Technologies of Authoritarian Statecraft in Welfare Provision: Contracting Services to Social Organizations

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ABSTRACT

In 2013 the authoritarian Chinese Communist Party adopted a nationwide policy to contract out welfare services to social organizations. This presented the Party/state with a conundrum: how best to foster service-oriented social organizations whilst retaining control over politically sensitive groups. Using a Foucauldian framework of analysis, this article explores the rationalities and technologies of statecraft deployed to navigate this tension. It argues that contracting welfare services is a form of governmentality linked to economic efficiency, welfare provision and social stability, requiring subtle ways of governing society. In implementing this policy, the Party/state seeks to foster a service-oriented civil society and stymie rights-based and politically sensitive groups.

INTRODUCTION

In 2013 the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rolled out a nationwide programme of contracting welfare services to social organizations.[1] This required modifying the restrictive regulatory framework governing social

1. In this article, we use the term 'social organizations' (*shehui zuzhi*), which is more current in Chinese than the English 'NGOs'. The administrative term 'social organizations' refers to organizations such as foundations, social groups and people's not-for-profit enterprises registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA). In this article, the term is used sociologically to describe the associational landscape of registered and unregistered NGOs, with varying degrees of autonomy and relations with government, including grassroots organizations and government-organized NGOs (GONGOs). The terms in Chinese to describe NGOs are often used interchangeably and change over time in administrative regulations, academically and in everyday discourse. For example, in registration regulations of 2016 governing social organizations, MOCA replaced 'people's non-profit enterprise' with 'social service organization'.

organizations to facilitate registration and enable applications for government contracts. Given that the Party/state had hitherto viewed social organizations with ambivalence, sometimes tolerating their existence when deemed instrumentally useful but sometimes harassing those perceived as threatening, this was a significant change of approach. However, it presented the Party/state with a challenge: how to foster service-oriented social organizations, whilst keeping at bay rights-oriented and politically sensitive groups. Given the Party/state's ongoing suspicion and frequent repression of social organizations, this volte-face would also need some justification if social organizations were to trust the government and the public were to accept this new type of service provider. Furthermore, it would require the Party/state to leverage technologies of statecraft to ensure both the expansion of service-oriented social organizations and control over rights-based, advocacy-oriented social organizations.

This article adopts a Foucauldian framework to explore the rationalities and technologies of statecraft that the Party/state adopted to manage these challenges.[2] We argue that contracting welfare services to social organizations is not merely a technical solution to pluralizing the range of service providers but also a form of governmentality linked to broader goals of economic efficiency, welfare provision and social stability, requiring subtle ways of governing society. Deploying modified and new technologies of statecraft, the Party/state seeks to foster a service-oriented civil society and to stymie rights-based and politically sensitive groups, which have often proved adept at manoeuvring around controls.

The article begins by outlining the theoretical framework and explaining the key concepts: governmentality, political rationalities and technologies of statecraft. It then sketches the meta-rationality of hybrid socialism-neoliberalism that encompasses the rationalities of public sector reform, social governance and the pluralization of welfare used to legitimize the contracting of welfare services to social organizations. The subsequent section then examines the key technologies of statecraft used to facilitate this policy shift without risking social instability and regime threat. These are: first, changes in the regulatory environment to encourage and simultaneously discourage certain types of social organizations; second, social work practice that focuses on individuals and legitimizes social workers; third, the use of lists as techniques of exclusion and inclusion that shape the matrix of legitimate service-providers; fourth, devices that distinguish needs and services from rights and activism; and fifth, Party cells as techniques of

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2. In adopting a Foucauldian analysis of power, the article acknowledges that power cannot be merely reduced to visible intent, but rather is subtly embodied in discursive shifts, institutional strategies and practices.

surveillance and control. Our goal is neither to assess the effectiveness of these technologies nor to investigate in depth the varied empirical process of policy implementation,[3] but rather to understand the shifting contours of governance in China.

The article draws upon an analysis of policies, laws and speeches of leaders related to welfare-services contracting over the past two decades. It forms part of a larger project funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council on the politics of contracting welfare services to NGOs in China. The research involved an extensive review of relevant Chinese and English literature, alongside an analysis of relevant policies, laws and regulations at central level and, where available, at local level, from 1998 to 2020. It is supplemented with findings from fieldwork conducted during 2018 and 2019 in four locations (A, B, C, D) and across three sectors. The four locations had varying contracting histories and trajectories, including former experimental sites for contracting and a city new to contracting, with few social organizations. The three sectors were HIV/AIDs, children with disabilities and migrant groups; they represented marginalized interests less covered in the literature, enabling us to capture issues around rights and advocacy work in an increasingly repressive political context. Altogether 121 interviews of between one and three hours were conducted with 84 NGOs, 29 academics and experts (including 14 based in Hong Kong) and eight government officials. Where permission was granted, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The names of informants remain anonymous to protect interviewees. Organizations were sampled using various sources such as handbooks of NGOs, websites and personal networks, lists of contracting programmes, contacts with government officials and stakeholders and snowballing techniques. In analysing the policies, laws and speeches and relevant fieldwork, we developed thematic codes such as NGO–state relations, lists, autonomy, Party cells' contracting processes, and social work. The interview data were triangulated with relevant sources such as sectoral and locational studies, policies and websites. All translations into English are provided by the authors.[4]

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3. It is well established in China studies that there is considerable variation across time and place and across levels of the Party/state in policy implementation processes (see, for example, Hsu et al., 2017). At different levels and divisions of the Party/state, officials face different economic, historical and cultural circumstances, juggle often competing and increasingly varied interests, operate with hidden rules, and engage with varying degrees of caution and tolerance with non-state actors. The Party/state is thus not wholly monolithic. Our empirical findings on the contracting of welfare services to social organizations in different sectors and locations are pursued in greater depth in forthcoming publications.

4. In the References list, the titles of some Chinese articles have been translated into English by the journal in which they are published. These have not been altered.

GOVERNMENTALITY, SOCIAL ORDER AND WELFARISM

In understanding the politics of welfare provision through contracting out to social organizations in urban China, Foucault's seminal work on power and governmentality offers a treasure trove of concepts and tools. In particular, Foucault's concepts of governmentality, political rationalities and technologies of power are useful for capturing some of the processes by which states in general, and China in particular, rule (Dean, 2010). For Foucault, governmentality comprises the networks between political authorities and other authorities such as economic, technical or medical that seek 'to govern the lives of others' through various programmes and plans according to conceptualizations of the 'good, healthy, normal, virtuous, efficient or profitable' (Rose and Miller, 1992: 175). Foucault's approach to knowledge, discourse and expertise as sources of power that create truths and produce rationalities for certain practices and policy choices transcends linear accounts of policy processes (Foucault, 1991: 175–76).

In their discussion of the 'problematics of government', Rose and Miller (1992: 175) analyse governmentality through political rationalities and governmental technologies. Political rationalities refer to how power is discursively conceptualized and morally and rationally justified. Discourses reveal power through the creation of knowledge and systems of naming, explaining and defining. As Chambon (1999: 57) puts it; 'each discursive practice implies a play of prescriptions that designate its exclusions and choices'. Discourses in turn shape the ways of thinking about processes, produce truth claims and, as Parton (1999: 105–06) notes, 'make some actions possible and preclude others'. Discursive practices delimit a field and legitimate certain activities, practices and processes and not others.

The second aspect raised by Rose and Miller (1992: 183–84) is the technologies of government deployed to meet grand political, economic and social objectives. These comprise the various policies (which embody government's intentions), projects and programmes, the procedures, laws and regulations, the techniques, documentation and accredited practices through which relevant designated political and non-political authorities seek to realize governmental goals. They include technical devices such as listing, data collection, evaluation reports, assessment and standardization processes that foster certain habits and practices and generate experts and professionals. Hierarchical surveillance, normalizing judgement and examination are key elements of a disciplinary power that ensures that political rationalities permeate the micro levels of practice (Parton, 1999: 108).

For Foucault, to govern is 'to structure the possible field of action of others' (Chambon, 1999: 65). How states discipline and regulate the public life of citizens and their ability to organize collectively is a way of governing to ensure meta-goals of social order and stability. Setting the boundaries of public engagement constructs the possible field of action of citizens in public life. In this process the governmentalities of social order and welfarism

can intersect. In Rose and Miller's (1992) seminal work on welfarism, welfare states govern by harnessing social policy and social work to their ends. The intersection of these governmentalities of welfarism and social order structure the possibilities for citizens to engage in the provision of welfare as volunteers and as organized actors through social organizations. This interplay between the governmentalities of welfarism and of citizen engagement through organized public action form the subject matter of this article. In the next section we examine how the Chinese Party/state rationalizes the policy shift towards contracting welfare services to social organizations, the bodies of knowledge it draws on and the discourses used to express this. We will show how the Chinese Party/state deploys social policy, social work and service-oriented social organizations as instrumentalities of governance that are in turn justified and rationalized by selective knowledge and truth claims.
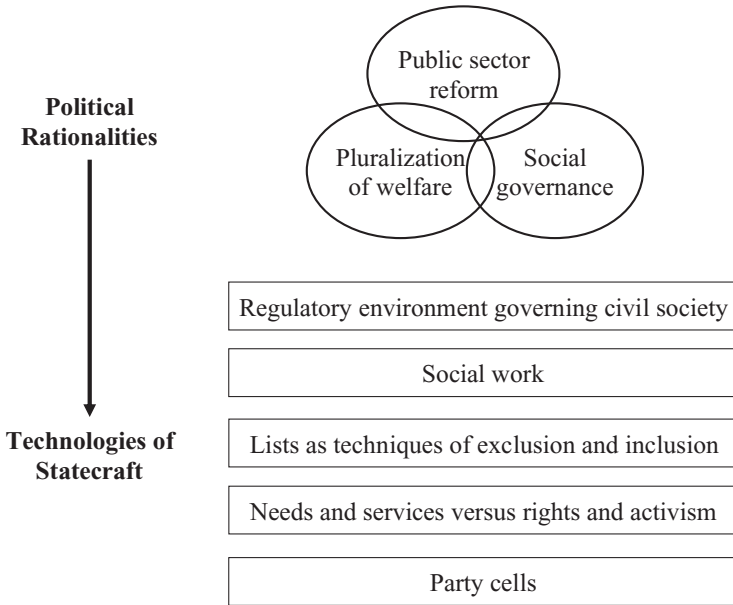
RATIONALITIES OF GOVERNANCE IN CHINA

The political rationalities informing governance are embedded in shifting discursive fields buttressed by bodies of knowledge and moral justifications. Such rationalities relate to ideas, norms, values and visions of the ideal society, the appropriate scope of politics and the tasks of different social entities such as family, individuals, bureaucracy. They articulate justifications for government action to achieve broad meta-goals such as enhanced well-being, prosperity, social order and stability, and social justice. Given the 'black box' of policy making in China, minimal reporting on intra-elite differences or leaders' personal policy preferences, and limited access to high-level leaders, analysis of discursive shifts, tropes and subtle twists in approach evident in speeches, legislation and policy are important indicators of areas of difference and debate.

Under China's market reforms since 1978 a meta-political rationality of hybrid socialism-neoliberalism has developed that combines socialist rationalities of planning with market rationalities of competition, efficiency, autonomy and choice (Sigley, 2006: 489, 499). This hybrid rationality paved the way for the application of these principles to the governance of society, and specifically welfare. In this vein, governing at a distance was to become crucial in welfare reform. Just as neoliberal ideas of competition, privatization, efficiency, individual choice and streamlining of states were shaping China's market reforms, they also shaped public sector and welfare reforms through the field of new public management (NPM) (Andrews and Van de Walle, 2013; Dunleavy and Hood, 1994; Hood, 1991).

Couched within this meta-rationality, three interlinked political rationalities were used to justify changes in the governance of welfare and society, namely, public sector reform, social governance and the pluralization of welfare (see Figure 1), which we explore below. Elements of these

Figure 1. Political Rationalities and Technologies of Statecraft in China

**Political
Rationalities**

Public sector
reform

Pluralization
of welfare

Social
governance

| Regulatory environment governing civil society |
| Social work |
| Lists as techniques of exclusion and inclusion |
| Needs and services versus rights and activism |
| Party cells |

**Technologies of
Statecraft**

Source: Authors' elaboration

rationalities — such as contracts and arms-length economic governance —
go back to the Deng Xiaoping era (1978–92), whilst changes in the state, en-
terprise and employee relations through insurance-based medical and pen-
sion reforms were galvanized in the Jiang Zemin era (1992–2002). The re-
thinking of state–citizen relations and mixed welfare provision deepened
in the Hu-Wen era (2002–12) and has developed further and more vigor-
ously during the Xi Jinping period. Hu-Wen's notion of 'social management'
evolved into 'social governance' as Xi Jinping reinforced leadership by the
Party at the centre of all institutions, including non-governmental, whilst so-
cial work, social policy and social organizations became a way of pluralizing
welfare and governing society.

Public Sector Reform (*zhengfu gaige*)

Changes in the welfare sphere were justified morally and rationally in the
speeches of Party leaders, different levels of government legislation, reg-
ulations and policies and media reportage, through subtle shifts in lan-
guage. Welfare reform required a new relationship between the state and
society that was captured discursively in key tropes such as 'separation
of government from society', 'transferring the functions of government to

society', 'service-oriented government', 'competition' and 'giving play to social forces'. These reflected the idea of the state stepping back and, as with the economy, guiding rather than directly ruling society. This necessitated a reframing of the approach towards public sector reform. In the Hu-Wen period this was articulated in the notion of 'people-centred' government; this then threaded into Xi Jinping's 'service-oriented government' (CCCP and State Office, 2011), marking a discursive shift from direct control over citizens to governing at a distance through services provision.

These changes called in turn for adjustments in the role of government officials (Chan, 2018), new institutional arrangements and new agencies to be involved in the delivery of welfare services. Just as the concept of the 'contract' had come to organize labour markets and agricultural production during the Deng period of office, contracts became a tool in public sector reform. This began in the Jiang Zemin era with the procurement of government services, predominantly transport and construction, which was codified in the new Contract Law of 1992. The contract embodied neoliberal principles of competition, efficiency, performance evaluation, cost-effectiveness and streamlined government (Jia and Su, 2009).

The seeds of welfare contracting were already being sown in the mid-1990s in Shanghai when the YMCA was contracted to deliver services (Wang, 2015: 88; Yang et al., 2015). As part of this transfer of functions, the Pudong government in Shanghai set up incubators for the development of service-oriented social organizations. The Asian Development Bank pushed this direction further when in 2005 it sponsored the contracting of poverty alleviation efforts in Anhui province to non-governmental groups (Jia and Su, 2009). Parallel to this, central government encouraged experimentation in government contracting to social organizations, with pilots initiated in Guangzhou, Beijing, Shenzhen and Shanghai from 2003 onwards. This culminated in the nationwide extension of the contracting of welfare services to social organizations in 2013, which offered a technical means to transfer government functions and pluralize the delivery of welfare. With it came new ways of facilitating individual choice and competition such as providing welfare recipients with vouchers (Jing and Savas, 2009; Leung and Xu, 2015: 140) and creating competition between welfare service providers for government contracts. This approach was justified in the Decision on Core Issues in Deepening Reform announced at the 3rd Session of the 18th Party Congress, in November 2013, as follows: 'We will promote government purchases of public services by means of contract and entrustment, and introduce a competition mechanism into general-affairs management services'.[5] To this end, ruling at a distance required changes in the relations between

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5. Part IV, Article 15 in the 'Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform', 12 November 2013. See: https://china.usc.edu/decision-central-committee-communist-party-china-some-major-issues-concerning-comprehensively

the state, individuals and organized society and the development of a cadre of social workers, all justified by the rationality of 'social governance'.

Social Governance (*shehui zhili*)

In his speech at the 2013 Party Congress, Xi Jinping coined the term 'social governance' (*shehui zhili*), replacing the preceding administration's trope of 'social management' (*shehui guanli*). The idea of 'social management' entered political discourse in the Hu-Wen period to rationalize the re-ordering of urban governance, the changing roles of government and governed, and governance through social work and social organizations (Howell, 2019; Leung et al., 2012). The term was contested, with policy makers and academics debating whether social management or social governance should be used, and whether these terms implied control of society or not (Cohen, 2011; He, Z.K., 2014). Whilst Jiang Zemin had linked social management to public order in his speech of 2 November 2002 at the 16th Party Congress, Hu Jintao emphasized its role in welfare in a keynote speech at the Party School in 2011. The rising importance of social management and welfare were reflected in The Outline of the 12th Five Year Plan, adopted in the 11th National People's Congress in March 2011, where a whole section, Part XI, was dedicated to social management (Howell, 2019: 70).

It was during the Xi Jinping era that the term subtly slid into 'social governance', expressing more firmly the idea of government control over society. The shift was significant in two ways: first, it signalled a deepening of governance through welfare, social work and social organizations; second, it enabled the assertion of Party power over and within non-state institutions, including social organizations, as discussed in the subsequent section on technologies. In his speech at the 3rd Session of the 18th Party Congress in 2013 Xi Jinping calls for 'innovation in the governance system', 'speeding up of the separation of government from society' and 'strengthening of the management of social organizations and foreign organizations'.[6] The extension of Party cells into social organizations was a key technology for realizing social governance. Devolving some power and authority to 'social forces' through the 'socialization' of welfare was perceived as a potential risk to social stability. Establishing a firm system of governance at a distance was vital to ensuring Party leadership over society as government tasks were transferred to social workers and social organizations.

As social work was a practice to be engaged in at the grassroots level and involved changes in the state's relationship with society and the individual,

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6. Part XIII, Articles 47 and 48 in the 'Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform', 12 November 2013. See: https://china.usc.edu/decision-central-committee-communist-party-china-some-major-issues-concerning-comprehensively

it also necessitated a restructuring of governance at the lowest level. This was to be achieved by transforming institutional structures and readjusting the roles of grassroots officials (Bray, 2006). In this vein, street committees and neighbourhood committees were recast in the language of 'community', with the new organizational pillars of community centres, volunteers and social organizations (ibid.). The new-fangled notion of 'three clubs linked', that started in Shanghai in 2004 and was adopted across the country by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA) from 2013, neatly captured the interlinking of community, social organizations and social workers (Wang et al., 2018: 22). Resources were channelled via municipal budgets to communities to recruit additional government officials and professional social workers.

Just as governing the market at a distance called for entrepreneurialism, so governing society at a distance required active citizenship at individual and collective levels (Bray, 2006; Leung and Xu, 2015). In place of docile class-based masses, social management called for active citizens with responsibilities for their own and society's development, ready to engage in community affairs and volunteer services (Cho, 2017; Leung et al., 2012). In this way, street committee officials could theoretically rule at a distance whilst social workers and social organizations took on frontline roles in organizing community activities, working with vulnerable groups and managing social stresses. In keeping with the meta-rationality of socialism-neoliberalism, social workers were hired on short-term contracts in the marketplace of welfare, whether recruited directly by government, as in Beijing and Shanghai, or indirectly through contracting schemes mediated by social organizations, as in Guangzhou and Shenzhen (Chan, 2018). This restructuring of grassroots governance, which began under the Hu-Wen administration and was extended and deepened under Xi's office, required new non-state providers of services. The idea of the 'pluralization of welfare' paved the way for local governments to transfer service delivery to private agencies, both for-profit and not-for-profit, through the governance tool of contracts.

Pluralization of Welfare (*fuli duoyuanhua*)

Communities were now the new locus of urban governance, social workers the new agents of social control and welfare provision, and individuals were to be responsible and participatory citizens. Local community officials could not directly provide all services; alternative providers were needed. However, the supply of non-governmental providers was very limited (Yue, 2017). Some local governments tolerated the activities of unregistered social organizations as they addressed new social needs, worked with marginal groups and dealt with issues that the state could not easily tackle itself, but the restrictive regulatory environment and ongoing harassment constrained their development, scale and effectiveness (Fisher et al., 2012; Xu, 2014:

39). The state had now to court grassroots groups and nurture their development if they were to transfer welfare services functions to social organizations.

Mixed welfare provision was the answer to sole reliance on the state but this too had to be justified, given that public awareness and trust of social organizations was low and government officials were often suspicious of their activities, especially those with funding from international donors and those engaged in rights work. Justification of this move required discursive shifts that emphasized the benefits of social organizations. The notions of 'pluralization' (*duoyuan hua*), 'social forces' and 'socialization' of welfare (*shehui hua*), which echoed NPM principles of choice and government streamlining, were key elements in this justification[7] (He, P., 2015: 111; Lei and Walker, 2013: 19–22).

Government purchasing of services was first strategically articulated as central to deepening government reforms and social governance in the 12th Five Year Plan during Hu-Wen's office and was reinforced at the 18th Party Congress in the Xi administration. Social organizations were conceptualized as 'beneficial for the acceleration of the transformation of government functions … and provision of public services' (State Council, 2014), contributing towards the development of a 'service-oriented government' and public sector reform more broadly (State Council, 2013). To this end, giving 'full play to the market mechanism' (State Council, 2016a) and 'using competitive means' (State Council, 2016b: Section 4) to transfer government functions to social organizations embraced NPM principles of competition. The merit of social organizations was evident in tropes such as giving 'full play to their unique advantages' in meeting people's needs and 'their positive role … in discovering new public service demand' (State Council, 2016a: Sections 1.1 and 2.1). As stated in State Council (2016b: 1), social organizations also formed a cornerstone of the Party's governance of society: 'Reform of the social organization management system … is conducive to consolidating and expanding the foundations for governance by the Party'. The transfer of welfare services to social organizations was further legitimized through conferences, academic research and international exchange, generating new journals and research projects and exposing Chinese researchers, policy makers and practitioners to new concepts such as Third Sector and civil society. This bolstered the ideological and epistemological legitimation for a mixed welfare approach involving social organizations.

These three rationalities — public sector reform, social governance and the pluralization of welfare — have underpinned the readjustment of relations between the state, market, social organizations and individuals at community level and facilitated the contracting of welfare services to social organizations. They resonate with principles of NPM such as streamlining

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7. See, for example, State Council (2006), in which the government recognized the need to 'encourage and mobilize social forces' in the purchasing of services.

government, choice, efficiency, competition and performance evaluation. Whilst they have enabled the idea of ruling at a distance, they have not implied the retreat of the state (Sigley, 2006: 497, 503) nor the absence of state control. The socialist element in the meta-rationality of hybrid socialism-neoliberalism is important here, not just ideologically but also in terms of stability and Party control. During the Xi Jinping era not only has the principle of Party leadership been further emphasized, but it has been extended more thoroughly to non-governmental institutions. In this way welfare reforms through social policy, social workers and social organizations serve not only to facilitate public sector reform but also to ensure the continued control of the state over society. As will be examined in the next section, technologies of statecraft are the means through which power is exercised over society to realize governmental goals of welfare and social stability.

TECHNOLOGIES OF STATECRAFT IN CHINA

This section delves into the technologies deployed in the governmental contracting of welfare services to social organizations in order to realize public sector reform, promote mixed welfare through choice and competition, and maintain social stability. We focus specifically on the regulatory environment governing social organizations; the recruitment of social workers; the use of lists and accredited practices to sift potential providers; techniques of exclusion and inclusion through lists; and disciplinary techniques of hierarchical control over social organizations.[8] We show how these measures shape the field of legitimate service-delivery providers and craft a vision of civil society based on needs and professionalism rather than rights and activism that would be more common in most liberal democratic societies.

Regulatory Environment Governing Civil Society

Regulatory frameworks encompassing specific laws and policies on social organizations are particular technologies for shaping the development of civil society. Though market reforms from 1978 onwards opened up spaces for new forms of non-governmental organizing responsive to changing needs, the regulatory environment constrained the ability of emerging social organizations to gain legal status and grow. In particular, Article 3 of the 1998 Regulations for the Registration and Management of Social Organizations required the latter to seek the approval of a sponsoring agency.[9]

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8. As Kang and Han (2008) demonstrate, there is a repertoire of 'graduated controls' used to control civil society.
9. 1998 Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations: Article 3, 'Social organizations should receive the approval and examination of a sponsor organiza-

Risk-averse government officials often hesitated to back a social organization for fear that unforeseen activities might adversely affect their promotion. Other constraining articles included Article 13 which restricted the number of social organizations in any specific field to one,[10] and Article 19 which prevented social organizations from setting up branches across the country for fear that nationwide networks could pose a threat to the political regime.[11]

However, if welfare reforms that transferred government functions to society were to be effected, the regulatory framework governing social organizations had to change. Specifically, the framework had to enable the recruitment of social organizations that were instrumentally useful to the state in deepening public sector and welfare reforms without undermining social stability. Whilst the MOCA had pushed since the 1990s for a legitimate role for social organizations in welfare, security-focused agencies such as the Ministry of Public Affairs resisted these efforts (Howell, 2019: 68, 72). Thus existing laws, regulations and policies were adjusted and new ones introduced both to encourage particular types of social organizations and to discourage unwanted others. We first trace the regulatory changes to enable the development of social organizations and then examine the move to constrain the activities of foreign social organizations.

In the more open Hu-Wen period, adjustments were made to the 1998 Regulations for the Registration and Management of Social Organizations to exempt certain types of social organizations from the requirement contained in Article 3 to identify a supervisory agency, enabling them to directly apply for registration to the relevant level of MOCA. Pilot experimentation with this began in Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Shanghai and Beijing from 2003 onwards and was generalized across the country under the Xi leadership in 2013 (Leung and Xu, 2015: 159–67). These regulatory changes rendered it easier for nascent and non-registered social organizations to register and bid competitively for government contracts. Given the absence in the former planned economy of a private sector or autonomous social organizations involved in welfare provision, these changes were crucial to expanding the supply of social service providers through contracting.

This apparent relaxation of the regulation had differentiating effects. On the one hand, it promised to create opportunities for the 'right type' of social organization to gain legal status, bid for government contracts and

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tion'. See: www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/regulations-on-the-registration-and-management-of-social-organizations

10. Ibid.: Article 13, 'There already exists a social organization in the same administrative district with the same or a similar scope of activity, and there is thus no need to set up another one'. See: www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/regulations-on-the-registration-and-management-of-social-organizations

11. Ibid.: Article 19, 'A social organization cannot establish a regional branch office'. See www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/regulations-on-the-registration-and-management-of-social-organizations

potentially expand their funding and client base. On the other hand, it drew a sharper and politically convenient line between social organizations which complied with government requirements by focusing on service delivery and those perceived as suspect by the Party/state. In between was a grey area where local officials had flexibility to contract to organizations without full registration.[12] This division was further entrenched through the promulgation of the Foreign NGOs Law in 2016, effective from January 2017. Prior to this, Yunnan province had already issued a new regulation in December 2009, effective from January 2010, which required foreign NGOs to register with the local Civil Affairs Bureau, evoking considerable concern amongst civil society researchers, foreign NGOs and international organizations.[13] The new law made the process of operating in China much more difficult and burdensome for foreign NGOs (Batke, 2019; Shieh, 2018), not least because the law required registration with the relevant level of the Ministry of Public Security rather than MOCA. As an international foundation director commented, 'the situation is restrictive and we have to engage more with the police now'.[14] It also limited the type of projects and activities they could engage in and subjected them to annual government approval and reporting. For domestic social organizations that received foreign funds, the new law dried up a vital source of funding. This was particularly serious for social organizations working on sensitive issues and adopting a rights-based approach to their work, which had relied mainly on foreign funding.

Foreign funding from international bilateral and multilateral organizations, international NGOs and foundations had all played an important role, particularly after China's entry into the World Trade Organization in 2002, in shaping advocacy and service delivery in various fields such as children's services and rights, labour rights, poverty alleviation, HIV/AIDs, gender and the environment). Foreign funding brought with it exposure to international expertise, knowledge and practice as well as rights-based approaches. Against the background of government suspicion of foreign agencies, which had intensified following the Colour Revolutions (Howell, 2019: 72), contracting of service delivery to social organizations provided an opportune device to strengthen regulation of social organizations and limit undesirable external influence by substituting governmental for foreign funds and, as Zhu and Chen note (2013: 44), 'social work for foreign NGOs'.

The drawing of lines between desirable social organizations, such as those focused on services, and less desirable social organizations became even sharper with the promulgation of the 'Notice on Eliminating the Breeding Grounds for Illegal Social Organizations and Cleansing the Ecological

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12. For example, in location A the government had a small pot of funds that could be used to fund social organizations, registered or not, to provide services.
13. The 'Yunnan Province Interim Regulations Standardizing International NGO Activities' was a precursor to the 2017 Foreign NGO Law.
14. Interview 85, international foundation director, location C, April 2019.

Space for Social Organizations' by the MOCA in March 2021.[15] This Notice sought to deprive so-called 'illegal social organizations' of any means of survival by outlawing all forms of support to them, whether by the media, organizations renting venues, or internet enterprises facilitating online platforms of these organizations. In this way the CCP sought to remove any spaces, means or possibilities for unregistered social organizations to survive.

Whilst the 2016 Foreign NGOs Law and the 2021 Notice sought to contain the growth of undesirable social organizations, other regulations, as described above, were adjusted to facilitate the expansion of service-focused social organizations. However, these adjustments in the regulatory regime have still not sufficed to expand the supply of scaled-up, service-oriented social organizations. Some unregistered social organizations resist contracting government welfare services because of concerns for their autonomy, others hesitate because the registration process is too complicated and some refrain from contracting because they lack the scale and capacity to be competitive (Jing, 2018). To further facilitate the development of non-governmental service providers, the Ministry of Finance issued Order No. 102 in March 2020 encouraging small-scale grassroots organizations to apply for government contracts.[16] 'Growing' a compliant, service-oriented Third Sector of social organizations as part of a strategy to govern civil society has proved far from smooth.

Social Work

The rationality of social governance required social policy as a knowledge base and social work as a practice to be developed in China if social workers were to be inserted into the fabric of community governance as legitimate frontline workers. However, this was a new body of knowledge and expertise that had to be nurtured and justified if social work was to be effective as a new technology of statecraft (Leung and Xu, 2015: 153–59). Although social work had begun to be taught in Chinese universities from the mid-1980s, it was only after 2006 that the Party heralded the role of social work as important in achieving a 'harmonious society' and strengthening Party leadership (ibid.: 156). It then rapidly developed as a field of knowledge and expertise. As China lacked any experience in social work practice, the government invited Hong Kong social work academics and practitioners to

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15. MOCA, 'Notice on Eliminating the Breeding Grounds for Illegal Social Organizations and Cleansing the Ecological Space for Social Organizations', Document No. 25, March 2021. See: http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/xw/tzgg/202103/20210300032709.shtml

16. Ministry of Finance, 'Measures for the Administration of Government Procurement of Services (effective)', Order No. 102, March 2020. See: http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?id=32178&lib=law

assist in galvanizing the field of social work, providing expertise, training and advice for the mainland.[17] As Leung et al. (2012) argue, the thrust of social work that spread across China centred on individual-based, therapeutic approaches that echoed the liberal values of many welfare states and focused on people with psychological and behavioural issues.[18]

These liberalist-humanist features of social work traditions practised in Hong Kong were more deeply absorbed in the nearby cities of Shenzhen and Guangzhou, as compared to Beijing and Shanghai, due to the different recruitment systems of social workers (Leung et al., 2012: 1053–54). In southern cities local governments indirectly recruited social workers through contracted schemes mediated by social organizations, whilst in northern cities social workers were directly recruited by government (ibid.: 1053). Universities and newly founded social workers' associations produced textbooks, manuals and professional codes of conduct, which imbibed the liberal and humanistic ideas around personal autonomy, the self-governing individual and ethical values of care and justice that were commonplace in Hong Kong and liberal countries (ibid.: 1052). Through this came the rapid creation of a cadre of professional social workers, a dedicated social work association, and a key technology of urban governance.

As social work was a new concept and practice, both the government and the Chinese Association of Social Workers (CASW) played a key role in familiarizing the public with the roles and values of social workers. The Association's 2018–19 annual report proudly notes a reference to the field in Li Keqiang's 2019 Report on the Work of the Government, and the use of the term 'social work' on four occasions. In 2019 the Association created a symbol for social work in China in order to 'build overall social work … strengthen social work publicity … and promote brand building' (CASW, 2018). On the 13th international social work day, provinces organized celebrations around 'the new journey of dreaming, social workers in action' (ibid.). Building social work and gaining public trust in social workers was vital if this was to serve as a technology for governing communities and ensuring social stability in a rapidly changing society.

As Leung et al. (2012: 1054) suggested, the liberalist-humanist tradition of social work practice, indirect hiring of social workers through independent social organizations, and professional supervision from Hong Kong posed a potential threat to the 'manageability of social work as new technology of government'. For social workers trained in this tradition, actual practice in the frontline of community governance has created dilemmas of values and interests. Frontline social workers have to reconcile conflicting expectations around the needs of clients and the demands of community officials to be their 'foot soldiers' (Chan and Lei, 2017: 1349–53). Social workers trained in notions of empowerment, rights and participation,

17. Interview 66, Professor of Social Work, Hong Kong, March 2019.
18. See State Council (2016b) for the kinds of issues to be addressed.

particularly in Guangdong province, encounter the grim reality that they may be required to serve as agents of social order maintenance, there to deliver government agendas and mediate between the Party/state and citizens. As professional experts they become complicit in the subjectification of certain categories of society such as the unemployed, migrants and the new poor, who have to be known, observed, calculated and dealt with to guarantee stability and social order.

These moves to govern society through social work do not guarantee that social work can be fully deployed as a technology of statecraft. As power also produces points of resistance, it is not surprising to find unease amongst social workers in having to assume government administrative tasks (Guan, 2015; Zhu and Chen, 2013: 50). Social workers might refuse to take these on, challenge government officials or approach these tasks with reluctance, risking forfeiting cooperative relations with officials and job contracts (Zhu and Chen, 2013: 50). Alongside low pay and short-term contracts this has contributed to the rapid turnover of social workers.[19] Furthermore, as Leung et al. anticipated in 2012, the unmanageability of this technology eventually led in the Xi era to the closure of undergraduate social work programmes in several universities in Guangdong province.

Lists as Techniques of Exclusion and Inclusion

In 2013 the Decision at the 18th Central Committee of the CCP endorsed clearly the position that 'social organizations should be commissioned to provide public services'.[20] The challenge for the Party/state was how to select social organizations that could deliver quality services but that would not pose a risk to political stability if allowed to grow. It is here that hierarchies and lists that normatively position objects entered as devices for exercising disciplinary power, shaping perceptions and facilitating processes of inclusion and exclusion. Lists and preferential policies are differentiating techniques for ordering society, dividing people into groups that are characterized and treated in different ways, and allocating budgetary resources. They give sustenance and power to particular groups and not others and in this way carve out the shape of associational life. By delineating which service providers can be entrusted with contracting service delivery at national and provincial levels, the development of social organizations can be deftly controlled. Those not on the list are then required, as before, to obtain a

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19. On low salaries, see Lu and Cai (2018: 49).
20. See Part XIII, Article 48 in the 'Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform', 12 November 2013. See: https://china.usc.edu/decision-central-committee-communist-party-china-some-major-issues-concerning-comprehensively

supervisory government department to oversee them — a process often so obstructive that most organizations do not even attempt to register.

In March 2013 the State Council announced four categories of social organizations, namely, industrial associations, charities, community services and science and technology associations, that would be exempt from securing a supervisory agency for registration purposes (Howell, 2019: 76). The Decision at the Third Plenum of the 18th Central Party Committee in November 2013 reinforced these moves,[21] stating that selected organizations such as charities, philanthropic organizations and community organizations could apply directly for registration. Though provincial governments had some leeway in this categorization process, they adhered to the overall direction of service orientation. The government created a digital platform recording every registered social organization, including particulars about their legal person, registered capital and assessment trajectory, a procedure that makes visible legitimated organizations and facilitates information gathering, monitoring and control.

Winners here tended to be GONGOs such as Party-affiliated organizations like the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF); quasi-governmental organizations; established service-focused organizations with professional staff, volunteers, scale, reputation and good government connections; and new social organizations often established purposively by government departments to obtain contracts.[22] Furthermore, GONGOs often served as hub organizations, coordinating and evaluating contract applications, organizing capacity building, and often competing simultaneously for funding (Zhao et al., 2016: 2243–44).[23] Smaller grassroots organizations tended not even to apply for contracts or, if they did, were rarely successful. Indeed, the very term 'professional' (*zhuanye hua*) was a convenient discursive trope to distinguish desirable and undesirable social organizations and was one of four elements of social governance outlined in Xi Jinping's speech in relation to social governance at the 18th Party Congress.[24] It is sufficiently vague and widespread that it subtly justifies governance over social organizations, functioning as a sorting device. At its most basic level it referred to qualified social workers and signalled the importance of quality in service delivery. However, in practice a minority of organizations could meet the criteria, hence the

21. Ibid.
22. These findings corroborate those of Zhao et al. (2016).
23. Interview 89, director, women's organization, location B, June 2019; Interview 5, Head of Social Work Office of Civil Affairs Bureau, location D, October 2017; Interview 89, senior staff member of hub organization, location B, June 2016.
24. These four elements were socialization of welfare, use of law, digitization and professionalization (*shehuihua, zhizhuhua, zhinenghua, zhuanyehua*). See Part XIII, Articles 47 and 48 in the 'Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform', 12 November 2013. See: https://china.usc.edu/decision-central-committee-communist-party-china-some-major-issues-concerning-comprehensively

recruitment of more established organizations to provide capacity building to develop the sector (Zhao et al., 2016). Further differentiation came with the specification of certain categories of social organizations according to assessment criteria. For example, the MOCA (2010: Document 39, Article 28) stipulates that 'organizations that acquire a level 3A and above can be given priority to … receive government purchasing of services', the assessment being carried out by relevant government departments.[25]

Whilst these lists endorse certain types of social organizations, they are juxtaposed by so-called 'blacklists' of groups that the government considers suspicious.[26] For example, in State Council (2016b: Section 3.6), it is stated that 'Civil affairs departments will … establish databases of social organizations which present with suspect behaviour and blacklists'. The lists allow local officials discretion in deciding which groups to contract. In the current tight political context, local officials are more conservatively disposed and unwilling to take risks.

Given the limited sources of funding available to social organizations in the wake of the 2016 Foreign NGO Law, and other constraints on fundraising, it becomes difficult politically and operationally for social organizations to continue any rights work. Our fieldwork yielded several examples of social organizations that had either closed because of the inability to identify alternative funding, including government contracts, or had abandoned their rights work in order to survive. This is not to say that organizations do not find ways around this, such as continuing rights work discreetly.[27] Nevertheless, it remains hard to advocate, mobilize and grow. Governmental contracting becomes a device through which the Party/state can not only instrumentalize social organizations for community engagement and welfare reform but also tame and control civil society.

Needs and Services versus Rights and Activism

Discourses shaping the purpose of social organizations in government contracts subtly project the power of the Party over society. Specifically, the emphasis on service provision as defined through clients' interests and needs rather than rights provides the steer to social workers and social organizations about their legitimate role. In response to the central government's 2013 directive to contract welfare services to social organizations (State Council, 2013: 3.3; also State Council, 2014: Document 96, Article 16),

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25. In Guangdong, Fujian and Beijing assessment is carried out by academic and non-profit organizations (Chen, 2013).
26. Interview 77, academic, and Interview 78, social worker, location C, April 2019.
27. Interview 82, NGO, location D, April 2019; Interview 99, NGO director, location D, June 2019; Interview 54, NGO director, location B, December 2018; Interview 84, NGO director, location B, December 2018.

local governments were required to compile lists of eligible services within the broad framework devised by central government. The lists that are sent down from central government are not devised through processes of consultation at the grassroots level. Nevertheless, provincial and county governments have leeway to put forward other needs and services that can be covered by government contracting. However, issues perceived as sensitive such as HIV/AIDS, migrant workers or rights-based work may lead risk-averse officials concerned about promotion prospects to hesitate in allocating government resources to these groups.

Whilst basic services such as elderly care are a key focus in services contracting, marginalized interests are left to the discretion of local officials. The power of lists and accompanying budgets emerges when choices are made in allocating resources. According to the Guiding Opinions (State Council, 2013: 3.3; State Council, 2014: Document 96, Article 15), the relevant government department issues a list of services open for contracting that is then used in allocating resources. Marginalized interests around sexuality, HIV/AIDS, certain disabilities and migrants often do not appear on such lists and lack a budgetary allocation. This may be because services for these groups are neither the responsibility of any department nor seen as basic services.[28] Nevertheless, the policy contradicts other government pronouncements that extol the advantages of social organizations in identifying new needs (State Council, 2016a: 54, Sections 1.1 and 2.1). The inclusion of marginal interests calls for advocacy, empowerment, representation of interests and the recognition of rights. However, in an authoritarian state such as China the room for advocating around alternative needs is limited, because of the constraints on citizens' organizing and limitations on campaigning, as well as censorship and media restrictions.

As described above, the categories of social organizations that become eligible for government contracts divide welfare-type social organizations into those providing services and those that focus on rights. In this way the Party/state reveals its normative imagination of civil society and fashions it to this end. The role of the Party/state in welfare centres on needs of individuals, encouraging them through social insurance and controlled participation to share mutual risks and take responsibility for their own well-being. This is not about meeting claims for rights or empowering citizens to identify problems or codetermine priorities and solutions. It is about needs versus rights, person-centred development versus collective solidarity (Leung et al., 2012: 1049), professional services versus activism, and service-delivery social organizations versus rights-based groups. Lists are the power device deployed to order needs and social organizations according to a broader imagination of associational life in authoritarian China.

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28. Interview 76, social work academic, location C, April 2019.

Party Cells

Contracting government services to social organizations assists the government in facilitating public sector reform and in filling the service-provider gap. However, from the perspective of the Party/state, encouraging the development of a Third Sector also runs the risk of emboldening organizations to promote rights, critique policy and potentially challenge the regime. Whilst the technologies of regulations, lists and assessment facilitate the growth of service-oriented social organizations, the Party/state constantly needs to maintain control lest these organizations slip into rights work and advocacy. It is here that Party strengthening comes to play a disciplinary role in potentially checking the development of social organizations. In the late Hu-Wen era, a directive was issued requiring social organizations to establish Party cells. This was not stringently enforced at the time and most non-governmental groups were in any case not registered. Though Party strengthening was not new, its application to non-state institutions as a technology of statecraft was (Leung et al., 2012: 1049; Thornton, 2013).

During the Xi administration, as part of a more general policy of strengthening Party organizations[29] and a fervent anti-corruption campaign, Party cells have been extended with renewed vigour to non-state institutions, broadening the capillary-like reach of the Chinese Communist Party as a device of surveillance and control. To enforce this, a swathe of policy documents followed requiring social organizations seeking government contracts to establish Party cells or, where too small, to merge with others. For example, in September 2015 the central government issued Notice 51 entitled 'Opinion on Strengthening Party-building in Social Organizations'. Local governments soon followed suit. In April 2016 Guangdong Province issued more detailed guidelines in its Notice 8 on Party-building in social organizations (Shenzhen City Social Organizations Management Bureau, 2017). These directives were also issued parallel to the drafting of the Foreign NGOs Law, signalling a tactical move to assert Party control over domestic social organizations and quash the influence of overseas organizations.

These Notices required social organizations not only to have established Party cells but also to support the work and activities of Party members. In September 2016, MOCA issued Notice 257, 'Notice Concerning Issues Regarding Building Party Work in Social Organizations at the Time of Registration', which formally required social organizations to comply with the 2015 central government Notice 51. In this spirit Shenzhen, a pioneer in contracting to NGOs, issued a Notice in October 2016 requiring social organizations to include Party work in their constitutions and to consult with

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29. 'A Decision by the CCP Central Committee on deepening reform of Party and state institutions', CCP Central Committee, February 2018. See: www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/05/c_137015953.htm.

the Party on the organization's policies, activities, expenditure, donations and outside engagement.[30]

These regulations effectively gave Party cells a central panopticon-like position within social organizations, enabling the monitoring of funds, gathering of information, surveillance of activities, goals and expenditure — a level of intrusion that had not been experienced previously. Foucault's seminal work on imprisonment vividly deployed Jeremy Bentham's panopticon design to visualize processes of surveillance and power (Foucault, 1977: 195–228; 1991: 206–13). This architectural device allowed the prison guard to observe the prisoners, who could see neither the inmates of the neighbouring cells nor their watcher (Foucault, 1977: 201–02). The intrusion of the Party into the life-body of social organizations evokes the metaphor of the panopticon, though not perfectly as staff can also watch Party members and members have multiple identities and loyalties. Nevertheless, placing itself at the centre of the organization, the Party can observe the everyday working of social organizations, assess risks, monitor staff, volunteers and visitors and discipline social organizations to deliver information useful for governing. Moreover, the shrinking opportunities for horizontal networking amongst social organizations that previously were often funded by international donors mean that social organizations are less able to form cross-regional networks, just as prisoners in the panopticon could not communicate with adjacent cells.

The positioning of the Party at the centre of social organizations poses risks to the autonomy of the latter to determine goals, objectives, methods, fundraising and use of funds (Chan and Lei, 2017: 1349–50, 1353). It enhances the knowledge of the Party/state about registered social organizations, enabling it to better calculate how best to harness and control such groups. It also potentially undermines relations of trust with clients, whose details are shared with the Party/state, and increases control over social workers. As one social worker in a southern city put it, 'It's about putting the Party first because the Party is afraid social workers will mobilize people'.[31] With Party-building inserted into contracts as a performance indicator, the assessment of social organizations becomes subject to political criteria, not just project execution.[32] As a social worker commented, 'If you are bidding for government contracts, your organization is more competitive if you have a Party cell'.[33] Moreover, as another social worker stated during the same interview, 'To be a five star NGO, apart from the financial and professional criteria, you need a well-performing Party cell'.[34]

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30. See Shenzhen City's Notice regarding promoting social organizations to put Party work into their constitution (Shenzhen City Social Organizations Management Bureau, 2017).
31. Interview 78, social worker, location C, April 2019.
32. Interviews 75, 76 academics, Interviews 77, 78, social workers, location C, April 2019. Without a Party cell, a social organization is assessed as normal or below average.
33. Interview 78, social worker, location C, April 2019.
34. Interview 78, social worker, location C, April 2019.

The increasing importance given to the Party is mirrored in the renaming in 2016 of 'community comprehensive service centres' as 'Party/masses service centres' in Guangdong.[35] The emphasis on Party leadership has also put pressure on the priorities of social workers in terms of their client or Party work. In the words of a social worker, 'The Party appreciates our humanity and sees it as a good way to relate to the masses. But the purpose of the work is changing: it's about the legitimacy of the Party. The Party takes the credit and sees [NGOs] as useful'.[36] However, the picture is varied as some social organizations see the Party cell as a formality that does not intrude on their governance or activities. As one staff member stated: 'This NGO joined with the mother Party organization from another organization …but this has no use … it is a requirement to have it'.[37] Whilst it is too soon to assess the overall impact of Party cells on social organizations, their very presence makes available a tool for monitoring and disciplinary control that cannot be dismissed.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that the Chinese Party/state pursues an agenda of enhanced welfare provision through the matrix of community centres, social workers and social organizations located in the neighbourhood as a way to maintain social order. The interweaving of political rationalities around public sector reform, social governance and pluralization of welfare provides the rationale and moral justification for this approach. Discourses used to frame thinking around welfare are informed by intersecting bodies of knowledge such as NPM, social work and Third Sector studies. The contracting of government services to social organizations provides a revealing lens through which to observe the unfolding of these rationalities at the micro level. Although the rationalities underpinning welfare service contracting echo neoliberal trends globally, they also overlap with rationalities of planned socialism in relation to equality, the continued role of the state, albeit at a distance, and the reduction of poverty and social injustice. As Sigley (2006: 503) implies, a hybrid neoliberal-socialist rationality legitimates the reworked approaches to governance — and, we argue, also to welfarism. In realizing these new ideas around welfare and governance, the Party/state has used a range of technologies of statecraft. These include the use of laws and regulations governing social organizations, social work practice, techniques of inclusion and exclusion, discursive framing of needs and services

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35. That is, from *shequ zonghe fuwu zhongxin* to *dangqun fuwu zhongxin*. Interview 79, academic, April 2019.
36. Interview 77, social worker, location C, April 2019.
37. Interview 51, NGO, location D, December 2018.

over rights and activism, and the panopticon-like Party strengthening within social organizations.

However, as Foucauldian notions of power assume the possibility of resistance, it should not be concluded that the Party/state is wholly successful in this undertaking. As observed in this article, social workers find ways to resist those directives of local government officials which are incompatible with and/or detract from what they see as their prime responsibilities. Social organizations, too, find ways to circumvent the intended strictures of government contracting, setting up alternative entities to pursue more rights-based work, pursuing rights-based work without reporting back on it, or finding alternative ways of funding their work that can preserve their autonomy. As noted in footnote 3, Party/state officials vary across and within regions, in their degree of risk aversion and in their circumstances, resource constraints, informal rules, and relations with non-state actors, leading to different degrees of enthusiasm and compliance with policy implementation. Foucauldian micro-analyses of the contracting of welfare services to social organizations can add fine texture complementing broader, macro-analyses of power.

Questions remain, however, about the limitations of a Foucauldian approach to understanding governmentality in authoritarian China and about the uniqueness of the Chinese experience. For example, juxtaposing professionalism against activism may be a way for the government to sort the chaff from the wheat in terms of social organizations. However, there is an argument for some professionalization of social organizations in China to enhance government and public trust in them and improve the effectiveness of their work. Similarly, as Parton (1999) notes, all states need to prioritize the allocation of resources and make difficult choices around which services to support or not. Thus, it is wholly sensible to dedicate considerable resources to, say, elderly care given the demographic phenomenon of ageing and to prioritize services and professional social organizations with scale and capacity. Similarly, it can be argued that the commitment to expanding welfare provision brings benefits to some groups with particular needs and should not therefore be lightly dismissed. Likewise, the process of government contracting, commitment to upscaling and improving the quality of social organizations could benefit the expansion of civil society. Although the strategy seeks to institutionalize a divide between service-delivery and rights-based approaches, the expansion of space might create openings for rights-oriented groups. In essence, this underlines the fact that power relations are never settled, never solid and never undisturbed. As Foucault argued (1991: 60–62, 204–05), power can be both productive and negative. The key is to understand the strategies, tactics and paths of power and the opportunities for resistance.

This also raises the question of what is distinctive about China or about authoritarian regimes engaged in contracting of welfare services through social organizations. In studies of welfare capitalism, the argument has long

been made that capitalist governments ensure social order by providing pub-
lic goods and thus appease any demands for systemic change. There is also
a body of work that investigates how and why authoritarian regimes provide
public goods to secure their rule (Cassani, 2017; Croissant and Wurster,
2013). As Leung et al. (2012: 1054) note, there are similarities with the Eu-
ropean context around the role of social work in governmentality. Further-
more, contracting services out to the non-profit and private sector has been
practised for decades in many countries. The Chinese Party/state's welfare
reforms and its particular strategy of contracting out services echo this neo-
liberal logic.

In reflecting on the differences between the manipulation of welfare in
authoritarian and capitalist regimes, stark divergences include the embed-
ding of the Party-cell panopticon in social organizations as a way of dis-
ciplining them; the limits on the autonomy of social organizations; the se-
vere lack of downward accountability of social workers, local government
officials and social organizations; and the lack of transparency in the con-
tracting process. For the last two points on accountability and transparency,
this is largely a matter of degree, for similar phenomena are to be found in
liberal-democratic contexts. The panopticon phenomenon is reflective of the
more intrusive reach of coercive institutions in authoritarian states. Thus,
whilst capitalism may deploy welfarism as a way of subduing resistance
and revolution, in authoritarian states this instrumentalization has an impor-
tant regime-maintenance dimension with implications for civil society that
should not be overlooked.

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