

THE EMERGENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY  
AND INTELLECTUALS IN CHINA

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By

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the emergence of civil society in China. The existence and sustainability of civil society in China has bearing on the country's further economic, political and social development. Using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, this study employs secondary statistical data as well as individual and focus groups interviews to address the emergence of civil society and intellectuals in China. The position of this paper is that Chinese civil society has developed in 'fits and starts' since the beginning of economic liberalization in 1978. This contributed to changes in the political and social spheres, allowing more autonomous bodies to grow out of society as well as state structures, and facilitating the emergence of Chinese civil society. Intellectuals in particular have been able to exercise their autonomy in the Chinese policy process, influencing the direction of state policy towards their own interests, and consequently strengthening the public sphere and civil society

Chinese civil society is punctuated by the influence of the historical, cultural, and political factors that constitute the form of its institutions, organizations and associations, as well as how these social actors communicate in the public sphere. It differs from that generally found in western countries. Unlike the west, it does not exist in opposition to the state. Instead, Chinese institutions of civil society also exist at the interstices between state and society and across them as well. This entwining entanglement of civil society with the state is indicative of the specific social, political, economic, and cultural conditions that have contributed to its development.

As it continues to emerge, Chinese civil society is increasingly becoming a sphere of identity formation, social integration, and cultural reproduction.

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## **DEDICATION**

To my mother, and all those who helped along the way.

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background Information

This study investigates the emergence of civil society in China. This topic has been the subject of considerable debate, and it is an important area for academic inquiry because the existence and sustainability of civil society in China has bearing on the country's further economic, political and social development.

There is a storied past to the debate surrounding the presence of civil society in Chinese society. Several scholars (Rankin, 1993; Rowe, 1990) argue that China has enjoyed something approaching Western-style civil society at numerous points along its historical path. Using the establishment of modern China as a beginning point (Hutchings, 2000), scholars point to evidence of the presence of a public sphere and an effective civil society in the late Qing dynasty (1644 – 1911) and the beginning of the Republican era that began in 1911 (Ma, 1994:8). However by the 1930s, the economic, political and social environment effectively disrupted all of its elements. Other scholars reject this line of reasoning all together (Wakeman, 1993), arguing that because there has never been any major confrontation between civic power and the Chinese state, there cannot be such a thing as civil society in China's history.

What little consensus does exist among sinologists suggests that nothing resembling civil society existed in the period between the coming to power of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1949, and the beginning of economic and political reforms in 1978. This is largely attributed to the near omnipotence of the CCP in the areas of economy, politics, and society. The search for signs of civil society was sharpened after the introduction of economic reforms in 1978, and once again in 1989 in the wake of large-scale student-led Tiananmen Square protests in China and the general collapse of communism throughout Eastern Europe. The number of participants and the rate at which autonomous organizations became involved in these movements led many to argue that civil society had emerged in China. Scholars suggested that the collapse of communism in Europe was fueled by a civil society that operated independently of the party-penetrated state and society, and

that this undermined the official structures and organizations (Sullivan, 1990). After the Tiananmen Square incident, this same process was sought after in China. This initial research used a western model of civil society, focusing on conflict between the state and society to point out all types of non-conformity as evidence of its emergence. Unfortunately, this conclusion proved too simplistic. As the Tiananmen Square protests demonstrated, non-conformity in itself does not equate to civil society. Even though Chinese civil society had been developing slowly since 1978, it was still in an early stage of development (Zong, 1993) and the student protests failed because there was no strong civil society that it could attach itself to. In order to thrive, a robust civil society needs a competent state structure and impartial legal system to support it. The ensuing government crackdown on all forms of participation, organization and freedom of expression in 1989 not only led a number of scholars to denounce the presence of civil society, but also its use as an analytical model for studying China. These arguments came from two fronts. The first casts doubt on the usefulness of using the concept of civil society in China because of the authoritarianism of the CCP, that as a result of its Leninist past, the overbearing Chinese state makes it impossible for a western-style civil society to develop. The second argument is more theoretical and posits that because the concept of civil society was developed in the west and for the west, it therefore holds little validity in China and is an imprecise analytical tool for studying China's social development.

Although these are powerful arguments, they have not settled the debate. Others argue that civil society is generally applicable to the study of communist systems, China included, so long as the influence of the cultures and traditions of these individual countries are accounted for (Miller, 1992). Similarly, the civil society paradigm, despite its basic European orientation (Keane, 1988), has also been recognized as applicable to the study of developing countries (Migdal, 1988).

This latter perspective challenges those who are against the presence and use of civil society in China. It argues that critics place too much importance on the structure of the Chinese state, consequently underestimating the role that it plays in sponsoring significant societal changes, changes that resemble the organizational innovation

needed for an emerging civil society. Furthermore, the critics over-emphasize the importance of autonomy and the presence of independent organizations, failing to account for the fact that not all divisions between the state and society are as clear as they are in the west. In China, virtually all societal organizations have links to the government, meaning that there is no distinct dichotomy between state and society. Thus, since the state sponsors many changes that are seen as beneficial to developing civil society, it is more useful to look at quasi-governmental organizations which in many cases resemble 'traditional' civil society organizations, providing public space for citizens to organize and represent themselves. In the face of blurred boundaries and state-society relations that are rife with embeddedness and entwinement (O'Brien, 1994), the dualistic argument of state versus civil society is inadequate to account for the interrelationships that exist in contemporary China.

Accounting for this complexity, some researchers define this phenomenon as 'state-led civil society' (Frolic, 1997), where civil society is created by the state to help it govern, co-opt and socialize potentially politically active elements of the population. This description can be useful because it avoids the shortfall of a civil society-state dualism and permits dynamic interaction between society and state structures. It also guards against the shortfall of looking at the relationship as purely 'corporatist,' where the existence of social organizations depends solely on their dependency with the state. A corporatist approach can be useful for capturing the top-down nature of control in the system and how citizens are integrated into vertical structures with elites representing their interests. However, emphasis on the vertical "minimizes the capabilities and opportunities that people exercise regularly to communicate horizontally and form cooperative bodies" (Brook, 1997:23). Similarly, both 'state-led' and 'corporatist' explanations risk obscuring the important element of change, as well as oversimplifying the complexities of the dynamics of interaction. Often enough, using these models means that inadequate attention is paid to the benefits that this relationship provides 'subordinate' parties. In practice, social organizations can have considerable impact on the policy-making process by retaining strong linkages to the party and the state. In most cases far more than if they were

completely autonomous (Howell, 2004). In China, the interrelationships are symbiotic rather than unidirectional (Saich, 2004:231). Social organizations with close government contacts often play a more direct role in policy formulation as they do not have to compete with other organizations in social space for dominance and access to government attention on relevant policy issues (Saich, 2000).

## 1.2 Purpose and Objective

Framed in this context of contemporary state-society relations, my thesis contributes to the ongoing discussion surrounding civil society in China. I do so by focusing on one social group, intellectuals, and describe the role that this group has in China's emerging civil society. There are also exploratory and explanatory dimensions to my thesis. As an exploratory project, I add to the debate on the existence of civil society in China. As an explanatory endeavour, my theoretical conversation produces insight into state-society relations and the processes of social action in China.

The research questions that I pose in my study envelope two broad areas: the emergence of civil society in China; and the influence that intellectuals, as a component of civil society, have in the policy process. In order to examine the role of intellectuals in the emergence of civil society, I attempt to answer the following questions: Is civil society an appropriate theoretical concept for studying China? Does civil society exist in China? How does it differ from western concepts? How is it emerging? Are intellectuals a part of China's emerging civil society? What is their role in Chinese society? How do intellectuals influence public policy? What structural and systematic features of society contribute or inhibit the involvement of intellectuals in the policy process?

## 1.3 Thesis Outline

Chapter 1 begins with an elaboration of my chosen theoretical framework, tracing the history of 'civil society' as a theoretical concept. I begin by outlining the general debates surrounding the concept, how its definition has changed, and its influence in the social sciences. I examine the evolution of the term through three phases and the

major theoretical transformations that accompany them. In the process, I examine the collective work of scholars from the Scottish Enlightenment, the philosophy of Friedrich Hegel, the materialism of Karl Marx, the work of Emile Durkheim, Antonio Gramsci's reformulation of the concept and its adoption in Eastern Europe, and finally the contemporary work of Jurgen Habermas, whose work serves as the basis for my theoretical framework. Habermas's conception of civil society owes much to the development of the 'public sphere,' a realm where the ideas, interests, values, and ideologies formed within the relations of civil society are voiced and made politically efficacious (Chambers, 2002:96). The public sphere provides the social arena for individuals and groups to discuss public affairs of common concern and to organize against the coercive and oppressive forms of social and state power (Tai, 2006:32). As a site of resistance and emancipation, civil society coordinates action in the arena of the public sphere. Here, civil society and public sphere activity are seen as mechanisms that enable forms of public debate, which in turn influence the formation of policy (Habermas, 1989). This chapter also analyzes the efficacy of applying Habermas's theory to the Chinese context. After summarizing criticisms of this approach, I defend its use at the theoretical and practical levels by demonstrating how the application of this framework reveals how the recent economic and social reforms created the conditions for the emergence of a relatively autonomous civil society. Different than that found in western countries, China's emerging civil society is one infused with Chinese characteristics.

The primary aim of my research project is to examine the extent that intellectuals, identified as one component of an emerging civil society, exert a politics of influence in the policy process. To this end, Chapter 2 is a review of the methodology I use in my thesis, and the quantitative and qualitative research methods used to answer my research questions. Specifically, in order to assess the emergence of civil society, I rely on quantitative methods, analyzing existing statistical databases and archives in order to provide empirical evidence to corroborate the emergence and enlargement of a liberalized space for independent communication, participation and association (Howell, 2004). I also use existing statistics to demonstrate a significant rise in the

number of intellectuals, intellectual associations and overall intellectual activity in China. Qualitative methods are also used. Particularly to explicate the involvement and degree of influence that intellectuals have in the policy process. This is evidenced using responses from interviews with intellectuals who relate their capacity to do so through communication and production of knowledge in the public sphere.

Chapter 3 serves to set the context for the emergence of civil society in China. It argues that the emergence of civil society has been predicated on the introduction of reforms and policy changes by the CCP in 1978. This chapter begins by describing the economic, political and social realities of Chinese society under the CCP before the reform period, as well as supplementary descriptions of the major changes that have taken place in these three realms. It shows that the economic, political and social transformations brought about by the reforms led to an intentional and unintentional relaxation of party control over the economy, society and ultimately over public discourse. Policy reforms and the subsequent transformation that began in the economic sphere led to changes in the political and social spheres. These changes stimulated new forms of expression, organization and participation that facilitated the emergence of civil society in China. Despite continued intervals of ‘tightening’ and ‘releasing,’ or suppression and relaxation, by the state, there has been a general increase in the quantity and quality of expression, organization and participation in all of these spheres since the introduction of reforms.

Chapter 4 examines how the economic, political and social transformations have stimulated new forms of expression, organization and participation that have facilitated the emergence of a public sphere in China. This chapter examines the emergence of civil society in China in two areas. The first is the growing public sphere. Since the reforms, the available avenues for receiving and transmitting information have risen dramatically. Publication opportunities in books, magazines and the print press, and transmissions on television and radio have all seen marked growth. Furthermore, innovations in technology have led to a proliferation of ‘new’ media possibilities, of which the internet has proven to be a particularly popular. The growth of the media sector in China has increased the available opportunities for

communication and has increased participation in an ever expanding public sphere. While communication still faces some restriction, in general, public discourse in the Chinese public sphere is freer than any time since 1949. This section also notes how intellectuals in particular have benefited from changes in China's communication system. In relation to the general population, intellectuals have enjoyed more opportunities for participation and have enjoyed more autonomy and freedom of expression in China's growing public sphere.

Chapter 4 also focuses on Chinese social organizations. The reforms have spurred significant growth in the number of social organizations operating in China. These organizations make up an important component of China's modernization and development strategy. In order to participate in this manner, the state has been forced to relinquish control and grant these groups varying degrees of autonomy. This chapter demonstrates that despite continued intervals suppression and relaxation by the state, China's public sphere and its social organizations have seen a general increase in the quantity and quality of expression, organization and participation since the introduction of reforms, consequently facilitating the emergence of civil society in China.

In the context of this greater autonomy, freedom of expression, social organization, and participation, Chapter 5 focuses on Chinese intellectuals and their role in the emergence of civil society. Even though the state has taken a number of precautions in an attempt to control social space, intellectuals are in a privileged position, as the state realizes the contributions that these 'articulate social audiences' can make to its economic programs (Saich, 2004:183). The leadership realizes that a higher degree of participation by intellectuals is both desirable to promote modernization and inevitable given the overall societal changes that have taken place since 1978. To this end it has acknowledged the importance of relinquishing to intellectuals greater freedom within their professions, also allowing them to follow internationally accepted norms and values. Following a description of the changing status of intellectuals since 1949, this chapter looks at the orientation, status, position, autonomy and the influence of Chinese intellectuals. This is followed by a discussion

of the policy process and the how intellectuals fit in this process. This includes a general overview of the national condition as well as the particular situation of a certain strata of intellectual in this process: social scientists.

The final chapter summarizes and concludes the argument built throughout my thesis: that economic liberalization has cultivated a fertile ground for the growth and prosperity of Chinese civil society (Tai, 2006:287). The policy of economic reform and openness initiated in 1978 has pluralized China's socioeconomic structure and has greatly weakened the state's dominance over Chinese society. Increased individual freedom in economic, political and social activities has spawned an expanding space for Chinese civil society as individual and group interests have become the most important motivational force in social life. The growth of the private sector not only brought about the development of individualism, individual rights to liberty and property, but also enhanced people's democratic consciousness and a desire for more political involvement. Thus, as civil society expands and as independent organizations, ideas and publications become established, the state's control becomes increasingly undermined (Zong, 1993:257-60). These changes reduce the power of the state, and a sphere of economic and social pluralism has emerged between the official sphere of the state and the private sphere of the individual. As a result, more autonomous bodies, such as intellectuals, grow out of state structures. Intellectuals in particular, have in turn been able to exercise their autonomy in the Chinese policy process, influencing the direction of state policy towards their own interests, and consequently strengthening the public sphere and civil society.



## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is divided into three parts in order to adequately develop my theoretical framework and to demonstrate how it is applied in this study. I begin by tracing the history of ‘civil society,’ outlining the general debates surrounding the concept, how its definition has changed, and the influence that it has had in the social sciences. I examine the evolution of the term through three phases and the major theoretical transformations that distinguish them. In the process, I examine the collective work of scholars from the Scottish Enlightenment, the philosophy of Friedrich Hegel, the materialism of Karl Marx, the work of Emile Durkheim, Antonio Gramsci’s reformulation of the concept and its adoption in Eastern Europe, and finally the contemporary work of Jurgen Habermas. Following this review, the second section develops Habermas’ concept of civil society as the theoretical framework used in my research project. It contains an analysis of Habermas’ differentiation of society into the ‘system’ and ‘lifeworld,’ the ‘colonization of the lifeworld’ by the system, and the hope of resistance that he finds in the ‘public sphere’ and ‘new social movements.’ The final section of this chapter critically analyzes the usefulness of applying a Habermasian theory of civil society to the Chinese context. In developing this argument, I look at the criticisms of this approach; defending its use at the theoretical level and at the practical level by demonstrating how the application of this theoretical framework reveals how the recent economic and social reforms in China created the conditions for the emergence of a relatively autonomous civil society, albeit one that is infused with Chinese characteristics.

### **2.1 The History of Civil Society in Social Theory**

The concept of ‘civil society’ has been used for thousands of years, since the time of Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates. As it has taken on different meanings and has been used in different ways throughout the centuries, its popularity and use-value have ebbed and flowed, but always seeming to re-emerge during times of societal change. In an attempt to clarify the history of civil society as a concept in social theory, it is useful to present a

brief overview of its current use. Metzger (2001) sees civil society being used in three different ways, according to three distinct definitions. The first is a classical definition, exemplified by Saint Augustine as an “assemblage of men associated by a common acknowledgement of right and by a community of interests” (Metzger, 2001:206). The second, a sociological definition, posits that “civil society retains a distinctive character to the extent that it is made up of areas of social life – the domestic world, the economic sphere, cultural activities and political interaction – which are organized by private or voluntary arrangements between individuals and groups outside the direct control of the state” (Held, 1987:281). Finally, there is a political definition, similar to the sociological one but with the exception that the public sphere should be strengthened at the expense of the state (Metzger, 2001:206). Since I am concerned with the use of civil society as a concept for social theory, a review of the history of the concept of ‘civil society,’ as it developed out of western social theory in response to the emergence of capitalism in Western Europe is a useful and necessary endeavour that gives perspective on the evolution of its major positions, debates and the changing contours of its influence and use up to the present. This review also presents the context for civil society’s re-emergence in contemporary social theory.

In his examination of the history of civil society as a concept in social theory, Jeffrey Alexander (1998) suggests that civil society has historically been conceived in three ideal-typical forms whose use succeeds each other in time. Alexander’s typology is useful for categorizing the various threads of thought concerning the concept as it has developed over the centuries. While any such classification scheme will obviously skim over the differences and the finer points of the corresponding theories and theorists, it has the benefit of providing a clear analysis of the general trends in the development of the concept throughout history. Categorization in this vein is a useful enterprise because classification schemes can be helpful in grouping together individuals with similar views, to explain how they can have such diverse implications for the social sciences, as well as facilitating an understanding of the apparent contradictions (Rosenau, 1992:16-17) as they relate to the concept of civil society.

The first major transformation of the concept of civil society in western social theory began in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century as an argument about civil society as political society.

Before this period, civil society was associated with a classical definition derived from ancient Greece, which equated civil society as political society. The ‘emancipation’ of civil society from political society and its emergence as something distinct in and of itself did not occur until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when debate concerning the negotiation of the relationship between civic virtue and civil virtue were carried out in the context of newly emerging forms of private and commercial life (Ashenden, 1999:144) associated with the rise of capitalism. In response to the breakdown of feudalism and the newly emerging forms of private and commercial life, scholars began to put forward theories to explain these changes. Included in these explanatory theories, the concept of civil society touched upon anxieties about difference, strains of commercial society, fears of totality, and tensions between theory and praxis (Hall & Trentmann, 2005:3). Seligman (1992) discusses how Ferguson, Hume, Smith and other great theorists of the Scottish Enlightenment were able to separate civil society from political society and use it as a solution to the problem of resolving societal tensions between the one and the many, unity and diversity, and the vision of a unified social order all the while recognizing the autonomy of legal, moral and economic spheres. Although they differed on their accounts of trust in the capacity of commercial society to deliver social progress, they all borrowed from Montesquieu a modern notion of political freedom in terms of economic progress, social refinement and a balanced constitution (Ashenden, 1999:144). In this context civil society became a precondition for political and economic freedom (Alexander, 1998:1), conceptualized as an ethical arena of market exchange that provided the basis of what was ‘good’ and ‘right’, as well as a space for social interaction.

In 1821 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel wrote *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, which had a profound influence on philosophical and social thought throughout continental Europe. Here, Hegel located civil society as a social sphere of private interaction with individuals free to pursue their particular interests, and as a realm separated from the patriarchal connections of the family and below the universality of the state. By conceptualizing civil society as a private sphere of trade and social interaction counterpoised to the public realm of the state, Hegel was likewise able to break with earlier definitions based on the natural law tradition that treated civil society and the state interchangeably (Baynes, 2002). In Hegel’s philosophy, civil society is composed of

three dimensions: the system of needs, the administration of justice, and the ‘public authority’ made up of corporations and the police (Hardimon, 1994). This model focuses on tensions between the individual and the community through the subsumption of particular interests beneath the unfolding of the universal (Ashenden, 1999:145). Hegel’s conceptualization differs from the liberal tradition promoted by the authors of the Scottish Enlightenment and signifies an important development in the philosophical evolution of civil society for two reasons. First, it signals the dissolution of the liberal model in which a private sphere is complemented by a public sphere. Secondly, it breaks down the liberal ideology that trusted in civil society as a natural state of affairs and accepted uncritically the equation of *bourgeois* and *homme* (Holub, 1991:5). As a result, Hegel reversed the aforementioned positions of civil society and the state, creating a situation where the latter represents the ideal repository of civic virtue, and civil society as the realm of private vice. Hegel viewed civil society as the sphere of life-activity which had historically evolved in the interstices between the family and the universal state, and as the arena of economic, social and intellectual activity where individuals pursue their egoistic material and spiritual needs, subject only to the guiding reason and overall supervision of the state (Miller, 1992:4). By reversing these two spheres, civil society became dependent on the universalism of the state; losing the autonomy of action against the state that it had acquired under the interpretations of Smith, Ferguson, and even Aristotle.

Despite these important differences, Hegel and the Scottish Enlightenment theorists all conceptualized civil society as an inclusive concept that referred to the multitude of institutions outside of the state. It included the capitalist market and its institutions and also private and public associations and organizations, all forms of cooperative social relationships that create bonds of trust, public opinion, legal rights and institutions, and political parties (Alexander, 1998:3). Another similarity between theorists of this historical period is that they endowed civil society with a distinctively moral and ethical force that extended even to the capitalist market, where capitalism was understood as producing self-discipline and individual responsibility (Alexander, 1998:3). This decidedly positive moral and ethical tone attributed to market society and civil society underwent a dramatic transformation in the early half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century under the

reinterpretation of Karl Marx, whose work subsequently ushered in the second major transformation of the concept.

## 2.2 The Dismissal of Civil Society in Social Theory

Using Hegel's philosophy as his theoretical base, Marx focused on only one component of Hegel's conceptualization of civil society: the system of needs, equating it with the economic relations of production. This had the consequent effect of locating civil society in the realm of individual egoism and self-interest, as 'bourgeois society' and as something to be overcome (Ashenden, 1999:145). Thus, the Scottish Enlightenment use of 'commerce' as meaning more than just productive relations, but also social intercourse, communication, and transaction was lost (Ashenden, 1999:145) as Marx reduced civil society to the capitalist mode of production. By interpreting the relations of production as based on the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, Marx's analysis of civil society is that of a contradictory entity composed of classes that are necessarily antagonistic to one another. Thus, civil society becomes an arena of conflict where public opinion is manifested in the bourgeois public sphere producing false consciousness in the masses (Holub, 1991:5). Marx treats civil society as a superstructure, a field of purely private interests where the legal and political arena is produced as camouflage for the domination of commodities and the capitalist class (Alexander, 1998:4-5). In the end, Marx dismisses civil society as the residue of bourgeois social organization that reflected the necessarily partial interests of the owning class (Miller, 1992:5). This dramatic transformation of the moral and social identity of market capitalism had a fateful effect on the concept of civil society in social theory. Devoid of its cooperative, democratic, associative, and public ties, this second historical conceptualization of civil society is explained away as market capitalism (Alexander, 1998:4). Under the influence of this definition, the use of civil society as a concept in social theory disappeared in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In order to accommodate the methodological implications of civil society as a superstructure, social and intellectual attention shifted to the state, and mobility, poverty, and class conflict became the primary topics of theory and research (Alexander, 1998:5). Marx's re-conceptualization of civil society affected social theory by effectively removing civil society as a useful tool for

social analysis. Acknowledgement of its emancipatory and developmental potential did not occur until it was re-conceptualised once more in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Despite the devastating effects of the Marxist critique on the notion of civil society, social theory did not abandon the field of state-society relations. And, from the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, much of it followed in the tradition of Emile Durkheim. Referring to Marxism a set of “disputable and out-of-date hypotheses” (Lukes, 1972:323), Durkheim rejected the Marxist idea of a stateless society that suggested a stable and integrated economic life was possible without regulation. In his view, the bane of modern society was attributed to moral decline and a lack of moral regulation. For Durkheim, the state served legitimate and necessary functions and its role had to be held at some necessary minimum (Westby, 1991:288). Along with the role of protecting individual rights and promoting moral individualism, the state also has the duty to perpetuate and expand them (Westby, 1991:291). Within society, he saw a diverse array of secondary social groups, often founded on occupational grounds. Individualism, as the moral code of industrialized societies propagated by the state, flourished in an organizational matrix constituted by these social groups (Westby, 1991:283).

In his *Professional Ethics and Civil Morals* (1957), Durkheim posits that the crucial feature of the state is not that it necessarily controls large numbers of people, but also a number of different secondary social groupings, and that it is concerned with governing these secondary groups. In this sense, the state is not an embodiment of society, as Hegel had argued, but a specialized institution (Craib, 1997:80). Durkheim argues that as societies become more complex, there becomes a need for individuals to move between social groupings and a need to prevent secondary groups from exercising despotic control over their members. It is the function of the state to provide this need (Craib, 1997:81). As the function of the state is to create and protect the social milieu for its citizens to practice individualism (Durkheim, 1957:71), the state then is essentially a mediator between secondary groups. These groups in turn mediate between society and the individual just as the state mediates between the individual and secondary groups (Craib, 1997:81). In essence, Durkheim’s is a pluralist conception of the state that consists of inserting a conception of society, composed of social organizations, between the individual and the state.

Although Durkheim's political sociology did not address civil society per se, his work has had a tremendous impact on contemporary sociology in general, particularly through the work of Talcott Parsons, as well as a significant influence on contemporary writers on civil society such as Adam Seligman and Robert Putnam.

### 2.3 The Rediscovery of Civil Society in Social Theory

Renewed interest in the civil society idea during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was sparked by the popularity of Antonio Gramsci's work. Although a devout Marxist, Gramsci's theory of civil society marks an important development in the history of the concept because it turns away from the interpretation of civil society being synonymous with the economic relations of production, and instead focuses on hegemony and the cultural sphere. According to Gramsci, civil society is the sphere in which a dominant social group organizes consent and hegemony, as opposed to political society where it rules by coercion and direct domination. It is also "a sphere where the dominated social groups may organize their opposition and where an alternative hegemony may be constructed" (Miller, 1992:6). Accordingly, civil society is made up of the institutions that produce and maintain cultural hegemony. These institutions include churches, clubs, universities, associations, unions, institutions, parties, and social movements that have a role in reproducing the ideas necessary to maintain stability (Chambers, 2002:90-1). Gramsci also includes the family as an institution of civil society because of its central role in shaping the general political dispositions of citizens. His work is important, not just for its theoretical involvement, but because of its effect on the contemporary revival of civil society.

The catalyst for the re-emergence of civil society in social theory took place in Eastern Europe during the 1970s when it was used to underpin the strategy among Polish dissident intellectuals who later became prominent in the Solidarity movement in 1980-81. In fact, Eastern European intellectuals almost single-handedly reintroduced 'civil society' into social theory discourse. Whereas it had been thought of as a thoroughly obsolete conservative notion (Alexander, 1998:1) under the then dominant Marxist definition, here it was re-interpreted as a sphere of social activity free of the interference of the communist party state, as a strategy for dealing with the problems of life under

‘really existing socialism.’ They had experienced the effort of creating a ‘good society’ under socialism firsthand and they sought a return to formal freedoms instead. Basing their formulations of civil society on Gramsci’s theory, their civil society envisaged a realm of free social and cultural space carved out of the totalitarian communist party by conscious intellectual and social action (Miller, 1992:5-6). It was to be a sphere of autonomous, non-political, social activity, which did not seek to challenge the state’s control over the main levers of power (Miller, 1992:6). Gramsci’s conceptualization was attractive because it was designed precisely for a situation where the opposition movement had to operate within a strong modern state, of which it had almost no prospect of overcoming through the use of violence. Gramsci noted that under these conditions, there was some scope for social and intellectual activity among the masses which could eventually change the balance of social and intellectual hegemony. But in order for this project to be possible, there had to exist associations which were not totally penetrated by political society (Miller, 1992:6). This was the goal of Solidarity, an organization whose goals were to turn Gramsci’s theoretical formulation into practice and change the balance of hegemony in society.

Despite its ambitions, in practice Solidarity found it impossible to keep within the self-imposed limitations of this conception of civil society (Miller, 1992:6). Gramsci’s version suffered from serious practical contradictions. As a strategy for overthrowing an existing political society, it necessarily depended on the forbearance of and the legal security offered by the state for its existence, but the activity espoused by Gramsci, and practiced by Solidarity, to achieve hegemony were political actions (Miller, 1992:7). And by early 1989, four years after *perestroika* in the USSR, it became obvious that efforts to evolve a workable social, economic and political system in Poland without the direct participation of Solidarity would fail, and it seemed as if the original Gramscian project of establishing a civil society within the bosom of the totalitarian system was already too modest (Miller, 1992:1). Here, the theoretical and practical importance of civil society was recast. No longer was Solidarity content to carve out a niche for itself within the framework of the existing socialist order. Increasingly, it sought to actively reconstitute a new post-communist order, which would gradually withdraw from intensive political engagement to operate under the circumstances associated with western models of



parliamentary democracy and a free-market economy (Miller, 1992:2). Despite the failure of Solidarity to implement the ideal-typical notion of civil society in Eastern Europe, the idea itself has not been discarded. Instead, its tasks have been substantially altered: its role is to be constitutive and preservative of the liberal-democratic political systems and free-market economies that the new post-communist elites in Europe have committed themselves to build (Miller, 1992:8).

Comparisons between the transitional societies of Eastern Europe and China are often made because of the commonalities of adopting a market economy and the decentralizing of control over the socialist economy and some aspects of politics (Zong, 1993:256-257). Employing civil society as a concept to examine particular and specific developments in transitional societies does prove useful for broadly contrasting democratic and un-democratic societies (Alexander, 1998:13). However it does not extend to the task of comprehending the dynamics of differentiated and conflicting social spheres in particular countries. To say that they exhibit similar conceptions and realizations of civil society is a culturally and historically flattened approach. The problem with this idea is that the Chinese and European cases are qualitatively and quantitatively different with regard to civil society institutions (Wasserstrom & Liu, 1995). In transitional societies, emerging civil societies bear a strong imprint of the different cultural, ethnic, and material conditions of their respective countries undergoing transformation. This has produced a variety of types of potential civil societies.

Gramsci's work represents a theoretical bridge between the second historical conceptualization of civil society and its third contemporary iteration. Contemporary usage is more precise and more specific than the all-inclusive umbrella idea of the first type, and is more general and inclusive than the reductionism associated with the second Marxist type. Both of these previous versions linked individualism and the collective sense of social obligation with market society. However, they err in that the economic practices of market capitalism did not invent moral or immoral individualism. Rather, they mark a new specification and institutionalization of individualism, along with other newly emerging forms of social organization (Alexander, 1998:6-7). Contemporary reformulations of Gramsci's and Hegel's conceptions have led to a third major transformation of civil society in social theory. According to this third type, civil society

is recognized as a sphere that is analytically independent of the state, the market and other spheres as well (Alexander, 1998:6). This contemporary conception of civil society is perhaps best represented in the work of Jurgen Habermas, whose civil society is a sphere of identity formation, social integration, and cultural reproduction. Even though economic relations and the state play a part in these functions, their roles are (ideally) supporting, not leading (Chambers, 2002:91). There, civil society is defined as the realm of society, lying outside the institutionalized political and administrative mechanisms of the state and the state-regulated part of the economy, where people carry on their publicly oriented social and economic activities. Within this sphere, citizens may freely organize themselves into various levels of groups and associations in order to influence the state into adopting policies consonant with their interests (Arato and Cohen, 1988). However, these politics of influence from civil society must also be characterized by a substantial degree of self-restraint because its power to influence the state only exists in the presence of the state. Thus, civil society must recognize the imperatives of specialized expertise for the exercise of governmental policy-formulation and regulation in order to keep civil society functioning.

The enormous amount of work that has been generated under the banner of civil society since the 1980s attests to its popularity in contemporary social theory. Unfortunately, the renewal of interest in civil society is dominated by rival and competing definitions, evaluations, and conceptualizations. These fall within all three historic types and possess a range so wide that the concept itself is mystified and its use as an analytical tool has become debatable. Civil society is sometimes interpreted as a normative ideal, an empirical reality, a concept to think about the problems of society and politics, or to describe social formations (Hall & Trentmann, 2005:2). Often interpretations waver between the normative and the empirical, and as already existing and as something to be pursued (Baynes, 2002:124). Another descriptive conceptualization characterizes civil society as including economic associations, while others equate it with non-economic voluntary associations. One popular description of civil society is as a space situated between the 'private' and the 'public.' While there is a general consensus in this abbreviated definition at the theoretical level, in practice it is usually described as something private when contrasted to the public and as something

public when contrasted to the private sphere (Seligman, 1998). Ashenden's (1999) classification scheme makes use of both of these methods in order to place contemporary evaluations of civil society into two camps based on differences in their use of differentiation between the 'private' and the 'public' realms, and on the relationship with the economic sphere. Theorists belonging to the first group tend to interpret civil society as belonging in the realm of individualism that developed out of the enlightenment, and as encompassing the relations of capitalism. In this light, the concept becomes associated with individualism, the rule of law and markets. The second group, which correlates closely with the third historical type mentioned previously, separates civil society from economic relations and from the family, using it in reference to a non-market, non-state sphere of 'social life' (Habermas, 1984, 1987; Cohen & Arato, 1992). This conceptualization of civil society provides a notion of a realm of 'private individuals' communicating freely in a 'public context,' in the 'free associations of civil society.' These theorists regard civil society as the locus for the potential development of critical political spheres capable of generating resistance to forms of unaccountable expert authority and administrative power (Ashenden, 1999:146). Of the theorists who have contributed to the development of this position, the work of Jurgen Habermas is arguably the most influential. In relation to the 'rediscovery of civil society', he says:

[T]he now current meaning of the term 'civil society' ... no longer includes a sphere of an economy regulated by labour, capital and commodity markets and thus differs from the modern translation, common since Hegel and Marx, of '*societas civilis*' as 'bourgeois society.' Unfortunately, a search for clear definitions in the relevant publications is in vain. However, this much is apparent: the institutional core of 'civil society' is constituted by voluntary unions outside the realm of the state and the economy and ranging from churches, cultural association, and academies to independent media, sport and leisure clubs, debating societies, groups of concerned citizens, and grass-roots petitioning drives all the way to occupational associations, political parties, labour unions and 'alternative institutions' (1992:453-4).

The following section introduces Habermas' theory of civil society, providing the basis for an elaborated theory of civil society which I use as my theoretical framework.

#### 2.4 Habermas: System and Lifeworld, Public Sphere and Civil Society

Habermas' theory of civil society is related to his larger theory of communicative action. It is within this greater, more complex theory that he discusses the relationship between society, the state and the economy. According to Habermas, society is differentiated by two prominent domains: the 'system' and the 'lifeworld.' An understanding of these two domains is necessary before locating and reviewing Habermas' concept of civil society, and its relevance in the Chinese context. Thus, this section begins by examining Habermas' larger theory of communicative action and societal rationalization, as well as the differentiation between the system and lifeworld before moving on to locating civil society within this larger project. I then point out how Habermas' conception of civil society relates to his notion of the 'public sphere.'

In *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984, 1987), Habermas makes a categorical distinction between two different types of action: purposive rational action and communicative action. The first type represents action oriented towards success; the second towards reaching an understanding through language, referring to the interaction of at least two subjects (1984:85-6). These two types of action correspond to two separate evolutionary processes of rationalization: purposive and communicative.

Purposive-rational actions can be regarded under two different aspects – the empirical efficiency of technical means and the consistency of choice between suitable means. Actions and action systems can be rationalized in both respects. The rationality of means requires technically utilizable, empirical knowledge. The rationality of decisions required the explication and inner consistency of value systems and decision maxims, as well as the correct derivation of acts of choice (Habermas in Bernstein, 1985: 20).

These rationalization processes are similar to Weber's instrumental rationality (Kalberg, 1980). Communicative rationalization processes on the other hand mean

[E]xtirpating those relations of force that are inconspicuously set in the very structures of communication and that prevent conscious settlement of conflicts, and consensual regulation of conflicts by means of inter-psychic as well as interpersonal communication. Rationalization means overcoming such systematically distorted communication in which the action-supporting consensus concerning the reciprocally raised validity claims – especially consensus concerning the truthfulness of intentional expressions and the rightness of underlying norms – can be sustained in appearance only that is counterfactually (Habermas in Bernstein, 1985: 21).

Based on the two action orientations of purposive-rational action and communicative action, Habermas proposes a corresponding two-level conception of society based on the ideal types of the system and the lifeworld. Each of these two spheres is characterized by their own basis of thought, action, and organization.

System integration concerns the material reproduction of society and is organized principally through the institutionalization of purposive rational action in the modern economy and state. The system refers to those mechanisms in modern society that are ‘uncoupled’ from the communicative context of the lifeworld. The system is based on the demands of material production and is further differentiated into dimensions of the state administrative apparatus and the modern economy. These two subsystems operate according to the logic of purposive rationality and are coordinated through interconnections using media of money and power (Habermas, 1987:150). In the state, power is the medium that governs operations. While power is essentially hierarchical and coercive, communication is egalitarian and negotiable. In the economy, money is the medium that governs action. The ends of economic exchange are profit, efficiency, and instrumental success whereas the ends of communication are the production and transmission of meaning (Chambers, 2002:93). Habermas’ conceptualization of the system as an ideal type is an important step in the development of social theory. By introducing the system as a realm of society, it allows the theorist to look for explanatory

regularities or patterns in the unintended consequences of actions, patterns that can be used to explain developments in the lifeworld (Braaten, 1991:103).

In contrast to the state and economic systems, the lifeworld is a shared social construct constituted through communication. It is based on the norms of communicative rationality which strive toward consensus and underlies the three functions of the lifeworld: cultural transmission, social integration, and socialization (Braaten, 1991:80-2). Habermas formulates the modern lifeworld as “a reservoir of taken for granted, of unshaken convictions that participants in communicative action draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation” (1987:124). This conceptualization of the lifeworld has two distinct dimensions. On the one hand, it refers to the source of definitions of the situation, to the reservoir of implicitly known traditions and common-sense background assumptions which are embedded in language and culture, and drawn upon by individuals in their everyday lives (Alway, 1995:113). On the other hand, the lifeworld is composed of three separate structural components: culture, society and personality. Each of these components is distinct, complete with its own processes of reproduction (Arato & Cohen, 1988:201). Culture is reproduced through practices and processes that ensure the continuation of valid knowledge; society through the processes and practices of social integration and stabilization of group identity; and personality through socialization (Alway, 1995:114). The structural differentiation of the lifeworld occurs through the emergence of institutions specialized in the reproduction of traditions, solidarities and identities. This institutional dimension of the lifeworld corresponds to the definition of civil society (Arato & Cohen, 1988:201). Habermas argues that the lifeworld is symbolically reproduced through communicative action and serves as a background source of situation definitions which undergo rationalization in terms of the attainment of ‘communicatively achieved understanding’ instead of the traditional ‘normatively ascribed agreement’ (Habermas, 1984:70). The lifeworld is transmitted, altered, and reproduced via communication (Chambers, 2002:92), and the reproduction of dimensions in the lifeworld involves communicative processes of cultural transmission, social integration, and socialization (Arato & Cohen, 1988:201), functions which have been differentiated through evolution (Habermas, 1987:152). As a concept that includes institutions that range from the nuclear family as well as those in the political sphere,

Habermas' lifeworld constitutes a social sphere that straddles dimensions of the private and the public, and is the background against which all social interaction takes place. It is a repository, containing the accumulated interpretations of past generations. It is made up of meanings and we are connected to it via our interpretations and understandings. As social actors, we draw upon these understandings when trying to make sense of the world.

When Habermas makes a clear distinction between the lifeworld and the system, he also demonstrates how each presupposes the other and how they are interdependent. Although the economic and political subsystems become increasingly removed from the lifeworld, it is in the lifeworld that they are born and from where they obtain the basis of their normative support and reproduction. The system remains fastened in the lifeworld and is dependent upon it for its own structural possibilities and limitations that are developed through the rationalization of the lifeworld (Habermas, 1987:148). Using the example of the state, a modern lifeworld without the state is difficult to imagine, as the state offers legal guarantees that protect the integrity of the lifeworld, and the lifeworld acts as a source of legitimacy for the state (Chambers, 2002:93). Thus, in order to understand the social systems, one must understand how they develop out of the activities of social agents who comprise the lifeworld, and in order to understand the character of the lifeworld, one must understand the social systems that shape it. Not surprisingly, this interdependent relationship also exists between the institutions of the lifeworld in civil society and the subsystems of the system. Similarly, the maintenance and reproduction of the associations that comprise civil society are affected by the actions of the state and may even depend on state action (Baynes, 2002:129). The state is not neutral in this process, but frequently acts in ways that either facilitate or impede the life of associations of civil society (Baynes, 2002:133). This is true to such an extent that it has been pointed out by Walzer (1990:17) that many associations of civil society cannot survive without the active support of the state.

For Habermas, the crisis of modern capitalist society results from the uncoupling of the system and the lifeworld from each other. This is due to the assimilation by systems of functionally integrated actions of tasks that inherently belong to the lifeworld. The assimilation of these tasks by the system distorts communication, and the fluid processes of cultural value formation are replaced by fixed, non-communicative bureaucratic

procedures. This is what Habermas calls the ‘colonization of the lifeworld’ (Braaten, 1991:88-9). The colonization of the lifeworld by the system occurs when the system takes over the essential reproductive functions of the lifeworld thereby ‘objectifying’ and ‘reifying’ social relationships. This is a result of one-sided, ‘selective’ rationalization where the purposive rationalization of the economic and political system comes to dominate aspects of the lifeworld. The colonization of the lifeworld produces pathological consequences in society because as was mentioned above, it is here, in the lifeworld that its essential functions of socialization, social integration and understanding, are located (Habermas, 1987:208). As opposed to communicative action and rationality, the colonization of the lifeworld champions the purposive, instrumental rationality of science over the associative rationalities of ethics or praxis. In the light of purposive-instrumental rationality, science is presented as value free and independent of ethical and political questions. Colonization in this sense can be understood as the encroachment of selective processes of purposive-rational rationalization that distorts free and open communication within the lifeworld. The colonization of the lifeworld also represents a systematic threat to civil society. This is because the institutions of civil society experience an invasion of the logic of commodity production and exchange into its underlying processes of cultural reproduction (White, 2002:146). The public sphere then, begins to decline in conjunction with the colonization of the lifeworld. The collapse occurs because of the intervention of the system into the private affairs of society. The role that the public sphere had played in the intellectual life of society is then assumed by other institutions that reproduce the image of the public sphere in distorted guise (Holub, 1991:6). By introducing the system and lifeworld as ideal types based on purposive and communicative rationalization processes, Habermas is able to develop a research program that explains the dynamics of social processes. Habermas investigates and exposes the forms of domination practiced in civil society through his theory of the colonization of the lifeworld. He also identifies the sources of authentic autonomy that can be found in the institutions of civil society in a theory of discursive democracy (Chambers, 2002:92). The explanatory power of his theory comes from examining the dynamics of interaction between the systemic and lifeworld dimensions of society and at the ‘seams’ between them.



Civil society is the lifeworld as it is expressed in institutions. It “could include all the institutions and associational forms that require communicative interaction for their reproduction and that rely primarily on processes of social integration for coordinating action within their boundaries” (Cohen & Arato, 1992). People live out their lives in civil society (Chambers, 2002:107). It is the context and the background within which communicative action and lifeworld processes take place. As a component of the lifeworld, the unifying link within civil society is communication. Civil society is autonomous when its activities are governed by norms drawn from the lifeworld and reproduced through communication (Chambers, 2002:93). Based on the different forms of rationality that govern the lifeworld compared to those that govern the subsystems of the state and the economy, it is clear that the subsystems are excluded from civil society. As that “variegated space of institutions and practices that reproduces itself primarily through ‘communicative action,’ it is distinguished from the state and economy, which constitute systemic patterns of interconnection, steering themselves through the media of administrative power and money” (Habermas in White, 2002:146). Thus, the definition of civil society becomes that of “a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication” (Cohen & Arato, 1992:367).

Besides being the institutionalized factors of the lifeworld, civil society is an important concept for Habermas because it is here that he positions the possibility of resistance to the colonization of the lifeworld. Civil society is seen as a potential source for a rehabilitated public sphere (Cohen & Arato, 1992). Specifically, Habermas sees hope for resistance to these pathologies in ‘new social movements’ that emerge from the lifeworld and organized along the ‘seam’ between the lifeworld and the system. These social movements are critical for Habermas in being able to “erect a democratic dam against the colonizing encroachment of system imperatives on areas of the lifeworld” (1992:444). The lifeworld is regarded as an arena of autonomy and communicative rationality potentially capable of leading to the ideal of an undistorted inter-subjectivity. Warren (2001:77) calls this the ‘public sphere effect’ of associational life, which provides

the “means for forming opinions and developing agendas outside the state, as well as outside the structures of economic markets”. Civil society’s

[I]nstitutional core comprises those nongovernmental and non-economic connections and voluntary associations that anchor the communication structures of the public sphere in the society component of the lifeworld. Civil society is composed of those more or less spontaneously emergent associations, organizations, and movements that, attuned to how societal problems resonate in the private life spheres, distil and transmit such reactions in amplified form to the public sphere (Habermas, 1996:367).

Positioned within the lifeworld, civil society has the potential to rehabilitate and strengthen the public sphere, thus acting as a locus of resistance to the colonization of the lifeworld.

Here, it is useful to consider the differences between ‘strong publics’ and ‘weak publics’. ‘Strong publics’ refer to the parliamentary bodies and other formally organized institutions of the political system (Habermas, 1989). ‘Weak publics,’ on the other hand are located in the informally organized public sphere and range from private associations to the mass media located within civil society. Weak publics assume a central responsibility for identifying, interpreting, and addressing social problems (Baynes, 2002:129). As a set of social institutions, civil society is ‘public’ in that it refers to the space of choice and action in which individuals shape their individual and collective identities and in turn, give expression to a ‘public opinion’. Public opinion is not simply the aggregate of private opinions. Rather, it is an opinion that is formed publicly, in critical public debate. Thus, opinion is public in three senses: it is about public matters; it is in the public domain; and it is produced by a public made up of private citizens interacting in the public sphere (Chambers, 2002:96). This is distinct from the ‘strong public’ associated with the formal political system and is more akin to the ‘weak public.’ As a source of public opinion, civil society necessarily maintains a degree of independence from the state even though it is not immune from state action and regulation (Baynes, 2002:131). However, as Baynes (2002) points out, weak publics can

only emerge when there are sufficient legal guarantees of the basic liberties of the person, expression, and association. The interdependence of civil society and the state in modern society is explicated in the conditions of the relationship where the weak publics that exist in civil society may rely on the state for their protection, but the scope and content of these liberties requires (in the ideal case) the continuing input of public opinion generated in the public sphere of civil society.

## 2.5 Habermas: Public Sphere, Civil Society and New Social Movements

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), Habermas traces the emergence of a 'bourgeois public sphere' in 18<sup>th</sup> century European society. He sees this emergence as a result of the rise of the modern state and the development of the capitalist economy. The growth of commercial life led to the development of a division and separation of state and civil society, facilitated by the emergence of a modern public sphere. In this vein, the appearance and popularity of print media and the establishment of coffee houses and salons where open discussions concerning current issues could freely take place were essential. This period in Europe also saw the development of the idea of society as separate from the ruler and of a public of private individuals debating the authority of state by engaging in the 'public use of reason' (Habermas, 1989:27) and authority judged on the basis of rational criticism. The bourgeois public sphere originates in the private realm; it is constituted by private citizens who deliberate on issues of public concern. It is not essential that every citizen participates or that they are represented in the public sphere. However, it is essential that all those interested be able to take part in a general conversation, that their views are able to be publicly aired, and that the rules of evidence and argument be applied. This activity seeks thoughtful agreement about society's needs and the best policies for a nation. The public sphere assumes that public dialogue and public deliberation, freely engaged among private individuals, can result in a reconciliation of views, consensus, or at least a general agreement (Rosenau, 1992:101). The bourgeois public sphere provided a space for the emergence of critical rational debate:

[T]he bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people coming together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatised but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason (Habermas, 1989:27).

What attracted Habermas to the notion of the public sphere is its potential as a foundation for a critique of society based on democratic principles. It is a realm in which individuals gather to participate in open discussions. It is accessible by everyone, and no participant has an advantage over any other. However, these generic qualities of the public sphere are subject to particularization based on historical context and on the topics that are admitted to discussion (Holub, 1991:3). Although the public sphere is an ideal concept and is never fully realized in society (Habermas, 1989), its conceptualization delineates a social space of institutions and practices that mediates between the private interests of the individuals and families on one hand, and the state on the other. The public sphere is an important extension of civil society. It is where the ideas, interests, values, and ideologies formed within the relations of civil society are voiced and made politically efficacious (Chambers, 2002:96). It provides the social arenas for individuals and groups to discuss public affairs of common concern and to organize against the coercive and oppressive forms of social and state power (Tai, 2006:32). Given their similar definitions, civil society and the public sphere seemingly appear to be one and the same. However, in the breakdown of society into the dimensions of system and lifeworld, civil society develops out of institutions, organizations and associations from within the lifeworld. It is not limited to the public sphere, as it also comprises private institutions such as the family. By contrast, the public sphere exists on a conceptually different level and refers to the communicative dimension mentioned above.

As the site of resistance and emancipation, civil society coordinates its action of democratic deliberation in the arena of the public sphere. In this view, civil society and

the associated idea of public sphere activity are mechanisms that enable forms of public debate, which in turn influence the formation of policy (Habermas, 1989). However, it is not civil society as a whole that is the actor in this process, but new social movements. There are two interrelated roles to social movements in Habermas' theory. First, they are seen as the dynamic element in social learning processes and identity formation. They transpose latently available structures of rationality into social practice so that they can find embodiments in new identities and norms. Second, movements with democratic projects have the potential to initiate processes by which the public sphere might be revived and discourses institutionalized, within a wide range of social institutions (Cohen & Arato, 1992:527).

Habermas himself is sceptical of the "emancipatory potential" of these social movements as carriers of new (rational) social identities, and sees them mired in particularism (Cohen & Arato, 1992:528). Nevertheless, Habermas is on to something when he argues that the new conflicts arise at the "seam between system and lifeworld," over those roles that institutionalize the media of money and power and mediate between the public and private spheres and the economic and administrative subsystems (Cohen & Arato, 1992:528-9). Habermas' analysis of movements does not do justice to his own theory because he fails to see the offensive potential of associations in the lifeworld and how they can contribute to institutional change within civil society. The movements also generate new solidarities, alter the associational structure of civil society, and create a plurality of new public spaces while expanding and revitalizing spaces that are already institutionalized (Cohen & Arato, 1992:530). New social movements are the actors who have most characteristically taken on this dual role. Cohen and Arato identify this dualism as offensive and defensive strategies. Offensively, groups set out to influence the state and economy (Chambers, 2002:98). In the 'colonization thesis,' civil society institutions are primarily defensive, struggling to protect and democratize the communicative infrastructure of everyday life. However, these can also be offensive projects geared towards institutional reform. The offensive aspect of collective action targets political and economic society – the realms of 'mediation' between civil society and the subsystems of the administrative state and the economy (Cohen & Arato, 1992:531-2). The offensive politics of the new social movements involve not only

struggles for money or political recognition but also a politics of influence targeting political (and perhaps economic) insiders and (self-limiting) projects of institutional reform. They attempt to make the subsystems more receptive to new issues and concerns, more responsive to the needs and self-understanding of actors in civil society, and more internally democratic than they are now. In other words, those elements of the new movements that target political society articulate a project of self-limiting, democratic institutional reform aimed at broadening and democratizing the structures of discourse and compromise that already exist in these domains (Cohen & Arato, 1992:532). Thus, there is a double political task of new social movements: the acquisition of influence by publics, associations, and organizations on political society, and the institutionalization of their gains within the lifeworld (Cohen & Arato, 1992:555-6). The latter of which corresponds to the emergence of civil society.

The success of social movements on the level of civil society should be conceived not in terms of the achievement of certain substantive goals or perpetuation of the movement, but rather in terms of the democratization of values, norms, and institutions that are rooted ultimately in a political culture. The rights achieved by movements stabilize the boundaries between lifeworld, state, and economy but they are also the reflection of newly achieved collective identities, and they constitute the condition and possibility of the emergence of new institutional arrangements, associations, assemblies, and movements (Cohen & Arato, 1992:562). From the point of view of a theory of civil society, the politics of influence is the most central (Cohen & Arato, 1992:563). This perspective is indicative of the aims of my overall research project. Using this theoretical framework of civil society and the public sphere, I examine the politics of influence that intellectuals and their associations have in China. The following section outlines whether or not this theoretical framework, as I have outlined it above, is applicable to the Chinese context, and examines how the general framework must be reworked due to the situational context of Chinese society.

## 2.6 The Applicability of Civil Society in China: Criticisms and a Reply

There are some criticisms regarding the applicability of Habermas' concept of the public sphere and theory of civil society to the Chinese context. These criticisms are

predominantly characterized by two arguments. The first contends that the concept of civil society is so engrained in western socio-political thought, religion, customs and values that it cannot justly be applied to the Chinese, or any other international context. The other major argument comes from those who see a lack of autonomy and power in a sphere of existence outside of the Chinese state. In Charles Taylor's discussion of the senses of civil society, he notes that civil society exists in a minimal sense where there are free associations not under the tutelage of the state. Second, a stronger sense of civil society ensues when society can structure and co-ordinate its actions through these associations. Finally, the public dimension of civil society is strongest when the ensemble of associations can significantly influence the course of state policy (1990:98). Keane (2001) argues that in the Chinese context, all three of these conditions describing the existence of civil society are not met because of the presence of an authoritarian state and because of the corresponding corporatist model that characterizes state-society relations. This position criticizes the Habermasian normative tradition that views civil society and the associated idea of public sphere activity as mechanisms that enable forms of public debate, which in turn influence the formation of policy. Wakeman (1993) too rejects the idea of applying the public sphere-civil society model to China. He argues that even though the public realm has experienced significant expansion, it has not produced the desired effects of a surging civic power over the state. Thus, although civil society might succeed as a descriptive device to indicate an increasing separation of government and society in China, the idea that interest groups significantly influence the formation of cultural and media policy is a case of misplaced optimism about the nature of social change (Keane, 2001:783). Instead, Keane distinguishes between the concept of civil society and the processes of civil society. The latter is the object of his critique and refers to the formal and informal mechanisms or procedures by which interest groups and individuals seek to influence policy formulation (Keane, 2001:785-786). He contends that whereas citizens in liberal democracies seek to influence the formation of policy by the force of ideas and by interest group activities, under the Chinese social tradition, political participation as it is related to policy, is relegated to interpretation and implementation (Keane, 2001:783-4). These arguments are characteristic of those based on a separation of state and society, where intellectuals are placed in society, and are unable to influence

decisions at the state level because communication is a vertical, one-way, top-down affair based on a corporatist model of relations. According to this model, intellectuals in China do not play any substantive role in policy formulation, and only have the capacity to influence policy interpretation and implementation. Taken as a whole, these arguments act as the foil for my research project.

In response, I argue that to dismiss the presence of civil society in China because of the impact of an authoritarian regime or to suggest that the concept of civil society is uniquely entrenched in western political thought and historical experience is misdirected for three reasons. First, these approaches fail to reveal or explain the gradual opening up of spaces for more autonomous organizing and expression since 1978, despite the fact that the Chinese polity remains essentially authoritarian. Second, much of the debate about the prospects of civil society in non-European settings has been conducted by comparing their social historical potential with a model of civil society and the public sphere of 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe as was elaborated by Habermas in the 1960s. Finally, the denial of civil society at this level gives way to a cultural and historical essentialism that impedes the investigation of multiple forms of organizing in pursuit of shared values, norms and meanings. Civil society, state, society and economy are never fixed or static; it is their fluidity, their complex layers of meaning, and the politics of their appropriation that make them interesting. As abstract ideal-types they do not pretend to correspond neatly to reality, but offer vital analytic tools for critical enquiry into processes of social and political change (Howell, 2004:121). Following Weber's lead, Habermas openly states that as an ideal type, the bourgeois public sphere's full utopian potential is never realized in practice and its existence in society is impossible. Instead, it is used as an analytical tool for obtaining an analytical perspective by measuring the current conditions of different cases as they appear when contrasted to the ideal type. As ideal types, I argue that Habermas's model of the public sphere and civil society are useful analytical concepts with which to base research in China.

Like Habermas, I use the term 'civil society' ideal-typically as a concept and as a social space that exists in reality. Its existence in social reality will not correspond to the specific type formulated in Habermas' theory. As a concept, it is functional rather than normative, and it must be understood in dynamic terms by taking into consideration the



different socioeconomic, political, and historical conditions under which it is used (Tai, 2006:51). In China, the public sphere and corresponding civil society are in the process of being created. When realized they will bear unique Chinese characteristics that differ from the ideal type and from other public spheres. Therefore, as opposed to examining the existence or non-existence of a particular European type in China, it is more fruitful to examine what particular type of civil society exists in China and how it impacts the political arena (Tai, 2006:57). Instead of imposing a unified model of civil society on different societies, my focus is on how to adapt the concept to the different contexts, under which it is analyzed, and its convergences and divergences across various historical and analytical conditions (Tai, 2006:52). Civil society in a particular national setting should be contextualized and historicized. It “is not all or nothing, either existing or not existing” (Schak & Hudson, 2003:1), so instead of approaching the subject of civil society as an either/or dichotomous category, it should be viewed as a continuum. At one end is the environment in which civil society is completely autonomous from state control and interference; at the other is the situation in which civil society is incorporated into one unified national hierarchical associational structure under complete control of the state. In between those two extremes lie varying degrees of societal and state corporatist variations (Tai, 2006:56).

Deductively, we can also agree with the premise that in actuality it is also wrong to speak of a single public sphere (Habermas, 1992:424). The public sphere, as a direct result of an active civil society, is a historical phenomenon that is not only temporally but culturally specific. Commenting on its emergence during 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe, Habermas states that it is “a category that is typical of an epoch. It cannot be abstracted from the unique developmental history of that ‘civil society’ originating in the European High Middle Ages; nor can it be transferred ideal-typically generalized, to any number of historical situations that represent formally similar constellations” (Habermas, 1989:xvii). Instead, there is a “coexistence of competing public spheres” because “the same structures of communication simultaneously give rise to the formation of several arenas where, beside the hegemonic bourgeois public sphere, additional sub-cultural or class-specific public spheres are constituted on the basis of their own and initially not easily reconcilable premises” (Habermas, 1992:425). Thus, we see that there are multiple,

competing and sometimes overlapping public spheres in the arenas of public communication. These variations of the public sphere have always existed because of accommodations to different historical, cultural, and societal conditions (Tai, 2006:50). When Habermas talks about the public sphere as a direct creation of civil society, he is referring to it both as an ideal type and as a social reality, but only in the sense that it is grounded in peculiar historical terms (Calhoun, 1992; Habermas, 1992). If this is the case, then there is a typology of public spheres and we can conceptualize the Chinese situation as one variant in accordance to new formations of political, social, and institutional forces. This type of formulation allows us to examine the pulling and pushing that occurs when elements of the ideal become incorporated into existing social systems (Alexander, 1998:12). Civil society, as both a social realm and a normative conception, provides an empirical tool for analyzing the structural and cultural processes of actually existing societies (Alexander, 1998:12). It enables us to examine the push and pull between the structural components that make up society, and the institutions and social movements that exhibit agency between the seams.

## 2.7 Summary

This chapter has developed the concept of civil society as a suitable theoretical framework for examining intellectuals and intellectual organizations as components of an existing civil society in China. In this chapter, civil society is defined as both a normative conception and as a social realm. As a concept, the term is employed ideal-typically as the realm of society, lying outside the institutionalized political and administrative mechanisms of the state and the state-regulated part of the economy, where people carry on their publicly oriented social and economic activities. Within this sphere, citizens may freely organize themselves into various levels of groups and associations in order to influence the state into adopting policies consonant with their interests (Arato & Cohen, 1988). As an ideal type, civil society also acts as an empirical tool for analyzing the structural and cultural processes of actually existing societies (Alexander, 1998:12), done so by measuring the current conditions of different cases as they appear when contrasted to the ideal type. Concurrently, as a social reality, civil society is functional and is

understood in dynamic terms by taking into consideration the different socioeconomic, political, and historical conditions under which it is used (Tai, 2006:51).

Consistent with the theoretical perspective developed in this chapter, civil society is not an all-or-none construct which either exists or does not exist. At one end of the spectrum is an environment where civil society is completely autonomous from state control and interference; at the other is a situation where civil society is incorporated into one unified national hierarchical associational structure under complete control of the state. In between these two extremes are varying degrees of societal and state corporatist variations (Tai, 2006:56). Thus, instead of adopting a western-centric framework of civil society that posits the state versus society, I adopt a framework based on Habermas' ideal type, comparing it to the situation in China, emphasizing the flexible interactions, and the blurry multilayered roles of state agents in civil institutions.

Civil society is the locus for the potential development of critical political spheres capable of generating resistance to forms of unaccountable expert authority and administrative power (Ashenden, 1999:146). Civil society exists in a minimal sense where there are free associations not under the tutelage of the state. A stronger sense of civil society ensues when society can structure and co-ordinate its actions through these associations. The public dimension of civil society is strongest when the ensemble of associations can significantly influence the course of state policy (Taylor, 1990:98).

In the chapters that follow, I argue that while this was not possible under Maoist leadership, the economic, political and social transformations that have enveloped the country since the introduction of economic reforms in 1978 have facilitated the emergence of civil society. The existing examples of its emergence are abundant, but a detailed study of every case is beyond the scope of this paper. My study examines one case, the case of intellectuals in China.

In the next chapter, I outline the corresponding methodology that I use to examine intellectuals and their associations as an influential component of civil society in China. Situated where they are, at the interstices and between the seams of Chinese state-society relations, the next chapter elaborates a methodology for examining whether or not intellectuals encapsulate the essence of new social movements that engage in politics of influence in the Chinese public sphere.

## METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

Chapter 1 outlines my chosen theoretical framework, based on a Habermasian theory, to examine Chinese civil society. Civil society is inherently broad and encompasses numerous segments of society. I attempt to examine its emergence in China by focusing on one group, intellectuals, and their relation in the policy process. My hypothesis consists of the following: If Chinese intellectuals are able to exert influence in the policy process, then it can be said that, in the case of intellectuals, that Chinese civil society is able to influence politics at least to some extent.

I define civil society as a normative conception and as a realm of social reality. As a concept, I employ the term ideal-typically as the realm of society lying outside the institutionalized political and administrative mechanisms of the state and the state-regulated part of the economy, where people carry on their publicly oriented social and economic activities. Within this sphere, citizens may freely organize themselves into various groups and associations in order to influence the state into adopting policies consonant with their interests (Arato & Cohen, 1988). As an ideal type, it provides an empirical tool for analyzing the structural and cultural processes of actually existing societies (Alexander, 1998:12). As an analytical tool it measures the current conditions of different cases as they appear when contrasted against the ideal type. Conversely, as social reality, civil society in China is reflective of the specific social, political, economic, and cultural conditions that have contributed to its development. Most of the significant factors contributing to its development have occurred since the introduction of reforms in 1978.

In this chapter I outline the methodology and the corresponding methods used to measure the emergence of intellectuals as an institution of civil society. This chapter also promotes a methodology for examining how intellectuals engage in politics of influence in the Chinese public sphere.

### 3.1 Research Design and Methodology

My research project is primarily a descriptive exercise into the emergence of civil society and the role of intellectuals in China, however there are also exploratory and explanatory dimensions to my study. The goal of this project is to examine the extent that intellectuals, identified as one institution of an emerging civil society, can exert a politics of influence in the public sphere. The extent of intellectual influence is based on interview responses relating their capacity to do so through communication and production of knowledge in the public sphere. As an exploratory project, I add insight into the debate surrounding the existence of civil society in China. If my hypothesis that intellectuals are able to influence policy holds true, based on the theoretical framework outlined in the previous section, it can then be argued that my project also has the potential for a theoretical explanation of state-society relations and the process of societal action.

The research questions I pose envelope two broad areas: the emergence of civil society in China, and the influence of intellectuals in the policy process. In order to answer these questions, I use quantitative and qualitative methods. Specifically, in order to measure the emergence of civil society in China, I use unobtrusive quantitative methods, analyzing existing government statistical databases and archives, in order to provide empirical evidence to corroborate the enlargement of a liberalized space for independent association (Howell, 2004). I also use existing government statistics to provide evidence of increasing numbers of intellectuals, intellectual associations and general intellectual activity in China. Conversely, I explicate the involvement and degree of influence that intellectuals have in this sphere using data gleaned from interviews with Chinese intellectuals.

This project entails a cross-sectional study of a sub-population of intellectuals in China. Although I am interested in the present climate of civil society in China, I am aware that civil society, in the sense of a relatively independent sphere of non-coerced association for shared interests, has developed in China over a span of 30 years. Thus, my study also aims at understanding the process of the emergence of civil society over time. In this light, civil society has been affected by a series of national campaigns that has seen it develop in “fits and starts” (Howell, 2004:121) as government control has cycled

through periods of ‘tightening’ and ‘letting go.’ These campaigns altered the political atmosphere and affected people’s work and non-work activities (Bian, 1994:19). This nonlinear growth of civil society makes it difficult to draw a conclusion about the form of civil society based on one instance in time. Nonetheless, a historical record of the empirical data since the reform period began in 1978 represents a new direction in state-society relations, indicating a trend towards the growth of new forms of association, autonomous from state control, of which intellectuals are included.

### 3.2 Research Methods: Quantitative

In order to frame the context of an emerging civil society in China, I use a number of unobtrusive measures for gathering quantitative empirical data. These include analyzing existing statistical data sets and archival research from government sources as well as from statistical analyses and conclusions drawn from other researchers. Chosen sources are based on the ability of the empirical evidence to demonstrate growth in the number and in the autonomy of intellectuals and social organizations in China. Similarly, these sources present empirical evidence demonstrating a growth in the associations and institutions necessary for the emergence of a public sphere in China.

### 3.3 Data Sources

Data corresponding to the number and types of intellectuals and academic institutions that have risen out of the aftermath of the reforms is from the China Statistical Yearbook (CSY), published by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) of China. Data from the CSY is available in aggregate form online and in complete form on CD at the Xi’an Jiaotong University library. These national data banks provide empirical information that I use as a test function against my theoretical model. The advantages of using existing statistics and archives are that they are inexpensive to obtain, easy to sample, and the restrictions associated with them are knowable and controllable through data transformations and the construction of indices. Using this data also permits for longitudinal studies of phenomena over time, allowing me to test my hypothesis of an emerging civil society, represented quantitatively and qualitatively, by subjecting it to an evaluation in multiple settings and at multiple times (Webb et al., 2000:86-87).

The reliability of existing statistics depends heavily on the quality of the statistics themselves, as well as the process of record keeping (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2002:281-282). Government statistics can be inaccurate, and questions about the reliability of Chinese official statistics have been raised by academics (Travers, 1982) as well as the mass media (Chan, 2004). In order to guard against this potential problem, Babbie and Benaquisto (2002:281) suggest that it is necessary to investigate the nature of the data collection and tabulation to assess the nature and degree of reliability in order to judge its potential impact on research. Analyzing this question, I conclude that in the case of national figures relating to the numbers of academics, universities and research institutes, there is no reason to suspect that the data is unreliable. A review of the literature that criticizes Chinese statistics does so primarily in the economic sphere, particularly in China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Rawski, 2001). Like many developing countries, China's GDP data is prone to substantial errors, and statistical accuracy is a problem in transitional economies because the magnitude of change is so large. Prices, coverage, and politics afflict Chinese data in several ways. First, official statistics do not adequately correct for the effects of inflation. Second, statisticians have a hard time accounting for the expanding scope of the economy. Third, data collection is intertwined with politics in China in such a way that reduces the accuracy of statistics. The NBS monopoly on statistics means that the benefits of a competitive marketplace have not reached the data field. Furthermore, many crucial data series, like GDP, are used as success indicators for local officials, who therefore have incentives to inflate or distort the numbers that are reported. Caution must be exercised when using Chinese data and it is recommended that it be accepted only within a fairly large margin of error (Naughton, 2007:141-142).

Given the political implications associated with China's modernization drive, it makes sense that respondents and officials at local and provincial levels will 'trick' the data in favour of their locale. However, it is highly unlikely that they would be able to falsify education or employment records. On the other hand, there is room for concern related to the results of the number of autonomous and semi-autonomous organizations that are operating in China. These organizations must register through the Ministry of Civil Affairs, whose licensing procedures are stringent. The difficulty of procuring a license under its procedures has led many organizations to register as non-profit

enterprises with alternative ministries such as the Industry and Commerce Bureau, which has more lenient licensing requirements (Howell, 2004:123). Thus the dodging of official registration means that there are likely more autonomous organizations than publicly acknowledged, and any increase in the number of these organizations is probably greater than officially recognized.

While there may be problems associated with using these data sets, it must be mentioned that there is no plausible alternative set of data for China. Furthermore, the data produced by the NBS is the product of a data collection network systematically analyzed by a large group of government statisticians, making it the most reliable data available.

### 3.4 Research Methods: Qualitative

Even if the quantitative data represent an increase in the number of intellectuals and intellectual associations, this does not necessarily represent an increase in the activity of academics as an institution of civil society engaged in politics of influence. Thus, in order to gather this information I employ qualitative methods, conducting interviews focus groups with various levels of intellectuals: professors, think tank researchers, and graduate students. These interviews focus not only on topics related to the emergence of civil society in China, but also on the status of research in China and the ability of intellectuals to influence policy. The data gathered through these interviews corresponds with the experience, thoughts and ideas that intellectuals have towards the following topics: the status of social science, the status and location of intellectuals in state-society relationships, and the influence and relationship that intellectuals have with policy.

### 3.5 Units of Analysis and Research Location

The units of analysis used for obtaining information on the impact and influence of intellectual activity in China are individual intellectuals themselves. Intellectuals in China exist at numerous levels based on, but not limited to, the following capacities: individuals, such as establishment professors, non-establishment professors, and graduate students; and organizations, such as think tanks and research institutes. Differentiations exist between various types of Chinese intellectuals, particularly between establishment and



non-establishment intellectuals (Tang, 1999 & 2005; Ding, 1994). A more detailed examination of the various types and categories of intellectuals is made in Chapter 5. In this study, all respondents are affiliated with the College of Social Science at Xi'an Jiaotong University (XJTU), in the city of Xi'an, Shaanxi province, China. Made up of professors, researchers, and graduate students, they were selected based on their association and familiarity with the academic climate in China, and because they have the greatest potential to be involved in the process of knowledge production in Chinese society. Constituting various academic and professional backgrounds, this sample includes participants of differing ages, genders, economic statuses, marital statuses and locations, thus enabling access to a diverse range of perspectives.

Point of entry is an important consideration for any researcher wishing to conduct interviews. Fortunately, I did not encounter any significant problems gaining access to my respondents. Since my project is supported by the College of Social Science at XJTU, it was relatively easy to elicit support for my study. Recruiting participants from intellectuals affiliated with academic departments in the Social Sciences at XJTU was facilitated through a colleague of mine, who assisted in posting recruitment posters (see Appendix A) in the following Social Science departments: Sociology, Anthropology, Economic, Geography and Psychology. Using a recruitment poster ensures that there is no loss of confidentiality in the recruitment process. Those interested participants who contacted the researcher to arrange individual online interviews or collaborative focus groups were provided with a consent form (see Appendix B) and asked to read it before scheduling a formal interview.

Altogether, I was able to solicit nine respondents to take part in my research study. Four of these participated via individual interviews, while five others corroborated for an online focus group. While such a limited sample size does not allow us to infer anything to the wider population on intellectuals in China, it does allow us to look at trends as they exist in this location at this point in time, and see how they correspond to the general situation as outlined in the literature.

### 3.6 The Interview Process

Initially, interview topics were generated in negotiation with the relevant literature and through informal discussions with friends and colleagues on topics related to my research project. These included trends in Chinese development over time, the role of Chinese intellectuals, and the emergence of civil society amongst others. As jot-notes from these talks began to accumulate and as apparent themes began to emerge, I compiled specific research questions into an interview guide in an effort to add an element of structure to the formal interview process (see Appendix C). These informal conversations identified important topics and themes for my research and set the stage for subsequent rounds of formal interview sessions. Although helpful in the interview process, the interview guide did not predetermine the interview agenda. Instead, I sought to provide a relaxing and friendly environment for participants to engage in open-ended and non-structured interviews. Besides responding to the questions included in the interview guide, participants were free to steer the discussion as they saw fit.

Formal interviews were conducted online using mediums that suited the respondents. As all participants had access to free and available internet connections, this technological element did not produce any known problems. The software used in this process included Skype, MSN Messenger, and QQ (a software program similar to MSN Messenger popular in China).

Beginning an interview, I re-read the consent form, reminding participants of their right to withdraw at any time, for any reason. If they chose to continue participating, I obtained their oral consent to participate in the research project. Given the time and distance between researcher and participant, oral consent was preferred in this context because having participants sign and fax a signed consent form themselves was seen as an unnecessary time and financial burden.

The format of my semi-structured interviews involved asking those questions in the interview guide and following up on particulars. Semi-structured interviews allowed respondents to discuss the topics and to identify and focus on specific themes that they thought were important. When possible, I strived for engaging, collaborative interviews so that the participant and I were able to learn from the process. As such, the data that emerged from the interview is the product of interaction by the speakers (Rapley,

2004:16). Meetings between interviewer and interviewees were seen as social encounters where we collaborated in producing accounts of their thought and experiences. This approach highlights the fact that interviews are “a joint accomplishment of interviewer and respondent” (Dingwall, 1997:56). Interviews are interactive events, where the data is collaboratively produced (Rapley, 2004:16).

There are multiple possible influences on the interaction, direction, and outcome of an interview, including such variables as location, status, gender and age. It is “crucial that the researcher take account of his or her own and the interviewee’s social locations and how they might affect the research relationship” (Reinharz & Chase, 2002:233). Using semi-structured interviews that allowed participants to address aspects of their experiences and thoughts were suitable for this study because they were able to generate individual perspectives on the location and role of intellectuals in the relationship between state and society, and on intellectuals’ perspectives on the influence of their work therein.

Besides several individual interviews, I also conducted one online focus group. The focus group process proceeded in the same manner, except that it required that certain differences be implemented in order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of these participants. To begin with, they were given pseudonyms to use during discussions. In order for the focus group to function in an orderly and efficient manner, I acted as a moderator. In this role, I assigned participants a number and asked that they respond to questions in an orderly fashion, according to their number, before posing said question. Since responses were intended to be open ended discussions, participants were notified that they had the opportunity to respond to each others comments in turn, based on their assigned number. I made sure that all participants had the opportunity to respond before moving on to the next question.

Initially, I had thought that language difficulties were going to be a significant problem when conducting interviews. Even though in the end I found that language problems did not hamper the interview process, there were still some concerns. I overcame this obstacle by recording all interviews with a tape recorder. Tape-recorders are useful because they are pragmatic and provide a more detailed record of verbal interaction than what I could have produced through note taking alone. Tapes can be

replayed and selectively drawn upon to produce transcripts that provide concrete evidence in demonstration of an argument (Rapley, 2004:18). Having a taped copy of my interviews proved useful for analyzing data. In light of some language difficulties, having a copy allowed me to translate and transcribe the interviews more clearly.

Once an interview was completed, the procedure typically followed the path of reviewing notes from the interview, listening and transcribing the interview, identifying important topics and themes, and examining how they fit into my research design. Throughout this process, I was careful not to solicit any identifying information about participants at any time. Any accidentally reported identifying information noted at the end of the data collection period and was not included in final report. In order to safeguard and store the data, the original audio tapes, transcriptions and signed consent forms will be securely stored by my research supervisor at the University of Saskatchewan for a minimum of five years, as per University regulations. Since my work uses direct quotations, participants were given the opportunity to read and revise their transcript in order to acknowledge that it accurately portrayed what they said. To this end, participants were asked to sign a Transcript Release Form (see Appendix D). This approach is appropriate given that the potential risk and harm associated with the compromise of participant anonymity is very small because all responses are already publicly available and already widely known. Furthermore, the risk or harm associated with participation in this project is not greater, considering probability and magnitude, than that ordinarily encountered in daily life.

### 3.7 Summary

This chapter outlines the methodology and the research methods used in my research project. It begins by re-introducing my theoretical framework and how it contextualizes and focuses my research design and choice of methods. It then introduces my research design and methodology for gathering data on the emergence of civil society in China, and on the influence of intellectuals in the policy process. In order to evaluate the emergence of civil society in China, I use unobtrusive quantitative data collection methods. Specifically, I examine existing available data sets, and draw on the research and conclusions of other researchers. In order to gather data on the influence of

intellectuals in the policy process, I conduct semi-structured interviews online with intellectuals from Xi'an Jiaotong University. Based on these methods, the next chapter begins to elaborate on the results that this research has uncovered.

## **ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION**

### **Introduction**

The emergence of civil society in China is predicated on the introduction of reforms and policy changes initiated by the Chinese Communist Party in 1978. Even though these changes focused on economic reform, the fact that the previously existing economic, political, and social systems were intertwined under the banner of socialism meant that reforming the economy produced fundamental political and social changes as well (Guthrie, 2006:98-99). This chapter examines the economic, political and social transformations brought about by the reforms, and how these changes facilitated a reordering of state-society relations, characterized by increased separation of party and state, and separation of state and economy (Fewsmith, 1999:92). Intentionally and unintentionally, the reforms led to a relaxation of party control over the economy, politics, society and ultimately over public discourse. Policy reforms and transformation began in the economic sphere, then in the political sphere, finally leading to change in the social sphere and individuals' ideological orientation. Together, these changes have facilitated the emergence of civil society in China. Social spaces began to open up as the state withdrew, creating pressure for further opening of space and its filling with new, previously unorthodox ideas (Saich, 2004:222-223). This chapter is divided into three sections (economic, political and social), each containing a description of the corresponding realities of Chinese society before the reform period, as well as supplementary descriptions of the major changes that have taken since the reforms. This is a necessary step that enables us to comprehend through comparison, the extent of the transformation that has taken place in China over the last thirty years.

#### **4.1 Economic Reform and Transformation**

China's initial development strategy following the CCP's rise to power in 1949 resembled the Feldman Development Paradigm (Chai & Roy, 2006), a "Big Push" strategy borrowed from the Soviet Union that emphasized heavy industry and central

planning. The state controlled most of the economy directly and used its control to divert resources as it saw fit. Consequently, as consumption was squeezed and as rapid industrialization was given highest priority, most government investment was funneled into heavy industry (Naughton, 2007:56). In practice, this amounted to an unbalanced growth strategy that emphasized an investment allocation ratio in the heavy capital goods sector (Chai & Roy, 2006:12). Over time, this led to an excessive accumulation rate and an imbalance among agriculture, light industry and heavy industry (Field, 1984). Under its adopted command economy, the CCP quickly collectivized agriculture, taking over ownership of the land and management of the farm economy. It also took over commerce by nationalizing all private industry, taking ownership of all large factories, transportation and communication enterprises, and controlling practically all the productive resources in agriculture, husbandry, forestry, and mining (Cannon, 2000:10). Markets were replaced by supply and marketing cooperatives, and tens of millions of small enterprises were replaced by a smaller number of larger ones. The state maintained control over this system through a bureaucratic, hierarchical personnel system where state planners assigned production targets and directly allocated resources and goods among producers. In this environment, finances were used to audit and monitor performance, not to drive investment decisions. Prices lost their significance for directing the economy as the state controlled the price system, setting relative prices in order to channel resources into government coffers and its own industrialization plan (Naughton, 2007:59-60). This strategy had three objectives: to achieve rapid economic independence from the outside world; rapid catch-up with the western world in terms of per capita income and living standards; and to build an egalitarian socialist society. Beginning in the late 1950s, differences of opinion concerning communist ideology and economic and socialist development between China and the Soviet Union began to emerge, eventually leading to a rift in Sino-Soviet relations in the early 1960s (Spence, 1999:553-559). From that point on, all development in China was dominated by Mao Zedong thought. This spurred differentiations in China's Socialist project, such as the formation of the commune, the principle of self-reliance, an emphasis on

egalitarianism, and increased centralized planning.

When the CCP came to power, one of its first decisions was to introduce land reform throughout the countryside. Initially, this policy boosted agricultural production and the country enjoyed a brief economic recovery in the early 1950s. However, by the end of 1956, private ownership of land and private marketing were both abolished. For the next 25 years, the state planned, planted, bought and sold all main crops. Communes characterized the countryside since being introduced during the Great Leap Forward (GLF) in 1958. By the early 1960s, the approximately 90 million family farms had been amalgamated into 74,000 communes. These were set up nationwide as both a political and administrative institution that functioned as the highest level of economic organization and as the basic level of government. Composed of brigades and teams, the teams were more important because they made the final decisions for production and the distribution of goods and income, amounting to a system known as “eating from the same big pot.” In terms of its affect on development, China’s economy leading up to 1978 could be summed up by the following four features: collective farms in the agricultural sector; state-owned enterprises in the non-agricultural sector; central planning; and widespread bureaucratic control of the economy by the government.

In the 1970s, Fordist industrial systems, a focus on heavy industry, economies of scale, and Taylorist organizations of labour, all of which had been relatively appropriate following the Second World War were becoming obsolete. Changes in the world economy necessitated changes in socialist economics and politics. The world was entering a fundamental transformation towards a new post-Fordist economy that emphasized small-scale and ‘just in time’ production, unprecedented levels of trade and integration, and a highly trained and independent work force (McMichael, 2000). For ideological reasons, it was only after Mao Zedong’s death in 1976 that the conditions for sustained economic growth and the development of civil society became plausible (Powers & Kluver, 1999:1). At that moment in time, the economic situation in China was bleak and poverty threatened the party’s hold on power. Years of communist rule had cost China as initiatives like the GLF (1958-1960) and the



Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) failed to deliver a better, richer society. As one respondent recollected on their childhood before the reforms:

In the past when I was a child, my family condition was well off. My father was a cadre and my mother was a teacher. So the average salary at the end of the 1970s was about 18 Rmb [Authors note: in 1978 the exchange rate was approximately 1.5 Rmb per 1 US Dollar (CUHK, 2000)] per month. 1 Rmb was a lot of money. You could buy an ice cream for 1 *mao* [Author's note: 10 *mao* make up 1 Rmb]. But my mother earned 32 Rmb per month and my father earned 92.5 Rmb per month. For those students graduating from university, at the beginning they got low salaries but in the end got almost 52 Rmb per month. Or maybe 56, I'm not sure, something like that. Those university students were amazing at that time. A couple got 30 or 40 each at the time, so to get more than 70 or 80 for them at the time was amazing. From the 1960s until reforms, salaries were almost the same. At that time even if you got a higher salary there was nothing to buy, nothing to consume. At that time, the state allocated a certain amount of food to your family based on your *hukou* registration system and how many people were in your family. Flour accounted for a little part so life at that time was hard. Even if you had money you could not buy more because items were based on *hukou* distribution. The great achievement of reforms is that you have choice. You can buy and eat whatever you want. And you don't need tickets to buy anything. If you wanted to buy rice you needed a rice ticket, meat, a meat ticket. Even if you had money you could not buy anything without a ticket. Materialistic supplies at the time were very tight. Leaders at the time were very powerful because they had the means to give you subsidies. They could allocate one kilogram of rice to a family; cigarettes etc. were all the right of the government (Interview with A).

The Maoist development strategy was undermined by two factors. The first was the political structure that enforced it. The rigidity of the CCP's dictatorship over the people was enacted according to an idealist image of socialism. This prevented feedback from production units on how the economy was doing, and made it difficult to modify policies. The Chinese planned economy, which based success in terms of target fulfillment, produced incentives for false reporting. The worst illustration of this is exemplified in the GLF, where inaccurate reporting masked the need for emergency action and relief, exacerbating deaths in a famine that claimed between 13 and 30 million lives (Cannon, 2000:9). The second factor was the rigidity of economic thinking, which limited the range of policies that could be tried when problems were identified. Since anyone who went against the orthodoxy was excluded from policymaking, policies could not easily be changed to respond to problems (Cannon, 2000:9). Failed government sponsored campaigns leading up to the end of the 1970s, such as the Cultural Revolution, resulted in a loss of faith in the communist ideals, ideals that had previously sustained and restrained the population. The initial post-Mao strategy to improve economic performance had failed, and more and more Chinese were becoming dissatisfied with living standards that for the majority of the population had not seen significant improvements since the early 1950s. As public anger mounted, people began to question the legitimacy of CCP rule. By the end of the 1970s, the party was facing considerable pressure to reform, even though doing so might threaten their hold on power.

At the same time as China was encountering economic and political crises, its neighbours, the 'four little dragons' of Taiwan, Singapore, Japan and South Korea were being hailed as 'economic miracles.' They also provided China with successful models of free market and export-led growth with which to begin a dramatic change in development policy. Based on these models of success, China's development strategy switched to an adherence of the 'four modernizations' of agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology as the basis for reforming the Maoist planned economic system. This change began with Deng Xiaoping, who although never assumed formal leadership, was nonetheless China's paramount leader (Shambaugh,

1995) until his death in February 1997,

Under Deng's leadership, China initiated the Reform and Open Door policies in December 1978 (McCormick, Su & Xiao, 1992). This represented a strategic reversal in policy, turning away from a centrally-planned economy, and towards a market economy. This resulted in the dismantling of major economic institutions such as the people's communes, and the restoration of other economic institutions that had previously been abolished, such as stock exchanges (OECD, 2003:31). The reforms centered on the promotion of market mechanisms to counter the inefficiencies of allocation and distribution from the state planning system. Also, in an effort to make the system more flexible to change and to take advantage of market opportunities, decentralization processes allocated much decision making power to the localities. Economic decentralization ushered in two forces that have been critical to the reforms' success. First, local officials and economic organizations were given the autonomy to pursue various economic initiatives. Possessing autonomy, individual provinces and municipalities soon began to make economic decisions and innovations in developmental strategies in order to gain advantages over neighboring regions and provinces. This corresponds to the second force of economic decentralization, a level of competition among local officials vying for economic opportunities (Guthrie, 2006:45-46). The other element of Deng's policy reversal was the 'opening up' of the economy to foreign trade and investment, which consequently inserted China into the world economy (OECD, 2003:31-32). The Open Door policy was adopted in order to enable participation in the international division of labour, so as to increase efficiency, and to transfer foreign technology into China through foreign direct investment (FDI), thus accelerating its rate of technological progress and high-quality consumer goods (Chai & Roy, 2006:19). Highly successful, it launched China into sustained, rapid growth by using the country's low-cost and disciplined labour force to produce light industrial products for export (Hutchings, 2000:226). Two-way merchandise trade has more than doubled, from 11.3 percent of current-price GDP in 1979 to 26.8 percent in 1990. Today, exports account for more than one quarter of the country's GDP and imports amount to one-fifth (Krieger, 2005:90). Furthermore, the changing

composition of exports and imports demonstrates an expansion of the capacity to manufacture a greater quantity and variety of items, and also an expansion of consumer choice in the domestic market (OECD, 2003:33). In 1979, trade exports largely consisted of bulk commodities and simple products such as textiles. By 1991, increasingly sophisticated manufactured goods comprised 77.5 percent of exports and 83.1 percent of imports (NBS, 2001). Engaging in the global economy greatly increased foreign trade and encouraged inward investment, particularly in FDI. It also prioritized growth in the coastal region, in special economic zones and other 'open cities' designated by the state (Yang, 1997). These economic reforms have spurred two simultaneous transformations that have been important in changing Chinese society (Naughton, 1999:30). The first is the transition from a planned economy towards one based on the market. The second is the structural transformation from a predominantly agrarian economy towards an increasingly urbanized, industrializing economy (Hutchings, 2000:18).

Market transition in China includes elements common to all market transitions. Chai and Roy (2006) note that the transition from a planned economy to a market economy normally involves the following steps: the liberalization of the economy from bureaucratic control; the establishment of market institutions, in particular the product and factor markets; privatization; and control of macro-instability. In this regard, China has made great strides towards its goal of establishing a market economy. This is most prominent in the shift from bureaucratic control of resources to market-determined allocation, and the corresponding shifts in the nature of political and economic power (Naughton, 1999:30). A central principle of the reform effort has been to reduce dependency on the state-run economy and to encourage private initiative. Although its initial purpose was not to embrace private business, as reformers became concerned with unemployment and the provision of consumer goods and services, policies were initiated that legalized private production and commerce, unintentionally contributing to the growth of the private economy (Parris, 1999:262). Legitimizing private business led to increases in participation and growth in the private sector. By 1995 there were over 25 million individual and over 650

thousand private enterprises registered with the state. These accounted for 14.6 percent of the country's GDP, a figure that is considered by many to be significantly understated (Parris, 1999:267-268).

China's transitional approach has differed from other communist countries in several ways. First of all, economic development has always been on the minds of policy makers. The idea of postponing economic development until after system transformation was never seriously considered. It was always assumed that system transformation would take place concurrently with economic development and that the economy would drive market transition forward, guaranteeing its eventual success (Naughton, 1999:32). To this end, reform effectiveness was judged on whether or not it contributed to the goal of short-term economic growth.

Another difference in China's transitional approach is that instead of engaging in 'shock therapy' and the rapid introduction of free market economics, as was the Russian case (Gerber & Hout, 1998); the state has consistently and methodically guided the reform process. The government's methodical experimentation with different institutional forms and the party's gradual withdrawal of control over the economy has brought about a 'quiet revolution' in the Chinese economy. This is a slow and gradual process that must be placed in the context of China's recent institutional history. The market economy has arrived throughout most of China, and it has done so under the guise of gradual institutional reform under the communist mantle (Guthrie, 2006:72). Similarly, while the ultimate economic objective of the reforms is to establish a full market economy, its development continues to be a gradual process (Gao & Chi, 1997). The state has experimented with, and gradually introduced the policies and laws through which the new markets that govern economic processes in China have been constructed. In this sense, China's successful path of economic reform has been gradual, experimental, and fundamentally political (Guthrie, 2006:13). This approach is reflected in Deng's famous statement of "groping for stones to cross the river," meaning that the reform agenda is not guided by any blueprint. Instead, it relies on pragmatic and piecemeal engineering to solve its problems (Hu, 2000:123-124). While piecemeal engineering is generally thought of as

being practiced by open democratic systems, it is premised on not trying to re-design society as a whole, but proceeding slowly and gradually, carefully comparing at each stage the results achieved with the results expected, always on the lookout for the avoidable, unwanted consequences of any reform (Popper, 1961:66-67). This approach represents a major change in reform policy because it is rooted in pragmatism, not ideology. Unlike Mao, Deng endorsed the pursuit of private interests and tied the realization of the public good to the attainment of material prosperity and national power rather than the attainment of an abstract revolutionary vision (Parris, 1999:264). Deng proposed practice as the sole judge of truth “in accordance with the Marxist spirit of seeking truth from facts” (Hu, 2000:122). In practice, this means an important change in perspective away from ‘Marxism’ as an ideological framework towards ‘science’ as the basis for practical political measures. This represents a paradigmatic shift away from “Maoist utopianism,” towards “Dengist pragmatism” (Burton, 1990:1-4). As the party attempts to engage the free market while maintaining the Chinese Communist ‘essence’ (Hutchings, 2000:19), it still clings to its ideological roots by adopting linguistic phrases that seek to explain the current reality by retaining allegiance to socialism. These include adherence to such catchphrases as the ‘socialist market economy,’ ‘Chinese-style socialism,’ ‘a socialist democracy’ or ‘a harmonious society.’ In practice however, these have all meant the encouragement of the profit motive. Communism and the construction of egalitarian socialism are placed on the backburner while economic modernization is now elevated as the single most important goal of China’s long-term development strategy. Since 1978, everything else, including social development, has been subordinated to meeting this objective.

Redefining obsolete revolutionary goals in terms of national and individual enrichment, the reforms, economic modernization and ameliorating the standard of living of its citizens were deemed the most effective way of maintaining the party’s legitimacy in the face of the people. Seen in this light, the origins of the reforms have not been intended to introduce democracy or a free market economy, but to find a way for the CCP to survive (Huang, 2003). It was the decline of regime legitimacy that

prompted the party to switch from ideological legitimacy to performance legitimacy. Once reforms were initiated the prevailing Maoist logic was replaced by one that demands that living standards increase continuously, thus economic reforms continued (Fewsmith, 1999:93). The party's legitimacy is highly conditional and rests on the leadership's ability to produce results that are tested against improving standards of living. Marketization undermines the legitimacy of the CCP. But, this may not be a problem so long as economic development remains strong and social conflicts remain under control (Fewsmith, 2000:161). As long as it has sufficient patronage to deploy and continues to deliver the economic goods, there is little incentive to seek alternatives or to rock the boat (Saich, 2004:23). Thus, while the goal of catching up with western countries' per capita income levels has not changed, the raising of the consumption standard of the Chinese population has become an ever more important goal of development (Chai & Roy, 2006).

Reforms originated in the countryside. In 1979 the first round of reforms disbanded the communes and introduced the 'household responsibility system' (HRS). By doing away with the communes, the reforms placed many functions of economic responsibility in the hands of individual households. Whereas the old commune system was based on central planning, large-scale production and unified distribution, the HRS made the household the nucleus of agricultural production, allowing them to decide what, how, and how much they would produce. Under this system, farmers contracted the land and sold a portion of their output to the state. Households took over management of agricultural production and after turning over a certain amount of procurement (low price) and tax (zero price) after harvest. Fulfilling these obligations, they were then free to sell the rest of their surplus as they saw fit. This policy essentially recreated the traditional farm household economy (Naughton, 2007:89). The return of family farming and the profit motive meant that farmers had the right, at least to some extent, of doing business on their own, holding farmers' markets, and engaging in side production. The policy proved extremely successful, and by the end of 1981, 90 percent of the country had adopted the new mode of production. In 1982 this became the officially acknowledged mode of production, and in 1983, the

people's commune was officially abolished, replaced by the township as the basis of government (Naughton, 2007). The HRS had three positive consequences. First, it allowed an infusion of income into individual households. Second, with income linked to output, peasants showed enthusiasm for production, stimulating grain output significantly. Annual production rates grew at 7.4 percent annually between 1978 and 1984, from 305 tons to 407 tons (Lin, 1996:17). Third, by creating incentives for individuals to produce and then allowing them the autonomy to do so, a large constituency was created that supported the economic reforms from the very beginning (Guthrie, 2006:45).

The HRS broke the bond of peasants with the land (Cannon, 2000:18). Besides boosting production, the new system allowed peasants to engage in industrial and commercial activities (Hu, 2000:126), subsequently leading to the structural transformation of China as the labour force moved from agriculture to industry and other nonagricultural occupations. The subsequent transformation of agricultural organization (the implementation of household farming, the breakdown of the communes in favour of townships and villages, and the emergence of rural markets), saw unnecessary surplus labour begin to explore various profit making enterprises, often becoming factory workers in the booming rural township and village enterprises (TVEs) that had sprung up around the country. From a peak of more than 70 percent 1978, agricultural employment dropped to 60 percent of the total labour force in 1991, and then to 50 percent in 1996 (Naughton, 1999:41). By boosting local industry and TVEs in the countryside, the reforms altered the relationship of the people to the land in terms of control, ownership and rights of use, and by providing opportunities to migrate in search of work.

TVEs are collectively owned businesses outside the formal state sector. As the state decentralized control over economic decision making, the reforms created conditions where villages, local governments and private businesses banded together to operate factories for the processing of agricultural products and light manufacturing. General economic liberalization included a relaxation of the state monopoly on the purchasing of agricultural products, allowing more to remain on rural markets and



thus available to rural enterprises for processing. Reformers also gave enterprises and producers more decision-making autonomy and better incentives, such as lower tax rates and even tax exemption. Faced with few restrictions, TVEs were essentially free to engage in any activity they could find a market for. These industries grew rapidly throughout the 1980s, taking advantage of market competition, a shortage of consumer products and high prices. In 1978 rural enterprise accounted for 22 percent of industrial output, 30 percent in 1984, and 36 percent in 1988 (Hutchings, 2000:226). From 1978 to the mid 1990s, TVEs were the most dynamic part of the Chinese economy. TVE employment grew from 28 million in 1978 to 135 million in 1996, a 9 percent annual growth rate. Value added growth from TVEs increased from less than 6 percent of GDP in 1978 to 26 percent in 1996 (Naughton, 2007:274-275). The success of TVEs served to fuel China's reform program throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s.

TVE growth played an important role in the transformation of the Chinese economy as it absorbed surplus agricultural labour, increased rural incomes, and helped to narrow the rural-urban divide. The emergence of TVEs also led to the emergence of a competitive product market. TVEs imparted a new dynamism into China's economy, eroding the planned economy and spearheading the emergence of a market economy (Fewsmith, 1999:94). The loss of protected markets deprived state owned enterprises (SOEs) of the high markups and surplus earnings they had previously enjoyed, causing changes in the system of industrial finance and the position of industrial firms as SOEs were forced to shift their orientation toward profitability.

Having succeeded in rural reform, Deng and his policymakers shifted their attention to urban reforms, on developing productive forces, deemphasizing public ownership and on dismantling the planned economy. Urban reforms began by granting individual economic activities and relaxing restrictions on population movement. In 1984 the state called for an overall reform of the planned economy and the development of a commodity economy. These measures included granting more autonomy to enterprises, emphasizing material incentives, utilizing market

mechanisms, separating government administration from enterprise management and reforming the price system (Hu, 2000:127). Allowing markets to determine prices figured prominently in the country's transition from a planned to a market economy. Prices were divided into three categories: major industrial products such as steel were set by the state, price ceilings and floors were established for other industrial products, and most consumer goods were allowed to fluctuate (Hu, 2000:127). This system of having planned and free-floating prices within the same economy is often referred to as a 'dual track' economic system. This system was effective in guiding and sustaining China's economy through the first decade of reforms.

Although the Chinese economic ship experienced relatively smooth sailing throughout most of the 1980s, the boat was rocked, and nearly capsized at the end of the decade amongst a stagnating economy and an unsatisfied population hungry for change. Increasing material standards of living led to new demands for information, for new kinds of cultural products, for new careers, and for new kinds of political participation. Furthermore, the dual track economy of planned and free floating prices had exhausted itself at this time, as industries involved in the latter price system became more efficient and productive than those in the former. This resulted in a general decline in living standards. Inflation and unemployment began to rise in the mid 1980s as the initial phase of reform began to run its course. The retail price index rose 12.5 percent in 1985, 7 percent in 1986, 7.2 percent in 1987, and 18.5 percent in 1988 (Hu, 2000:133). The declining economy added fuel to the fire as anger over rampant state corruption and student demands for more freedom, accelerated political reform, a redress of socioeconomic problems, and in some cases demands for general elections, a multiparty system, or the termination of one-party rule (Hu, 2000:134) all came to a head in at the end of May and the beginning of June 1989 in Tiananmen Square. A result of many interrelated factors of Deng's economic and political reforms, the 1989 protests and the subsequent violent government crackdown on June 4<sup>th</sup> 1989 had a significant impact on future reforms.

Initially, it appeared as though China would roll back its reform process. However, state efforts to tighten control in the presence of open markets only created

new incentives to increase marketization (Naughton, 1995:119-127). After a relatively short period, a number of particular and structural factors made sure reforms continued. One was the role of Deng Xiaoping. While he did authorize the use of force to end the demonstrations, he also insisted that economic reform and opening up continue. Deng stabilized the system, preventing the Chinese political system from going out of control and reverting back to hard-lined communism, and then promoted a new round of reforms and their institutionalization throughout Chinese society (Fewsmith, 1999:98). Furthermore, groups arose with powerful vested interests in further reform, such as export-oriented businessmen, farmers, and intellectuals. These groups helped to ensure that reforms did not expire for long after Tiananmen, and that they resumed with more intensity soon after (Naughton, 1999:37). Another factor was the further disintegration of the role of ideology. Tiananmen shattered whatever legitimacy remained in Marxism-Leninism, forcing the regime to base its continued existence ever more on its ability to “deliver the goods.”

Following the domestic and international backlash that followed, the CCP found itself facing another legitimacy crisis. In order to right the ship, Deng made his now historical ‘Southern Tour’ to the city of Shenzhen in 1992, visiting special economic zones and promoting additional reforms along the way. Deng reemphasized the need for accelerated economic reform and specifically reaffirmed a non-ideological, pragmatic approach to experimentation. To this end, he declared that “it does not matter if policies are labeled socialist or free market, so long as they foster development.” As was the case in 1978, further reforms were seen as the CCP’s only chance at political survival (Fewsmith, 2000:158). Insisting that only economic growth could save socialism, he redefined socialism in terms of the ‘three advantages.’ Reforms would continue, and would be judged on whether they were advantageous to the development of socialist productive forces, whether they increased the comprehensive strength of a socialist nation, and whether they raised the people’s standard of living (Deng, 1993:372). Everything that contributed to this was encouraged, with the caveat that it did not contradict party rule. From then on, the Chinese people rededicated themselves to making money like never before. Results

were spectacular: growth soared, cities were engulfed in construction, the performance of stock and futures markets took off, and foreign investment spread the economic boom along the coastal region (Hutchings, 2000:14). This approach was canonized at the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party in October 1992 by the CCP as the “social market economy.”

Deng’s Southern Tour represents such a significant shift in the reform process that it is helpful to look at China’s development since 1978 in two separate phases. During the first phase (1978-1992), reform consisted of overall decentralization, shifting power and resources from the hands of central planners to local actors, all the while still protecting core state interests and state owned enterprises. However, by 1993 this pattern of reform had largely run its course. As the market sphere expanded, it became increasingly necessary to build a firmer institutional basis for the market economy (Naughton, 2007:90). Having established a firm macroeconomic policy base during the first phase, the focus of reforms shifted toward dissolving the dual track economic plan, creating uniform rules and tax rates for all sectors of the economy, permitting competition across a broad range of activities and on a level playing field, and setting prices in a unified market (Naughton, 1999:34-39). Deng’s Southern Tour marks the second phase of reforms, focusing on regulatory and administrative restructuring in key market sectors: the banking system, the tax system, the system of corporate governance, and the external sector, through membership in the World Trade Organization. To this end, two major policies were adopted on January 1, 1994. One was the unification of the exchange rate, which was followed by a gradual shift to current account convertibility; the second was the creation of a new fiscal system with a broader tax base and lower, nearly uniform rates primarily based on a value-added tax. These were supplemented by efforts to restructure SOEs and commercial banks, and the limited conversion of SOEs to joint stock companies. This period also saw significant increases in privatization and downsizing in the SOE sector (Naughton, 2007:297-298). The conversion of SOEs to a unified commercial form is a primary element of the reforms. The restructuring of these companies picked up after the Company Law and Banking Law were passed in 1994 and 1995.

Accompanying this second policy has been the leadership turning its attention to issues such as improving SOE governance mechanisms, privatizing enterprise, easing institutional impediments to rural-urban labour flows, improving the banking system and the further integration of domestic markets with foreign competition (Naughton, 2000:56-57). All of these changes are characterized by a system where all firms are treated equally, and subject to essentially the same rules, tax rates, and price-setting mechanisms (Naughton, 1999:39). The new approach to economic transition merged with the structural transformation of the economy, intensifying social change. Increasingly, in the 1990s, urbanization, migration, and career mobility drove economic change, instead of government economic reform policy (Naughton, 1999:43).

Economically, the reforms have been a tremendous success. In the 1980s, China's real GDP grew at an average annual rate of 10.2 percent. From 1990-1996, this increased to 12.3 percent. Overall, the economy has grown by an annual average of 10 percent since 1978 and in 2006 its GDP (in billions of US dollars) was 2,644.68, representing an annual growth of 10.7 percent over the previous year (NBS, 2007). Today China has the sixth largest economy in the world in terms of overall GDP, and is second only to the United States when GDP is adjusted for purchasing power within the country (Guthrie, 2006:4). These enormous growth rates are reinforced by successes such as the doubling of the standard of living for many Chinese, and a dramatic drop in poverty. Absolute poverty has dropped from 250 million people in 1978 to 28 million in 2002 (Saich, 2004). Since 1978, nearly every aspect of the technological and institutional foundations of industry has been transformed. China's industrialization since the reform period has produced remarkable achievements. New industries have been created and China has become the industrial workshop of the world. Its industry has grown at a real annual rate of about 15 percent since 1980, and in 2000 industrial output was ten times what it was in 1978 (Naughton, 2007:298).

The overall success of China's gradual economic reform can be attributed to two factors. First, through gradual reform, the state retained its role as a stabilizing force in the midst of the uncertainty that accompanied the transition from a planned to a

market economy. The dual track system kept large SOEs partially on the plan, while at the same time gave them incentives to generate extra income through selling what they could produce above the plan in the country's emerging consumer markets. As market practices became more successful, their 'market' ratio grew as their 'plan' ratio decreased, giving them the time to learn the practices of setting prices, competing for contracts, and efficient production (Naughton, 1995). Second, the state gradually pushed economic control down the state hierarchy to the localities. This created an incentive structure for local administrators to engage in the economic development of their villages and townships (Naughton, 1995). This decentralization has meant that since the 1980s, individuals have increasingly had more freedom to pursue their fortunes in the newly emerging markets of the Chinese economy (Guthrie, 2006:41).

Despite these successes, the road traveled since 1978 has not been without problems. Environmental pollution is a growing problem in China. Two thirds of urban Chinese live in medium to high levels of air pollution, 58 percent of China's rivers and lakes are polluted, and the groundwater in more than half of its cities is also seriously polluted (SR, 2006:17). Rampant pollution has a direct effect on China's economy by diluting China's GDP increase. According to The World Bank, losses resulting from air and water pollution in 1995 equaled 8 percent of that year's GDP. This figure is thought to be growing and may now be over 15 percent (SR, 2006:12).

Concerns over ownership also remain an issue. Even though reforms amounted to the acceptance of the failure of public ownership, and in the country farmers are granted private tenancy of land, the land is still technically owned by the state. In urban centers, SOEs continue to cause problems, distorting the ownership environment and exacerbating social problems that have come to the fore since 1978. There has been a devastating reduction of welfare and social safety nets in the countryside as health, education, and welfare security are largely left to be dealt with by the peasants themselves (Cannon, 2000:3).

Other problems revolve around equality and equity (Hu, 2000:128). Economic inequality rose sharply once China decentralized and opened up, and experienced an

explosion of foreign trade and FDI (Kanbur & Zhang, 2006). FDI has played an important role in China's economy by stimulating trade growth and promoting productivity improvements in the domestic economy (OECD, 2003:29). China became the world's largest recipient of FDI in 2002 (OECD, 2003:3), but most of it is concentrated in eastern coastal provinces, particularly in Guangdong, thus contributing to regional economic disparity. Significant income inequality in China not only exists between regions, between rural and urban areas, but between villages within a province and between households within a village as well (Wan & Zhou, 2006:117). In 1985 the highest per capita rural net income was 3.2 times that of the lowest. This increased to 4.3 in 2002 (NBS, 2003). The reforms have also served to perpetuate existing economic disparity between rural and urban areas. The development strategy of heavy industrial development played a particularly significant role in creating an enormous rural-urban gap in the pre-reform period. China's economic development was achieved through urbanization at the cost of rural interests. From 1954 to 1978, the state siphoned 510 billion Rmb from the countryside to support urban development by cutting the prices of agricultural products supplied to cities, resulting in a wider economic gap between rural and urban areas. This disparity continues to persist, and in 2005 the income gap between urban and rural residents was 3.2 to 1 (SR, 2006:13). Obviously, the distribution of economic gains is far from equal. Cronyism remains prominent, especially in localities where local officials hold enormous power. Corruption has flourished (Naughton, 1999:37).

In post reform China, a key dimension of inequality is between the inland and coastal provinces. Economic gains have not been evenly distributed across regions, as coastal provinces have attracted more FDI and generated more trade volume than inland provinces (Kanbur & Zhang, 2006:104). Openness and decentralization have contributed to the rapid increase in inland-coastal disparity in the 1980s and 1990s (Kanbur & Zhang, 2006:108), to the extent that the 2000 Gini coefficient of regional inequality in China exceeded the peak of inequality reached during the Cultural Revolution in 1976 and the Great Famine of the Great Leap Forward in 1960. Inequality in 2000 was 16 percent higher than in 1960 (Kanbur & Zhang, 2006:93). A

significant share of this inequality is a direct result of the policies taken in the name of economic modernization. The “Coastal Economic Development Strategy” that China has followed since 1978 has widened the gap between the coast and the interior regions (Lai, 2002). The coast’s share of state investment increased from 42.2 percent between 1976 and 1980 to 53.6 percent between 1996 and 1997, whereas the central and western regions’ shares dwindled from 50 percent to 38.8 percent. Similarly, per capita GDP in the coastal region grew at 10.2 percent per annum between 1978 and 1995, compared to 7.5 percent in the western region (Lai, 2002:437). Income inequality has serious implications for China’s ability to maintain sustainable growth, and can undermine social and political stability (Wan & Zhou, 2006:115).

The 1992 shift in policy direction effectively marked the beginning of “reform with losers” and the breaking of the “iron rice bowl” which guaranteed virtual full employment from birth to death. Since 1993, the benefits of modernization and development are spread less equally among the population. This has increased rapidly in recent years, and the concentration of wealth at the top of the spectrum has meant suffering at the lower end. Groups and individuals that had been sheltered from competition during the first phase of reforms by the state are now subject to employment uncertainty for the first time since the establishment of the PRC. Laid off SOE workers (*xiagang*) represent one such substantial social group that has incurred losses during this second phase of reforms. An example of this is represented in the plight of laid off (*xiagang*) workers since the mid 1990s.

After the opening up policy, there were many social problems that emerged. The reforms solved some old problems but also created new ones. At that time we let them (SOE workers) have their work but actually it is a kind of ‘invisible unemployment’ because their working efficiency was very low. Because it is a type of “cooperative work,” each of them will not work very hard because you cannot notice who performing well and who is not performing well. These types of enterprises are in a weak position in the new market economy. The enterprises had no choice but to



lay off workers (Interview with A).

*Xiagang* workers have been particularly vulnerable since the acceleration of reforms in the 1990s. SOE reform took place slowly and sheltered its workers from the initial phase of reforms throughout the 1980s. However, as SOEs faced increased market competition from TVEs and an influx of foreign products, authorities began to cut them off, reducing their access to funding from government banks. TVEs, besides fulfilling consumer desires, were supported by local governments, who themselves benefit from the increased tax revenues provided by TVEs (Oi, 1999). This has cut into the monopoly rents once enjoyed by SOEs, causing a decline in central government revenue just as local government revenues grow rapidly (Fewsmith, 1999:105). Over time, SOE subsidies increased even as their profits declined, culminating in a failed attempt at reviving the planned economy after the Tiananmen incident. Following the second wave of reforms, SOEs and their associated problems began to threaten state solvency and the existing fiscal system. While approximately 20 percent of these enterprises ran deficits in the 1980s, this figure rose to 30 percent in the early 1990s, 43.7 percent in 1995 (Yang, 1997:3), and in 1996 began to run a net loss (Fewsmith, 1999:103). This forced state leadership to turn its attention to improving SOE governance mechanisms. Enterprise reform entered a new phase in 1997 when Premier Zhu Rongji set a three year target for the completion of SOE reform. In order to improve efficiency and standards of management, enterprises were given greater latitude to transform their ownership structure (Hung & Chiu, 2003:204,205). To date, these efforts have had some success, but they still have a way to go. As one respondent commented:

Some of the leaders of the enterprises do not have management or leadership experience so that is why they did not know how to compete in the market. Because in the past they produced things according to government quotas. But now they have to compete with foreign private companies in market competition (Interview with A).

Furthermore, many SOEs have yet to fully submit to market principles, the size of the state sector is still very large and the role of the state in economic activity is still overwhelming. Most importantly, the factor markets have yet to be fully developed and budget constraints for SOEs remain weak (Chai & Roy, 2006:66). In an effort of modernize their industries, many managers have had no choice but to lay off workers in the face of competition. As one researcher put it, the problem of *xiagang*, or laid off workers from SOEs, is a pressing social problem in China.

There is a large group of people in China right now called the ‘hard to be employed’ group of people because it is hard for them to find a job. There are several reasons for this. For example, in the past they worked for a SOE. Once they get into a SOE they want all guarantees from the SOE and mentally they become very dependent on the system, dependent on enterprise, the state, the country. They are not independent anymore. When SOEs go bankrupt the workers have nothing to do, but because SOE are state owned, they think they are still state workers and should be taken care of by the government. It is not a private company. Since they cannot find work, they get unemployment subsidies and low government allowance and guarantee by government. They live together in enterprise communities so it is easy for them to get together and get organized by a leader to protest against the government. They protest for better lives, for jobs, improvements. You will see this kind of situation at least once a month around Xi’an. When I work near the government residence I often pass by these protests. The traffic is often blocked by their protests. The state says you can protest peacefully but you cannot block traffic. So there are lots of policemen there to make sure nothing happens. They have organizational leaders, have their protests banners and are allowed to choose one representative to go see the government and have face to face conversations. Otherwise they will just block traffic. Protesters are mostly

*xiagang* people... It is very important to do reemployment research because *xiagang* people do not have enough technical skills. They also have a mental dependence on the government. They do not want to learn new skills. When they work they think it is too hard, too tiring. So they become psychologically imbalanced. They do not have any skills and learning new ones is too hard. They may think why do you have a higher salary just sitting in an office? But I do hard manual labour but I do not make much? They may remember their working lives in the state owned companies, because no matter if they did easy or difficult work they always got the same decent salary. Now they have to work very hard but do not get much money. In the past all the workers were the owners, masters and equals, so they could argue with the leaders of the companies. So before they all had equal political status... Recently I have handed out 100s of questionnaires about this situation and have already collected several of them... When I make the questionnaire, there was one question: do you have any technical skills? That is to say, do you have a major? Do you have skills? Like me I am a teacher I can teach in the schools. If I am a worker, what can I do with my skills? I found that most of them answer “no” I do not have any skills, few of them answered yes to having transferable skills. The main reason is that they worked in large industrial companies. Now the market has changed to a market economy and lots of industry is no longer in demand. Like the silk industry. One of the silk industries called Xi'an Silk Manufacturing Industry became bankrupt recently. All the workers were laid off in February, 2005. Their skill was sewing (Interview with A).

There has been more separation between politics and the economy, and the state has been gradually removing itself from direct control of enterprises since the mid 1990s, striking at the foundation of the old planned economy. This general separation of political and economic spheres denotes a movement away from a totalitarian

political system towards a more authoritarian one, which is a more favourable environment for individual autonomy, and perhaps even the emergence of democracy (Fewsmith, 1999:105).

#### 4.2 Political Reform and Transformation

After 1949, the CCP sought to institutionalize political control, by establishing a state-society relationship based on strong organizational control over society by the state (Whyte & Parish, 1984) and the organizational dependency of individuals on socialist economic institutions (Walder, 1986). The end effect of the CCP's 1949 political revolution was a sharpening of power between the state and society: the state became more powerful and the individual weaker than ever before (Liu, 1996:223). Although the CCP's rise to power was not experienced by most Chinese as a form of personal or political liberation, it was seen as a marked improvement because of the order and discipline that the CCP brought to the political environment. Most Chinese, being poor, set more importance on the 'right to development,' meaning food and clothing, rather than in free speech and free elections (Hutchings, 2000:100). People in and around poverty are more concerned with survival than anything else.

China's political system is based on classic Leninism where one party dominates political discourse and tries to control all aspects of society. Even though there are eight other political parties in the PRC, but the only one that has ever mattered is the CCP. Within the CCP, the Political Bureau and its Standing Committee are the two pillars of political power in the PRC. Originally established in 1921, the CCP rose to power in 1949 and has been the face of Chinese politics ever since. Under the leadership of the CCP, the determining features of the PRC since 1949 have been a centrally planned economy with predominant, if not total, social ownership of the means of production overseen by a hierarchical and highly centralized political power structure concentrated within a one-party state, with an atomized society where the agents of civil society are weak or ineffective (Saich, 2004). Although political participation in China before the reforms was at a very high level, it did not have any impact on the political agenda as it was limited to public expression of support for

centrally agreed policy preferences. Political participation was mobilized by the leadership using mass campaigns and role models to show public support for the party and their policies, not for individual rights or democracy.

The political system reflects a political culture that is highly paternalistic, fixed and relatively passive, where society is governed by elites who rule by moral example (Pye, 1985). Like other Asian countries, Chinese politics is characterized by oligarchs who dominate political processes and ensure that less elitist social forces cannot successfully use democratic institutions as channels for asserting and pursuing their interests, despite the existence of various democratic institutions such as limited elections and voting (Zweig, 2004:111).

The nature of China's socialist system before 1978 meant that the possibilities for change were limited and the areas of policy debate tended to oscillate along a continuum of a key set of policy alternatives (Lieberthal & Oksenberg, 1992). A lack of need to be responsive to social forces and the eradication of potential opposition meant that policymaking was monolithic, and less grounded in reality than it was in ideology. Coercion within the system prevailed and was heightened by a traditional statist culture, the dominance of the party over all institutions, and the individual domination of Mao Zedong over the decision making process (Saich, 2004:219). While this system allowed policy decisions to be made quickly and efficiently, it was a system hampered by low on information flows. Feedback on policy was inefficient and inaccurate, with those in lower positions passing up only the information that those in higher positions wanted to hear (Saich, 2004:222). It was only after reformers began to undermine these pillars that fundamental change became feasible.

This happened after the death of Mao in 1976 and the introduction of economic reforms in 1978. Reform not only led to tremendous economic growth, but also generated pressure to reform China's political and administrative systems (Burton, 1990; Fewsmith, 1999). The reforms have intentionally and unintentionally led to significant changes in the party's role in the political system, its relationship to state and society, its capacity to command obedience and its membership. In the upper levels of government, the situation has not changed much since 1949. Reflecting

traditional Chinese political culture, politics remain uninstitutionalized and outcomes are based on who has more power, as there is no defined forum where conflicts are mediated or where decisions can be referred (Fewsmith, 1999:99). Opportunities to participate in the exercise of political power are closely held, and leaders respond to popular opinion as a matter of choice or tactics, not out of obligation or fear of removal (O'brien, 2002:216-217). However, there have been some structural changes in the political system since. Before 1976, Mao's word was truth incarnate and held unchallenged authority. While China's political system is still authoritarian and committed to a Leninist model of political control, it does not have the same amount of authority as it did before the reforms because policy within the party and its relationship with other institutions is more contested than in the past (Saich, 2004:91). While still tightly controlled, policy making is now more open and consultative than it ever had under Mao (Fewsmith, 2000:152). And, while China has not experienced much progress in overall democratization, it has experienced a significant extent of political liberalization.

There have been two major transitions in China's political institutions since 1978 (Guthrie, 2006:93). Both of these demonstrate attempts by the CCP to maintain its political legitimacy through self-transformation. The first amounts to administrative reforms and the effort to eliminate bureaucratic inefficiency (Deng, 1987:152-153). This represents a changing relationship between the CCP and the government. Attempts have been made to 'rationalize' the government in order to ensure the success of economic reform. To this end, the party has been removed from the daily management of the state system and economic enterprises. The second major transition is political liberalization. Diminishing the role for planning required the partial withdrawal of the government from sections of the economy and stricter separation between party and government. Economic reforms could not be deepened without political reform. Political reforms represent a change in system rather than a change of system. Chinese political reform is characterized not by democratization, but by liberalization and institutionalization (Hu, 2000:137). The process of creating 'rational' economic processes in China saw significant growth since 1978, especially

after 1989 in the wake of Tiananmen and Deng's Southern Tour. The rationalization of reforms, while incomplete, marks an important step towards their institutionalization (Fewsmith, 1999:105). Economic reform has generated pressures to change the role of politics and the role of the party in Chinese society, resulting in the separation of politics and the economy, increasing institutionalization of the state and the building of more 'rational' bureaucratic structures, and to regularize politics through the use of more objective criteria and rule-based solutions to resolve political conflict (Fewsmith, 1999: 92-109). The use of 'objective rules' has added an element of formalism, furthering the institutionalization of the political system (Fewsmith, 1999:100). Reforming the bureaucracy and reducing the role of planning by the state has introduced an element of stability, predictability and legality into political life. The reforms have encouraged the emergence of norms that curtailed the arbitrary exercise of power. Politics is now supposed to be treated according to formal procedures, including some elections and representative institutions. Political activity was restricted and regularized, including the repudiation of the campaign style of politics that had dominated during the Cultural Revolution. People no longer participate as a mobilized mass, but as citizens involved in the functioning of established institutions. This retreat of the party-state has been one of the most significant aspects of political reform.

The reforms also initiated changes in the organization, structure and the role of government. With the reforms, Deng sought to strengthen formal structures within the government. There was a greater emphasis on collective leadership, on not wielding 'big sticks' in criticizing opponents, on intraparty supervision and control, routinizing cadre promotion, and establishing a retirement system. Furthermore, the National Peoples Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress were restored and began to take on a greater role, particularly as the NPC became more active in formulating economic legislation (Fewsmith, 2000:152). The NPC, China's legislature, has moved from a 'rubberstamp' institution to one that discusses government laws and on occasion even criticizes them (Guthrie, 2006:93-94). Efforts to reduce the size of the government bureaucracy included the abolition and merging

of entire ministries was conducted in 1988 and 1998 (Hutchings, 2000:161). Party officials were told to leave administration to the government and focus on 'supervision' and policy matters. There were accompanied by attempts to establish 'horizontal' relationships between ministries so as to ensure flexibility (Hutchings, 2000:162). The policymaking process, while still tightly controlled, became more open and consultative than it ever had under Mao.

Further changes were made to party membership composition, which had been overrun by a gerontocracy. Personnel reform was pushed for by leaders of economic enterprises, and to a lesser extent, service units such as universities, as well as leading members of the party (Burns, 1989:739). Deng facilitated the retirement of older cadres as well as the recruitment of a younger generation composed of technical professionals (Hu, 2000:131), who were needed in order to manage its more complex economy, and who were chosen based in part on their technical qualifications and job performance, not their ideological convictions. At all levels, there was a turnover of personnel as older, poorly educated officials gave way to younger, professionally qualified staff. This revitalized the ranks of government and set limits to the system of lifelong tenure. Economic reform has placed a premium on expertise. This has produced a vast growth in the number of professionals, especially economists and engineers, and a growing acceptance of their role in the polity. The expansion of expertise and the growth of economic organs has meant that information acquisition is better, and that it is better utilized in the decision making process (Fewsmith, 1999:95). Changes in party membership were made even easier after 2002 when the theory of the "three represents" of Jiang Zemin, the former president and general secretary of the CCP, was enshrined in the party's constitution. According to this theory, the CCP would from then on represent advanced productive forces, advanced culture, and the majority of the people's interests (Jiang, 2001). One of the outcomes of this meant that the CCP would go beyond its traditional membership base and accept outstanding individuals from other sectors of society, especially private entrepreneurs and intellectuals. This effectively reversed a 1989 ban on private business persons becoming party members. While it is designed to give



representatives of the growing private sector a share in the system, it is also designed to co-opt important pieces of the private sector and thus help consolidate the party's dominance and prolong its rule (Yang, 2001:19). However, given the state's propensity for economic development, and because the social sciences remain relatively suspect in the eyes of government, the tendency has been to recruit those who have had technical training, particularly engineering, thus giving China's political elite a very technocratic cast (Fewsmith, 1999:96).

Outside of party membership, China's more pragmatic government also seeks input from interest groups and professional associations to help shape policy and advance the goals of modernization. Economic reforms depend on contributions of groups such as scientists and other intellectuals, managers and new entrepreneurs. "It does not matter whether a cat is black or white, as long as it can catch mice, it is a good one" (Deng Xiaoping in Hu, 2000:121). To this effect, it has encouraged the participation of intellectuals and social organizations, gradually delegating control throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The flourishing of both these groups represents the triumph of pragmatism over ideology and of pluralism over a monolithic one-party state (Ogden, 2000:268).

Legal reform has been another important part of China's political transformation (Hu, 2000:131). A comprehensive criminal code and a code of criminal procedure were adopted in 1979. In 1982, the constitution reinstated the principle that "all citizens are equal before the law," entitled to freedom of the press, assembly, association, conscience, and personal correspondence. Besides regulating the legal process of the nation, laws have also been directed specifically at the functioning of the state. In 1989 the Administrative Procedure Law enabled citizens to sue the government for the first time (Hu, 2000:131). Similarly, by creating laws such as the Labour Law and Company Law in 1994, and the National Compensation Law in 1995, the party became more accountable to the legal system, subsequently making it more difficult for the party to rule over the population (Guthrie, 2006:66). Unfortunately, while legal reforms have improved the political system and have set high standards for its leaders, the enactment of laws is different than their enforcement, which as

many analysts have noticed (Hu, 2000), is not sufficient enough to make them a part of social reality.

Political liberalization means the process of establishing certain effective rights that protect both individuals and social groups from arbitrary interventions by the state power (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986:7). China's political liberalization consists of the following. First, there has been a significant reduction in the state's interference in the daily life of Chinese people, leading to greater freedom of belief, expression and consumption as well as employment and residential choices. Second, there is more participation at the county and township level, as elections for village committees began in the early 1980s. These are not part of the state apparatus; rather they are 'autonomous mass organizations' that deal with local affairs, resources, education, and other local needs (O'brien, 2002:219). Third, the role of the National People's Congress has changed from a rubber-stamping parliamentary body, to one that is assertive and even occasionally opposes the Party's desires. Finally, single party rule by the CCP has been loosened as measures have been introduced to separate the party from the government and reduce the party's interference with economic institutions. Indeed, the reforms introduced a new understanding of politics and the view "that there exist certain areas of autonomy in economic and social life into which political power cannot and should not intrude" (Tsou, 1983).

One aspect of China's political liberalization has to do with the conscious decentralization of power. While China is often considered to be a plenary state with uniform policies, the reality is a very diverse country with different policies and practices (Liu, 2002). Power is diffused across geographical regions and economic sectors; among individuals and corporate entities. Many provinces and cities have grown powerful due to the decentralization of economic decision-making (Hutchings, 2000:162). Even though Beijing may hand down a set of rules that local governments are supposed to carry out, when central policy filters down to the different localities it takes on different forms according to local conditions. Local institutions exhibit certain patterns which mold central policy to local conditions (Chen, 2004:186-187). This has meant greater de facto independence for the localities to pursue their own

development strategies within broadly defined guidelines (Saich, 2004:123). To be sure, the centre still retains significant forces of control, integration and national cohesion, and it is still worth paying attention to the formal organizational structure at the centre because it is these institutions that shape the overall nature of the state and politics and it is thus important to understand how they function and how they interrelate (Blecher, 1997:117). The strength of central control may have weakened but ultimately it still possesses the control mechanisms such as appointments and dismissals to national posts, the nomenklatura system, propaganda and media, discipline mechanisms, control over key economic resources, and control of military forces to keep the country together (Breslin, 1996:12-38). Despite this significance, its position has been greatly weakened relative to the strength of some regions and localities.

China's political reforms have led to a limited localization of politics. Faced with serious local corruption and a legitimacy crisis in the countryside since the introduction of reforms, the government began to encourage grassroots democracy and the election of Village Committees throughout rural villages since 1987. In 1989, law was passed that defined village committees as autonomous organizations. To date, at least 40 percent of villages in China have incorporated village elections, and more than 700 million people have been involved in direct elections (Zweig, 2004:129). While village democracy has taken root and has helped to instill democratic and individualistic ideals, there is little sign that it is challenging the local state structure. Even though villagers elect a fully constituted political authority, its influence is limited to local economic issues (Zweig, 2004:114), and the Village Committee cannot challenge local CCP authority even though it is theoretically autonomous. In practice, Village Committees fall under the influence of township government, the lowest level of official government authority, resting one level above these village committees (Zweig, 2004:126). Furthermore, local political oligarchs and newly emerging businessmen are able to manipulate the electoral process, and local cadre corruption at the township and county level remains rampant and beyond the reach of village democracy (Zweig, 2004:114). Official corruption is among the most serious

of these facing the party. The CCP still holds enormous and exclusive political power in China, which provides many opportunities for officials to abuse their power and trade favours for profitable deals (Guthrie, 2006:100). This has led to the emergence of what is commonly called ‘illiberal democracy’ (Zakariah, 1997). Under these conditions, villagers have resorted to informal procedures and alternative forms of political action. This includes petitioning higher level officials, migration, or the formation of legal and illegal non-governmental organizations to solve their problems (Zweig, 2004:111-112). In some cases, they turn to social protest and extra-legal political activity, both of which are becoming increasingly widespread throughout the countryside, in order to elicit resources from political elites (Bernstein, 1998: 93-110), consequently constituting in a threat to the regime’s stability.

While economic development and political liberalization did enhance the CCP’s legitimacy, they have also proven to be a double edged sword. Reforms have opened a “Pandora’s box” (Olson Jr., 1963), causing instability and undermining state power in a number of ways. First, reforms have weakened state power over Chinese society. Economic fate is now decided more by people’s local enterprises than by the central government. Second, reforms diverted elites’ attention from political power alone as wealth has come to replace power as the symbol of status in China, meaning that elites now choose between making money and seeking power. Third, economic reform has led to decentralization (Wang, 1995: 87-113). Since the early 1980s, Beijing gradually lost much of its fiscal authority to local governments, thus limiting state power. Finally, once economic development satisfies people’s basic needs, they demand more freedom and democracy (Hu, 2000:129).

Chinese society has become more pluralistic and complex as a variety of groups and interests have sprung up as a result of the market reform and economic modernization (Guo, 2000:125). A gradual shift in the balance of power between state and society is under way, which provides greater opportunities for social forces to exert influence over party-state institutions, opening up greater space for new socio-economic institutions and interests, leading to increasingly open discontent and friction between the party-state and society (White, 1994). In the context of political

liberalization, whether or not China has multiple political parties is less important than that interest groups and associations continue to grow and expand their channels for making demands on the government. Ultimately, the leadership must be responsive to the merging norms and expectations of the governed (Burton, 1990:6). Imposing restrictions and failing to take account of their interests could endanger prospects for economic growth. Party officials are constrained in the exercise of stronger political controls by the need to consider costs to the main dimensions of their own reform agenda (Mackerras et al., 1998:125-126).

Traditionally, the state was responsible for the welfare of its citizens and took care of them in return for their loyalty to the state. This encouraged dependency on the state and allowed the patriarchal state to control its citizenry. The result of this political culture means that it is difficult for the Chinese state and society to function as separate entities (Ogden, 2000:268). Elements of this perspective continue to survive, to the point that China's state and society are not clearly distinct and autonomous spheres. While the net effect of the Maoist years was to sharpen their separation, the reforms have served to merge aspects of state and society (Solinger, 1993). This conflation takes place at various levels. One is at the local level where reform and the development of TVEs have strengthened the role of government. Local officials are deeply involved in the economy, often deciding how to allocate resources and deciding on local development strategies (Oi, 1992). This type of situation is quite common in China, and as it becomes more entrenched, there is a lack of separation between economic and political society and a corresponding conflation of state and society (He, 1998). To the extent that the economic and public spheres and the realms of party and state are conflated, it will be difficult for a dynamic civil society to emerge or for law to become more than an adjunct to administration (Fewsmith, 1999:108). The state has retreated significantly from society, giving individuals greater freedom than ever before. However, there is still a high degree of interaction of public and private, and of dependence on the state (Unger & Chan, 1996). Though the regime has relaxed its control over daily life and the economic activities of its citizens, it has not made a substantial retreat from the state apparatus.

Given the amplitude of evidence, many public spaces are structured and defined in ways that strengthen party-state domination rather than weaken it. In many cases, the state still defines the parameters of public spaces and shapes society in accordance with its own terms, values and ideologies (Guo, 2000:155). Political institutions can be both formal, as in the development of a “usable bureaucracy,” and informal, as in regular behaviour patterns. The formal and informal can be mutually reinforcing, but the former is difficult to develop if the latter is destructive of stable expectations. Contemporary Chinese politics have generally been characterized by continual conflict between formal institution building and informal patterns of behaviour, often to the detriment of political stability (Tsou, 1986:241). Thus, at the same time as the state continues to play a major role in defining state-society relations and as it tightens its control over society through institutionalization, these same institutions, born out of the economic and political reforms have contributed to the state’s partial abdication of its role as caretaker of the Chinese people. This erosion of controlling authority at both the top and the bottom, combined with a better-educated youth who are more assertive in demanding their rights, and a large number of retired or idle workers and officials who use their residual power to start and run associations, has in turn led to the creation of significantly greater public space (Ogden, 2000:269). Nonetheless, while the power of the state has begun to decompose, its influence has far from disappeared (Solinger, 1993:270).

Because of such experiences as the Hundred Flowers movement, the Cultural Revolution, and student movements of the 1980s, the leadership is still suspicious of participation that takes place outside of its direct control. Thus, the party is at once trying to control social space while at the same time not negating the contributions that ‘articulate social audiences’ can make to the country’s economic development and modernization (Saich, 2004:183). Indeed, politics in the reform era can be seen in terms of alternating periods of *fang* (letting go) and *shou* (tightening up) (Baum, 1994). This dual facet is a characteristic of contemporary Chinese society. Since 1989, the Chinese government has sought to strike a developmental balance between reform and stability. The success of this balancing act has varied as its commitment to

continuing reform has often implied the promotion of painful policies that are at cross-purposes with the goal of order and stability. In their effort to champion both reform and stability, China's leadership has combined heavy-handed repression of its challengers with progressive reforms in numerous policy areas. Policies of liberalization have often been coupled with strategies to contain liberalization's pace and scope (Yang, 2001:28). While pursuing rapid economic development, China tries to preserve national sovereignty and political stability. In some cases, the contemporary Chinese state has brought unprecedented discipline and control over the lives of Chinese people (Esherick, 2003:59). The state has fought hard against various religious groups like the Falun Gong, while simultaneously making progress in strengthening the regulatory state and improving the rights of groups such as migrants, AIDS sufferers, and homosexuals (Yang, 2001:15). The role of the state has declined in recent years, but is still an overwhelming presence in many people's lives.

As people have grown richer and better educated, interest in democracy and its auxiliary freedoms such as a free press and an independent judiciary have grown stronger and the party's reasons for resisting them weaker (Hutchings, 2000:101). The stress placed on economic modernization since 1978 has required the party to relax its grip over society and to devise mechanisms to incorporate the views of various groups (Saich, 2004:183). To date, the party has gone further than anytime since 1949 in its attempt to take account of the increasing heterogeneity that its modernization strategy has produced. The leadership realizes that a higher degree of participation by sanctioned groups is both desirable to promote modernization and is inevitable given the changes that they propose. The economic reforms have expanded the limits of personal freedom and there is now de facto recognition of a much wider sphere of private life, although the state does vary the limits of political intrusions. Nevertheless, the party faces new constraints in exercising political controls because of the effects and economic changes and corresponding social changes. With the decline in the scope of the work unit (*danwei*) structure and the de-collectivization of agriculture, significant sections of the population are no longer neatly packaged for the exercise of political controls, suggesting greater potential for individual and more independent

group participation. The possibilities of political ‘tightening up’ have declined. The state is less able to use ideological controls, as it can no longer monopolize information and opinion and much of the population is less receptive to its ideological messages (Mackerras et al., 1998:125).

Most studies of policy-making in communist systems emphasize the monolithic and top-down nature of the process. Concern focuses on the totality of the decisions and the actions of a cabal of key leaders who conduct the direction of policy that is implemented by a subservient bureaucracy. Thus communist states such as China were traditionally thought to not possess a “policy process” (White et al., 1990:216). In 1992, Lieberthal and Oksenberg concluded that the policy-making process in China was not entirely rational, and that there was no direct relationship between the problem and the solution, and the policy outcome may not be an actual response to the problem that began the process in the first place. Conversely, the connections are complex, loose and apparently random. It is the bureaucratic structure that creates or compounds problems, and its understanding is crucial for policy outcomes. They concluded that the bureaucratic structure in China was highly fragmented, making consensus-building central and the policy process protracted, disjointed, and incremental. This creates three operational consequences (1992: 22-23). First, problems get pushed up the system to where supra-bureaucratic bodies can coordinate response and have sufficient leverage to bring together the different parties. Second, fragmentation of authority means that strenuous efforts must be made at each step in order to maintain consensus. Third, for a policy to be successful, it needs the support of one or more top leaders.

However, as reforms continue to progress and as the state loses its grip over society, the complexity of society increases, making policy implementation for difficult. China’s size and diversity means that policy must be flexible and that policy-makers receive accurate information for policy design and on feedback once it begins. To deal with this complexity, the state has sought to move away from the ‘linear model’ of policy implementation outlined in Lieberthal and Oksenberg’s study. Furthermore, while the state is still cautious towards individuals and groups that are



not a part of its internal system, it has promoted more pluralistic input to decision-making, with different views being put forward from intellectuals and social organizations.

#### 4.3 Social Reform and Transformation

In 1949, under the guise of 'revolutionary socialism,' the Chinese state began to monopolize all livelihood resources, and became omnipresent in nearly every aspect of individuals' lives (White, 1983). This domination had become virtually complete by 1960 as the party penetrated into society further than any imperialist dynasty ever had. With all independent social forces having been purged during the socialist transformation, and the party liberated from reliance on societal forces, the Chinese state became a party-led bureaucracy that served its own interests. Since the means of production were in the hands of the government, this also meant that the CCP had more discretionary power over decisions related to social policy in comparison with western countries.

The initial changes in Chinese society took place in the 1950s through a series of major campaigns carried out by the party. With each successive campaign, private ownership and organization decreased. When the communes were formed in the early 1960s they functioned as the highest level of economic organization and as the basic level of government and made the final decisions for production and distribution of goods and income. The collectivization of land and nationalization of most private businesses meant that private estates were no longer private and the interests of families became tied to their associative *danwei*. These structures compartmentalized society and formed a system that exerted control over China's population and locked them into a dependent relationship with the state through their *danwei*. By fragmenting and compartmentalizing society, the state suffocated the formation of opposition organizations that may have presented a moral alternative or different organizing principle than its own. Similarly, by taking the market out of the role of allocating goods and services, the state eradicated intermediary organizations that had operated in market economies and in the spaces between the local state and family

(Saich, 2004:215). Land reform and collectivization eliminated lineages, religious sets and gentry-dominated voluntary organizations from rule over rural social life (Whyte, 1991:262). All previous organizations were replaced by government bureaus or state-sponsored mass associations, all of which were run by party members and served as channels for information, communication, and political influence. The central organizing principle of the state was hierarchical, with parallel vertical structures that made horizontal relationships almost impossible to maintain. With the absence of social organizations, the state assumed the role as the provider of society's moral framework and compass.

Another institution that helped to maintain state control over the population was the maintenance of a rural-urban divide. The creation of this dual rural-urban society was solidified by the household registration system (*hukou*) that ensured state resources were channeled primarily to the cities. Officially invoked in 1960, the *hukou* system was instituted to curb urban migration and to ensure there was enough agricultural labour to support and sustain the urban population. *Hukou* registration meant that people were registered permanently to a particular location on the basis of their birth, or for women, that of the person they married (Saich, 2004:217). The *hukou* system developed into a social institution. Dividing Chinese society between 'agricultural' and 'non-agricultural' *hukou* status, it effectively established and reified a permanent spatial hierarchy of positions that were transmitted across generations (Saich, 2004:217).

In the end, the *hukou* system perpetuated the distinction between prosperous urban centers and the more disadvantaged rural areas (Saich, 2004:214-215), by locking the population into different socio-economic structures in terms of remuneration and the provision of public goods and services. One's *hukou* status defined the claims that citizens could make on state resources, creating a fundamental cleavage between people 'eating state grain' and those growing their own (Mallee, 2000:85). The essential difference between these two groups was their different relation to the state. Whereas the state concentrated welfare resources in urban areas, in the countryside, it enforced the practice of self-reliance. Agricultural peasants

depended on their own labour and fluctuating harvests for their livelihood, while those with an urban *hukou* were better off and consistently enjoyed higher living standards in terms of both incomes and welfare benefits (Cannon, 2000:16). The state provided them with lifetime employment, subsidized housing, inexpensive food, education, medical care, and pensions (Mallee, 2000:85). Here, the *danwei* became a system to ensure social control (Walder, 1986). Housing, welfare benefits, holidays, and even permission to reproduce were all controlled by the *danwei*. The *danwei* controls personnel, provides communal facilities, operates independent accounts and budgets, has an urban or industrial role and is in the public sector (Lu & Perry, 1997). It contributed to a system of vertically defined control and the cellularization of society and eschewed horizontal contact between workers, students and farmers. This basic pattern of communist society was established by 1960. By then most people belonged to one large, all embracing unit such as a factory, government office, or village. Units were run by party branches and were supposed to operate under common administrative rules and procedures that reflect the policies of the party. Under the command economy, the life of an individual revolved around these units that were for all intensive purposes extensions of the state. Most questions about an individual's life and prospects could be answered by specifying the unit that they were associated with (Saich, 2004:217). At the end of the 1970s, only about 16 percent of the population held 'non-agricultural' *hukou* status, while the great majority fell into the other category. People were born into either of these segments, and government control meant that mobility between the two was minimal (Mallee, 2000:86). Migration was rare and tightly controlled by the state.

At the outset of the reform period, there were three institutions at the core of Chinese society: the family, the *danwei* in the city and the collective farm in rural China, and the communist-party state (Oberschall, 1996:1028). Citizens belonged to a family, and every family belonged to a *danwei* unit or a collective farm. The party-state, accountable only to itself, penetrated and controlled every work unit and collective farm, and by extension, every family and every individual. Chinese social organization was rigid and hierarchic. Work units were isolated from each other and

collective identity encapsulated members against outsiders.

The reforms that began in 1978 have redefined the social structure by changing the distribution of power between state and society, consequently altering the principles on which society is organized and the ways in which it interacts with the state apparatus. The reach of the state is on the wane and the scope for individual initiative is on the rise (Hutchings, 2000:21). The reforms have made economic development the de facto priority for modernizing China, whose aim is to build a market economy while leaving the party-state intact. However, despite its focus on the economic sector, the fact that the political, economic, and social systems were intertwined meant that reforming the economy necessarily led to fundamental political and social changes as well. From the early 1980s on, individuals were empowered to make their own economic decisions. The reemergence of the private sector meant individuals increasingly had the freedom to pursue profit in the newly established markets within the economy. Through these critical changes, the party-state removed itself as the key economic decision maker, and, the emergence of the private sector broke the dependency of individuals on the state because it no longer held monopoly control over their lives (Guthrie, 2006:98-99). Now, as individuals can access nearly all necessities in their everyday lives, the relations of authority based on the patron-client ties in the workplace have broken down, and the organizational dependency of individuals on their work units has been largely eliminated (Guthrie, 2006:99).

Presently, Chinese society is more complex in terms of both structure and attitudes and is more fluid and dynamic than any time since 1949. There is greater social and geographical mobility and horizontal interaction and integration has developed as the vertical and cellular boundaries of the traditional Leninist system break down. One student characterized social life after the reforms in the following way: "I think not only that life is more colorful, but one's social experiences are wider. There is more opportunity for social experiences." There is a significant redistribution of economic power away from the state towards new or reformed institutions, groups and individuals (Saich, 2004:223). Since the reforms, a shift from the idea that there is

an inherent capacity to cooperate and realize the benefits of collectivism, to an explicit acceptance that self-seeking and profit maximizing behaviour is not only proper for individuals but also efficient for satisfying wider social needs (Cannon, 2000:11). People are no longer simply recipients of economic policies determined from above. Whereas previously they had virtually no room to maneuver, they now have more opportunities to act independently within a policy framework that allows for more private initiative (Cannon, 2000:5).

The reforms accepted by the Fifteenth Party Congress and the Ninth NPC (1997-1998) mark a significant retreat of the role of the state in regulating society. This partial withdrawal has led to a revival of many traditional practices, the emergence of new organizations to fill the institutional void and the appearance of new trends in thought to fill the spiritual void. There is also the emergence of a focus on individual desires and wants. Individuals are rejecting the collectivist ethos and believe that they have more to gain through the pursuit of their own self-interest rather than supporting the collective (Apter & Saich, 1994). Reflecting upon the balance between individualism and collectivism, one respondent shared their own perspective:

For myself I advocate individualism. This means independence and I can do whatever I want. But second, you have to have a responsible attitude towards society. Sometimes we need people to concentrate on our own benefits, but sometimes we need to make contributions to our society. If these two aspects can be balanced then society can be greatly approved. I do not support overly idealistic ideas or utopia. You cannot have too much individualism, otherwise there is no cooperation and you have anarchy. That is what harmonious society requires (Interview with G).

This opinion conveys the social reality in China today. The collectivist ethos is still present, but individualism has taken the lead. Contemporary China has far more diverse needs and interests than in the past, and specialized associations and interest groups serve the need of articulating these interests (Ogden, 2000:267). However,

while the party's official discourse is no longer hegemonic and the voice of alternative discourses can be heard, there is as of yet no new dominant discourse, nor a coherent alternative vision that would fashion either a western-style civil society or a rapid construction of a democratic political order (Saich, 2004:223).

Although the rapid growth of the Chinese economy has brought about improvements in the country's standard of living, it has also engendered numerous social problems. According to Premier Wen Jiabao's 2006 government work report, China's social challenges are: an irrational economic structure; lack of motivation to innovate; excessive consumption of energy resources; alarmingly high environmental pollution; uneven regional development and a widening income gap; and sluggish promotion of social welfare (SR, 2006:12). Furthermore, social challenges differ between rural and urban areas. In rural China, it is a question of providing basic systems to cover healthcare and education. In urban China, the challenge is in defining welfare guarantees. *Hukou* registration is still a legally entrenched caste system that grants rural residents political and social-welfare rights inferior to those of urban residents. Despite changes, the core of the *hukou* system has not changed. The division between rural and urban residence is no longer clearly defined, but Chinese society can generally still be divided into an 'agricultural' segment and a 'non-agricultural' one. Differences in entitlements between the two still remain, and serve to perpetuate existing inequality between the two (Mallee, 2000:99).

Before reform, social policy was closely tied to the development strategy that kept rural and urban China separate while privileging the urban and industry at the expense of the rural and agriculture. Reforms have perpetuated existing social problems and introduced new inequalities. This is exemplified in the continued disparity between rural and urban China and an abandonment of social welfare. While the reforms have raised the standard of living for the vast majority and moved the country along the road of a market economy, its policy-makers have had problems devising policy to bridge the social transition. In the 1990s, little attention was paid to the social consequences of reforms as there was a general assumption that a high level of economic growth would resolve all problems. However, by 2000 it was clear that

not all had benefited equally from the reform process and that income inequality and differential access to services had become a major problem since the reforms (Zhou, 2000). Income disparity and poverty are believed to be the root of many of society's ills:

In the past fake currency was very rare, now it is very common. Also in the past you could sleep without locking your door or anything because everything in the house was worthless. There were no thieves. You could leave the windows and doors open, but now you cannot. You need security doors, and have iron bars on our windows because of theft. This is due to the two extremes of people in society. Poor people are psychologically imbalanced. That is why some of the bad social phenomenon in society is happening. Because one part of people are extremely rich and some are extremely poor. Some can drive cars, while others have to worry about what to eat (Interview with A).

China's current development plan is extremely inegalitarian. But, while the party leader, Hu Jintao, preaches the virtues of a 'harmonious society', disparities in wealth continue to increase and the gap between booming coastal provinces and poor interior ones shows no sign of narrowing (Fenby, 2008). In 2002, the Gini coefficient of inequality was 0.457. In 2005 the income gap between urban and rural residents was 3.2:1 (SR, 2006:13). The idea of the day is that the best way to alleviate poverty and boost welfare is to increase production. Policies of income redistribution to the poor have been eschewed and welfare will only expand as production increases. As one respondent put it,

Because China is in a higher state of economic development, although we still have some social problems, our main focus is still on economic development. Only when you have a relatively strong economic foundation, then can you improve your social life, so you can better

improve the level of social development (Interview with G).

In light of many of the problems that have accompanied the reforms, the state is proposing a new pattern of economic growth whose emphasis is on social development and conserving energy and resources (SR, 2006:12). This plan depends more on technological and human resources, stimulating the rural economy, and making public services available throughout the nation. In the past, China's economic development depended heavily on material consumption, and sacrificing rural interests in order to boost urban and industrial development (SR, 2006:12). Now, China will rely on science to build a harmonious society and realize sustainable economic development.

#### 4.4 Summary

This chapter outlines the economic, political and social realities as they existed before the introduction of reforms in 1978. It also provides descriptions that highlight the major policy reforms and transformations that have taken place in these realms since the introduction of reforms. Economic reforms have moved China away from its traditional agricultural base and a socialist command economy, towards an open market economy based on industrialization. The reforms also re-established the terms of CCP legitimacy: economic progress. In terms of results, the reforms have been a tremendous success. The economy continues to grow at average of approximately 10 percent a year, the standard of living for most of the population has doubled, and poverty has dropped significantly.

Economic reform led to pressure for political reform and political modernization (Burton, 1990:1). Political reform however, has not been as dramatic or widespread as economic reform. Nonetheless, while China's political system still follows a Leninist model of political control, it is struggling to exercise this control as it retreats in the face of political liberalization.

The economic and political reforms have had a tremendous impact on society, reducing the power of the state over the economy and over the lives of the country's



citizens. The reforms have redefined the social structure and are changing the distribution of power between state and society, consequently altering the principles on which society is organized and the ways in which it interacts with the state apparatus. Contemporary Chinese society has far more diverse needs and interests than in the past. In order to accommodate these needs, specialized associations and interest groups have sprung up, articulating and serving these interests (Ogden, 2000:267).

Economic liberalization created a new role for associations and a more accommodating environment for the evolution of civil society in China (Lane & Luo, 1999; Ogden, 2000). It has gradually emerged since 1978 in response to changes in the economic sphere and the reestablishment of private ownership. With the advent of economic reform, the basis of control of the existing power structure became incompatible with the basis of material wealth under the new economic system (Zong, 1993:258-9). Thus, changes in the economy necessitated the further development of political and social change. The nature of these changes reflected the need to integrate the new market system, meaning that society was reorganized accordingly so that that the market could function without destabilising results. The changes also reflect the independence of new, active social groups created or strengthened by the reforms (Kelly & He, 1992:28). The proliferation of the market economy encouraged a change in ideology and behaviour. Individual decisions became increasingly independent, rational, and self-controlled, subsequently supplying the civil sphere with facilities like independence, self-control, rationality, equality, self-realization, cooperation, and trust (Alexander, 1998:9). This change in behaviour and ideology created further demands for the reforms to continue along the lines of individual rights and freedoms.

In Chapter 4, I examine how the economic, political and social transformations put forward in this chapter affected changes in the role of social organizations and the public sphere, which together have facilitated the emergence of civil society in China.

## THE EMERGENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN CHINA

### Introduction

Economic, political and social transformations stimulated new forms of expression, organization and participation that have subsequently facilitated the emergence of civil society in China. In this chapter, the emergence of civil society in China is examined in two areas. The first is a growing public sphere. The second is the growth of social organizations.

As a result of the reforms, the available avenues for sending and receiving information have risen dramatically. Publication opportunities in books, journals, magazines and the print press have expanded as never before. Similarly, both television and radio have all seen marked growth. Innovations in technology have also led to the proliferation of ‘new’ media possibilities. Of these, the internet has proven to be a particularly significant for Chinese society. The growth of the media sector in China is apparent in two areas: increased means for communication, and increased participation, both of which contribute to an ever expanding public sphere. Communication in the public sphere has also become more liberal and independent. While there are still restrictions set in place by the state, in general, public discourse in the Chinese public sphere is freer than at anytime going back to 1949. This chapter also notes how intellectuals in particular have benefited from changes in China’s communication system. In relation to the general population, intellectuals have enjoyed even more opportunities for participation and more autonomy and freedom of expression in China’s growing public sphere.

The second part of this chapter focuses on China’s social organizations. It begins by examining the status of social organizations and how the reforms spurred growth in the number of social organizations operating in China. Social organizations are thought to be an important component of civil society. In China, these organizations are recognized for making an important contribution to the country’s modernization and development. In order to facilitate their participation, the state has relinquished control, granting varying degrees of organizational and operational

autonomy. While the majority of these groups are not entirely independent from the state, the great majority of them enjoy greater autonomy to organize and participate in society than before the reform period. This is a trend apparent across the country and across different types of social organizations. This chapter includes a description of the overall situation facing social organizations, as well as a focus on the current condition of intellectual organizations.

Despite continued intervals of suppression and relaxation by the state, China's public sphere and its social organizations have experienced a general increase in the quantity and quality of expression, organization and participation since the introduction of reforms. Consequently, this has facilitated the emergence of civil society in China.

### 5.1 The Emergence of Civil Society in China: the Public Sphere

The public sphere is an important extension of civil society. It delineates a social space of institutions and practices that mediate between the private interests of individuals and the state. It is where the ideas, interests, values, and ideologies formed within the relations of civil society are voiced and made politically efficacious (Chambers, 2002:96). It is "a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment" (Hauser, 1998:86). In this sense, the public sphere is that "in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk" (Fraser, 1990) and "a realm of social life in which public opinion can be formed" (Asen, 1999). Chapter 1 discusses how western civil society was facilitated by the emergence of a modern public sphere. Originating in the private realm, it is made up of private citizens, who deliberate on issues of public concern using the 'public use of reason' (Habermas, 1989:27). In Europe, the emergence of the public sphere was felt in the appearance and popularity of print media and the establishment of coffee houses and salons where open discussions on current issues could freely take place. Ideally, the public sphere is a realm in which individuals gather to participate in open discussions. It is accessible by everyone, and no participant has an advantage over any other.

However, as discussed in Chapter 1, these generic qualities of the public sphere are subject to particularization based on historical context and on the topics that are admitted to discussion (Holub, 1991:3). Chapter 3 outlines China's particular historical context over the course of the last sixty years. It describes how China's economic, political and social situation has undergone dramatic transformations over this time, particularly following the reform period that began in 1978. In what follows, I examine the development of China's public sphere against the backdrop of these changes.

The public sphere in China between 1949 and 1978 was extremely weak, if not absent. Except for brief interludes of tolerance by the state, such as the Hundred Flowers movement, government control made the public expression of ideas practically impossible. The media in this period, instead of providing the population with a platform for communication, was a social engineering tool used by the state. Engaged in 'party journalism,' the role of the media was to provide intelligence about the population for the leadership, transmit party policy, and spread communist ideology amongst the population. Media transformation was not possible until after the death of Mao and the introduction of economic reforms in 1978.

The reform process initiated significant changes in China's media sector. No longer did all media outlets mirror CCP policy and ideology. Increased liberalization and decentralization were embraced by the press, and although it was still far from free to publish whatever it wanted, it did gradually push the boundaries of what was acceptable for publication. Mirroring the transformations that had taken place in other sectors of Chinese society after 1978, media boundaries gradually expanded until the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident. The government then reestablished firm control over society, and Chinese mass media reverted back to an expression of party journalism (Hutchings, 2000:309). This remained the case until Deng's 1992 Southern Tour. Since then, there has been a general loosening of political control and a parallel trend of commercialization (Zhao, 1998) in China's mass media. Commercialization has caused advertising to soar as news and information have become commoditized. Growing revenues and unrestrained enthusiasm for materialism have led to an

explosion in media of every kind. This is apparent in ‘old’ media, such as newspapers, magazines, television and radio, and especially in ‘new’ media (Clarke, 2003:368), which pertains primarily to the internet.

## 5.2 ‘Old’ Media and the Public Sphere

The print press, a traditional medium for the expression of ideas, has seen a dramatic increase in the volume of published material since 1978. Examining Table 4.1, we see that book publications, numbering 14,987 unique titles in 1978 increased by 30 percent only two years after, and tripled to 45,603 by the time the initial round of reforms really took hold in 1985. In 1992, Deng’s reaffirmed support of the market economy elicited a considerable rise in the production and distribution in all forms of media. In publishing, the number of unique book titles published in 1995 was 101,381. By 2006 this number had risen to 233,971. Magazine publication experienced similar growth. While there were 930 different magazine titles published in 1978, this number rose to 4,705 in 1985 and to 9,468 in 2006. Newspaper outlets in mainland China also experienced growth, from 186 titles in 1978, exploding to 1,445 just seven year later in 1985 and increasing to 1,938 in 2006. The actual number of newspaper publications peaked at 2,163 in 1996, but a new period of repression in the mid 1990s saw many newspapers and journals shut down, and by 2000 there were only 2,007 newspaper publications. Officials explained the closures as the repercussion of restructuring, and that the decision had been taken to avoid redundancy and to upgrade quality. Surviving publications were grouped into media conglomerates or syndicates in order to maximize publishing efficiency and cut costs. Critics however, argued that the real motive behind the establishment of media syndicates was to enhance official control (Dreyer, 2008:272-273). This period of tightening by the state did not last long, as reflected in the rebounding numbers of newspaper publications soon after. By 2003, the number of newspaper publications had increased once more, totalling 2,119.

Table 4.1 Mass Media Outlets in China by Year

Year	Television Stations	Radio Stations	Books	Magazines	Newspapers
1978			14,987	930	186
1980			21,621	2,191	188
1985			45,603	4,705	1,445
1990			80,224	5,751	1,444
1995	932	1,414	101,381	7,583	2,089
1996	983	1,481	112,813	7,916	2,163
1997	1,032	1,616	120,106	7,918	2,149
1998	1,065	1,645	130,613	7,999	2,053
1999	1,108	1,696	141,831	8,187	2,038
2000	1,206	1,934	143,376	8,725	2,007
2001	2,194	1,935	154,526	8,889	2,111
2002	2,124	1,983	170,962	9,029	2,137
2003	2,262	2,064	190,391	9,074	2,119
2004	2,389	2,264	208,294	9,490	1,922
2005	2,899	2,306	222,473	9,468	1,931
2006	2,983	2,365	233,971	9,468	1,938

\*Data compiled from the China Statistical Yearbook 2007 (NBS, 2007).

While official statistics for television and radio are unavailable before the second phase of reforms that took place in the 1990s, it is clear from Table 4.1 that they too are profiting from the overall decentralization and commercialization of China's mass media. In radio, the number of broadcasting stations has increased from 1,414 in 1995 to 2,365 in 2006. The number of television broadcasting stations has increased even more rapidly, and where the PRC had only 932 broadcasting stations in 1995, this rose to 2,983 by 2006. It is fairly obvious that by stimulating commercialization, the reforms have affected a dramatic increase in the sources of information available for consumption.

These changes in the media have positively contributed to the emergence of civil society in China. It is true that most mainstream outlets of 'old' media in radio, television and the press are still largely owned or controlled either by governments or business corporations (Clarke, 2003:368). However, the introduction of commercialization and the market economy suggest that they inevitably depend on society for their audience, meaning that they must conform to the passions and desires

of the population in order to remain competitive. While audience participation in this model is mainly played out by passive consumers, there are increasing instances of audience involvement in the public debate of current issues. Clear examples of this exist in the popularity of radio phone-in programs and letters to the editor in the print press.

The expansion of media diversity in China is due to the loosening of political control and increased commercialization. China's media outlets are experiencing a situation similar to the country's state-owned enterprises. Since the mid 1990s, many state media outlets no longer receive large state subsidies. Instead, they are expected to compete in the marketplace, where they must support themselves through advertising. As such, they are no longer simply mouthpieces for government, but must cater to the tastes of their viewers in order to be successful. The withdrawal of government subsidies has also caused some media outlets to take critical stands against the government. Evidently, commercialization has made the attraction of readers and the avoidance of bankruptcy more important than the threat of government repression.

The introduction of reforms spurred a decentralization of power that has led to greater media autonomy. This increased autonomy is reflected in its increasingly diversified content. As market reforms made deeper inroads into society, the content of the Chinese media began to change. News of the outside world increased, introducing new sounds, images, and ideas to the wider population. Foreign programming and film appeared on television, foreign music appeared on the radio, as did phone-in topical discussion programs. Similarly, magazines and journals also became much less inhibited in their coverage. Beginning in the late 1970s, arms of the media began to criticize party cadres and even publish debates on such topics as the rule of law, the freedom of the press, universal human rights, and reporting on social and lifestyle subjects that were previously taboo. Nowadays, the only untouchable subjects for discussion seem to correspond to an unwritten ban on challenges to the party's right to rule, the legitimacy of the CCP, and the decision making authority of top party leaders. While it is true that there is no free discussion about ending CCP

rule, independence for Tibet or serious inquiries into the events surrounding Tiananmen Square, there is relatively open debate in leading newspapers and academic journals concerning issues such as China's economic model, how to clean up corruption, or deal with foreign policy issues like Japan or North Korea (Leonard, 2008). Magazines and journals appear to enjoy more freedom than newspapers, which in turn have more leeway than radio and television. Magazines now print internal police reports on the jailing of religious leaders and other dissidents (Chen, 2005). In many cases, the state is unwilling to intervene and shut down these publications because it worries about public reaction, is anxious to avoid drawing more popular attention to the magazines, and knows that its own resources are already stretched thin (Chen, 2005).

It is apparent that there has been a dramatic increase in the quantity of available space for expression in the media, mirrored by an increase in autonomy of those making use of this space. This scenario is found not only in the mass media but also in such varied social spaces as living rooms, telephone hotlines, discos, and even McDonald's restaurants (Chen, 2000).

The state is having a difficult time maintaining control over segments of the media, as well as the country, that are not close to China's major cities, its major spheres of influence. It seems as if the old adage that "the sky is high and the emperor far away" applies to China's media as well as the political situation discussed in Chapter 3. This is apparent in local and regional 'peripheral' media. In general, the farther away media organizations are from the centre (Beijing), the greater their leeway and independence. Paradoxically, increased administrative and legal regulation of the media in the 1990s has also increased media autonomy as officials are generally less able, and at times less willing, to enforce regulations because of a lack of financial resources (Leonard, 2008). Legal reform in the 1990s went a long way towards institutionalizing the system of media in China. However, the legal system also causes problems for media independence as well. A particularly salient issue for the media is that the law is vague when it comes to clarifying what is acceptable and what is unacceptable for publication. The state uses this legal



ambiguity to its advantage, reinterpreting vague laws in order to censor media reports on social and political conditions (such as Tibet) that it finds politically sensitive.

Although there is now much more discussion of social issues in the media, it is also clear that the state has not relinquished total control. Some argue that changes in China's media constitute a change in form rather than function (Hutchings, 2000:310). This is a valid claim worth exploring. Tensions between national sovereignty and foreign participation, state monopoly and privatization, government control and individual liberty are rife throughout the country and have yet to be resolved. The media is not exempt from these tensions. Clearly, the number of journals and newspapers has increased throughout the reform period and their content is much more varied than before, sometimes even bordering on the subversive (Chen, 2005). However, they are still closely related to the state in that they have to have official sponsorship and submit to official supervision in order to receive publication permission (Zhou, 2006:156). Even though the state has thin resources and is worried about popular reaction towards its closing down of media publications, it still does not tolerate serious questioning of government policy. Fear of being shutdown by the state, coupled with vague laws means that many media outlets use self-censorship to toe the party line set by the Propaganda Department. The occupational hazards of journalism in China, conceived as the free pursuit of critical inquiry, are considerable and include censorship and even jail (Hutchings, 2000:310). News of journalists being jailed for 'dissent' is nothing new in China. Reports from international non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International, Reporters Without Borders, and Human Rights Watch indicate that Chinese authorities regularly detain and imprison professional and freelance journalists and writers based on accusations that their writings violate national security laws. A list of writers arrested in China is even available online at [www.penchinese.com](http://www.penchinese.com). As one foreign news outlet reports, the Propaganda Department has produced a 'grey list' of academics and journalists whose writings are no longer allowed to be published in newspapers and magazines. The Propaganda Department has also lengthened its list of forbidden topics, to include stories about the growing gap between rich and poor and a number of big protests in

the provinces (Watts, 2004), targets that appear to have little in common other than challenging the state's authority.

Chinese authorities employ several different types of censorship over its citizens in an effort to silence CCP critics and maintain control over political information and news reporting. These include legislative, political, psychological and technological barriers (CECC, 2006). Legislatively, people in China must get governmental permission before they are allowed to publish. Administrative barriers however, make it difficult, dangerous, or impossible for citizens to exercise their right to freedom of expression. Politically, the CCP has the right and the ability to screen works prior to publication, and stop publication of those works it finds objectionable. Psychologically, Chinese authorities intimidate the majority of China's citizens into silence, using vague laws to imprison people who publish politically sensitive works without permission. Finally, technological barriers include the use of computer software and hardware to prevent Chinese citizens from viewing and publishing opinions that the government disapproves of (CECC, 2006).

Nevertheless, Chinese authorities recognize that outlets must exist for the average person to express themselves, even if this includes dissatisfaction with the government. As such, citizens are allowed to submit their critiques to state sponsored media. The toleration of critique is a pragmatic decision on behalf of the state. It believes that the availability of officially approved and monitored outlets can help preserve CCP power in several ways (CECC, 2004): lessening political tension by acting as a release valve for discontent; deflecting criticism that people in the PRC do not enjoy freedom of expression; enabling government authorities to monitor the mood of the people and find out where weaknesses exist, both in the government apparatus and in popular support; and by allowing government authorities to track those who express discontent, and keep such expression from being forced underground where authorities cannot monitor or control it.

### 5.3 'New' Media and the Public Sphere

Recent changes in media and telecommunications technology have exposed

China's citizens to new methods of communicating and receiving information. While 'new' media pertains primarily to the internet and World Wide Web, it also includes mobile phones and satellite broadcasts (Clarke, 2003:368). Like 'old' media, some of these are under state control while others are not. In the end however, both 'old' and 'new,' and both state-controlled and non-state-controlled media contribute to increasing availability and accessibility.

In China, the growth of 'new' media, particularly the internet, is staggering. Table 4.2 documents the growth of internet use in China since 2000. Current estimates indicate that there are at least 150 million, and possibly upwards of around 200 million internet users in China. Nielsen Net Ratings, which do not have statistics for China, reports that the U.S.A. had 154 million active users in January 2006. This means that China is on par with, or has surpassed the U.S.A., as having the largest number of internet users in the world (Pace, 2006). While impressive, this is also slightly misleading. Given a population of more than 1.3 billion people, if the new 2008 estimate is correct, that China has more than 250 million internet users, this figure represents less than 20 percent of the overall population. However, even if only a fifth of the Chinese population is using the internet, it is also likely that this number will continue its dramatic ascent in the near future as more and more people acquire the capability to connect online.

Table 4.2 Internet Use in China since 2000

Year	Users	Population %
*2000	22,500,000	1.7
*2001	33,700,000	2.6
*2002	59,100,000	4.6
**2003	69,000,000	5.4
**2004	94,000,000	7.3
**2005	103,000,000	7.9
**2006	137,000,000	10.4
**2007	162,000,000	12.3
**2008	253,000,000	19.0

\* Data from the Internet World Stats website (IWS, 2007)

\*\* Data from the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC, 2008)

While the public expression of ideas is now more autonomous in the print press and on radio and television, nowhere is it more prominent or more liberal than on the internet. In many cases, independent publication and editorship were virtually absent before the arrival of the internet. Indeed, part of the popularity of the internet in China is that it provides unprecedented openness for the expression of individual opinion (Zhou, 2006:156). The use of online chat rooms, forums, and online bulletin board systems (BBS), websites that provide a relatively free space for the expression of opinions in a society whose limits on political expression in real space can be quite stringent, have all increased dramatically. While these newly emergent websites have undoubtedly expanded the space of free expression for Chinese citizens, at the same time, the state has also confronted this new means of publication with refined strategies to monitor its content (Zhou, 2006:154). Online, the public sphere faces a familiar situation: previously controlled space has opened up while the state simultaneously tries to channel political discourse in a favorable direction.

'New' media facilitates communication in groups, domestically or internationally, and with or without associational links, making it easier to do everything from pursuing benign common interests to organizing protests (Clarke, 2003:369). In response to these potential threats, the Chinese authorities attempt to block anything it perceives as sensitive information. This is often done without providing public notice, explanation or the opportunity for appeal. This includes reports on human rights as well as educational, political, and news websites. A national firewall system sometimes called the "Great Firewall of China" filters and prevents citizens from accessing certain types of content and information that originate outside of China (Hutchings, 2000:418). Although it is used primarily to block political content, it does not filter out obscenity or junk mail, both of which are readily available in China. Attempts to access prohibited websites such as those belonging to Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch result in a gateway timeout and a "Page Cannot Be Displayed" message. Similarly, searching for sensitive

terms such as "Falun Gong" on search engines such as Google result in the browser being temporarily disabled. Websites, blogs, and forums found to discuss 'sensitive topics' are monitored using a sophisticated network of human and technological controls. In order to monitor the multitude of online spaces, the state uses software to automatically block posts containing blacklisted words as well as human monitors who block and remove articles that include politically unacceptable content. The goal appears to be the development of technologies and methods that will allow all online information to be screened, and determine both the source and the requestor of that information (CECC, 2006). To date, the authorities have been somewhat successful in this mission, as they have been able to maintain a degree of control over the most liberal of online space, BBSs. By law, these must be licensed, their articles must be monitored, and all BBS providers must keep a record of all content posted on their website, the time it was posted, and the source's IP address or city name.

In recent years, the party has become more dynamic in its policing of the internet. Its traditional system of media repression, a propaganda apparatus geared towards the suppression of news and information has been effective, but has positioned the party in an increasingly reactive posture, always a step behind, and unable to push its own messages. Thus, in recent years the state has developed new methods to control the internet that are not just defensive, but offensive as well, reflecting "a new pattern of public-opinion guidance." As President Hu Jintao has stressed, the party needs to 'use' the internet as well as control it (Bandurski, 2008). To this end, the state has funded the "Fifty Cent Party," web commentators—instigated, trained and financed by party organizations—who safeguard the interests of the CCP by infiltrating and policing the internet. Numbering as many as 280,000 nationwide, their job is to neutralize undesirable public opinion by pushing pro-CCP views through chat rooms and forums, and by reporting dangerous content to authorities (Bandurski, 2008).

The use of these methods demonstrates that control of information remains a major concern of the state. Nonetheless, the process has become more flexible, and the state does not always play a straightforwardly repressive role (Zhou, 2006:154).

The process of government censorship has evolved from the old totalitarian control mechanism to a new, looser system with more room to maneuver. Online, the state uses a more refined control mechanism than in the print press, and despite the control mechanisms mentioned above, there is a greater degree of tolerance online. The state usually exerts pressure on website editors through self-censorship rather than attempting to close down sites outright, although this is always a final option. Like the situation facing 'old' media, there is no clear regulation as to what can or cannot be published online, meaning that editors and webmasters have to exercise their own judgment on acceptability. This ambiguity is generally effective when it comes to topics like the Falun Gong, demonstrated by the fact that information on this group is virtually absent on Chinese websites. As long as the state does not change its policies, editors will most likely continue to impose self-censorship, making a truly independent electronic press unable to emerge (Zhou, 2006:179). Though the internet expands space for political participation, this space has few clearly articulated rules of operation (Zhou, 2006:170). According to one webmaster, self-censorship "depends on your feeling [*ganjue*]." It is context and case specific, constantly adapting to different circumstances (Zhou, 2006:173). In this environment, webmasters must have a strong grasp on the current political atmosphere in order to judge what is appropriate. Penalties for sending sensitive news out of China or debating about topics such as Tibet, Taiwan, and human rights vary in severity. While most abusers will find that their sites have been shut down, some journalists, writers, and webmasters have faced punishments ranging from sudden unemployment to long term prison sentences (Human Rights Watch, 2006).

The ideal scenario for the formation of a public sphere entails limited government control and free participation by self-disciplined participants. In this light, the ideal public sphere described by Habermas (1989) does not exist in China, as state interference in the media and the formation of public opinion is rife. In some realms however, it has experienced significant growth in terms of size and in terms of ideas being transmitted in the public sphere, stimulating the emergence of civil society in China. New technological advances, coupled with a more liberal social environment

have led to the rapid popularization of the internet, an accessible online space where participants are able to express themselves more freely than before.

#### 5.4 Media, Intellectuals, and the Public Sphere

Intellectuals and the media have a close relationship, and the majority of intellectual research is transmitted to other intellectuals, the general population, and government policy makers via the media. There are many similarities between Chinese and western intellectuals. Both conventionally publish research findings in peer-reviewed academic journals, and both are under ‘some’ pressure from their associated administrations to focus on publishing and to have their research published in leading academic journals. According to one professor at Xi’an Jiaotong University:

To be a professor you need to publish a certain amount of articles under the Chinese Social Science Citation Index, other publications are useless. Under such circumstances teachers must concentrate on their research. Lots of teachers like to teach, but for their own growth and economic considerations and social status they have to put aside teaching and their love for students and instead focus on their own research and publications (Interview with A).

Although China has seen an expansion in the available outlets for publishing, this has been surpassed by a dramatic growth in the number of professional academics (see Chapter 5) and there is considerable competition to publish research results in the country’s leading journals.

Canada’s population is about 30 million, but in China I think the number of intellectuals is more than that [laughs]. All the articles are published in this system. But when only 20 articles are allowed to be taken per journal publication, and 200 are submitted, how are they to be chosen (Interview

with A)?

Since a significant amount of intellectual communication is mediated by the media, changes in the media environment may disproportionately affect intellectuals. Just as print technology was important for the emergence of public spheres in many modern western societies (Cosser, 1965); the ongoing revolution in electronic media may be creating similar opportunities in China (Kellner, 1997). The internet, like any technological innovation, increases the production possibility frontier of those who use it. It offers new lines of communication and opportunities for intellectuals to control their published output (Roberts, 1999; Sosteric, 1996). It simultaneously expands the size of the market while increasing individual productivity (Drezner, 2008:2). The net effect of which has been the creation of a more favourable environment for intellectuals.

Chinese intellectuals have been quick to realize that the internet provides an effective means for expressing opinions and formulating debate. Particularly, intellectual websites of the ‘scholarship and thought’ (*xueshu sixiang*) type, sites that focus on academic, critical, and theoretical discussions of diverse political, cultural, and other intellectual topics, have become popular outlets for many intellectuals to voice their opinions on a variety of issues concerning the country in general and academic matters in particular (Zhou, 2006:156). Although an exact calculation is unavailable, a casual search online makes it clear that intellectual websites are flourishing. Many of these websites have adopted the guiding principles of “Scholarship is a Public Treasure for All under Heaven” (*Xueshu nei tianxia gongqi*); “Exchange, Communication, Sharing” (*Jiaoliu, chuanbo, gongxiang*); and “Inclusiveness of All Schools, Freedom of Thought” (*Jianrong bingxu, sixiangziyou*) in their operation (Zhou, 2006:164). The propagation of these sites signifies that Chinese intellectuals are making a conscious effort to treat cyberspace as a new domain of intellectual inquiry and to break free of the existing constraints of censorship in the pursuit of freedom of expression (Zhou, 2006:164). It is significant that these websites test the limits of government tolerance, struggling for more space



for online intellectual exchanges. These actions have enabled intellectuals to expand the space they need to engage in the exchange of ideas and free discussion, and the formation of a “public e-sphere” (Zhou, 2006:178).

Although the internet is heavily policed, debate is freer here than in the printed word, and intellectuals can generally talk freely about sensitive topics such as political reform (Leonard, 2008). These sites are often more independent than print journals. In contrast to the regularly published academic journals and magazines, websites display an unprecedented degree of openness and tolerance. Their content is rich and ranges from debates on the reform process, the introduction of western social theories, and the promotion of nationalism, to commentary on current national and international affairs. The general openness and tolerance afforded these websites has been particularly beneficial for nonconformist intellectuals, allowing them to publish thought provoking essays, and touch on topics that are consistently banned in other forms of media.

The growth of online publication opportunities has stimulated diversity within intellectuals as a class. With the advent of the internet, free expression is no longer excluded to the academic elite (Zhou, 2006:176). As elsewhere, the internet in China has been a boon to those wanting to express their ideas, leading to the emergence and proliferation of a new category of intellectual in China: the public intellectual. As media studies professor Siva Vaidhyanathan (2006) recently concluded, “there has never been a better time to be a public intellectual, and the Web is the big reason why.” Equally interested in expressing their opinion, the vast majority who do not belong to elite intellectual circles, have done so through their own private (*minjian*) websites. Some *minjian* writers are also regarded as public intellectuals who, in many cases are no different than their more academic counterparts, save that they lack the formal academic background. Public intellectuals are popular with the general public because many of them focus on short, interesting articles rather than grand theoretical inquiries.

The explosion of online publications, forums, and especially weblogs has enabled intellectuals to express their ideas beyond the narrow confines of traditional

academic publication opportunities. In particular, the growth of online publication makes the expression of ideas easier. BBS services are particularly popular with university students. According to one graduate student, “we have BBS, and people use it to express themselves freely” (Interview with I). In China, formal intellectuals, as well as journalists and *minjian* writers have seized the moment to call for thoughtful engagement and criticism. Internet users are publicly asking questions like how Chinese citizens can legitimately attack western media organizations if their own government does not allow them to watch these same foreign media. Similarly, some are using issues like the Olympics as a springboard to discuss the significance of politically sensitive topics like Taiwanese democracy, the mainland's political future, and the desirability of an open press (Economy & Segal, 2008).

Despite the perceived benefits that media liberalization and ‘new’ media have had on the intellectual environment in China, they also present potential threats to the content of intellectual inquiry (Benjamin, 1935). One danger is that the ‘information explosion’ of the internet may undermine intellectuals’ claim of expertise (Kurzman & Owens, 2002:81). Alan Wolfe (2004) argues that “the way we argue now has been shaped by cable news and Weblogs; it's all ‘gotcha’ commentary and attributions of bad faith. No emotion can be too angry and no exaggeration too incredible.” In this argument however, public intellectuals who bypass the traditional route of publication in peer-reviewed journals are conflated with ‘publicists.’ Many publicists like television pundits, do not advocate or discuss abstract policy or political ideas. Indeed, since a large number of pundits tend to thrive by adopting anti-intellectual personas, it may be that they represent the very antithesis of the definition of an ‘intellectual’ (Hitchens, 2008:68). Another criticism is put forward by Russell Jacoby, who is unimpressed with the ways that the internet and weblogs benefit public intellectuals (Jacoby in Drezner, 2008:10-11). He argues that although the internet provides instant communication and quick access to vast resources, it has altered the quality and content of intellectual discussions. In effect, “too many voices may cancel each other out.” However, an analysis of the distribution of traffic and links in the blogosphere by Drezner and Farrell (2008) reveals two facts. First, the distribution is highly

skewed. There are a few highly ranked blogs with many readers, followed by a steep drop off and a “long tail” of medium-to-low ranked bloggers with far fewer readers. Second, intellectuals do surprisingly well within this skewed distribution, as academics make up a fair number of the elite group of bloggers (Drezner & Farrell, 2008). Since the mainstream media sometimes responds to cues from the blogosphere, a well timed post or exchange of ideas can potentially have a pronounced effect on public discourse (Wallsten, 2007). In this way, weblogs expand publication opportunities. Blogging is not a substitute to other publications: done correctly, it is a powerful complement. The academization of intellectual output and the long process of peer-review publication in China and the west before the popularization of the internet created barriers to the flourishing of intellectuals. The proliferation of public intellectuals, *minjian* sites, and intellectual blogs and forums reverses this trend in several ways. It facilitates the rise of a new class of non-academic intellectual, and democratizes the function of public intellectual; giving them more autonomy to express and publish their ideas (Drezner, 2008:13). Now, intellectuals can start a blog and potentially have an impact on the public.

Even as the state continues to employ tools to regulate those who might use the internet for political purposes contradicting their interests, there is no doubt that for China’s intellectuals, the internet has expanded the space for free expression. Chinese intellectuals, including *minjian* writers, have succeeded in expanding political participation online, particularly in their own websites and BBS forums. Thusfar, the internet has been prolific in propagating the expansion of the public sphere and civil society in China. Civil society and the internet stimulate each others development in China (Yang, 2003). The internet facilitates civil society activities by offering new possibilities for citizen participation, and civil society facilitates the development of the internet by providing the necessary social basis for communication and interaction.

### 5.5 The Emergence of Civil Society in China: Social Organizations

The significant withdrawal of the state from society and the gradual emergence

of a realm of social and economic activity not directly dominated by the state represent a change in the organization of society. This has been encapsulated in terms such as societal autonomy, economic freedom, and social pluralism, all of which describe and seek to rationalize China's emerging social reality (Ding, 2001:48). This reorganization of society is premised on the erosion of communes in the countryside and the *danwei* system in urban areas as components of social organization in the state's vertical control structure, and the development of new organizational forms that have replaced it. These include the emergence of horizontal groupings in associational activities, and the development of relatively autonomous 'quasi-governmental' organizations (Ding, 2001:49). The development of associational activities stems from a breakdown in the old organizational structure, the differentiation of interests, and the development of social pluralism that is taking place throughout Chinese society. As the country becomes wealthier and its people better educated, citizens have started to demand more from their government. Coupled with greater social space created by the reforms, social organizations with varying degrees of autonomy from the party and state structures have experienced significant growth, especially since the 1990s. Growth has come from the top as well as the bottom (Ding, 2001:51), stimulated both by government promotions and by citizen demands, leading to dramatic growth in the number of official state-sponsored social organizations as well as numerous unofficial groups that exist outside the government's control.

There is a realization that while the state remains an important and indispensable structure, it is not able to carry out all the tasks of its development program by itself; and while the transition from socialism to a market economy has led to rapid and exponential growth, it has also damaged the previous system of social support. The 'iron rice bowl' is broken and the state lacks the resources to carry out the same range of social services as before. Sometimes called the 'third force' of development (Yang, 2003:5), social organizations and associations not only liaise between state and society but also provide social services for a growing number of social problems born out of the reforms (Saich 2004:190). Many of them promote

various levels of development from outside the official structures of the state. These are generally considered to comprise, or be part of, something resembling civil society (Clarke, 2002:363).

Identifying with elements of civil society is an increasingly important factor in any nation's development strategy (Atal, 1997:15-16). As a key component of civil society, social organizations have emerged as key contributors in the PRC's development strategy, directly influencing the pace and quality of economic growth (Deolalikar et al., 2002). Their contributions have even been recognized as such by the state. In his speech to the Fifteenth Party Congress in 1997, Jiang Zemin, the CCP general secretary, stressed the need to "cultivate and develop" the "social intermediary organizations" as the reform process continued (Jiang, 1997). Government support of NGOs was recently strengthened, when in 2007 the state implemented new enterprise income tax laws where, in terms of enterprise expenditures for public welfare donations, up to 12 percent of the total annual profits can be deducted (Huang, 2007), a four-fold increase over previously existing levels.

It is important to note that in China, social organizations constitute the closest conception to the western notion of an NGO (Hsia & White, 2002:331). As scholars have begun to study social organizations as the equivalent of 'western' NGOs (Ma, 2002), in this paper, the terms 'social organization' and 'NGO' are used interchangeably unless otherwise noted.

Throughout the world, NGOs have achieved an increasingly important role in development through their efficient delivery of goods and services that relate to their organizational missions and goals. They have a comparative advantage over government bureaucracies in accomplishing certain service-related tasks: their extensive social network allows them to raise funds and provide services to the public, particularly to disadvantaged groups in social sectors where government has withdrawn; and they show both functional efficiency and cost effectiveness in accomplishing challenging tasks, making them a viable partner for fulfilling responsibilities that once were the sole province of government (Ward, 2005:1-2). Generally, NGOs are most active in those fields where there is a strong social demand

but difficult conditions for government and business to provide services. At present, Chinese NGOs are primarily involved in various fields of work related to economic and social development. Serving the desires of an expanding civil society, they provide social welfare, legal aid, scientific research, and cultural services in a wide range of public benefit activities. These include women and children's rights and interests, environmental protection, poverty reduction through micro credit programs, building schools and increasing access to education, providing services for the 'floating population,' access to health care programs, AIDS prevention and treatment, and services to disadvantaged groups such as orphans, the elderly, and the disabled (ADB, 2002). According to a report by Professor Wang Ming of Qinghua University, Chinese NGOs are active in the following capacities: social services (45%), survey and research (43%), industrial associations' and societies' work (40%), legal counseling and service (25%), policy consulting (22%) and poverty reduction (21%) (Huang, 2007). Obviously these percentages do not add up to one hundred. The reason for this is that many NGOs in China involve themselves in several capacities simultaneously. Thus, it not uncommon for an NGO to be involved in legal counseling and services at the same time as it is involved in social services.

As an important component of China's new development strategy, social organizations have the ability to influence the direction of policy making (Edes, 2002). This characteristic means that they constitute an important part of the country's emerging civil society. Top-down NGOs are able to make suggestions directly to government bodies, while bottom-up NGOs can influence government policies through the media. In terms of public policy in the PRC, NGOs are most influential in the fields of environmental protection, education and poverty reduction (WB, 2006). In a study of the role that NGOs have in poverty reduction in China, the Asian Development Bank explains the process in the following way. Proven to be effective, they influence government policies, which in turn influence growth and distributional outcomes, which then affect the pace of poverty reduction (Deolalikar et al., 2002).

The proliferation of relatively autonomous social organizations in China is a marked departure from previous practice and represents a significant change in the

organization of society. Traditionally, the party relied on officially sanctioned ‘mass organizations’ (*qunzhong zuzhe*) as mechanisms of societal participation. Until 1978, the only groups that the government considered ‘independent’ were the eight mass organizations left over from 1949 that had been transformed into government organs. This included the All-China Women’s Federation, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, and the Chinese Communist Youth League. Today there are more than 2,000 national mass organizations in China. Of these, nearly 200 receive appropriations from the state and are listed in the national administrative setup (China Facts & Figures, 2007). They enjoy special political status; have extensive social influence; and have partial autonomy and are allowed to organize their own activities within a broadly defined framework, and to support the pursuance of legitimate rights for their members so long as they do not override the party. In return, the party expects mass organizations to support its broader political, economic and social programs (Saich, 2004:186). The official classification scheme for Chinese NGOs corresponds to the regulation process used by the State Council and consists of three categories: social organizations, private non-enterprise entities, and foundations. Social organizations, the largest of these, can be subdivided into four types: academic, industrial, professional and federation organizations.

Determining the actual number of NGOs in China is difficult for several reasons, one being a matter of definition. They are sometimes referred to as ‘peoples organizations’ (*minjian zuzhi*), ‘non-governmental organizations’ (*feizhengfu zuzhi*), ‘social organizations’ (*shehui tuanti*), or ‘non-profit organizations’ (*minban feiqiye zuzhi*), the latter being a more expansive definition that includes institutions such as some hospitals, educational institutes and retirement homes. Since the literal translation of NGO, *feiguanfang zuzhi*, can be understood as anti-governmental (Stone, 1998:13), many groups refer to themselves as non-profit organizations (NPOs). Yet, this too is problematic because some of them do run profit generating operations. The Chinese term *shehui tuanti*, or social organization, is closest to the western concept of NGO (Hsia & White, 2002:331). The problem here however is that in China, *shehui tuanti* are rarely completely separate from government (Hsia & White, 2002:331), and

according to many observers of NGOs, being independent from the state is a defining characteristic of what makes an NGO an NGO (Ward, 2005:7). The definition of an NGO used by the United Nations is “any non-profit, voluntary citizens’ group which is organized on a local, national or international level” (Ward, 2005:6). Many observers also believe that it is the voluntary, autonomous nature of NGOs that connects them with civil society. Despite this ambiguity in definition, many social organizations have become a central component of China’s emerging civil society (Brook & Frolic, 1997). This capacity generally, but not always, depends on their relationship with the state. While the character of NGOs in China encompasses a range that spans from the completely state-controlled to the completely autonomous, the majority can be divided into three types based on their relation to the state (Shue, 1994). These include those that assist the state by consulting with it, regulating membership to conform to state policies; those representing members’ interests in a way that challenges state policies or state control; and those that do both. While those assisting the state are less a part of civil society than those that represent their members’ interests, in China, more often than not, associations fall into the latter category of assisting and challenging the state (Ogden, 2000:265).

It is clear that the number of NGOs operating in China has increased since the beginning of the reform process in 1978. However, up until the mid 1990s NGOs were still an unknown concept to most Chinese people and played a very limited role in society. This changed in 1995 when the fourth UN Women's Conference was held in Beijing. Since then, NGO growth in China has taken off as their performance has been gradually noticed by the public and the government, and as the latter became more interested in incorporating NGOs into its development plan. While the actual number of NGOs in China is unknown, their numbers have grown significantly: The Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) reports that China had 280,000 registered NGOs in 2005, including some 6,000 foreign NGOs, representing a considerable increase over the 4,800 NGOs that operated in China in 1988. Alternatively, the World Bank estimates the present number to be between 300,000 and 700,000 (Mooney, 2006). In 2006, the official number of registered NGOs jumped to 354,000 NGOs, including



192,000 social organizations, 161,000 private non-enterprise entities and 1,144 foundations. Government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) are also quite pervasive in China and despite their government ties, often contribute to the overall goals of civil society. According to the MCA, GONGOs are not required to register, and although there is no official estimate of their number, the State Department Annual Human Rights Report for China 2001 reported that there were 1,500 GONGOs at the end of 1998. Calculating the total number of active NGOs in China is further complicated by the fact that many grassroots and community-based organizations do not officially registered, and many others register as businesses because the registration process is easier. Hong Kong scholar Wang Shaoguang estimates that China has more than 8 million total registered and unregistered, nongovernmental and quasi-governmental organizations (Mooney, 2006).

Critics argue that although Chinese NGOs have multiplied in number over the years, they are not necessarily flourishing (Huang, 2007) because many of the institutions and associations that make up China's budding civil society are not fully autonomous (Ogden, 2000:291). As is the case elsewhere, the state is reluctant to relinquish complete control over society and monitors social organizations for potentially rebellious political activity (Hsia & White, 2002:334). In China, the state-NGO relationship is sometimes referred to as "a marriage of convenience rather than a catalyst for citizen resistance" (Frolic, 1997:58). The government views social organizations as 'bridges' between the people and the state, having the intended dual function of being tools of the state to control various social groups as well as a tool of representation for its members (Ding, 2001:56). This two-way transmission of ideas reinforces the party's control in the short run over a rapidly pluralizing society (Howell, 1994:206). With the decline of the *danwei* work unit system, social organizations are being used by the party as channels to impart its policies to individuals, households, and enterprises. Like mass organizations, NGOs are tasked with communicating the ideas of the people to the state and second, to engage in activities that serve the public (Hsia & White, 2002:331). Since it is the state that decides what type of activities are in the best interests of society, only those groups

whose interests coincide with those of the state are free to operate with relative autonomy (Hsia & White, 2002:337). To this end, NGOs that operate in less politically sensitive areas like health, and environmental or general education can usually carry out their activities with relatively few restrictions and little interference. Those that try to broach politically sensitive areas like human rights or religion risk interference and even the threat of closure.

This state-NGO relationship is reinforced by structures and regulations designed to bind these organizations to the state in an attempt to control their activities. For example, in September 1998, the state adopted Regulations for Registration and Management of Social Organizations, seeking to incorporate NGOs more closely within existing party and state structures. The state's intent is to maintain control of society through the delegation of authority to associations (Ogden, 2000:272). These regulations require NGOs to be registered with the state. Only the MCA and the local Civil Affairs Department at the county level and above have the authority to register NGOs. To register, NGOs are required to find an organizational sponsor, or 'professional leading unit' (*yewu zhuguan danwei*) which is usually a government agency carrying out similar work. A registered NGO must also accept the authority of the registration management agency, usually the Civil Affairs Department. Both the professional leading unit and the registration management agency must approve the registration. The MCA also has legal power over social organizations. It can issue warnings, order organizational changes, or cancel and NGO's registration. NGOs must submit an annual report to the professional leading unit regarding activities from the previous year. They must also undergo an annual investigation by their registration management agency. The state also bans 'similar organizations' coexisting at the various administrative levels in order to control representation to a smaller number of manageable units. This also ensures that mass organizations continue to maintain a monopoly in their jurisdictions and cannot be challenged by independent groups. The state's intent is to mimic the compartmentalization of government departments and limit the horizontal linkages. In practice, all of this favors groups with close government ties and discourages bottom-up initiatives (Saich,

2004:190).

Despite complicated regulations, state penetration into NGO affairs is not as consistent or extensive as it appears to be. Many organizations have found ways to maneuver or evade state control, and often employ strategies to bypass the government's strict registration policies. Although strict, loopholes exist in the registration process that allows NGOs to register as corporations, businesses or as a secondary entity of an existing organization (Saich, 2000).

Similarly, just because an organization is registered does not mean it is a puppet of the state (Forney, 1998:10-11). Sometimes being associated with the state is the way in which social organizations may influence the government (Zhu, 1997:191-194). China's social organizations, having had control delegated to them by the state, in some cases may have a high degree of autonomy by working within the state structure, sometimes under the umbrella of mass organizations. Many NGOs turn state sponsorship to their advantage, finding that they can often negotiate freer space and influencing the policy-making process and bringing key issues into the public domain by working from within the system rather than opposed to it. Some organizations, even though they are organized by the state, are able to carve out an autonomous area of action where the state does not intervene. This is particularly true at the local level. Wank (1998) notes that the local consequences of structures and policies promulgated by the central state create incentives at the 'grass roots' level for behaviour and actions that deviated significantly from their intent. The overall decentralization of control that has accompanied economic liberalization has also been responsible for much of the growth of autonomy for NGOs.

The simultaneous ebb and flow of increased autonomy coupled by increased repression for NGOs is reflective of a dilemma that the state has yet to solve. In order for associations to perform the developmental role that the state has assigned them, it has to tolerate the aggregation and the articulation of members' interests, even if they oppose those of the state. Inevitably, the growth of social organizations weakens the capacity of the state to control its population (Madsen, 1993:189). To date, social organizations have not only grown in number, but also enjoyed more independence

than ever before (Ma, 2002). These groups have created an increased organizational sphere, a social space, in which to operate, to represent social interests, and to convey those interests into the policy-making process. While the NGO sector in China is still in its initial development phase, given the country's dynamic economic development, NGOs will have more opportunities to develop in the future. The NGO movement in China will most likely gradually gain strength as Chinese authorities continue to cede more political space. The introduction of WTO mechanisms will further deepen the market economy reform and promote NGO development in China. Moreover, economic progress in East China, changing moral values and a growing middle class will all encourage NGO development (Huang, 2007). The growth of NGOs in China is representative of the transition from a society of strong governmental control to one where civil society controls more.

#### 5.6 Intellectual Organizations in China

Before 1978, Chinese intellectuals faced a situation that was less than ideal. Although Mao had promoted a policy of “letting one hundred flowers blossom and hundred schools of thought contend” in the 1950s, it was never realized. Beginning in 1949, state-led political campaigns hindered intellectuals, preventing them from playing an appropriate role in the country’s development or in society. Some of these were particularly aggressive. During the Cultural Revolution intellectuals were linked with the bourgeoisie (Luo, 1991:75), subjected to abuse and in some cases even death. In this period, state suppression of intellectual activity was especially strong towards those engaged in literature, art, and social sciences.

Since the reforms, the intellectual climate has been much more stable and favourable than ever before. This is evident in the improvement of intellectuals’ social status and their living and working conditions. Several factors have contributed to this change. First, to meet the needs of the reform and open-door policy, and the increasing demand for information, China must both understand the external world and strengthen the study of its domestic situation; all of which require intellectual effort. Second, Deng Xiaoping’s admission that “intellectuals are one part of the

working class” changed the public’s perception and created a favourable environment for intellectuals. Third, the “democratization and scientification of decision making” advocated by the government has pushed the development of academic research. Finally, there has been a proliferation of various academic organizations throughout the country, as numerous universities, think tanks, and other institutes of higher learning have sprung up throughout the country (Luo, 1991:75). Intellectual organizations in China include the following: government institutions, independent research institutions, academic research institutions, research societies and private institutions, and think tanks.

Intellectual organizations in China can also be classified as official, semi-official or privately owned. In reality, the boundary between official and semi-official is blurred. All institutes affiliated with government, military and the propaganda systems are classified as ‘official research institutes.’ These are coordinated vertically, and horizontal coordination of policy research is weak, as research products are transferred upwards, not downwards (Glaser & Saunders, 2002:600). At one end of the spectrum, there are government research institutions, whose activities are mainly authorized by the government. These institutions provide direct service to the government by formulating policies and implementing procedures, and consulting on specific policies (Luo, 1991:71). At the other end, there has been an influx of private research institutions and think tanks in China since the 1980s. These are self-funded and possess more autonomy than those closely tied to the state. These institutes undertake their own independent research activities, as well as providing compensative research services to other institutions (Luo, 1991:74). It should be noted however that these too tend to have some form of connections with the government, be it in membership or directorship.

While the gamut of academic organizations runs from being state extensions to being relatively autonomous, like other types of social organizations in China, most of these lie somewhere in between. Universities for example, generally fall in between these two extremes. They are regarded as ‘semi-official’ institutes because to a large extent they are close to and are mainly supported by government organizations (Shai

& Stone, 2004:144). The recent proliferation of universities has been the result of state initiatives. As such, labeling universities as autonomous organizations is problematic (Hayhoe & Zhong, 1997). The contemporary Chinese university does not differ significantly from other state-sponsored institutions. While the university does enjoy some degree of autonomy from the state and has been granted certain powers of self-governance, universities are locked into a 'disciplined partnership' with the state, because it is the state that controls much of the university's funding (Hayhoe & Zhong, 1997). The state decides which universities qualify as 'keypoint' universities, an important distinction as this makes select institutions eligible for increased government funding. Established in 1978, keypoint designation means that a school has priority both in the choice of students from among those who had passed the university entrance examinations, and in the allocation of resources (Dreyer, 2008:221). Since student tuition contributions are negligible, government funding is an important financial resource for Chinese universities.

Academic research institutions also tend to fall within the middle of this spectrum. These institutions include the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), and fall under the State Council of the PRC. These government institutions are made up of research organizations that constitute various academic disciplines. In the CASS there are more than 30 institutes, and each can be divided into several study groups, ranging from economics, history, and literary studies to international studies. Furthermore, within each institute there are a number of research divisions and sections and editorial boards. In addition to carrying out projects authorized by the state, CASS can also conduct projects for private enterprises, cooperate with international organizations and foreign academic institutions, and provide consulting services to other organizations and institutions (Luo, 1991:72-73).

Research societies are another type of intellectual organization that sits in this middle of the spectrum. They have the impetus to engage in academic activities and develop scholarship in their fields of expertise. However, they also play an important intermediary role, actively establishing contacts between China's social science

communities and government departments at different levels (Luo, 1991:74), and transmitting PRC policy messages to foreigners.

There is little agreement as to what differentiates a think tank from other types of intellectual organizations. The term is used to embrace a wide variety of organizations, and seeing as there is no agreed upon definition of what constitutes a think tank, many of the intellectual organizations mentioned above can be regarded as think tanks as well. Think tanks may vary on such features as their degree of autonomy from the state, membership, leadership, and sources of funding. One agreed upon defining characteristic however is that on a general level, a think tank focuses on public policy (Langford & Brownsey, 1991:4). Think tanks try to influence or inform policy through intellectual argument and analysis rather than direct lobbying. They engage in the analysis of policy issues and are concerned with the ideas and concepts that underpin policy. Think tanks collect, synthesize and create a range of information products, often directed at a political audience, but sometimes also for the benefit of the media, interest groups, business, and the general public (Stone, 2004:3). Both governmental and private think tanks have flourished since the early 1990s (Stone, 2004:7). This growth mirrors the growing complexity of the policy agenda facing China since connecting itself to the international economy. It also reflects acknowledgment by the state that its previously existing centralized apparatus was incapable of providing the information required to make decisions in this complex environment (Langford & Brownsey, 1991:2-3).

There are four specific roles played by think tanks in China's policy process. They act as information filters, policy defenders, introducers of new ideas, and interlocutors with foreign interests (Shai & Stone, 2004:149). The role of think tanks in China is more universally called the extension of the role of intellectuals (Luo, 1991:74). To meet the needs arising from China's modernization, Chinese think tanks investigate special subjects such as rural development, social problems, ethnic relations, religious activities, the development of legal institutions and the mass media. In formulating or evaluating development strategy, or in presenting policy oriented research findings, these studies provide the government and relevant departments with

reference materials which may be the basis for policy decisions (Luo, 1991:73). They provide leaders with analysis based on the filtering of raw data, providing political leaders with a pool of processed information. In deciding how to process information, scholars do have some power in shaping agendas and how problems are perceived. Thus, they affect problem definition. Moreover, they play a role in providing suggestions for reaching results after leaders have already set the agenda. In this way, they help decision makers to clarify the various societal interests in complex problems (Shai & Stone, 2004:149). The attempt to measure the influence of think tanks in the policy process is plagued with methodological problems. Their impact on policy thinking is exaggerated by some, while others refuse to acknowledge that think tanks can have any genuine input at all (Stone, 2004:10). Obviously, not all government decisions can be attributed to the research achievements made by intellectuals. After all, they are not the decision makers. Nonetheless, one can hardly deny that the research achievements of think tanks and social science workers have exerted considerable impact on government decisions (Luo, 1991:75). Examples of intellectual influence in policymaking are abundant, one being the implementation of foreign practices in public security and professionalized crime fighting (Tanner, 2002).

In the west, governments use think tanks as a means to extend policy analytic capacities, promote the development of human capital development, and aid the development of civil society (Overseas Development Council, 1999 in Stone, 2004:1). Some argue that Chinese think tanks do not promote the interests of civil society. Observers note that the political control of the state remains pervasive and sets clear parameters for the autonomy of Chinese intellectuals in think tanks. In China, think tanks are often created from within, through executive initiatives, like commissions or task forces, in order to assist the government in clarifying the emerging policy agenda, develop strategic solutions and gain the support of communities affected by changes in policy direction (Langford & Brownsey, 1991:3; Marsh, 1991). For organizations that work from within the government infrastructure, their policy inquiry is private in character, undertaken within the bounds of the corporatist client-analyst relationship



and not released for immediate public consumption (Lindquist, 1991). These think tanks maintain close patron-client relations with certain political leaders and operate within a closed policy context that is distant from civil society. Consequently, these institutes tend to filter and exclude voices and ideas from the policy process and to contain public debate (Shai & Stone, 2004:142). For some observers, this means that the power and influence of Chinese think tanks is limited and dependent, and given the close relationship that think tanks have with the state, they are hesitant to call them think tanks at all, calling their autonomy into question because their position does not allow them the latitude to create independent research agendas or even to freely explore the items on that agenda. It may be less the case that think tanks have an impact on government, than that government employs these organizations as tools to pursue their own interests and provide intellectual legitimacy for policy (Stone, 2004:11). They argue that in China, think tank analysis serves to justify the policies of political leaders and legitimate their official positions, becoming policy defenders for the regime and legitimate prevailing values and ideologies (Muta & Noda, 1995:354). If this is indeed the case, it presents a problem for the government. If the role of government think tanks is just to engage in 'brainwashing' or the explanation and dissemination of CCP policy, then there is little chance of them enhancing the government's capacity to cope with the challenges of an increasingly complex society (Langford & Brownsey, 1991:5). While this may have been the case in the period leading up to the 1978 reforms, it does not reflect the increasingly pragmatic nature of the state.

Even though the government sets the political framework within which intellectuals and think tanks interact with the state, intellectual organizations still do influence the state through their advice. While individual intellectuals have little desire to challenge top leaders or challenge the principles of policy in public, they do use their expertise to affect the content of policy and even to influence the perceptions of political actors indirectly. This is particularly the case when they have the political patronage of a leader with similar policy beliefs or a willingness to engage in new thinking (Shai & Stone, 2004:151). Think tanks need to have some kind of

engagement with government if they are to succeed in influencing policy, but their intellectuals are also reluctant to surrender their intellectual autonomy. In practice, this means that most try to strike a balance (Stone, 2004:4).

The notion that think tanks require complete independence or autonomy from the state in order to be 'free-thinking' is a western predilection. In China, the line between Chinese policy intellectuals and the state is blurred to such an extent that to talk of independence as a defining characteristic makes little sense in their respective cultural context (Stone, 2004:2). Chinese think tanks cannot be regarded as 'independent' research institutes to the same degree as those in the west. In China, political connections of establishment scholars to their political patrons shape the role of think tanks in the policy process. Generally, think tank scholars have no intention of challenging and replacing the regime, instead wanting to maintain the existing structures of political authority by persuading the state to change itself and thus help the political leadership overcome its challenges (Shai & Stone, 2004:143). In this light, China's think tanks are both instruments for political leaders, to help them legitimate their political position, and analytical bodies whose role is to formulate better solutions when dealing with increasingly complex political problems (Shai & Stone, 2004:144). This situation reflects the broader cultural and historical context where intellectuals play an active role in providing the government with policy suggestions but to not challenge the prevailing ideological values (Shai & Stone, 2004:143). Like other social organizations, being affiliated with the state is a survival strategy (Keister & Lu, 2004). Some think tanks choose to shackle themselves to government created research agendas and policy goals to ensure their continued relevance, access to policymakers and research revenue. Similarly, some research organizations embedded in government manage to create counter establishment information and recommendations on difficult emerging issues which also have a radical impact on the course of policy debates (Langford & Brownsey, 1991:5).

Chinese scholars and researchers do play a role in government policy making. Although progress can still be made towards creating a more receptive environment for the opinions and suggestions from intellectuals, the climate for such dialogue is

much more favourable than ever before, and intellectual contributions in policy making are becoming increasingly important.

### 5.7 Summary

In the context of the economic, political and social transformations introduced in Chapter 3, this chapter demonstrates the emergence of Chinese civil society in two key areas. First, transformations wrought out of the reforms have led to changes in the form and content of the media in China, expanding the public sphere as the country experiences marked growth in all available avenues for communication. This is apparent not only in traditional forms of publication and transmission like books, newspapers, magazines, radio and television, but also in the emergence of 'new' media, as the internet continues to expand at a rapid pace. China's expanding public sphere has also seen a growing diversity in the content of ideas being expressed across these mediums. Generally, intellectuals have profited from these changes more than regular citizens. In the public sphere, intellectuals possess more autonomy and have more influence in the policy process than average citizens. These represent indications of a changing political culture and a growing public sphere where intellectuals are willing to challenge political authority. More independent bodies are emerging and a significant number of scholars are inclined to seek a public profile for themselves, institute or ideas via the media. Broadcasters are more open and an increasingly commercialized publishing industry has provided new outlets for policy analysis beyond the research institute system and a source of income (Shai & Stone, 2004:153).

This chapter also looks at how China's economic and political liberalization has created more social space, and how social organizations with varying degrees of autonomy from state structures have taken advantage of this space and have experienced significant growth. These groups have created an organizational sphere, a social space in which to operate and to represent social interests, and to convey those interests into the policy-making process. In this last respect, intellectual organizations have proven especially capable, as these groups possess more autonomy than regular

social organizations. In general, the climate for such dialogue is much more favourable than ever before and intellectual contributions in policy making are becoming increasingly important.

## INTELLECTUALS IN CHINA

### Introduction

Chinese civil society continues to emerge in ‘fits and starts.’ Greater autonomy and freedom of expression in social organization and participation are an inevitable outcome of the reform process. However the government, given such experiences of dissent such as the Hundred Flowers movement and the Tiananmen Square demonstrations, is still suspicious of organization, participation, and expression that take place outside of its own direct control. Thus, the state has taken a number of precautions in its attempt to control social space while not negating the contributions that ‘articulate social audiences,’ such as intellectuals, can make to its economic programs (Saich, 2004:183). The leadership realizes that a higher degree of participation by intellectuals is both desirable to promote modernization and inevitable given the overall societal changes that have taken place since 1978. To this end, it has acknowledged the importance of relinquishing some of its power, granting intellectuals greater freedom within their professions and allowing the scientific community to follow internationally accepted norms and values.

State behaviour in relation to intellectuals is generally motivated by short term economic and political requirements (Cao, 1999:322). Since 1949, the relationship between intellectuals and the state has varied, mirroring the changing dynamic between the party's sometimes ideological and sometimes utilitarian agenda for modernization, and intellectuals’ demands for autonomy. The party has continually revised its policy towards intellectuals, partly in an effort to ease tensions with them, and partly because it needs to mobilize them in order to push its development agenda and consolidate its power. Examples of major shifts in this relationship include the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square movement. As state requirements continue to change, so does the relationship between intellectuals and the state. Throughout the reforms, the party has been uncertain about how to strike a balance between permitting freedom and autonomy for individual scientists and institutes and its own role of guidance and control over intellectuals, a social group

that is still considers problematic (Cao, 1999:323). There have been times throughout the reform era where the relationship reflects a continuation Maoist policy. Conversely, there have also been times where the relationship reflects internationally accepted norms and values. As reforms continue to progress, this later scenario is becoming more and more of a reality.

Whether the greater freedom being experienced by the intelligentsia corresponds to actors in an emerging civil society is the question tackled in this chapter. In order to demonstrate that Chinese intellectuals are a force in a gradual emergence of civil society, it is first necessary to look at the position of intellectuals in the context of overall change that has taken place in the relationship between the state and society. This chapter begins by looking at the changing role of Chinese intellectuals since 1949, an important step that allows us to examine the changing historical context affecting intellectuals and their organizations. It will be noted that not all intellectuals have the same capacity to participate and express themselves in the public sphere and in the policy process. Thus, it is not only necessary to define what it means to be an intellectual in China, but to make distinctions between intellectuals as a class. The second part of this chapter categorizes intellectuals according to their relationship with the state, as establishment or non-establishment intellectuals, and according to their orientation as liberal or neo-leftist. Differentiating amongst Chinese intellectuals in this manner is useful, because differences in affiliation and orientation affect the politics of influence an intellectual can exert in the policy process. To this end, the third part of this chapter focuses on the role of intellectuals in the policy process. It includes a general overview of the Chinese policy process and also examines the particular situation of social sciences and sociology in the policy process. While methodological efficacy makes it possible to single out this discipline, doing so is also a practical endeavor. It demonstrates that though intellectuals now enjoy significant improvements in their general situation vis-à-vis the state and that they are able to exert greater influence in the policy process than before, these benefits have not been distributed equally. This chapter concludes by providing suggestions on how to ameliorate the situation of intellectuals and social scientists in China, and on how to

improve their participation in the policy process.

### 6.1 Chinese Intellectuals Before 1949

Some traditions established during the imperial period still influence the status of Chinese intellectuals today. For the majority of this epoch, intellectuals essentially belonged to the imperial establishment and served the state's needs in a utilitarian manner, and the government bureaucracy was staffed mostly by scholars who had become eligible for recruitment by virtue of passing imperial examinations (Hua, 1994:92). As education was traditionally rooted in Confucianism, this complex institutionalized civil service examination system was based on Confucian classics. As Confucian scholars, they had to strike a balance between their loyalty to the emperor and their obligation to 'correct wrong thinking' when they perceived it. Then, as now, most intellectual and government leaders subscribed to the premise that ideological change was a prerequisite for political change (Worden et al., 1987). Historically, Chinese intellectuals rarely formed groups to oppose the established government. In essence, their participation amounted to supporting various cliques within the government and by supporting their policies.

With the abolition of the civil service examination system in 1905 and the end of the last imperial dynasty in 1911, intellectuals found themselves without a vehicle for participation in the government. They also found that the absence of a controlling government interest provided a favorable environment for intellectual independence. Intellectual expression began to flourish in the universities and in treaty ports, where a large influx of foreigners provided unprecedented opportunities for intellectual exchange. As one correspondent put it, "the 1920s was a period where academic freedom flourished. At that time a lot of proactive and radical books and ideas were generated. I think this was closely related to the general social conditions of the time" (Interview with H). The social conditions changed again following the Japanese invasion and occupation of large parts of China in 1937, hampering the intellectual climate. The Nationalist government responded to the Japanese crisis by tightening control over every aspect of life, causing a large number of dissident intellectuals to

seek refuge in Communist-administered areas (Worden et al., 1987), subsequently providing knowledge and know-how that would prove useful in the CCP's ascension to power.

## 6.2 The Changing Policies Affecting Chinese Intellectuals: Pre-Reform

The structural changes that took place following the rise of the CCP and the founding of the PRC had an enormous impact on Chinese intellectuals (Hua, 1994:13). First, with the combination of a more rigid social structure that included a common ideology and a centralized political system, the traditional role of intellectuals as bureaucrats and teachers was weakened, making them far more dependent on their superiors than were their predecessors. Second, unlike Confucianism, Marxism was unable to provide an all-encompassing ideology to sustain the social system. Consequently, intellectuals never felt completely comfortable devoting themselves to serving the ruler as they had in the past. Thus support for the regime or acquiescence to its rule had to be at least partly secured by the state through political intimidation. Third, tensions between serving the state or serving society was intensified with the fundamental change in the position of intellectuals, where only a fraction of intellectuals belonged to the ruling body (Hua, 1994:116). In this new system, intellectuals were confined to contributing their technical expertise to rebuilding the country in strict accordance with the party's development plan. Under government control and scrutiny, intellectuals were expected to serve the party and the state. Independent thinking was stifled, and political dissent was not tolerated (Worden et al., 1987).

The CCP made its presence felt in the academic community almost instantly by nationalizing higher education according to the Soviet model. In accordance with its development strategy, the state sacrificed intellectuals engaged in the social sciences in favour of those involved in science and engineering who could contribute to the state's desire for heavy industry. Coupled with an apparent need to diminish dissent among intellectuals, the state abolished several academic disciplines in 1952. "Sociology was cancelled in university. In this time it was because sociology was not



considered a science, so it was cancelled and was replaced by other courses deemed more important to the development of China” (Interview with B). To fill the void, and to further promote state control over education and research, the Chinese Academy of Science (CAS) and the Chinese Academy of Engineering (CAE) were created by the CCP as government agencies under the control of the State Council. As part of the government hierarchy, they were responsible for the administration of Chinese scientific research, and the allocation of manpower, facilities, and funding among its research institutes (Cao, 1999:301). Answering to the government, research institutes like CAS became the nation's hub for science and technology.

In 1956, hoping to encourage intellectuals’ participation in socialist construction, the party experimented with the idea of intellectual freedom. Representing the party leadership, Zhou Enlai suggested improving “the manner of employing and placing them,” giving them “due confidence and support,” and providing them with “the necessary working conditions and appropriate treatment.” The goal was to “find a correct solution for the question of intellectuals, to mobilize them more efficiently, and to make fuller use of their abilities” (Zhou in Meisner, 1977). The party saw to it that the living conditions of scientists improved substantially and even admitted senior intellectuals into its ranks as a way to mobilize their support. In return, intellectuals from universities and government research institutes like CAS played a key role in drafting policy such as the Twelve-Year Science Plan in 1956, policy that launched Chinese research into new areas of science-based technologies (including atomic energy, electronics, jet propulsion, automation, and the like), providing the foundation for China’s overall strategy of scientific development (Cao & Suttmeier, 1999:527). In 1956 Mao Zedong proposed the Hundred Flowers Campaign, a policy more liberal toward intellectuals than ever before. The campaign was launched in 1957 and utilized the slogan of letting “a hundred flowers bloom and the hundred schools of thought contend.” Letting “a hundred flowers bloom” applied to the development of the arts, while “the hundred schools of thought contend” encouraged the development of science (Worden et al., 1987). Its aim was to give intellectuals even greater participation, and to bring them closer to the policy process by stimulating a

fresh flow of ideas that would hasten the progress of socialist construction. The intellectual community first reluctantly, then actively accepted this invitation to express their views. Believing themselves to be expressing loyalty by participating in a move toward rectifying bureaucratism, factionalism and subjectivism, intellectuals were enthusiastic in their criticism. In the end, they aired a number of debates and criticisms about CCP policies. One group of CAS researchers even drafted a manifesto entitled “Some Suggestions on China's Science System,” that included a number of proposals for the reform of policies and administrative practices affecting research and education (Cao, 1999; Cao & Suttmeier, 1999:528). By 1957, intellectuals had conveyed a number of grievances relating to problems such as the development of democracy in academic leadership and how to use intellectuals more effectively to lead scientific research.

The volume and intensity of their criticism shocked the CCP. Interpreting criticism as a challenge to its leadership and legitimacy, the CCP retaliated immediately and harshly, labeling more than 800,000 intellectuals and college students “rightists” (Cao, 1999:310) at the same time as it launched the Anti-Rightist campaign. This campaign was intended to suppress all divergent thought and to firmly reestablish orthodox CCP ideology. Intellectuals who had answered the party’s previous invitation to offer criticisms and alternative solutions to China’s problems were abruptly silenced, and many were sent to reform camps or exiled to the countryside (Worden et al., 1987). Disillusioned with the ‘elitism’ of intellectuals, the CCP turned to the participation of the ‘masses,’ which it manipulated through mass campaigns, as the main driving force in its development strategy and to transform objective reality as it saw fit (White, 1983; Saich, 2004:181). The Anti-Rightist campaign created a radical mood that led to the introduction of a series of extreme “leftist” radical measures culminating in the Great Leap Forward (GLF). Beginning in 1958 and ending in 1960, the GLF was a political campaign intended to modernize China’s agricultural and industrial production. In the end, its ambitious but impractical goals severely damaged the national economy. The crisis of the GLF escalated as several years of natural disasters further set back agricultural production,

resulting in severe food shortages and famine. Facing possible rebellion, the party reconsidered its ill-conceived policy and admitted to its mistake in launching the GLF. This period was followed by economic readjustment and consolidation as the party once again sought to utilize the expertise of intellectuals. It modified its policy towards intellectuals by allowing former “rightists” to return to their old positions in research and education (Cao, 1999:311). However, shortly thereafter a segment of intellectuals again infuriated the party by proposing policy alternatives (Worden et al., 1987). Their efforts resulted in the party leadership enacting the Socialist Education movement of 1962. This campaign was launched in order to once more solidify CCP control over academia, and to terminate what it saw as the privileged status of the intelligentsia. The end result was the expulsion and sending down of even more intellectuals to labour in the countryside so that they could learn the error of their ways from the peasants.

The goals of the GLF were finally realized in 1966 with the introduction of the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). While the Anti-Rightist campaign and the GLF had seriously diminished the role of intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution (CR) destroyed it completely. Party functionaries assumed positions of leadership at most research institutes and universities, and schools were closed or converted to “soldiers’, workers’, and peasants’ universities” (Worden et al., 1987). Furthering their experiments in education, the CCP sought to extend and equalize educational opportunity across the country based on a hard-line interpretation of communist ideology. This experiment failed. Within weeks, China’s system of higher education ground to a halt as the country suspended formal operations and blocked entrance to all post-secondary education. With education disrupted, students were left in the cities with nothing to do but contribute to growing urban poverty. The state responded by instituting massive send-down policies, mobilizing millions of urban youth to go “up to the mountains and down to the villages” (*shangshan xiexiang*). The intention was that this would alleviate urban unemployment and contribute to rural development. Graduates from junior and senior high schools in 1966, 1967, and 1968 were required to go down to the countryside, where most had to stay for five to ten

years before being allowed to return (Hung & Chiu, 2003:211-212). The net effect of the CR was catastrophic for Chinese intellectuals and had a long and devastating impact on Chinese science and education (Cao, 1999:313). Denounced as the “stinking ninth category,” intellectuals were branded once again as belonging to the bourgeoisie, and consequently subjected to such familiar abuses such as having their rights to teach and conduct research revoked, public denunciations and various forms of humiliation (Cao & Suttmeier, 1999:528). If they were lucky, their work was only heavily edited for ‘political purity’ (Worden et al., 1987). If not, they could be subjected to physical torture and even death (Cao & Suttmeier, 1999:528).

Following the fall of Lin Biao, the Minister of National Defense and Mao's heir apparent, in 1971, the state's attitude towards intellectuals slowly began to improve. Under the aegis of Zhou Enlai and later Deng Xiaoping, many intellectuals were restored to their former positions and warily resumed their pre-CR duties. In January 1975, Zhou Enlai set out his ambitious Four Modernizations program and solicited the support of China's intellectuals in turning China into a modern industrialized nation (Worden et al., 1987). However, it was not until the death of Mao in 1976 and the disposal of the Gang of Four that the educational policies of the CR were attacked and comprehensively reversed (Hutchings, 2001:118-9). When the Maoist period ended in 1976, the systems of Chinese science and education were in shambles. The consequences for the quality of Chinese research and education and, more generally, the national development policies that had proceeded in the absence of sound technical judgment were banefully apparent to post-Mao political leaders. By the late 1970s, efforts to reconstitute institutions of scientific leadership and develop conduits for providing technical advice were underway (Cao 1999; Cao & Suttmeier, 1999: 526-527). The regime undertook a full-scale restoration of intellectuals in order to win back their trust. By raising their prestige, the party hoped to rehabilitate its relationship with the intellectual community and to eliminate any conflict that had been engendered by the Cultural Revolution.

### 6.3 The Changing Policies Affecting Chinese Intellectuals: Post-Reform

The Third Plenum of the Eleventh National Party Congress Central Committee in December 1978 officially made the Four Modernizations basic national policy in a context that reemphasized the importance of intellectuals in this process. Deng Xiaoping celebrated the role of scientists in society, making it clear that science and technology were the principal “productive force” and that intellectuals should be celebrated as “mental labourers,” making them “part of the working class” (Cao, 1999:315). This effectively reversed the negative stigma that intellectuals had accumulated in their previous association with the “bourgeoisie.” From that point on they were no longer denigrated as a class, harassed, suppressed, imprisoned and persecuted to death as they had been during the Mao era. Once more, changing CCP requirements meant that intellectuals were again an essential component in the party’s goal of economic modernization.

The introduction of reforms was especially conducive to the intellectual environment, especially in the universities. Data compiled from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, presented here in Table 5.1, shows that while there were only 206,000 university professors, an intellectual’s foremost form of employment, in China at the outset of the reform process in 1978, this number increased to 247,000 in 1980 after only two years of reforms. Progressive growth in the number of intellectuals continued throughout the decade, and in 1989 China’s university system was employing 397,000 university professors.

Table 5.1 Intellectuals in the Chinese University System: 1978 to 2006\*

Year	Number of Full-time Teachers in Institutions of Higher Education
1978	206,000
1980	247,000
1985	344,000
1986	372,000
1987	385,000
1988	393,000
1989	397,000
1990	395,000

1991	391,000
1992	388,000
1993	388,000
1994	396,000
1995	401,000
1996	403,000
1997	405,000
1998	407,000
1999	426,000
2000	463,000
2001	532,000
2002	618,000
2003	725,000
2004	858,000
2005	966,000
2006	1,076,000

\* Data compiled from the National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBS, 2007)

The state's goal of economic modernization meant that those intellectuals involved in the sciences, technology and economics in particular enjoyed elite status as advisers to the government, similar to the situation that Chinese intellectuals had enjoyed throughout most of history up until 1949 (Goldman, 1999:700). For those intellectuals involved in the social sciences however, the situation was markedly different. Government intervention had dictated and directed the development of academic disciplines for decades, and while it took some time for most departments to readjust to their relative autonomy following 1978, social science disciplines like sociology had to start all over again.

From the 1930s to the 1940s there was a flourishing, a springtime period for sociology in China. Most of the universities opened this kind of major. I think it was in order to meet the requirements of society. Most of the professors of this discipline did their research and studies abroad, and brought their ideas with them to China. From 1952 however, this kind of major was canceled by the state. It was not reinstated until 1979. So actually the development of sociology in China is only about 30 years

(Interview with G).

Indeed, disciplines such as sociology are relatively new developments in China. At Xi'an Jiaotong University for example, it has only existed as an academic department since the year 2000. An astonishing fact since this university is considered to be one of the ten best universities in the country (XJTU, 2008).

Xi'an Jiaotong University is a university engaged mainly in science, and sociology has developed relatively late. It was included as a discipline after 2000, so less than 8 years. When comparing the faculty and the research environment, it is relatively weak compared to science majors  
(Interview with G).

The 25 year banishment of the social sciences has meant that Chinese universities have struggled to staff their social science departments with professors who have the appropriate knowledge and experience to teach and conduct research in disciplines such as sociology. In many cases, sociology professors were originally trained in other disciplines. Interviews with university professors reveal the following experiences: "My specialization is based on physics as an undergraduate student, then as a masters student I studied science and technology... now I teach economic sociology" (Interview with C). Similarly, "I started in political economics. And then I taught courses on western economics. When sociology was founded in this university, I was transferred here. But I'm more familiar with economics" (Interview with A).

At the outset of the reform period, most academics and their associative institutions were kept busy trying to recuperate and rebuild their disciplines in the wake of the CR. One of the most significant outcomes of the reforms has been that scholars and researchers now have comparatively freer rein to pursue scientific research. However, lessons learned over the course of the previous 25 years resulted in an initial situation where most were content to avoid political involvement, choosing instead to focus on their role as specialist researchers and teachers. Most

were content with the understanding that as long as they adhered to the four cardinal principles of upholding socialism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leadership of the party, and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought (Worden et al., 1987), and so long as they did not rock the boat, they were permitted to conduct research with relative autonomy, free from bureaucratic interference.

As China's reforms and opening to the outside world continued, intellectual complacency began to dwindle and the state found that controlling them was becoming an ever more difficult task. Extended exchanges between Chinese intellectuals and their foreign peers led the Chinese intellectual community to increasingly adopt internationally established norms and values. This is demonstrated in the development of the science funding system, the introduction of peer review, and the increasing role that scientists have in the decision making processes of education, science, and the economy (Cao, 1999:318). Relations between the state and the intellectual community became increasingly strained throughout the 1980s as intellectuals became more outspoken on issues that affected them and the country more generally. The first serious challenge to the new environment of intellectual freedom came in 1980, as conservative ideologues in the military and the party sought to combat "bourgeois liberalization," a loosely defined, catch-all designation for anything it deemed to stretch the limits of the four cardinal principles (Worden et al., 1987). In the case of intellectuals, the state was particularly concerned with the increased propensity of western ideas and theories. While short-lived and relatively unsuccessful, this was not the only political campaign to target intellectuals in the 1980s.

After a mild respite in 1982 and most of 1983, "antibourgeois liberalism" returned in full force in another short-lived campaign against "spiritual pollution." Launched by a speech given by Deng Xiaoping at the Second Plenum of the Twelfth National Party Congress Central Committee in October 1983, Deng assaulted "bourgeois humanitarianism," "bourgeois liberalism," and the growing fascination with the "decadent elements" of western culture (Worden et al., 1987). The result of this campaign made intellectuals (including scientists, managerial and technical



personnel) hesitant to take any action that could expose them to criticism. In many cases they behaved by doing nothing. Not surprisingly, as intellectual inaction spread, it had a negative effect on the country's drive towards economic modernization. Because of these adverse results, the central leadership reevaluated the campaign, and by January 1984 the campaign against spiritual pollution had died out (Worden et al., 1987). Following the campaign's failure, and perhaps because of it, the position and security of intellectuals improved significantly, and in 1984 the government turned its attention once more to promoting economic reforms. A more positive approach to academic and cultural pursuits was reflected in periodic exhortations in the official press calling on the people to support and encourage the building of a "socialist spiritual civilization," a term used to denote general intellectual activity, including ethics and morality, science, and culture (Worden et al., 1987). As intellectuals' freedom of expression expanded, they began to call for a new Hundred Flowers campaign. This call was echoed by the state in 1986 when the head of the party's Propaganda Department said "only through the comparison and contention of different viewpoints and ideas can people gradually arrive at a truthful understanding," and that literary freedom was "a vital part of socialist literature" (Worden et al., 1987). But as writers began to test the limits of free expression, and as students protested against corruption, demanding more freedom, another anti-western campaign against "bourgeois liberalism" was launched in order to remind intellectuals of their "social responsibilities." This was essentially a warning for them to use self-censorship and to remain within the state's prescribed limits of free expression (Worden et al., 1987).

The initial outcome of the Tiananmen Square movement in 1989 saw the return of Maoists and New Leftists to the Propaganda Department and the media, and a revival of the politicalization of academia (Cao & Suttmeier, 1999:529). The negative impact of the 1989 government crackdown on Chinese intellectuals is apparent in Table 5.1. While the number of intellectuals working in the university system had increased by 191,000 since the beginning of reforms in 1978 to 397,000 in 1989, this number decreased as the government's attitude towards intellectuals tightened. Those

who had criticized the state were forced out of the system and the creation of new positions was put on hold. Accordingly, the number of intellectuals working at universities decreased from 397,000 in 1989 to 388,000 in 1992. Growth remained stagnant through 1993, while virtually every other sector of the job market was experiencing growth.

The negative aftermath of this government crackdown was relatively brief, and moreover, unlike the Mao period, intellectuals as a class, their families and colleagues did not suffer to the same extent for their involvement in the pro-democracy movement. Thus, while disillusioned with the regime, most intellectuals and students were not alienated from it. Many continued to work in the state bureaucracy, academia and the media. Many of those thrown out or turned away from the official establishment focused their attention on private business, as the creation of a market economy and opening to the outside world offered alternatives to university and government employment (Goldman, 1999:701). Unlike the bureaucracy or academia, where they might lose their jobs or salaries for expressing dissident views, business alternatives provided individual and economic independence that offered a degree of protection from political retaliation. While intellectuals played an important role in enlightening the general public throughout the 1980s, the ensuing result of the activities of 1989 saw many scholars in the 1990s react as they had at the outset of the reforms. They eschewed direct political participation, instead emphasizing the study of concrete social issues and sound scholarship (Zhou, 2006:177). To date, as a large proportion of intellectuals have “returned to the ivory tower” or have turned their interests to individual scholarly or business pursuits, there has not been a recurrence of the activism of 1989.

In an effort to revive the economic reforms and beat back the Maoist upsurge that followed the 1989 crackdown, during his 1992 Southern Tour, Deng attacked the leftists as a greater danger to the country than the liberals. A familiar pattern soon ensued. In 1993-1994, the more open political atmosphere that had accompanied Deng’s trip emboldened some liberal intellectuals to publicly call for more political reforms and for the release of Tiananmen political prisoners (Goldman, 1999:703).

Perceiving these calls as challenges to its leadership, the government reacted as it had throughout the 1980s. Some activists were arrested and others were put under surveillance. Although similar, it is noteworthy that government campaigns against intellectuals in the 1990s did not disrupt the inflow of western products or ideas. By and large, by 1994 China's economic, political, and social transformations had made this virtually impossible. Furthermore, the political leadership was reluctant to use threats of violence, mass mobilization or the ideological zeal (Goldman, 1999:703) that had been so destabilizing during the Mao years and in 1989.

The overall outcome of Deng's Southern Tour for intellectuals was a more inviting intellectual environment. As shown in Table 5.1, the number of academics in the university system began to increase once more in 1994. Growth was gradual through the 1990s as the overall figure increased by 2,000 a year through 1995-1998. By the year 2000 there were 463,000 intellectuals working in Chinese universities, more than doubling the 1978 figure of 206,000. While this increase is impressive, it pales in comparison to the growth experienced between 2000 and 2006, when the number of intellectuals working in the university system increased by more than 100,000 each year. According to estimates compiled by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, in 2006 there were 1,076,000 intellectuals working in the Chinese university system.

China's zigzag, contradictory treatment of intellectuals in the 1980s and 1990s reveals that while elements within the CCP may agree with liberal intellectuals on the need for increased political reforms in order to deal with problems resulting from the economic reforms, the state is nonetheless hesitant to move in this direction. It fears an outcome characterized by a lack of stability and increased social unrest, but more importantly, it fears a Soviet-style scenario where the Leninist party-state is replaced (Goldman, 1999:710). Consequently, though its control over society continues to weaken as a result of accelerating market reforms, increased engagement with the world, and its continual withdrawal from most areas of daily life, the state continues to suppress actions it perceives as political threats. The leadership in the 1990s tolerated a variety of voices, but it did not let any of them organize into political

groupings, only briefly tolerated public political discourse. Nevertheless, political ideas, ranging from Maoist to liberal to moral leftist, continue to be discussed internally in establishment intellectual and policy circles (Goldman, 1999:710).

There is no question that Chinese intellectuals currently enjoy more individual and academic freedoms, access to foreign knowledge and a more pluralistic cultural environment than at any other time in the history of the PRC. According to one intellectual:

After the reforms, the importance of intellectuals has been greatly increased. In the beginning of reforms the structure of intellectuals was very simple. They supported the government decision of opening up policies. Their ideas and behaviours were exactly the same as government policy and instructions. With the development of society, in my generation of scholars, the structure of intellectuals has changed. It is now more flexible in the current generation, from the scholar's perspective (Interview with B).

As another scholar put it,

After the reforms, the government made many policies to encourage education, so now intellectuals have more space, funding and chances to do their research. Importantly, the reforms changed the whole society in every aspect; intellectuals thus have lots of topics to study (Interview with D).

By the mid-1990s, the ideological homogeneity of Maoist China had given way to a broad range of intellectual and cultural activities. While the kind of intellectual engagement in public political debates of the 1980s was suppressed through most of the 1990s, the state's continual retreat from the cultural and intellectual realm (in terms of censorship, financial support and tolerance of diversity and foreign

influences) sparked an explosion of artistic experimentation, a vibrant popular culture and non-political intellectual discourse. China's cities, universities and institutes became gathering places for foreign experts, academics, artists, writers, entertainers, audiences and visitors involved in a wide variety of cultural, intellectual and artistic endeavours that had no ostensible political content. As long as the content and style of intellectual pursuit steered clear of politics, the state tolerated and at times even encouraged an apolitical culture as a diversion from political engagement (Goldman, 1999:702).

#### 6.4 Classifying Intellectuals

Defining an 'intellectual' is difficult. As Bourdieu comments (1989), cut-and-dried definitions effectively destroy "a central property of the intellectual field, namely, that it is the site of struggle over who does and does not belong to it." Kurzman and Owens (2002:80-81) propose that defining intellectuals is less important than exploring how intellectuals define themselves and are defined by others, in particular historical situations. While a boundary is inevitable, this type of definition makes them different from all other definitions in that they are self-definitions intended to create a boundary with the definer on the inside (Bauman, 1987:8). When intellectual identity is ascribed by outsiders, it can prove damaging, the classic Chinese example occurring throughout the Cultural Revolution when being labeled as an 'intellectual' was synonymous with 'bourgeoisie,' meaning the accused could be subjected to unnecessary cruelty. In China, intellectuals are generally viewed as an entire class (Wagner, 1987) using either a 'patron-client' model (Moody, 1977) or a dichotomy model composed of leading intellectuals and other intellectuals, the former group of which number "probably only in the hundreds" according to Merle Goldman (1981:1). However, both the dichotomy and the patron-client models largely draw upon experience from the pre-reform era (Hua, 1994:114). A more contemporary separation of intellectuals as a class often differentiates between "establishment intellectuals," those who directly serve the party, and "non-establishment intellectuals," who do not serve the state, or only indirectly so (Hua, 1994:92).

One of my correspondents distinguishes between ‘formal intellectuals’ and ‘accidental intellectuals.’ Accordingly, formal intellectuals encompass most establishment intellectuals as well as many non-establishment intellectuals. Here, the factor that they share in common is their formal education. As such, they generally research the same subjects, use similar methodologies, and go about publicizing their research along the same institutional lines. On the other hand,

Accidental intellectuals are not formal intellectuals. They include the likes of popular writers and authors. They do not have formal educations, but their books are hot sellers and they can communicate their ideas very well to society and their ideas are no worse than those of establishment intellectuals. In some ways, they were not meant to be intellectuals, but they became them. No matter how you define ‘intellectual,’ this second group always exists. It exists because it is important, so they survive. However, accidental intellectuals are not all on the same platform; they are separated on different fields and are representative of different industries and social groups. So, I myself (a ‘formal’ intellectual) am the spokesman for some people, and you (the accidental intellectual) are for other people. Both groups try to convey their ideas to higher social levels, like the government. All types of intellectuals are very important to society (Interview with B).

In this sense, accidental intellectuals are similar to the public intellectuals and *minjian* writers introduced in Chapter 3, the only difference being that public intellectuals may also include formal intellectuals.

Historically, ‘loyal opposition’ was an unknown concept in China, and the state did not acknowledge the legitimacy of an opposition as a necessary part of the political system. This clearly defined the role of intellectuals within traditional society. Since most scholars were officials and vice versa, this system worked against intellectual autonomy as opposing to the state was seen as dangerous and often

resulted in loss of position or worse. In this respect, virtually every scientist, researcher, and scholar in imperial China can be classified as an establishment intellectual based on their servitude to the state. Like the Emperors of old, the CCP has built up an army of establishment intellectuals (Hamrin & Cheek, 1986) since 1949. In recent years, CCP efforts to recruit intellectuals have been reminiscent of earlier periods when pragmatic policies reigned, and scientists and engineers were seen as important for the achievement of party objectives. Since the establishment of the PRC, party recruitment efforts have peaked during two periods: The first during the Hundred Flowers movement, a period of favorable intellectual policies (1955-56); and the second at the beginning of the reform period of 1978 (Cao & Suttmeier, 1999:551). In both periods, the party sought to ease tensions with the intellectual community and utilize intellectuals for its goals of socialist construction. At the same time, the successful recruitment of intellectuals, particularly scientists and engineers into the party has been seen as a means for extending party control over an important segment of Chinese society and as a means for rewarding technical intellectuals who had made important contributions to society (Cao & Suttmeier, 1999:552). Providing meaningful material and symbolic rewards to institutions and individuals judged to be the brightest and best has been a successful recruitment tool for the state. The 1994 establishment of honorific membership systems of “academicians” (*yuanshi*) in government and research institutes like the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) was an especially important expression of this intent to recognize and reward high achievement. The *yuanshi* system is an institution that recruits members through peer review from among a nation’s best scientists and engineers on the basis of professional merit; maintains a close, but relatively autonomous, relationship with the political elite; provides expertise to the political community, advising on national policy involving matters of science and technology; and by virtue of these qualities can be considered as providing academic leadership for the society (Cao & Suttmeier, 1999:525-526). Appointing elite scientists who are also party members to top-level posts in scientific research administrations has served both to subordinate scientific research to the party and ensures it receives professional advice in its decision making

(Cao & Suttmeier, 1999:553).

Motivations to join the party vary among individual intellectuals. Because the distribution of rewards according to social and political virtues has been a central element in the government strategy of social transformation, mobilization for development, and political legitimization, political loyalty is often rewarded with career opportunities. Therefore, some intellectuals see party membership as a resource for improving individual, social and professional mobility (Cao & Suttmeier, 1999:552). Thus, for some intellectuals, being a party member can in principle, increase their chances for personal gain. Conversely, other intellectuals see party membership as an avenue to pursue individual interest in scientific research more effectively and strengthen their hand in dealings with the party leadership. In general, intellectuals are more likely to have their influence felt as co-opted members of the party than not (Cao & Suttmeier, 1999:550-551). Some seek to benefit through ‘institutional parasitism,’ where groups or individuals do not seek institutional separateness, but seek to manipulate official and semi-official institutions for their own advantage (Ding, 1994). Some also view party membership as an opportunity to represent collective interests more directly to political decision makers.

Establishment and non-establishment intellectuals can be further distinguished on the basis of their political-ideological orientation. This orientation generally ranges from a “Liberal” to a “New Leftist” perspective. These two categories are not exhaustive or mutually exclusive, but they do represent the two most dominant ideological perspectives when it comes to policy decisions. Generally, liberals acknowledge the progress China has made toward a market economy, but view this process as incomplete and feel that it is impeded by a lack of political reforms and a lack of democracy, individual freedom, and law. Liberals also tend to be proponents of globalization and increased international exchange. They attribute domestic problems such as corruption, the polarization of wealth, and social injustice towards the powerless and poor to an unhealthy market economy that does not operate according to principles of the free market, but rather through corporatist top-down initiatives that protect state interests. Liberals advocate fundamental political reforms



that will lead China to a fully free-market engaged in the global marketplace, as well as a democratic and political social system (Zhou, 2006:160). Conversely, New Leftists are generally more conservative in their approach and view the faults of China's economic transformation as a result of the country's evolving incorporation into a larger process of globalization dominated by the western world. As China transforms into a free market society, socially marginal groups have been at the mercy of all-encompassing market forces. New Leftists argue that China should not blindly follow neo-liberal economic doctrine or the 'invisible hand' of the marketplace. Instead, they advocate an internal solution, building on successful experiences of its socialist and Maoist past in order to rectify the increasing economic injustice that the reforms have inflicted on many ordinary Chinese (Zhou, 2006:160). Generally, the two dichotomies: between establishment and non-establishment, and between liberal and new leftist encompass the majority of Chinese intellectuals.

In the Chinese policy process, it is a "double-edged sword" opinion that incorporates both Liberal and New Leftist perspectives is dominant. Extreme, New Leftist critiques of globalization and market forces are received sympathetically by many in the mainstream and are popular fodder for publication because they attract a large audience, but in reality, these have little impact on Chinese policy as "serious scholars don't pay attention to them, nor do policy makers" (Interview in Banning, 2001:417). Extreme New Leftist critiques receive press for two reasons. The first relates to the commercialization of the media and the fact that these critiques sell, and sell well. The second is because of the close ideological proximity that these opinions have with official CCP doctrine. As they help to legitimize and promote the continuing presence of the CCP in daily life, and are thus readily promoted by the state. This is one method used by the state to protect itself from negative effects of globalization. Despite the desire of some within the party to revert back to socialism, China's top leaders and officials accept that China must "more actively participate in globalization" (Banning, 2001:417). Similarly, although the Chinese public is even more receptive to the anti-western and nationalistic message of these critics, they too do not want to sacrifice the economic benefits of the reforms and globalization as the

price of reasserting socialist egalitarianism. “Their critique is popular but not their alternatives,” a senior Institute of American Studies expert asserted, because “people want prosperity” (Banning, 2001:414).

A growing trend in recent years among both New Leftist and Liberal non-establishment intellectuals has been the pronounced emergence of “public intellectuals.” Public intellectuals in China are a relatively new phenomenon. The concept itself did not reach the PRC until the 2002 publication of Richard Posner’s book *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline*. However, in contrast to Posner’s position, the Chinese debate centered less on the topic of decline, and more on the idea itself, of public-minded individuals with an independent opinion fighting for a just cause (Volland, 2006). The term, along with its overtones of free expression and autonomous judgment, crept along silently until 2004 when the Southern People’s Weekly (*Nanfang renwu zhoukan*), a popular magazine in Guangdong province, published a list of China’s “Top 50 Public Intellectuals” that it considered essential in shaping public discourse in the PRC. Public intellectuals have been lauded by many intellectuals in China as a possible harbinger of greater freedom of expression, and even by some officials. They are celebrated for opposing brutal police practices; for promoting greater citizen participation, AIDS awareness, and freer speech; and for advocating friendly environmental policies (Marquand, 2004). However, since their explosion onto the intellectual scene, the state Propaganda Department has created a grey list of historians, economists, writers, environmentalists, and others who have offered a critical voice or who have been influential in recent years outside official circles (Marquand, 2004). This is but another example of the many periods alternating between the ‘tightening’ and ‘opening’ of freedom and autonomy that has permeated the state-intellectual relationship since the inception of the CCP. As autonomy is a defining characteristic of the civil society movement, whether intellectuals possess it or not and whether they exercise it or not are critical to understanding the position of intellectuals in China’s emerging civil society.

## 6.5 Academic Freedom and Intellectual Autonomy in China

Since 1978, the intellectual community in China has experienced extensive institutional reform and change designed to help make it more socially relevant and practical towards the state's quest for modernization and development. One outcome of the reforms has been an increase in the amount of autonomy that intellectuals enjoy. The first section of this chapter pointed out that intellectuals' pursuit of autonomy has been interrupted by periods of repression even after the reforms began in 1978. This is true, yet an overall comparison of the periods 1949-1978 and 1978-2008 clearly demonstrate an improvement in intellectual autonomy. Chinese intellectuals will be the first to assert that both their situation as intellectuals and their intellectual autonomy have seen marked improvement since 1978.

At the beginning of reforms, there were still a lot of restrictions towards academic freedom. But generally speaking, in the past few years it has greatly improved and many restrictions have been broken. In the past lots of sensitive topics which could not be touched are now being explored, like the Cultural Revolution (Interview with G).

The emergence of freer political debate, the multitudes of students returning from the west, and huge international events like the Olympics continue to make China an increasingly more intellectually open society (Leonard, 2008). As one respondent put it:

After reforms the situation of intellectuals has greatly improved, partly because the economic situation and social status of intellectuals has greatly improved. Now scholars have their own ideas and their own voice instead of simply representing the government and following orders. Some scholars even criticize some problems and phenomenon in society. The voice of criticism is very strong and becoming very common. In western countries you can publish criticism, but before, in China these criticisms

could not be published in public mediums because those institutions were fully controlled by the government. Now is better, because criticism exists in society and these ideas are starting to poke through. However there is still a lot of state control over public media (Interview with B).

The emergence of civil society in China has seen a growing number of groups and institutions enjoy a measure of autonomy in relation to the state. Chinese authorities have only recently begun to tolerate criticism, and then only from certain categories of people who make up a kind of “free-speech elite.” Despite barriers to access the means of publication and the dangers inherent in publishing political news and information critical of the state, members of this “free-speech elite” are able to express concerns and criticism regarding the government with less fear of punishment than the average Chinese citizen. In this regard, autonomy exists for a highly prestigious, but extremely narrow slice of the Chinese population. Academics are one such group afforded this privilege (CECC, 2006). They are permitted to publicly question government policies in newspaper interviews and on the Internet, and even to criticize them in private government sponsored forums and in professional journals and academic and professional conferences. This environment embodies a new approach in relations between society and the state. In this case, intellectuals are in a unique position to contest the party’s interpretations of what is true, and thus begin to alter the terms of the inherited relationships between knowledge and power (Cao & Suttmeier, 1999:559). From the state’s perspective, the operative principle with respect to this group could be expressed as follows: the degree to which the government is willing to tolerate criticism of its leaders and policies is contingent upon the size and nature of the audience and the ideological credentials of the speaker (CECC, 2006). As one respondent put it,

Generally, most intellectuals know what kind of research is politically acceptable or not. For example, as for the problem of the existing Chinese Communist Party, no one talks about the rationality of the party’s

existence. I think that academic freedom exists in certain areas, but for some fields, there is no issue of freedom to discuss. Meaning that you do not even have the right to discuss whether or not there is freedom” (Interview with I).

In another situation, the significance of politics in academic freedom was made quite clear. One respondent, a student, answered a question related to the freedom afforded intellectuals as the following, “I think now we can write about anything we want.” At which point, their colleague jumped in, exclaiming “That is because you have not done any political research and are only focusing on the psychological perspective. It is very necessary to first learn about the political situation.” In this regard, it is clear that China has not yet developed into a completely intellectually open society. However, it has made significant progress towards this goal, and this does not go unnoticed by its intelligentsia:

It is impossible for China to be a completely free country in only 30 years since the reforms. Because our government is very traditional and very focused on self preservation, first it has to make sure that society is stable, and then it will allow you to touch some sensitive fields. Like the earthquake in Wenchuan. I think the government gave a lot of media openness to the public. Which shows that the state is relatively more open than it was in the past (Interview with G).

In general, it appears that although intellectuals recognize that their situation has been steadily improving since the introduction of reforms, they nonetheless remain critical of the present. Many of them, especially students and younger professors who are not old enough to be able to compare first hand experience are dissatisfied with the status quo and are persistent in their desire for even more academic freedom. The intellectuals that I interviewed were quick to point out their displeasure in the following areas: The influence of the state; ambivalence in the academic community;

and a lack of autonomy in choosing research topics. Voicing their displeasure, one respondent said:

To be honest, Chinese intellectuals do not have power. They just work for the need of the Chinese Communist Party, but not the need of academia and society. So they do not have academic freedom... Intellectuals should always make suggestions and alarms to government. Although the suggestions might not be popular, intellectuals should always try their best to think more. Public policy also needs the feedback of intellectuals after its execution. But in reality, just some Chinese Communist Party perspectives and suggestions are encouraged and published... Unfortunately, most of them (intellectuals) are used to this situation (Interview with D).

As this comment makes clear, Chinese academicians face a tradition of ambivalence about relations with the state. Complacency with their allotted measure of autonomy means that many intellectuals sacrifice wanting to be heard by the state, afraid that their autonomy will be compromised if they do. One critic interpreted this internal conflict as follows: "I think the intellectuals of China do not have the courage to seek the freedom for themselves. They do not have the radical, critical intellectual spirit." Another respondent, answering a question related to the role of Chinese intellectuals and academic freedom was also pessimistic and echoed the critique of ambivalence in the intellectual community:

I think another issue is that for those intellectuals, they should not just do research on concrete social problems, but should also point out and criticize existing realities, like the situation with the state. But Chinese scholars seldom engage in these activities and just follow the state made path towards 'harmonious society'... Before 1989 people had grand thoughts about freedom, but these days it is seldom mentioned. Not just by

intellectuals, but by the general public as well. They do not consider whether they need this kind of freedom or not. Instead, they just focus on their own lives, their own careers and their own well-being (Interview with I).

As the preceding comments make clear, the influence of the state on academic freedom not only comes in the form of direct control, but also by producing ambivalence amongst the intellectual community. Restrictions on academic freedom are not monopolized by the state however. During one discussion on the topic, a group of graduate students summarized their personal experiences. While lengthy, their discussion provides general insight into academic freedom as well as on how cultural barriers within, and outside the academy restrict intellectuals in their choice of research topics.

E: Let us talk about academic freedom. I think this is a very sensitive topic. Most of the students are handling research topics given to them by their supervisors, but basically, we do not have any restrictions in choosing what we want to study. As for myself, there is maybe a problem because I do my research in feminist sociology, and because of the history and the government, it is very hard to get people's real ideas. Maybe because of feudal society in our past, there are many mental restrictions on people. So it is very hard for me to do this type of research freely. I think towards intellectuals they are very curious why you want to choose this type of research topic. I think feminist sociology is very popular in many western circles, but why can I not choose this? It is because of Chinese culture and the influence of my family. They are not supportive for me to do this kind of research about feminism. I want to study the "dark side" of society, like brothels and prostitution. This kind of phenomenon exists in society, but if you want to do research on it, it is very hard to conduct research. If I want to do this research I think I can only do it abroad because currently

speaking, it is very hard to do this research in the mainland.

F: There is a scholar who has made great research on sexual sociology but in the library there are few students who have free access to it. That is because of the stigma surrounding the culture of sex in China. It is taboo. It is not open. Research into sex and gender is very limited. A few days ago I spoke about these sexual issues with a male friend (the speaker is female) and my colleague told me not to talk about these sexual issues with boys. Otherwise they might think you are not a very traditional girl, that you are too casual and too open, that you are someone “who gets around.” Even if you are talking about scientific research, I think most of the men in China think like that.

G: People are also very sensitive about homosexuals and out of marriage sexual affairs. But people have tried to accept it in recent years. It is not as restricted as in the past.

H: Whenever anyone mentions sex, people think they are not a “good guy” or a “good girl,” or that you have moral problems. In the beginning I was very interested to do this research and was very eager to start... I am very interested in studying “*hongdengqu*” (red light districts). Sex is a very sensitive yet important topic, but there are only a few scholars who publish on this topic. Most only use journals and articles as sources but have no first-hand experience with it. This phenomenon has a bad influence on society. Many do not want to touch the issue because of the negative culture. Some scholars have suggestions to regulate and manage these areas, but no one has dared to try it.

F: I think academic freedom is restricted. Generally people advocate it, but it is restricted and limited in some fields, for instance, cultural restrictions and state restrictions. When I wrote my undergraduate thesis, I wanted, but could not write about Christianity. I changed my topic because no professors were interested in helping me, nor did they have the expertise. So there was no faculty or facilities to help me. But it was what I wanted



to study. And without the support of faculty and financial support I think it is very hard to do by myself. Also there were not enough resources, so I had to choose another topic.

While most of this discussion centers on political and cultural restrictions to academic freedom among intellectuals, the final comments are interesting in that they reveal some institutional limits to academic freedom. In this case, it was a lack of professional interest in the department and a lack of expertise on the topic of religion.

### 6.6 Intellectuals and Public Policy in China

The Chinese like to argue about whether it is the intellectuals that influence decision makers, or whether groups of decision makers use pet intellectuals as informal mouthpieces to advance their own views (Leonard, 2008). As one university professor noted, in reality, the situation is not an either/or question, but is in fact a little bit of both. Regarding the latter perspective:

Another important role of the scholar is that they can help government officials to persuade and convince the population. Because society is composed of common people, it is easy for them to be influenced. If the scholar, as a member of society, gives their advice or opinions then it is easy for society to believe them. So in recent years, government officials have fully made use of the importance of scholars to convey and deliver their policy to society. Scholars are like a two-way-bridge between policy officials and society (Interview with B).

As for the first perspective, whether or not intellectuals influence decision makers. When respondents were asked if their research influenced government policy making, their responses varied. While some were pessimistic, others were more optimistic about their influence:

I think that relationship is very complicated...Overall, I think our research results have a weak influence on the formation of public policy...Officials want to hear our advice and opinions, but our ideas have weak influence on policy decision making. It is not an interactive activity (Interview with C).

There are problems that exist in our society. I hope through my research that I can find some solutions that will have a positive impact on society. I hope that politicians can adopt my solutions and use my recommendations in their policy making procedures (Interview with E).

One respondent, choosing to relate the question to the overall affect of intellectuals and their research on public policy had this to say:

Yes I think that intellectuals and sociologists have some influence on policy making of society. As for mine, I cannot say it has directly influenced policy making of society. But when all those research results of different scholars accumulate together, it has formed very strong views that are noticed by government officials. In recent years policy making has had greatly been affected by intellectuals (Interview with B).

Either way, intellectuals are an important part of the policy process. They put ideas into play and expand the options available to Chinese decision makers. In many respects, the policy role of Chinese intellectuals and intellectual organizations is similar to the west, where they are bodies that render advice and assistance to the government. Academics within government-led research institutions like CAS can, and do submit suggestions to the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee, China's highest decision making organ (Cao & Suttmeier, 1999:554). For example, in 1986, in response to the growing international economic and military importance of high technology industry, CAS members wrote Deng Xiaoping suggesting a program

for tracking the global trends in high-technology. It received prompt approval and led to the initiation of the national “863” high technology development plan (the name signifies that the plan was initiated in March, 1986). Emphasizing the fields of biotechnology, space technology, information, laser, automation, new energy, and new materials, plan 863 involved the active participation of leading scientists in the organization of research, the selection of projects and participants, and the allocation of funding. Additionally, plan 863 has also led to the promotion of fundamental research underlying these technologies and has become an effective tool for reorienting Chinese research and development during the reform period (Cao & Suttmeier, 1999:554).

Besides honoring individual achievement, establishment intellectuals, like those in the CAS, also serve as mechanisms for providing professional leadership and advice to national decision makers on societal problems. According to those I interviewed, being an elite academician in these organizations can boost the influence that intellectuals can exercise in the policy process.

If you are a famous researcher then your recommendations will be more easily entered into policy formulation. For instance, in relation to research on unemployment, there is a researcher, Dean Wu Angang at the state research center at Qinghua University. Because he is very distinct, he can easily capture all problems that exist in society and he has enough financial support. Most of his research points out problems in society before the problems are realized by government officials. Similarly, he also realized the importance of problems like sustainable development and environmental protection and reported on them before our country paid attention to these issues. Most of his results appear in government reports or at the two major conferences in China. Those kinds of reports are a part of the state policy system. It is very good proof that intellectuals can have great influence on state policy making. He found the problems, and then wrote the articles with policy in mind to advocate change at the state level

(Interview with A).

The status of an intellectual can have a significant effect on their capacity to influence policy. As one graduate student put it, “Some famous scholars have articles that have great influence on policy making, but as for graduate students, our opinions and our research is virtually never adopted by policy officials” (Interview with H). Establishment intellectuals of the *yuanshi* variety often end up as members of important committees responsible for allocating resources for research, engineering, and education. They thereby have special access to information and opportunities to influence decisions (Cao & Suttmeier, 1999:539). Thus, by being a part of an intellectual organization that is closely associated with the state, an intellectual can garner the political resources that they are otherwise lacking. Although the relationship that establishment intellectuals have with the state is close, their proximity also provides an increasing measure of autonomy. Although the complex web of relationships that intellectuals and intellectual organizations that are close to the state maintain with powerful interests in society, they are coming to play an important advisory role for the government (Cao & Suttmeier, 1999:556).

Establishment intellectuals and non-establishment intellectuals who hope to affect public policy must speak with more than the philosophical or scientific knowledge expected of them. Unless they are willing to live within the confines of the state bureaucracy, they have also to engage the political process through which they can effect the translation of their values and ideas into practicable programs. In China, intellectuals are becoming more involved in the political process than ever before. For example, they are regularly asked to evaluate key national development projects; brief the politburo in “study sessions”; they prepare reports that feed into the party's five-year plans; and they can give advice on the government papers. In addition to responding to consultation requests from the government, intellectuals have also initiated suggestions:

There is another scholar Jiang Xiaojuan. He is the leader of the economic

meeting of the country, and he has the responsibility to modify policy in the government work report. You can see he has great influence on government policy making. Before the report is published, there is a team who takes responsibility to draft the report. The team members are all relevant scholars and experts from universities and scientific research institutions. Their opinions will directly influence policy decisions for the coming year. This kind of team is not formed by the state, but by intellectuals. So from this case it is proof that intellectuals have great influence on policy (Interview with A).

In the west, political decisions about social policies are rarely the direct outcome of social science research. They are more usually the result of conflicting pressures by social actors – entrepreneurs, workers’ organizations, religious authorities, special interest groups, and the media. However, on the other hand, social science may be said to have a fundamental role in laying a diffuse base for the dominant themes and assumptions on which social policy is developed (Lee et al., 21). Sociologists in China were torn on whether their discipline in particular had any affect on public policy formation in China. While there was a general believe that the importance of sociology in public policy had increased since the introduction of reforms, and that the importance of the discipline was continuing to grow, there was some pessimism due to the status of sociology in relation to other disciplines. One sociologist lamented,

Sociology belongs to the Arts, to the ‘soft sciences.’ Compared with the natural sciences it is considered to be weak. I do not know about the west, but in China it is thought that if you master the sciences then you can do anything society (*Xue hao shulihua, zou bian tian xia dou bu pa*). But that is a saying from the 1980s. Maybe things have changed? (Interview with E)

Others were much more enthusiastic about the influence of sociology in the Chinese policy process. Generally, respondents described sociology as having a growing influence in this process. Its increased importance was attributed to the growing emphasis being placed on the nation's social development. One professor had this to say about the status and importance of sociology:

Of course Sociology is very important for social development! The importance of sociology has been shown to the people. The state of sociology has greatly improved. That is why it is enjoying a reemergence in society. Actually there is common agreement in society that sociology is a very important discipline. This agreement is not only from government officials, but from other scholars in other disciplines and from the common people. It is seen as a legitimate science once again. However because it was cancelled for a long period of time, so the situation of sociology is now relatively low and has lots of room to develop (Interview with B).

Using their own work as an example, another respondent gave a precise account of how the work of sociologists is influential and valuable in society:

As for my research, actually it is a cooperative research project between the university and the university's affiliated primary school. Because some of the teachers and leaders of the primary school have some ideas, they want to understand how under the social development situation, how the ideas of students and parents have changed. So as to better improve their teaching methods. Because the primary school has a close relationship with Xi'an Jiaotong University, so they think the university can offer their facilities and some support for this research. The school in turn will provide their students as research subjects. And Xi'an Jiaotong University can provide the faculty, the research resources like professors and students.

This research result can be reflected to those targeted primary schools but can also be adopted by other education institutions and even by the parents of the students. It also makes a great contribution to society (Interview with F).

## 6.7 Summary

This chapter began by describing the changing state of affairs affecting Chinese intellectuals from 1949 to the present. As this chapter shows, the state's behaviour toward intellectuals has generally been motivated by near-term economic and political requirements (Cao, 1999:322). This has been the case since 1949. As the economic, political, and social requirements of the state changed, so too did the conditions facing intellectuals. While there have been alternating periods of 'tightening' and 'opening' of control by the state towards intellectuals by the CCP, since 1978 the state's general policy towards intellectuals has been one of more privilege, power, and autonomy. A comparison of the conditions facing intellectuals in the period 1949 to 1978 and 1978 to the present makes it clear that the intellectual climate has improved since 1978. Chinese intellectuals now enjoy more autonomy than ever before and play a stronger, more influential role in the policy process. Intellectuals have seen their stock rise largely as a result of their participation in the nation's development program. As one academic at Xi'an Jiaotong University put it, "all intellectuals are important" for the further development of the country. Thus, the overall conditions facing intellectuals continues to improve as they contribute their expertise through research and in policy. Increased intellectual autonomy, coupled with an increased presence in the policy process has allowed intellectuals in China to promote various interests. This includes the interests of society, disadvantaged groups, as well as their own. In the process, they have been able to expand communication and participation in the public sphere, consequently expanding civil society.

While this represents the general trend towards intellectuals as a class, it is apparent that the benefits of increased autonomy and increased participation in the policy process have not been spread equally across the intellectual environment.

Using a categorization scheme that separates Chinese intellectuals into two groups based on their relation to the state, this chapter distinguishes between establishment and non establishment intellectuals. These two categories of intellectuals in China can also be sub divided on the basis of ideological orientation, between Liberal and New Leftist intellectuals. Another characteristic that differentiates intellectuals in China is based on how they disseminate their research findings and opinions. Formal intellectuals adhere to traditional channels while public intellectuals make use of alternative channels. This chapter has shown that all intellectuals: establishment, non-establishment, Liberal, New Leftist, formal, and public contribute to the reemergence of civil society in China. This is primarily done through communication in the public sphere and in influencing the policy process.

In terms of exercising a politics of influence in the policy process, establishment intellectuals have more influence than non-establishment intellectuals, Liberal intellectuals have more influence than New Leftist intellectuals, and formal intellectuals have more influence than public intellectuals.



## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### Introduction

The emergence of civil society in China is a complex affair, and its discussion inevitably leads to debate. In this paper, I have attempted to contribute to the discourse surrounding this debate with a descriptive exercise that examines intellectuals as one institution within civil society, exploring their role in the policy process and their ability to engage in politics of influence within the public sphere. This paper also contains elements of an explanatory project, producing insight into state-society relations and the processes of social action in China.

In this paper, I have put forward the argument that the policy of economic reform initiated under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping in 1978 pluralized China's socioeconomic structure and significantly lowered the state's control over society. Economic liberalization spawned individualism and an expanding space for Chinese civil society as individual and group interests became more important in social life. The growth of the private sector brought about the development of individualism and enhanced people's desires for political and social freedoms. As civil society expands through a growing public sphere, and as organizations, ideas and publications gain autonomy, the state's control becomes increasingly undermined. Social organizations and groups have emerged at the seams of the state-society divide that contribute to an expanding civil society in China. These groups have been facilitated by, and continue to reduce the power of the state, and contribute to the emergence of a sphere of economic and social pluralism between the official sphere of the state and the private sphere of the individual.

This paper has examined one of these groups in depth, intellectuals. As a group, intellectuals possess more autonomy than many other components of society due to their recognized role in facilitating the nation's development goals. Granted various degrees of autonomy by the state, intellectuals have been able to exercise influence in the Chinese policy process in accordance with their own interests and the interests of those they represent. Consequently, their actions contribute to strengthening the public

sphere and civil society in the process.

## 7.1 Summary

Chapter 1 presents the theoretical framework for this argument. It begins by tracing the historical development of ‘civil society’ as a theoretical concept in the western social sciences. Its historical development can be conceived in three ideal-typical forms that succeed each other in time (Alexander, 1998). The first significant transformation began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the writings of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as Smith and Ferguson, and continued in the work of Hegel. Despite individual particularities, these thinkers conceptualized civil society as the multitude of institutions outside the state. This included the free market, private and public associations and organizations, all forms of cooperative social relationships that create bonds of trust, public opinion, legal rights and institutions, and political parties (Alexander, 1998:3). The second major transformation in the conceptual understanding of civil society occurred in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century in the writings of Karl Marx. Building off of Hegel’s work, Marx located civil society in the realm of individual egoism and self-interest, reducing it to ‘bourgeois society’ and the capitalist mode of production (Ashenden, 1999:145). Marx’s re-conceptualization of civil society effecting removed civil society as a popular tool for social analysis until the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century, where it reappeared in the popular writings of Antonio Gramsci. While Gramsci’s work does not constitute a transformation in itself, his theory does represent a bridge between the second historical conceptualization and the third, contemporary form of the term, represented in the work of Jurgen Habermas. Habermas’s conceptualization of civil society sees it as a sphere of identity formation, social integration, and cultural reproduction. It is the realm of society, lying outside the institutionalized political and administrative mechanisms of the state and the state-regulated part of the economy, where people carry on their publicly oriented social and economic activities. Within this sphere, citizens may freely organize themselves into various levels of groups and associations in order to influence the state into adopting policies consonant with their interests (Arato & Cohen, 1988).

However, the politics of influence that derive from civil society must also be characterized by a substantial degree of self-restraint because its power to influence the state only exists with the presence of the state. Thus, civil society must recognize the imperatives of specialized expertise for the exercise of governmental policy-formulation and regulation that keep civil society functioning. As the site of resistance and emancipation, civil society coordinates its action of democratic deliberation in the arena of the public sphere. In this view, civil society and the associated idea of public sphere activity are mechanisms that enable forms of public debate, which in turn influence the formation of policy (Habermas, 1989). Civil society however, does not do this as a whole. Instead, the actors within civil society that engage in this process are what Habermas calls ‘new social movements.’ These movements contribute to institutional change within civil society by generating new solidarities, altering the associational structure of civil society, and creating a plurality of new public spaces while simultaneously expanding and revitalizing spaces that are already institutionalized (Cohen & Arato, 1992:530). The success of social movements on the level of civil society should be conceived not in terms of the achievement of certain substantive goals or perpetuation of the movement, but rather in terms of the democratization of values, norms, and institutions that are rooted ultimately in a political culture. The rights achieved by movements stabilize the boundaries between lifeworld, state, and economy but they are also the reflection of newly achieved collective identities, and they constitute the condition of possibility of the emergence of new institutional arrangements, associations, assemblies, and movements (Cohen & Arato, 1992:562).

Chapter 1 also tackles the debate surrounding the applicability of a Habermasian conceptualization of civil society as an analytical tool for examining Chinese society. Following an outline of the debate, I argue that as a concept, it is functional rather than normative, and it must be understood in dynamic terms by taking into consideration the different socioeconomic, political, and historical conditions under which it is used (Tai, 2006:51). In China, a public sphere and corresponding civil society are in the process of being created and bear unique Chinese characteristics.

Together, these sections develop the theoretical framework and act as a guiding principle for the chapters that follow.

Chapter 2 is a summary of the methodology that I use to gather data on the emergence of civil society in China and role that intellectuals have in this process. My research uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods. In order to frame the context of an emerging civil society in China, I employ a number of unobtrusive measures for gathering quantitative empirical data. These include examining existing statistical data sets and archival research from government sources as well as from statistical analyses and conclusions drawn from other researchers. In order to gather information on intellectuals' involvement in politics of influence, I engage in qualitative research, conducting interviews and focus groups with various types of intellectuals. The type of data that I generate throughout these interviews corresponds with the experience, thoughts and ideas that intellectuals have towards the following topics: the status of social science, the status and location of intellectuals in state-society relationships, and the influence and relationship that intellectuals have with policy.

Chapter 3 examines the emergence of civil society in the context of the economic, political and social transformations brought about by China's economic reforms. The chapter provides descriptions of the economic, political and social realities of Chinese society before the reform period, juxtaposing them with the major transformations that have occurred in each sector since reforms were introduced in 1978. Since then, two simultaneous economic transformations have been underway: a movement away from agriculture towards industry; and from a planned, to a mostly market economy (Hutchings, 2000:18). China's transition has involved the following steps: the liberalization of the economy from bureaucratic control; the establishment of market institutions, in particular the product and factor markets; privatization; and control of macro-instability. In this regard, China has made great strides towards its goal in only 30 years.

Before the reforms, China's defining characteristics included a centrally planned economy with social ownership of the means of production overseen by a highly

centralized one-party state. In such a society, any agents of civil society were weak or ineffective (Saich, 2004). However, with the introduction of reforms, China has experienced significant political liberalization. The outcome of which has been a significant reduction in the state's interference in the daily life of its people, greater freedom of belief, expression and consumption as well as employment and residential choices. China's more pragmatic government now seeks input from interest groups and professional associations to help shape policy and advance the goals of modernization, and its economic reforms depend on contributions of groups such as scientists and other intellectuals, managers and new entrepreneurs. To this effect, it has encouraged the participation of intellectuals and social organizations.

The reforms also redefined the social structure and changed the distribution of power between state and society, consequently altering the principles on which society is organized and the ways in which it interacts with the state apparatus. The reach of the state is on the wane and the scope for individual initiative is on the rise (Hutchings, 2000:21). There is greater social and geographical mobility and horizontal interaction and integration has developed as the vertical and cellular boundaries of the traditional Leninist system have been breaking down.

Chapter 4 focuses on how the economic, political and social transformations introduced in Chapter 3 facilitated the emergence of civil society in China in two select areas: the growth of the public sphere, and the growth of social organizations.

The emergence of a public sphere is apparent in the increased means for communication and increased participation in the development of its media sector. This chapter shows that while there is still a significant degree of state interference that deters free communication in the public sphere, in general, public discourse in the Chinese public sphere is freer now than at anytime under the CCP. Changes in communication technology and a more accessible public sphere has had particular benefit for intellectuals who, in relation to the general population, have enjoyed even more opportunities for participation and more autonomy and freedom of expression.

The second part of Chapter 4 focuses on the growth of China's social organizations, an important component of civil society. In order to facilitate their

participation in the country's development, the state has granted them varying degrees of organizational and operational autonomy. While the majority of these are not entirely independent from the state, the great majority of them enjoy greater autonomy to organize and participate in society than ever before.

Despite alternating intervals of 'tightening' and 'letting go' of political control by the state, China's public sphere and its social organizations have experienced a general increase in the quantity and quality of expression, organization and participation since the introduction of reforms, the consequence of which has facilitated the emergence of civil society in China.

Chapter 5 focuses on Chinese intellectuals and the role that they play in promoting civil society. It begins by describing how their position in the PRC is affected by state actions motivated by short term economic and political requirements (Cao, 1999:322). This means that since 1949, the relationship between intellectuals and the state has varied, mirroring the changing dynamic between the party's sometimes ideological and sometimes utilitarian agenda for modernization, and intellectuals' demands for autonomy. Although the state's policy towards intellectuals has followed a general trend of 'tightening' and 'letting go' since the introduction of reforms in 1978, there is no question that Chinese intellectuals currently enjoy more individual and intellectual freedoms, access to foreign knowledge and a more pluralistic cultural environment than at any other time in the history of the PRC.

This chapter also notes that while the overall levels of autonomy, academic freedom, and influence have improved for all intellectuals, factors such as an intellectual's relation to the state, orientation, position and status help determine the degree of autonomy that they enjoy and the degree of influence that they are able to assert in the policy process.

## 7.2 Conclusions: the Emergence of Civil Society in China

In the Chinese context, the role of civil society in the transformation of Chinese politics and society has attracted considerable attention. As mentioned in Chapter 1, some scholars refute the applicability of civil society as a useful theoretical concept

for analyzing China because of the political context that currently exists in China. However, others contend that civil society does exist and has existed since long before the reform period. William Rowe argues that the rise of trade and a commodity economy in the late Qing dynasty created new types of entrepreneurial organization separate from ordinary family life. This created a need for new institutions of communication that introduced a commoditization of information and created a concept of public opinion similar to Habermas' notion of the public sphere. He argues that the public "became freed from identification with the bureaucratic administration, the concept of 'society' as a distinct political actor counterpoised to the state emerged, and private voluntary associations were granted legitimacy as interest groups" (Rowe, 1990:319). Similarly, David Strand notes the expansion of 'the public' and public opinion as a vastly expanded sphere of discussion and debate during this time (Strand, 1989:168). The arguments against the presence of a civil society in China run opposite to what others see happening in contemporary China in regards to state-society reconfiguration and the emergence of civil society since the death of Mao in 1976. Mao's death is significant because only here did the seeds for a budding civil society find the conditions for sustained growth and development (Powers & Kluver, 1999:1). The reform era that began shortly after in 1978 is believed to be continuously contributing to the rejuvenation of society and weakening the power of state control (Rosenbaum, 1992). With the improved economic environment and a higher quality of life, most of the social conditions thought necessary for the emergence of a vibrant civil society and the social conditions that once contributed to the birth and prosperity of civil society in the west are also emerging in China after nearly 30 years of economic reform and development (Zhang, 1997).

The composition of state-society relations in China before 1978 essentially followed the will of the totalitarian state. Communism did sharpen the distinction between the two spheres in terms of relative power of influence, but in terms of structure, the boundary between state and society was non-existent. The state controlled virtually every aspect of society, including the life course of its people (Zhou & Hou, 1999). Before 1978, 'private individuals' were not able to

communicate freely in a ‘public context,’ in the ‘free associations of civil society’ because these did not exist.

Chinese civil society gradually emerged after the reforms of 1978 in response to changes in the economic sphere and the reestablishment of private ownership. The role of free market economics facilitating the construction of civil society in important ways is a historical and sociological fact. When an economy is structured by markets, behaviour is encouraged that is independent, rational, and self-controlled (Alexander, 1998:8). By creating an enormous supply of cheap and widely available material media, mass production lessens the invidious distinctions of status markers that separated rich and poor in more restricted economies. It becomes increasingly possible for masses to express their individuality, their autonomy, and their equality through consumption and thus partake of the common symbolic inheritance of cultural life (Alexander, 1998:8-9). The economic reforms supported private ownership and encouraged entrepreneurs to take risks with private capital as a means of rapid accumulation. Private ownership supplies the civil sphere with facilities like independence, self-control, rationality, equality, self-realization, cooperation, and trust (Alexander, 1998:9), necessitating the further development of society along the lines of individual rights and freedoms and the basis of control of the existing power structure becomes incompatible with the basis of material wealth under a new economic system (Zong, 1993:258-9). The reforms have created many potential social bases for autonomy in the economic sphere. This phenomenon reflected the need to integrate the new market system by organizing society so that the market could function without destabilising results, and partly reflects the independence of new, active social groups created or strengthened by reforms (Kelly & He, 1992:28).

The policy of economic reform and openness initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 has pluralized China’s socioeconomic structure and has greatly reduced the state’s dominance over society in China. Individual freedom in economic activities has spawned an expanding space for Chinese civil society because personal and group interests have become an important motivational force in social life. China’s economic liberalization has cultivated a fertile ground for the growth and prosperity



of civil society (Tai, 2006:287). The growth of the private sector not only brought about the development of individualism, individual rights to liberty and property, but also enhanced people's democratic consciousness, and the wish for more political involvement. Thus, as civil society expands and as independent organizations, ideas and publications become established, the state's control becomes increasingly undermined (Zong, 1993:257-60). Furthermore, government decentralization after the reforms meant increasing degrees of power of autonomy for local governments. These changes reduced the power of the state and a sphere of economic and social pluralism began to emerge between the official sphere of the state and the private sphere of the individual. As a result, more autonomous bodies grew out of state structures that no longer depended directly on state structures (Zong, 1993:261).

Similarly, in an effort to improve economic modernization, the state began to liberalize spaces for more open discussion, intellectual debate and independent association. This stimulated the emergence of new forms of association, particularly those in the fields of academia, science and technology (Howell, 2004:122). The increasing number of publications since the 1980s has allowed for far-reaching intellectual debates, and public opinion began to distinguish itself from official propaganda (Zong, 1993:262). The reduction of control over the academic process gave intellectuals and students more opportunities to discuss matters amongst themselves, in conferences, and internationally, propagating new ideas and thoughts that challenged the existing ideology and led toward new ways of thinking.

That the rapid process of socioeconomic transformations in China since 1978 are becoming manifest in the contours of civil society is well documented, and relatively autonomous social organization has been expanding for years. In the 1980s, the main actors forming more independent organizations were intellectuals, professionals and business classes. This has continued into the present, but from the mid-1990s onwards the spaces for more autonomous organization are also being used to address the needs of those who are losing out in the reform process (Howell, 2004:128). The emergence of a layer of organizations concerned with issues of socio-economic inequalities, social justice and social welfare is not coincidental. It

reflects a deliberate strategy by the state to encourage the development of non-governmental welfare provisions. It also reflects the increasing socioeconomic disparities that have accompanied the process of rapid modernization and a deep concern amongst top party leaders that such disparities are potentially destabilizing (Howell, 2004:124).

Some of the new social movements that have emerged since the late 1980s provide examples of what Frenzel-Zagorska analyses as adaptation through opposition, or “supporting existing state institutions on the behavioural level, at the same time taking advantage of them and displacing their goals by trying to achieve private goals at the expense of official ones” (Kelly & He, 1992:29). This type of relationship is indicative of the extent that the processes of the state and society are interwoven. Indeed, many of the various ways that scholars have reformulated the concept of civil society in China make note of the increased interaction that takes place at the interstices, at the ‘seams’ between the two spheres. An important difference between China and western countries is that in the Chinese case, the boundaries between the state and civil society are ‘blurry’ and anything but clear. Thus, in order to study the emergence of civil society in China, we need to look at the organizations and institutions that operate between the seams of society and the state. Many of these organizations and institutions, while linked to the state apparatus in various ways, are nonetheless relatively autonomous.

### 7.3 Conclusions: State-Society Relations in China

Despite the predominance of state power in determining the outcomes of state-society relationships. Many scholars note the decreasing influence of the state in favour of increased autonomy of actors from within civil society influencing the state through a type of public sphere. Attempts to explain the current conditions of civil society and the public sphere in China are numerous. Baogang He has developed the notion of a “semi-civil society in China” (He, 1994; 1997) based on the lack of autonomy enjoyed by organizations between the state and society. These organizations are neither completely autonomous from the state nor completely

dependent on the state (Tai, 2006:52). “[I]t is the feature of partial autonomy and overlapping with the state that makes Chinese social associations a semi- or quasi-civil society” (He, 1997:8). He writes that semi-civil society has come about by the need to adapt to the Chinese political landscape: It “reveals a strategy employed by members of associations. They deliberately “blur” the demarcation between the state and associations, or “sacrifice” their autonomy in order to survive and develop, or to change the structure of policy of the state from within. The very uncertainty of the distinction between the state and civil society is a protection for civil society in the face of oppression; that is, semi-civil institutions can be defended as part of the state’s institutions” (He, 1997:8). Similarly, Huang (1993) argues that the concepts of ‘public sphere’ and ‘civil society’ as developed in the west are inapplicable to China because they presuppose a dichotomous opposition between state and society. He proposes a ‘third realm,’ which is “a third space conceptually distinct from state and society” to describe the particularities in Chinese socio-political life (Huang, 1993:225). “Contrary to the vision of the public sphere/civil society models, actual socio-political change in China has never come from any lasting assertion of societal autonomy against the state, but rather from the workings out of state-society relations in the third realm” (Huang, 1993).

O'Brien’s concepts of ‘entwinement’ and ‘embeddedness’ are able to offer some insight here into the relationship between state and associations in Chinese civil society. Given the omnipresence of state power and influence, social organizations may voluntarily give up a part of their autonomy in exchange for advantages in influencing state policymaking or maintaining legitimacy. Entwinement refers to the effort by social forces to harmonize their relations with the state by subordinating themselves to the established centers of state power. Through the strategy of entwining, social organizations can enmesh themselves in the political system and avoid potential confrontations with the state, and thereby acquire viability and legitimacy. Embeddedness occurs as leaders, staff, and allies of an organization redraw the formal and informal rules of a political system to win a valued place for their organization. These agents of change seek proximity to existing centers of power

rather than distance. In effect, they work to promote change from within the system as opposed from without. By maintaining only limited autonomy, embeddedness brings about organizational development as a result of attention and support from the state power (O'brien, 1994). Newly emerging social forces strategically tie their fortunes to the state by adopting a strategy of voluntary cooptation. The process of entwinement ensures that the state is incorporated into the institutional structure of social organizations and therefore becomes more responsive to society's demands and interests. However, it also means that the state has a direct say in regulating social forces and secondary associations (Tai, 2006:53-54). When state-society interaction is a two-way process, these relationships are "mutually empowering," with each affecting the other in certain directions (Shue, 1994). Thus while the Chinese Communist Party intends to incorporate social organizations into its domain of control through such relationships, social organizations use them to tilt state decisions in their own favour and to seek state protection for their group interests (Tai, 2006:58). An example of this type of group is the 'red capitalists,' private entrepreneurs who are recruited into the communist party by the state. According to Dickson (2003), 'red capitalists' are able to exert pressure for political change from within the party. Thus, it is possible for groups 'embedded' in the political system to promote change even though they have a close relationship with the state. The presence and actions of the 'red capitalists' also demonstrates how other groups from civil society are influencing behaviour across the state-society divide, affecting change in policy that ultimately benefits their own interests.

As the above dialogue concerning state and society relations makes clear, civil society, in the sense of a relatively independent sphere of non-coerced association for shared interests, has developed over 30 years of reform in China, but it has developed in 'fits and starts' (Howell, 2004:121). Examining civil society in China as an ideal-type that assumes a clear boundary between state and society is misdirected. As the variety of relationships between state and society in the Chinese context make clear, the idea of civil society must be reworked to embrace the blurry interpenetration of state and society (Flower & Leonard, 1996:200). There has been a strong state, but

it has not successfully strangled competing social forces (Tai, 2006:57). The development of civil society in China has always been a fluid process adapting to evolving social, economic, political, and ideological conditions. State-versus-society frameworks need to be broken down to allow room for flexible interactions, and more nuanced analyses of the blurry, multilayered roles of state agents in civil institutions (Flower & Leonard, 1996:219-220).

#### 7.4 Concluding Remarks

There is some agreement that civil society is taking shape in China outside the sphere of influence of the once all-powerful and all-inclusive state. However, the form of this civil society still remains debatable and it has been noticed that civil society in China still lacks autonomy and is still interwoven within the parameters of the state. As an existing social sphere, Chinese civil society does not resemble the bourgeois model that arose in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Instead, Chinese civil society is punctuated by the influence of the historical, cultural, and political factors that constitute the form of its institutions, organizations and associations, as well as how these social actors communicate in the public sphere.

Chinese civil society is undoubtedly different than its western counterparts. Unlike the west, it does not exist in opposition to the state. Instead, it is characterized by a range of institutions that exist at the interstices between state and society. Chinese state-society relations are 'blurry' and interdependent. As such, the sphere that encapsulates the institutions of civil society in China not only exists between the spheres of state and society, but within them as well. The entwining entanglement of civil society with the state is indicative of the specific social, political, economic, and cultural conditions that have contributed to its development. Elements of civil society emerge from within society and from within the state. While initially incipient in nature, these institutions are usually relatively weak as far as their politics of influence is concerned. As these institutions continue to develop, they expand their presence across the permeable 'boundary' that separates the spheres of state and society. In some situations, it is possible that they straddle this boundary from the beginning,

making expansion unnecessary. As these institutions grow and become more powerful, horizontal linkages can be established with other groups, organizations, and institutions, subsequently expanding the boundaries of civil society in the process.

Like their counterparts in western civil society, these groups and associations influence the state into adopting policies consonant with their interests. The difference is that in most cases, these groups are not originally composed of “voluntary unions outside the realm of the state and the economy” (Habermas, 1992:453-454). In China, many of these groups begin as organizations that are a part of the state apparatus. Although there are exceptions, most do not initially belong to the realm of society, lying outside the institutionalized political and administrative mechanisms of the state and the state-regulated part of the economy (Arato & Cohen, 1988).

Civil society in China does not, and may not ever resemble the western conception of a sphere in opposition to the state. However, this does not mean that it does not exist. It is an incipient part of Chinese society and as it continues to emerge, Chinese civil society is increasingly becoming a sphere of identity formation, social integration, and cultural reproduction.

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## Civil Society in China

Would you like to participate in a graduate research project?

Canadian graduate student Ian Cooper is looking for university professors and university graduate students from Xi'an Jiaotong University to participate in his study entitled *The emergence of civil society in China: Intellectuals in the public policy process*. Participants are invited to share their thoughts and opinions on the emergence of civil society in China. Civil society is an inherently broad concept and encompasses numerous segments of society. This study is an attempt to examine its emergence in China by focusing on one group, namely intellectuals, and their relation to the policy process. As an intellectual, you can contribute your voice to the international discourse surrounding this hot topic.

Online 1 on 1 interviews and focus groups will be scheduled at the convenience of the participants. The expected time commitment is no longer than 1 hour.

If you would like to participate in this study, or if you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact Ian Cooper at [inc965@mail.usask.ca](mailto:inc965@mail.usask.ca) and more details will be provided.

**CONSENT FORM**

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled *The emergence of civil society in China: Intellectuals in the public policy process*. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

**Researcher(s):** Ian Cooper,

Department of Sociology, University of Saskatchewan,

Email: inc965@mail.usask.ca

Telephone: (001) 819-953-5998.

**Purpose and Procedure:** The purpose of this study is to contribute to the discourse surrounding the emergence of civil society in China. Civil society is an inherently broad and encompasses numerous segments of society. By focusing on one group, intellectuals, and their role in the public policy process, this study attempts to inform debate on the emergence of civil society in China.

If you choose to participate in this study, please contact the researcher to schedule a 1on1 online interview using SKYPE, QQ, MSN Messenger etc. Online focus groups can also be arranged if there is enough interest. The estimated length of time needed to participate in this project is one hour. Interviews will be conducted and recorded by the researcher. Findings are directed at the academic community but will also be publicly available. Interview responses will be reported using direct quotations.

**Potential Benefits:** Participants in this research project will have the benefit of making a contribution to the established literature surrounding the discourse of civil society in China.

**Potential Risks:** The researcher will take all available precautions to assure that participant anonymity and confidentiality are assured. However, there is a potential risk that your responses might include personal identifiable information. The researcher will

## Appendix B – Consent form

remove all information that is not greater, considering probability and magnitude, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

If you choose to participate in a focus group, groups will be formed based on the availability of the participants. Be aware that all participants are either graduate students or professors of a social science discipline at Xi'an Jiaotong University and may know you in a professional relationship. Also be aware that in focus groups, there are limits to which the researcher can ensure the confidentiality of the information shared.

Furthermore, due to the nature of a network, the online interview cannot be considered secure and that as a result confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. By participating in this study you acknowledge your responsibility and agree to protect the integrity and confidentiality of what others in the group have said during the research sessions.

**Storage of Data:** Interviews and focus groups will be recorded on audio tape for the confidential use of the researcher only. In order to safeguard and store the data, the original audio tapes, transcriptions and signed consent forms will be securely stored by my supervisor at the University of Saskatchewan for a minimum of five years, as per University regulations. After 5 years, the data, the original audio tapes, transcriptions and signed consent forms will be destroyed appropriately and beyond recovery

**Confidentiality:** The data from this research project will be published and presented at conferences; however, your identity will be kept confidential. Although we will report direct quotations from the interview, you will be given a pseudonym, and all identifying information (list relevant possibilities such as the name of the institution, the participant's position etc.) will be removed from the report.

In the case of focus groups, the researcher will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion, but cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so. Please respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the contents of this discussion outside the group, and be aware that others may not respect your confidentiality.

## Appendix B – Consent form

Because the participants for this research project have been selected from a small group of people, it is possible that you may be identifiable to other people on the basis of what you have said.

After you interview, and prior to the data being included in the final report, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of you interview, and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcripts as you see fit.

There is a potential loss of anonymity for correspondence carried out by fax or e-mail. The researcher will attempt to minimize this loss by keeping correspondence information confidential and separate from public view.

**Right to Withdraw:** Your participation is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. There is no guarantee that you will personally benefit from your involvement. The information that is shared will be held in strict confidence and discussed only with the researcher. You may refuse to answer individual questions. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort. After the interview is complete, you may withdraw your responses from the research project for whatever reason. If you withdraw from the research project at any time, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request.

**Questions:** If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researcher at the number provided if you have other questions. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (001-306-966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect.

Appendix B – Consent form

**Follow-Up or Debriefing:** The results of the research project will be made public through the University of Saskatchewan Library at the conclusion of the study.

**Consent to Participate:**

The participant has received a copy of this consent form for their records. I read and explained this Consent Form to the participant before receiving the participant's consent, and the participant had knowledge of its contents, appeared to understand it, and has given their oral consent to participate.

**(Name of Participant)** \_\_\_\_\_ **(Date)** \_\_\_\_\_

**(Signature of Researcher)** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C – Interview guide

### Interview Guide

Online interviews and focus groups are semi-structured by the researcher. The questions are open-ended and participants are free to respond with as much or as little detail as they wish. The researcher will ask the following questions:

- What is your area of study?
- What is the selection process for obtaining research topics?
- What is the relationship between intellectuals and the policy process?
- Does your research and discipline have policy implications? If yes, please discuss.
- What is the role of intellectuals in China?
- How have the economic reforms influenced intellectuals?
- How is research published in China?

Appendix D – Transcript release form

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study *entitled, The emergence of civil society in China: Intellectuals on the public policy process*, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with **Ian Cooper**. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to **Ian Cooper** to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of researcher