<u>**Building Community in Post-Socialist China: Towards Local Democratic Governance?**</u>

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Americans are not clamoring for more elections,…What Americans *do* hunger for is more control over matters that directly affect their lives: public safety, their children's schools, the developers who want to change their neighborhoods. They care so much about these things, in fact, that many of them devote precious hours every week to volunteer work in the schools, on neighborhood watches, or in community organizations. It is precisely here that participatory democracy is becoming real within American government. (Osborne and Gaebler, 74)

For long time, urban residents were under administrative management to various degree, as a result, there was not high degree of residents' participation in *shequ* building…within *shequ*, there will be democratic elections, democratic decision-making; democratic management, democratic supervision, so that residents exercise self-management, self-education, self-supervision. (China's Ministry of Civil Affairs document on promoting *shequ* building in cities)

1. Introduction:

The question of governance (*zhili*) in China during its "transition to market economy" is an important and urgent task for the Chinese state; in the view of some, the survival of the Communist Party is at stake. China's over three-decades-old economic reform has seen spectacular economic growth, but also an increasing gap between rural and urban, between regions and between poor and rich in the cities. Social polarization has led to rural and urban unrest around the country. In terms of governance, what is the relationship among state, market and society that is conducive to developing the market economy and, at the same time, maintaining a stable political and social order during the "transition"? At this moment , community building is considered key to answering the question. According to the government, community building moves away from the model of direct government intervention in all aspects of people's lives, down to the neighbourhood and individual families. It is instead a model of community self-governance and grass-roots democracy (*shequ zizhi he jiceng minzu*).

Does this trend represent grass-roots democratization in China? Community building is Party-led and government-initiated, so an easy rejection of this idea would

depend on the thesis that an autonomous civil society is pre-requisite to democracy. Such argument is not wrong in itself: what it misses is the changing global context under which civil society is formed, and hence the contextual meaning of democracy, freedom and participation. Further, if we are too quick to dismiss government-initiated community self-governance, we are not really paying attention to the government's changing thinking about governance. As recent experience has proven, the CCP is pragmatic, willing to integrate anything from Marxism, to Confucianism and capitalism that might strengthen its rule and stabilize development. The present paper argues that community-building is not about democracy, but rather about how to govern more effectively and efficiently, and that self-governance touted as participatory democracy is the means. Both the government and China scholars agree on the goal, but some scholars also hope that community self-governance becomes a "training ground for democracy" (Bi; Ling; Lei). But as I will argue, in the global spread of neo-liberal governance, the meaning of self-governance and grass-roots democracy has also changed: from bottom-up -- social movements fighting for equality and justice -- to "do-it-yourself" democracy in reaction to voter apathy and the "bankruptcy" of electoral politics in liberal democracy. The opening quotation illustrates the political philosophy behind the global trend of "reinventing government", of making government act according to market logic, and within this logic, of seeing citizens become customers (the Blair and Clinton Third Way politics).

In line with neo-liberalism, community building has tremendous appeal to both the Chinese government and Chinese scholars because it can potentially reduce social tensions more effectively than totalitarian control: it provides a channel for public

participation in governing their own affairs in the community. Yet at the same time, the dominance of the Party needs not be questioned. The government policy to "take control of the big matters, and let go of small matters" (*zhuada fangxiao*) is a good summary of its political rationale behind the reform of government functions (*zhengfu zhineng*).

What is emerging in the thinking and practice of governance in China has strong parallels with global neo-liberal governance: small government, big society (*xiaozhengfu, dashehui*). Government should be entrepreneurial [1] and society rather than the state should be enlisted to provide social services. In liberal democracy, the trend is away from welfare as citizenship rights towards an emphasis on both rights, and responsibilities and obligations. This is the so-called Third Way politics: no rights without responsibilities. In China; the trend is to move away from urban residents' reliance on workplace (hence, ultimately, the state) welfare provision to the state shedding off its responsibilities to society. While these turns occurred in different historical contexts, they have parallel political philosophies: government should not row but only steer, and citizens must take up more responsibilities for their own welfare, which is expressed as empowering citizens to solve their own problems. It is in this context we can also understand the global rise of an appropriated variation of communitarianism (after Amitai Etzioni) and social capital theory (Robert Putnam). While commenting on citizenship in neo-liberal Canada, Suzan Ilcan and Tanya Basok state, "it can be said that the task of government today is no longer engaged in traditional planning but is more involved in enabling, inspiring, and assisting citizens to take

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[1] The Chinese translation of Osborne and Gaebler's book was published in 1998. The book's title "Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector," says it all: the key message is that government should be run like corporation. As Business Week wrote in the back cover of the book, "The new gospel of good government…chronicles the efforts of government officials to

responsibility for social problems for their action. (132)

This paper looks specifically at the *political rationalities* behind the Chinese effort to promote community building, not the sociological reality of community. So it will not pursue the empirical study of how 'democratic' community is.[2] I will use personal interviews I conducted in China last summer, and analyze government documents and Chinese scholarly writings on community building to develop my argument. The paper is divided into three sections: 1) theoretical framework; 2)global and national context of governance; 3) from *danwei* to community

1. Theoretical Framework

1) State-Society Relations

In liberal discourse, state and civil society are generally considered antithetical to each other. In the less critical variants of conceptualizing of civil society, it is the sphere of freedom, where people can flourish as individual citizens, outside of state hierarchies. In most versions, liberal democracies are believed to have strong civil societies and in the less critical versions, people there are therefore more free. In contrast, communist authoritarian regimes are considered to have no civil society, but a dominant state. Therefore, civil society is seen to be the marker of how democratic a country is.

Gramscian conceptions of civil society would accept the basic comparative contrast between eastern and western Europe, but he would hesitate to accept civil society to be portrayed as such a zone of autonomy and freedom. Civil society must operate by such principles on some minimal level, because it is the realm par excellence for the exercise

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bring business technologies to public service."
[2] Benjamin L. Read provided an interesting study of home-owner association's pursuit for self-governance, and applied theories of Engels, Barrington Moore and Seymour Martin Lipset to investigate the linkage between home-ownership and democracy in China (2003).

of hegemony, understood in his terms as "intellectual and moral leadership". But for that very reason, civil society is but one moment in a wider social formation, a complement rather than a contrast to the state in the successful wielding of power.

Experts are interested in the question of civil society, primarily on the assumption that detecting it is taken to be a marker of democratization. Guided by such Euro-centric liberal understanding of state-society relations, even some Chinese scholars tended to treat the recent expansion of NGOs (associations of professionals, entrepreneurs or women's organizations) as a sign of the emergence of civil society independent of state (Bi; Wang2004). Bernie Frolic provided a much more accurate understanding of the nature of civil society in China, when he e suggested that Chinese civil society is state-led civil society. This agrees with the findings of Chinese scholars who have been engaging in their own state-civil society debate . The consensus seems that civil society in China cannot accurately be said to be separate from the state, rather it depends on the state for its survival to a degree unknown in the West. On the other hand, the state needs civil society in its effort to combat social problems.

2)Governance and Michel Foucault's Governmentality

Literature on civil society arises out of macro and analytic concerns, while concept of governance grows out of practical concerns within institutions, so that one can talk about governance of government; governance of school, and governance of corporation. Governance literature influences the question of governing in the context of neo-liberalism. It has generated a cottage industry in China . The general idea behind governance and its particular de-centring of the state is that in the increasingly globalized world, the state can no longer afford expensive social policies. To remain globally

competitive, government must become lean and small. Government becomes only one

actor in the complex web of governing state and non-state actors. Government must

forgo those it cannot help or who are not competent sentence unclear, and let others

(especially the third sector) do the job (Rose 1999). Both privatization and public-

private partnerships are promoted in the literature on good governance. The societal

partnership of state and market means that society no longer acts as a *contestant of power*

over norms and morality, but rather is *brought in line* with the state and market. As

James Rosenau points out, "governance is always effective in performing the functions

necessary to systemic persistence, else it is not conceived to exist since instead of

referring to ineffective governance, one speaks of anarchy and chaos."(5)

Since the 1990s, governance theories and practices have been imported to China

through the translation of books, through academic exchanges, and through various

international development agency programs such as those of the World Bank.[3] Chinese

scholars find the concept of governance appealing because it speaks to the Chinese need

to reform the omnipresent state and to create civil society. Some of these scholars

consider the latter to be conducive to democracy in the long run. "Small government, big

society" is now the mantra of China's attempt to reform government functions, which in

turn is commonly linked to political reform. Sun Boyin (2003) summarized governance

the best: "governance promotes small government, based on model of the market, and

advocates individual responsibility and community responsibility." (Sun 2003: 71).

Through the example of community building, we can clearly see how governance

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[3] Lester Salamon, considered one of the pioneers in the notion of the "associational revolution", lectured at
the Tsinghua University NGOs Center in 1999. Anthony Giddens' Third Way was translated into Chinese.
In several recent trips to bookstores in Beijing, I discovered shelves of books written by Chinese political
scientists and sociologists, on the topics of governance in China, community building and political reform

guides the Chinese government's attempts to reconstitute relations amongst the state, the market and the society. Such attempts are hailed by scholars and top-level politicians as conducive to political reform .

Governance literature has assumed hegemonic discourse since 1990s in both global politics and Chinese politics. Yet in some respects, it resembles Michael Foucault's far more critical notion of governmentality . However, while Foucault's notion of governmentality is the critical analysis of the operation of power/knowledge in neo-liberalism, the governance literature is both descriptive and normative.[4] "Governance rests on a move toward closure, a move toward things being controlled or steered this way and not that way. It is an assignment of places, values, and options." (Latham, 29).

One might dispute using the label "liberal" to describe governance in China. But as Aihwa Ong argues, and I agree, in calling the equally 'illiberal' Southeast Asia liberal, liberal individualism or "too much" government is not what is meant. She argues that if

> one considers liberalism not as a political philosophy but as an art of government, then liberalism is not something that can be reduced to a perfect realization of a doctrine called liberalism; rather, it includes the array of rationalities whereby a liberal government attempts to resolve problems of how to govern society as a whole. (Ong 195)

The key to understand Foucault's notion of liberal government, or governmentality, is as the "conduct of conduct": the social regulation of the conduct of individuals, families, markets, and populations. Community self governance in China can be understood as "mode[s] of government that work upon the capacities of citizens to act on their own behalf." (Cruikshank, 39) Government is only on actor in the network of

in the globalized world. See my bibliography for this.

state and non-state actors in the "conduct of conduct". But in liberal democracy, such

social regulation is dispersed in the network of state and non-state agencies (experts,

social workers, voluntary associations, etc.) because government in liberal democracy

cannot be seen to govern "too much". In contrast to the liberal state, the Chinese state,

like the Southeast Asian states in Ong's book, has always seen the "conduct of conduct"

to be the realm of the legitimate state intervention. The state has always taken up a role

in specifically moral leadership. In China, power has been visibly performed, and

assertively so, over multiple régime changes. The Chinese state asserts its own power

through visibility, primarily because of the tradition of moral leadership by the state and a

weak or absent civil society. The state therefore plays a relatively prominent role in

governance. But this is a state that at the same time is gradually limiting itself to the

macro-management of society only, from rule on ideologies (political) to rule on

technicalities (i.e., how to govern society as a whole from an administrative and social

point of view). Hence it might be thought to be moving towards liberal political

rationality. The fundamental question facing Chinese leadership is how to ensure market

economy will flourish, while the Party maintains its rule and Chinese society remains

cohesive. This fundamental balancing act prompts government to experiment on political

reform at the community level.

2. The Global and Chinese Context: "Small Government, Big Society"

In liberal democracies in the 1980s, governance involved the "hollowing out of

the state"—the retreat from the post-WWII welfare state. The so-called "Third Way"

politics of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton that epitomizes neo-liberal governance, claims to

have moved beyond both the left and right, and therefore, beyond ideologies (Giddens)

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[4] Rose 1999, chapter 1.

Instead of tackling inequality through redistribution (as in the welfare state), the "Third Way" politics treats inequality as government's inadequate response to global change. That global change discriminates against unskilled labor, hence the wage gap. The solution to the latter thus is not redistribution, but investing in human capital (Froud, et. al., 159).

In China, the state under socialism was omnipresent in politics, economy, and society alike. Workplaces in the state sector acted as social institutions, in that they provide their employees subsidized housing, medical care, and a pension. In China, a "hollowing out" of the state has involved several steps: 1) the state withdrawal from the economic sphere (*zhengqi fengkai*), so that market functions freely. 2) the off-loading of state-owned enterprises' (SOEs') pre-reform social responsibilities to societal and market institutions, in addition to laying off employees (*qishe fengkai*). 3) the shedding of many social responsibilities (*zhengshe fengkai*) of the state to the society. Social responsibilities such as medical care, pension, employment, etc. are now deemed societal responsibilities, not government ones. What the government is doing, as it declares, is simply returning social responsibilities back to where they belong: the society. These steps are by no means complete or coherent. However, the general philosophy guiding these steps is seemingly liberal: good governance means less government.

Social problems, such as the increasing gap between the rich and the poor, are the direct result of the Chinese state's attempts to re-organize the relations of the state, economy and society, policy initiatives very much in line with international neo-liberal governance. But government seeks solutions to these social problems, not through non-market mechanisms as Karl Polanyi theorized in his theory of "double movement".

Rather, the government tries to solve these social problems by pushing people further into the market: for example, for people to remain on welfare (itself extremely stingy), they must demonstrate that they are actively seeking employment, and community is there to monitor anybody who cheats on the system.

The Chinese government calls on social forces (*shehui liliang*) to involve themselves in social causes (*shehui shiye*). But in the Chinese context, what is society and what counts as the social? It seems at this moment in history, society in China is an abstract and reified vessel that contains whatever market and government deem not to be economical or political, and are therefore the responsibilities of neither . This is a delicate position for the government to adopt, as it faces mounting social problems: it is simultaneously inclined to police the latter as a potential source of "social turmoil".

In general, social conduct now properly becomes a sphere for regulation by a complex web of actors—social scientists, professional social workers, and so on. Crucially, however, the notion of "social forces" does not distinguish between profit and non-profit activity.(Young 2001) Thus, the central dividing line in official government rhetoric is clearly the divide between government and non-government, and not between market and non-market. Privatization and user fees are therefore considered to be efficient and desirable ways to deliver social services: if companies are not to deliver social services, social services are to be provided as if a company were providing them, and indeed in many instances by the extension of the for-profit institutional form.

From a Polanyian perspective, however, if the government's peculiar appeal for "social forces" to deal with social problems tends to exacerbate, rather than reduce, social polarization, it is because it addresses the consequences of market rationality by the

further extension of market rationality. Further, government officials, especially at the

county and township levels, are reluctant to invest in social spending because it is seen to

hurt local economic performance by reducing cost competitiveness, and the latter is what

determines the individual official's fortune in his or her political career.

3. From *Danwei* to *Shequ*

> Communitarianism springs from the recognition that the human being is by nature
> a social animal as well as an individual with a desire for autonomy.
> Communitarians recognize that a healthy society must have a correct balance
> between individual autonomy and social cohesion. Much recent thinking has
> focused on an assumed conflict between the rights of the individual and the
> responsibilities of the government. When you put "community" back into the
> equation, you find that the apparent conflict between the individual and the
> government can be resolved by public policies that are consistent with core
> American values and work to the benefit of all members of our society
> (Communitarian Network. Available online at http://www.gwu.edu/~ccps/).

If one replaces "American" with "Chinese" above, the above quoted statement

rings true to the current government thinking on people-centred development and

promoting social cohesion through community building. In communitarian political

philosophy, individual rights and autonomy are considered legitimate, but social cohesion

must not be sacrificed in the pursuit of individual autonomy and rights. The Chinese

government arguably does not need to turn to communitarianism for inspiration, since

Chinese culture is said to be more communitarian than individualistic. But the global

trend of communitarianism (Amitai Etzioni), the distinct, but related development of

social capital (Robert Putnam), and finally World Bank and UN support for

communitarianism and social capital[5] all have to be considered important in the global

context to understand community building in China.

"Community" as a sociological concept was introduced into China by the famous

Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong in the 1930s when he translated the works of the "Chicago School". At that time, community was considered a concept from liberal-bourgeois sociology because it implies reformism and gradualism.[6] Marxist sociology, emphasizing revolution, was considered a more powerful analytical approach to China's social problems . Interestingly enough, community was re-introduced to China in the 1990s, and has since been hailed as the solution to the urban problems China faces today. The reasons offered are that community is about building bonds and shared moral values. Community is about humanism (*yiren weiben*), and the key reform is humanistic management in the form of self-governance, in contrast to administrative, and hence coercive, management. (Lei; Dou; Xu)

Although scholars in China are still debating the meaning of community, within the allowable limits in China, community is very concrete, geographically-based, and territorially-bounded. It is larger than the old neighbourhood committee (*jumin weiyuanwei*). It usually has about 1,000 – 1,500 households. Some communities are based on existing urban geography, consisting of old neighbourhoods; some are newly-developed gated communities (*xiaoqu*); some are based on neighbourhoods composed of *danwei*-assigned apartments; some are almost shanty towns. Each type of community has different history, which impacts on the degree of prior communal bonding and residents' willingness to participate in community activities. In contemporary China, there is no reason to believe that community residents share any organic relationship, as implied by Tönnies' original *Gemeinschaft*. The latter concept describes a pre-modern

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[5] See Harris, and UN and World Bank websites for example.
[6] The Rural Reconstruction Movement led by James Yen (Yen Yangcu) and Liang Sumin was a movement influenced by building community among Chinese peasants so that peasants know how to govern themselves through solidarity, cooperation and public interest. See Zhen 2000.

rather than a modern society , and the modern contrary, *Gesellschaft* or society, is believed to be full of atomized individuals, without any organic social bonds. It is the latter that more nearly approximates the meaning of community in many if not most settings. Therefore, 'community building' is understood to mean that an conscious effort has to be made to cultivate community consciousness in people so that individuals can *return to* community. Finally, the government emphatically does not allow community organizations or community organizing activities that jeopardize its policies or disturb the social order. It emphasizes "orderly participation" (*youxu canyu*).[7]

Community building is considered government policy on urban governance, parallel to self-governance of villagers in rural governance (Lei; Wang 2003) It passed the *Law on Urban Residents Committee Organization* in1989. To promote grassroots democracy, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA), in 1998, even set up a division called the division of grassroots authority and community building (*jiceng zhengquan yu shequjianshe si*). In 1992, the MCA held its first "community-building theory seminar" in Tianjing. Community-building experts attended the seminar, and used theories to evaluate and analyze some communities. Later in the same year, a second such theory seminar was held. In 1993, community experts in Hangzhou, Tianjing and Shanghai went to choose some communities in their respective cities to put their theory into practice. Even the Vice-President of the NPC, Lei Jieqiong, went to communities in Hangzhou to conduct investigations. She later acted as the editor-in-chief of a book on community building in Beijing (Lei 2001). As with the implementation of most policies, community building was carried out in some experimental sites. The government chose big urban

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[7] The then Party Secretary Jiang Zemin lays this out in his *Build Comfortable-Living Society, Develop Socialist Causes with Chinese Characteristics*. People's Publishing House, 2002.

cities such as Shanghai, Shenyang and Wuhan to run experiment, and the experience of each site then became a model to be used for national implementation later. So we now have the Shanghai , Shengyang , Wuhan , Tianjing and Qingdao models. But since 1998, community building has been officially 'brought into line with' (*naru*) national administrative functions (Wang Qingshan 2001: 12-22). According to Wang Qingshan, this move means that community work "is authoritative; it is part of national policies." "It also means that community work has institutional support at the national level." (19)

At this point, it is critical to emphasize a point hinted at earlier: that in the Chinese context, community represents a level of local institutions designed to displace discredited structures of mobilization and surveillance below the lowest level of urban government agency. The mandate for a community is also considered to be a shift from a coercive administrative order to "humanist management" [*renxinhua guanli*)[8] as well as devolution of power to local government. "Humanistic management" means that the people govern themselves, instead of being governed by "coercive administrative order." (Wang 2003; Lei) The idea of devolution (*fangquan*) is guided by the desire of the central government to transform the relationship between the state and the society, and between the economy and the society, so that social affairs can be returned to society to manage. However, devolution, as many Chinese scholars have emphasized, is not the same as the division or separation of powers (*fengquan*) between the state and society, because separation of powers assumes that society has different interests from those of the state, and hence implicitly provides the grounds for contestation over power. (Wang 2001). Thus, devolution is about the state exercising its sovereign power to de-centralize, in order to govern better.

But this self-governance model of community building is also based on the other fundamental principle of a strong Party presence and leadership in the community. Here is the crux of the motivation behind the Chinese state's decision to build community in the country: community building is to strengthen the Party's dominant role, rather than weaken it. (Just so, capitalism and globalization strengthen the Party, rather than weaken it.) To quote Tang Qingshan, a cadre in the newly created MCA division of community building, since the Chinese are moving away from a "work-unit person" (*danweiren*) to a "society person" (*shehuiren*), the community, rather than the work unit, is becoming the most important social structure, and community life will become an important form of social life.[9] Anticipating such dramatic social transformation, the Party deems it essential to build a strong presence for itself in the community, so that in this new local structure, the Party wins a powerful social base. Economic reform has led to progressive social differentiation, with increasingly heterogeneous interests, so government deems social cohesion essential to the maintenance of social order. But because of the heterogeneous nature of urban residents with different interests, self-governance, not government direct intervention, is considered the most effective and efficient way of governing for certain limited purposes, (Wang 2001; Wang 2003) and on that point, liberal democracy offers rich experience.

Government adopts a utilitarian view towards community building, because it sees social services to community as the "essence of its lifeline". The Party/government's legitimacy is at stake if the people's daily life (*shenghuo*) is not stabilized, and community is where people live (apart from their working lives). These

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[8] Personal interview with deputy minister of civil affairs of a district in Shanghai, May 18, 2004.
[9] Tang, http://www.sp.cn

social problems are the direct result of the state's effort to create a self-regulating market.

However, the Chinese state deems these problems as "social" rather than "economic".

Since these are social problems, society should take responsibility, with the state playing

only a supplementary role (*fuzu*). Community building is thus a concrete way to create

social structures, structures almost destroyed under Mao's socialism in its totalitarian

moments. As government declares, social service is the lifeline of community, and

democracy is the soul of community: the following section is devoted to critical analyses

of these two aspects of community building.

1) **Self-governance and Participation: The Desired Institutional and Behavioural Change**

The central government insisted that community/neighbourhood must govern

based on the model of "self-management, self-education, self-service and self-

surveillance." (Article 2) Following Article 2, eight tasks expected of community are

laid out: 1) take care of residents' public issues and causes; 2) mediate conflicts between

neighbors; 3)assist in maintaining societal safety and security; 4) assist the government or

its agencies in carrying out works in public hygiene, family planning, relief, and youth

education; 5) report residents' opinion to the government or its agencies Not surprisingly,

the eight main tasks stipulated in the Law match the main social problems the

government sees itself facing in cities: aging populations where small families are

increasingly the norm; unemployment; the declining importance of *danwei* , and hence a

major social control function in people's lives for a large urban population; social

marginalization/exclusion/frustration/unrest; and migrant populations, who fall outside of

urban social control.

As one looks at the activities the Law lays out for communities, it is obvious that

the tasks expected of a community are what the government is interested in. Any task not

included in the Law is presumably not considered legal. The key to community

residents' self-government is "orderly participation." (*youxu canyu*). Neither government

pronouncements or scholars give precise meaning to this term. " As I understand it,

"orderly participation" allows for participation within the realm of the Law –

participation that assists government's political project of social cohesion. It certainly

does not permit participation that challenges government interests. As Ling Shangli

states, the keys to 'democratization' in the current Chinese sense of the term is to:

"institutionalize a democratic system; achieve democratic decision-making; expand

orderly participation; and strengthen societal self-governance." (Lin, 72) But terms such

as democratic decision-making, like participation and self-governance, are limited in

several ways: not only are they on matters of very limited significance and to be

conducted within the constraints of the law, but also they lost the meanings usually

anticipated because they are guided above all by the spirit of entrepreneurship. Such

entrepreneurial spirit in citizens is seen to be absolutely essential in ensuring that market

economy flourishes, but it is encouraged in areas of social life.

      I will now briefly turn to the causes of the social problems to which *shequ* are

viewed as solutions, and the reasons behind community structures being asked to take up

these tasks. *Danwei* used to function as providers of welfare and as social control

mechanisms. Government policies, ranging from family planning to public hygiene

campaigns, were carried out at *danwei*. Many *danwei* even owned their own hospitals,

schools and apartment buildings. *Danwei* under the planned economy is not only a

workplace, but also a social institution that provides for employees' welfare benefits,

such as health care, housing, day care, and pension. To have a job in a SOE in particular was considered to have received an "iron rice bowl". Everything from birth to death was taken care of.

Urban reform, with reforming state-owned enterprises (SOEs) as the key, has led to the smashing of the "iron rice bowl". More and more urban people have found themselves unemployed and thus without welfare benefits. As government tells its citizens, in the drive to shed the social burdens of companies and of government (*shuidiao baofu*), the unemployed are no longer the responsibilities of *danwei*, but those of communities . The government withdrawal from various welfare services occurs in tandem with the marketization of such key services as medical care, education, and housing . The double movement of government shedding social responsibilities and the marketization of key services has had a devastating effect on a new umbrella social category, "weak social group" (*ruoshi shehui tuanti*). But their welfare is now the responsibility of themselves and/or of community they live in; government only provides an assisting role.

Further, with rising unemployment, employment outside the *danwei* system and a large migrant population unserved by *danwei*, *danwei* can no longer act as the comprehensive social control mechanism it used to be. In other words, a large and growing population, which tends to find itself at the bottom of the social hierarchy and which is therefore not happy with the government, is now outside government surveillance and discipline . That is very troubling for a government that attaches utmost importance to 'social order' (*shehui zhixu*). Therefore, community has to replace *danwei* in this function. The broader social change is that Chinese society is moving from self-

contained *danwei* with little population mobility to a much more open and diverse society, with a large migrant population. It is essential to maintain such an open society to facilitate the flow of goods, capital and population in the market economy. How to maintain social control therefore demands a new political rationalities (Foucault) for government. The growing "pathology" associated with Chinese cities is caused by the coming apart of old-style *danwei*, the place for social control and human bonding. Community is that new organization of social control: not only can it function as a social control mechanism, but it has a potentially radical or democratizing ring to it: citizen self-governance . Chinese scholars see community building in China as extension of global movement of community building, with the UN as its international promoter.

The hierarchical government structure of Chinese cities is this: municipal and district government, with the street committee (*jiedao waiyuanhui*) as the lowest-scale agency of the government (*zhengfu paichu jigou*). Under the formula of community self-governance, government only plays the role of guidance (*zhidao*) rather than leader (*lingdao*). This is both a change, and a line of continuity with the past. Under the old system, the neighborhood committee (*juwaihui*) is, in theory, a mass organization, though in practice, it still acted as an "arm" of the government. The aim of building community self-governance is then to abolish the hierarchical relationship between the street committee and neighborhood committee, and to set-up a self-governed and self-contained entity. Government only intervenes under the state of exception/emergency (Agamben), reflecting its so-called governance philosophy, "take control of big matters, and let go of small matters" (*zhuada, fangxiao*). It is also within community that democratic experiments can occur. But any democracy is still understood to be led by the

Communist Party.

By drawing a clear boundary between community and local government (municipal, district and street), it is hoped that community can enjoy autonomy in running its own affairs. (Dou; Lin; Xu) But the only legitimate political space for action is the territory-bound community and matters affecting their living environment (security, hygiene) and quality of life (service delivery). Self-governance is to empower residents to work actively towards solving their own problems, so that government does not need to intervene (Dou; Lin; Xu). At one level, less government interference into residents' lives is probably welcome to many. But if less government interference means less financial support from the government without compensating funding from other sources, then one might question whether self-governance is always inherently liberating and good.[10]

Besides institutional change, citizens' behavioral change is also deemed necessary to build community self-governance (Dou; Lin; Xu). The key behavioral change is that people must replace dependence (*yilai*) and submission to authority (doing as one is told) with independence and active participation in community affairs. Many modern Chinese do not find such behavior easy or natural. But how to encourage people to participate when they are told that in the market economy, they must be "on their own" rather than follow the government; and when *danwei* can no longer be used to discipline people to do things the government wants?

Many communities continue to use mass mobilization techniques to mobilize people to volunteer, to donate and participate in community election. But as many

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[10] On the whole, Chinese scholars argue, from civil societal perspective, that participation means empowering citizens to use their right to govern themselves, and in doing so, limits state power.

Chinese scholars argue, Maoist-style mass mobilization politics cannot work as effectively in the market economy as it did under Mao because 1) a large proportion of the population does not function within government system; 2) mass mobilization takes the form of a campaign: it is unsustainable, and is viewed as the result of strong government coercive power at work (Dou). Under Mao, Chinese people were also mobilized to participate in public causes, but in a Maoist participation style that inherently disavows the self; one had to give up one's self interest totally for the public interest (altruism). This point appears to have been better absorbed into the community approach. In today's call for citizens' participation, participation is considered good for the public, but also for self-realization: hence, the motto or slogan, "I help others; others help me." (*renren weiwo, wowei renren*). This is in some ways quite similar to the limited altruism and volunteerism as practiced in some liberal democracies. Participation in community work is seen to solve the problem of citizens' lack of "citizenship consciousness and participation consciousness". Participation is also now presented as an indicator of one's 'quality', the ubiquitous term not only official but ordinary people's everyday discourse. Volunteerism is presented as manifestation of citizens' consciousness of democratic participation (Dou; Lin; Xu)

2) Self-governance and Participation: the "Art of Liberal Government"

The main task of community building, to quote Tang from MCA, is to

gradually build a small government, big society, strong Party and strong self-governance, and to understand properly the ideas of limited government, government function from management and control to service, *and the idea of cost-benefit*. (Tang, http://www.sp.cn, emphasis added)

I draw attention to this last attribute, because I wish to emphasize that Tang's summary about community building is in line with neo-liberal political rationality. If

good governance means less government and government ceding place to the market, cost-benefit is the criteria to decide whether government should act , and consistent with this logic, subjects government action to a process of market rationality.

Participation includes the democratic election of members to the community neighborhood assembly(the community decision-making body), and in some communities, members of the neighborhood committee (the executive body). As the head of a district civil affairs department in Shanghai told me, democratic election has several advantages in low-scale governance: it publicizes community so that residents develop a sense of community; it is easier for directly-elected community officials than government officials to conduct community affairs, because residents tend not to trust the latter; it can strengthen residents' democratic consciousness . One is not surprised then that "participation" catches on quickly in Chinese political discourse. It also has aids in getting funding from international agencies, since "participation" (participatory development) is a key criterion for almost all development agencies and governance programs.

Government at each level calls on social forces to "contribute with a loving heart" (*xianaixin*) to help those in need: the elderly, the unemployed, and the poor. Participation (*canyu*) in elections, indeed in volunteering for all community activities, is considered key to democratic governance. But also the success of community relies on participation, and it is in the latter that the government is interested. Community residents are encouraged to participate through volunteering and donation, so that services can be delivered without much government financing. Examples of such participation are widely and favorably publicized . Participation in community affairs includes

volunteering in neighborhood watch programmes; helping police monitor traffic violations; helping with public hygiene; mediating conflicts; donating money to community projects such as repairing walls, helping the needy; caring for the elderly; and educate the youth, and so on. That residents govern their own affairs not only delivers services without cost, but is also more effective than direct government intervention, because self-governance gives a sense of empowerment and bolster self-esteem and it is self-directed.

Note however, Chinese citizens are encouraged to participate in *public-spirited* causes, and that participation has to be 'orderly'. So, for example, if community residents collectively take actions against developers, and therefore often local government, to defend their own interests, such participation is neither considered "orderly" or "public-spirited cause because they are simply self-interested. What counts as citizen's participation, then, is only when citizens participate in a way that helps government policy goals. Volunteerism is encouraged, while collective action outside the terms of the law is discouraged as unlawfully political.

In today's China, volunteerism is a form of free service that is much needed in usually cash-tight communities. But the monetary value of volunteerism is made invisible by turning volunteerism into something mainly a manifestation of participation in public affairs. The monetary value of volunteerism is brought to the fore when one writer argues that volunteers as human resource (*renli ziyuan*) should be used efficiently to maximize its use value. Dou makes two arguments in support of this principle1) Volunteers should only help those who are too poor to afford services. Those who can afford services should buy them in the market. 2) Volunteer labour is often available

when it is least required. Volunteers tend to work in community seniors' home and youth

center on weekend, when friends and relatives of the seniors and youth are also around to

help out (Dou: 246-48).

As I mentioned earlier, participation in the form of collective action is not

considered legal, because it is, as Dou put it, "outside the system of participation"

(*zhiduyiwai canyu*). Scholars such as Lin Shangli from Fudan University, point out that

attacking and controlling those who voice their anger and frustration at the government as

anti-socialism is counter-productive, because it may further politicize the matter because

of its antagonistic nature. Government negotiation and consultation with people

disadvantaged by the current system, 'soft' social control of a 'self-governance nature',

has the advantage of turning governing from a political to a technical or administrative

matter (Lin, 293). In elaborating on Foucault's notion of governmentality, Mitchell Dean

points out some of the implications of this:

> One of the key implications of this emphasis on government as technique is to
> contest those models of government that wish to view it solely – or even mainly –
> as a manifestation of values, ideologies, worldviews, etc. ...Those technical
> means are a condition of government and often impose limits over what is
> possible to do. (Dean, 31)

Lin sees social governance in the form of community building as the "dress rehearsal"

(*caipai*) for China's 'political civilization'. (The latter is a new term coined by Jiang

Zemin, joining an existing complementary pairing of 'material' and 'spiritual'

civilization), that includes setting up democratic procedure to reach consensus. The

advantage of community is that it is of manageable size, and concerns solely the issues of

residents' daily lives (295-6). According to many Chinese scholars, if successful,

community can not only achieve social cohesion, but also prepares Chinese citizens for a

democracy to come.

<u>Conclusion</u>

As Chinese leaders have been saying, their reform is still in development: "crossing the river, while groping for the stone" (*muzhe shizi guohe*). Government initiated community building is aimed at social control, and delivering social services cheaply and more efficiently through the government, community and market partnership. But in order to do so, self-governance and participation are encouraged. If scholars such as Lin have the ear of the government, China might be on track towards a liberal democracy in its neo-liberal form. The justification would be that social unrest, if not resolved through such institutional and legal means, would have the potential of breaking into violence and social chaos. Good governance, democracy, and political civilization are now safe topics to discuss among Chinese scholars, so long as -- and perhaps precisely because -- democracy in the neo-liberal context has lost its radical and progressive meaning—it is now about empowering citizens to govern themselves in the realm of the society.

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