteering then it will foster this instinct (本能) to help others voluntarily, then this societal atmosphere (社会氛围) will experience a big change and conflict between people will decrease."*

Many of the interviewees talked about a similar shift in attitudes towards helping people. Much of this was to do with a re-visualisation of the 'other' as a collection of individuals rather than as an amorphous 'them'. This shift was also noticed by Rolandsen's study of CYV volunteers. He said that volunteers are told that the elderly people that they are helping are individuals: 'each client is an independent individual (duli zhi geti) with special qualities and needs' (Rolandsen, 2008, 111). Many of the volunteers talked to in this study referred to a change in the perception of those who potentially needed help. Chenhua linked this shift to increases in both education and 'suzhi' (quality, discussed in the literature review). Chenyue said that "society's attitude is

*improving, before if you went to help someone you didn't know this was unusual, but today more and more people are helping those they don't know". Zhenyi talked a lot about this shift in attitudes:*

*"At the moment I'm really happy to see that loads and loads of young people have started off on the road of volunteering and public-welfare. It shows that the citizens of this country or this generation of youngsters have a growing awareness, a social awareness, and sense of social responsibility that is gradually waking-up (苏醒) and getting stronger. I think that this is really valuable and helps to shape a positive image of my generation."*

The interviewee Xiaoxiao also noted a shift in attitudes towards helping: *"more and more people are paying attention to helping others. The political consciousness (思想觉悟) of people today, of volunteers today, is increasing. There are more and more people who have this kind of mentality (意识), who have the kind of thinking that makes them want to go and help other people"*.

Ziqing linked a shift in perceptions of society, and notions of 'the other', to increased information via the internet:

*"Every day the television tells you that the country is like this, the society is like that, but on the internet you can discover many different voices, some are good some are bad, from our perspective it's a big conflict. From the internet you can gradually see what society is really like, not the society where everybody is happy, not where the government says everything is perfect and flourishing, but you can hear all the voices of those who are unhappy".*

The interviewee Zhilan said that when she was young she often went travelling with her family to other parts of the province that she lived in. When she was there she realised how poor many of the other people were *"in comparison to [her] own life"*. Zhangsui, who helped to set up a small CSO to help rural children, said that her main motivation was just coming across photographs of poor children: *"When I saw those small children I just thought that I wanted to help them. They moved me"*. Shihong said that a confluence of recognition influenced her to volunteer: the recognition that a) she was lucky and had a lot of free time that she was wasting and b) that there were lots of people that she could help: *"gradually from looking at people around me and on the news I realised that there were lots of people who need help"*. In this way the 'stronger' individuals of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have gradually been able to *re-imagine* the local community

around them through a rising awareness of the individuality of others and the social problems that affect them.

#### 4.4.2. Nationalism

As many studies point out; nationalism can significantly affect the way in which a civil society grows (see Weigle and Butterfield, 1992, 1-2; Cox, 1999, 13). Indeed, as described in the literature review Hall (1995 7-15) lists “*socially-homogenous nationalism*” as one of his five ‘enemies’ of civil society, saying that it leads to an exclusive definition of society and endangers an inclusive civil society. Others point out that nationalism contradicts heavily with the basic tenets of neo-Tocquevillian definitions of civil society because it is incompatible with the plurality and diversity of civil society and can be the enemy of the Habermasian public sphere (Calhoun, 1993, 275-276). The growth of Chinese nationalism is a well identified trend and, as discussed in the literature review, the Chinese state has promoted patriotism and attempted to direct nationalism as a means to strengthen their legitimacy (Zhao, 1998; Gries, 2004).

One of the initial hypotheses of this study was that nationalism would play an important part in the motivations of the volunteers i.e. ‘I volunteer to make China stronger’ or ‘I volunteer for national glory’. However, the interviewees, almost exclusively, had a much more nuanced view of the relationship between patriotism, nationalism, and their volunteering. A small minority of them said that they were not patriotic at all. Most said that they were in some way. A few were fervently patriotic. And yet the vast majority displayed an inclusive patriotism rather than a xenophobic nationalism. Significantly however, almost all of them did not talk about patriotism or nationalism as being a big factor in their decision to volunteer. Quite a few, including Jingfei in the case-study below, talked about concepts such as being a ‘world citizen’. The interviewee Kewen did consider himself to be patriotic and offered an interesting portrayal of how patriotism influenced him to volunteer:

*“It’s definitely a big influence. I think that you can divide it up into lots of areas. One is to love your relatives and friends. Another is to love your compatriots (同胞) from very far away, for example those in remote regions. I haven’t met them but they are still my ‘同胞’. Third is to love your ‘people’ (民族); love our culture, love the places in our country. I think that all of these small parts come together to influence me as patriotism”*

Another interesting study of patriotism/nationalism was the interviewee Liyun. When asked about the relationship between her volunteering and concepts such as ‘national glory’, she said that patriotism hadn’t influenced her: *“I think that I do volunteering to improve myself, to exercise myself, and study things. I’ve never thought about it in relation to the country, or national glory, I’ve never thought about it in this lofty (高) way.”* However, when asked specifically about patriotism she clarified her answer:

*“Patriotism hasn’t influenced me at all [to volunteer]. But I am a very patriotic person [...] for example when Japan and China have disputes, I’m an angry youth (属于愤青). You know, last year when the anti-Japanese protests occurred, I was shopping with my brother in the city centre, I saw the protestors, I saw their slogans and joined in with their anti-Japanese chanting. I felt passionate. So, yes I am patriotic, but it has nothing to do with my volunteering. Yes, I am a patriot, Yes I am a volunteer, but they have no relationship to each other. I’ve never thought about them being related at all.”*

Liyun, a quietly spoken art student, therefore self-identified as patriotic, especially when it came to issues of national glory at an international level (indeed by many standards she could be deemed to be nationalistic because she took part in the anti-Japanese protests). However she did not see any link at all between patriotic sentiment and her volunteering.

This distinction between patriotism and volunteering was very clear in the responses of the interviewees. Most of the interviewees said that they were patriotic but that patriotism had nothing to do with volunteering, as a selection of their responses demonstrates:

Qiuye: *“I don’t think that loving ones country has anything to do with my volunteering. It’s more to do with loving humanity”.*

Luli: *“If patriotism means loving your fellow citizens then yes, it had a huge influence on me to volunteer. I love people; meeting people and helping people. But patriotism and the government? No, they didn’t have a big influence on me volunteering.”*

Tangli: *“There’s no relationship between something like national glory and my volunteering, nor is there a relationship with patriotism. If another country needed help then I would also go and help”.*

Shihong: *“There’s no link between me being patriotic and me choosing to volunteer. I don’t help people just because they are from the same country as me. Everyone is the same, all over the world”.*

Lijuan: *“I’m certainly patriotic, I love my country. But it has no influence on my volunteering. I would equally go to America or the UK to volunteer”.*

Wenling: *“Everybody should love their country, but I can’t say that I volunteer because I love my country. No, that would be exaggerating. I guess it’s a small reason but not a big one.”*

Overall, the initial hypothesis that the volunteers would consider patriotism as an important motivation was roundly dispelled. Some of the volunteers discussed the reason why. Chenhua linked nationalism to ‘Lei Feng spirit’ but linked ‘volunteer spirit’ to more humanistic values: *“Volunteer spirit’ has ‘wider eyes’, its more broad, it could lead you to go abroad to work, to help the world, help humanity, not just helping Chinese people or those directly around you”.* Ruojian linked a re-conceptualisation of nationalism with greater information and better education. For Ruojian, his experience of university has taught him to view everybody more equally, and this influenced him to volunteer:

*“Today’s China has developed gradually from a poor country and when I was young we were taught to just look at things from a Chinese point-of-view. When 9/11 happened in the US I was in junior-middle school and when we heard about it my classmates applauded. Back then I only thought about the soldiers, I didn’t think about the effect on people. But now the education that I have received at university has taught me not just to look at things from the perspective of the Chinese people but to instead look at it from the perspective of everybody in the world.”*

Similar to the above answers Chende said that patriotism didn’t have anything to do with his volunteering and that he would go abroad to help if he could. He very strongly showed an individualised alignment: *“it’s not that I love this country so I participate in this volunteer activity, it’s more that I love my life so I participate”.* Chende and many of the others therefore (and in combination with the previous discussion of ‘scale’) conceived their volunteering as being more on an ‘individual’ scale, rather than something that was strongly connected to the national narrative. This theme will be further discussed in the next chapter.

### 4.4.3. The Global Mirror

Some interviewees also talked about volunteering to contribute towards the projection of the image of China as a ‘civilised’ nation. In this way they showed how the outside world can reflexively influence the shaping of their values and obligations, so that, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, 212) say; their sense of self takes on a globalised slant, rather than one that is fully invested within the borders of their nation. China is exponentially more integrated with the world than ever before and the 21<sup>st</sup> century individual can observe the way that individuals live in every society across the globe, whilst at the same time being aware that they themselves are being observed. Many of the volunteers talked of how they considered it a positive thing for other countries to see that lots of Chinese people volunteering. Luli talked about how she wanted to give foreigners a good impression of China: *“If foreigners see that people like me are fond of helping others then they will think that all Chinese people are like this. I think that this is a really good effect”*. She had previously talked of how she had also been influenced by a foreign organizer at the NGO and also how impressed she was that foreigners were willing to volunteer to help Chinese people: *“he’s a foreigner and when the Wenchuan earthquake happened, I guess it didn’t really have anything to do with him directly. However he spent three years forming this organisation to help local people, to make their lives better and easier. This had a big influence on me”*. This sense of global citizenship influenced Luli to volunteer in order to project the image of China as being part of this global identity. Jiancui, who said that patriotism didn’t really have anything to do with his volunteering, said something similar to Luli at several points during his interview. However he drew a strong distinction between the state and the people, he wanted to project an image of China that showed ‘people-power’, not just state-power: *“if other countries see that lots of Chinese people are volunteering this is a good impression. For example if you as a British person see me volunteering then your opinion of Chinese people will get better. You will see that this is the Chinese people, not the Party.”*

One of the interview questions looked at the perceived differences between Chinese and non-Chinese volunteers. Most of the interviewees stressed that there were no large differences other than economic ones. Wenqian, who was older than the majority of the interviewees, emphasised the cross-cultural similarities between volunteers:

*“I think that volunteers all over the world are the same. The volunteers of other countries are more developed but those of China are more backwards. Western volunteers are bringing Chinese volunteers forward with them, they are helping them to develop. Lots of Chinese volunteers volunteer with the Red Cross, you can also see lots of foreigners volunteering with*

*them. The aims of all volunteers across the globe are the same. I think that the views of Western volunteers are the same as the views of Chinese volunteers.*”

Shihong said something similar to Wenqian: *“Overall, the motivations of Westerner volunteers and Chinese volunteers are the same: they want to help those who need it. The main difference is that Western volunteers are able to go abroad and help other people in other countries. However for many Chinese it’s not possible to go abroad and also there are enough people that already need help in China anyway.”*

Ruojian’s answer contained this conception: *“I think that volunteering is an important way for people to evaluate the civilisation level (文明程度) of a country. It shows how the country treats their old people and children. If everyone has this desire to volunteer then China can develop more, it can progress.”*

These ideas show a strongly reflexive volunteer identity, one that was heavily influenced by both the individual’s ability to view the outside world, and the acknowledgement that the outside world can view the individual. It also drew heavily from a narrative of ‘development’, ‘modernisation’, and ‘civilisation’ that will be discussed further in chapter six.

Another theme that emerged in the interviewee’s revised narratives of volunteering was the importance of ideas and concepts that had originated abroad. These are significant for the individualised individual because they represent values that can be adopted, altered, and adapted as alternative ways to arrange their lives. Several of the interviewees had first got involved with volunteering during a period of studying abroad. Huangzhi first got involved with CSO-work in the USA whilst he was an exchange student. A friend that he met there had recommended that he should get involved with CSO2 when he returned to China. Several other interviewees had been influenced to volunteer by foreign friends or teachers. Wenling was influenced to participate in volunteer activities by her university’s English language teacher. Wenling strongly linked volunteering with Western influence and a part of being ‘开放’ (liberal, open-minded). She also said that a cross-cultural dissemination of ideas had been important in the development of Chinese volunteerism, saying that *“Chinese individuals have seen foreigners volunteering and have assimilated the idea”*. The interviewee Ruojian also emphasised the Western influence on volunteering. He considered that *“volunteering has only a few years history in China but I think that it started much earlier in the West.”* He went on to say that: *“I think my parent’s generation had no idea about volunteer work [...] but I think that we are different now because the things that we have learnt are different. We have learnt not only from Chinese culture but also from*



*Western culture.*” Interestingly, quite a few of the interviewees considered that Chinese society could *benefit* from integrating certain ‘foreign’ ideas of ‘community’. In her interview Meixiu, a hugely experienced and dedicated volunteer, continuously articulated the view that Westerners pay more respect to the notion of ‘community responsibility’:

*“I don’t have a deep understanding of foreign concepts of volunteering. However, I have foreign friends and I know that they really think that ‘community’, the concept of ‘shequ’ (社区), is really important. They think that every person has a responsibility to support their community. But I think that in China at the moment the idea of ‘shequ’, of community, is not that prominent. Most people think of the individual, not the community.”*

This runs contrary to common bipolar readings of differences between East and West, and especially to the ‘Asian values’ debate discussed in the literature review. Indeed, it could be said to have more in common with the appeals of early reformists such as Liang Qichao who emphasised the over-collectivised, familial orientation of Chinese traditional society (Cheng & Bunnin, 2008).

For the interviewees, the appeal of Western concepts of community work seemed to lie partly in the fact that they injected the ‘I’ into the ‘we’, giving a more balanced, less sacrificial pattern of involvement than the *leifengist* model. This is important for the individualised individual. As Vanessa Fong’s study shows, today’s urban youth want to live a modern first-world life (Fong, 2004b) and as Rolandsen writes in his study of CYV volunteers: *“the discourse employed by the local volunteers in their descriptions of their own volunteer participation is characteristic of the middle-class tastes and values (i.e. a Western lifestyle, individual choice and flexibility) to which an increasing number of urban Chinese aspire.”* (Rolandsen, 2008: 107). Interestingly, and again in contrast to the Asian values debates, the volunteers in this study did not see the competition between ‘Western’ and ‘Chinese’ readings of society as being zero-sum. Another of Ruojian’s answers was illustrative of this: *“I think that volunteering will become more and more widespread and popular. People’s ideas [观念] are changing. Right now our own culture is being bombarded by Western culture, and we are able to pick and choose and draw lessons from (借鉴) the good parts”*. This ‘picking and choosing the good parts’ is integral to the construction of the ‘DIY biography’ and ‘reflexive project of the self’. The individualised individual accepts and rejects parts of different narratives that align with their own self-constructed value-sets. It is not, however, in line with the state *leifengist* message.

#### 4.4.4. New Role Models

Thompson (1995, 220-223) shows how following and idealising a role model is a "strategy of self" because it contributes to reflexively constructing the followers biographical narrative. During the Mao-era the only role models that were made visible to the individual as examples to follow were ones manufactured by the state, such as Lei Feng (Zhang, 1999). Today the situation is different and a plethora of figures are on view in the media and online (Fong, 2004b). State role-models continue to be visible but, if the state is viewed negatively, then the individualised individual will not recreate its example, instead they may choose to follow a non-state example. Many of the interviewees talked about role models in answer to the interview questions that looked at who (or what) 'influenced' them to get involved with volunteering. The interviewee Zhangsui listed a volunteer in Yunnan as a big influence; *"It was when I was in High School, there was this very famous volunteer called Shu Benyu [...] He was in Yunnan about five or six years ago and was involved in volunteer teaching. The media did a report on him and that was the first time I had ever come into contact with the concept of volunteering"*. A figure that was mentioned by two separate interviewees was Wang Keqin, a famous investigative reporter and blogger. The interviewee Yangmei described him as a role-model: *"I saw him at an NGO conference and after that I began to worship him (崇拜他)"*. The interviewee Wangmei cited the prominent journalist Deng Fei, who is well known in volunteering circles for setting up free lunches for disadvantaged groups. For Wangmei, Deng Fei was an exemplar of doing things that were '意义' (meaningful), which is a subject that will be discussed in the next chapter. Ziqing was influenced by the boss of the NGO, who he thought was a 'hero'. He also said that he 'worshipped' (崇拜) him:

*"His views really influenced me; how to look at (怎么去看待) the environment, and how to look at other people around you. I learnt things from him that influenced what I should pay attention to (关注), what I should strive for (努力), what I should consider (思考); about what an individual should do in society."*

In a similar way, the interviewee Jiancui cited pop-stars as being the main influence on him:

*"What do I pay attention to? Music stars. When I read in the news that they do stuff like volunteering (义工) then the influence on me is very big. They are very busy people but they still*

*find time to do it [volunteering]. I'm just a normal person so it makes me think that I should be able to do it even more"*

Others were influenced by foreign role models. Chenyue said that he was influenced by an American book called "Pay it Forward"<sup>51</sup> that talked about pro-social attitudes: "*[it told me that] if you help one person they should go and help three other people and so on*". The interviewee Luli was inspired by a Western organiser and founder of the NGO, because she said that she found him "*inspiring*", especially the fact that he dedicated a lot of time and effort to helping Chinese people (even though he wasn't Chinese himself). Kewen said that the billionaire American philanthropist Bill Gates and the Hong Kong philanthropist Li Jiacheng had influenced him by teaching him to: "*work to strengthen myself first, then I can help more people*". Liuhua, who was involved with an environmental organisation, said that she was heavily influenced by the famous environmentalist Jane Goodall:

*"Jane Goodall and her institute really influenced me. One of Jane Goodall's sayings had a big effect on me: that 'every person is really important, every person is able to bring about a change, every person is able to produce an effect' (每个人都很重要, 每个人都能带来变化, 每个人都会发挥作用)"*

Goodall's message, highlighting the importance of individual agency, is one that is clearly at odds to the *leifengist* messages that are promoted by the state role models (these will be looked at specifically in chapter seven). The above examples all illustrate how new role models, many of whom would have been previously invisible, are contributing to a new, reflexively constructed volunteer identity.

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<sup>51</sup> There are films and books based around the idea of 'pay it forward' which emphasises reciprocity. There is a 'Pay it Forward Foundation' which details some of these ideas at [www.pifexperience.com](http://www.pifexperience.com).

# 5. Volunteering To Construct the New Self

## 5.1. Introduction

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This chapter will look at how volunteering was conceived by the interviewees as a means to construct new identities of self. It will explore this topic through analysing the following areas: volunteering to shape the outline of biography; volunteering to express self-politics; volunteering to find ‘like-minded people’; volunteering to search for new experiences; and volunteering to create meaning. As discussed in the literature review, one of the key features of the individualisation thesis is called the ‘DIY biography’ (Beck, 1994, 15) or the ‘reflexive project of the self’ (Giddens, 1991, 52–5). Whereas previously the biography of the Chinese individual was a ‘standard biography’ that was largely shaped by the state or tradition (Delman and Yin, 2010, 98), in today’s China life-choices are more and more the decision of the individual. Dis-embedment forces the individualised individual to construct their own biography and in doing so to re-construct their relations with the other individuals around them. As Ulrich Beck says: “*people are forced to conceive of themselves as do-it-yourself producers of meaning and biography, to play a part in shaping both their own lives and the life of society*” (Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 2002, 151). This de-traditionalisation has left the ascription of values increasingly up to the individual, who ascribes meaning to acts, objects, and ideas based on the fluid and dynamic value-sets that they hold. The act of volunteering is saturated with ideals and values; as discussed in the literature review, to voluntarily donate your free time and resources to a cause and organisation implies value-directed choice at many levels. However, actions also *create* meaning that influences value-sets and future actions. The act of volunteering therefore becomes both a recipient of value-decision but also plays a part in the construction of value and meaning itself. In this way; actions develop identity and identity produces actions in a generative, symbiotic relationship.

## 5.2. Living the ‘Volunteer Lifestyle’

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In today’s China the withering of cultural norms and the normalisation of choice and expression means that the individual’s authorship of their own biography is free to travel in directions that correspond to their own views as long as they do not transgress the lines drawn by the ruling power. Implied within this is the rejection of options that do not conform to their own needs and

ideals, in exchange for the acceptance of options that do. In reflexive modernity the importance of individual acts, even small ones that may seem trivial, becomes the defining traits of an individual. The combination of choices that an individual makes becomes a coherent narrative, a 'lifestyle' that becomes entwined with the identity of self. As Giddens says: "A lifestyle can be defined as a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity" (Giddens, 1991, 81). As discussed in the previous chapter this culture of 'lifestyle' choice is becoming increasingly widespread in China (see Fong, 2004b; Rofel, 2007; Yan, 2009)<sup>52</sup>. In Leslie T. Chang's study of migrant workers she finds numerous examples of the individual worker re-constructing their own identity: "In a factory with one thousand or ten thousand people, to have the boss discover you is very hard. You must discover yourself. You must develop yourself." (Chang, 2008, 174). Many young Chinese today express similar sentiments, citing the huge size of the country's population rather than the number of fellow workers (see Rofel, 2007; Palmer, 2013). Lifestyle choices become essential to define the individual and distinguish them from those around them.

Many of the interviewees talked of their volunteering in lifestyle terms. Many distinguished the act of volunteering from the cause itself and implied that it was 'being a volunteer' that shaped their biography more than 'being an environmentalist' or someone interested in helping the elderly. These interviewees indicated that the act was just as important, or even more important, than the alignment of the action; often implying that they would get involved with other CSOs focusing on vastly different causes. This is not to say that they were not committed volunteers, but rather that 'the volunteer' lifestyle was a more solid outline to define their biography, or a more representative container for the sum of their views. The interviewee Chenhua, who volunteered for a CSO that assisted the elderly in old people's homes, said that: "I haven't got a particular interest in helping old people – I just wanted to be a volunteer. If the activity was, for example, helping children, then I would also do it". Xiuying said something similar:

*"I didn't have any particular interest in an aim or anything, I just wanted to become a volunteer, because, well you know, becoming a volunteer is a way to expand the scope of your life (生活范围扩大的一个途径). So I wouldn't restrict (限于) myself to just one thing, like helping animals or helping children. I just wanted to purely become a volunteer."*

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<sup>52</sup> Some authors have noted the development of a Chinese version of the 'American Dream' (see Yan, 1994).

Lijuan's trajectory of volunteering demonstrated comparable notions of lifestyle. She volunteered for four different CSOs, all with differing aims and objectives: one was a community group, one was CSO2, another was CSO4, and the fourth was a Christian group (even though she said that she was not Christian). She said that she had no specific interest in the alignments of the activities of each CSO. When asked to sum up her motivations, she said: "*I don't have any particular interest in these things, I just want to volunteer*". Zhenping talked of his volunteering in terms of a lifestyle choice, describing it as a hobby: "*Some people use their free time to practice religion or to go to bars, but I chose to use this time to volunteer. Every individual's choice of hobby, the way that they use their free time, is different. I myself see volunteering as an opportunity to relax.*"

Some of the volunteers talked about the '志愿者生活' (the volunteering life) alongside the notions of '志愿者精神' (volunteer spirit) that were discussed in the previous chapter. What defined this 'volunteer life'? Superficially it was involvement with a number of CSOs aligned towards different causes, or with one or two CSOs that dealt with multiple causes. There were numerous instances of interviewees who displayed this pattern; for example the veteran volunteer Ziqing had travelled across the country volunteering with CSOs dealing with issues that ranged from; environmental, poverty, and LGBT. Another veteran, Chende, was involved with many different CSOs, all addressing diverse issues. Chenguang, Fuhan, and Shihong, had all previously volunteered with CSOs that addressed very different issues to their current volunteering commitment. New recruit Hongmei said that she didn't care about the issue, she just wanted to volunteer.

In the 'volunteer life', being 'a volunteer' acts as one of the key coherent narratives that are constructed to define the self. The word 'volunteer' aligns better with the value-set of the individual than the word 'environment', or 'poverty', or 'LGBT'. This lifestyle volunteering also acts as one of the primary architects of the DIY biography, influencing other choices in what defines the self; the people one associates with, the blogs one reads, the TV shows a person watches. In this sense 'volunteerism' itself, can be seen as a type of identity-forming 'new social movement' (see Larana *et al*, 1994). Individuals volunteer *not* because they have a particular desire to take part in cause-based action, to address specific issues such as 'deforestation' or 'AIDS-awareness'. Instead they volunteer to take part in volunteering itself, to shape their biography into the form of 'a volunteer', and to take on some of the views, values, and social networks attached to 'being a volunteer'.

### 5.3. Life-politics and Pluralised Solidarity

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Traditional volunteering in the West was entwined with the religious and political meta-frameworks that dominated first modernity. Volunteers therefore often got involved with organisations that were corollaries of long-established institutions: a Christian might volunteer for the Salvation Army; a socialist might join a trade-union voluntary group (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2000, 14-15). The Chinese context was of course different, but voluntary action was similarly tied to the same established doctrines and ideologies that prescribed meaning and direction to all other life-choices (mainly Confucianism and then Maoism) (Brilliant, 1995; Leung, 1997). However, embedded within the choices of the individualised DIY biography are ‘self-politics’ or ‘life-politics’ (Giddens, 1991) where “*the political bursts into the centre of the private and social life is ‘re-moralised’*” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 44). Politics become individualised, the stances of the individual fluid and non-linear: a ‘pick and mix’ of positions that may seem contradictory to the old-style ‘left-right’ political voter (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2000). This creates a disconnect with the Tocquevillian linkage between politics and involvement in civil society that was discussed in the literature review. Whilst the Tocquevillian position would be that involvement in civil society stimulates a greater investment in traditional politics, modern individualised individuals may see involvement in civil society as an alternative, even an ‘escape’ from it (Dekker and Halman, 2003, 9). As Galston and Levine (1997, 26) say: “*Indeed, citizens, particularly the youngest, seem to be shifting their preferred civil involvement from official politics to the voluntary sector. If so, the classic Tocquevillian thesis would have to be modified: local civic life, far from acting as a school for wider political involvement, may increasingly serve as a refuge from (and alternative) to it*”.

In the contemporary Chinese context there is only one inflexible political line to subscribe to (or to ignore). Traditionally there has been active state opposition to those who choose to contradict this Party line but increasingly this is not the case if the transgression does not question the key unmovable pillars of CCP legitimation (see Shambaugh, 2008; Tsang, 2009). The Chinese state continues to pay great attention to controlling the individual’s activity in the public political sphere, but in the private sphere it is both increasingly unable and unwilling to interfere (Yan, 2010, 502-506). From the perspective of individualisation this is interesting because individualised self-politics deals primarily with issues that are in this private sphere. Political issues, and the expression and debate of those issues, are no longer confined to the traditional arenas that the old political systems dominated. Civil society is therefore an important conduit for self-politics because the individualised individual can express their fragmented and fluid political positions, no longer suited to single-party politics, in self-constructed combinations of choices.

Concordantly, many of the interviewees also recognised that their conception of ‘citizenship’ was best expressed through a group organisation. Some of the interviewees, such as Luli, Zhenping, and Qiuye expressed this by using a ‘street’ analogy:

Luli: *“because, for example, if you come across a beggar on a street and you feel that you want to help him. If you give him your money this is not enough. But if you can get involved with other people in a group and help him together then you can really transform and influence his situation. Doing it this way is far more effective and more important than just giving him a bit of your own money.”*

Qiuye: *“The difference is that Lei Feng is spontaneous, you see something or someone on the street that that needs help and you go and help them. But volunteering is more suitable (比较适当的); it’s planned, it’s organised, it’s more that you have chosen to do it”*

Zhenping: *“Through the internet you can realise your aspirations of volunteering. You can’t just casually do that on your own, on the street! You need to be able to find the organisations to help you”.*

Qiuye’s point about volunteering being about ‘planning’, ‘organisation’ and ‘choice’ highlights a key difference between the interviewees’ notions of good citizenship behaviour (through volunteering in CSOs) and the state’s (through *leifengism*).

Increasingly the Chinese individual is associating with other individuals based on mutual interest, meaning that the homogenous collective that Maoism tried directly and indirectly to create is steadily fragmenting into communities. The individual is now left to arrange their own associational life as long as they stay away from overtly political expression (Yan 2009; Hansen and Pang, 2010). As discussed above, re-configured notions of ‘self’ have re-drawn the outline of the individual as a self-determining agent with a broad range of life-choices. No longer are they just appointed members of group defined by a greater ideology (Pye, 1991); instead they shape their own memberships of groups defined increasingly by the sum of their parts. This membership increasingly shapes the individual as one of the ‘lifestyle choices’ which; *“involves a cluster of habits and orientations, and hence has a certain unity - important to a continuing sense of ontological security - that connects options in a more or less ordered pattern.”* (Giddens, 1991, 82). As discussed in the section above, many of the interviewees identified themselves as ‘volunteers’, as if to be a volunteer was to be ‘a certain kind of person’ and a member of a certain strata of society. This was a continuation of the recognition of cross-cultural similarities and



global-identity talked about in the previous chapter; how the interviewees talked about how “volunteers all over the world are the same” (Wenqian). This represents a recognition and acceptance of pluralisation. The volunteer Xiaoxiao was a good example of this. Alongside her volunteering involvement, another great passion of hers was Cosplay<sup>53</sup>. In terms of associational activity she saw little difference between her volunteer work and the Cosplay organisation that she was involved with. After talking about the importance of ‘helping yourself through volunteering as well as helping others’ and ‘spreading happiness’ (as discussed at the beginning of this chapter), she gave examples:

*“For example helping others; such as when I go to volunteer teach I’m helping those primary school students. An example of helping yourself, in a broader sense, would be this LGBT organisation that I know of, they are involved with improving societal acceptance of LGBT people, so in that way they are helping themselves, because they are all LGBT themselves. An example of ‘spreading happiness’ would be this Cosplay organisation that I’m involved with. Now, you may be surprised at this answer, how can a Cosplay organisation be like a volunteering organisation? However, I think that their aims and aspirations are similar; spreading happiness through holding activities and allowing people to participate. In this sense they are the same.”*

In this way Xiaoxiao disregarded the disparate alignments of the organisations (welfare through education, LGBT advocacy, and cultural hobby), instead conceiving them as similar social spaces which ‘spread happiness’ by allowing like-minded people to participate.

Like Xiaoxiao, many of the interviewees talked about volunteering to meet people who ‘thought’ like them. Others said that once they volunteered they realised that their fellow volunteers held similar views to their own. Wangmei volunteered to meet more “志同道合的人” (‘like-minded people’ or ‘kindred-spirits’). In a similar way Liuhua said that meeting “志同道合的人” was a big benefit of volunteering: “*Through doing the activities you can feel yourself improving more and more, you meet a lot of new friends that are like-minded (志同道合的)*”. Wenqian said that although he didn’t know his fellow volunteers at first, they turned into friends because “*we are all optimistic and up-beat (积极向上), Within the organisation everyone’s aims and attitudes are similar*” Zhilan said something analogous:

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<sup>53</sup> Cosplay stands for ‘Costume play’ and is a sub-culture that is centred around role-play. It is particularly associated with Japan.

*“I know about 80% of the other volunteers very well. Most of them I didn’t know before I volunteered and then, after we volunteered together, we became friends. I think this is because most of our views are the same, our worldviews are the same, the thing we like are all the same. After a volunteer activity we will have a get-together, maybe we will keep in contact by sending postcards. So I think our relationship is very good”*

Another interviewee, Zhenyi, emphasised that the relationship between her ‘like-minded’ volunteer friends (志同道合的人) was ‘free’ and ‘equal’:

*“We are all friends, like family. We all come from different places, different colleges, different areas but we have all become acquainted with each other through having common ideas. The style (风味) of our relationship is also relatively free (自由), and relatively equal (公平) so everyone has a deep friendship, our relationship is really good.”*

The interviewees all showed evidence of being part of a society beginning to organise into pluralised interest groups denoted by chosen membership, and associations defined by voluntary commitment and action. The emphasis on choice in the associational life of the individualised individual also extends to a re-conceptualisation of the relationship *between* groups. If one individual is allowed to choose how they associate, then so must the choices of other individuals be accepted. This stands in great contrast to how Pye (1991, 452-453) describes the traditional membership of Chinese associations as commonly being ‘ascriptive’ and ‘passive’. It also stands in great contrast to the critics of new forms of association who, as discussed in the literature review, forecast a ‘decline’ into fragmented hyper-individualisation and atomisation. As the interviewee Xiuying said: *“Because of Chinas development, because of the modern living environment (环境) and also because of work, people are becoming alienated from one another (疏离), however, I think that volunteering can bring people together.”* In this sense, Xiuying is talking about a form of ‘re-embedding’, and this will be looked at in chapter seven. In the case study below, the interviewee Jingfei also talked about involvement in a CSO as both an expression of life-politics and a form of re-embedding.

## **Case study: Jingfei**

Jingfei volunteered for an environmental CSO (CSO6) that she had helped to set up with a number of friends. She was passionate about environmental issues and particularly enthusiastic about the benefits of vegetarianism. She said that all of her friends were vegetarians and that she had been originally introduced to it by a friend, gradually finding more and more out about it from material on the internet. Originally she thought that vegetarianism “*was just for nuns and monks but then I found out how environmentally friendly and healthy it was*”. She now sees vegetarianism as “*an easy and accessible way for everyone to make an environmentally friendly impact*”.

Part of Jingfei’s volunteering involved promoting the economic and health benefits of vegetarianism. The CSO that she was involved in organised activities in schools and universities, setting up free tasting sessions where students could have a free taste of vegetarian food so that they will find out that “*it is tasty and that it is carbon friendly*”. She said “*the most important thing is that they provide the information for the person so that they can make their own decision*”. She had first got involved with volunteering in the aftermath of the Wenchuan earthquake, which taught her “*to think-over (考虑) my own affairs*”. After the earthquake she became one of the founders of CSO6: “*when we started there were only three of us doing it then, together with a university environmental group, we expanded it. Then more and more people became involved with it*”. She then gradually became more involved with the group, even though she had a busy job in marketing that took up a lot of her time.

Jingfei thought that volunteering was becoming more and more popular in China and that there were increasing opportunities to volunteer. She also noted a changing attitude: “*today’s society is more and more receptive of it, that volunteering is becoming really normal, that young people should go and volunteer*”. Jingfei was one of the few interviewees who said that she was not patriotic at all. She talked about how “*I wouldn’t say that I love my country but that I love the earth*” and that “*I think that all volunteers across the world consider themselves to be world citizens (世界的公民)*.” She also noted a change in the conception of volunteering, from being a state-directed collective activity, to being an expression of new notions of individuality and self:

“*Before, it was about examples. This is different to today. Today it’s more about the individual’s needs, spiritual and material needs. Before it was about society’s needs (社会的需要). People*

today have individualised characters (有个性), if you want to do it then you do it. Before it was the government [that told you to do it]. Young people today do volunteering because they see it as an individualistic (有个性的) and honourable (有荣耀的) thing to do and that it can strengthen their understanding of society.”

Jingfei’s ontological narrative of volunteering clearly displays lifestyle politics and choices, and, as the quote above demonstrates, her notion of volunteering is strongly individualised, containing many of the themes discussed in the previous chapter and this chapter.

## 5.4. Searching for ‘Newness’ and ‘Meaning’

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In reflexive modernity the identity of the self becomes a blank outline for the individual to colour in as they so wish; the search for new ‘colours’ becomes an active part of life. As Giddens (1994, 82-83) says: “*Our day-to-day lives have become experimental in a manner which parallels the ‘grand experiment’ of modernity as a whole*”. Concordant to this, ‘self-improvement’ becomes important, as Calhoun (1994, 20) points out. Many of the interviewees described the CSO as acting as a conduit for this experimental biographical-shaping and ‘improvement’ because of its ability to expose them to ‘the new’. In doing so many of them simultaneously contrasted the opportunities to ‘explore’ and ‘search’ provided by voluntary action and association with the opposite: the relative ‘monotony’ and ‘blandness’ of everyday life. Chenyue said that he volunteered to make his life “*more interesting*”. On several occasions he described his life as “*a bit boring*” and “*monotonous*” (单调), and said that volunteering “*brought colour to [his] life*”. In a similar way, Wenling constantly talked about volunteering as a means to “*meet new people*”, saying that she liked “*coming into contact with people who aren’t like her*”. For Wenling, it was not the ‘cause’ of the volunteering that was important, it was the opportunity that it provided to experience ‘the other’: “*I don’t mind who I am helping: old people, sick children, etc. The most important thing is that they are different to me*”. She also talked a lot about making herself a better person through volunteering, summing up her motivations as “*to enrich my experiences and my being through helping others*” (帮助别人时候丰富自己的经历, 自己的内心) and talked of volunteering as exposing herself to new ideas: “*Life is like climbing a mountain, you have to overcome lots of difficulties along the climb. But volunteering activities are like encountering something beautiful (奇葩) along the way, like some beautiful scenery, it helps with the difficult climb. It can give you happiness.*” Wenling correspondingly linked volunteering with being ‘开放’ (open-minded) and also with foreign ideals. She contrasted the new things that she

had learnt through volunteering with her parent's generation, who she said: "*don't have a very open-minded way of thinking (开放思想)*".

The interviewee Wangmei also emphasised that a key motivation for getting involved with volunteering was to experience 'the new'. When asked about how she initially came to be involved she said that "*My life was boring, I spent all day at university. So I searched on the internet for opportunities to have some fun*". She was involved with volunteering to help autistic children and she said that when she saw the volunteering opportunity for the first time she had "*never heard of autism and was interested to see what it was like*". In a similar manner to Wenling, she also went on to say that she saw volunteering as a way to meet new people and new ideas: "*I wanted new experiences, to get involved with a social group (社会团体) so I could see society from a new perspective*". Another interviewee, Liyun, when asked what her original motivations for volunteering were, said that "*volunteering could enable me to learn and understand more, also to find new friends*". Zhilan really emphasised how she could experience 'the new' through volunteering, and in doing so, to improve herself. When asked about what activities she liked the best, she said that she liked all of them because they were new and had made her more tolerant and understanding:

*"All of my volunteering experiences have been in different fields and directions so I think that all of the experiences are new. They are all in fields that I haven't previously experienced so I'm always interested in all of them [...] You can also understand how other people live their lives, and this is really good. I am still young and I haven't experienced too much but through volunteering I can see that all those people around me live their lives in different ways and that these people are still optimistic and happy. So I think that this has been a big influence on me."*

In this way, these examples demonstrate how volunteering acted as a conduit for the individuals to encounter new values and ideas, and in doing so to 'improve' and 'develop' the self. For some this was a secondary concern that emerged after initial involvement. For many others however, the decision to become first involved was heavily motivated by an active search for opportunities to encounter 'the new'.

As discussed in the introduction, individualisation forces individuals to become "*do-it-yourself producers of meaning and biography*" (Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 2002, 151). From the interviews conducted for this study it was striking how common it was for the interviewees to respond to questions about 'motivations' by referencing the idea of '意义' ('to have meaning', or

‘to be meaningful’) <sup>54</sup>. For example, by answering ‘why do you volunteer’ with “我要一个有意义的生活” (“I want a meaningful life”). In China there is a clear attempt by the state to dominate the definition of ‘意义’ (meaningfulness) and to entangle it with the negative state-sanctioned depictions of individualism. For the Chinese state, a ‘有意义的生活’ (a meaningful life) can only be found in traditional structures and value-systems, defined by the state as strong government and collectivist individual. Alternative routes to ‘意义’ are portrayed as egoistic and selfish (Pye, 1991; Ci, 1994). As described in the literature review, this response has similarities (although for different reasons) to the response of religious and political systems to individualisation across the globe (e.g. Telegraph, 2009; GOP, 2012). For these institutions, the path to 意义 can only be signposted by traditionally defined symbols. However, viewed through the lens of the individualisation thesis this ‘reactionary’ response is doomed to failure because the old monolithic value systems that traditionally created ‘meaning’ are incompatible for the individualised individual. Not only are they dominated by rationale that seems outdated in the modern world, they are also too prescriptive and rigid. Furthermore, in the Chinese context, for the state to define morality and dictate meaning may seem absurd to the modern Chinese individual because it is increasingly apparent that many of those within the CCP are not paragons of moral virtue (see Shirk, 1982; Guardian, 2011; Global Times, 2012).

The ‘search for meaning’ in the lives of modern Chinese individuals is a reflexive process that crosses spatial, temporal, and ideological boundaries. In China’s ‘compressed modernisation’ (Yan, 2009, xvii) the desire for a stable income, career and family life (the exemplar of this being the 1950’s American suburban lifestyle) is developing *whilst* the very socio-economic conditions that make it achievable are changing. There is increasingly no longer a linear life path to follow and what constitutes a ‘meaningful life’ is left to the individual to define. Individuals pick and choose from a huge menu including ‘Confucian’, ‘Rock-music’, ‘Buddhist’, ‘Celebrity’, ‘Maoist’, and ‘Western’ options. This creates the appearance of contradictions as elements of value-systems that have developed in radically different cultural and temporal contexts are merged. To older generations, these contradictions seem alien and un-rectifiable<sup>55</sup>. However, viewed through the individualisation lens the signs of contradiction are symptomatic of individualised individuals creating meaning from disparate combinations of value systems.

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<sup>54</sup> Fleischer’s study of Guangzhou volunteers also picked up on this (2009), linking the ‘search for 意义 with a ‘moral-selving’.

<sup>55</sup> This is why the practises of new religious converts seems disturbing to many traditional followers of the religions who label them ‘superficial’. A recent example of this came when Buddhists practising ‘fang sheng’ inappropriately released snakes into a village to cause chaos (Telegraph, 2012).

Overall, the repetition of ‘意义’ (meaningfulness) in the interviewee’s narratives of volunteering was striking. Many of the interviewees linked their volunteering motivations with a general search for a ‘meaningful life’. Wenqian’s statement was typical. He said that he had first gotten involved with volunteering because he had “*free time and he wanted to pursue a meaningful life (追求一个意义的生活)*”. The interviewee Zongying said that “*if you do things that are 意义 [like volunteering] then you are also being good to yourself*”. Bozhen, who was the volunteer co-ordinator for CSO2, said that she thought that volunteering was becoming more common because: “*I think it’s probably because everybody likes to enrich their after-class time or their free-time by doing something meaningful (意义的事情). I think lots of young people have this way of thinking.*” Many of the interviewees contrasted their notions of ‘a meaningful life’ with representations of the alternative; a life without meaning. For some volunteers this meaningless life was analogous to ‘boring’. Like Wenling above, Qiuye repeatedly stated that she had wanted to join the voluntary organisation to meet people who were not the same as herself, saying that “*my life is too smooth, too peaceful, too affluent, I want to meet people who are not affluent.*” For others a life without meaning was represented by a pursuit of money. Yangguang said that people today didn’t get involved in meaningful activities like volunteering because: “*people just want to make money, in today’s Chinese society money is everything, people think that it can solve all of their problems*”.

The interviewee Xiuying described her volunteering as ‘meaningful’: “*it’s a really important part of my life. It allows me to find lots of good friends. It allows me to feel that my life is full of meaning. Along with making money, eating, sleeping, it’s a really meaningful (意义的) thing*”. She also described her choice to volunteer as a ‘strategy of self’, to guide her life away from ‘no meaning’ and towards ‘meaning’:

*“I don’t think that any single person influenced me. It was more that I personally wanted to change me life. And I thought to myself ‘how should I change?’ and then I thought to myself that ‘maybe volunteering was perhaps a very good and a very useful thing to do’ so I went to do it. Then I discovered that it was indeed really useful and good!”*

Zhenyi also contextualised her search for meaning succinctly, noting a link between feelings of anomie (Beck’s ‘disenchantment dimension’) and volunteering. According to her, volunteering had an important ‘understanding’ function, and that, as more and more people in society felt ‘lost’, more and more people would get involved in volunteering because it gave meaning to their lives:

*“In today’s China, at its stage of development, I feel that lots of people have an impulsive and impetuous mentality (浮躁的心里), and are in a condition of bewilderment (迷茫的状态). This is different to previous generations. Today’s young people need and want more and more, but they don’t always find answers. China is more developed than before, more choices are on offer, people don’t know what to choose and do, this gives people a feeling of being empty (落空的状态). And so because of this I think people will choose a new way of doing things, like choosing to be a volunteer. By doing volunteering it can fill-up this empty state of mind (弥补落空的思想状态). So I think that in the future this trend will become more widespread [because more people are becoming ‘lost’].”*

In a similar way, many other volunteers talked about ‘learning’ through volunteering: learning about issues, learning about themselves, and learning about other people. Liyun, when asked what her original motivations were, said that “*volunteering could enable me to learn and understand more, also to find new friends*”. Xingjuan said that she thought that through volunteering she could “*feel herself becoming a better person*”. She went on to say that: “*volunteering can turn you from a selfish person into a selfless person and make you look at the world differently*”. Many of the volunteers therefore talked about the meaning that they had created and ‘learnt’ through volunteering influencing other acts and choices in their biography, and it is this that will be discussed in chapter seven. The following two case studies present examples of how the core processes detailed in this chapter - shaping the outline of biography, expressing self-politics, and searching for ‘newness’ and ‘meaning’ - combined to manifest themselves in the interviewee’s narratives.

## 5.5. Case Studies

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### ***Case study: Hongmei***

The interviewee Hongmei was in her mid-twenties and was brought up in the countryside. In her interview she described how her family was quite poor when she was young, and how she used to sell cigarettes by the side of the road with her mother. However, her father’s business became profitable and by the time that she was older, her family were able to afford to send her to university. She studied linguistics and spent a year in Europe as part of her degree. She was able



to speak several different languages and had a number of foreign friends inside and outside the country. She realised how “lucky” she was but she said that she still felt deeply unsatisfied with her life: *“My life has no meaning. It’s just work, and then going out, and then more work”*. Hongmei also felt ‘guilty’ about how lavish her life was: *“I know that my life is very good, but I think that I am selfish. I have a guilty conscience.”*

At the time of her interview, Hongmei was utilising her language skills in a job with a large multinational company. She said that she led a rich and varied social life, going out to bars several times a week with work colleagues and friends. She hadn’t started to volunteer yet but had signed up to volunteer for a group that helped animals. She repeatedly described her own life as both ‘selfish’ and ‘chaotic’, and volunteering as a means to escape this: *“Sometimes my life is chaotic, I just want to help normal people”*. For Hongmei, volunteering represented redemption, both an escape from and a cure for a life that she no longer liked: *“It’s selfish. All of my friends are selfish, they just care about money and appearances. I hope that through volunteering I can make friends with people who have more meaningful life. Most of my current friends just work and socialise. Their lives are selfish.”* Although she said that she was an atheist she explicitly compared her volunteering to Buddhist ideals of redemption. She summed up her motivations as to ‘free myself from guilt,’ saying: *“I’m not a Buddhist but I suppose my motivations are somewhat similar to ‘赎罪’ (‘redemption’ or ‘atonement’).*

She was perhaps the interviewee who was most critical of both the state and tradition. She distanced her motivations to volunteer from any notions of patriotism and differentiated it from state-directed volunteering activities: *“I volunteer because I myself am willing to (愿意), it has nothing to do with the government. I wouldn’t get involved with any volunteering activities that the government organises, such as those during the Olympics, because they don’t help anyone and also because the government actually harms people”*.

She was also very critical of certain aspects of Chinese tradition, especially familialism. She described how that, when her father became rich, the rest of the family were “like locusts”, swarming around him to receive their windfall: *“When I was young my family was poor. From five years old I sold cigarettes, I was really small, quite pitiful really. No one helped us then. Then my father started a business and we got richer. Then lots of relatives came asking for help. I don’t like them. I don’t think that blood-tie commitments are reasonable”*. Hongmei’s description of her own life therefore displayed many of the characteristics that are common criticisms of modern China society; a materialist life focused on work and money. However, whilst she herself

realised this, she was not swallowing the state-sanctioned medication. She linked the immorality of the state with the immorality of society and was also critical of traditional Chinese familialism. Instead she was taking her life in a different direction; searching for meaning in volunteering. Her narrative was therefore very far from being Lei-Feng-like.

### ***Case study: Jiancui***

The researcher first encountered the interviewee Jiancui during a volunteering activity with CSO3. It was during a festival period and the activity consisted of accompanying elderly people around a Taoist temple. Jiancui stood out from the rest of volunteers<sup>56</sup>. He was dressed in ambitious combinations of colour and fabric, wore polarised sunglasses, and had neatly spiked hair. The rest of the group, including the researcher, looked slightly dishevelled. He was in his early twenties and was very knowledgeable about Western pop culture, and talked constantly about music. For Jiancui, music and pop-stars had the greatest influence on his life. He cited two influences for his volunteering: the girl who first introduced him to the CSO (who he knew through teaching her guitar) and pop-stars:

*“From the education that I received since I was young it (‘义工’, volunteering) was mentioned but I didn’t pay much attention to it. What do I pay attention to? Music stars. When I read in the news that they did stuff like volunteering then their influence on me was really big. They are really busy but they still find time to do something like volunteering. I’m just a normal person so it made me think that I should do it even more.”*

In particular he mentioned the influence of one pop-star: *“I really like Xiao Jingteng he did some volunteering, he helped some kids”*. Aside from the influence of Xiao Jingteng and others, Jiancui also said that he thought that volunteering was meaningful (有意义) because it was the sign of a ‘developed’ country: *“if a country attaches importance to volunteers, and pays attention to disadvantaged groups in society(弱势群体), addresses the poor peoples’ clothing and eating problems, and helps to cure the sick, then this country can have a stable kind of development. Because if these weak groups (弱势群体) are not addressed then society is not stable (稳定).”*

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<sup>56</sup> In fact, based on appearances, the researcher, even as the only foreigner, may have had more in common with both the elderly participants and the other volunteers than with Jiancui.

He had many similarities to Hongmei. Like her, his parents were also from the countryside and he considered their views on volunteering to be different to his own: *“My mother and father grew up in the countryside, they weren’t very well educated. I guess they think that something like volunteering has nothing to do with me, that you should just do the things you need to do to help yourself, and that’s all that matters.”*

Like Hongmei he led a rich social life, referring to his friends as ‘night cats’ (夜猫子), and was similarly critical of the state: *“The government doesn’t do enough to help people, I’ve seen it loads on the internet, there are loads of people who are ill but receive no help, old people who have no home, old people who are ill but have no means to treat themselves. The government’s efforts are not enough and they are rubbish compared with those of developed countries.”* He also said that patriotism had nothing to do with his motivations for volunteering, and that he did it for the normal people (普通的人). He considered that although the efforts of volunteers like himself were only small compared to the governments: *“they can still give people’s hearts a warm kind of feeling”*.

Jiancui was therefore engaged in pro-social activity - such as taking elderly people around a Taoist temple (what would seem to be a very Confucian activity) - but he was clearly not a strict follower of tradition, nor did he consider that he was following state-directives to volunteer. According to his self-constructed narrative, he volunteered because he personally considered it to be ‘meaningful’, and because his role-models and friends influenced him to.

# 6. The Role of Education, Modernisation, the Internet, and the Wenchuan Earthquake

## 6.1. Introduction

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The first analysis chapter looked at how revised notions of social commitments contributed to a re-defined, bottom-up construction of the modern volunteer identity. The previous chapter looked at how involvement in civil society enabled the individual volunteer to construct and expand their self-identity. This chapter will turn back to the volunteering narrative by focusing on four areas that constituted significant ‘themes’ in the interviewee’s narrative trajectories of volunteering: education, modernisation, the internet, and the Wenchuan earthquake. All four of these areas performed important functions in enabling the interviewees to reflexively achieve their identity as civil society volunteers.

From the literature review we learnt that education, modernisation, and the internet can all significantly affect an individual’s involvement in volunteering (Inglehart, 1997, 2003; Wilson, 2000; Dekker and Halman, 2003; Edwards, 2009). We also learnt that they play an important role in the individualisation processes (Triandis, 1995; Barber, 2001; Macfadyen *et al*, 2004; Cao, 2009). Giddens says that greater education and material wealth gives access to more ‘options’ (Giddens, 1991, 80-88) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim say that affluence and education alter ‘value-systems’ leading to increased individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 38). The internet is also very important for resource-lacking Chinese CSOs (Tai, 2006; Yang, 2011) because it links organisations to individuals. It is also an important conduit for individualisation because it pluralises society, exposing individuals to new ideas and values (Lo *et al*, 2008; Yan, 2009) and giving them an enhanced ability to share and process information (Barber, 2001). The 2008 Wenchuan earthquake has also been included in this chapter because many of the interviewee’s described it as playing an important role in their volunteering trajectories. All of these four themes – education, modernisation, the internet, and the Wenchuan earthquake – combined in the interviewee’s narratives to offer new spaces, resources and visibilities that enabled the volunteer to reflexively construct their identity as a civil society volunteer.

## 6.2. Education

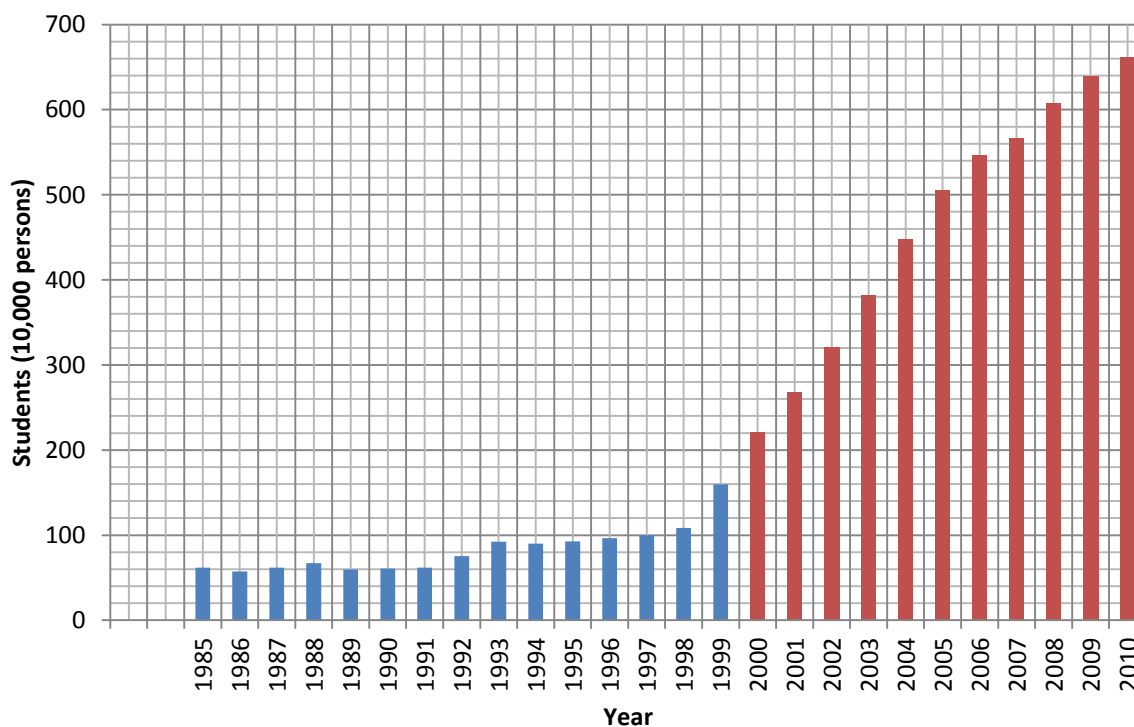
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Overall, education manifested itself in two ways in the interviewee's narratives: 1) altering value-sets, and 2) providing a spatial and temporal 'space'. The second way – providing a 'space' - was far more prominent than the first, so this section will concentrate on that.

### 6.2.1. Development and Reform

The Chinese education system has been targeted for reform and development by late-Qing, republican, and communist governments (Schwarz, 1986; Cheng, 2009). The post-Mao government took over this baton (Xinhua, 2012a) and at the time of this study there existed a huge pool of highly educated young adults:

**Figure 2.1. Number of Students Enrolled in Institutes of Higher Education**



Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China (available at [www.stats.gov.cn](http://www.stats.gov.cn)).

This expanded education system has also begun to be gradually reformed (Cao, 2009, 44-45; China Daily, 2010). A key function of the traditional education system was to socialise the individual and promote conformity at the expense of individuality (Schwarz, 1986; Cheng and Wong, 1996; Cheng, 2009). During the Mao-era the content of that education was heavily

politicised and orientated towards collectivising the individual (Cheung and Pan, 2006, 38; Cheng, 2009, 83-109) by emphasising self-sacrifice and demonising individuality (Cheng, 2009, 85-86). However, recent reforms aim to move education away from their Maoist role of producing workers for the planned economy and towards nurturing creative individuals for the global economy<sup>57</sup>. Since the mid 1990's 'all-round education' and a 'creative' individuality have begun to be promoted alongside socialisation (Cheung and Pan, 2006; Cao, 2009). For example a 2004 policy document called for "*the development of individualized study methods and the autonomous learning ability on the part of students*" (quoted in Cao, 2009, 45).

As shown in the literature review, many of the norms and values that are required to have developed within a person in order for them to engage in associational activity will have come from their experience growing into adulthood (Janoski *et al*, 1998; Reed and Selbee, 2003). As Edwards says "*the values and beliefs we want to see developed are fostered in all the places where we learn and grow*" (Edwards, 2005). The level and type of a person's education is found to correlate positively with the likelihood that they will volunteer because it enhances an individual's ability to process choices, increases their awareness of social issues, and builds empathic feeling (Sundeen & Raskoff, 1994, 392; Brady *et al*, 1995, 285; Rosenthal *et al* 1998, 480). Stronger and more liberal education is also an important individualising factor in China (Cao, 2009), as Triandis (1995, 66) points out; "*education generally leads to greater exposure to cultural diversity and tends towards individualism*".

Some of the interviewee's cited educational reform as an important part of their volunteering trajectory. For example the interviewees Wenling and Chenhua talked about how education played an important role in forming the '价值观' (value system) that had influenced them to get involved in volunteering. Kewen linked a perceived increase in people wanting to volunteer with the rising numbers of university students ("*those with culture and knowledge*"), saying that they are more likely to have more '想法' (ideas, ways of accomplishing something) and be the ones who want to help others. Similarly Jiancui, who had graduated from university a year before the interview, attributed importance to educational reform:

*"I think that today's society is gradually becoming more accepting of the idea of volunteering and this is partly due to education. Before, let's say around 20 years before, the education wasn't that good, less people went to university and it was good if you got to high school. Furthermore, the*

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<sup>57</sup> These reforms should not be over-emphasised: top-down-directed learning by rote to pass multiple-choice exams continues to dominate (and continues to be criticised) and as Cheung and Pan note; any individualism that is promoted remains restricted and 'regulated' (Cheung and Pan, 2006, 46).

*ideas of education were also different, they didn't talk about doing 公益 [public-welfare work, here referring to volunteering]. Now that is different and education is better. Before it didn't nurture the student, now it is more nurturing and more supportive."*

However, the dominant way that the interviewees talked about education was how it provided a space – both temporal and spatial – for a relationship to develop between volunteering and the individual.

### **6.2.2. Providing Opportunities for Free Association**

As discussed in the literature review, the role of education as a predictor of voluntary involvement is also linked to the fact that greater involvement in education increases the likelihood that the individual will belong to more organisations (Herzog & Morgan, 1993, 137; Wilson & Musick, 1997) and develop the skills required to involve themselves within an organisation (Brady *et al*, 1995, 285). As Thornton and Fricke (1987, 755-758) show, in China the spread of state-schooling in the Mao-era was an important step in the Maoist individualisation process because it allowed the individual to form networks outside of the family. Today, aside from facilitating informal networks outside the dominant non-school environments, the education system also allows for formal organisations to be established from the bottom-up. Outside the campus these organisations would be subjected to a stronger enforcement of regulations, but on the campus student-run organisations are encouraged (Ma, 2002, 2006; Cooper, 2006; Pulver, 2009).

Campus student groups have been prominent in 20th Century Chinese history, playing important roles in the Republican and May 4th movements, the Cultural Revolution, and the 1989 Tiananmen incident (Schwarz, 1986, 12-93; Zhao, 2001). In the Hu-Wen era there has been a blossoming of student groups focused, like the CSOs outside of the campus, on less-politicised issues (particularly the environment) (Lu, 2003; Pulver, 2009). In common with higher education institutes across the globe, first-year Chinese students are now presented with a growing range of associations and organisations to join. Whereas previously these would have been offshoots of the state and the *voluntariness* of membership questionable, today the organisations can be

student-established and run, and focusing on a wide variety of issues for the new student to choose or ignore as they see fit<sup>58</sup>.

Many of the volunteers interviewed for this study had gotten involved in volunteering whilst at university and for many it was their first experience. A common conduit for engagement was to see a ‘通知’ (a notice) about it, as the interviewee Kewen said: “*My first time volunteering was at university; about two years ago I saw a notice that said ‘go to Beichuan and volunteer-teach’*” (Beichuan is a town that was near the epicentre of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake). Liuhua described a ‘recruitment fair’ in her first year where there were “*loads of societies (社团) all looking for new members*”. She had volunteered a couple of times at high school but it was her university experience that turned her into a committed volunteer: “*I first got involved with volunteering at high school but that influence didn’t mature (成熟) very much. However, after I went to university I discovered that doing volunteering was the kind of activity that requires thought and action (需要更多的思想和行动). It was then that I became a really dedicated volunteer*”<sup>59</sup>. University therefore turned her initial interest into ‘dedicated’ involvement with CSO work and at the time of her interview she was president of a student-run and established environmental advocacy CSO (CSO12).

Many of the interviewees talked about university as a time to ‘express’ and ‘explore’ their individuality, contrasting it with the busy period of life either side of the university experience<sup>60</sup>. Many of the interviewees therefore talked of it as an opportunity to be both *exposed to* and to *try-out* new ideas and activities, such as volunteering. The interviewee Xiuying’s response was typical and her statement below clearly depicts the university as a temporal space that allows her to reflexively (by observing her peers) construct her own biography:

*“In high school you concentrate every second to preparing for the ‘Gaokao’ (the university entrance examination) and you don’t have time for anything else because you are so busy. Then when you enter university it’s completely different to before. You meet new friends and you think that their lives are really rich (丰富), full of lots of different things. Then you think that maybe*

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<sup>58</sup> The decline of state control on the university campus is clearly concerning the Party leadership. In 2012 Xi Jinping gave a speech to university administrators saying that universities should increase “*thought control*” over students and that “*University Communist Party organs must adopt firmer and stronger measures to maintain harmony and stability in universities*” (LA Times, 2012).

<sup>59</sup> Another common way was to get involved with the China Youth Volunteers, the state-run volunteering organisation that has a presence on every campus in China. This will be discussed in chapter seven.

<sup>60</sup> Chinese middle and high school students are some of the most examined in the world and the first few years of university offers a breathing space after the relentless exam preparation of the early-mid teenage years and before the period of full-time work and family-building.



*your life could be like theirs, crammed full of interesting stuff. So I thought 'how should I fill it up' and something came to mind, that of 'being good to myself by being good to others' (对我好, 对大家双赢的一个局面) so then I decided to be a volunteer.*"

The stresses and strains placed on middle and high school students were also referred to by some of the interviewees as reasons for why they *didn't* volunteer until enrolling in university. Kewen, who was taking his university entrance examinations at the time of the 2008 earthquake, knew that although he couldn't volunteer at the time, he would have opportunities to do so once he joined university: "*When the earthquake happened I was preparing to take the Gaokao (the university entrance exam). It made me sad that I couldn't go and help at that time, but I knew that when I became a university student I would have the means and the capacity to help.*" Sure enough in his first year of university that is what he did. Another interviewee, Liyun, talked about the pressures of school in a similar way:

*"In middle and high school we studied every day. At that time teachers and parents emphasised one thing; that you should practise every day [for exams]. You should practise to get into a good high school, then you should practise to get into a good university. You just have no time to even consider volunteering. But when you get to university you learn from your friends and family that perhaps you could volunteer"*

The quotes above from Liyun, Kewen, and Xiuying all illustrate how the university presented a temporal 'breathing space' after the pressured environment of high school examinations, which allowed them the opportunity to expand their biography by filling it with chosen tasks like volunteering. Zhenyi, a recent graduate, talked about how she had become a volunteer at university because she wanted to do something 'meaningful' (有意义的):

*"One very important reason was that many of my classmates didn't do anything, all just mucking around, playing games. I didn't want this kind of life, so I became a volunteer. After university many of those classmates regretted not making the most of their time at university, regretted that they had wasted their time playing games. But I was really happy that I chose to do volunteering."*

As discussed in the previous chapter, and in line with both Fleischer (2009) and Rolandsen (2008)'s findings, this 'search for meaning' was a very common component of the volunteers self-constructed narrative. For many of the volunteers, including Chende in the case study below,

the university provided the time, space, and opportunity, as well as engendering the appropriate ideals and values, to conduct this ‘search for meaning’ through volunteering.

The university also provided the space and opportunity for the interviewees to meet ‘like-minded people’ (this corresponds with the findings of Zhao, 2001). For some this led to the formation of their own organisations (this aspect will be further discussed in the next chapter). CSO1 was formed by the interviewee Zhangsui along with her classmates:

*“At the very beginning there were just five of us, we were all classmates from five different colleges within the university, all studying for different degrees. We all met each other through participating in the activities of the university organisation. Then we realised that we all had similar views and ways of thinking (共同的想法)”*

Therefore, for Zhangsui, the university environment not only provided her with her first experience of volunteering and the opportunity to meet people with similar ‘views and ways of thinking’, it also gave her the space and networks to form her own organisation (this will be detailed in a case study in the next chapter).

The CSO co-ordinators that were spoken to in this study also recognised the university as a key resource for their organisation and many of them actively promoted their organisations on university campuses. Bozhen, the administrator of the local branch of CSO2, said that her organisation had strong links with the main local universities:

*“I guess we connect more with University organisations and the University’s own student volunteer organisations. We have a reciprocal relationship with them and help each other. For example if a university student-run organisation has a problem then our organisation can give them help. If we ourselves are in need of long-term volunteers to help out then we can go there and recruit.”*

From the discussion above it is clear that the contemporary landscape of the Chinese university is playing a key role in exposing Chinese students to volunteering. This is important because if an individual sees that CSOs and CSO volunteering are accepted on the university campus then they are more likely to deem them to be socially acceptable, which increases the likelihood that they will get involved (see Andreoni, 1989, Freeman, 1997; Wilson, 2000). Not only is the link formalised through the presence of volunteer groups within the university system, it is also fostered through the topography of the life experiences of the modern Chinese youth. The

university provides both a space for volunteering to have a presence, and the conditions for individuals to get involved in it. The case study below is a good example of this.

### ***Case study: Chende***

The interviewee Chende was one of the most committed volunteers interviewed in this study. He had a long history of volunteering, was employed by an organisation that helped to support local CSOs, and at weekends he volunteered with many of the organisations that he worked with. When asked about what had influenced him to initially get involved in volunteering he listed three main reasons. One was his experiences growing up in a poor area:

*“I grew up in a relatively poor village, and when I was small my family was quite poor. We received a lot of help from friends and relatives, from neighbours, and from teachers at my primary and middle schools; they all gave us a lot of help. This made me realise that helping others is a really joyous activity and that I myself want to help people when I grow up. Having these early experiences influenced the way I thought.”*

These experiences during his youth motivated him to study social work at a nearby agricultural college. It was here that he received what he cited as his biggest influence; attending university: *“If I hadn’t gone to University then I probably wouldn’t have come into contact with volunteering, probably would never have got involved with voluntary service. So I think that for me, my experience of education had a huge impact on whether or not I got involved with volunteering”*

From his own experiences Chende therefore saw a firm link between volunteering and education. However, for him the link was less about educational attainment, and more about the kind of opportunities that the university environment provided:

*“Before I went to University I had never volunteered. I had grown up and studied in a village, the village didn’t have any volunteering organisations. When I went to university I didn’t know about anything at all, I saw the recruitment calls for volunteers and I was interested but I didn’t know*

*how to participate. I spoke to one of the senior students in my college and he took me to join-up. Then I gradually got more and more involved with the group and it became a hobby of mine.”*

This is how Chende started what would turn into a five-year association with volunteering, an interest that would eventually turn into an occupation. Therefore for Chende the space and opportunities that university provided significantly influenced his relationship with volunteer organisations, turning views and opinions on helping others that had been nurtured during childhood, into actual *action* within an organisation.

## **6.3. Modernisation**

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The above section discussed how ‘education’ manifested itself in the interviewee’s volunteering trajectories. This section will focus on ‘modernisation’. Issues of ‘modernisation’ - including related terms such as ‘development’ – are significant for the modern Chinese individual. Modernisation – as one of Somers’ (1994, 619) ‘meta-narratives’ – has driven the life experiences of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Chinese individuals in a very intense way. In many ways it remains an issue that is ‘closer’ to the modern Chinese individual than, for example, the Western European one. As described in the literature review, issues of individualism, collectivism, civil society and volunteering are all caught up in the state’s modernisation (and legitimation) narrative, with its stated aim of ‘harmonious’ state-led growth to achieve a ‘*xiaokang*’ society. This section will examine how the volunteering narratives employed by the interviewees bisected the modernisation meta-narrative.

### **6.3.1. Economic Growth**

By all accounts Chinese economic growth (a core part of the modernisation meta-narrative) in the reform-era has been remarkable. Since 1979 annual GDP growth rates averaging 10% have lifted over 250 million from dollar-a-day poverty (Ravallion and Chen, 2007). They have also created a burgeoning middle-income strata (Tomba, 2009; Li, 2011); average income has quadrupled, car ownership increased from 240,000 in 1990 to 26 million in 2009, and the number of credit cards increased from just 3 million in 2003 to over 150 million in 2008 (Li, 2011, 9). These rapid rises in affluence have occurred so quickly that their effects are only now beginning to be measured. Rising standards of living alter an individuals place in society (Triandis, 1995; Lo *et al*, 2008; Palmer, 2013) transforming the web of relationships that existed previously between the

individual and the family, society, and state (Inglehart, 1997, 2003; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Yan, 2009).

Links between civil society growth and modernisation were central to the theses of early civil society theorists such as Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson, who saw new economic patterns as breaking the shackles of feudalism and giving individuals the freedom to forge new social arrangements. However, for many recent theorists looking at Western societies, modernisation has instead been the enemy of civil society, disintegrating the social bonds formed in Smith and Ferguson's early modernity (see Putnam, 1995, 2000). Critics of new patterns of living in China often give a similarly negative appraisal, linking a rising affluence with increased materialism and individualism, collapsing social ties, and a cause for the many societal problems found in China today (see Wang, 2002; Guan, 2007; Ci, 2009; Lehre, 2012; Palmer, 2012). However this was not how the interviewees in this study conceived the link.

Every single one of the interviewees related their volunteering in some way to the *positive* transformative effects of economic growth. Many of the volunteers positioned their volunteering within a grand, 'modernisation' meta-narrative, seeing a direct correlation between increased economic development and increased volunteering, in a similar way to how Inglehart (1997, 2003) conceives it<sup>61</sup>. Many implied that fewer people volunteered in previous times because economic development was limited (creating Inglehart's 'survival' values), and that the reason why more people were doing it today was because of the post-Mao economic growth. Overall there were three ways in which modernisation and economic growth issues manifested themselves in the interviewees' self-constructed volunteering trajectory.

### ***I help others because I have reached a certain 'point'***

Many of the interviewees located their volunteering on a development scale, rationalising that they volunteered because they have reached a certain 'point' on that scale. For many this scale linked a combination of quantitative economic development (living standards) with an associated measurement of qualitative human development (often referring to '*suzhi*', quality). For these interviewees: the higher up on the scale, the more likely a person was to volunteer. This is very much in line with what most theories of volunteering say (Dekker and Halman, 2003; Wilson,

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<sup>61</sup> As discussed in the literature review, Ronald Inglehart's work (1997, 2003; Inglehart and Baker, 2000) looks at how modernisation brings about macro-level shifts in a society's value-system. He talks about a shift from 'traditional' values to 'secular-rational' values and from 'survival' to 'self-expression' values (2003, 57) and says this has a major impact on volunteering and pro-social activity.

2000) and also similar to how some Chinese scholars conceive the link (Rolandsen, 2008) (such as Tan, 2004). Common responses to the interview question ‘Do you think volunteering is becoming more and more popular in China?’ referenced economic growth and its associated human development. The interviewee Jiayin, for example, said:

*“to become a volunteer is a process (过程). Why are there lots of volunteers in Europe and America? It’s because the lives of those volunteers have already reached a certain level. There are some people who are very rich but they don’t help others, that’s an education problem. But, if you ask ‘are there many volunteers in China?’ then I would say that the level of thinking (思想水平) has not reached a high enough level yet on this scale. China is a developing country, twenty years after reform and opening up, ‘material life’ (物质生活) has reached a higher level but ‘spirit’ (精神) hasn’t caught up.”*

Xingjuan also linked 物质 (material) and 精神 (spirit) levels: “Volunteering in China is definitely getting more and more normal because material life (物质生活) is bringing the spirit (精神) level up with it. China’s material level is improving all the time so more and more people are having the aspiration (心胸) required to become a volunteer”. Kewen said something similar:

*“It’s becoming more and more widespread and one reason for that is that the quality of civilised culture (文化素质) is getting higher and higher. Another reason is that the standard of living is getting better and better. Everyone has more capabilities (能力) and are more and more willing to help poor people and old people, those who need help.”*

Later on in the interview Kewen described ‘volunteer spirit’ using a phrase from the philosopher Mencius: ‘穷则独善其身，达则兼济天下’ meaning “if you are poor then take care of yourself, if you are well-off then take care of others”. For Kewen it was this difference that accounted for the change in attitudes towards volunteering. Jiayin said something very similar to Kewen’s Mencius quote: “So I have this really simple view: when I have no problems (困难) myself I am willing to help those who are going through the same problems that I have also experienced.” These conceptions are very similar to Inglehart’s ‘survival values’.

Linked with answers such as these were inter-generational comparisons. Most of the interviewees talked a lot about what previous generations had (and had not) done, many of them noting the differences between them and contemporary society. Many of them took the view that

there was a lack of volunteering and voluntary organisations in earlier times and that this was primarily due to lower economic development (and its associated level of human development). These interviewees often linked a lack of volunteers to a ‘温饱’ problem (to be clothed and fed), implying that if this problem was not there then earlier generations would have got involved in volunteering. Liyun and Liuhua gave similar responses:

Liyun: *“Before, people had a food and clothing (温饱) problem, and they had to look after themselves. However, now it is getting better and better. Whether you are a compassionate person or not, when you can solve your own needs your volunteer spirit will emerge when you see that other people need your help. When you can solve your own needs, then you will go and help them.”*

Liuhua: *“My parent’s generation didn’t really do volunteering because just eating was difficult for them. So if you went to become a volunteer you wouldn’t be able to look after yourself or your family. But today’s society is becoming more accepting of volunteering, accepting that volunteering is good for society.”*

The interviewee Tangli also linked changing attitudes to improving economic conditions, saying that: *“economic conditions are getting better and better so people have the material prerequisites (物质条件) to be able to go and volunteer”*. She also thought that as a result; today’s society was increasingly supportive and respectful of volunteers. Lijuan talked about how her parents ‘生活条件’ (living conditions) were not as good as hers, and cited this as a key reason for why more people help today. Wangmei said that people like her parents were too poor in the early reform-era, and too busy making money to think about others. However, she also said that *“now that society is more developed, volunteering is becoming more popular”*. When the interviewee Chenyue was asked about the differences between Western and Chinese volunteers he only talked about economic development differences, not cultural ones. He said that he thought that 80% of Western volunteer motivations would be the same as Chinese ones. The 20% that were dissimilar were due to different ‘methods’ (方式) resulting from economic disparity. Xingjuan, in answer to the question ‘do you think that there are many Chinese volunteers?’ talked mainly about economic and life-course ‘stability’ preventing Chinese people from volunteering:

*“I think that there are too few, relative to the population size there are not enough. Why so few? I think that it’s to do with the fact that if a person thinks they are weak (弱者), then they can’t*

*become a volunteer or it's difficult to do so. This weakness isn't to do with money, it's to do with the question; do you think that your own life is smooth, steady, and safe? If the answer is yes then you will have more interest or feelings (情怀) to help other people. Therefore in China, although it's getting better and better, peoples way of thinking (心态) are still at least 50 years behind economic development."*

Similarly to Xingjuan, Wenling cited education and economic development as reasons why more and more people were becoming interested in volunteering: *"when people reach a better level of material living (物质生活) people begin to think about helping others"*. Like Chenyue, she went on to say that in her opinion the main difference between Western and Chinese attitudes towards helping people was just due to an economic disparity: *"[in the West] people's lives are better so they can help others, that's all"*.

In linking rising interest in volunteering to increasing levels of economic and human development the narratives of the interviewees diverge significantly from the position that the Chinese state takes on the development of voluntary action and association. As discussed in chapter four, they are a long way from the 'Asian values' that some use to frame the message that Chinese society is innately different from the West (see Chan, 1997). They also fail to align with the legitimisation claims that dictate the state's position on voluntary action and association. The state's position is not that voluntary action and association is growing and expanding because the economic situation is improving. The state also does not wish to portray the increase of new social forms and commitments (such as CSOs) as resulting from new social relations and attitudes resulting from economic development (although it recognises that this is the case). If it did then it would chime with the civil society theories that often give a democratic transition as the end result (see Alagappa, 2004, 5-6). Instead the state emphasises *continuity*: volunteers are the 'New Lei Fengs', propagating the directives of the state; they are not autonomous individualist action (Hustinx *et al* 2012, 65; Xing and Zhang, 2006, Luova; 2011, 777). A Beijing Youth Daily article - entitled 'Volunteer Spirit is the continuation and development of Lei Feng Spirit' - concisely illustrates this point, strongly depicting volunteering as a direct continuation of Lei Feng, rather than something new and non-state directed. It concludes that *"If there had not been the long-term accumulated legacy of Lei Feng spirit in Chinas then it would have been impossible for volunteer spirit to grow so quickly in China."* (Beijing Youth Daily, 2012). This greatly contrasts with the narratives provided by the volunteers themselves who subjectively described a causative link between their civil society volunteering and modernisation. In this way they conceived their involvement in civil society in line with the findings of Inglehart (1997,



2003) who demonstrates a positive correlation between modernisation and civic participation, linking it to “*a shift from survival values to self-expression values*” (2003, 56-57).

### ***I help others because I feel responsible or guilty***

In concordance with the above theme, many of the interviewees linked their motivations for volunteering with feelings of responsibility for those who had not benefited (as they had) from economic development. This corresponds to the ‘self-construction of biography’ in the ‘risk society’ (see Beck, 1992, 1994; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) that is a core part of reflexive modernisation. In 21st century China, inequality has grown rapidly and tremendous wealth and dire poverty can easily be seen juxtaposed next to each another. This juxtaposition presents reflexive choices to the individual with a degree of anticipated reciprocity: they realise the precariousness of their life-choices and acknowledge the fine line between success and failure (Giddens, 1991, 52–5; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2010). They see that whilst they themselves are currently in a position of stability and success, this may not necessarily last. Similarly, in the interviewee’s conceptions of this responsibility, a degree of guilt was also contained alongside this sentiment; a suspicion that the interviewee had benefited at the expense of other individuals or other things (e.g. the environment, social relations, tradition). These ‘responsibility’ and ‘guilt’ motivations are also recognised in the volunteer literature that has looked at Western volunteers (see Banks, 1997; Freeman, 1997).

The ‘compressed modernisation’ of the Chinese context also means that differences between generations, and gaps between those who have benefited and those who have not, are starker because there are still ample areas and segments of the population that remain comparatively underdeveloped. The notion of being ‘undeveloped’ is, for most individuals in the Western world, a relatively distant and obscure concept, something often associated with the pre-Industrial Revolution-era Western world, or modern-day Africa. For Chinese individuals however, issues of development are much closer at hand: the most common word for development, 发展, can be seen and heard across the government and media spectrum<sup>62</sup>. As discussed in previous chapters, many of the interviewees contrasted the experiences of their generation with that of their parents and grandparents; and also reflected upon how they felt

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<sup>62</sup> In fact, the tumultuous Chinese 20<sup>th</sup> Century can be viewed as a striving for ‘development’, and a strengthening to prohibit the ‘Century of Humiliation’, which resulted from ‘underdevelopment’, from ever happening again.

'lucky' in comparison with those that they were helping. The interviewee Jiancui talked about how he had recognised that he had "*too many clothes compared to the poor people living in the countryside*". Alongside other volunteering commitments he therefore helped to co-ordinate the collection of second-hand clothes from students on his campus. Liyun summed up the 'responsibility' motivation nicely by saying that "*when you have looked after yourself you begin to look back at how you once were and think 'oh, I should help others to achieve what I have'*".

### ***I help others because of new working patterns***

Economic growth and development has both resulted *from*, as well as *created*, new patterns of work (see Delman, and Yin, 2010). The most obvious changes are that in some cases the employer has changed from the state to private enterprise and that in most cases all work is now market-orientated. However, alongside these meta-changes have come micro-alterations in patterns of employment and labour relations. The way in which the modern Chinese individual works (the times they work, the money they get paid, the expectations that they meet, and the work that they produce) is increasingly detached from the work patterns of the Mao-era. No longer is the work and life community one and the same; instead they are separated. Whereas once there was relative homogeneity in management-styles, now the character of the employer can define the work community. Chinese companies are increasingly moving away from the stolid rigidity of the state enterprises, incorporating new methods, into their work patterns. Within this shifting matrix, relations between the individual as the 'professional', and notions of voluntary work and association, are changing. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is already well integrated into China's most progressive companies and beginning to become a key component of the modern workplace (UNV, 2011). This is important because it transmits and develops the acceptability of 'volunteering' and pro-social attitudes to the individual (Wilson and Musick, 1997).

Several of the interviewees that were in full-time employment said that they had first come into contact with volunteering through their place of work. Weilong (as his primary volunteering activity), Zhangsui (as her secondary volunteering) and Hongmei (as her intended voluntary activity) all worked for foreign multinationals and all volunteered through the CSR schemes that they ran. Hongmei said that she had first been exposed to voluntary work through her work's monthly volunteering scheme, in which employees get the opportunity to go to an old people's home and help the elderly residents. Weilong also first got involved with volunteering through a CSR scheme:

Weilong: *“I was influenced to become a volunteer by my company’s corporate culture. A company’s culture can lead you to do some things, for example volunteering, and then after you have done these things you discover that volunteering is a really great societal activity. Then you can turn this [volunteering] into a habit”*

Interviewer: *“So you could say that the company has encouraged you?”*

Weilong: *“Yes, yes, yes. The company is very supportive of everybody volunteering [...] The company also has a volunteer recognition scheme. They pick one volunteer employee every year from across their entire global network who has volunteered particularly well, who has contributed to his community particularly well.”*

Alongside receiving new opportunities to exposure through corporate CSR culture, new work patterns have also created a clearer distinction between work and leisure time. As discussed in the literature review, during the Mao-era; eating, cooking, sleeping and socialising occurred within the same physical and social environments. This is no longer the case. For the average worker there is increasingly a clear line between work and non-work. Many of the interviewees compartmentalised their responsibilities, demonstrating that involvement with a voluntary organisation was possible within the new work-life balance that they had shaped. Chende, when asked about the position of volunteering in his life, gave a response that was representative of this: *“volunteering is a normal part of life [...] it’s become the same as anything else.”*

## **6.4. The Internet**

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### **6.4.1. Increasing Flows of Information**

The third theme that will be discussed in this chapter is the internet. This was a dominant theme that permeated every single one of the interviewees volunteering narratives. The Chinese internet is famously subjected to strict regulations (Yang, 2011) and much Western coverage of it is fixated by this regulatory aspect. However, the side of the internet that often has less attention paid to it is the ‘day-to-day’ communication that exists, and indeed flourishes, within the regulation. Even behind the ‘Great Firewall’, and despite the strict top-down censorship and widespread bottom-up self-censorship, the internet still has massive potential to change Chinese

society. Information technology such as the internet is an important part of the individualisation thesis, playing a significant role in undermining the traditional meta-frameworks that previously dominated individual life-courses. The rise of the internet and associated social media alters the Chinese individual's place in society, giving them a superior ability to transmit and receive information (Barber, 2001; Yang, 2003, 2011; Macfayden *et al*, 2004; Tai, 2006; Kuhn and Wu, 2007). It can link individuals to new forms of association and organisation (Tai, 2006; Yang, 2011) and in doing so propagates the ideas, values, and methods voluntary action and association. This not only normalises both the ideas and concepts of non-state organisation but significantly for the individualised individual it also offers greater 'choice' (Cao, 2009); exposing them to new ideas and values (Lo *et al*, 2008; Yan, 2009) that can be incorporated into the DIY biography. This also contributes to contesting the lack of public awareness that many studies cite (e.g. Chen *et al*, 2006; Lu, 2007) as hampering the growth of Chinese civil society today.

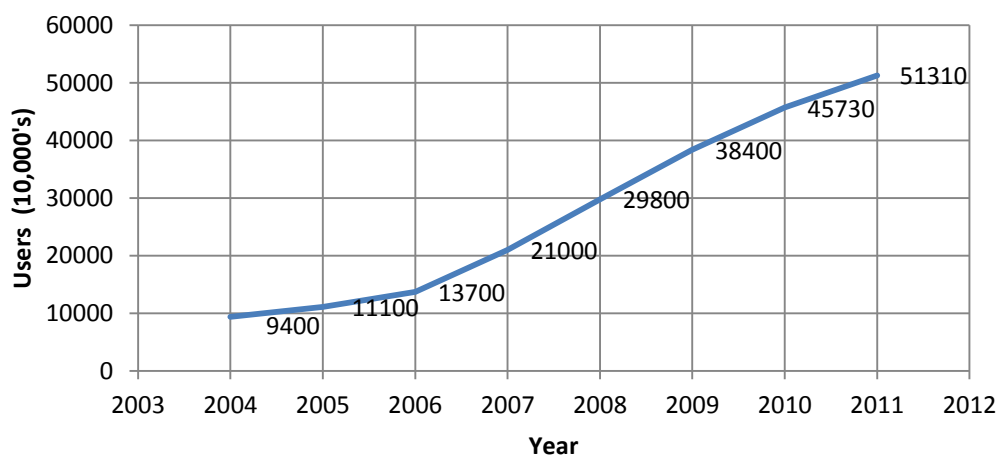
In 21<sup>st</sup> Century China therefore, it is no longer the case that whoever controls the conduits for communication (the state) controls the conversation. Previously the Chinese state's hegemony of communication enabled it to easily control expression, debate, and opinion. For the individual this limited the flow of information that they could receive and process, and reduced the visibility of the non-state, stymieing the development of non-state association and organisation. However, with the pluralisation of society, coupled with the rapid rise in social media technologies, vastly different conversations can now occur (Barber, 2001; Macfayden *et al*, 2004). Today it is increasingly the case that it is whoever that says something *pertinent* and *meaningful* to the life of that individual, that gains their attention. This could indeed still be the state, if the state says something relevant to the life of the individual. However it could also be the non-state. The interviewee Xiuying summarised this:

*"The internet is so important for the lives of Chinese people today because it gives us loads and loads of information. China has media censorship (媒体审查) so there is loads of information that you can't get from the TV, from CCTV news for example. However, the internet gives us a much wider information platform (更广阔的咨询平台), From this platform you can see loads of things. For my volunteering it allows me to see all of the information that people write about volunteering. It makes me think 'why don't I try this?' So the internet becomes this motivating factor, this mechanism, that makes you come into contact with volunteering. So yes it gives volunteering a huge amount of assistance."*

This growth and penetration of the internet into Chinese society has been developing steadily over the last few decades but has changed beyond all recognition in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup>

Century. Despite the ‘Great Firewall’, the rapid penetration of social media into Chinese society has been similar to the experience of the West (Tai, 2006, 119-159). By the end of 2011 there were more than five hundred million internet users including 356 million mobile-phone internet users (CNNIC, 2012). Around 80% of these users (415 million) used Instant Messaging Services (IMS) and, despite only starting in 2009, by 2011 249 million people already had a micro-blog account<sup>63</sup> (CNNIC, 2012). Whilst internet use is increasing in both rural areas and amongst older demographics, it remains the case that internet use is greatest amongst young, urban Chinese. At the end of 2011 73.5% of total users were from urban areas, 83.0% were below the age of forty with the largest user age group being 20-29 year olds (representing 29.8% of total users). With regards to education, internet penetration has a positive correlation with educational attainment, with those holding a higher education degree having a penetration rate of 96.1% (CNNIC, 2012).

**Figure 3.1. Number of Internet Users**



Source: CNNIC (2012).

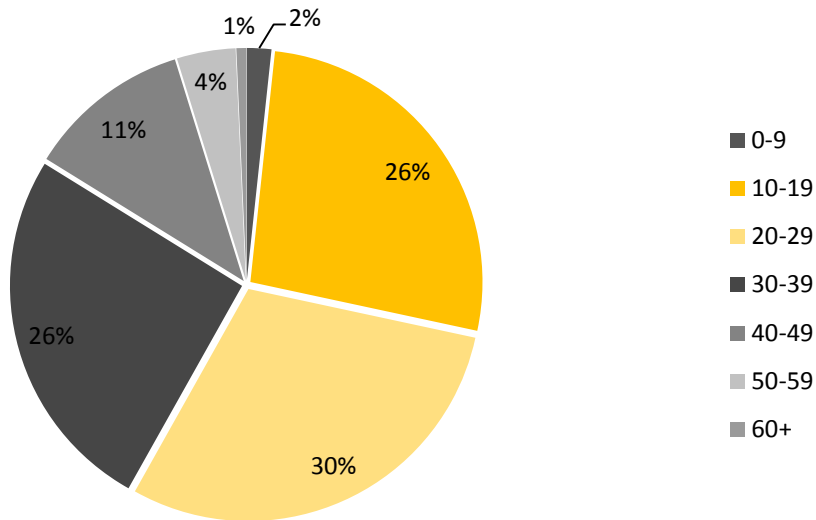
Restrictions on foreign internet companies has meant that social media in China is dominated by domestic service-providers (Chiu *et al*, 2012). This is bad for competition but increases the connectivity potential as more users use fewer social media systems. This increased connectivity is most realised with the complete domination of the IMS market by QQ. IMS is far more popular in China than in the West; 80% of internet users use it and the vast majority of these use QQ

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<sup>63</sup> See Appendix for a description of the Chinese internet services mentioned in this paper.

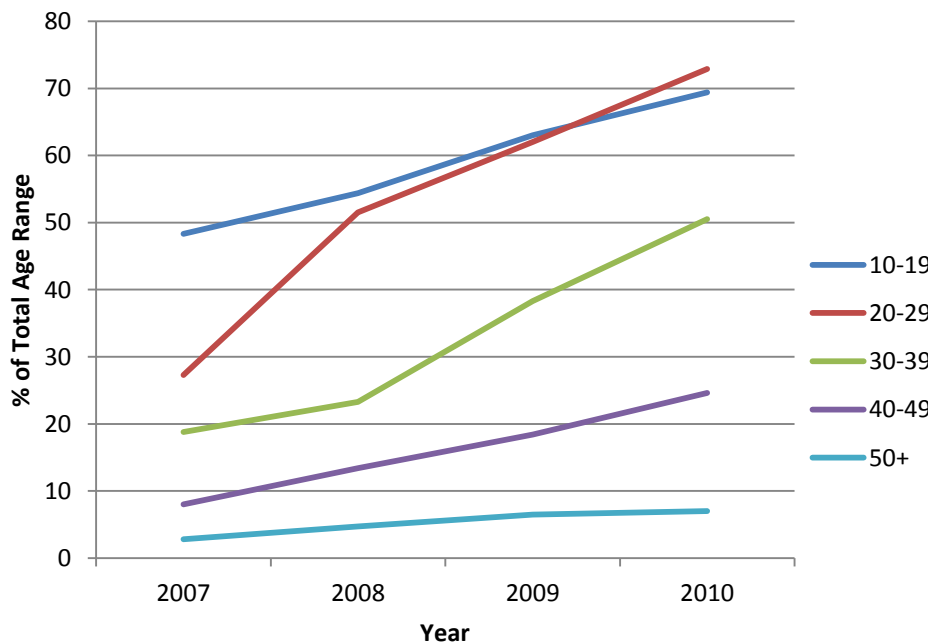
(CNNIC, 2012)<sup>64</sup>. Alongside QQ, micro-blogging has rapidly become popular within the middle-classes and fulfils a complementary role to IMS services.

**Figure 3.2. Percentage of Internet Users by Age Range**



Source: CNNIC (2012).

**Figure 3.3. Internet Users as Percentage of Age Range**



Source: CNNIC (2012).

<sup>64</sup> From the authors (considerable) personal experience it has penetrated deep into Chinese society and is utilised at home, at work and on the move. Often the first thing that young people will ask for when exchanging contact details is not ‘what’s your telephone number?’ but ‘what’s your QQ number?’.

The young middle classes are the sector of society that most utilises the full potential of the internet and they are more than just ‘internet-savvy’: networking services such as QQ and micro-blogs have penetrated into every facet of their leisure and work (Tai, 2006; Chiu *et al*, 2012; Hjorth and Arnold, 2012). The potential for an internet-enabled civil society to connect with this demographic is therefore huge. This situation has differences with the Western context. In the West, earlier modernisation and civil society growth mean that the demographic constitution of civil society participation is different. Unlike in China (SRCA, 2005), a large part of a Western CSOs volunteer force comes from the older age ranges (US Bureau, 2012); the ages that are the least inclined to fully utilise the internet (Lenhart *et al*, 2010). In the transition to become internet-enabled Western CSOs therefore risk alienating a large base of their support, or risk wasting resources on maintaining both post-internet and pre-internet capabilities (Briones *et al*, 2011). This is not the situation in China where civil society has developed alongside the rise of the middle classes and the internet, and therefore has a massive potential connectivity with the parts of society that are most inclined to interact with it and participate in it (Yang, 2011).

#### **6.4.2. Technology, Individualisation, and Voluntary Action and Association.**

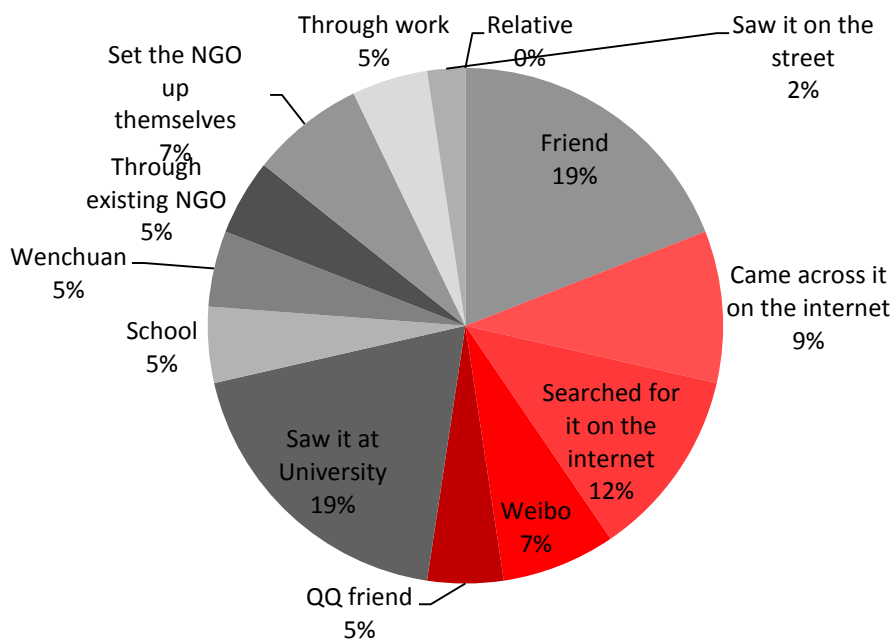
As discussed in the literature review, the concordant development of the internet and civil society has not gone unnoticed (see Yang, 2003, 2011; Tai 2006, Shi, 2012). Social media can increase the efficiency of under-funded CSOs by reducing costs and increasing the connectivity of both intra-organisational and inter-organisational communication (Bach and Stark, 2004; Kuhn and Wu, 2007). Crucially it also enables a CSO to disseminate information that can create a dialogue between individuals and a CSO that can then be re-disseminated within society (Kuhn and Wu, 2007; Briones *et al* 2011). This is the potential. Doubts have been expressed over the realisation of this potential (Ogden and Starita, 2007) with some analysts referring to the marginalising of non-internet users (Naughton, 2001) and the problems the internet creates through disrupting group cohesion (Nugroho, 2007). However, as shall be discussed in the next chapter, the potential for a positive relationship to develop between civil society and internet 2.0 is arguably greater in China than in Western contexts. This is not only because of their co-evolutionary development, but also because of concordant changes within the society that civil society is associating with. One key reason for this is the very ‘suppression’ that many discussions of Chinese civil society focus on. Many Chinese CSOs lack the offices or the resources to give themselves a visible presence (Ma, 2002, 2006). The internet offers a way around this. The massive connectivity potential between China’s steadily growing civil society and its emergent middle classes means

that new relationships are increasingly being formed through contact facilitated by social media. As shall be demonstrated below, organisations that would have previously had very limited means to access an audience, now have direct lines of communication to them.

### 6.4.3. The ‘Discovery’ Function of the Internet

The internet played an important role in many aspects of the interviewees volunteering. As a ‘way-in’ the internet was important for many. As the chart below shows, the internet played an important role in many of the volunteers first discovering the organisation that they would later volunteer for:

**Figure 4.1. ‘Ways in’ (all organisations)**



Source: Author.

The internet therefore performed an important ‘discovery’ function and many of the interviewees recognised this:

Kewen: *“If we want to do a volunteer activity, if there was no internet then we would have to learn about it from our friends. This way is not so effective and less people would find out about it but through the internet we can broadcast our activity information so that everyone in the*



country, everyone in the world can see it. The information dissemination effectiveness of it is excellent”

Liuhua: “The internet has definitely influenced me. Before I didn’t understand (了解) volunteering. But through the internet you can understand more, about what volunteers are doing, and also about what still can be done. It gives volunteering a stage and allows us to do more.”

Shihong: “The internet is really helpful, if there was no internet then I wouldn’t know where to go to find ways to volunteer. The information that they [the CSO] release on the internet means that it’s a really important platform. Otherwise you wouldn’t know which place needs your help or where you should go to get involved. At the moment the internet provides this platform where everyone can release information about this saying, for example, ‘we need this number of people’ or ‘we need this done”

Wenqian, one of the oldest volunteers interviewed in this study, used Baidu (the most popular search engine in China) to find his first voluntary activity. He said:

“Before I didn’t really understand: I didn’t have much understanding of volunteering behaviour (志愿者行为), charity-work (公益事业), or charity organisations (公益组织). But I think that society has developed up to the point where it is being propagated (宣传) far more in the news and online.”

At the organisational level, CSOs are acutely aware of this. Huangzhi, who had several years volunteer experience and worked as an intern in CSO2, used the internet to find both his own first volunteering opportunity (on the website Douban) and later opportunities with different CSOs. From his own experience he sees the internet as vital in promoting volunteering:

“The internet is important in making people become aware of volunteering. Young people use the internet more so they are more aware of volunteering and amongst young people volunteering is becoming more popular. Most of them are university students, and university students take more notice of new developments on the internet. Volunteering is a new concept so some people will think that it is fashionable to get involved”

Huangzhi therefore notes the potential for interaction (via the internet) between a young internet-connected section of the population and the ‘new concept’ of volunteering.

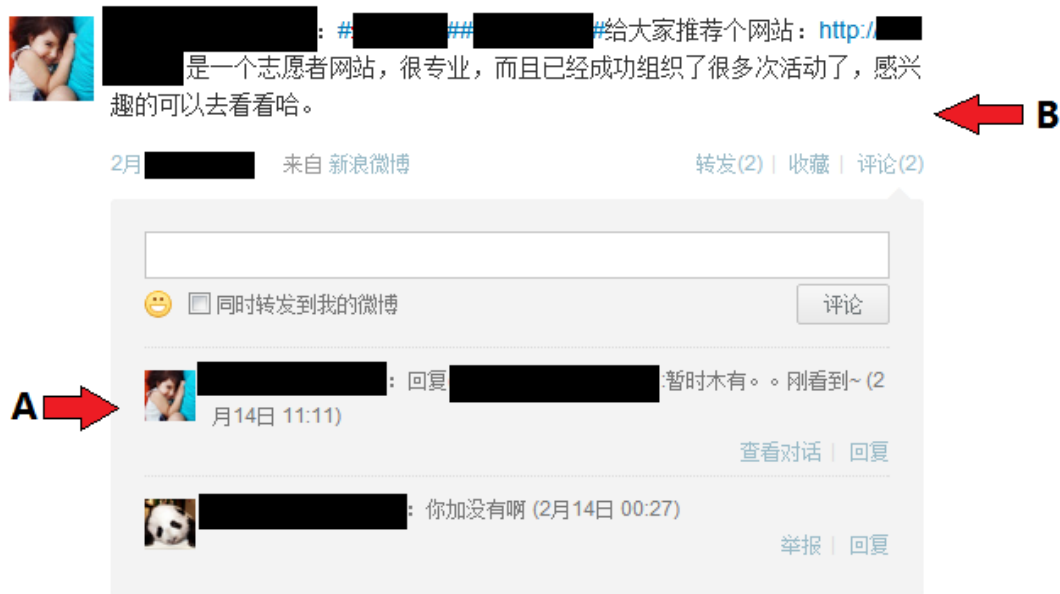
The diffusion of awareness that Huangzhi talks of occurs through two different processes: passively receiving information about an opportunity to get involved with a CSO (e.g. through a micro-blog feed, being told about it on QQ, or by stumbling across it on the internet) or pro-actively seeking-out an organisation. The pro-active method to discover an organisation online was usually done through a search engine. Jiayin’s description was quite typical of this: “*I’ve always wanted to volunteer then one day I searched for ‘volunteer organisations’. Before, I had always wanted to participate but I had no channel to do so, then I went on the internet*”. Like Jiayin, Xiuying also used a search engine:

*“I found the volunteering opportunities on the internet. If you Baidu to search for something, for example ‘volunteering activities (志愿者活动), then you can see what lots of people have written about volunteering, e.g. “I volunteered with ‘organisation X’. Then what you do is you search for ‘organisation X’, then you can find it, you can find the organisation’s entrance point (入口) and enter it and get involved.”*

The interviewee Zhenping also found the organisation that he volunteered for on the internet when he searched for ‘volunteering opportunities’. For Zhenping the internet was important because it put him in contact with organisations: “*Through the internet you can realise your aspirations of volunteering. You can’t just casually do that on your own, on the street! You need to be able to find the organisations to help you*”.

Passive discovery was more common than actively searching for volunteering opportunities. Chenyue, who volunteered for CSO4, first found out about the organisation through micro-blogging: “*I found out about it on Sina Weibo. That day I saw somebody’s feed, I can’t remember whose it was. He was recommending this Douban site so I followed his link, registered with the site, and was able to see information about the organisation and its previous activities*”. Chenyue found out about it through the micro-blogging service Weibo, which has become massively popular in recent years. Weibo users, at the same time as passively receiving information, can also re-distribute the content created by the CSO or create their own content about it. This information is then distributed horizontally to their own followers so that it appears on the feeds of someone like Chenyue. The screenshot below shows an example of someone broadcasting a Weibo message about CSO2:

Figure 5.1. Weibo message about CSO2 (screenshot)



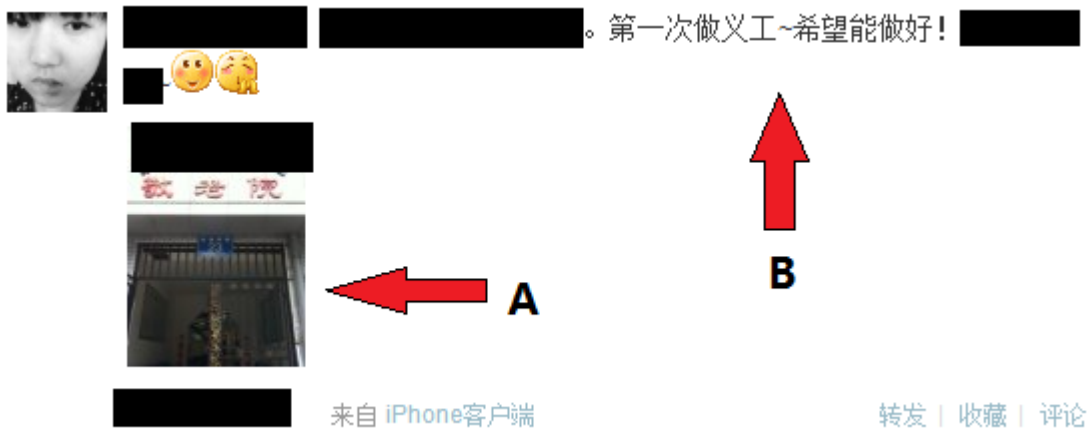
A. Comment Area.

B. “#CSO Name# Recommending a website to everyone: [CSO website address]. It’s a volunteer website, really professional, and it’s already successfully held loads of volunteering activities. If you’re interested go and take a look!”

Source: Author.

Discoveries like Chenyue’s are important because they represent the first step along the road to participation in new social forms and the creation of new relationships between civil society and society. The huge connectivity of internet 2.0 means that this connection can be in real-time at all hours of the day. The massive rise of mobile phone internet use means that civil society volunteers can also inform their followers by disseminating information about their experiences with a CSO as they occur. The example below is of a Weibo user who is a first-time volunteer at CSO2. Just before she enters an Old Persons Home to embark on her first time volunteering she broadcasts a message (including a photo of the Old Peoples Home) to her followers:

**Figure 5.2. Weibo message from first-time volunteer (screenshot).**



- A.** A photo of the entrance to the Old Peoples Home
- B.** The message, sent from her phone, saying “ (NGO name). Its my first time doing volunteer work, I hope I can do a good job!”

Source: Author.

Alongside the creation of new ties between civil society and society through the first-time ‘discovery’ of organisations, the huge horizontal connectivity of social media also facilitated ‘flow’ between organisations. Many of the volunteers found about the CSO that they were currently volunteering for through an organisation that they had previously participated in. The horizontal connectivity of social media means that one organisation’s social media presence usually links to the social media presence of other CSOs. For example the Weibo account of one CSO can not only contain links to its own website and QQ group, but also to the Weibo accounts of similar CSOs. The interviewee Yangmei said that she finds out about other CSOs through Weibo: “If I see a volunteer activity on Weibo, for example one to do with environmental protection, then I will join up. You discover that Weibo is important to the development of volunteering”. Lijuan’s story represents a good example of the interconnectivity provided by social media. At the time of her interview she was involved with three different CSOs. She had learned about two of these organisations through QQ groups that she was a member of. The third she found from just browsing the internet: “I was on the internet skimming through some news about volunteering and I stumbled across the organisation”. Having decided that she was interested in volunteering for this group she then also proceeded to tell her friends on QQ about it. Two of them, she said, then got involved with the CSO as well. This ‘flow’, through different individuals via the conduit of social media services, illustrates the role of the internet as a facilitator for new relationships to form between individuals and new associations. Currently

these new relationships are being established primarily within the young middle classes because of the synergy between internet 2.0 and the socio-economic situation of that demographic. There is also the potential for new relationships to extend outside this group as Bozhen, in her role as co-ordinator of CSO2, notes:

*“At the moment the participation rate of young people is high. With presences like the one we have on Douban we are able to attract lots of young people. Regarding the internet right now I hope that we can use some new methods to attract more office workers, those who have been in work for a long time, to start getting involved in activities”*

It is also important to remember that as internet penetration spreads to new demographics, and as the post-80's generation ages with the internet, the relationship between civil society and the individual will only get stronger.

## **6.5. The Wenchuan Earthquake: Re-framing Volunteering?**

The 2008 Wenchuan earthquake is the final theme that will be discussed in this chapter. It performed an important function in the volunteering narratives of many of the interviewee's. For many of them it exposed them to the concept of volunteering and civil society for the first time. This caused them to reflexively examine their own life, creating the desire to incorporate the values of the Wenchuan volunteers into their own DIY biography. Two case-studies are used to illustrate how this influenced two individuals volunteering narratives. However, for a minority of interviewees (discussed at the end of the chapter), Wenchuan volunteering did not represent anything 'new' at all; instead displaying significant continuity with Mao-era mass-mobilisation and *leifengist*-style volunteering.

### **6.5.1. The Wenchuan Earthquake**

The magnitude 8.0 earthquake that struck Sichuan's Wenchuan County on Monday the 12th of May, 2008, was by far the largest disaster to hit China since the reform-era began in 1978. It officially killed around 88,000 people, injured another 370,000 and left around five million homeless (UNICEF, 2009). Natural and man-made disasters resulting in mass-deaths are far from unprecedented in China but Wenchuan was the first big natural disaster and mass-death event to occur in 21st Century China; with its growth of civil society, it's increasingly open media, and its

internet-connected middle classes<sup>65</sup>. As a lens to expose civil society volunteering, Wenchuan was unprecedented in Chinese history. To contrast the 2008 earthquake with the 1976 Tangshan earthquake, the disaster that resulted in the most fatalities of any natural disaster in the 20th century, is to contrast two very different China's. In 1976 there were no true NGOs, all rescue and reconstruction work was state-directed, and media-coverage was closed (Earnshaw, 2008; Peoples Daily, 2008). In 2008 both the strength of civil society, and the openness and spread of mass-media, had increased to the extent that the government could not afford to embark on a solely unilateral response (Bannister, 2009). At Wenchuan there was therefore both unparalleled civil society involvement and a relatively high degree of freedom to report on the disaster response<sup>66</sup> (York, 2008). Hundreds of thousands of volunteers were closely watched by hundreds of millions of people over a period of several months. For many Chinese people it would have been their first exposure to CSOs and to CSO-organised volunteering. For many of the million volunteers that helped out, it would have been their first time getting involved in volunteering<sup>67</sup>.

### 6.5.2. Shock of Consciousness?

The term 'shock of consciousness' is taken from a quote by the political scientist Wenran Jiang who used it to describe the societal response to the 2008 Sichuan earthquake (quoted in York, 2008): *"I think this is a turning point [...] This will be very positive for China's civil society, for volunteer and charity work [...] When they see the media coverage, they feel that it is real and true. A more open and transparent society is mobilizing people to take positive action."* (York, 2008). For Jiang the 2008 earthquake produced a 'shock' that was the start of something new, a possible 'turning point'. Was there evidence of this 'shock' in the interviewee's volunteering narratives?

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<sup>65</sup> Just after the May earthquake came the Beijing Olympic Games, and in 2010 there was the Yushu earthquake, the Guangzhou Asian games and the Shanghai Expo. Although the orientation of the volunteering at the sporting and cultural events was very different to the 2008 earthquake, they nevertheless required enormous numbers of volunteers (4.2 million according to some estimates, UNV, 2011). In 2008 and 2010 therefore, due to both planned and unplanned events, volunteering received an unprecedented amount of visibility. However, what was striking was that whilst none of the interviewees mentioned the sporting and cultural events as a big influence, *all* of them talked about the Wenchuan earthquake as being influential.

<sup>66</sup> People both inside and outside China were already aware of the earthquake via non-state channels well before the first official reports emerged. The first online social media reports came the same minute that the quake struck, around 40 minutes before the first state media reports (Qu *et al*, 2011).

<sup>67</sup> Wenchuan also offered the state ample opportunity to display the humanistic, citizen-orientated, but state-guided values that were discussed in the previous section (Bannister, 2009). The emphasis on 'putting people first' (以人为本) in the state response at Wenchuan was clear (Ren, 2008; Xinhua, 2008).

All of the interviewees mentioned Wenchuan as an influence, many citing it as a very important one. For many of them, Wenchuan was their first exposure to the idea of formal volunteering. The case study below illustrates this:

### ***Case-study: Liyun***

For Liyun the Wenchuan earthquake played a pivotal role in her becoming a volunteer. In 2008 she was in Middle School and it was the earthquake that exposed her to volunteers for the first time:

*“I guess I had a muddled conception of it [volunteering] in primary school, and a vague idea of it in Middle School but on the whole I had never really thought about volunteering. Then in 2008, all of the volunteers who helped after the earthquake meant that that the idea entered my consciousness. It was then that I knew about volunteering.”*

She eventually became a volunteer four years after the earthquake after an ‘aunt’ (a friend of her mother) suggests that she might like to go and volunteer at the environmental organisation that she was involved with. For Liyun the aunt’s suggestion is the ‘trigger’ but it is the earthquake that planted the idea in her head:

*“Before I knew this aunt I had wanted to be a volunteer, I knew that one day it would happen. Probably you could say that nobody in particular influenced me to become a volunteer; other volunteers influenced me to become a volunteer. Wenchuan and a few floods, especially Wenchuan though. At the time of the ‘08 earthquake I was in Middle school doing my exams so I couldn’t volunteer then and there.”*

In her first year of University she became involved with an environmental CSO, a very different type of activity to the disaster-relief rescue organisations that were on display after the earthquake. Liyun says that her conceptions of voluntary activity have altered since she was first exposed to it after the earthquake:

*“At the time of the Wenchuan earthquake I considered volunteering to be noble, the volunteers there selflessly risked their own lives. However after I became a volunteer myself I think that I’m*

*not doing anything particularly noble at all. I'm just doing what I can. If I can serve the organisation by doing something within my means then I will."*

She believed that she had a "good foundation of volunteering" but that she didn't think that this was enough. She was not worried though because she considered that she was still young and that she would have more opportunities in the future.

So for Liyun, who was fifteen in 2008, the earthquake was the first time that the 'concept' of volunteering entered her consciousness, although she later goes on to explain that the pressures of school and entering university prevented her from doing so. The idea remains dormant for three years until a current volunteer suggested that she gave it a try.

Unlike Liyun, the interviewee Chende was already volunteering when the earthquake struck (he first started volunteering in 2007). From his current position working to facilitate NGO growth he sees the 2008 earthquake as playing a huge role in helping to develop China's civil society; *"the 2008 earthquake was a big beginning, it was a watershed moment. You can say that it was Chinese volunteering's 'source' (渊源). After Wenchuan we had a huge number of volunteers come and offer to help"*. For both Liyun and Chende therefore, what was being exposed at Wenchuan was not the *issue* that the volunteering was orientated towards (disaster relief) but the *idea* of volunteering itself. Along with Chende, other interviewees also implicitly identified this point. For Meixiu, also with much experience of volunteering and currently working at an NGO, Wenchuan was also very important. She was already volunteering at the time of the earthquake, but she identified it as a turning point:

*"After the earthquake loads of people suddenly started to get involved spontaneously (自发) with volunteering. So a tide (潮流) came and everybody started to do it (大家也开始投入). [...] The disaster made us feel that volunteering and helping other people was more important than our leisurely lives (优闲的生活)."*

For Meixiu, and like Chende, Wenchuan marked a turning point for Chinese civil society that not only directly influenced those who volunteered, but also spread new 'ideas and concepts' to those who were not physically present:

*"After the earthquake there was a tide of volunteers and it was from that tide that NGOs across the country started to really develop. What I see currently is that more and more people are*



*paying attention to charity-work (公益事业); the time and energy that they are willing to devote to it are increasing. This is coming about because the ideas and concepts learned by people from Wenchuan are gradually influencing loads of people to volunteer*”

Meixiu therefore saw a trickle-down effect after Wenchuan; the people who volunteered at Wenchuan influenced others to volunteer as well.

It is important to point out that the interviewees who cited Wenchuan as an influence were not volunteering in post-earthquake rescue when they were interviewed. After being influenced by the earthquake most of them got involved in volunteer activities that were orientated in a different direction to the volunteer activities displayed at Wenchuan, both geographically and thematically. Only one volunteer had worked in the earthquake area in post-earthquake reconstruction. The rest were working in the field of environmental protection, social advocacy, or general voluntary social work. What this shows is that it was not the orientation of the volunteer activities that the 2008 earthquake influenced; it was the propagation of the idea of ‘volunteering’. The interviewees who said that they were influenced by Wenchuan were doing things such as planting trees, helping old people, combating pollution, or helping autistic children. These activities are very different to pulling people from the rubble of an earthquake. The only thing that they have in common is that they are volunteering activities. The case-study below illustrates these points. It looks at Zhenyi, who considered that the mass volunteering that she saw after the earthquake exposed her to the ‘idea’ of volunteering, but says that it was her love of nature that affected the orientation of that volunteering:

### ***Case study: Zhenyi***

Zhenyi had worked with ENGO’s throughout her time volunteering. She cited her village background and love of nature as a major influence: *“I grew up in a village, and really liked nature. I often walked by the side of the road to look at flowers. But I didn’t understand it that much then, I remember looking after some baby birds but they all died. This influenced me deeply, it made me really want to educate others about caring for the environment, so that they wouldn’t make the same mistakes that I did when I was young”*

However, it was the 2008 earthquake that she cited as the main reason for her getting involved in volunteering itself. When asked about her initial motivations she replied:

*“In 2008 I was in my last year of high school. Experiencing the course of the earthquake gave me a really distinct kind of feeling. I really, really wanted to go and volunteer but at that time I didn’t really know much about volunteering, I thought it was just some kind of free-of-charge service (无偿服务). So during the earthquake relief effort I didn’t go and volunteer”*

The earthquake gave Zhenyi a feeling (感觉) and much later on in the interview she enlarged on this to describe how it moved her (感动);

*“Suddenly all of these volunteers came out and helped from all over the place, and people voluntarily donated money and things. The influence of this was very deep and moved me a lot. That ‘when one place is in trouble, everybody comes to help’ (一方有难, 八方支援), including people from all over the world, they all went to help them.”*

This feeling stayed with her until she started University;

*“After it was over I went to University and joined this environmental organisation. I just had this longing to go and have a look to see what I could do for them. I didn’t consider anything else or what I was actually able to do, I just wanted to see if I could use what I had to help them where they needed. It was just this feeling and nothing else.”*

Wenchuan therefore represented a ‘shock’ for Zhenyi in the sense that it exposed her to the idea of volunteering, which then motivated her to volunteer. However it did not dictate the alignment of her volunteering act; this was aligned towards environmentalism, an interest that she had been fostering since childhood.

### **6.5.3. Mass-Leifengism?**

In contrast to the statements above, some of the interviewees, whilst at the same time talking about the earthquake as significant for displaying volunteering as a concept, differentiated it from CSO-style volunteering, likening it instead to *leifengism*. For Chende the style of volunteering after Wenchuan had more in common with Lei Feng-style action. For him, the Wenchuan volunteers were displaying a kind of ‘irrational’, sacrificial desire to devote themselves to a cause:

*“Lei Feng was all about being selfless and altruistic [...] Today’s volunteer spirit, apart from being about dedication and altruism, is more about rationality (理性). To give an analogy; after the Wenchuan earthquake, in a short period of time a huge number of online volunteers went to the mountainous areas to help out. All these people didn’t know what to do, they were lacking expertise and things got really chaotic. This had a negative effect on the professional rescue and help organisations. So, I think it’s like this; they had a compassion for dedication (奉献), and that is good. However, a mature (成熟) country or a mature culture with volunteer spirit, still needs to strengthen the element of rationality (加强理性). You need to assess the situation, and ask yourself: should I or should I not do it? Should I do it at this time or another time? Should I or should I not adopt this way of doing something? You shouldn’t just think that ‘oh I want to devote myself to this or that’. You should realise that if you go you might not actually help the situation”*

This portrayal of the Wenchuan volunteering clearly shows a large degree of reflexivity. In a similar way Kewen talked a lot about the differences between ‘Lei Feng spirit’ and ‘volunteering spirit’:

*“My parents generation, and the generation before my own, they were taught Lei Feng Spirit. It emphasizes a kind of fearless spirit (无畏精神), that says that you should sacrifice yourself (自己牺牲) to help others. However, my generation understands volunteering as ‘do one’s best’ (尽力而为), that is, to help others to the best of your ability. This is the modern understanding of it. An example is the Wenchuan earthquake. At that time people saw others who needed help so they went to help, without fearing for themselves, even though it was chaotic and dangerous. Normal volunteering is different to this, it’s about helping people within your own means. I think that this kind of thinking is new, it shows that society is more pragmatic (变通), its being more clever, more thinking, about how it helps other people.”*

Kewen, like Chende, therefore linked the Wenchuan volunteers with the scale, aims, and methods of *leifengism* rather than with modern-style volunteering, which, as previously described, was associated by the interviewees with values that were different to the *leifengist* message. Therefore, whilst the influence of the Wenchuan earthquake on the interviewees was certainly significant, whether or not the messages it was sending out were new or not is questionable. For many of the interviewees it did represent a ‘shock’ or a ‘turning point’, however for those discussed in the section above it represented continuity with the past.

# 7. Rejecting the State, Re-embedding in Civil Society?

## 7.1. Introduction

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Previous chapters have detailed how individualisation processes guided and informed involvement in the CSO. Chapter four described how transformed conceptions of individuality are re-defining social commitments, leading to the bottom-up generation of a new volunteering identity. Chapter five showed how involvement within one new social form, the voluntary organisation, occurred as a result of individuals looking to construct their self-biography through searching for new meaning, and expressing self-politics. The previous chapter looked at how education, modernisation, the internet, and the Wenchuan earthquake all played important roles in the interviewee's narratives of volunteering. This last analysis chapter will build on all of these themes to look at how the interviewee's narratives described a type of 're-embedment' in new social forms and commitments, that, in certain key areas, also represented a 'dis-embedment' and rejection of the social forms and commitments detailed in the state narrative.

The first area that will be examined is how involvement reinforced the individualisation processes, changing the likelihood that the individual would sustain or increase their involvement within the organisation<sup>68</sup>. This is a key part of re-embedment, because, as previously discussed, in reflexive modernity action and identity exist in a generative, symbiotic relationship. This re-enforcement occurred in a number of ways. One was via the transferal of ideals behind the operating procedures of the organisation which, due to their specific approaches or the culture that surrounded those approaches, worked in ways that emphasised individuality. Another was through empowerment gained by the diffusion of new ideas and values, such as 'self-organisation' and 'rhetorics of equality', that altered the individual's value-sets and transformed their perceptions of individuality and association. Whilst this dissertation focuses on non-state

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<sup>68</sup> In this sense it is similar to work by some civil society scholars (e.g. Calhoun, 1993, 278; Ma, 2002, 2006) who emphasise the importance of looking at how new values can be fostered and transferred within an organisation. However, whilst these scholars focus on making the Tocquevillian democratic link, this study emphasises the individualisation link; looking at issues of 're-embedment' and 'biography' rather than democracy.

CSOs, the diffusions of new ideas discussed above can also occur through involvement within government-organised organisations. This chapter will therefore also mount a tentative exploration into how operating within a government-organised organisation also reinforced the individualisation process, increasing the likelihood that a ‘flow’ would develop from state to non-state because the non-state option represented a more suitable sociality. Concordantly, it will also discuss how the state volunteering narrative is increasingly being contested by counter-narratives and the increasing visibility of non-state alternatives.

## 7.2. The Doer of Good Becomes Better

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As discussed in the literature review, there are many studies that look at how volunteering can change an individual for the ‘better’<sup>69</sup>. For example, volunteering can improve an individual’s sense of self-worth (Krause et al, 1992; Harlow & Cantor, 1996), augment their skills-set making them more capable organisers (Verba *et al*, 1995), and teach them pro-social behaviour (Hart and Atkins, 1998). In these ways it can increase cultural capital making the individual more ‘capable’. It can also increase social capital through introducing the individual to new networks of people (Wuthnow, 1998); and expose the individual to new ways of thinking and doing (Knoke, 1990). Most of the studies that make these links were done by looking at Western volunteers (Wilson, 2000; Hustinx *et al*, 2003; Dekker and Halman, 2003) and the situation in China is of course different (Hustinx *et al*, 2012; Zhuang, 2010). One major difference, for example, affects the accumulation of cultural capital through volunteering. In China volunteering has not yet been fully integrated into the job market and this limits the economic benefits that can accrue from cultural capital gained through volunteering<sup>70</sup>. As other studies have pointed out; the accumulation of social capital could therefore be seen as more important for Chinese volunteers than the accumulation of cultural capital (Ma, 2006, 105-135; Rolandsen, 2008; Xu and Ngai, 2011).

However, viewed through the lens of individualisation volunteering could be seen to have the potential for a stronger effect on the Chinese volunteer than the Western volunteer. Whereas volunteering is well-established in the West, it is relatively new to China and, as established in

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<sup>69</sup> The title phrase is a re-working of the Hindu saying ‘the doer of good becomes good’.

<sup>70</sup> In countries where civil society has a much longer history, volunteering is often recognised by employers and educators through the recognition of the value of the experience on the individual’s CV. This is not yet the case in China although the situation is gradually changing. Incentive mechanisms have been introduced in some organisations such as the creation of ‘philanthropic banks’ where volunteers can exchange volunteering credits for material goods or coupons (see China.org, 2011).

previous chapters, can thus act as a new conduit for the transferal of new ideas and values. It offers a new social-space with new social commitments, which can give opportunities for the individual to express new individualities and exercise new conceptions of social relations. The question that this first section asks is: ‘how has involvement within this new space changed the individual?’

### **7.2.1. Reflexive Exploration: “Once You Step in You Won’t Want to Step Out”**

When asked whether they would still be volunteering in one year’s time, every single one of the interviewees considered that they would be. For many of them, this assertion was due to the fact that they considered that involvement in the CSO had altered their value-sets, making them more inclined towards continued participation. As established in previous chapters, many of them had actively sought involvement *because* they felt that they wanted to change, as the interviewee Xiuying said: *“I thought to myself ‘how should I change?’ and then I thought to myself that ‘maybe volunteering was perhaps a very good and a very useful thing to do’ so I went to do it”*. Many of the interviewees also described their volunteering as a conduit for ‘learning’, using terms such as ‘searching’ and ‘discovery’ to describe their key motivations. Volunteer work offered the interviewees new perspectives, broadening their life horizons, and in doing so, changing the individual. Luli said that her volunteering enabled her to think more deeply about *“humanity and human issues”*. Jiayin said that he had first got involved with volunteering to help him learn about himself: *“there was a period of time when I was at University when I was very bewildered (迷茫), I didn’t know what my life was for”*.

One of the interview questions asked about how the interviewee’s motivations had changed during their time volunteering. Chenhua replied to this question by describing how volunteering had enabled her to try lots of things that she hadn’t tried before and that she *“learnt to think about helping other whilst also helping herself”*. Zongying was influenced to strengthen her participation by coming into contact with the autistic children that she helped; their *“stories”* ‘moved’ her to volunteer more. Meixiu talked about how her initial motivations had changed:

*“When I first started volunteering I did it for my schoolwork and for my future development. I knew that these experiences would help me if, for example, I wanted to go abroad in the future. So it was more utilitarian. However, gradually you realize that through volunteering you are learning about loads of new stuff, so my valuation of it [volunteering] surpassed my initial thoughts towards it, changing my motivations”.*

Other volunteers talked about the new values and ideas that they had come into contact with through volunteering. Luli talked about the awareness that she had slowly built up: “*whether it’s protecting the environment, helping children, or doing post-disaster reconstruction and development, I’ve become very interested in all of these issues*”. She went on to say that (even though it was not what she was currently doing) she would like to get involved with environmental volunteering work in the future.

The final question of the interview asked ‘Do you think that volunteering is a part of a fulfilling and happy life?’ The interviewee Tangli answered it by saying that ‘yes’, it was, because it had changed and developed lots of her current views (看法) and ideas (心劲): “*for example through volunteering I got to see different ways in which people live their lives.*” In answer to the same question Zhenyi talked about how volunteering had made her more tolerant:

*“it has influenced my way of thinking (心态), before I was more impatient (急躁) and could get upset more easily (懊恼). Now I feel more cleansed (荡涤), and more tolerant (宽容). I think this will also be important for my life in the future. I have experienced poor people being grateful (感恩) for me. In response I am grateful for them. And then I’ve become more grateful for things in society.”*

Yangmei also said that involvement with the CSO had changed her views: “*Volunteering has influenced my life; it’s taught me to pay attention to environmental issues, for example the importance of saving water, pollution, waste, and the importance of NGOs. The way that it influences you happens slowly, you don’t notice then you realise that it has actually changed you – that it has changed the ideas I have about living life*”. Wenqian, an older volunteer who had not been to university, said:

*“Since I started volunteering all of my ideas (观念) and views (看法) have changed. I think for volunteer work, once ‘you step in you won’t want to step out’<sup>71</sup>. Having seen the old peoples smiling faces and the disabled children’s situation, I can’t abandon them, I would like to spend all my time volunteering, if I could I would spend all my time with them.”*

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<sup>71</sup> This was a local dialect saying. A mandarin translation would be something like: 一脚踏进去了就不想一脚踏出来了.

This transformative ‘understanding’ function was also important for Chende: “*I think that this process is symbiotic (共生) for me, because it allows me to grow up a lot (成长). It makes me love this land by allowing me to know and understand my country’s people more deeply*”. Xingjuan talked about how she considered that society was becoming more and more accepting of volunteering and how this made her feel:

*“I think that [contemporary society] increasingly likes it (喜欢), is increasingly receptive of it (接受), and also increasingly sees it as a good thing to do. I think that this is a really good development situation. If volunteering can turn into a part of one’s life, not a special part but a part, then you can do volunteer work anytime that you like”*

As discussed in previous chapters, this societal acceptance is important because it makes it more likely that individuals will initiate and increase involvement in CSOs (see Andreoni, 1989, Freeman, 1997; Wilson, 2000).

## **7.2.2. Role-Models and Networks**

As established in the literature review, many studies note that expansive social resources increase the likelihood that a person will volunteer (see McPherson *et al* 1992, 157; Smith, 1994, 255). However, much fewer studies emphasise the *enhancement* of social resources as being a major motivating factor that promotes involvement. This is a factor that is identified by Hustinx in her work on individualisation and Western European volunteering (Hustinx, 2000; Hustinx and Meijs, 2011) and also by Xu and Ngai (2011), Rolandsen (2008), and Fleischer (2009) in their qualitative studies of Chinese volunteers. In this study, getting exposed to new social networks was both a major motivation for involvement and an unintended benefit. As discussed in chapter’s four and five, many of the interviewees talked about actively seeking out people that were ‘like them’. For these interviewees, the social aspect of volunteering was important, and the networks that could be gained through involvement were just as important as the act and orientation of the act. This was apparent from the author’s personal observations as well. On several occasions when the author got involved with a volunteering activity there were many more ‘helpers’ than ‘helped’. Many brought along a camera and spent a fair amount of time chatting to each other and taking photos of the things that they were doing. This is very similar to the observations made by Rolandsen in his study of CYV volunteers. He also noted the importance of the social function of the volunteering activity: “*the fact that close to 30 volunteers*



were gathered to assist a total of five elderly meant that many of the participants never exchanged a single word with any of the residents, nor did they participate directly in any kind of assistance” (Rolandsen, 2008, 119). This ‘social function’ was also very prominent in the interviewee’s answers. Chende’s response was quite representative of the others. When I asked him about his motivations for volunteering he replied that:

*“I don’t think that there is one specific one. One was certainly that I thought the activity was interesting. I can go with the group to visit children and orphans, and I can help them to organise events, to communicate with them. I really liked the feeling of doing things together, as a group. So for me, I felt that I could make new friends through getting involved.”*

Yangmei said that she had become good friends with her fellow volunteers: *“they had become the same as close relatives (亲人)”*. She said that even though some had moved away, she still kept in contact with them and that, if she encountered problems in her life, she knew that she could rely on them to help her out. These are similar sentiments to those discussed in the case study below.<sup>72</sup>

Many of the interviewees also talked about the people within the CSO having an effect on them. Yangguang described an NGO leader as having a profound influence on his value-set:

*“His views really influenced me; how to look at (怎么去看待) the environment, and how to look at other people around you. I learnt things from him that influenced what I should pay attention to (关注), what I should strive for (努力), what I should consider (思考), about what an individual should do in society. His influence on me really was huge.”*

The interviewee Liuhua had made friends with the interviewee Meixiu through volunteering. Liuhua said that Meixiu had been a big influence on her: *“[Meixiu] has influenced me a lot [...]. Her behaviour, her enthusiastic attitude towards society and what she says about it, really influenced me.”* In a similar way Xiuying emphasised the importance of receiving new ‘points of view’ from the people that she encountered through volunteering:

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<sup>72</sup> Although it is important to note that they were not equally expressed across the sample. A few of the interviewees said that they didn’t know their fellow volunteers very well, such as Chenguang: *“you’ll meet somebody you like one week, but then they won’t be there the next time you do an activity”*. However, as found in Rolandsen’s study, the dominant response was still that the social aspect of the CSO was a significant motivation for volunteering involvement.

“Volunteering provides me with the opportunity to meet lots of people and to see whether the world from their perspective is different to the way it is viewed from mine. Whether it’s from the perspective of the people we are helping, or from the perspective of my fellow volunteers, from coming into contact with them I can use their eyes to view the world. This can give me a really fresh and new worldview (世界观) or values system (价值观). I think that this is really great.”

Zhenyi talked a lot about the influence that people she had met whilst volunteering had had on her own views:

“At first I didn’t know anything about volunteering. After I first entered the organisation I met some new friends and these people gave me a really deep influence. There were [three people] who influenced me most deeply because they were really committed environmental volunteers. The way that they viewed problems, including the way they treated other volunteers, it all influenced me and moved me a lot [...] They promoted my growth (促进了我的成长) and they gave me new ways of looking at things.”

Zhangsui talked of something similar: “through volunteering I can consider some issues. Maybe I’m a bit puzzled about certain aspects of life, aspects that I don’t understand. Through volunteering I can get some answers because I can meet lots of new people and learn with, and from, them.”

Some of the volunteers also talked about the influence that specific civil society leaders and organisers had had on them. These were not the well-known civil rights activists that are known in the West<sup>73</sup>, but local volunteering figures that the interviewees had encountered. Wenling talked about being influenced by “all of those that [she] met through volunteering”. Zhangsui was influenced by the headmaster of the rural school that her organisation volunteers at: “after I saw him I was really moved and inspired, he made me think that I should go and do something useful, that I shouldn’t just do this and that, and just waste time”. Xiaoxiao said that she had been influenced by her CSO leader who had volunteered abroad in Cambodia, saying that he had “taught her about certain new aspects”. When she was interviewed, Xiaoxiao said that after the interview had concluded she was going to attend a talk given by a volunteer who has worked abroad:

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<sup>73</sup> Hongmei was the only one who mentioned a civil rights figure that was well-known in the West; saying that she really admired Ai Weiwei and the other activists who had spoken out about the buildings that collapsed after the Wenchuan earthquake.

*“It’s a talk given by a really excellent volunteer who has come to talk to people here. [...] He’s been all over the place, to lots of foreign countries. His ideas and experience are broader than our own so we invited him to come and give us a talk. He’s seen lots of different societies, so we can learn from him how volunteers should help out.”*

As well as passively receiving transformative influences, many of the interviewees also talked about personally influencing other individuals around them. Chende talked of the importance of communication and spreading ideas:

*“From an organisational perspective; this country is very big, this area is very big. If you do one thing, for example caring for some old people, we can only care for one part, or two, or ten. To help more people it’s therefore really important to consider dissemination (传播) and influence (影响). You need to let more people know about what you have done. At the same time different groups should share information so that we can help and communicate with each other. From an individual perspective I also really like to interact with people, and really like to make new friends. Therefore I can spread my ideas, experiences and my support to other organisations and volunteer friends.”*

Shihong said that she had told her friends they should volunteer, and that just a few days ago she had recommended it to her cousin. When Lingzhu was asked how his motivations had changed he said that he realised the importance of spreading awareness: *“I realized that I can influence my friends, and through doing so that I can add value. Through volunteering and helping others I can influence my friends and perhaps get them to help as well. In this way I am also helping those who need it”*. Wangmei, when asked about ways of thinking that had influenced her, talked about doing a little to influence others: *“Now I understand that if you can do a little then you can influence those around you. [...] Lots of my friends didn’t really understand what I was doing, but I have influenced them to pay attention to these issues”*. Yangmei said that she influenced other people to become volunteers by *“telling them stories”, “describing it”, and “showing them photos”*. Through doing this she would *“give them exposure to a new way of living (新的生活方式)”*. In a similar way, when Xiaoxiao was asked whether she had influenced her friends to get involved with voluntary activities, she said that she didn’t force them but had influenced them ‘softly’: *“I wouldn’t force them to do it, but I could introduce it to them a little, to tell them a little about it. [...] In this way I can just give them a little look and they might gradually come around to my way of thinking and then turn into a fellow volunteer.”*

These examples demonstrate the micro-social ways in which civil society involvement spreads and ‘thickens’ via social networks and personal contact. The case-study below demonstrates how a CSO can act as a ‘hub’ for these processes to develop and spread.

### ***Case study: CSO11***

CSO11 was a small community CSO that was set-up in an apartment of a housing estate by a local resident, and was unknown outside of its local area (it was ‘discovered’ by one of the interviewee’s). In the apartment, owned by the founder, there were several rooms; one contained an exercise area with some old gym equipment, another contained a seating area with a large open space for games, and another smaller room had a projector for showing films. The organisation was designed to act as a ‘hub’ for the local community. It advertised itself through posters on the noticeboards of the housing estate, and through messages posted online. CSO11 was unregistered and the organiser (who was not interviewed as part of this study) said that he had had problems with the police on a number of occasions who harassed him for holding an “*unregistered gathering of people*”. All three of the interviewees who were involved with CSO11 said that the organiser had influenced them significantly, especially the way that they viewed volunteering.

The organiser, along with a core group of volunteers, held regular activities on weekday evenings and weekend afternoons. Sometimes these activities were free and sometimes the participants paid a small fee to cover running costs. All those who helped out at these events were unpaid. Examples of the activities included games-evenings (board games and mystery ‘who-done-it’ nights), dance-classes, foreign language lessons, film nights, and cookery courses. Everything was organised through the QQ IMS service and at the beginning of each week the organiser posted up a schedule of that week’s events. The QQ group contained several hundred members.

Three of the interviewees who volunteered for other organisations, were also involved with the running of CSO11: Shihong and Qiuye (who both volunteered for CSO4), and Lijuan (who volunteered for CSO2, CSO4, and two others). They had all first learnt about their volunteering opportunities from the organiser of CSO11, or through advertisements that were placed in CSO11’s apartment and messages posted on the organisation’s QQ group. The interviewee Shihong explained how this had occurred: “*After I got involved with [CSO11], I added myself to*

*the organisation's QQ group. Within the group some people posted some information about needing volunteers, then I got involved [with CSO4]"*

Qiuye said that she had first learnt about volunteering through the photos that the organiser of CSO11 and Lijuan had put up online to 分享 (share). Shihong said that before she got involved with CSO11 her friends weren't involved with volunteering, but through CSO11 she made friends who were interested in it. Lijuan said that the organisation played an important role in her life as a place to relax and socialise and to "*find out about things*".

In this way CSO11 acted as a 'hub' for 'thickening' relationships *between* individuals participating in CSO work, and also for introducing individuals to other CSO's. All of this relationship building was conducted through personal contact or through social media, predominantly the QQ IMS service. Furthermore CSO11 also acted as a re-embedding space, with Qiuye, Lijuan, and Shihong all spending considerable time 'relaxing' in the space and activities that the organisation provided.

### ***Case study: Kewen***

When Kewen was interviewed he was in his final year at university. He had been volunteering for more than two years and said that his commitment to volunteering had increased with experience. The first time he volunteered was during his first year when he saw a notice in the university looking for volunteer-teachers. Since then he had spent more and more time on volunteering commitments, becoming involved with the running of several organisations and helping to set one up. One of his commitments was collecting second hand clothes from the university that he attended. During the interview for this study he fielded a phone call from a donor, explaining that after he finished the interview he would go to the campus to collect their donation.

When he was asked who or what had influenced him to first get involved in volunteering, he said that at University he had met many like-minded people (志同道合的人) who had then become friends. It was this friendship group that had influenced him to volunteer. When asked whether his motivations had changed over his two years of volunteering experience, he said: "*No, they have just got stronger. I am increasingly willing to spend my time doing volunteering work*"

*because through volunteering I have discovered new things and people that make me want to help out more and more.”*

Kewen described the ‘things’ that he had ‘discovered’ by citing several influences. The main ones were two people. One was someone from another university who had set up a CSO. The second was a foreign girl that was involved with another volunteering organisation. He said that the girl was “*very brave....even though she is a girl she just does what she wants to do*”. Kewen said that he had told both of these two people that “*you have opened two windows for me*”. When he was asked what he meant by this, he said that:

*“Through talking and interacting with those two people I became aware of another sphere ( 领域 ), a really interesting sphere. This awareness made me think that I should also go and get involved. This ‘sphere’ is about environmentalism, and also about volunteering, and also about civic-mindedness. Those two people really had a very big influence on me by exposing me to this sphere.”*

Later on in the interview Kewen also said that he wanted to build on what he had learnt from these two people; including to “*learn more from other cultures about ways of helping others*”. He went on to talk about how he was interested in learning more about poverty-relief methods used in rural India, and about the work of micro-credit banks. In these ways Kewen’s relationship with CSO work had ‘thickened’ because exposure to new people with new ideas had altered his value-set and re-enforced his motivations for involvement.

## **7.3. From Passive to Active Participation**

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### **7.3.1. Feedback Sessions and Grassroots Organisations**

This section will discuss how the CSOs offered opportunities to express an ‘active’ and individualised form of participation that corresponds with the new values that were discussed in chapters four and five. As described in the literature review, during the Mao-era a limited individualisation resulted from the state-led destruction of tradition and familial dominance because, as (2003, 232) Yan says: “*The availability and accessibility of social space outside the family and kinship constitute the vital condition for the enrichment of the subjective world and the*

*development of individual identity*". Since the end of the Mao-era the state has allowed a limited degree of individualisation to emerge in order to drive economic growth, but only to a limited degree. The Chinese state "*castrates*" the process of individualisation, because it limits it to a strictly apolitical expression (Beck, 2010, xviii-xix). The individualised individual is therefore left untethered from the old restraints but unable to formally express new individualities in forms that the state believes to have political potential. CSOs occupy this contested area and are tolerated as long as they don't stray into political areas or expand too much (Ma, 2006). It is CSOs that therefore allow the individualised individual to express their new value-sets; they are both an outlet and a proving ground for the expression of new values.

In contemporary China, the increased desire to express individual choice and preferences has been noted by many studies (see Garrott, 1995; Barber, 2001; Allik and Realo, 2004; Stanat, 2005). The channels for expressing choice and preference have also greatly expanded, and there has been an influx of new ideas that give rise to new understandings of equality and meritocracy<sup>74</sup>. Previous chapters have discussed how stronger notions of 'equality' and 'plurality' in the interviewee's narratives generated new conceptions of social commitments and volunteering. As the interviewee Bozhen said: "*I think that today's 'volunteer spirit' places more emphasis on equality and mutuality*". Involvement in CSOs gives opportunity for the individual to play out these new conceptions in a new setting that is more open to new ways of doing, thinking, and organising. Looked at from a different perspective, the CSO could be said to create a space for a Habermasian public sphere to develop (Habermas, 1991) because it acts as a "*setting of relative equality*" (Hall, 1999, 420) in which individuals "*assemble to interrogate both their own interactions and the wider relations of social and political power within which they are always and already embedded*" (Keane, 1984, 2).

As discussed in previous chapters, involvement with organisations in traditional China was largely an 'ascriptive' and 'passive' form "*in which individual self-interest was not openly asserted.*" (Pye, 1996, 451). In Mao-era China the expression of an individual's ideas or values in a truly 'active' sense would have been dangerous if they did not correspond strictly to the Party-line<sup>75</sup>. However, today's individualised individual both wants, and needs, to express themselves; 'passive' membership of a voluntary organisation will not do (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2000, 15). One conduit for active membership was the 'feedback session' (反馈) which the researcher

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<sup>74</sup> As will be discussed below, this can be linked to the rapid popularisation of social media, where a person becomes used to the idea of expressing their interests (Yang, 2011, 443). The significance of this change could be seen as being far greater than in the West, where opportunities for individual expression and communication have a more established history.

<sup>75</sup> The repression of the Hundred Flowers movement is an extreme example of this.

personally witnessed being held after activities undertaken with CSO's 2, 4, and 10 (CSO's 7 and 8 also held them although the researcher did not personally witness them). These sessions were a time for the volunteers to reflect on the activity just undertaken; what had been gained by the individual, what they had disliked, and how this knowledge could contribute to the improvement of future activities. The general format of this session was that all the volunteers stood in a circle with the group-leader acting as the co-ordinator. Each volunteer had the opportunity to voluntarily contribute feedback, to say as little or as much as they wanted to, as the interviewee Chenyue described:

*“After every volunteering activity there is a ‘分享’ (sharing), where all the volunteers get together and talk about what they have gained from the activity (把自己的收获拿出来). These always make me really happy because everybody gets something different from the activity (每个人都有自己的不一样的收获).”*

The focus was therefore very much on the individual with an emphasis on mutuality and equality and the feedback session marks a shift from an individual's passive participation in an association to an active participation. This is at great odds with the state's *leifengist* message, which emphasises passivity. In the lead up to the 60th anniversary of Lei's death (in 2012) the state's promotion of the *leifengist* message received widespread criticism (NYTimes, 2012). The well-known journalist Li Chengpeng said that this was because of Lei Feng's unthinking passivity: *“China has had hundreds of these somewhat fake role models [...] They don't work because they don't represent the right values. Lei Feng is a good guy but he doesn't have critical thinking skills, doesn't reflect on things and only follows marching orders”* [emphasis added] (NYTimes, 2012). As discussed in previous chapters, many of the interviews noted something similar to Li.

Leading on from this point, it is also important to remember that if the aims and values of the organisation no longer align with the diverse aims and values held by the individualised individual, there is also the possibility that the individual will set out to form and shape *new*, more suitable, associations. As discussed in the literature review, previously this was less likely to happen; as Pye says of traditional-era China: *“the culture did not encourage the creating of new groupings in response to new interests.”* (Pye, 1996, 453). This aspect of Chinese culture is now changing and a more *active* participation within one organisation can lead to the formation of other, new organisations. Several of the interviewees had started their own organisations after first becoming involved in an existing volunteering organisation. Jingfei had set-up CSO6 with a couple of friends, and Kewen had helped to set-up an organisation (that was not part of this study). Other volunteers had also been heavily involved in the founding of volunteer



organisations although they had not been one of the originators (e.g. Linchun had been with CSO10 from the beginning of its foundation). Zhangsui had set-up CSO1 with some university classmates and her organisation is detailed in the case study below.

### ***Case study: CSO1***

CSO1 was a grassroots organisation that was established on the University campus and one of its founding members was the interviewee Zhangsui (another interviewee, Zhangsui's friend Xiaoxiao, later got involved with it as well). Zhangsui had graduated from university a year before being interviewed and was currently working at a large multinational firm. Like Chende, she had first become involved in volunteering at university, joining a university-run student group in the first few months of her first year. During her first two years at university she took part in what she described as 'normal' volunteering activities with the university-run group; helping old people out in their care homes, going to orphanages, and helping disadvantaged students. Then in her third year she set up her own organisation with some of her friends: *"We set up our own volunteering group, although it was relatively small. Then some of the students that we had volunteered with in the university organisations came and took part in our own group."*

She described how she had set it up with classmates that had become her friends through volunteering in the university volunteering group: *"At the very beginning there were just five of us, we were all classmates from five different colleges within the university, all studying for different degrees. We all met each other through participating in the activities of the university organisation. Then we realized that we all had similar views and ways of thinking [共同的想法]."*

One of these friends had a 'cause' that they decided to base their new organisation around: *"In this little group there was one of us who knew about this little school in a really poor part of Guizhou. We talked about what we could do to help, we talked a lot about this! Eventually we decided to set up our own organisation, and to go and help them [the school] through it."*

Through her final year of university Zhangsui dedicated a lot of time to setting up this organisation and after leaving university she continued to help run it in her spare time. Towards

the end of the interview she said that even though she was currently working in a company, in the future she would like to get a job that gave her more time to “nurture” her own organisation.

Zhangsui’s organisation was still “quite small” and she said that the internet and social media represented a significant cost-saving resource: “Our organisation is relatively small and over there [the school that they help] they don’t have internet. So what we do is we use the internet here to search for teaching material, because we don’t have any material to teach the lessons with.” Through the internet and through CSO activities Zhangsui said that she had come into contact with many other CSOs, and gotten to know the other volunteers in the group very well. The networks constructed around the organisation formed an important part of her social life, and she said that her CSO friendship group constantly met up to “discuss things”. She explained that she believed that the people within this social group would help her out if she needed assistance:

*“I’ve talked to the others about this, that if any of us encounter a problem in our own lives, for example if we can’t find a job, or need help getting some work experience or meeting someone, then everyone in the group should help them. We can solve the problem together, because probably one of us has experienced a similar problem and can give them the wealth of their own experience. So we are all really good friends and even though I’ve graduated we remain really close.”*

### **7.3.2. Internet 2.0 Strengthens Relationships**

The previous chapter discussed how the internet and social media performed an important role by facilitating the creation of *new* links between individuals and CSOs. This section will establish how they can also reinforce *existing* links. Vastly improved access to increasingly efficient social media platforms allows stronger dialogue to develop between CSOs and the individuals who are already involved with them (see Tai, 2006; Yang, 2011). This is important because it strengthens the attachment of the individual to the CSO, which increases the likelihood that they will both sustain and increase their participation (see Taylor *et al*, 2001; Dalton and Dignam, 2007; Hallahan, 2008). Furthermore, through the two-way dissemination of information both sides become better informed. As the interviewee Xiaoxiao said: “Right now we have our own blog and Weibo which we use to regularly send out information. This lets more people find out about us and enables us to find out about them”. This increased flow of information develops awareness and increases a CSOs capacity because it enables them to fine-tune the services that they provide.

Concordantly the aims of the CSO will also have increased resonance with society as the interviewee Lingzhu explained: “If you can propagate your volunteering activities on the internet, even if they are only occasional, then through the internet you are notifying other people about what you do and showing them those that need help.”

The dominant feature of social media is that the communicative process is two-way. Some of the volunteers emphasised this interactivity, as Kewen explained: “I can transmit some information on the internet and then a few days later I have had people from Beijing, Shandong, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu all enquiring and commenting on it”. Chende emphasised the horizontal exchange of information at a national level: “If I am in \*\*\*\* I can communicate frequently with friends in Shanghai, Beijing and Guangdong. I can tell them what has happened in \*\*\*\* and they can tell me what has happened in their place.” The interconnectivity of social media is crucial to the strengthening of the dialogue that Kewen and Chende describe. Integrated social media systems create the potential for dialogue to ensue across different platforms as the screenshot of a CSO’s Weibo profile demonstrates:

**Figure 6.1. CSO’s Weibo profile**



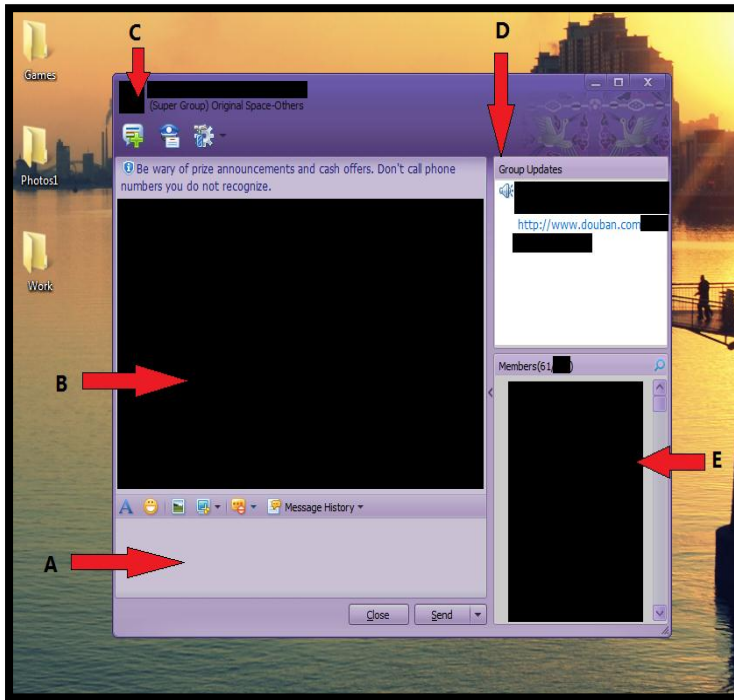
- A. The CSO’s latest Weibo message
- B. Photos of the CSO’s activities
- C. The profile of the organisation (its logo, short introduction, location, link to its blog)
- D. Details of its followers (currently 777)
- E. Other people and organisations that ‘follow’ the CSO
- F. Resources
- G. Keywords

Source: Weibo.com

The impacts of the high level of engagement (such as commenting, linking, and ‘liking’) provided by this interconnectivity are multiplied by its accessibility. Through the use of mobile internet, volunteers can engage with CSOs at home, at work, and on the move. This is not only important for strengthening the relationship between society and civil society but also for increasing the organisational capacity of CSOs.

At an organisational level social media enables a CSO to maximise its ability to plan, recruit, and publicise (Taylor *et al*, 2001; Dalton and Dignam, 2007). Through its integration into the network provided by QQ and Weibo, a Chinese CSO can rapidly establish a stable, free, and efficient real-time dialogue with other CSOs and existing volunteers. This enables an organisation to organise society for action independent of a physical space. QQ was utilised as an organisational tool by *all* of the volunteers and CSOs that looked at in this study. QQ offers an online space to disseminate information and organise and plan activities. Not only is it free and easy to use, it’s penetration into Chinese society means that many volunteers will already be frequent users. One of the key QQ functions is the ‘group’. Users - individuals or organisations - can create a ‘group’ which then acts as an online meeting-place and discussion area for other users that join the group (either by being asked or by requesting to join). These groups are widespread across the QQ network and offer a space for people interested in similar things to converge and interact with each other. Frequently this online interaction turns into interaction in the physical world as meetings are organised and events are planned through these groups (see Wang and He quoted in Ma, 2006, 105). Sometimes the users in these groups have already met in the offline world, often they enter the group having never physically met another member. The screenshot below shows the QQ group used by CSO5:

**Figure 6.2. QQ Group used by CSO5.**



- A. Space for the user to enter text in real time
- B. Group discussion area where all users contribute
- C. Group name
- D. Group updates. Messages from the Group moderators. Currently showing a 通知 about an upcoming volunteer activity and a link to its website.
- E. Group Members. Showing those members online and offline (currently 61 out of a total of 300+).

Source: Author

Most of the interviewee's talked about the importance of QQ for their volunteering. Jingfei, who helped to co-ordinate activities for CSO6, said: "[the internet] is really convenient for communication, this is really important. For example through the use of the QQ group that we set up it's really convenient having all the volunteers together to communicate and interact with them". At the volunteer level the QQ group represents an easy way to obtain information and present the opportunity to participate, as Shihong said: "the organisation mainly issues information through the QQ group then, when people have read the information, they decide whether they want to take part or not". The individual's 'decision' that Shihong mentions is significant for the individualised individual with their 'choice biography' and stronger conceptions of equality. Social media not only gives the individual a massively enhanced ability

to express, communicate, and choose; it also establishes a relatively equal relationship between organisation and user (Yang, 2011, 443).

## **7.4. Flow from State to Non-State?**

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The focus of this study was on volunteers involved with CSO's with no (or weak) links with the state. However, because of the Chinese context, implicit in this focus was the reverse question: 'why were they *not* involved with a state organisation?' As discussed previously only a few interviewees expressed outright opposition to involvement with a state organisation. Many had actually been involved with a state volunteering organisation in the past, particularly the CYV. However, this raises another question: 'why were they involved in a state organisation before, but not anymore?' Although this study did not look directly at state volunteering groups, other studies have. Rolandsen (2008) looked at a single CYV group, and Fleischer (2009) and Xu and Ngai (2011) looked at a mix of state and non-state voluntary groups. Using data from these studies combined with the interview and secondary data collected in this study, this last section will analyse some of the issues surrounding 'flow' between the state and non-state.

As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, 161) write; individualisation results in a shift towards dynamic value-sets that "*may indeed collide with the party apparatus, but [...] certainly make sense in the forms and forums of civil society*". For those looking to volunteer, the state voluntary organisations are by far the biggest and best-funded, but do they attract and retain the individualised individual? Is there flow from state to non-state because the non-state organisation better aligns with the requirements and values of the individualised volunteer? Hustinx and Meijs (2011) examine issues of 're-embedment' in Western European CSOs, identifying two different strategies employed by organisations; 'enablement' and 'pressure' (9-11). The first results from a positive assessment of individualisation and is suitable for the individualised individual because it looks to actively accommodate their new, more dynamic alignments. The second, 'pressure' results from a negative assessment of individualisation, and is far less suitable because it looks to pressure individuals to volunteer to *counter* the impacts of individualisation. As will be discussed below, it is clear that whilst Chinese CSOs tend to focus on 'enablement', the state organisations often emphasise 'pressure'.

Most studies draw attention to China's 'state-led' volunteering: "*volunteering in China fundamentally differs from [the] standard definition in that much of the impetus comes from the state*" (Hustinx *et al*, 2012, 57). However the previous chapters of this dissertation have disputed this statement by stressing that the 'impetus' to volunteer (in the sample of individuals that this

study looked at) came more from the individual than the state. They detailed how the individualised individual is redefining what it means to volunteer and how this contests the state-approved version. Two noteworthy trends are at work here: a) the individualised individual is more and more able to contest an increasingly diluted state meta-narrative that is no longer synchronised with their lives, and b) the alternative of the state; the non-state, is increasingly becoming visible and, just as importantly, viewed as accessible and acceptable<sup>76</sup>. This represents a significant change from China's past where, as discussed in the literature review, the relationship between the individual and non-state organisations was relatively weak. Membership during these periods was largely ascriptive (Vogel, 1965; Worden *et al*, 1987; Pye, 1991) and the element of 'choice' was severely limited (Kraus, 1981; Delman and Yin, 2010). As previously discussed, for Chinese CSOs this has created a problem of cultural inertia, as one CSO director says in Cooper's study: "*If you are not from a government agency, the local people may not accept you [...] It's a pity and it's really difficult.*" (Cooper, 2006: 134).

However, alongside the normalisation of the economic non-state, so the associational non-state has also become normal. This is significant for the individualised individual because they thrive on alternatives; picking and choosing the parts that align with their self-constructed value-sets. In 21<sup>st</sup> Century China the individual is increasingly in control; which organisation an individual chooses is largely dependent on criteria devised by the individual. With increasing individualisation the emphasis therefore shifts towards what an organisation can offer the individual. Furthermore there is also the opportunity to start up an organisation from scratch, to fill a demand that the existing options fail to meet. State organisations therefore face increasing competition to attract individuals with diverse value-sets and new aspirations to participate and express their individuality.

### **7.4.1. The Contested State Narrative**

#### ***The State Volunteering Option***

This section will detail the state's volunteering narrative and show how it is potentially at odds with the individualised individual. The literature review showed how the state has incorporated

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<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, as established in the literature review, studies of ex-communist Eastern Europe (e.g. Kuti, 1996; Salamon *et al*, 1999; Hodgkinson, 2003) show that a legacy of state-directed 'involuntary' volunteering can discourage individuals to volunteer.

volunteering into its revised legitimation strategy, part of its drive to create civilised, high-*suzhi* citizens that will help to drive a ‘bigger society’, in a ‘harmonious’ fashion, towards the realisation of a ‘*xiaokang* society’ (Jacka, 2009; Tomba, 2009; Wei and Cui, 2011; Xu and Ngai, 2011). The *shequ* (community) billboard below (located in the city of this study) locates volunteering within this framework:

**Figure 7.1.** “*Throw yourself into volunteer service, Promote volunteer spirit and jointly build a civilised city*”.



Source: Author’s own collection.

The state has co-opted the idea of ‘volunteering’ into its collectivist *leifengist* framework, turning 志愿者 (volunteers) into 雷锋传人 (‘disciples’ or ‘heirs’ of Lei Feng) (see Zhang, 2012).

**Figure 7.2.** “*Take part in volunteer service, Promote Lei Feng spirit*”.



Source: Weibo.com.



Two of the core aspects of this *leifengist* linkage are 1) the spread of collectivist, socialist values and 2) state leadership. That the state views volunteering as a means to spread socialist and collectivist values is clear, as Wang Weiguang summarises in a recent article in the CCP's *Qiushi* journal: "*Lei Feng's spirit of altruism should be used to purify social relationships, leading to everybody's overall development*" (Renminwang, 2012). Liu Yunshan, Director of the Propaganda Department and a key government figure connected with volunteering, has urged people "*to learn from Lei Feng*" to advance "*socialist morality*" (Xinhua, 2013, see also Liu, 2008). The CYV – the largest volunteering organisation in China – strongly promotes the CCP's core values in tandem with its promotion of volunteering, as their stated remit shows:

*"This association will provide society with volunteer service, promote the civilised construction of socialist spirit, advance the establishment and perfection of the socialist economic system, improve the overall 'suzhi' (quality) of youth, and make a contribution to the co-ordinated development and overall progression of economy and society."* (Renminwang, 2004)

Rolandsen's study (2008) also notes how a lot of CYV volunteering was centred around CCP ideology and CCP-defined 'good citizenship'. For example he notes that in one CYV meeting: "*most of the morning was spent on a plenum discussion of the application of the 'Eight Dos and Don'ts' (ba rong ba chi), a part of the Socialist Honour and Disgrace (shehuizhuyi rongruguan) campaign launched by the Chinese Communist Party to strengthen public morals.*" (2008: 116)<sup>77</sup>. The discourse of state voluntary organisations also has many references that link volunteering with the creation of 'harmony' as a mission-statement put out by one organisation shows: "*We are guided by Deng Xiaoping Theory and Three Representatives thought [...] We aim to build a socialist harmonious society and a well-off society*" (Xu and Ngai, 2011, 8). Many CYV activities are also focused around 'learning from Lei Feng' and they describe their volunteers as 'disciples of Lei Feng' (雷锋传人):

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<sup>77</sup> This refers to Hu Jintao's 2006 moral code entitled 'Eight Do's and Eight Don'ts' (or 'Eight honours and Eight shames'), within which the themes of stability and collectivism run very strong (see China.org.cn, 2009).

Figure. 7.3. Web banner, CYV Website ‘Inherit Lei Feng spirit, participate in volunteer service’



Source: [www.zgzyz.org.cn](http://www.zgzyz.org.cn)

Alongside ideology, the second aspect of the *leifengist* linkage – state leadership – is also clear. As previously mentioned, the state emphasises that volunteering is a direct continuation of Lei Feng, rather than something new and non-state directed. When state officials describe the ‘civic organisations’ that they are promoting as “bridges” that will “link government and society” (quoted in Chen, 2001, 1) they are talking about state-directed organisations with “the Party taking the leadership, the government assuming the responsibility” (as the Five Year Plan stated, shown above). This is made clear by the volunteering role models that the state provides. In a similar way to how White (1990, 56-59) shows how post-Mao mass-mobilisation campaigns have been “softened” to more *subtly* change behaviour (56), so the state *leifengist* message has also been *softened* by using new exemplar figures (Lei Feng 2.0’s). One way that these exemplar figures are transmitted to society is through social media<sup>78</sup>. Guo Mingyi is by far the most famous example of these blogging Lei Feng’s and is often labelled a ‘disciple of Lei Feng’ (雷锋传人)<sup>79</sup>. In the build-up to the 2012 CCP anniversary, a campaign was launched explicitly linking Lei Feng, Guo Mingyi, and volunteering (学雷锋、学郭明义, 百万志愿者在行动) (Qiushi, 2012). Through Weibo, Guo regularly transmits messages promoting state-directed volunteering. Guo is also the best known member of the ‘everyday heroes’ (平民英雄) that are presented to society as modern exemplars of *leifengism* (Xinhua, 2012c). In June 2012 articles appeared in various state newspapers praising the exploits of ‘everyday heroes’ and directly linking them to *leifengism* and state guidance: “This is a true portrayal of the ideological and moral underpinnings of Chinese society, which operates in the spirit of Lei Feng’s heritage. This is a major victory for the 16th CPC National Congress, in creating a good social atmosphere and cultivating civic morality” (Goldman, 2012). One of the everyday heroes, Zhang Lili (who lost her legs saving her

<sup>78</sup> A recent Xinhua article (2012d) talked about how model workers had been “mobilised to open micro-blog accounts” to “correctly guide opinion” and “take a part in social management via the new platforms”.

<sup>79</sup> Guo is an Anshan steelworker, a position that Lei Feng also held, and like Lei has had plays and films performed about his life.

students) was enrolled into the CCP as an important part of the CCP's 91<sup>st</sup> anniversary celebrations:

**Figure 7.4. Zhang Lili's induction into the CCP.**



Source: Weibo.com/jianchuan

Zhang's well-publicised co-optation into the CCP was intended by the state to not only demonstrate that the state endorses those ideals, but also to demonstrate symbolically that the state *guided* her actions. A final example of the state's emphasis on guiding volunteering is a recent interview with CCP member, volunteering expert, and pop singer Tan Jing. In the interview, captioned by the state media as 'Volunteering is Lei Feng Spirit for the new era' Tan said that volunteering had shown many recent developments "*but required more regulation in order to allow it to develop healthily*". She also articulated the state's co-optation of volunteering through the *leifengist* narrative: "*China's 'volunteer spirit' has developed from 'Lei Feng spirit'. You can say that this is a sign of the times and also the voice of today's youth*" (Zhongguo Fangtan, 2012). Tan's portrayal of volunteering as a direct continuation of Lei Feng rather than something new and non-state directed, is very much the state's vision of volunteering.

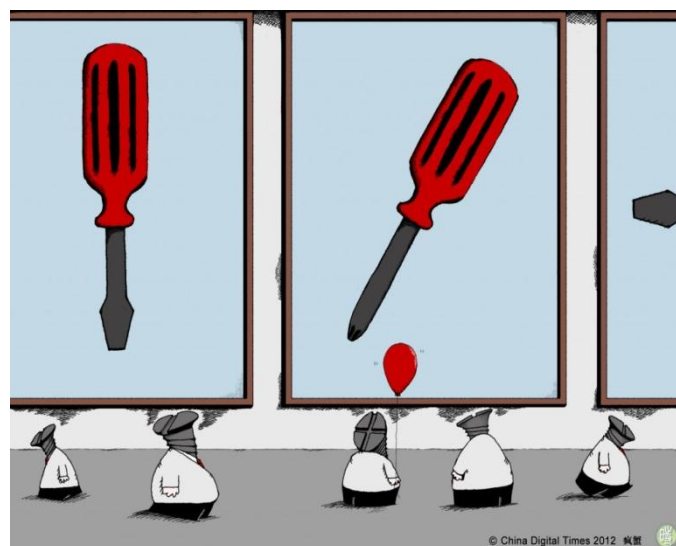
### ***Disconnect: Zombie Lei Fengs***

The above section has summarised the state volunteering narrative, showing how it remains tied to the figure of Lei Feng. 'Role models', such as Lei Feng, are important for the individualised individual because the values and ideas that they advocate and represent can be incorporated into

the individual ‘project of the self’ (Thompson, 1995). However, as established in previous chapters Lei Feng represents values that are out of sync with the modern Chinese individual. As discussed in the literature review, Beck’s concept of ‘zombie categories’ describes the disconnect between pre-existing institutions and the shifts that result from individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 203). A disconnect between the transmission of the state narrative and its reception is acknowledged in the second half of the Tan Jing interview (described above). Tan talks about the importance of 引导 (to lead or guide), to lead youth away from “*negative influences*”. This demonstrates the state recognition of the counter-narratives that impact the reception of its ‘meta-narrative’ (see Wang, 2002; Weigelin-Schwiedrik, 2006).

The 2012 artwork below, drawn by the Chinese online artist ‘Crazy Crab’, is an example of how the *leifengist* message is contested, drawing on Lei’s popular ‘rustless screws’ phrase<sup>80</sup>

**Figure 8.1. Crazy Crab artwork (untitled).**



Source: China Digital Times

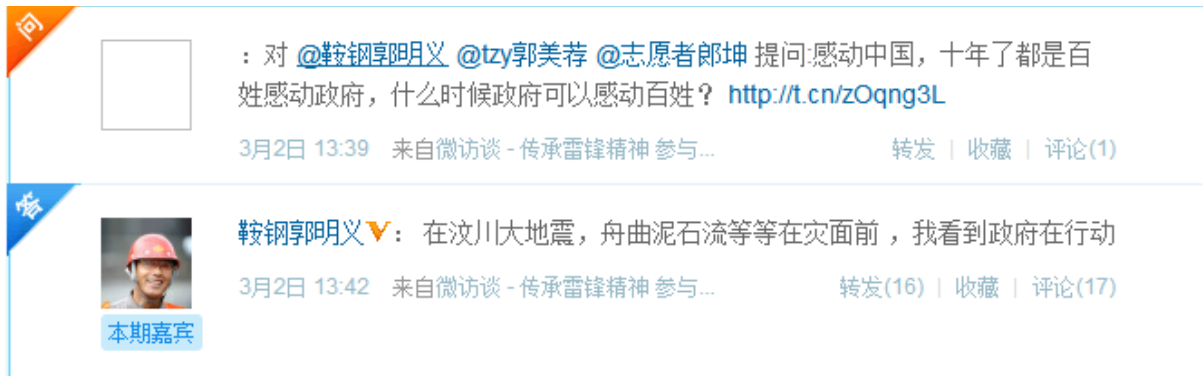
Lei Feng’s ‘heir’, Guo Mingyi, does not escape from cynicism and ridicule either. In the CYV Weibo web-chat – “Inherit Lei Feng spirit, participate in volunteer service” – (mentioned in the previous section) Guo answers questions about ‘Lei Feng spirit’ and ‘volunteer spirit’. Strictly

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<sup>80</sup> From [chinadigitaltimes.net/2012/02/hexie-farm-%E8%9F%B9%E5%86%9C%E5%9C%BA-remembering-lei-feng/](http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2012/02/hexie-farm-%E8%9F%B9%E5%86%9C%E5%9C%BA-remembering-lei-feng/)

following the state narrative, some of his answers faced criticism. Two are listed below along with the negative comments they received:

**Figure 8.2. First question to Guo Mingyi.**



Source: Weibo.com

**Question:** “*In the ten years of Gandong Zhongguo it was all common people ‘moving’ the government. When exactly are the government going to ‘move’ the common people?*”

**Guo Mingyi’s answer:** “*When we face disasters such as after the Wenchuan Earthquake and the Zhouqu landslide, I have seen government action.*”

17 people commented on Guo’s answer including the following:

@张丽yingshan: “*You are wrong! It was the tax-paying 老百姓 (common people) who acted!*”

@h黄方良: “*You are mistaken; It was the people who took action!*”

@nzy 共青情怀: “*If the people are the children of the Party and the nation, what kind of parents don’t love their children dearly?*”

@小保罗加油: “*I saw the government acting at Wenchuan and after the Zhouqu mudslide. Why does the government only wait until large numbers of people are in trouble before providing help?*”

**Figure 8.3. Second question to Guo Mingyi.**



The screenshot shows a Weibo post and a reply. The post is from an anonymous user (indicated by a blank profile picture) asking a question to @鞍钢郭明义. The question is: "现在都提倡要为人民服务,可是到头来都是人民为人民服务,没见几个当官的为人民服务的,我觉得雷锋精神应该多多在政府官员间提倡才是。" (Now everyone promotes serving the people, but in the end it's the people serving the people. I haven't seen many officials serving the people. I think the Lei Feng spirit should be promoted more among government officials.) The post is dated March 2nd at 13:38 and has 1 comment. The reply is from @鞍钢郭明义 (Guo Mingyi), who is identified as a "本期嘉宾" (Guest of the Period). He replies: "我看到好多党员干部也在为人民服务" (I see many Party cadres also serving the people.) The reply is dated March 2nd at 13:39 and has 16 retweets and 22 comments.

Source: Weibo.com

**Question:** “Right now ‘serve the people’ is always being promoted, however what really happens is the people serve the people. I have never met Party members who serve the people. I reckon that Lei Feng Spirit should be promoted amongst government officials instead.”

**Guo Mingyi’s answer:** “I have seen loads of Party cadres serving the people.”

22 people commented on Guo’s answer including:

@瞿瞿爸爸: “It’s more like ‘serve the RMB’!” “

@seven 蜗牛711: “Brother Guo, actually your answer tacitly agrees with the questioner’s statement. It’s your optimistic rose-tinted perspective, you are unwilling to answer the question directly about the corruption of government officials, you are just avoiding the issue – this is not Lei Feng Spirit!”

@西北的天空: “Party members=government officials? Do you think that this is an equal set-up?” “

The two questions above, and the sceptical questioning of Guo’s answers, are illustrative of the fact that the state’s legitimacy to dictate the volunteering narrative is being openly contested. The hypocrisy of a state that is increasingly seen as suffering from widespread corruption, moralising to society, is fairly obvious. As the Peoples University academic Zhou Xiaozheng recently said, “If the upper levels of society do not learn from Lei and become good examples to follow, how are the regular people supposed to be willing to?” (Global Times, 2012). Xu and Ngai’s study

also found that the appeal of state organisations can be hampered by their attachment to the state (Xu and Ngai, 2011, 8) and if an individual's set of moral values labels a corruption-link to be major problem; then why would an individual choose to express themselves within the state superstructure? Previously the answer would have been 'because they have no other options', but in today's China a plethora of alternative options exist.

A few of the interviewees' in this study brought up the issue of state corruption or immorality. Hongmei, felt most strongly about it, saying "*I volunteer because I myself am willing to (愿意), it has nothing to do with the government* " and that "*I wouldn't get involved in anything like the Olympic volunteering, because I think that it's volunteering for the government, behind your backs the government are violating other people's rights*". However this was certainly a minority position; although many of the interviewees were critical of certain aspects of the state, most were not openly hostile to it<sup>81</sup>. What was apparent though was the interviewees' total opposition to *leifengism*, with its focus on ideology and state-guidance. It was therefore more that they found the *methods* and *values* of state volunteering to be unappealing, compared to the greater dynamism of the non-state organisations.

#### **7.4.2. The Dynamism of the Non-State**

In economics, the dynamism of the non-state sphere is often compared favourably to the relative inflexibility and lethargy of the state economic sphere. Should it also be noted as a difference between the non-state and state *social* spheres? A dynamic organisation is important for the individualised individual with their flexible value-sets, and desire for choice, expression, and active participation. However, as noted in the section above Chinese state voluntary organisations are bound-up within the state's restrictive ideological narrative. Even though state voluntary organisations are beginning to recognise the importance of the individual (see Tan, 2004), they maintain the Mao-era's collectivist focus and top-down paternalist processes and structures that give the individual far less opportunity to express themselves. Concordantly, they also maintain the suspicious attitude towards self-organisation at the micro, man-management level that is typical of the state's macro-policy towards civil society (Rolandsen 2008, 115). These methods are unsuitable for the individualised individual, who has an increasingly engrained feeling of entitlement to choice and expression (including organisational expression, such as Zhangsui's

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<sup>81</sup> As discussed in the literature review, this corresponds with how organisational studies of Chinese civil society find that most organisations do not consider themselves positioned in opposition to the state (see Ma, 2006; Lu, 2007; Hsu, 2010; Luova, 2011).

organisation described above). As the interviewee Jingfei noted: *“People today volunteer because of their own psychological or material needs but people before did it because of a societal need. Today is more about the individual, about the individuals personality, if the individual wants to do it then they will. Before it was all about the government making them.”*

From the perspective of the individualised individual, civil society organisations can therefore offer a more fluid, less-restrictive environment that is not tied to the past or to rigid ideology (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 161). Instead of subscribing to one inflexible Party-line, civil society gives a malleable and customisable way to express varied, self-formed value-sets in diverse ways and combinations. This links in with the re-conceptualisation of ‘scale’ that was examined in chapter four. Yangmei talked about this:

*“Lei Feng was at a national level, i.e. he was all about doing things for the country, doing things for the whole society; saying “I want to make a contribution to my country”. However, volunteering today is about helping a specific group of people, for example volunteer teaching is for helping the poor children, and environmental work is for the animals. It’s not at such a high-level as Lei Feng”.*

Another aspect is that a non-state CSO can give a greater emphasis to the ‘individuation’ of a volunteer’s commitments. Hustinx has studied this aspect, showing that it is those voluntary organisations that offer flexibility and choice that appeal to the individualised individual (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2011, 9-11). A key requirement is an absence of commitment to fixed volunteering patterns (e.g. signing up every week rather than committing to long-term involvement). As the interviewee Xiuying said above: *“I prefer to take part in activities that are more relaxed and loose (宽松), to have a more free environment (自由的环境) to do volunteering”.* Another feature is a different definition of ‘goals’. Hustinx and Lammertyn (2000, 179) describe how, for the individualised volunteer *“idealism is replaced by more tangible and pragmatic goals”.* The ideological sessions and paternalistic attitudes of Chinese state organisations (described in the previous section) are therefore out of touch with the values of the individualised individual and this can be seen in Rolandsen’s description of a potential CYV volunteer:

*“One of her old classmates informed her that China Volunteers is quite Party-oriented, and that members must attend all kinds of time-consuming [political] ‘activities’ (huodong). Because of this new information my friend decided against becoming a volunteer. She had no interest in*



becoming associated with the Party apparatus, she said, so volunteering did not sound like a suitable activity for her." [emphasis added] (2008, 114).

Many of the interviewees in this study emphasised the importance of Hustinx and Lammertyn's 'tangible goals' and 'flexibility' in their volunteering. A lot of them talked about the complexities of their lives, and the difficulty of balancing work, study, family and friends. The CSOs offered routes around this, offering patterns of work that recognised the individuality of each volunteer. Chenguang emphasised the importance of flexibility when asked the question 'Is there a conflict between your life and being a volunteer?', saying that: "*no. there can't be because you first see if you have free time, then you fit it into your plan, then you do it*". All of the CSOs in this study had commitments based on a week-by-week basis<sup>82</sup>; volunteers signed up online, selecting from the different activities that were available over the next week. This element of flexibility and choice places the volunteer at the centre of the transaction between organisation and individual. Lingzhu's description of the process of selecting an activity highlights this: "*The volunteer leader will ask each volunteer 'what are your interests and hobbies?' and then from that they will offer you a suitable task and ask "can you do this?".* Xiuying talked about volunteering as a pressure-release valve:

*"I've got a way of looking [at volunteering] (想法): it's that volunteering is a place to cleanse your heart (心灵洗涤). That when you go and participate in volunteering activity, it's not just a thing, it's a process that allows you to cleanse your heart. Then you can renew your life. I think that this is really important. I think that sometimes the pressure [on your life] is really great and you should find a kind of retreat, so it has a kind of regulating function (调节的作用), it's like Spring, you can refresh yourself."*

As discussed in previous chapters, many of the volunteers were therefore motivated to volunteer because it offered them a space to withdraw from their everyday life. This is very different from volunteering in order to receive political indoctrination. The interviewee Xiuying discussed this issue:

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<sup>82</sup> Except for CSO7 which was based around one-off voluntary trips lasting several weeks, and Weishan and Ziqing's involvement with CSO9, which was a regular internship.

*“I don’t really take part in government activities; I take part in those run by societal organisations (社会上的组织), smaller ones, smaller than the government ones. One reason is propaganda (宣传). Government activities just turn into propaganda exercises and this devalues them. Im not saying that government activities are bad, it’s just that I prefer to take part in activities that are more relaxed and loose (宽松), to have a more free environment (自由的环境) to do volunteering. Not ones that say you must do this and that, that’s not to say that they are necessarily bad, just that I prefer a more relaxed environment. But I think that the relationship between them [government and societal organisations] is complimentary 互补, because societal organisations can’t do everything on their own. For example the environment and helping the elderly, only the government can do this”*

For Xiuying therefore, it was not opposition to the state or the aims of the state organisation that made her volunteer with the non-state, but rather; the ways in which they did it. She opposed the state organisation’s politicisation of their volunteering activities and preferred the more flexible ‘relaxed’ apolitical environment of the non-state organisation. State organisations also direct a volunteer’s contribution to those that *the state* defines as ‘in need of help’, the interviewee Ruojian talked about this being a problem:

*“The government has lots of organisations and sub-organisations and they care about results (政绩). Volunteering is all about helping people, but sometimes the government uses the volunteer efforts for their political ends, i.e. they only care about making their department better. The purpose of volunteering therefore changes to what the volunteers can do for the government department.”*

Ruojian went on to say: *“I think the government only helps those next to them, volunteers want to help everyone”*. As discussed in chapter six, the interviewee Ziqing noted something similar when he compared ‘Lei Feng spirit’ to volunteer:

*“[Lei Feng Spirit] is more about the government taking the lead, it’s less about the actions of the individual. Every year the government runs campaigns to get people to ‘Learn from Lei Feng’ and encourages people to become ‘top-students’ ...so it’s like the government is using volunteers as unpaid labour to accomplish government aims, I think this is the opposite to ‘volunteer spirit’. Volunteer spirit is more about you, more about whether you are willing to do something, this is where volunteer spirit is different to Lei Feng Spirit”*

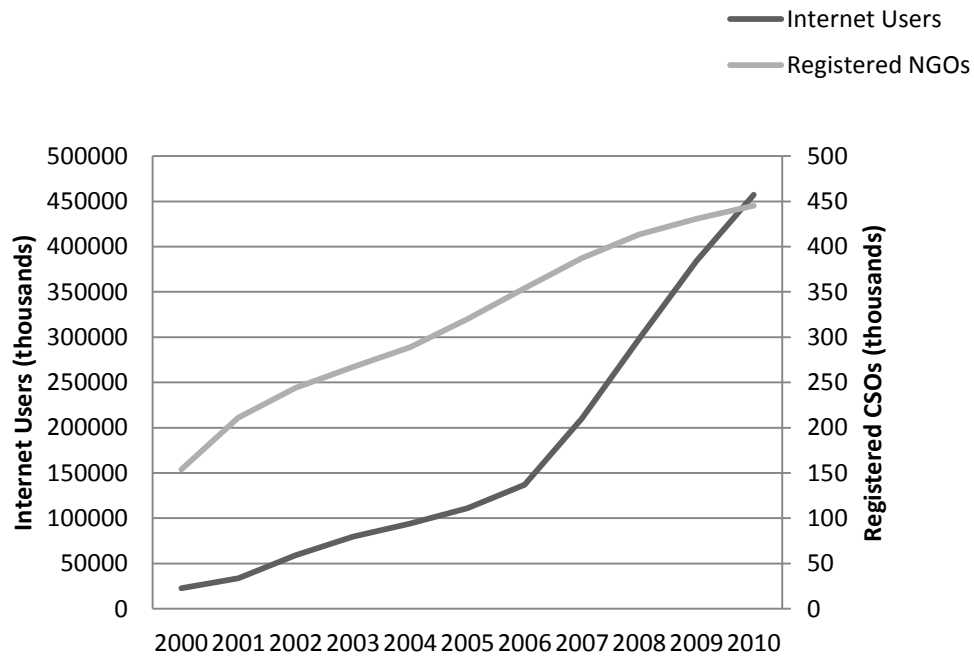
Another area that potentially gives the non-state ‘appeal’ through greater dynamism is its use of the internet and social media. The potential for the internet and social media, as both a tool and a platform, to affect the development of Chinese civil society is arguably greater than it is in the West. This may seem counterintuitive; from a casual glance, one would expect the better-resourced state organisations to have a greater ability to mobilise internet resources, as a volunteer co-ordinator from a CCYL-organised voluntary group in Xu and Ngai’s study said (in 2006): “*We can organize voluntary work extensively because we have the predominant media. At least it is a tool of propaganda [...] Furthermore, the media is actually a kind of official resource of the Party and the government*” (Xu and Ngai, 2011, 258). However, the findings of this study roundly challenge this statement. As discussed in previous chapters, all of the CSOs looked at in this study made an expansive use of social media (which has developed considerably since 2006, the year in which the above statement was made), and all of the interviewees, without exception, considered it central to their volunteering. There are several explanations for this that will be explored briefly below.

As discussed in the literature review, whilst civil society has a long established place in most Western societies, it is new to modern China. An often overlooked aspect of this is that Chinese civil society has none of the ‘historical baggage’ that Western civil societies carry with them. This means that Chinese civil society can utilise the knowledge accumulated by civil societies in the West whilst remaining free of the transitional problems that come with discarding this baggage in order to adopt new developments. CSOs have traditionally relied upon face-to-face communication, adverts in mass media and the postal service to interact with society. With the coming of the internet they now have easy access to a resource that offers vastly greater connectivity. In long-established Western civil societies this newly available resource presents a transitional problem as well established techniques and operating procedures have to be re-aligned and adapted towards the huge changes that the internet brings (Levine, 2004; Waters *et al*, 2009; Briones *et al*, 2011). In contrast to this the newly established Chinese CSOs are less affected by these transitional problems.

Concordantly the timing of Chinese civil society’s growth is also conducive to strong integration with the internet. CSO numbers began to grow after 1978 but the speed with which they have increased grew much greater at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This growth trajectory runs

parallel to the post-2000 rapid spread of the internet resulting in what Guobin Yang has described as ‘co-evolutionary’ growth (Yang, 2003). The graph below illustrates this<sup>83</sup>:

**Figure 9.1. Parallel Growth: Internet Users and Registered CSOs.**



Source: MOCA 2011; CNNIC 2012.

Not only has Chinese civil society developed alongside the internet but it has also developed in an environment that is conducive to developing a strong internet presence. This idea may seem strange when issues of state control and suppression feature so prominently in Western analyses of the Chinese internet and Chinese civil society. Whilst it is true that state control of both elements remains powerful and stringent, it is also the case that the suppression of civil society by the state has forced it towards an online presence. As looked at in the literature review, Chinese civil society has found gaining a fixed physical presence (e.g. an office) difficult as the state places hurdles in front of it to stymie its growth (see Saich, 2000; Ma, 2006). Chinese CSOs have therefore found themselves chronically short of the resources that would enable them to expand (Cooper, 2006). The internet, and especially the very recent internet 2.0 developments of social

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83 The data does not include the vast numbers of unregistered CSOs/NGOs.

media and social networking, offers a cheap and highly efficient solution to this resource deficiency.

This all means that Chinese CSOs have potentially developed a strong symbiosis with internet technologies. All of the CSOs studied in this dissertation utilised the internet, and most co-ordinated their operations primarily online, co-ordinating the new dynamic forms of individual-organisation commitment through the use of mobile phone and social media. Whilst state organisations also utilise the internet and social media, they remain tied to traditional methods by their greater access to resources and established history. A greater symbiosis with new communication technologies is important because, as discussed in previous chapters, the demographic that is most likely to become involved in civil society is also the demographic that is most integrated with that technology. Whilst any firm conclusions on this subject of greater non-state symbiosis with technology is beyond the scope of this study, it presents an interesting avenue for further research.

### 7.4.3. Flow and Contradiction

The interviewee's history of volunteering undoubtedly demonstrated a trend of 'flow' from the state to the non-state. Most of the interviewees had previously been involved in a state voluntary organisation (mainly the CYV), but at the time of their interview these individuals were volunteering with a non-state organisation. Some examples include: Yangmei who was involved with the CYV first, before getting involved with CSO8; Tangli, who had volunteered for several organisations including a nationwide state research project, the Chinese Red Cross, and non-state poverty relief work; Wangmei who had first got involved with a government organised environmental program before joining CSO2; and Chende who first got involved with a university organisation, but now works promoting non-state CSO development. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the interviewee Zhangsui set up CSO1 after meeting people in a state volunteering organisation: *"We all met each other through participating in the activities of the university organisation. Then we realized that we all had similar views and ways of thinking (共同的想法)".* The interviewee Meixiu's vast volunteering experience was also illustrative of the flow. She had first got involved with voluntary work through her high school *"it was from then on that I first started to understand the importance of volunteering, and first discovered that volunteering was a really interesting activity"*. At university she got heavily involved with a university environmental association which she said was very important in her volunteering biography because *"it had loads of resources and had lots of links with other organisations"*.

Later on she moved into non-governmental work, later becoming employed by a foreign ENGO. Meixiu's extensive volunteering experience therefore shows a distinct flow between state and non-state.

However, this flow should perhaps not come as any surprise. The study was of a limited scale and purposely chose non-state voluntary organisations. Furthermore, state organisations still hold a large share of the options available to a potential volunteer, especially to the university-age potential volunteer, because the CYV presence is focused on the university campus. It must also be noted that whilst this 'flow' was one-directional – from the state to the non-state – there was not enough contained in the interviewees answers to say that it would necessarily remain so in the future. As already discussed, although many of them criticised aspects of it, few of the interviewees were 'opposed' to the state. They were more opposed to the methods and messages of the state organisations (i.e. *leifengism*) because they were poorly suited to the individualised individual. If these methods and messages of the state organisation were to reform and become more suitable, then the flow could reverse. Most of the individuals did not see any tension in this kind of fluidity (Hustinx and Lammertyn call it 'detached attachment', 2000, 15), although whether the state sees a tension, and whether the state is capable of reforming its methods and messages, is another matter.

Analysing voluntary action and involvement through the individualisation lens therefore sheds light on why the Chinese situation often seems to contradict Western civil society theories. The individualised individual may be a member or supporter of state organisations *and* non-state organisations at the same time. This is no contradiction to the individualised individual, who is just finding a way to express his politics in an unreformed and outdated political superstructure. If the sum of his current views can negotiate the 'contradictions' created by being both interested in a civil rights organisation and a CCP member then there is no contradiction for the individual, only contradictions for the un-enlightened observer. As Beck says "*Social reflexion - the processing of contradictory information, dialogue, negotiation, compromise - is almost synonymous with living one's own life*" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 26). These areas of 'contradiction' expand to the arena of nationalism and patriotism as well, in a way that might seem unintelligible to neoliberal ideas that equate civil society with liberalism. As previously mentioned, the interviewee Liyun provided a good example of this, saying that "*Yes, I am a patriot, Yes I am a volunteer, but they have no relationship to each other. I've never thought about them being related at all*". Liyun therefore compartmentalised her politics and CSO work into separate, unconnected fields.

Similarly, another interviewee, Ziqing, said that patriotism and nationalism had “*absolutely no relationship*” with his decision to volunteer. However he did not consider himself opposed to the state, instead recognising the CSOs relationship with the state as complimentary:

*“It’s a very important relationship. Firstly we are an independent organisation from the government. In some areas we can ourselves go and investigate on our own, and use our own ways of thinking. But the second aspect is that the relationship can be complimentary because of competition. The government can look at a NGO and ask ‘what are you doing? Is it useful? Could you change this and that?’ The government does something good and sees what the NGO will do in response. So it’s like NGOs and the government are two competing companies.”*

This was a very common response and corresponds with how Ma (2006, 9, 46-47) and (Hsu, 2010) show that Chinese NGOs considered themselves to be complimenting and assisting the state. The interviewee Yangmei had been involved with the CYV in her first year at university and recognised that it “*had a big government background (背景)*”. Now involved with a CSO, Yangmei conceived the difference as being ‘complimentary’ (although sometimes “*conflicting*” ‘违背的’). She said that the state was involved with the macro (宏观), and with political achievements (政绩), but that CSO volunteers were concerned with smaller, more ‘ordinary things’ (平凡的事情): “*The government and NGOs (非政府组织) have different ways of thinking (概念). The government uses money to solve problems, they are very direct (直接), but NGOs are more people orientated, they get much closer to the people*”. The interviewee Chenguang said something similar:

*“Yes I think that it [the relationship between the CSO and the state] is complimentary. Because the government isn’t all-powerful (万能的). It can successfully deal with things on the macro (宏观) scale. However, although it would like to pay attention (关注) to things on the smaller, micro scale, things surrounding people’s lives, it doesn’t have time or energy (精力) to do so. This is our mission (使命). The government doesn’t have the ability (能力) to help people, so we go and help them. However I’m not sure if this kind of situation can properly exist at the moment, that these kind of organisations can be allowed to help the government. I think that this isn’t so good.”*

Overall therefore, the ‘flow’ from state to non-state should not be read as evidence of ‘opposition’ to the state. Nor should it ignore the fact that the state organisations also do a lot of

good work. It is more that they way that they do it, and the values that they hold, can be unsuitable for the individualised volunteer. Liuhua's volunteering experience, and the ways in which she spoke about the state, represents a good study of these flows and contradictions.

### ***Case study: Liuhua***

Liuhua had first got involved with volunteering at high school, and at the time of the interview was in her final year of university and president of an unregistered environmental group (CSO12). The internet played an important role in informing her about volunteering: *“It’s definitely influenced me. Before I didn’t understand (了解) volunteering. But through the internet you can understand more, about what volunteers are doing, and also about what still can be done. It gives it a stage and allows us to do more.”*

She had first got involved with CSO12 during her first year at university, when she saw it at a recruitment fair for new students. She had become progressively more involved in volunteering so that she that *“I think that my grades have suffered because of it!”* and that *“over the past three years I can truly say that aside from studying volunteering has been the most important part of my life”*. For Liuhua, however, the time had not been wasted: *“even though it’s affected my grades I love it. Through doing the activities you can feel yourself improving more and more and feel that you are being really helpful and making lots of small changes. You can also meet a lot of new friends that are like-minded (志同道合的).”*

Liuhua cited non-state, non-patriotic sources as having influenced her to volunteer. For example, when asked her whether the Wenchuan earthquake had influenced her to volunteer, she answered that it had but that an environmental disaster film that had come out in the same year, was more influential: *“yes I guess it did, but actually the film ‘the day after tomorrow’ was a deeper influence for me [than the earthquake]”*. She also cited a good friend (another interviewee: Meixiu) who had influenced her heavily: *“[Meixiu] has influenced me a lot. [...] Her behaviour and what she says, really influenced me. Her enthusiastic attitude towards society really influenced me.”* As discussed in chapter four, she spoke about established environmental activists as influencing her conception of volunteering, such as a lecturer at her university, and the activist Jane Goodall: *“Jane Goodall and her institute really influenced me. One of Jane Goodalls saying really influenced me. That ‘every person is really important, every person is able to bring about a*



change, every person is able to produce an effect' (每个人都很重要, 每个人都能带来变化, 每个人都会发挥作用)".

When asked about her motivations for volunteering, she replied that *"I became a volunteer because I care and I want to bring about some changes"* (我当志愿者因为我关心并且想带来一些改变). When asked how her motivations had changed she said that: *"they have just gotten stronger"* and that she was interested in pursuing a career in NGO-work: *"Originally I only planned for it to be one part of my life but then it became something that I would like to do as a career"*. She also talked about differences in her conception of volunteering and that of her parents: *"They think that my volunteering work will affect my studying so they don't really approve [...] They want me to follow a traditional kind of pattern. I guess that our ways of thinking are different."*

For Liuhua the state represented a suppressive force but not in the sense that this word might be interpreted in common analyses of Chinese civil society:

*"From some aspects the government can give us assistance, but sometimes they can also suppress us (压制). For example, this one time we wanted to put out some information about Canadian seals and the university authorities stopped us. You see, what they do is they check the information we put out and sometimes they stop us. Also sometimes the university authorities make us do these superficial events (名义上的) in order to enhance its reputation. However these are not things that we genuinely want to do. They also make us take part in projects and competitions organised by the big government organisations. However, these activities really don't have any substance or use (实质作用), they are just stunts that have these huge slogans (口号). This kind of thing doesn't give any real help. Therefore they give us this kind of suppression, they filter out lots of the things that we originally want to do, lots of the more meaningful (意义的) things are filtered out, and they make us do more stuff that is not meaningful"*

When she talked about 'suppression' Liuhua was therefore not talking about something like human rights; instead she was talking about a suppression of individualised dynamism. *"They make us do stuff that is not meaningful"* runs contrary to the aspirations of the individualised individual whose own value-sets construct meaning from the bottom-up (as established in chapter five), and no longer fit with the top-down imposition of state-defined 'meaning'. For Liuhua, a non-state CSO represented the opportunity to express her individuality and social commitments

in ways that she herself defined as ‘meaningful’. In contrast, the state organisation suppressed this by aligning her acts on a framework that the state defined as ‘meaningful’. It is this that marks one of the key differences between the state ‘option’ and the non-state ‘option’ for the individualised individual. As a quote from Han Han says: "*In China today, there are many different paths to fulfillment [...] There's no reason to stay on the normal, boring road when there are so many other ways to do things*" (TIME, 2011). Liuhua clearly saw the non-state ‘path’ as better representing her idea of ‘fulfillment’.

# 8. Conclusions

## Introduction

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This dissertation has examined how individualisation processes guide and inform involvement in Chinese CSOs. Through doing so it has explored how social commitments and new social forms are conceived in China's reflexive modernity. It has also gained insight into connections between three significant and well-identified trends in contemporary Chinese society; the development of civil society, the growth of volunteerism, and the re-alignment of notions of individualism and collectivism. It has focused on several key questions: What evidence of individualisation's core features ('dis-embedment', 're-embedment', and 'the reflexive project of the self') is there in the interviewee's volunteering narratives? How have stronger notions of individuality affected perceptions of the role of the volunteer? What role does civil society volunteering play in constructing self-identity? What key resources and mechanisms enable an individual to achieve an identity as a civil society volunteer? Are individualisation and participation in civil society mutually strengthening processes? How has individualisation affected the reception of the state volunteering narrative? This final concluding chapter will first summarise the findings of this dissertation before analysing each theme that has emerged.

Through exploring the questions above this dissertation has contributed key findings to the following four areas of study:

- Chinese individualisation; including the contemporary re-conceptualisation of social commitments and shifts in the collectivism-individualism dichotomy.
- Chinese civil society; this study takes an original approach to civil society growth in China, conceiving it as a recipient of the individualisation processes.
- Volunteerism in China; this study portrays Chinese volunteerism as being individual-led, rather than state-led.
- The reception of the Chinese state narrative by the middle-income strata; focusing on the reception of the state volunteering narrative.

As Anheier and Salamon (1999, 43) state "*volunteering is part of the way societies are organized, how they allocate social responsibilities, and how much engagement and participation*

*they expect from citizens*” (1999, 43). From the literature review we learnt that the social commitments of the historical Chinese individual were aligned to family-focused collectivism in the traditional period, and then state-focused collectivism in the Mao-era. These alignments dominated notions of individuality, volunteerism, and non-state, non-family organisation. However in the post-Mao-era all of these alignments are beginning to be re-conceptualised with a stronger emphasis on the individual. At the same time the individual has gotten ‘stronger’ and more able to circumvent the state narrative, and new spaces have emerged for the individual to configure bottom-up conceptions of social commitments. CSOs represent one of these new spaces but when Western civil society and volunteering theories are applied to analyse them, they tend to inadequately take into account the political, social, and cultural legacy of this historical context. Therefore, new conceptual approaches are required to gain new insights, and this study applied the individualisation thesis as a conceptual lens that brought all of these issues into focus.

In light of the literature review summary given above, the individuals studied in this dissertation can be viewed as being on the front-line of redefining social commitments in 21st century China. As volunteers, the interviewees looked at in this study were exploring the transformations brought on by individualisation and searching for ways to balance new notions of individuality with being a member of a state-corporatist-governed society that is undergoing ‘compressed modernisation’. In contrast to how volunteering emerged in the West, Chinese volunteering has emerged out of state-directed *leifengism*, with its ultra-collectivist, anti-individuality emphasis. The modern Party-state, because it aims to stem individualism and promote collectivism, ties volunteering to the *leifengist* narrative. Lei was the state’s vision of what the ideal ‘individual’ should be; passive and self-sacrificing for the greater good of the collective and Party. The state continues to promote Lei: recently the *leifengist* message has been used to control bankers (CBRC, 2012), the military (Xinhua, 2012b), and Tibetans (SMH, 2012). The call made at the Sixth Plenum of the 17th CPC Central Committee in 2011 for the “*permanent implementation of the campaign to learn from Lei Feng*” was only the third time that this has come from the highest echelons of the Party (CPC Encyclopedia). Furthermore, in Hu Jintao’s final report to the National People’s Congress in November, 2012, the name of Lei Feng featured prominently alongside that of Marx, Lenin, Mao, Deng, and Jiang (Guardian, 2013). However, the volunteers in this study were far from being ‘heirs of Lei Feng’. They arranged notions of individualism and collectivism in a more balanced way, drawing attention to some of the ways in which a stronger conception of individualism can actually *induce* pro-social behavior. In doing so, they showed that a rejection of the state *leifengist* narrative does not result in hedonistic self-centeredness as the state suggests.

Furthermore, many studies of Chinese volunteering continue to draw attention to the absolute dominance of the state in volunteering, as a quote from a recent survey (published in 2012, the year the fieldwork for this study was completed) illustrates: “*In a population that is used to taking instruction from government on many aspects of its social life, volunteering may be seen as yet another response to government initiatives rather than one that is purely voluntary*” (Hustinx *et al.*, 2012, 57). The findings of this dissertation strongly dispute such assertions. The volunteering in this study was not ‘yet another response’ to a ‘government initiative’ as happened in the recent past. Nor, indeed, was it a response to a familial initiative, as the Confucian past might presume. Instead it was, in many ways, an initiative of the self, with the individual very much at the centre. In this way this study contests some of the popular (often state approved) negative conceptions of contemporary Chinese society. It contributes to the broader recognition that the modern Chinese individual is less inclined to be a singular ‘grain of sand’ (as Sun Yat-sen famously said), nor have they reverted to a wholly familial orientation, nor are they a state-controlled automaton, and, perhaps most significantly, nor have they become atomised and detached from society<sup>84</sup>.

## **8.1. The ‘I’ was Central to the Interviewees’ Accounts**

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One of the major themes that ran through the findings of this study in this study was how *central* notions of individuality were to the interviewees’ accounts. In this way their conceptions of social relations and commitments diverged significantly from a) historical readings of the Chinese individual, b) the state-narrative, and c) readings of individualism, often informed by de Tocqueville, that correlate increasing individualism with declining civic engagement. Firstly, let’s deal with historical readings. The collectivism vs. individualism dichotomy is one of the core features that defines a culture (Hofstede, 2001, 209) and according to historical portrayals, the Chinese individual has long been subordinate to the collective. In a collectivist society, as Lustig and Koester (2006, 116) say: “*decisions that juxtapose the benefits to the individual and the benefits to the group are always based on what is best for the group.*” Confucianism therefore positioned the individual in deference to the collective and the Maoist ideological framework that intended to destroy Confucianism, whilst ‘freeing’ the individual in some ways, also tied them forcibly to a ‘sacrificial’ relationship to the Party-defined collective. As Pye writes of the Mao-

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<sup>84</sup> Although, as will be reiterated in this conclusion; this study was confined to a small sample of mainly young and relatively affluent urbanites.

era: “*Self-sacrifice is glorified to such an extent that the safest rule for the individual is to pretend always to selflessness*” (Pye, 1991, 448).

However, for the individuals looked at in this study, the self was at the centre of their accounts and a *selfless* approach to the social commitments (that volunteering activities presented) was criticised by all. No-one was even ‘pretending to selflessness’, as Pye describes. This lack of selflessness was certainly not confined to the less committed volunteers in the study. Ziqing, who was one of the most committed volunteers (saying that volunteering “*takes up too much of my time*”) talked about “*volunteering spirit is about yourself*” and that “*I’m helping people but that I’m not sacrificing myself to help people*”. Similarly, Zhenyi, another of the most committed volunteers, said that “*today’s volunteer spirit is absolutely not about selfless sacrifice*” and Chende, who had spent the past six years volunteering could say “*it’s more that I love my life so I participate*”. Similarly, the acceptable orientation of acts of self-improvement was defined as being ‘for the state’ during Maoist times and ‘for the family’ during traditional times. The volunteer’s accounts diverged significantly from this, viewing the orientation as dichotomous. The opportunity to build and improve the self through participation in the social, not at the expense of the social, was a key motive of the interviewees.

Secondly, the centrality of the individual diverges from the state narrative. According to the state narrative, which itself is informed by a fusion of the Confucian past with Marxist critiques of the individual, excessive individualism is ‘hedonistic’, ‘selfish’, and ‘materialistic’ (Pye, 1991; Yan, 2010). The relationship between the individual and the collective is portrayed by the state as zero-sum, and to be individualistic is to do so at the expense of the collective ‘greater good’. The individual must be prepared to limit their individualism so that ‘harmony’ can prevail. The state incorporates volunteering into this narrative by tying it to the *leifengism* of the Mao-era. However, whilst the individual was central to the interviewee’s accounts, the interviewees could hardly be labelled ‘selfish’. They were volunteers after all, engaged in helping others, and even though the individual was at the centre of their accounts, it wasn’t a ‘hedonistic’ self-interest. Instead it was the positive-sum recognition that a stronger individuality was both desirable for the individual themselves, and good for society as a whole. The relationship that they were looking for was one emphasising reciprocity and mutuality, looking for ‘balance’ and a ‘win-win’ situation. Many of the interviews described this ‘balance’ in contrast to the ‘imbalance’ of *leifengism*. For example Shihong said that “*Lei Feng was more pure, he wouldn’t think about himself when he went to help people*” but that volunteering was “*more balanced; it’s about making the volunteer themselves happy*”. Hongmei said “*Lei Feng was selfless (无私) but today’s volunteering is to help yourself first then help others*”, and Meixiu said modern volunteers (not ‘modern Lei Fengs’) “*give a contribution to society because they themselves attach importance to*

*helping others. In that way they can solve many problems in a more balanced way*". Ziqing also talked about achieving a better balance in helping others: "[it] made me think that I'm helping people but that I'm not sacrificing myself to help people. That I'm probably the same as them anyway and that we are facing the same problems. We will solve problems together."

Finally, on a global scale the findings dispute neo-Tocquevillian critiques of individualism. Western theorists often draw links between increasing individualism and 'declines' in society, civil society, and pro-social attitudes. Following on from de Tocqueville, who viewed individualism as 'isolating' (1968, 506), they again take a zero-sum attitude towards the relationship between society and individualism. However, viewed through the lens of individualisation, many of the processes that these scholars decry are more to do with unreformed institutions (Beck's 'zombie categories') becoming unsuitable for the dis-embedded individualised individual with their self-constructed value-sets and DIY biography. What the centrality of the individual to the volunteers' accounts suggests is that, at least for the Chinese context, individualisation can lead to an increase in pro-social action and an increased engagement in civil society. This contradicts findings by scholars such as Putnam (1995, 2000), who suggests that individualism is antithetical to civil society. However it corresponds to work by Wuthnow (1991) and Inglehart (1997, 2003) both of whom view the relationship between pro-social attitudes and stronger notions of individuality as positive sum. In this way the individuals in this study were re-defining notions of individualism and collectivism towards a balanced "*co-operative or altruistic individualism*" as Beck terms it, in which "*[t]hinking of oneself and living for others at the same time, once considered a contradiction in terms, is revealed as an internal, substantive connection*". (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 212).

## **8.2. New Socialities to Dis-embed, Re-embed, and Re-enforce New Individualities**

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Another theme that emerged was that the interviewees were engaged in acts of both disembedding *and* re-embedding. This corresponds with something similar to what Rolandsen (2008) finds in his study of CYV volunteers. However the volunteers looked at in this study displayed a further act of disembedding from Rolandsens volunteers because they were not operating in a state organisation. Their decision to participate in a non-state CSO was a decision *not to participate* in the dominant established forms of associating; the traditional familial associations *and* the options provided by the state. This indicates revised notions of 'trust' similar to those found in Butchers (2003) Mexican study, which shows that even though civil society volunteering was not part of Mexico's "paternalistic" culture, stronger 'trust' of CSOs contributed

heavily to increased civil society volunteering. As discussed in the literature review in the traditional period there was a historical *mistrust* of both voluntary associations and non-family organisations (Pye, 1991). In Mao-era China, familial dominance was ended but interpersonal trust in the new state associations that aimed to replace the family was devastated by the extremes of the Cultural Revolution. However, those interviewed in this study have mainly experienced a world of political stability and material affluence, one in which the non-state, greater society, and the world beyond, has become increasingly visible, and the ability to communicate and receive information across this space has been great. Xiuying talked about how revised notions of reciprocity and trust were being re-negotiated through her CSO involvement: *“People think that [...] the organisation [will] take advantage of you (被组织利用). Lots of people consider that I am making a sacrifice (摆供) to help other people [...] However when you take part in an activity, then you can see whether the activity or the organisation can help you. If it can help then we can establish a win-win situation together (双赢的局面).”*

Whilst the act of CSO volunteering can be seen as one of dis-embedment, it can also be seen as an attempt at ‘re-embedment’. For many of the interviewees the CSO and its voluntary activities offered spaces that allowed them to express new notions of individuality. In doing so it offered social commitments that were more suited to the individualised individual. This is demonstrative of the role that individualisation is playing in the pluralisation of Chinese society, but is far from the fragmentary and atomising type of individualism that is described by the Chinese state. It was evidence of how Chinese society is reconstructing itself into pluralised interest groups denoted by chosen membership, rather than the ascribed, top-down delineated allocation of membership that occurred in the past. It also showed how interviewees chose organisations because they gave them the tools and resources to more actively shape their own biography. In this way it concurs with Rolandsen’s study which concludes that: *“what attracts youth to the volunteer movement is the opportunity to be part of a collective where they can contribute to society, while at the same time being recognised as individuals.”*(2008, 133).

From the interviewees accounts the CSOs offered the individual a chance to play-out and re-enforce new notions of individuality, ones that corresponded with the other studies of Chinese individualism (e.g. Barber, 2001) and included a re-conception of the ‘sacrificial’ relationship between individual and collective, a greater emphasis on active participation, and incorporated new ‘rhetorics of equality’. As the interviewee Zhenyi said of her organisation, the relationship between the ‘like-minded’ volunteers in the CSO was ‘free’ and ‘equal’: *“we are all friends, like family. We all come from different places, different colleges, different areas but we have all become acquainted with each other through having common ideas. The style (风味) of our*



*relationship is also relatively free (自由), and relatively equal (公平) so everyone has a deep friendship, our relationship is really good*". Concordantly many also talked about a changed relationship between the 'helper' and the 'helped' that, as discussed above, was more balanced and based upon new conceptions of society, as Xiaoxiao said: "When you go to volunteer you shouldn't go expecting to teach, you should go expecting to learn".

Many of the interviewees defined themselves as a 'volunteer', the more committed ones did so using terms that suggested that it was their primary identity. This represents a shift from the traditional familial identity and the Mao-era imposition of work-place or class-based identity. Many differentiated the act of volunteering from the alignment of the action itself. In doing so they were indicating that 'being a volunteer' shaped their biography more than, for example, 'being an environmentalist'. In this way the volunteerism described by many of the interviewees was a form of (new) social movement; they volunteered not to take part in specific issue-based action (i.e. to help impoverished children) but to take part in order to shape their biography into the form of 'a volunteer'. In doing so they were also aspiring to take on some of the values and ideas that they considered were attached to being a volunteer i.e. the ideas of reciprocity and 'win-win' (双赢).

An *active* participation, rather than a passive participation, was crucial to the act of re-embedding. As the popular blogger and essayist Han Han says: "it is my choice to do whatever I want and to go wherever I want" (TIME, 2004), and increasingly this is the guiding ideology of China's individualised generations. A significant strain that ran through all of the interviews was the desirability of 'choice'. When asked questions about the 'future of Chinese volunteering', one of the most common answers was that it 'would become more popular because the range of organisations was increasing'. The logic behind this response was that previously the choice was limited, but in the future the increasingly diverse aspirations of individuals would be met. This is in line with the desire of individualised individual to live a life 'on their own terms'. Individualised volunteers look for a "made-to-measure commitment" and if this not met then they will go "shopping" elsewhere (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2000, 15). In this study, an extreme manifestation of this was the *creation* of new CSOs such as CSO1. This represented an outlet for the full expression of the individualised individual, creating a new space that was better-suited to the aims of a group of individuals. This signifies a significant break with the past. As Lucian Pye says about traditional attitudes: "[...] one generally had little choice about whatever association one was expected to join. This was a critical feature in the organisation of Chinese society since it meant that there was no tradition of people forming voluntary associations spontaneously in response to their private interests" (Pye, 1991, 453). The volunteers in this study showed little

inclination towards this, instead demonstrating how the individualised individual is beginning to have an impact on the organisational level itself.

The question of whether this was a firm act of re-embedment or evidence of a shorter term one is too broad for this study to attempt to answer. Bauman talks about ‘peg communities’ which are ‘peg-like’ in the way that individuals *temporarily* hang their identity on them (2001, 71). In this way many of the newly emergent ‘communities’ such as online ones can be criticised as being superficial and ‘peg-like’. Others, such as Gong (2010), talk about the superficiality of new social forms in China because of their susceptibility to manipulation by a strong media; causing wave-like flows towards new social movements and new ‘causes’ as they become briefly popularised. In this study it is clear that re-embedment was discussed differently by the interviewees. The most committed volunteers viewed volunteering as one of the most significant parts of their life. Yangmei for example said that she had become good friends with her fellow volunteers: “*they had become the same as close relatives (比亲人一样)*”. She said that even though some had moved away, she still kept in contact with them and that, if she encountered difficulties in her life, she knew that she could rely on them to help her out. The less-committed volunteers, who did it for example just once or twice a week, saw it as making up one part of their life, often describing it as a ‘hobby’. Nevertheless it is important to note that they all differentiated their volunteering from other collective identities such as the family, the workplace, or university, indeed many saw a primary appeal of CSO volunteering as providing space to relax and socialise *away* from these identities, in a similar way to how Galston and Levine (1997) describe volunteering as a ‘refuge’.

Furthermore, and as described above, with its greater emphasis on mutuality, equality, and reciprocity, the interviewees talked about the more *active* involvement of CSO volunteering as being more suitable and sustainable for the individualised individual and, most significantly, as being *transformative*. This corresponds with how Ma (2000, 106) says: “*for millions of Chinese, self-organisation is an empowerment process and an opportunity to exercise their rights*”. In these ways, through participation in new social forms and commitments such as CSO volunteering, the process of individualisation became more entrenched and the likelihood of re-embedding in the old social forms and commitments lessens. This emphasises a break from the past. Taking the long-term view; viewed from the perspective of the individual, it could be said that the Mao-period represented yet another dynasty that ‘persecuted’ individuality. Similarly, some people say that in post-Mao China, society will revert to something close to traditional Confucianism (Sinica, 2011) This study, through using the individualisation thesis as a lens to study individuals at the forefront of social trends, suggests that this is unlikely because there have been some fundamental breaks with the collectivist past.

### 8.3. The CSO Offered Opportunities to Display Individualised Notions of ‘Citizenship’

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Following on from the above discussion, another major theme was how CSO volunteering enabled the interviewees to express the ‘self’ in a way that they themselves defined, applying moral values to actions in ways that often diverged from the state narrative. Pye begins an article on the Chinese individual with this opening line: “*It could be that no people have ever outdone the Chinese in ascribing moral virtues to the state or in deprecating the worth of the individual*” (Pye, 1991, 443). Furthermore, as discussed in the literature review, the issue of ‘moral values’ and ‘citizenship’ is important to the contemporary state narrative. Studies such as Tomba (2009) and Jacka (2009) show how the state plans to create ‘citizen-consumers’ that will assume a marginally greater but significantly limited responsibility, power economic growth through greater consumption and, above all, maintain stability through the acceptance of state-defined morality and the dominance of the Party-state. Essentially what the state aspires to is a nation of consumerist Lei Fengs, passively reacting to circumstances. However, the interviewees’ notions of citizenship were different, most of them emphasising the importance of playing an *active* role that was very far from the passive ‘screw-spirit’ of Lei Feng. This desire for *active* roles over ‘passive’ ones corresponds with Beck’s depiction of an individualised society “*in which individuals are not passive reflections of circumstances but active shapers of their own lives, within varying degrees of limitation*” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 24).

The interviewees discussed the CSO as a conduit for the expression of ‘good citizenship’ as defined by the individual, not the state. Implicit in this was that the interviewee recognised that this expression was best realised through a group structure because they acknowledged that key elements of their individual identity could only be expressed and realised within, or through, a group structure. As established in chapter five, some of the interviewees, such as Luli, Zhenping, and Qiuye expressed this by using a ‘street’ analogy: “*The difference is that Lei Feng is spontaneous, you see something or someone on the street that that needs help and you go and help them. But volunteering is more suitable (比较适当的); it’s planned, it’s organised, it’s more that you have chosen to do it*”. Qiuye’s point about volunteering being about ‘planning’, ‘organisation’ and ‘choice’ highlights a key difference between the interviewee’s notions of good citizenship behaviour (through volunteering in CSOs) and the state’s (through *leifengism*). Lei Feng was never meant to be a call for greater association: by calling for citizens to emulate Lei Feng the state did not want many Lei Feng’s coming together to form their own groups. Instead the Lei Feng message is used to call for individuals to display their citizenship individually, homogeneously, and passively; directed safely under the guidance of the Party-state. The

interviewee's notions of good citizenship behaviour contrasted greatly with this; instead emphasising small, group based-behaviour (including the creation of new groups to meet new needs), pluralism, and an *active* participation; all directed by the individual.

The CSO therefore worked to provide a framework and an outlet for the expression of individualised choice. All of the interviewee's emphasised the 'self' in embarking on the volunteer journey, the phrases '自发' (spontaneity) and '愿意' (to be willing) were notably common. As the interviewee Hongmei said: "*I will volunteer because I myself am willing to do so (愿意), it has nothing to do with the government*" and as Jiayin said: "*I did this on my own accord (自发的), because I myself am willing to. I don't care what other people think of me, I don't do it to give other people a good impression of me*". The values that were used to justify involvement and action within the CSO therefore came from the individual, not from the state, as Meixiu pointed out: "*My understanding of the modern concept of 'volunteer spirit' is that it needs to come from the individual, they need to instinctively turn themselves into an expert citizen. It is not that they go forth and help others because they rely on what someone or something else says. Rather, they give a contribution to society because they themselves attach importance to helping others. In that way they can solve many problems in a more balanced way.*" This was not stressing 'state-led' citizenship behaviour (see Tomba 2009; Jacka, 2009; Hustinx, *et al*, 2012, 62), it was emphasising that it was 'individual-led'.

## **8.4. Volunteering Offered the Individual Opportunities to Explore Society and Themselves**

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Another major theme that ran through the interviewees accounts was that of 'exploration'. Many of them said that they wanted to 'discover' new ways of thinking and doing and 'encounter' new people, and that volunteering through a CSO offered them the opportunity to do so. In this encounter the 'new' was found in the fellow volunteers, the methods of helping, and also from those being helped. Xiuying's statement succinctly summed this up: "*Whether it's from the perspective of the people we are helping, or from the perspective of my fellow volunteers, from coming into contact with them I can use their eyes to view the world. This can give me a really fresh and new worldview (世界观) or values system (价值观)*". As detailed in chapter five, many of the volunteers said that they 'just wanted to volunteer'. In this sense many were keen to adopt the 'volunteer life' in a way that chimes with Giddens' 'lifestyle' choices; "*because [it] give[s] material form to a particular narrative of self-identity*" (Giddens, 1991, 81). It didn't matter what the cause was, the main aspiration was just to become 'a volunteer'.

For some of the interviewees this was because they wanted to initiate a change in their life, or because of a desire for redemption, but for many it was because they wanted to make their life ‘broader’, ‘more colourful’, or ‘more meaningful’. Wenling saw volunteering as a way to encounter new people and new ideas: “*I wanted new experiences, to get involved with a social group (社会团体) so I can see society from a new perspective*” and went on to say that: “*I don’t mind who I am helping: old people, sick children, etc. The most important thing is that they are different to me*”. Overall, volunteering was talked about as a means of expanding the ‘self’ through learning more about ‘society’. In this way the CSO and the volunteering activity offered space for the volunteers to engage in something akin to a Habermasian ‘public sphere’ because it enabled them to “*assemble to interrogate both their own interactions and the wider relations of social and political power within which they are always and already embedded*” (Keane, 1984, 2). Engagement in a CSO was therefore portrayed as being a generative, symbiotic process; broadening the horizons of the volunteers through offering them new opportunities to reflexively examine their own lives and, in doing so, providing them with new materials to shape their own biographical identity.

## 8.5. A Renewed Drive to Shape Society

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Differences in generational attitudes towards volunteering and ‘helping others’ were prominently noted by all of the interviewees. Most of them linked these differences to economic disparities, reasoning that their parents’ generation were poorer and had little time to help others because they were concerned with their own ‘温饱’ (food and clothing) problems. In doing so, the narratives of the interviewees diverged significantly from the position that the Chinese state takes on the development of voluntary action and association. From the interviewees’ conceptions, increases in volunteerism and civil society were due to increased autonomous individualist action deriving from increased economic development. Such conceptions are a long way from the ‘Asian values’ that the state uses to frame its message that Chinese society is innately different from the West. They also fail to align with the legitimization claims that dictate the state’s position on voluntary action and association. The state’s position on increasing and diversifying voluntary action and association is not that it is growing out of *new* relations and attitudes resulting from economic development<sup>85</sup>. Instead the state emphasises *continuity*: volunteers are the ‘Heirs of Lei

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<sup>85</sup> If it did so then it would align with the civil society theories that link such developments with a delegitimizing middle-class, and give democratic revolution as a result.

Feng’, assuming a limited responsibility and propagating the directives of the Party-state. This stands in stark contrast to the narratives provided by the volunteers themselves.

As discussed in the literature review, many studies of Chinese society describe a cultural inertia that generates a contemporary aversion towards self-governance, self-organisation, and involvement in non-familial, non-state associations (e.g. Pye, 1991; Rolandsen, 2008). In this study, there was little evidence of this cultural inertia in the interviewee’s narratives although many did note a generational difference which corresponds with the tensions described in many other accounts (e.g. Yan, 2009, 109-132; Palmer, 2013). Many of the interviewees noted how their parent’s generation were sceptical about the *value* of their volunteering. Concordantly, this was also linked to a difference in the ‘willingness’ and ‘drive’ to want to proactively change society. Many of them talked about wanting to bring about small-scale changes to society, such as Lihua who said “*I became a volunteer because I care and I want to bring about some changes (想带来一些改变)*”. In contrast, older generations were generally portrayed as being more resistant to change, and critical of the interviewee’s attempts to initiate it.

The dominant logic within these perceptions was that; because today’s generations are more affluent they are more willing to take an active role in initiating ‘change’. As the interviewee Kewen said: “*I think that people nowadays, now that they are rich, are beginning to think how to change this society.*” This logic is understandable: the recurring narrative of ‘change’ is central to understanding modern China’s relationship with civil society. 20th century Chinese society was subjected to immense change and understandably there is a desire amongst older generations for stability (Bannister, 2012)<sup>86</sup>. However, there are hundreds of millions of young people in China who have known nothing else but post-Mao prosperity and relative stability. The chaotic experiences of the Cultural Revolution are told to them in history books. They have grown up increasingly empowered and individualised; both increasingly *able* and *forced* to shape their own lives. For these generations *shaping society* seems a natural corollary of this trend. They see a problem and they want to solve it, whilst their parents’ generation, who may have witnessed first-hand the catastrophic consequences of pro-active action, look on and sometimes fail to comprehend. In this sense the interviewees in this study resembled ‘Heirs of Liang Qichao’ more than they resembled ‘Heirs of Lei Feng’.

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<sup>86</sup> A degree of scepticism in older generation towards ‘change’ would also be highly understandable: older generations were raised on radical collectivist socialism, had the possibility of liberal reforms dangled briefly in front of them in the 1980’s, only for them to be told to be an economic get-rich-quick individualist, but to forget about concordant political and social reform.

## 8.6. Links between Nationalism and Volunteering were Insignificant

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As many studies of civil society point out; nationalism can significantly affect the way in which a civil society grows (see Weigle and Butterfield, 1992, 1-2; Cox, 1999, 13). Indeed, as described in the literature review Hall (1995 7-15) lists ‘socially-homogenous nationalism’ as one of his five ‘enemies’ of civil society, saying that it leads to an exclusive definition of society and endangers an inclusive civil society. The growth of Chinese nationalism is a well identified trend and it contradicts heavily with the basic tenets of neo-Tocquevillian definitions of civil society because is incompatible with the plurality and diversity of civil society and can be the enemy of the Habermasian public sphere (Calhoun, 1993, 275-276). One of the original hypotheses of this study was that nationalism or patriotism would be of considerable importance to the interviewee’s self-constructed narratives<sup>87</sup>. However this hypothesis was overwhelmingly disproved by the results of this study. None of the interviewees described nationalism or patriotism as big motivating factors in their volunteering. Most of them said that they were patriotic but many of them explicitly distinguished between patriotism and volunteering. The interviewee Liyun was probably the best example of this. A self-identified ‘angry youth’ who had recently taken part in anti-Japanese protests, she nevertheless saw no link between her volunteering and her patriotism/nationalism: “*Yes, I am a patriot, yes I am a volunteer, but they have no relationship to each other. I’ve never thought about them being related at all.*” Furthermore, although most of the interviewee’s said that they were patriotic, a ‘global identity’ was indicated as being significantly important by many of the interviewees (corresponding to the findings of other studies e.g. Fong, 2004a). Many of them distinguished between volunteers and ‘non-volunteers’, regardless of nationality, in doing so indicating that as a ‘volunteer’ they had more in common with a foreign volunteer than with a Chinese ‘non-volunteer’. As Xiuying said: “*I think that humanity’s concern (关爱) and emotions (情感) are really identical (很同一), they don’t change, you can’t say that culture or other reasons affect them*”.

These notions of national and global identity stand in stark contrast to common portrayals of modern Chinese youth, which usually highlight strong nationalistic sentiments<sup>88</sup>. However, nationalistic sentiment was notable by its absence in this study. An answer by the interviewee

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<sup>87</sup> This would differentiate them significantly from, for example, a British volunteer. From the author’s own experience, if you asked the average British CSO volunteer ‘do you volunteer for your country?’, you would probably be laughed at

<sup>88</sup> Indeed, it plays a significant role in certain aspects of the ‘China threat’ theory that highlights the dangers of a nationalistic populace dictating and constraining Chinese foreign policy.

Liyun points to a reason why this was the case: *“I think that I do volunteering to improve myself, to exercise myself, and study things. I’ve never thought about it in relation to the country, or national glory, I’ve never thought about it in this lofty (高) way.”* This was the dominant way in which the interviewee’s portrayed the relationship between nationalism (or patriotism) and their volunteering. Many of them said that they were patriotic but, as Liyun said, emphasised that their patriotism and volunteering *“have no relationship to each other”*. This compartmentalisation of patriotism and volunteering, and the juxtaposition of nationalisms and global identities, may seem contradictory to the outsider<sup>89</sup>, however it makes sense to the individualised individual who has moved away from singular ideologies and constructs their own DIY biography from a ‘pick and mix’ selection of options. These options include those sections of the menu that many Western liberals would steer away from; including nationalism<sup>90</sup>. The individualised individual can be patriotic, or even nationalistic or xenophobic, and still think that volunteering and pro-social behaviour is a good thing. All are options to be adopted into the individual’s DIY biography if they can be justified within their self-compiled moral code. What was common to all of them was that the individual, formed through that DIY biography, was central to their accounts: as Chende said: *“it’s not that I love this country so I participate in this volunteer activity, its more that I love my life so I participate”*.

## **8.7. The Importance of Internet 2.0**

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Another common theme that could be traced across all of the interviewee’s responses was the importance of the internet. Social media clearly enhanced the organisational capacity of the (usually resource-lacking) CSOs. This corresponds with the findings of other studies such as those by Tai (2006), Yang (2011) and Shi (2012), but, unlike those studies, this dissertation viewed it from the perspective of the individual rather than the organisation. It showed how internet search engines, QQ messaging, and micro-blogs enabled the individual to both actively and passively ‘discover’ an organisation. Social media then allowed the individual to convey their discovery to their friends. Furthermore internet 2.0 increased the visibility of CSOs through the dissemination of information and awareness. Through these ways, individuals increasingly *see* a civil society that is progressively more capable. This creates a revised understanding of capacity

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<sup>89</sup> It also contradicts civil society theorists such as Weigle and Butterfield (1992) who posit that the ‘character’ of a country’s civil society depends on (amongst other factors) *“particular forms of nationalism”* (1-2).

<sup>90</sup> In this way it chimes with other studies that show how the modern Chinese individual can be both ‘self-enterprising’ and nationalistic at the same time (e.g. Ong and Zhang, 2008; Hoffman 2010)



that is significant because, as detailed in the literature review, it is being presented to a society that is not used to the idea of ‘civil society’. This situation leads to the societal re-visualisation of the relationships that exist between society, the state, and the newly visible civil society. At the same time, the internet is also providing numerous alternative narratives that contest the state meta-narrative. Whereas before the state dictated the conversation because it dominated the conduits for communication; now it is impossible to do so.

The role of the internet in creating the acceptance of pluralisation and non-state alternatives should not be underestimated; it is an important tool for offering choice and promoting pluralistic association. The internet breaks through the previous barriers that obstructed individuals associating in self-defined groups. A recent quote from the artist Ai Weiwei succinctly sums this up: “*In modern history Chinese people are like a dish of sand, never really close together. But today I think a dish of sand is a good metaphor because now we have the Internet. We don't have to be physically united. You can be an individual and have your own set of values but join others in certain struggles [...] I think that is a miracle. It never happened in the past.*” [emphasis added] (Spiegel, 2011). From the evidence presented in this study it was also clear that internet 2.0 not only allowed for a ‘stronger’ individual, it also allowed for a stronger ‘local’. Yes, it provided greater flows of information about the ‘global’ and in doing so provided opportunities for the individual to contrast their own experience with that of other individuals. And yes, it also provided the potential for organisations and individuals to connect nationally and internationally. However, it also gave the tools for a greater understanding and a stronger co-ordination of the local, allowing the individual to better take their life into their own hands, enabling them to organise locally, to deal with localised problems<sup>91</sup>.

All of these points run contrary to studies that highlight the ‘atomising’ qualities of the internet. These include neo-Tocquevillian studies that highlight the (negatively) individualising effects of the internet (such as Putnam, 1995), and studies of NGOs which highlight the internet’s potential to disrupt group cohesion (such as Nugroho, 2007). Of course these issues do exist in China as well, but this study draws attention to the pluralising and ‘liberating’ role of the internet in Chinese society, showing how it provides the tools to actively link the individual with society and, in doing so, to strengthen and expand it. This is not emphasising the areas that most articles on social media and civil society are concerned with: political activism and the circumvention of ‘the Great Firewall’; but is instead concentrating on the everyday gradual diffusion of ideas and

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<sup>91</sup> This potentially provides a stronger defence against the more negative aspects of globalisation. Jacobsen (2008) talks about the importance of the internet in protecting local ‘lifeworlds’ from colonisation through globalisation.

concepts to the average citizen (who has probably never come into contact with a ‘political activist’). Furthermore this study emphasises that the importance of the internet for Chinese CSOs is magnified because of the concordant development of CSOs and social media, and the limitations of other conduits for full expression, co-ordination, and organisation. Concordantly it also highlights the synergy between the younger generations of the new Chinese ‘middle-classes’, the internet 2.0 services, and CSO work. All of this signifies a significant strengthening of the relationship between the individual and civil society, and all of this occurs within, and despite of, ‘the Great Firewall’.

## **8.8. Increased Awareness and Visibility: The Importance of Wenchuan and the University Campus**

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As already discussed, many of the interviewees talked about a recent shift in attitudes towards involvement in civil society and CSO volunteering. Aside from economic development and associated increases in human capital, the most common reason given for this was a rise in ‘awareness’ and ‘visibility’. The interviewee Shihong gave an example of this: “*When [my parent’s generation were young] there was not really a volunteering mentality (意识), not an understanding of it [...] In China at that time there was no word for it! However now people are gradually coming to realise that there are this group of people and that there are lots of different ways to do it. It’s a really big change.*” As talked about in the previous section, many of the interviewees described the internet as playing an important role in generating this increased awareness. Another common factor that was given was the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake which gave unprecedented exposure to volunteering. The presence of mass-volunteering at Wenchuan was symptomatic of both the relative development of domestic civil society and the widespread access to the media that had spread across the country. A 1976 Tangshan-style closed-off, unilateral state response could not have taken place in 2008 China. The retraction of state hegemony, the legitimisation crisis, and the massively increased visibility meant that the state had to be seen to be co-operating with society. At Wenchuan this meant co-operating with a spontaneous flood of CSOs and CSO volunteers. Wenchuan therefore acted as a key exposure event, making a new idea or concept visible to many of the interviewees in this study. Whether or not that resultant visibility was only present in the short term, will remain or will be allowed to increase is only partly important. The indisputable fact is that the exposure existed, crucially in clear public view, setting a precedent in the mind of the individual.

Alongside the internet and the Wenchuan earthquake, another area that was commonly cited as increasing awareness of volunteering and CSOs was the university. Most of the interviewees in this study had been to university or were currently a university student. In the interviewee's biographical narratives the university emerged as an important space both temporally and spatially for a link to be established between the individual and volunteering. Spatially it offered CSOs a space to establish themselves (CSOs 1, 7, and 12 were all set-up on the campus) and to come into contact with a pool of potential volunteers. Temporally it offered a period of calm between the relentless pressure of high school examinations, and the pressures of post-university family-making and job-hunting. This gave the individual a period in which they had time to make 'lifestyle choices', many of the interviewees contrasting their choice of 'meaningful' volunteering with the choices of their peers, who 'wasted their time'. All of these sites: the university, the internet, and Wenchuan played a part in increasing awareness and visibility of CSOs and volunteering, and, in doing so, normalising the concepts.

## **8.9. *Leifengism* is Unsuitable for the Individualised Individual**

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Another significant trend in the interviewees' responses was that Lei Feng-style volunteering was overwhelmingly criticised, even the 'softened' version that was discussed in chapter seven. As discussed in the literature review; in contemporary China, where boundaries between nation, Party, and society are becoming far less blurred, Lei Feng has become integrated into the state-corporatist model. In order to update the Lei Feng message the state has tied 'Lei Feng Spirit' (雷锋精神) directly to the modern concept of formal volunteering. Concordantly, voluntary action, a potentially sensitive political term, has been merged into *leifengism*. In the associational sphere Lei Feng is therefore effectively the 'road block' that the state places on the path to greater individualisation and the state aims to 'capture' volunteering within its *leifengist* framework. It therefore does its utmost to portray volunteering as a direct continuation of Lei Feng, saying that volunteering is merely a modern 're-branding' of *leifengism* and calling 志愿者 (volunteers) 雷锋传人 ('heirs' or 'disciples' of Lei Feng'). As Zhang Yiwu (2012) concludes: "*if there had not been the long-term accumulated legacy of leifeng spirit in China then it would have been impossible for volunteer spirit to grow so quickly in China*".

However, this narrative is being expressed to a society that is profoundly different from that which first received the original Lei Feng message in 1963. It is also vastly different to the society that received the post-Tiananmen Lei Feng messages in the early 1990's. So, whilst the

nucleus of the state message has remained the same, the society that is receiving it has not. This was clearly apparent in the interviewee's answers. Whilst some of the interviews praised the core sentiments of the 'altruistic' part of the Lei Feng message, almost all of them said that its ideological focus, and its 'sacrificial' individual-collective arrangement, were unsuitable. Lei Feng and *leifengist* style volunteering remains attached to the Party-state ideology. However, as discussed throughout this thesis, the focus of the individualised individual, and the way that they frame their involvement in volunteering, is not so singular (none of the interviewees used the language of socialism to describe their volunteering).

Furthermore, implicit in the Lei Feng message is that 'being like Lei' is about being passive: a 'rustless screw' in a greater machine. From the state perspective a lot of passive, state-guided Lei Feng's are more stable, and less threatening, than a lot of thinking, creating, and developing 'volunteers'. However, the interviewees' conceptions of the volunteering identity was that volunteers were *active* participants who sometimes took the lead; creating and re-making social forms and commitments. As the interviewee Ziqing noted: "[*Lei Feng spirit*] is more about the government taking the lead, it's less about the actions of the individual". There was therefore a significant divergence of values, corresponding to how Li Chengpeng said that Lei Feng doesn't "represent the right values" because he "doesn't have critical thinking skills, doesn't reflect on things and only follows marching orders" (NYTimes, 2012). Overall, for the interviewee's there was a marked difference between '志愿者精神' (volunteer spirit) and '雷锋精神' (Lei Feng spirit) and an emphasis on 'newness' and 'change'. This marks a significant divergence from the state narrative, which emphasises continuity and tries to co-opt volunteering into *leifengism*.

In the second half of the Tan Jing interview that was talked about in chapter five, Tan talked about the importance of 引导 (leadership) in leading youth *away* from bad 'influences' and *towards* Lei Feng. Some of these 'influences' were mentioned in this thesis e.g. Liuhua's mention of Jane Goodall: "One of Jane Goodall's sayings had a big effect on me: that 'every person is really important, every person is able to bring about a change, every person is able to produce an effect' (每个人都很重要, 每个人都能带来变化, 每个人都会发挥作用)". This conception of agency, emphasising 'change' and the 'power' and 'importance' of the individual, is very different from the *leifengist* message. Concordant to new influences such as these, there are also new spaces to operate in that focus more on the individual actor. Whilst state organisations continue to use the outdated language of self-sacrifice to determine a volunteer's relationship to the group, non-state organisations often have the individual at the core, rather than the collective. For the state organisations, improvements gained by the individual through volunteering are gained for the benefit of the collective. All of these factors led to many of the interviewee's trajectories deviating away from state organisations, as Xiuying said "Government activities just

*turn into propaganda exercises and this devalues them. I'm not saying that government activities are bad, it's just that I prefer to take part in activities that are more relaxed and loose (宽松), to have a more free environment (自由的环境) to do volunteering."*

Liuhua termed the difference between state and non-state as relating to 'meaningfulness'. For her, the state 'filtered' out the meaningfulness: "*They give us this kind of suppression, they filter out lots of the things that we originally want to do, lots of the more meaningful (意义的) things are filtered out, and they make us do more stuff that is not meaningful*". As talked about in chapter five, the 'search for meaning' played a prominent role in the interviewee's narratives. For many of the individual's in this study the CSOs represented a better route to search for 'meaning' because, rather than being attached to rigidly monolithic value-systems, they were attached to lifestyles that were fluid and malleable, to be dropped, altered, and combined according to the individual<sup>92</sup>. Conceived in this way, this study disputes statements such as "*Volunteering in China is an essential part of [Post-Maoist institutionalized mobilization]; hence it should be understood as a state-sponsored effort to achieve political goals through intensive and targeted mobilization of active personal commitment*" (Hustinx *et al*, 2012, 63). Whilst this statement may accurately represent the goals of state policy, this study shows that achieving the 'active personal commitment' may be becoming increasingly difficult.

## **8.10. Involvement in the Non-State was Not an Active Opposition to the State**

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However, whilst there was near blanket opposition to the aims, means, and values of *leifengism*, it is important to note that there was very little evidence of the kind of diametric opposition between state and non-state that Western civil society theories often search for in China. This corresponds with how Huang (1993, 225) emphasises the importance of not "*being drawn into a simplistic dichotomization between state and society*". This study, looking at the individual, showed that whilst many of the interviews criticised aspects of the state; such as corruption, inefficiency, human rights, censorship; none questioned its legitimacy to govern. When questioned about the relationship between the CSO (that they volunteered for) and the state, most of them described it as being 'complimentary'. The vast majority saw this as the state dealing

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<sup>92</sup> Something similar happened in the 1980s when China first opened up to the outside world. Chinese citizens began to follow Taiwanese and Hong Kong pop-stars, not because they were 'superior' but because they *meant* more to their lives. The foci of the songs were not saturated with political messages, instead they dealt with everyday life, as it was increasingly lived by the individual (see Gold, 1993).

with the ‘macro’ issues whilst CSOs dealt with the ‘micro’ ones. For many of the interviewees this involved ‘gap-filling’; the CSOs did what the state was unable to do due to finite resources. This corresponds with how most organisational studies of Chinese CSOs emphasise that they see their role as supplementing and supporting the state position (e.g. Ma, 2006, 9). Some of the interviewees also described CSOs as being more suitable to deal with these ‘micro’ tasks than the state. Others saw the relationship as mutually beneficial; that state and non-state could learn from each other. Ziqing’s analogy was that they were like ‘two companies’ striving to compete with each other and making improvements in doing so (and that therefore in the end it is the people – the ‘consumer’ - who are the ‘winners’).

However, whilst there was no active opposition to the state from the interviewees, and none perceived them to be undermining the state in any way, the fact that they were operating in a non-state environment could be construed as a ‘passive’ form of opposition. Delman and Yin describe how the modern Chinese state needs to build consensus, promote unity, and limit pluralisation and individualism (2010, 101-102). Actions that diverge from these aims are running counter to state aims. For an individual to operate within a non-state (and non-profit organisation) is an expression of choice (and non-choice). Spare time is finite and these individuals have chosen the CSO as the recipient of this valuable commodity. The individual has expressed that they would rather spend their spare time working not-for-profit, within a CSO, rather than working for money or political ideology (or for family). In the same way the Beck describes non-participation in the traditional democratic system in the West as a form of political expression (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 159); not choosing to operate directly within the state superstructure is therefore also a form of political expression in China. Whilst the actual boundaries between state and non-state are often blurred, what matters for this study is the individual’s perception of the boundaries. If an individual perceives the organisation to be non-state then their decision to involve themselves with it is an expression of choice. This can be an active political decision - part of the ‘self-politics’ of the individualised individual - or it might not be a conscious decision.

The interviewees were also passively ‘opposing’ the state by questioning the traditional role of the state as the custodian of the definition of the ‘public interest’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 159). In expending resources of time and effort towards the aims of the CSO, the interviewees were choosing to direct their help away from the traditional familial focus, and from who, or what, the state defines as ‘in need of help’. As quoted in section 8.3.; Pye (1991, 443) writes that “*the Chinese*” attribute great importance to “*ascribing moral virtues to the state*” whilst “*deprecating the worth of the individual*”. The interviewees in this study gave little hint of these acts of ‘ascription’ or ‘deprecation’. Instead they clearly emphasised the worth of the

individual and criticised the *blind* application of state-defined moral values. As established in the literature review, Mao-era state-society divisions were blurred and decisions made by the Party-state were theoretically made *by* the people, *for* the people (Guo, 2003, 9). Using this logic; to follow state commands to ‘volunteer’ was therefore to organise and act for the people; to resist these demands, or to *independently* organise and act, was therefore effectively being ‘anti-people’. This logic was not conveyed by the interviewees at all; the state no longer defined what was being ‘for the people’. The interviewees used their own self-constructed value-sets to define their aims and methods, and in doing so they self-defined those who needed help and how to help them. Overall it could be said that the individuals in this study were at the forefront of taking a society in flux in a new direction; not by reverting back, or passively accepting the state’s ‘medicine’, but by taking it into their own hands.

## 8.11. Policy Implications

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Whilst this study was not policy-focused, the findings do have some subtle policy implications for civil society and voluntary organisations, as well as for issues of governance:

- Firstly, and following on from Rolandsen (2008), this study makes it clear that a top-down, sacrificial approach to encouraging pro-social action and volunteerism does not appeal to the contemporary Chinese individual. What is more appealing is an approach that is individual-focused, emphasising mutuality and reciprocity. This study also highlights the importance of a global identity in appeals for pro-social action and the relative insignificance of nationalism.
- Secondly, and as Hustinx (2000, 2003) has pointed out in her studies of European volunteers, the findings also indicate that an individuated, apolitical, and flexible style of volunteering is more suitable for the contemporary individual, whose value-sets and lifestyles increasingly no longer conform with traditional alignments.
- Thirdly, this study also highlights the importance of allowing for an ‘active’ involvement of volunteers in the running of organisations. This contrasts with the passivity that is inherent to the *leifengist* model. Furthermore, the importance of ‘lifestyle volunteering’ and issues of ‘exploration’ and exposure to ‘the new’, offer important new themes for Chinese CSOs to utilise in attracting new volunteers.
- Fourthly, the findings of this study also stress the vital importance of both the internet and the university campus for establishing a link between CSOs and potential volunteers.

- Finally, these findings have implications for issues of governance in China. They depict individuals who, whilst not being actively opposed to the state, are unwilling to accept the state's full prescription of top-down, paternalistic policies. Political expression was not being signed away by the interviewees to 'Left' or 'Right', pro-state or anti-state, but divided up piecemeal, between the organisational corollary of individualisation; civil society. In this way, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, 161) write, the values of the individualised individual "*may indeed collide with the party apparatus, but they certainly make sense in the forms and forums of civil society.*" This is less problematic in a democratic context, but creates problems in a country where the state is unwilling to allow a pluralisation of politics or power.

## 8.12. Limitations

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This dissertation offers empirical and theoretical findings that shed original light on the development of Chinese individualisation; the concordantly revised notions of social commitments, individualism and collectivism; and the development of Chinese civil society and volunteering. However, the study has a number of limitations which, whilst in no way invalidating the findings, places caveats on them that makes it clear that the thesis should be read in context with other research and that further research would significantly enhance this study. Firstly there are limitations related to the collection of data. This study looked at a sample of fifty individuals, predominantly young adults, operating in a small range of CSOs operating in one city in the southwest of China. They therefore cannot be considered statistically representative of the entire Chinese population, nor a global one. The rural Chinese farmer and the retiree, for example, would perhaps find little to relate to in the findings of this study. Furthermore this study was not looking at the 'typical Chinese volunteer' either. As discussed in the literature review, all surveys (e.g. Long, 2002; Li, 2003) give low rates of non-state led volunteering, whilst other surveys (e.g. Chen and Lin, 2002) emphasise that a command from the state was a necessary requirement for most individuals to get involved. The individuals in this study were clearly different to this type of volunteer. Nevertheless the sample of this study can be deemed to be representative of the socio-demographic group who are most likely to become involved in both volunteering and civil society work in China and concordantly, according to the structural and temporal variables of the individualisation thesis, are also on the receiving end of the strongest individualisation forces. This dissertation can therefore be seen as a study of a developing trend, because volunteering, civil society, and all the processes that contribute to Chinese



individualisation – such as urbanisation, increased wealth, increased flow of information, and the pluralisation of society - are all considered to be growing in China. Furthermore, as work by scholars such as Yan (2009) shows, both old and rural people are also increasingly subject to the forces of individualisation. The findings therefore could be significantly enhanced by carrying out further studies of other geographical areas and demographic groups.

Secondly there are also theoretical limitations to this study. This study focuses on agency and subjectivity; studying the individual's subjective accounts of their own biographies. This approach has a tendency to over-emphasise the potential of agency and underplay the role of structure. As the state plays such an important structural role in China, this thesis has tried to expend much effort in examining its influence. However, even so, it can still be said to offer a somewhat one-dimensional view of notions of individuality and collectivism. Questions were focused on one aspect; volunteering; they only brushed upon aspects of family for example (a key alignment of the Chinese individual that would presumably have significant bearing on many of the issues discussed). However, whilst the micro-sociological analysis that comprised this study has given a description of the presence of agency within the structure, it does not aim to dismiss the structural determinisms that are often said to guide the Chinese individual. It is perhaps intended as more of a 're-balancing' act, because so many studies of Chinese society emphasise the limits placed on agency.

It is also not argued here that the singular theoretical focus of this thesis is the only viable one, nor that it should be read on its own. It does not claim to be the 'final word' in the study of Chinese volunteering, civil society, or individualism and collectivism. There are many other perspectives (some of which were discussed in the literature review) that can give alternative readings of both civil society volunteering (for example, human and social capital theory), and issues relating to revised social commitments and stronger notions of individuality. However, what this dissertation does claim is that it offers an original angle that ties these processes together in a way that incorporates China's particular socio-historiographical context (in a way that, for example, human and social capital theories have trouble doing). This study offers up the first study of individualisation in Chinese civil society volunteers, one of the few studies of the individualisation thesis in China, one of the few qualitative studies of volunteering, one of the few studies of Chinese civil society that focuses on the volunteer, and makes a valuable contribution to the considerable but constantly evolving literature on notions of Chinese individualism and collectivism. It also offers up the first examination of Chinese civil society that ties together all of these strands – revised notions of individualism and collectivism and growing popularity of volunteering - emphasising their entwined relationships with one another.

## 8.12. Opportunities for Further Research

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It is the position of this dissertation that the individualisation thesis provides a rich description of the changes that are affecting individuals in contemporary modernity, and therefore a suitable framework for this study and other further studies. Using the individualisation thesis as a lens to view new socialities adds a different perspective because it focuses on the individual. If a Chinese CSO is viewed from an organisational perspective then the discussion is inevitably occupied with the non-state organisation's subordinate relationship with the state. However, if we look at a Chinese CSO from an individual's perspective then new vistas are revealed. What concerns the individual more is what the organisation can offer *them*. As such it avoids being drawn into a simplistic dichotomy between state and non-state. Using the individualisation thesis to study the ways in which the Chinese individual is associating also helps to place China in a comparative perspective. Traditional civil society models are ambiguous and have difficult making cross-cultural comparisons. Observing new social forms through the lens of individualisation makes them easier to compare across cultures and societies, drawing attention to the many similarities that exist between the position of the Chinese individual and the position of the non-Chinese individual. Furthermore, the individualisation thesis has been applied outside of the West to an inadequate degree and it is very useful to expand its application (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2010, xv).

As such it is important to note that numerous opportunities for future research have emerged through this study. Hopefully this study has demonstrated that conducting further research into the ways in which individualised volunteers operate in Chinese CSOs is important for the continued growth and development of Chinese voluntary organisations. As Hustinx says in her study of Western European volunteering; examining issues of individualisation aids CSO practitioners because understanding it is crucial to adapting and developing the organisation (Hustinx, 2010). This is significant as well because the way in which help is distributed in China is changing and will continue to change. Traditional patterns of association have been fragmented by modernisation as they were in the West. However, whilst in the West social security nets and civil society organisations have come to replace the traditional forms, in China the progression has not been so linear. Demographic issues of an ageing population and skewed dependency ratios will hit Chinese society whilst the social security net is only partially-reformed. Chinese civil society can therefore play an important role in meeting these challenges, and studies that lead to a greater understanding of the individuals who operate within CSOs are important to strengthen it.

A project focusing on the regional dimensions of individualisation processes in CSO volunteers would also represent an extremely interesting avenue for future research. Individualisation processes are not uniformly spread, as Beck writes about Western society: “*It is essentially a change on the part of the better educated and more affluent younger generation, whereas older, poorer and less educated groups remain clearly tied to the value system of the 1950s*” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 38). This study looked at one city in one part of China. A study taking a cross-regional perspective; between rural and urban, different urban spaces, and also across different cultures and societies, would gain significant new insight. Furthermore, this study focused on volunteers in non-state organisations, using other studies of state voluntary organisations as a foil. Another excellent opportunity for future research would be to analyse a split sample of individuals operating in state and non-state organisations, comparing individual motivations, and contrasting organisational operating procedures.

Similarly there are also generational dimensions to individualisation that would make a cross-generational comparison another interesting avenue of further research. Interestingly, whilst all of the under-30 year’s old interviewees in this study (the vast majority of the interview sample) talked about Lei Feng being outdated; the few older interviewees retained a greater attachment to him. Linchun, who was in her 40’s, spoke of Lei Feng in purely positive terms and Wenqian, who was in his mid-to-late 30’s, said that he “*wanted to be like Lei Feng*” and emphasised the importance of the influence of teachers when he was young: “*they taught me that I should become a useful person, and contribute (贡献) to society*”. Taking this further and comparing the attitudes of older and younger volunteers in a large-sample study would significantly augment the study of civil society, volunteering, and individualisation in China.

### **8.13. Closing Remarks**

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This thesis is partly about how the individualised individual deals with the tensions and contradictions created by the ‘compressed modernisation’ of China. Giddens likens modernity to a ‘juggernaut’, both unrelenting and un-steerable (Giddens, 1991, 28). Despite its re-orientation towards ‘human-centred development’, the Chinese state remains the impersonal driver of ‘juggernaut modernity’. This study contributes to understanding how individuals are beginning to place a few fingers back on its steering wheel. This study also contributes to the much-needed reappraisal of Chinese notions of individuality. Whilst organisations that are based around volunteers have increased dramatically since the end of the Mao-era; one of the hottest topics of Chinese conversation has been the ‘moral vacuum’ and the rise of negative, ‘anti-social’

individualism. Much is talked about this hedonistic individualism and this thesis tries to take the debate away from this rhetoric and towards how individualisation can produce something positive and ‘pro-social’.

In the West, neoliberalism paints a one-sided picture of the individual whilst demonising collectivism (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 258-263). In China quite the opposite happens because it is in the state’s interest to demonise individualism and promote collectivism. However both portrayals are similar in that they give a one-sided depiction of individualism. This study, through the exploration of the transformation of relationships between the individual and society, aims to provide a more rounded picture of the modern Chinese individual. As Liu Binyan said of the Maoist demonisation of individualism: “*nobody could ever explain to me where natural self-interest ends and selfishness begins*” (Liu, 1990, 16). The individuals interviewed in this study were in the process of working this out for themselves. They talked about individualism in a different way, placing the individual at the center of their worlds but crucially maintaining the link with the social. They talked about mutuality and reciprocity; about being ‘双赢’ (win-win) and abhorring the ‘sacrificial’ *leifengist* relationship. Instead of zero-sum relationships they talked about organising social commitments around their own lives and forging relations with others conceived as independent individuals. The volunteers were therefore re-defining notions of individualism, drawing them towards more positive-sum, ‘balanced’ conceptions, taking the individual-collective relationship from Walder’s ‘organised dependency’ to a re-organised independence.

This thesis also gives another angle to explore the growth of civil society. The interviewee’s were not involving themselves with non-state organisations because they ‘oppose’ the state. They were getting involved because the organisation offered opportunities for them to explore and expand their notions of self, and to express their notion of citizenship in ways that they defined as correct. Analysing civil society in this way draws the focus away from the diametric opposition between state and non-state organisation, and towards what the organisation can offer the individualised individual. Studies of Chinese CSOs often talk about ‘co-optation’, many demonstrating that the state is successful at co-opting the organisation. This study shows that whilst this may be the case, the state is far less successful at co-opting the individual. The state promotion of *leifengist*-style volunteering is contested, demonstrating a growing disconnect between the communitarian, paternalistic values of the state and that of the individual. However, this study demonstrates how this disconnect does not necessarily result in atomisation, nor in direct opposition to the state, nor a reversion to traditional forms of social commitments. Instead it shows that although the values of the individualised individual correspond less to rigid Party lines, they can align with the pluralistic forms and positive-sum commitments of civil society.

The volunteers in this study were not ‘heirs of Lei Feng’. Instead, they were taking *leifengist* ideas and remoulding them, using more robust readings of individuality to guide the individual-collective balance towards a relationship based on reciprocity, mutuality, and equality. One popular nickname of the younger Chinese generations is the ‘me generation’ (我一代), and this is certainly born out through this study. ‘Me’ness’ was central to the narratives of the interviewees. However, an unbalanced reading of this only tells half of the story. The individuals in this study were not ‘little emperors’; or uncreative, materialistic, and money-focused (‘往钱看’). They were also not unthinking Party-worshipping ‘little screw’ Lei Fengs or nationalistic, irrational ‘angry youth’. Conversely, nor were they working in ‘good’ organisations to oppose a ‘bad’ state. They were individualised ‘I’ associating in an individualised ‘we’, and, in doing so, transforming both.

## 9. Bibliography

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## 10. Appendices

### 10.1. Interviewee Details

Name (pseudonym)	Occupation	Age	Gender	Organisations associated with	Interview date	Notes
Bozhen	Work	22-30	f	CSO2	July, 2011	Employed by CSO2 to co-ordinate their volunteers
Chende	Work	22-30	m	CSO5, various others	November , 2011	Employed by CSO5, Volunteer with various others
Chenguang	University	18-21	f	CSO6, various others	August, 2011	Volunteer
Chenhua	University	18-21	f	CSO7 and various others.	September, 2011	Volunteer
Chenyue	University	18-21	m	CSO4	January, 2012	Volunteer
Fuhan	Work	22-30	m	CSO3	December, 2011	Volunteer
Hongmei	Work	22-30	f	CSO2 and work.	February, 2012	Prospective volunteer, first volunteered in March 2012
Huangzhi	Work	22-30	m	CSO2	August, 2011	Intern in CSO2, Volunteer with various others
Huiqing	University	18-21	m	CSO10	June, 2011	Volunteer
Jiancui	Work	22-30	m	CSO4	July, 2011	Volunteer

Jiayin	Work	22-30	m	CSO2	May, 2011	Volunteer
Jingfei	Work	30+	f	CSO6	June, 2011	Founding member of CSO6, Volunteer
Kewen	University	18-21	m	CSO1 and various others.	October, 2011	Volunteer, Volunteer-co-ordinator of various
Lijuan	Work	22-30	f	CSO2, CSO4, CSO12 and various others.	August, 2011	Volunteer
Linchun	Work	30+	f	CSO10	December, 2011	Volunteer
Lingzhu	University	18-21	m	CSO7	December, 2011	Volunteer
Liuhua	University	18-21	f	CSO12	October, 2011	Volunteer president of CSO12
Liuyi	University	18-21	m	CSO11	August, 2011	Volunteer
Liyun	University	18-21	f	CSO8	January, 2012	Volunteer
Luli	Work	22-30	f	CSO13	November, 2011	Volunteer
Meilin	Work	22-30	f	CSO4	January, 2012	Volunteer co-ordinator of CSO4
Meixiu	Work	22-30	f	CSO12 and various others.	May, 2011	Currently employed by a large international NGO. Extensive volunteering experience.
Mingya	Work	22-30	f	CSO5, Various	November, 2011	Volunteer
Qiuye	Work	30+	f	CSO4, CSO11	August, 2011	Volunteer

Ruojian	University	18-21	m	CSO13 and various others.	November, 2011	Volunteer
Shihong	Work	30+	f	CSO4, CSO11	October, 2011	Volunteer
Shuyun	University	18-21	m	CSO11	January, 2011	Volunteer
Songli	Work	22-30	m	CSO10	December, 2011	Volunteer
Tangli	University	18-21	f	CSO6	September, 2011	Volunteer
Tianming	Work	18-21	m	CSO13	May, 2011	Volunteer
Wangmei	University	18-21	f	CSO2	July, 2011	Volunteer
Weilong	Work	30+	m	CSO2 and work CSR scheme	July, 2011	Volunteer
Weishan	Work	22-30	m	CSO9	February, 2012	Volunteer
Wenling	University	22-30	f	CSO13, various others	October, 2011	Volunteer
Wenqian	Work	30+	m	CSO10	November, 2011	Volunteer
Xiaohui	High School	17	f	CSO2	February, 2011	Volunteer
Xiaoli	High School	17	m	School scheme	February, 2011	Volunteer
Xiaoqing	High School	17	m	School scheme	February, 2011	Volunteer
Xiaoxiao	University	18-21	f	CSO1	October, 2011	Volunteer
Xingjuan	Work	30+	f	CSO13, various others	August, 2011	Volunteer
Xiuying	Work	22-30	f	CSO2	June, 2011	Volunteer
Yangmei	Work	22-30	f	CSO8	November, 2011	Volunteer
Zhangsui	Work	22-30	f	CSO1	October, 2011	Founding member of CSO1, Volunteer

Zhenping	University	18-21	m	CSO2	November, 2011	Volunteer
Zhenyi	Work	22-30	f	CSO3	January, 2012	Volunteer
Zhenzhen	Work	22-30	f	CSO2	May, 2011	Volunteer
Zhilan	University	18-21	f	CSO12 and various others.	June, 2011	Volunteer
Ziqing	Work	22-30	m	CSO9	February, 2012	Volunteer
Ziyi	University	18-21	f	CSO2	May, 2011	Volunteer
Zongying	Work	22-30	f	CSO9	December, 2011	Volunteer

## 10.2. CSO Details

Designation	Focus	Notes
CSO1	Poverty	Unregistered local grassroots organisation established by university students
CSO2	Volunteering	Unregistered local branch of an international voluntary organisation. Involved with a broad range of volunteering activities in the local area.
CSO3	Environmental	Registered local branch of a well-established Chinese environmental organisation.
CSO4	The elderly	Unregistered local grassroots organisation that assists local elderly. Has affiliations with local government but remains unregistered.
CSO5	NGO work	Registered organisation that focuses on assisting grassroots NGOs. Has branch offices in several first-tier cities.
CSO6	Environmental	Unregistered local grassroots environmental organisations with a particular focus on information dissemination and education.
CSO7	Poverty	Registered student group carrying out expeditions to impoverished areas during the university holidays.
CSO8	Environmental	Registered large grassroots environmental organisation focusing on local pollution issues.
CSO9	Environmental	Registered local branch of a Chinese environmental organisation.
CSO10	The elderly	Unregistered grassroots organisation set-up by a local resident. Focuses on providing care to residents in peri-urban elderly care homes.
CSO11	Community	Unregistered grassroots organisation established by a local resident. Focuses on providing services to local residents that are focused on community-building.
CSO12	Environmental	Registered student-run university campus organisation that organises a large-range of student environmental events.
CSO13	Poverty	Registered organisation formed during the 2008 earthquake relief effort. Now undertaking poverty-relief work in the local area.

### 10.3. Semi-structured Interview Framework for Volunteers

格式:

**1) 主要的问题**

a) 次要的问题 或者 提示

**1) 你当志愿者多久了？ 每个星期参加几次志愿活动？ 每一次多长时间？**

a) 如果你有机会， 你宁愿参加更多的志愿活动吗？

b) 你的志愿者时间和你的生活时间有没有冲突？

**2) 你参加什么样的志愿者活动， 做什么样的任务？**

a) 你最喜欢的志愿者活动是什么？

b) 你最不喜欢的志愿者活动是什么？

**3) 你通过什么样的途径参加志愿者组织？**

a) 你怎么发现了这个组织？

**4) 你当志愿者的初衷（最初目的）： 你的愿望是想投身志愿事业 或者 是因为对某特殊团体有兴趣？**

**5) 在你当志愿者的经历中， 什么任务或活动让你感觉开心？**

**6) 在你当志愿者的经历中， 什么任务或活动让你感觉生气或烦恼？**

**7) 在你的志愿者组织， 你对你的同事了解吗， 你们是什么关系？**

a) 你常常跟他们交往吗？

**8) 在你的日常生活中， 志愿者的事情（活动）是一个什么样的地位？ 你重视志愿者的事情吗？**

a) 你常常考虑志愿者的事情？ 比如说睡觉以前， 或者在路上， 等等

**9) 在你的生活中， 有没有人影响你当志愿者？**

a) 比如说一个朋友， 家人或者有名的人？

**10) 从童年到成年你觉得什么经历或事件影响你当志愿者?**

a) 比如说: 一件事 或者 你的教育程度 等等

b) 有没有理念影响你参加志愿者活动?

**11) 你觉得你的志愿者活动和国家荣誉有关系吗?**

a) 爱国主义有没有影响你做志愿者?

**12) 请用一句话来总结你当志愿者的原因(动机)?**

a) 从你第一次当志愿者到现在这些原因有没有改变了?

**13) 你觉得你的原因和你同事的原因一样吗?**

a) 不一样的话, 可以说明有什么区别?

**14) 因特网是否影响你对志愿者的看法。**

a) 比如说; 因特网改变了你的看法或思想。

**15) 对你的志愿者的活动, 你有没有遇到其他人对其表示怀疑或否定性的看法?**

a) 你的父母和你的朋友对你当志愿者的看法是什么?

b) 他们支持你吗?

**16) 你觉得做志愿者的中国人多吗?**

a) 为什么?

**17) 你认为当志愿者在中国是越来越普遍吗?**

a) 现代社会对志愿者的态度和以前有什么不一样?

**18) 你觉得全球的志愿者是相同的吗?**

a) 比如说: 你觉得一个西方的志愿者和一个中国的志愿者有相同的看法吗?

b) 在现代社会, 什么是志愿者精神?

**19) 在你的志愿者的活动, 你经常跟其他组织的志愿者联系吗?**

a) 这些组织是从哪里来的?



20) 因特网对你做志愿者有没有帮助?

a) 你的组织用因特网联系你吗?

21) 如果你未来的生活变困难了, 你觉得你会一直当志愿者吗?

a) 比如说你失业了, 或者你的工资变少了

22) 你觉得你的志愿者的活动和政府的活动有什么样的关系?

a) 你觉得是互补的吗?

23) 你喜不喜欢你现在的的生活? 你觉得当志愿者是不是幸福生活的一部分?

## 10.4. Semi-structured Interview Framework for Volunteer Coordinators

### 1) 请先介绍你的组织

(做什么样的任务? 有什么样的范围和目标? 有几个志愿者? )

First, please introduce your organisation (what kind of activities do you perform? what are your aims? How many volunteers do you have?)

### 2) 你通过什么样的途径参加这个志愿者组织?

How did you become involved with this organisation?

### 3) 在你在这个组织工作的经历中, 什么事情让你感觉开心?

(什么事情让你感觉生气或烦恼? )

From your experience working with this organisation, what things have made you happy? What experiences have frustrated you?

### 4) 您的组织通过什么方式招募志愿者?

What methods does your organisation use to recruit volunteers?

### 5) 您的招募方法用的是什么样的口号?

What kind of slogans or phrases does your recruitment method employ?

### 6) 您的招募会用那种主题和方式来吸引志愿者?

(例如:公民的义务, 爱国主义, 等等)

What ideas or themes do your recruitment methods use to appeal to the volunteer? (i.e. symbolism, ideology etc)

### 7) 您觉得您的组织现在的招募方式有效吗? 需要什么完善?

Do you think your organisations recruitment methods are effective? What kind of improvements could be made?

### 8) 在您的招聘策略中, 网络是否是很重要的部分? 您怎样运用它?

Is the internet important in your recruitment strategy? How is it used?

9) 当前招募志愿者的形势好吗？为什么？

Is the volunteer recruitment situation good or bad right now? Why?

10) 在你的志愿者组织，你经常跟其他志愿者组织联系吗？

(这些组织是从哪里来的？你们有什么关系？)

Do you frequently contact other volunteer organisations? What kind of relationship do you have with them?

11) 你觉得你的志愿者组织的活动和政府的活动有什么关系？

(你觉得是互补的吗？范围和目标是一样吗？)

What kind of relationship do you think that your organisations activities have with government activities? Do you think your aims and scope are the same?

12) 您认为志愿者拥有某种特质吗？您觉得一个标准的志愿者是什么样的？

Do you think that Chinese volunteers possess certain characteristics? Is there such a thing as a 'typical Chinese volunteer'?

13) 您觉得现在中国人对志愿者的看法是怎样的？是在变的更好（认同）还是更坏（排斥）？

How would you describe the Chinese attitude towards volunteers and volunteering? In your opinion is it improving or getting worse?

## 10.5. Consent Form

### 重要信息

参与研究是自愿的！您可以选择是否参加研究。您可以答应或不答应。

不论您做什么决定都没关系！

现了解下列的参与者声明：

- 1) 我自愿同意参加这个研究。
- 2) 我知道这个研究要完全确保我匿名。
- 3) 我知道如果以后我对研究或研究参与者的权利有任何问题，研究人员会为我解答。

如果你同意这三点，请继续