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## **Social Organizations and Community Service Delivery in China**

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## Acronyms

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| <b>SOs</b>      | Social organizations  |
| <b>NGOs</b>     | Non-governmental organization   |
| <b>PRC</b>      | People's Republic of China  |
| <b>Hukou</b>    | Household Registration System   |
| <b>Dibao</b>    | Minimum income guarantee  |
| <b>Wubao</b>    | Five types of guarantee   |
| <b>HIV/AIDs</b> | Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) |

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## Abstract/Summary

In 2010, the Chinese government decided to encourage social organizations (SOs) to deliver social services. This decision received great attention from observers, both domestically and internationally, as the relationship between the Chinese government and SOs was previously characterised by political tension. In contrast, it now appeared that the government was not only offering to fund SOs but was also offering to provide in-kind support to improve the capacity of SOs so they could take responsibility for more social services. SOs grew exponentially in number due to this governmental push, and it was estimated that by the end of 2015 there would be more than 600,000 SOs in China, employing 7.35 million people, and 4,696 charitable foundations were established. This change in the state–SO relationship has had serious implications for China’s social policy development. It has not only changed the bodies that provide social services but has also altered the content of these services and the decision-making processes involved. Currently, after six years of trial and error, SOs have become an important part of social policy in China. This report provides an overview of the status of SO development in China and aims to answer several questions related to the future of SOs. These questions are as follows: (i) Is the Chinese government committed to its decision to allow SOs to thrive? (ii) What added value have SOs brought to China’s social service provision? (iii) Is there a promising future for SO social service provision in China?

This research includes fieldwork by the research team undertaken during 2014 and 2015 in six cities. Given the complexity of this research, which involved multiple stakeholders dealing with complicated governance issues in the process of transition, we decided to use a mixed research method—primarily qualitative analyses supported with quantitative analyses. This combined research method was particularly useful to capture the complexity and rich dynamics of the interactions between stakeholders.

This working paper is the first of three. It provides an overarching framework for the research and the social-economic background and the policy background that underpins the new trend of changing social service delivery in China. This work also provides an overview of the research methods used in the field research and the summary findings of our research in two policy sectors—old age care and community social service provision. The other two reports provide more details regarding these two policy sectors.

In the following sections, we first examine the primary social changes in China that posed major challenges to its social service delivery and the government responses to these challenges. We argue that introducing social organizations into the social service delivery system unavoidably departs from the previous narrative of the state–SO relationship by turning communities into a space that offers opportunities for each stakeholder to seek new sources of funding, new businesses and new opportunities to engage with the civil society. This is followed by a discussion of the research methods to be used in the whole research (including the three reports). Our research findings provide the state of SOs in China and how different types of SOs operate to fulfil different roles.



In 2010, the Chinese government started adopting measures to encourage social organizations (SOs) to initiate social service provision. This decision attracted some serious attention from both domestic and international observers as the relationship between the Chinese government and SOs was previously characterized by political tension. In contrast, it now appeared that the government was not only offering to fund SOs but was also offering in-kind support to improve the capacity of SOs so they could offer more social services. As a result of this governmental compulsion, SOs grew exponentially in number. It is estimated that more than 600,000 SOs were functional in China by the end of 2015, employing 7.35 million people, and 4,696 charitable foundations were established. This change in the state–SO relationship has had serious implications on China’s social policy development. It has not only changed the bodies that provide social services but has also altered the content of these services and the decision-making processes involved. Currently, after six years of trial and error, SOs have become an integral part of social life in China.

This report provides an overview of the status of SO development in China and subsequently aims to answer several questions raised by many researchers related to the future of SOs. These questions are as follows: (i) Is the Chinese government serious about allowing SOs to thrive? (ii) What added value have SOs brought to China’s social service provision? (iii) Is there a promising future for SO social service provision in China?

## **Changing the Social and Economic Environment for Social Service Provision in China**

China’s social service delivery system has undergone three major transitions: (i) from production-centered to human settlement–centered social service provision; (ii) from focusing on the financing of social welfare to focusing on service delivery; and (iii) from segmented and institutionalized services to a continuation of varied services that can complement each other.

### ***Shifting from Production-Centered to Human Settlement–Centered Social Service Provision***

Despite the drastic changes to the welfare system in China in the 1990s, marked by privatization of social services which used to be provided by public- or collective-sector employers, the social service system did not depart from its production-centered logic. The transition in the social welfare system from the 1980s was primarily a result of the economic changes that required a different labor protection system. Thus, the changes were a continuation of the focus on production. In contrast, a human settlement–centered system refers to a system that helps people settle in the location of their choice. It does not create barriers for people to settle and could even help residents feel secure and ultimately become part of their residential community. The shift to a human settlement–centered service in China involves two elements: (i) shifting from selective to inclusive welfare entitlement, and (ii) shifting from employment-based to community-based service provision.

#### ***From Selective to Inclusive Welfare Entitlement***

The increasing inclusiveness of Chinese social policy is essentially an expansion of the offering of social citizenship from selected privileged labor groups to a wider population.

There are several factors involved in this change. The first is improved access for different social groups by implementing the following:

- (i) introducing means-tested social protection, such as a minimum living standard guarantee and unemployment benefits to unemployed people;
- (ii) establishing a social insurance contribution framework for public sector employees first, and then extend this to private sector employees (Zhang 2014);
- (iii) establishing social insurance schemes in rural areas;
- (iv) improving access to urban social benefits and services and improving labor protection and social insurance schemes for rural-urban migrants and
- (v) extending social insurance to the self-employed (Li 2013).

The second factor is the adoption of an overarching framework for finance and access to social welfare. In the past, the social protection system was highly fragmented, with different entitlements for different social groups based on their place of origin, sector of employment and place of residence. These different entitlements were decided based on different formulae and modified with different supplementary criteria. The more recent reforms have aimed at unifying the structure of each welfare segment by establishing multiple pillars for financial contributions. Thus, the entitlement of different social groups is placed under one structure, with variations resulting from different parameter settings (Li 2014).

As argued by Li (2012), despite the dominance of economic growth in public discourse in China, economic growth has not been the ultimate goal on its own—Economic growth has been fundamentally considered a useful tool to achieve social stability and political trust, which are important to ensure the legitimacy of the Communist Party of China. Therefore, due to growing awareness that livelihood (*‘Minsheng’*) improvement can directly contribute to social stability without requiring economic growth, welfare entitlement expanded to more social groups (such as the unemployed, rural-urban migrant population, farmers who have lost their land and impoverished farmers) despite the absence of any major political system reforms. The change towards more inclusive welfare provision in China was thus a logical result of institutional complementarity, given the desired political goals.

### *From Employment-Centered to Community-Centered Services*

Analysts in China tend to differentiate between welfare provision during the central planning era and that during the marketization era because of China’s economic transition. However, an examination of the relationship between social service provision and the economy reveals that the real transition from a work-based provision system to a community-based system only occurred recently. This delay is because, paradoxically, social services primarily focused on the labor force both in the central planning era (–1978) and the transitional period (1978–2005). The only difference was the changed nature of the economy.

The welfare system in the central planning era was a result of prioritizing industrial production in general and heavy industries in particular (Yang and Cai 2003). Most social services were delivered or arranged through employers, with employers acting as gatekeepers and sometimes providers of services. This system was supported by heavy-handed labor control and was based on the belief that minimizing labor mobility would make it easier to reduce labor costs. This is particularly evident in the arrangement of social services—such as housing, childcare, primary healthcare, training and education—



in which services were organized so that it would be easier to manage workers and identify talent (Zhang 1997; Li and Piachaud 2006).

With the beginning of market transition during the reform period, the nature of employment started changing. Employees did not expect to work for the state or collective enterprises and did not expect to secure lifetime employment. Urban citizens started to move between jobs and cities, while rural-urban migrants entered cities to work and reside in. Rural-urban migrants were less loyal to employers, and the turnover rate was a lot higher than other urban employees (Knight and Yueh 2004; Fan 2002). These changes required a freer labor market, which meant that the hurdles that workers had to clear for job changes needed to be reduced (Davis 1992). Furthermore, large numbers of workers were made redundant with the acceleration of the reform of state enterprises in the 1990s. These workers' welfare entitlements continued to be lodged with their previous employers, as there were no dedicated social protection systems or social service deliverers in the 1990s (Lee 2000). It was soon realized that even with the simplified administration for job changes, the varied entitlement to social services and their delivery had become a bottleneck for economic activities (Gu 2001, 1999; Croll 1999).

China's welfare reform in the 1990s and well into the 2000s can be perceived as a series of efforts to remove constraints on labor mobility, thereby liberating employers by reducing their 'burden' of providing social welfare. Employers stopped providing social services to their employees; instead, in-kind benefits became cash benefits or were packaged into salaries. This shift to monetary benefits made it easier for employees to quit. More recent reforms centered on generating a social welfare finance system in which individuals are expected to make contributions to social insurance schemes. These reforms have resulted in breaking most welfare linkages with employment. However, it is also worth noting that the reduction in social service responsibilities by employers was not accompanied by a corresponding service delivery improvement in other sectors. Due to efficiency considerations, the state privatized essential social services such as housing, healthcare, a large part of education and burial services (Blumenthal and Hsiao 2004; Mok 1997). Even though these service providers are not labeled as private, they charge fees and behave in a way similar to profit-making private companies. Meanwhile, public or collectively-provided services that are considered inefficient—such as rural education, rural social welfare institutions and childcare—were closed down (Han 1999). Some of these services were accepted by private sectors while some were not.

It can be argued that as state enterprises were reformed from the 1990s, social protection such as a minimum income guarantee (*Dibao*) was introduced for laid-off workers or people in long-term unemployment. However, this was still a response to the labor market change. The entitlement was not for all the economically underprivileged living in cities; therefore, it could still be considered employment-centered. Thus, it is justifiable to conclude that the welfare reform helped China depart from a centrally-planned economy but did not help it depart from the vision of a productivist welfare system.

In contrast, what marked a paradigm shift in China was the introduction of community-based service delivery—i.e., social services that are provided according to the location in which people live, rather than the location of their place of employment. In this sense, the services are centered on facilitating people to live as residents. We labeled this a 'human settlement approach'.

Community-based services have been championed by China's Ministry of Civil Affairs since 1986; however, the initial idea of social services was primarily focused on satisfying urban citizens' demand for services as they started acquiring property in the private

market. These services were previously provided by employers in the employee housing complex. As people bought houses in the newly built private communities, there were no related services—not even paid services. Residents required services such as estate management, housing maintenance, establishing convenient stores, garbage collection and so forth. Gradually, new estate planning was introduced to ensure there was room for private services to be introduced to these new communities after the construction of each housing estate. At the same time, neighborhood committees (grassroots government agencies) were introduced to the new neighborhoods. Similar to the old system, these committees focused primarily on community-level public administration. These administrations mostly involved collaborating with local policy or organizing volunteers to maintain public security and social control—these were not social service deliverers. Resultantly, a paucity of neighbourhood-based services still exists in urban neighbourhoods.

In 2007, the Ministry of Civil Affairs produced a national-level Community Service System Development Plan (Ministry of Civil Affairs, PRC 2007). Pilot schemes had been previously implemented in different areas of the country; however, the establishment of the 2007 regulations meant that the government completely endorsed the idea of developing a community service system. However, this did not imply that community services were accessible to all urban residents. The Household Registration system (*Hukou*), which was considered to be the last barrier to free labor mobility in China, determined that only urban citizens could access these services. However, this final hurdle was demolished in July 2014 when *Hukou* registration was replaced with a resident identification that did not differentiate between residents' regions of origin. This exclusion implied that once a person became a long-term resident, they were able to access the services available in the neighborhood in which they settled. Thus, the services were delivered in a manner that favoured settled residents.

### ***Shifting from Financing Welfare to Social Service Delivery***

Reforms in the Chinese social protection system had focused on the financial elements up to the end of 2005, and there had been growing funding as a result of the relevant reforms. Similar to what the United Nations suggested, the social protection system in China has gradually developed four pillars: (i) a state-funded minimum income guarantee, (ii) 'forced savings' through individual accounts, (iii) a social pooling account with employer contributions and (iv) private finance (Dong and Wang 2014). During the past decade, particularly since the worldwide economic recession, the Chinese government has increased social spending in a relatively short time from 6% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2007 to 9% of the GDP in 2012 (Ngok and Huang 2014). Although this remains well below the average Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development level of 22% of GDP, the actual amount of funding has increased rapidly during these five years.

Despite a large proportion of funding being spent on improving the physical infrastructure and equipment at the grassroots level, unification and equalization remain difficult to achieve (Lei 2011; Wang and Shi 2013). A skilled labor force takes time to train, and it is difficult to motivate better qualified social workers to accept jobs in poorer areas (Wang and Gao 2013; Yip et al. 2012). At the same time, there is growing demand in better-off regions for new and higher-quality social services (Wu 2011). The state's capacity to provide services directly is challenged, and improvements in actual service delivery are languishing. The state continues to play a minimal role in providing social services—apart from health and education, community-based social services mostly target the poorest people who have no other means of support (*Wubao*, then *Dibao*). In residential

areas, community-level government agencies and their representatives in neighborhoods and villages are primarily administrators rather than service providers to keep residential neighborhoods in order (Chu 2015).

### ***Shifting from Institutionalized Services to Services Delivered through Multiple Platforms***

Before 2006, China had limited social services that were mostly delivered through institutions. For example, old age care services were largely provided by private or public care homes. However, the Chinese government realized that there was a need to improve old age care services, and their initial attempt involved establishing care homes and meeting targets for the number of beds per 1,000 people. This led to a visible increase in the supply of care homes regarding the number of beds. Meanwhile, healthcare services were provided by hospitals and focused on treating diseases. Similarly, compulsory education was provided in public schools. In this sense, social services were equivalent to institutional services. The advantages of this type of service delivery were that this was provided by professionals and was easier to manage as a public sector provider. However, this was also followed by several problems. First, the costs of delivery were high because the administration and a large number of professionals were hired as civil servants. Second, the types of services provided were defined top-down and subsequently struggled to adapt to the new forms of social needs generated by economic and social changes and public awareness. Further, the social needs of human beings are continuous and diversified while institutional provision is fragmented and not continuous. Consequently, the gap between social needs and service delivery is widening.

Non-state providers are required to fill these gaps in social services. Prior to the enforcement of the state provisions, private providers emerged to meet some of the needs of higher income groups. This included providing domestic services or private care homes for the elderly. This supply, however, remains fee-based, and lower-income or even middle-income groups find it difficult to gain access. After all, private services are still institutionalized and separated—they are not located in communities and are not streamlined with other services. These major shifts highlight the need to move in a direction that is different from the existing combination of state and private sector provision. There must be a platform that can coordinate different services, allocate funds and register user needs. This platform should be easily accessible in residential locations. Further, there need to be other deliverers who can supplement or even replace the roles of the state and private sectors.

### **Key Responses to the Challenges Imposed by These Major Transitions**

One response to China's challenges is a growing emphasis by the central government on transforming the administrative government (*'guanlixing zhengfu'*) to a service-providing government (*'fuwuxing zhengfu'*) (Zhang 2014). This shift means that local governments would behave as if they are service providers—they would respond to the needs of residents and adopt a service approach that would treat users as customers. However, this does not imply that the government would take on more social services. In contrast, the government would be less involved in the direct provision of services. Thus, the mentality of the government should not be one of command and control but be in line that of civil servants whose mission is to serve the people and/or develop a stronger sense of community.

Another response is to expand the supply side capacity. In the central planning era, the state monopolized the funding for public sector services such as healthcare, childcare and education. As the state's supply fell short of the growing demand for social services, the private sector began providing services to meet the uncovered social needs. For example, childcare was largely taken over by private nurseries. Before the state began allowing migrant workers' children to attend public schools in large cities, private schools had rapidly developed in peri-urban neighborhoods. Further, the urban healthcare system was not accessible to migrant workers; thus, private or even informal healthcare was provided by migrant doctors within some migrant communities. Therefore, a mixed social service provision developed. In this setup, the state assisted the neediest and the private sector filled some of the gaps.

Non-profit organizations did exist in the past; however, they were mostly registered as private enterprises as permitted by the state. The potential for non-profit organizations to be service providers has been increasingly recognized by the state. In March 2013, the Chinese government decided to relax the tight control over social service-providing NGOs and relabeled them as SOs. Using SOs to improve service provision involves the below listed two factors: new sources of funding—SOs become a supplementary source of funding to state; and private funding new service providers—professional SOs would become contractors of services funded by the state, or charity funds.

As mentioned above, there is a changing mode in the focus of service delivery—from workplace-based to residence-based access. This means that neighborhoods—either in the form of urban residential communities or rural villages—become the central platforms of social service provision. In this proposal, communities are administratively-defined spatial units in which social services are organized and delivered. These changes would directly transform the arena of social service delivery and mode of governance; however, such changes are not easy to achieve. In this general report, we highlight some of the problems faced by communities in incorporating these reforms.

## Changes in SO Legislation

A brief history of SOs can help readers to understand the path of policy changes in China. It helps to understand the debates and trends behind the current legislation:

**1950–1978:** In September 1950, the State Council published *Temporary Rules on the Registration of Social Groups*. This regulation was formalized in 1954. However, as social groups' leaders were considered rightist, the activities of social groups were seriously undermined. In the 1960s, the long-disappeared social groups emerged again. However, the cultural revolution disrupted the normal operation of these groups. As there were no official statistics for social groups during this period, the level of activities was primarily estimated by political movements—i.e., whenever there was a major political campaign, social groups were disrupted. Therefore, there were several ups and downs during the pre-reform period (–1978).

**1978–1989:** In the 1980s, SOs began emerging in China. The entire decade of the 1980s is recognized as a revival period of SOs. Starting in 1988, the Ministry of Civil Affairs began collecting statistical information nationwide and estimated that there were 4,400 social groups.

**1989–1997:** In October 1989, the State Council published the *Regulation on the Registration of Social Groups*. This regulation was revised in 1998. The 1998 revision placed much tighter control over the registration of SOs, whereby SOs had to identify a

hosting government department to be able to register (State Council, 1998). This policy aimed to address two issues: (i) lack of regulation meant that NGOs often took the opportunity to gain profit, and charitable activities were used for commercial interests and (ii) more importantly, some NGOs (such as academic associations and public activity groups) had become an important force in political movements. The 1989 Tiananmen movement led to the end of the free operation era for NGOs. The 1989 regulation introduced a double management system, in which NGOs were regulated and administered by registration and administration agencies. These two agencies used two years to re-register and approve SOs and disqualified any SOs with a tendency to be politically active. However, SOs did not stop developing. Moreover, several began operating as private businesses. After 1992, the control over SOs relaxed. However, this period is often referred to as a tortuous period of development of SOs since the development was unsteady. By the end of 1996, there were 180,000 SOs in China.

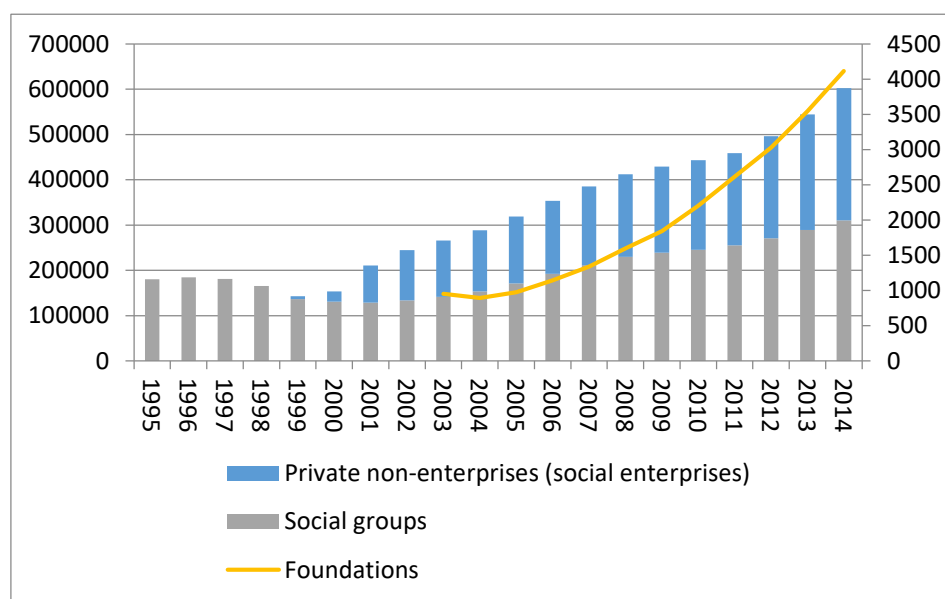
**1997–2000:** More regulations were introduced to tighten control over SOs. In 1997, the government started implementing the *Interim Measures for Annual Review of Social Organizations* (published in 1996). SOs were required to be reviewed annually, which resulted in a serious reduction in the number of groups. The 1998 registration regulation also made it more difficult for NGOs to register and imposed tighter regulations. However, by the end of 2000, there were 211,000 social groups in China (Zhu and Huang 2009).

**2001–2012:** It was not long before the total number of SOs began increasing again. This was because a new channel of registration was introduced by the Ministry of Civil Affairs—private non-profit organizations (or social enterprises). This was introduced by a new regulation—*Interim Regulations on the Registration and Administration of Private Non-enterprise Units* (*‘Mínbàn fēi qǐyè dānwèi dēngjì guǎnlǐ zhànxíng tiáoli’*). Social groups took advantage of this new regulation to be registered as enterprises. Therefore, it would be misleading to count just the number of social groups. Apart from social enterprises, the overall level of activity could be observed by the number of charitable foundations, which increased rapidly. This implied that more funding was invested in non-government and non-private-sector activities in China. Charitable foundations were under the radar of government regulation. In 2004, a *Charitable Foundation Management Regulation* was published by the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

**2013–Present:** The total number of SOs has now increased to 0.55 million. In March 2013, after successful earlier pilots in several southern cities, SOs were championed officially as a means to promote public participation and as a step to exercise local democracy further. According to the State Council Institutional Reform and Functional Transformation Program (*‘Guówùyuan jīgòu gǎigé hé zhínéng zhuǎnbiàn fāng'àn’*) (2013), SOs were more specifically classified. This liberalization had several aspects. SOs were limited to industrial associations, science and technology SOs, charities, and rural and urban community services. The new regulation did not require SOs to obtain partnership with the government, and the approval procedure was simplified. SOs were only required to register with the Ministry of Civil Affairs or with local authorities, depending on the field in which they operated. This meant that only religious and ‘humanity and social science’ types of SOs would continue to be monitored under the dual administration system. The growing number of SOs made it difficult for the government to undertake detailed monitoring of SO activities. Thus, at the end of 2015, the Ministry of Civil Affairs decided to use an annual report system to replace the annual inspection system with annual reports spot-checked by the government. In 2016, a new regulation was introduced whereby SOs are required to expand the influence of the

Communist party by encouraging SO staff members to join the party and by establishing a party network in the sector.

**Figure 1. Numbers of SOs in China by type (1995–2014)**



*Data source:* National Statistical Bureau, PRC, Statistical Yearbooks of China, various issues.

## The State–SO Relationship: A Review of the Literature

Western literature offers several different perspectives on the state–SO relationship. One view is that the state is limited in its capacity and that this has led to the emergence and success of civil society (Somers 2001). Another idea is of a liberal state that wishes to actively promote citizen autonomy and self-reliance (Hayek 1979). A related idea is that the state desires to promote an entrepreneurial civil society (Rose 2000) while also maintaining order, which requires guided governance involving a wide range of public and private actors (Kooiman 2000). Another suggestion is that the government is making deliberate use of the steering discourse to disguise the reality of state withdrawal due to budget constraints (Rosol 2012). The state and SOs can have different roles in these relationships, and the combination of state and SO characteristics has resulted in the varied state–SO interactions.

However, when observing the interactions between the state and SOs in China, the prevailing paradigm to analyze these relationships is incredibly narrow and provides an oversimplified picture of the Chinese state and suppressed SOs. This paradigm cannot capture the dynamics of the changing state–society relationship (Salmenkari 2013). For example, the current literature largely considers communities as an adversarial ‘space of resistance,’ in which an omnipresent authoritarian regime seeks to impose unlimited control over SOs. SOs are protesters, anti-government and anti-establishment; however, they can never overcome the state power. This view claims that SOs are representatives of the vulnerable, while the state is striving to prevent SOs from playing this role.

This line of argument may have merit in studying campaign-style NGOs and probably still holds valid in various perspectives (Howell 2015). However, when analyzing other types of SOs together (which are the majority)—such as those delivering social services

and facilitating community development—this lens can only offer a limited view of the world of SOs in China. This analysis does not explain why, if SOs are under such control, there is such rapid growth in SO activities in China. There are also explanations for the survival of grassroots SOs. Spires (2011) argued that

Grassroots NGOs survive only insofar as they refrain from democratic claims-making and address social needs that might fuel grievances against the state. For its part, the state tolerates such groups as long as particular state agents can claim credit for any good works while avoiding blame for any problems.

This is superficially true and has frequently been discussed by Chinese SOs. Even among international governments, it is likely that no rational government official would wish to see a radicalized SO operating in his or her territory and seeking to overthrow or undermine the office to which the official is duty-bound. Consequently, it would be reasonable for a government official to use a variety of methods to prevent or reduce the influence of SOs to serve his or her interests or promote his or her career. However, the difference lies in what the government officials consider to be an effective approach to achieve this goal—a factor that can vary greatly.

## **Space of Opportunities in the Context of Development: China's Experience**

### ***Placing SOs and NGOs in the Context of Development***

Hsu (2015) sought to break away from the narrow view of NGO resistance against the state and argued that NGOs play much more varied roles in China; thereby, they should be examined in the context of political and social development. NGOs have functioned as champions of rights, while also working to be capacity builders in communities, supplementary providers of services and enablers for people to escape the traps of poverty and vulnerability (Hsu 2015). NGOs are also actively engaged in campaigning for increasingly diversified social needs for disadvantaged groups. NGOs can be importers of ideas from other countries, can be a reminder of social needs to policymakers, and can be a voice for the disadvantaged. However, a recent study by Hsu indicated that Chinese NGOs do not perceive their role as that of being an importer of ideas and do not conform to the organizational development process outlined in extant NGO literature (Hsu and Hasmath 2015). Hsu's work is important because it mainstreamed NGO studies in China without losing sight of the resistance and struggles faced by certain types of NGOs in China.

Hsu and her colleagues continued to examine the interactions between the state and NGOs by further categorizing NGOs. They examined NGOs as organizations that pursue organizational development. Hsu and Jiang (2015) observed an emerging strategic relationship between the state and NGOs in the context of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) prevention, which is an extremely sensitive policy field that includes both campaigning and service perspectives. They observed that the state–NGO relationship is not solely about resistance. There is a strategic relationship that involves collaboration and avoidance—when NGOs face threats from a local state, they may try to avoid it by shifting locations rather than confronting the local state. They also established that there is a split between the different types of NGOs—those who worked for the state in the past tend to seek party–state

alliances, while those with no experience with the state tend to avoid using state resources (Hsu 2010).

From a broader perspective, these studies show that SOs do make strategic decisions that can benefit the organization. In this paper, we contribute to the literature by arguing that it is insufficient to examine SOs as champions of rights, capacity builders, supplementary builders and enablers. Focusing on the roles of SOs in political and social development generates the illusion that SOs and their leaders are driven only by social agendas. However, SO leaders as individuals and SOs as organizations are also rational decision makers who pursue their development and selfish interests. The positive implications of this assumption are threefold and are listed below:

- SOs are important job providers who may contribute significantly to the country's economic agenda, employ people who have lost jobs in the private market and provide new employment opportunities
- SO activities should be counted as economic activities that also contribute to overall economic development
- SO employees or leaders are economic individuals who pursue their career development to sustain their organizations and maintain their jobs.

The negative implications are that SO leaders and SOs may not always act in the best interests of the people they serve. SOs' irregular behaviors are not always driven by the state—they can also be driven by the overall business environment and by SO leaders' personal agendas. As market actors, SOs are not necessarily trusted by users from their initiation and may not necessarily have comparative advantages against the state and private sector service providers even if their initial intention is to fill the gap in the services. This also helps further explain the boom and bust of SOs. The larger waves of political campaigns at the national level to regulate SO behavior and change the entry requirement have played a major role in the fluctuations in the number of SOs. At the same time, as economic actors, SOs and SO leaders may not be able to survive the severe conditions in the newfound land. Their business acumen, management capacity and understanding of their role in society are crucial to their survival.

### ***Space of Opportunities: State–SO Relationships***

In this report, we argue that the space in which SOs operate in China is best viewed as a space of opportunities. In our view, the government is not interested in direct control and nor are the people necessarily interested in local power for its own sake. In this space, the state has three interests—(i) to restructure its own organizations to reduce the burden of service delivery, (ii) to identify ways to realize control of society more effectively (as evidenced by social harmony achieved with less government input) and (iii) to achieve its economic development goals. The fact that communities are primarily interested in having good services coincides with the government's intention to subdue its citizens. This has created an opportunity for fruitful negotiation between SOs and lower-level states, with the potential of gaining effective management of services that combines local knowledge and government support. However, this opportunity is not always seized, and failure can lead to negotiation breakdown and adversarial dynamics.

We view communities—both physical and virtual—as a space of opportunity that harbors a variety of motivations not very different to those discussed in the literature on the relationship between the state and civil society in the West, and largely overlaps with the state and enterprise relationship in the private domain. In contrast, the state is not an abstract entity—it is composed of individual officials, particularly the official directly in



charge of the NGOs concerned. These offices have individual strategies in order to collaborate with, control or manipulate their relationship with NGOs. The outcomes depend on their own experience, knowledge and skills to deal with their counterparts. In this sense, the interaction is similar to the supply and demand interaction in a market situation. However, unlike in the goods' market, there is no clear pricing mechanism; therefore, it is a bargaining process in which the two sides try to establish the other side's acceptable line.

Crucial in this bargaining process is the search for opportunities in this space that all stakeholders perform to achieve their own goals. The outcomes are determined by the power, resources, information and belief of these stakeholders—including the NGOs and government officials involved. Based on these factors, we could develop different types of state-NGO relationships. The reason that we focus on local officials rather than local government agencies is because each NGO operating in Chinese communities has designated government officials as fund holders, regulators, mentors or even guardians, who are held accountable by the higher authorities if the NGO becomes 'problematic' and who may also be credited if the NGO performs well.

The ratio of officials to NGOs is disproportionate and thereby each official deals with multiple NGOs at the same time. Within the government, government officials have labor division according to the type of businesses. For example, an official may be in charge of social enterprises and another official may be responsible for NGOs. The officials can be from different levels of government, depending on the level at which the concerned NGO is registered. For example, an NGO operating at the community level is registered with the community service center while an NGO operating at the district level is registered with the district government. Thus, whether the relationship is intimate and trustful or distant and distrustful is connected to the personal relationship between NGO leaders and corresponding government officials. In the following sections, we examine how SOs have fared in this space of opportunities, and how this space has contributed to the overall development agenda in China.

## **Research Methods**

This research includes fieldwork undertaken during 2014 and 2015 in six cities. Given the complexity of this research, which involved multiple stakeholders dealing with complicated governance issues in the process of transition, we decided to use a mixed research method—primarily qualitative analyses supported with quantitative analyses. This combined research method was particularly useful to capture the complexity and rich dynamics of the interactions between the stakeholders.

### ***Data Sources and Data Collection***

To answer the research questions, we collected data from the following sources:

- Government documents from different social policy areas to determine the actual changes in legislation and the introduction of SOs to the relevant policy fields
- Official statistics on national- and provincial-level data for social services, local social-economic background, and local service availability, affordability and actual usage
- Second-hand data presented by other researchers—due to the limited funding and time for this research, it was impossible for us to perform nationwide surveys and

data analyses; thus, we used several important state-level reports as part of the evidence for our arguments

- Fieldwork in six cities, including in-depth interviews with government officials at city and district levels (including the Bureau of Civil Affairs at city and district level), and visiting community service centers and holding discussions with community administrative staff and service providers, as well as undertaking in-depth interviews with users.

### ***Selection of Policy Fields: Two Major Social Challenges in China***

The Chinese social service system has been facing several prominent challenges. The disintegration of the family care system constitutes the first challenge. Traditional family care in China relied heavily on intergenerational support. Parents cared for their children, who were later expected to care for their elderly parents. This system disintegrated during the central planning era, where family care was largely socialized. However, once the economic reform began, the social care system was dismantled by the state. Presently, older people continue to care for their grandchildren while individuals of the younger generation work hard to pursue their careers.

This system is dissipating further because of China's aging population. At the end of 2013, 14.9% of the Chinese population (202 million) were over 60 years of age. By 2044, this proportion will grow to 30%—equivalent to 400+ million. The number of people older than 80 was 19.04 million in 2010 and will be more than 20 million in 2020. The scale and speed of population aging have exceeded expectations, and China is not yet prepared to respond to this trend (Chomik and Piggott 2013).

The social effects of aging are exacerbated by shrinking family size. Starting from the early 1980s, when the one-child policy was enforced, the household size of Chinese families has declined. The number of household members reduced from 4.41 to 3.16 between 1982 and 2008. In large cities, the household size is even smaller. For example, Beijing has the least number of people per household, with less than 2.6 at the end of 2008 (Li 2013). This implies that the intergenerational care system is not sustainable—the dependency rate of older people is growing significantly, while the number of younger people in an extended family able to offer care is reducing. Consequently, there is a greater need for socially provided care and relevant services.

The second challenge faced by the Chinese social service system is the difficulty in responding to the needs of a more mobile population. There are several different types of migrants, as listed below:

**Rural–urban migrants:** In 2012, 236 million people lived outside their place of origin, equivalent to one in six people (PRC Ministry of Health and Family Planning 2013), among which approximately 200 people were of rural origin. Overall, the urban population grew at a rate higher than 5% per year during 1985 to 1990, and at 3 to 4% per year since 1990. China's urban population growth is higher than that of Asia and the world (United Nations, 2014). Both in cities and rural areas, the younger generations are less constrained by the labor control imposed during the central planning era and relocate to different parts of the country to pursue education and employment. They may also move between cities or provinces before they finally settle.

**Highly skilled migrants:** These are the skilled migrants with talents considered important by local governments. They are granted special treatment by the local government and are accepted as local citizens without much difficulty.

**New school and university graduates:** These are the young people who have not yet gained much work experience. They have found jobs in cities but often find it difficult to afford housing in metropolitan areas, such as Beijing and Shanghai. Thus, they live in peri-urban areas or rent shared accommodation in urban neighborhoods (Woronov 2011). These include youngsters with rural origins (Heng 2010) and migrants from other cities (Suda 2014).

This growing population mobility challenges the old social service system, which allocated funds and delivered services according to the population registration—the Household Registration. The system must now deal with several issues. The first is that the migrant population—unless officially recognized by changing their household registration record—finds it difficult to access social services. There have been great efforts by the government to include the migrant population in social insurance schemes, which means that the migrant population can contribute to the social protection system in a similar manner to the urban population although there may be some variations. This is only acceptable to the migrant population when the entitlement is in the form of cash benefits or when the population can access services via their contribution, such as insurance against industrial accidents. For services to which migrant workers do not have equal access, they are not willing to contribute.

The second issue is that migration has made social service delivery in rural areas more difficult. As more young people move to cities, rural villages have to meet the challenges of deteriorating services. This is partly a result of the state planners' intention to pursue higher service efficiency by closing down services that were considered to have fewer users in rural areas (Li and Piachaud 2004). Even though the state has been more actively redistributing funding to rural areas and has upgraded the infrastructure for various services (such as rural primary healthcare and education), it remains difficult to attract young people—especially qualified young professionals—to work in rural areas. This is particularly problematic in rural villages, where it is difficult to commute to cities.

Several existing studies have blamed the lack of access to social services on the long-lasting rural–urban divide, and particularly the household registration system. However, as the exclusion imposed by household registration is gradually recognized, people realize that removing discrimination in service access cannot erase all the difficulties the migrant population is facing. Thus, it is important to enhance the capacity of the social service system across the board. During the fieldwork, we found that it was impossible to only examine urbanization and old age care services without considering community service centers—the community-based platform that facilitates resources and undertakes overall service planning and monitoring in all the communities we studied.

### ***Selection of Fieldwork Sites***

Communities in China vary greatly; thus, for the purposes of this research, we selected six cities. The selection of these cities arose from a few considerations: (i) to obtain a range of communities in both well-established communities and newly built communities; (ii) to select communities from both better developed regions and poorer regions and (iii) to select communities facing the two main challenges discussed in the area—ageing and urbanization. The six examined cities were as follows:

**1. Shanghai:** Among the three communities studied in Shanghai, two were from the inner-city districts (Xuhui and Yangpu), and one was from a peri-urban district (the Jiuting community). The reason we selected Shanghai is that it is a mega-city that suffers from serious aging issues. Studying Shanghai's inner-city neighborhoods helped us to

gain knowledge from the urban residents belonging to the most aged population. Meanwhile, peri-urban areas have a low density of older people and larger migrant population; thus, older people find it difficult to live in these areas.

**2. Taicang:** The three communities of Taicang included two urbanized rural communities (the Changfeng community and Chengxiang Town) and one mixed community (the Weiyang community). Taicang is experiencing rapid urbanization and, even before urbanization, rural industries thrived. However, urbanization challenges the existing social structure and the manner in which services are delivered. Changfeng is a pilot for China's urbanization policy. The original rural communities where Changfeng is located were converted into a new city called Kejiaoxincheng. Changfeng is the first urban neighborhood in the new city. As a national pilot scheme for social development, SOs were artificially introduced in this community and researchers from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences have been following the changes in public awareness and attitudes towards community-based social service delivery. In contrast, Chengxiang Town does not belong to the pilot scheme so it has no SO involvement, and the limited services are provided directly by the government. Chengxiang Town has two villages transformed into urban communities, from which we selected one community to study. Weiyang hosts more than 10,000 migrants with the migrant population much larger than the local population. Therefore, it is considered important to develop an integrated community atmosphere, and the community must face the challenge of helping the migrant population settle and improve community care services for older people.

**3. Guiyang:** The three communities examined in Guiyang included one newly built community (the Xinshijicheng community), one peri-urban community (the Longjing community) and one rural community (the Luwo community). Despite its recently ignited fast economic growth, the Guizhou province remains one of the poorest provinces in China. The Xinshijicheng community is an artificially developed new urban community.

**4. Chengdu:** Chengdu is one of the pilot cities in China to experiment community development. In 2004, it also became one of the earliest cities to push for rural–urban integrated development. It is considered a good example of using innovative methods to encourage community participatory decision-making and service delivery. We visited three communities in Chengdu. Jinjiang district is in a central location in the city. It houses several traditional enterprise-owned buildings which are limited in public space. The residents are often well-educated middle-class population. This district began courtyard self-governance, which is a more decentralized form of self-governance than community self-governance. There are usually several dozens of families in a courtyard. In this district, we visited the Shuijingfang street committee and the Longzhoulu community, as well as the Jinyang street committee and the Yulin community in Wuhou district. These communities initially used to be dormitories for large state enterprises during the central planning era. As a result, most of the residents of each community used to work for the same employer and thus many people know each other for years. The local authorities of these communities could take advantage of the social capital in the communities to access volunteers and establish mutual support systems.

**5. Hangzhou:** Our research in Hangzhou focused on old age care facilities. In Hangzhou, we visited the Gudang, Jiangcun Jingdu and Yanshahe communities. Unlike the communities in Shanghai and Jiangsu, Hangzhou (as the capital city of Zhejiang province) is known for its market-oriented approach towards social services. Hangzhou highlights the role of the private sector, while also having a strong top-down approach for local governments to meet clearly defined targets. In Hangzhou, SOs serve only a marginal role.

**6. Xiamen:** Our research in Xiamen was focused on the Haicang district—a newly urbanized district that is experiencing severe challenges in terms of urban governance and rural–urban integrated development. We undertook fieldwork in 10 communities in both urban and rural villages in this district.<sup>1</sup> At the time of our interview, Haicang District was operating a massive campaign to push for coproduction and participatory decision-making in communities. The local government was experiencing major transformation; thus, it was a good opportunity for us to observe major reforms being initiated.

## **The State of SOs in China**

There are several different types of SOs in China—these include industrial associations, special interest groups, foundations, social service providers, social worker organizations or self-governance organizations. They may or may not be based on membership. In principle, they do not generate profit and should be initiated by society and not by the government. However, given the nature of governance in China, they rarely break completely free from the government. Several SOs are introduced by the government and operate closely with the government. At the same time, the government cannot easily incorporate SOs into the authoritative control system (Leung et al. 2012).

### ***The Growth of SOs and the Fields of Operation***

According to the statistics published by the China Social Organization Administration Bureau, 662,000 SOs were operating throughout China by the end of 2015. The growth rate was approaching 10% each year. The number of people employed in all SOs reached 7.384 million—a 7.7% increase over the previous year. The annual income of all SOs was CNY 292.9 billion (USD 42.45 billion), and the spending by these organizations was CNY 238.38 billion (USD 34.55 billion). These SOs received donations from different sources of CNY 61.03 billion (USD 8.84 billion). Public offerings and private foundations received CNY 43.93 billion (USD 302.29 million) donations. More detailed classifications are listed in Table 1.

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<sup>1</sup> The research team had established a good working relationship with the district authorities, who were particularly keen to let us study the coproduction initiatives for rural–urban integration and governance of migrant populations. We ended up being able to conduct a lot more field research than we had originally planned.

**Table 1. Fields of SOs at the end of 2015**

|  | <b>Social groups</b> | <b>Private non-enterprise units</b> | <b>Sub-total</b> | <b>Overall percentage (%)</b> |
|--|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Industry and business services</b>              | 37,000               | 3,355                               | 40,355           | 5.64                          |
| <b>Research and development services</b>           | 17,000               | 16,000                              | 33,000           | 4.61                          |
| <b>Education services</b>                          | 100,000              | 183,000                             | 283,000          | 39.56                         |
| <b>Health services</b>                             | 10,000               | 24,000                              | 34,000           | 4.75                          |
| <b>Other social services</b>                       | 48,000               | 49,000                              | 97,000           | 13.56                         |
| <b>Cultural organizations</b>                      | 3,300                | 17,000                              | 20,300           | 2.84                          |
| <b>Professional associations</b>                   | 21,000               | 0                                   | 21,000           | 2.94                          |
| <b>Sports organizations</b>                        | 23,000               | 14,000                              | 37,000           | 5.17                          |
| <b>Eco/environment organizations</b>               | 7,000                | 433                                 | 7,433            | 1.04                          |
| <b>Legal services</b>                              | 3,000                | 0                                   | 3,000            | 0.42                          |
| <b>Religious organizations</b>                     | 5,000                | 114                                 | 5,114            | 0.71                          |
| <b>Agricultural and rural development services</b> | 62,000               | 0                                   | 62,000           | 8.67                          |
| <b>International organizations</b>                 | 0                    | 7                                   | 7                | 0.00                          |
| <b>Other</b>                                       | 53,000               | 19,000                              | 72,000           | 10.07                         |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>389,300</b>       | <b>325,909</b>                      | <b>715,209</b>   | <b>100.00</b>                 |

*Source:* Ministry of Civil Affairs, Statistical Communique on Social Services Development, 2015, and calculation by the authors.

It is important to note that our research only examined SOs that fell under the categories highlighted in Table 1, because we only considered SOs based in communities. For example, legal services are community-based legal advisers for local residents, while education services constitute after-school services for children. These are operated by community service providers that are not part of the formal school education.

### **Types of SOs**

There are numerous different types of SOs. The first type of SO comprises of previous government agencies who provide state-budgeted services such as old age care homes for (senior) civil servants or the previously non-administrative arms of the government, such as certain research centers. These services were severed from the government and re-registered as SOs. They still receive full funding from the state and their staff members are previously civil servants. They are NGO employees.

The second type of SO comprises of community-based social service NGOs such as community service centers. They are originally branching of the government-funded service centers that did not provide many social services but were community administration bodies. As the government decided to fund community-based services, some of the staff members of community administrative bodies registered NGOs and bid for government funding. Thus, the staff members have a double status—community service NGOs and community administrators.

The third type of SO comprises of ‘purpose-built’ NGOs, which seek funding from the government and other donors. These are mostly social enterprises that operate according to market principles. They can either be small NGOs based in one community or larger NGOs in multiple communities. The largest NGOs operate beyond city boundaries. For example, NPI is a chain of SOs that provides community social work services in multiple

cities. Apart from social enterprises, there are also campaign-style NGOs that seek to champion citizens' rights and awareness of issues such as environmental protection, labor rights and women's rights. Unlike other types of NGOs, these campaign organizations often have a difficult relationship with the state, especially those that use protests as their main tool for enhancing public awareness. They are often perceived as threatening to social stability and are subsequently the focus of government control.

The fourth type of SO comprises of self-governed NGOs that receive no public funding or only some ad-hoc subsidies from the government. These NGOs focus on activities, such as sports, cultural activities and hobby-based activities.

In reality, the types of SOs are so diverse that it is very difficult to capture the organizations neatly with a couple of straightforward indicators. SOs in China vary greatly in terms of funding, organization and business models, fields of interest, scale, and relationships with the state and other stakeholders. Although they do not yet contribute much to the GDP as private enterprises, SOs have already become important sources for employment and satisfying social needs.

### ***Economic Contributions of SOs***

As discussed in the theoretical section of this paper, we argue that SOs should be perceived as businesses that contribute to the economy alongside providing social services. This can be justified from several perspectives. As calculated by Wang and Li (2015), SOs have important employment effects. The SO sector had created more than six million jobs by the end of 2014. In addition, SOs' activities have resulted in indirect employment outcomes such as NGOs helping women in remote rural areas to sell their products in large cities ended up getting several previously unemployed or under-employed women new jobs. Over time, the number of people employed has increased while the average operation cost per person has declined, indicating high efficiency in the sector.

**Table 2. The employment effect of SOs**

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Direct employment (millions)</b> | <b>Direct employment/funding (person /CNY10,000)</b> | <b>Indirect employment (millions)</b> | <b>Overall employment/funding (person/CNY10,000)</b> |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| <b>2006</b> | 4.25                                | 3.7897   | 10.11                                 | 9.0087   |
| <b>2007</b> | 4.57                                | 1.4854   | 10.86                                 | 3.5310   |
| <b>2008</b> | 4.76                                | 1.2777   | 10.65                                 | 2.8600   |
| <b>2009</b> | 5.45                                | 1.1046   | 12.19                                 | 2.4727   |
| <b>2010</b> | 6.18                                | 1.1638   | 12.98                                 | 2.4437   |
| <b>2011</b> | 5.99                                | 0.9080   | 12.81                                 | 1.9404   |
| <b>2012</b> | 6.13                                | 1.1669   | 13.33                                 | 2.5368   |
| <b>2013</b> | 6.37                                | 1.1147   | 13.84                                 | 2.4234   |
| <b>2014</b> | 6.83                                | 1.0684   | 14.83                                 | 2.3229   |

*Source:* Wang and Li (2015).

## Opportunity Searching and Matching in Different Types of SOs

In this section, we present our findings regarding the manner in which SOs have operated in the space of opportunities and negotiated their position in relation to other stakeholders—particularly local government officials. The discussion is placed in the development context of China. The context is related to the following four functions of SOs listed by Hsu (2015)—(i) champions of rights, (ii) capacity builders, (iii) supplementary providers and (iv) enablers. We also add the economic dimension of SOs' activities.

### ***Seeking Opportunities in a Tightly Controlled Policy Field***

NGOs function as champions of rights that must be protected by government legislation and enforcement. Before NGOs began their campaign, it was often the state that failed to offer protection to the people concerned. Campaigns usually involve awareness building; however, they might be politically sensitive and face government control depending on the attitude of the state towards the field covered. This has resulted in different versions of the same campaigns by NGOs internationally (Ho 2001; Stern and Hassid, 2012). As discussed earlier, these types of organizations have been widely discussed in international literature; they were once hoped to be a genuine driving force for political change (Franceschini 2014). However, the political climate has changed in recent years and these NGOs remain under tight control because of the China's determination to maintain social stability. The overall environment faced by these NGOs in China presents numerous difficulties—in particular, the government suppresses the internationally-funded NGOs that champion labor rights, farmers' rights and women's rights by protesting publicly or organizing strikes (Leung, P. 2015). However, as observed in Fu (2016),

The central state's mandate to maintain social stability is refracted through the interests and capabilities of local agencies. These result in 'fragmented control': divergent, even conflicting, forms of state governance over civil society. Local authorities work at cross-purposes by simultaneously repressing, co-opting, and neglecting underground organizing. Fragmented control generates political uncertainty on the part of activists and induces them to engage in 'censored entrepreneurialism'—a set of tactical adaptations characterized by a mixture of self-censorship and entrepreneurial experimentation.

During the fieldwork we encountered Mr. W, an NGO leader whose personal experience though not representative of all people in the area, reveals some of the struggles that NGO leaders face. According to Mr. W, NGOs' relationship with the government has changed over time. When they first started, the idea was not to campaign—they wished to help solve social problems by improving local governance. However, the local government could not often see the value of these NGOs. Even if the NGOs wished to organize volunteers to help improve rural education—which would help relieve local governments of the headache caused by uneven resource distribution—they were not permitted to do so. To survive, they had to work with international fund holders; however, these fundholders had their personal agendas. For example, Mr. W's organizations sometimes took on international projects that were not in accordance with their main interests. However, with the international funding, they managed to survive. In those days, domestic donors were only interested in supporting activities to satisfy social needs but not in improving governance. Consequently, the local NGOs could only take international NGOs' money. Mr. W stated that



[H]owever, later there was various requirements on this [government] side [so] it was impossible to continue ... We started to look for ways to adapt. Without doing so, we could not even get our agenda heard. We had our own framework, which we believe could make a positive contribution to our country. However, if we do not seek reconciliation with the government, we could not promote our own ideas ... The harder we tried to fight, the bigger the pressure we had to face. I was thrown out of my own daytime job. I ended up in deep debt myself. I had to look for new opportunities to survive ... The initiatives by the government to improve community governance in 2010 was an opportunity for us. So we set up a social organization to take up government projects for community governance. We registered in [District A]. But the party secretary was not keen to work with us. However, I got to know the party secretary in [District B] and became friendly with him. He shared a similar vision. He recommended me to several communities ... Now we are in good shape.

The transition of the NGO led by Mr. W is an example of how this NGO leader actively sought opportunities to sustain his business after he could not attain funding from international sources. The other side of this example is the roles of the two government officials that Mr. W mentioned. According to what Mr. W discussed, we observe several factors playing a role in the different attitudes of the two districts' party secretaries—the timing and trust between Mr. W and the corresponding officials.

With regard to timing, District A's party secretary Mr X was approached in 2010 when the community development initiatives were first introduced by the central government. It would take some time for any national-level policies to reach the lowest level of government. The process would include policy being passed down the administrative hierarchy step by step, subject to endorsement by each government. After the endorsement, it would take time for the local authorities to develop local implementation plans before an initiative could be formally implemented. Therefore, in 2010 when the policy was just published at the national level, Mr. X was waiting for the higher-level governments to provide further information. When District B's party secretary Mr. Y agreed to help Mr. W, it was already 2012. At the time, Mr. Y should have received strong signals from the higher authorities to encourage innovation in community development. Mr. Y had just been promoted to govern a newly constructed neighborhood of an unprecedented scale. Only the first stage of the project was completed, and new residents had moved in. The community had a very high density and Mr. Y, with his rich experience in community governance at his previous jobs, sensed that governing these types of communities could be very challenging. As he stated,

In the past, our resident committee had more than 200 responsibilities. We spent most of our time reporting to the higher authorities and had no time to provide real services ... After 2010, as the government tried to simplify the report system and the performance evaluation, we could focus more on how to improve services ... I do not have a fancy university degree. I know social organizations may help, but I did not know how they arrange production. I learnt a lot from [Mr. W]. I increasingly agree that the government cannot do everything.

Instead of hiring Mr. W immediately, Mr. Y recommended Mr. W to District C (which was much smaller in scale and located in a different area). District C was trying to find ways for NGOs to assume responsibilities that 'the government could not do very well.' According to Mr. W, District C started investing in SOs from 2012; however, the SOs that bid for the projects primarily focused on old age care. Mr. W's NGO was the first social work organization that sought to help establish a community service platform. Mr.

W managed to settle in District C and operated there for a while before his NGO was invited by Mr. Y to help establish the platform in District B.

Mr. W's experience in District A was not only about the timing. It was also related to social networks and trust. Mr. X, the district party secretary, did not know Mr. W; however, Mr. Y knew Mr. W through a mutual friend. Mr. W was introduced to Mr. Y by this friend, and they had long discussions regarding the role of SOs. Mr. Y was willing to listen to Mr. W and was persuaded by Mr. W. Ms. Z, the leader of District C, was recommended to Mr. W by Mr. Y. This was an important introduction because Ms. Z was able to trust Mr. Y and subsequently Mr. W.

### ***Seeking Opportunities in Less Sensitive Policy Areas***

SOs provide services to people or groups who are excluded or marginalized by other service providers. This line of work of SOs has been supported or even funded by the state in China. Thus, the relaxation of control of SOs and government service procurement could lead to a quasi-market situation that is different from bureaucratic-style service provision and could be able to enter territories the state has never been able to reach. For example, the numerous new community-level social care services introduced by SOs since last year did not exist in the past partly because of the lack of trust between civil society and the state and partly because of a lack of suitable institutional arrangements to allow SOs to enter traditional areas of social service provision. Thus, reduced control over SOs in China in the field of social service provision could be a win-win situation for the state and the SOs involved. This relationship can materialize in three ways, as follows.

First, this relationship can comprise a corporatism relationship, whereby the state develops and maintains the relationship and selects SOs to mediate interests on behalf of their constituents to the state. The SOs must adhere to the rules and regulations established by the state (Hsu and Hasmath 2014). This relationship often exists in the service areas fully funded by the government. In most cases—especially when the service was originally provided by the state and then contracted out to previous government employees—there are not many disputes between the state and the SOs. This relationship is an extension of a previous work relationship. The SO leaders who used to be government officials possess the skills and networks to socialize with the government officials. They have a good understanding of how the system works and where to seek financial support. The SO leaders who are also good at taking advantage of the policies often receive insider information from their previous colleagues. These SO leaders are secure and supportive of the system. Their only issue—as raised by several SOs—is that the government should provide more funding.

Another type of SO that thrives in the corporatism relationship includes the organizations that straddle SOs and local authorities. These are the SOs attached to community administration centers, which employ the same group of people to perform two roles. As community administrative staff, they are supposed to be government funded; however, they register as SOs to attain more funding from the government. To some extent, this is a way to supplement the community service staff's income. The problem with this practice is that it does not achieve the original idea of the reform, which was to separate administration from service provision. Community administrators also become social workers. The only difference is that their services used to be designated by the higher authorities, while they now take the initiative to bid for government funding support. In this sense, there is an element of decentralization. In this type of organization, the staff members benefit from these arrangements. These NGOs are registered with the

community administration; thus, the staff members are their own bosses, and they subsequently enjoy more autonomy than other SOs.

Second, the relationship between SOs and the state can comprise of a partner relationship in which the NGOs are considered to enjoy certain comparative advantages over the state, such as a better understanding of issues and the needs of the local communities. The state may function as a fund provider or regulator. Unlike the corporatism framework, NGOs as partners not only passively respond to state initiatives but also contribute to the definition of the relationship. Further, as the local government does not necessarily provide all the funding required by NGOs, the latter may take initiatives to modify the relationship. In this context, encouraging SOs to adopt a more active role in both funding and service delivery would be a partnership relationship. Over the past several years, the decreasing trust in officially-arranged charity works has already resulted in poor support from the general public (Teets 2009). Therefore, mediation by NGOs can potentially revive public interest in supporting these activities.

One of the key problems we encountered with the partnership relationship is the expectations raised regarding the government's role. The government engaging in a partnership often expects SOs to be able to raise more funds from alternative sources after the initial funding, with the government funding only serving as a seed fund. However, SOs (especially new ones) often find it difficult to start functioning with partial funding. They use the partial funding as a full funding in order to progress, which causes serious problems. For example, SO staff members (particularly those working as care workers) only receive minimum pay that is far below the market wage that professional caregivers receive. Consequently, well-trained workers have a very high turnover rate and only unskilled workers stay. The deeper issue with this type of organization is that they also need to cut corners to save money, which leads to further deterioration in user trust. One district official, Q, provided a comprehensive summary of the misunderstanding between the two parties involved in this relationship:

There is a gap between the government and SO leaders. We know that both sides have their own perspectives and principles. There is a need for us to compromise ... The government can play a very crucial role in facilitating SO development. We think that the government should not nurse the SOs endlessly. They should become independent after some time. As I see it, SOs really need to receive support on accounting. Many SOs do not want the government to get involved in their financial matters. The reality is, some of them keep such bad account that if we do a proper audit like in the private sector, many of them would be closed down. However, as we have already helped them to set up, we do wish them to thrive.

Third, the relationship between the state and SOs can act as a mentoring or regulating relationship. There are several types of mentors. The first is a political mentor, which is a form of party-state control to guarantee that SOs will not engage in the activities that the government considers undesirable such as inciting social unrest or resentment towards the government. In the past, NGOs were required to have a government official as their mentor or guardian. Despite this uninvited government presence in NGOs, civil servants in charge of an NGO also had their own work to complete; thus, it was not possible for one official to monitor a SO's activities on a daily basis. In addition, skillful SOs could manipulate these officials for their own benefits—the official could be a useful contact in the government and could offer entry to broader social networks. This policy was removed, however, following the relaxation of SO registrations since this policy was only possible when there were fewer SOs, and the relaxed registration led to a boom in new

social enterprises. Thus, the government found it impossible to offer such mentoring roles. When Xi-Li came into power, the regime stressed on the adoption of more party ideology in all sectors of the country. SOs were no exception to this. However, the government did not require civil servants to assume these jobs. Instead, community party members were supposed to perform this mentoring role. In addition, SOs are required to have at least one party member among their staff. This is obviously indicative of introducing political mentoring and monitoring; however, the new regulation also allows SOs to encourage their own staff members to become party members.

Another type of mentor is the business mentor. All newly established SOs have a business mentor from the government. An issue following the increase in SOs is that several enthusiastic and socially-motivated young people began becoming social entrepreneurs. Many of these young people were new graduates from universities—some had received university degrees as social workers and some had not. They were fresh out of school and had no experience or training in business start-ups, management or finances or in the business transparency that is crucial to developing trust in SOs. During our fieldwork, we frequently encountered complaints about the government control over SO activities since SOs were asked to account for their activities and spending. We heard of SOs pleading for less control and more trust. When questioned as to trust in what was being pleaded for, the SO leaders could rarely present a constructive idea. Meanwhile, once government officials decided to provide funding or subsidies to a SO, they were very keen to know where the money was being spent. A junior officer who had not been working in a government role for long stated the following:

I was asked to distribute this lot of funds to SOs. When I give away so much money, of course, I would want to know how the SO has worked. Some SOs just told us that it is all about the process, you should not expect to see the outcomes all the time. I know that not all social work is about visible outcomes and they can help to improve the community atmosphere, but I cannot tell my boss that the taxpayers' money helps to improve the community atmosphere, but you just cannot see it ... Some of our staff members went to the SO incubator and seeing the SO members just sit there and play computer games. Of course, I worry about the money we spent ... The anti-corruption campaign is very serious. I do not want to see one day the inspectors ask me what the money is used on; I cannot even give a clear explanation.

This was not the only time this issue was raised. At the initial stages of new social enterprises, government officials often adopt a very proactive role. Some of them treat the SO members like a tiger mom treats her children, and constantly wish to see results. For example, as mentioned by one staff member of a new social enterprise,

The government officer came to the incubator every day as if this is her office. If she saw us sitting here, she would question us: 'Why don't you go out to meet people? How you can find customers by just sitting here?' But we use the internet to liaise with our customers, we do not need to go out all the time.

When the government-funded new social enterprises could not find any customers—a frequent occurrence—the government officers became impatient and offered their own contacts to the social enterprise to secure work for the SO.

Resultantly, the government officials become nannies or even managers of NGOs. They are wary of failure, not only politically, but also financially. This approach evidently damages the autonomy of SOs.

## ***Searching for Opportunities in Enabling Civil Society***

Public awareness in several fields was poor to begin with—such as for disability, sexuality, HIV/AIDS, public health and environmental protection. This lack of state interest was partly a result of poor public awareness, sometimes even among the elites. Poor awareness can result in a lower priority in the decision-making process. NGOs' ability to improve awareness can modify the way other stakeholders perceive certain issues (Schwartz 2004; Child, Lu, and Tsai 2007), without which public participation would be low. Awareness in some fields—such as public health and environmental protection—has been promoted by the government. However, forceful campaigns by the state often caused resentment or cynical responses among the general public or grassroots bureaucrats (Zhang and Li 2011). These cynical views would attribute all efforts by the state as being solely for the sake of economic growth (Schwartz, 2004). Therefore, engaging SOs to assume these tasks can help people become more actively involved.

This type of work is often undertaken by community social work organizations that hire professional social workers to try to share resources between those in need and help strengthen community identity. A common challenge faced by these organizations was their absence in Chinese communities in the past. The type of work they perform was partially undertaken by older people—often residential committee members. These were retired citizens living in communities, and who had free time to socialize in urban communities and offer help to people. However, since several new housing estates are being established because of urban regeneration, the newly urbanized population and migration, more and more urban communities have become composed of strangers, and older people no longer feel comfortable operating in these communities. As a result, there is a high demand for professional services to help warm the unfriendly atmosphere. It is also considered important to improve social harmony and enable communities to be able to generate more social capital in terms of volunteerism and self-governance.

However, as discussed earlier, the activities of community social work organizations are difficult to measure. This is due to uncertainty regarding the means to effectively evaluate SOs' work. The experience of community social work organizations is a particularly interesting example. In the long term, SOs' work could help change a community of strangers into a friendly community or cultivate a stronger sense of belonging and self-governance. To make their activities measurable, government officials developed hard indicators such as the number of community social activities organized by the SOs and the participation in these. SO leaders—particularly among community social work organizations—responded by focusing on organizing visible activities such as community public events. However, the legitimacy of community social work organizations is jeopardized once they follow this path because the government is perceived to be spending large amounts of public funds on organizing community entertainment, and SOs become regarded as inefficient competitors of private event companies.

In communities where social work organizations succeed, the community administration staff began to appreciate the value of their work. However, this appreciation could also jeopardize the existence of the SOs because the local officials could sometimes find the professional social workers' approach to be very attractive. Thus, they encouraged more participation and allowed members of the public to be actively engaged. As a result, local officials expressed their wish to establish one or two job positions within the community administration and recruit SO staff to work for them. If the SO staff were not willing to do so, the community administration sent their own staff members to undertake social work training in the hope of not needing to contract the professional social work

organization's services anymore. In some other cases, the community administration had a shortage of staff members and decided to use the social work organizations to assume more community administration tasks. Occasionally, the social work organizations would be willing to take these jobs under financial pressure. This subsequently resulted in greater pressure to merge with the community administration.

At the same time, we also noticed that SO incubation and community development is increasingly assumed by the non-government sectors. Successful SOs have begun to take on the responsibility of nurturing other SOs (including community self-organization) to help social capacity building and community development. Instead of letting the government directly provide mentoring services, matured SOs become engaged in working with new SOs to help them improve. As discussed by a SO leader:

Social organizations, including us—why do they want to cultivate other social organizations, including community organizations—nurturing and support them? Compared to the government, social organizations are better at this. First of all, professional social organizations, such as social work agencies, have professional skills. The government people do not have the technical and professional skills needed to offer training. Therefore, the government does not have the capacity to do so. They are not even eligible to do so ... Second, we say that social groups themselves are a type of social participation. If the government takes the lead and teach people how to do it, there is no point doing social governance reform ... Third, when social organizations offer training to social organizations, they are companions to the new SOs. However, if the government does this, the SOs almost unavoidably become the vassals of the government.

## Conclusion

One key issue raised by the researchers of Chinese SOs is that it is difficult to determine whether the state is sincerely interested in letting SOs develop or is merely pretending to support them. From the perspective of protesting- and campaigning-style NGOs that aim to protect the social rights of certain groups, we noted a tendency in the government to control and closely monitor the NGOs' activities. The political climate is difficult to predict, even at the local government level, as activities that occur in one region (such as labor protests in the south) may affect policies nationwide. However, we observed a more colorful picture when considering the other perspectives of development. The Communist Party certainly has no plans to relinquish its political control but does not mind using these organizations to provide services that cater to the practical needs of the community. In particular, a degree of citizen autonomy, self-reliance, social entrepreneurship and improved services can actually help the state retain power.

The idea of an opportunity space helps capture some perspectives of the interactions between the state and the SOs. Our research indicates that once the state and SOs enter the same opportunity space and agree to operate jointly, they share common interests. The state has committed funding, while the SOs invest in a new career; thus, both work towards the success of the SOs. However, differences lie in how to achieve success. Evidently, government officials do not always share the same vision as SOs. This disagreement is partially caused by the different principles and perspectives of the government and SOs. These have been examined in numerous studies both in China and internationally. Government officials are constrained by their role in the party-state governing hierarchy and find it difficult to let SOs operate freely. They must serve the central agenda to maintain social stability and are accountable to their superiors'

performance measures. In contrast, SOs are driven by ideology and are accountable to the principles they serve. The nature of the SOs also determines whether they can be held accountable easily. Certain professional service providers—such as communal kitchens and old age care—could be easier to measure, while services related to effective governance are difficult to measure. Therefore, accountability becomes complicated.

Another explanation revealed in our research is the existence of a veil of ignorance, whereby both the state and SOs have knowledge gaps to fill. Most government officials at the community level only began working with SOs recently. The officials we met during the interviews were largely recent university graduates, while the few older officials had no higher education. They were allotted the task of managing hundreds of SOs, which was not previously a part of the government's responsibilities. Therefore, none of these officials could be considered experienced—they were keen to learn, but it is a steep learning curve. For example, local officials complained that with the massive growth in the number of SOs, they were assigned more responsibilities that subsequently made it impossible for them to perform more nuanced evaluations. They were forced to develop oversimplified measurement criteria that they knew would distort the behavior of SOs; however, they had no alternative solutions. Meanwhile, SOs might not have the capacity to deliver the ideal outcomes they have promised to communities. Their idealistic goals cannot replace real business skills. SOs are like business start-ups—to be sustained, they require good products, marketing skills, financial management abilities and judgment. Most SOs have no training in any of these. Thus, noticing opportunities and possessing the ability to seize opportunities and thrive are very different skills.

It remains unclear whether this trend in SO development will last. Some people are pessimistic about the ability of SOs to take over all social services. After all, there is a reason that some of these services were the government's responsibility. However, as discussed in the section on economic contributions, SOs have become deeply embedded in the government's new growth agenda despite their short history. This encourages people to be self-employed or start new businesses. The government now invests money in training young social entrepreneurs. It is thus hoped that irrespective of the success or failure of SOs, they will help cultivate a culture of social entrepreneurship among the younger generation, who may develop further ideas on how to provide services and govern communities more effectively. It is necessary to examine whether the existing services can form a long-lasting network and diffuse ideas and practices into a wider sphere. In our two sub-reports on aging and migrant community governance, we seek to explore these two perspectives.

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