

# **Layers of the Urban State: Migrant Organisations and the Chinese State\***

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*This paper explores the development of migrant non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and their interactions with central and local Chinese state. The paper suggests that while the central state is actively managing NGOs in Beijing and Shanghai with a strong regulatory framework, the urban local state, particularly the district level, is increasingly an important actor in ensuring the effectiveness of migrant NGOs' activities. In this vein, the paper presents a neo-model of state-migrant NGO relations, the subsequent informal rules that emerge from this reality, and the implications thereafter for state-society relations in China.*

Previous works focusing on the regulatory of central state-NGO interactions (See for example Ma, 2000; Lu, 2005; Simon, 2009) do not sufficiently explain the potential impact and effectiveness of a new breed of Chinese NGOs operating at the urban local level. Such focus does not account for the involvement of multiple levels of the state or the informal strategies at work between NGOs and the state. These two aspects, as this study will show, have an enormous impact on the NGO sector. For instance, new migrant NGOs working in Beijing and Shanghai<sup>1</sup> increasingly rely on the local state to assist with service delivery, thus suggesting an erosion of what little autonomy the NGO sector possesses. That said I adopt a multiple level analysis of the Chinese state and its interaction with migrant non-governmental organisations (NGOs).<sup>2</sup> Unlike other studies on NGOs in China, this paper will present new empirical research on the interactions between migrant NGOs and several layers of the urban state, from the central state to the residents' committee (*juweihui*) level. The NGOs explored in this paper represent rural-urban migrant workers. By analysing the typologies of relationships between different levels of the Chinese state and migrant NGOs, I provide a basis for theorising state-NGO relations. The findings of this research show that unlike the central state, the local states in both cities have adopted a variety of informal strategies in their interactions with migrant NGOs that significantly impact the future of China's NGO sector. The following section will explore the background and context of this study by briefly examining Chinese NGO regulations. In addition, I will frame the study within both the local Chinese state literature and the literature on typologies of state-NGO interaction. The second section will outline the work of the migrant NGOs. The third section will discuss the factors that affect state and NGO interactions. I will also contextualise the relationships within the typologies discussed. The last section will present conclusions and explore the future possibilities of NGOs vis-à-vis the Chinese state.

## **Background and Context**

The role of the central state in the NGO sector is clearly stipulated in the Ministry of Civil Affairs' (MCA) regulations. The MCA is responsible for registering and managing NGOs. No universal NGO regulatory system existed until the State Council issued the 'Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations' (*Shehui tuanti dengji guanli tiaoli*) in October 1989, post-Tiananmen. All NGOs under the regulation require a government sponsoring unit or leading professional unit (*yewu zhuguan danwei*) to complete registration. As the literature on Chinese NGOs suggests, finding a sponsor is difficult and prevents many organisations from completing the registration

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step (Edele, 2005; Simon, 2009). There are no incentives for government departments to take on the extra administrative work to sponsor a NGO as it could potentially expose the department to political liability, especially if the NGO became troublesome for the state.

The burdensome process erodes the NGO's autonomy as all final decisions must be approved by the sponsoring agency. To avoid the lengthy process, many NGOs register as a commercial entity with the Bureau for Industry and Commerce. Only ten per cent of NGOs are registered with the MCA, and 90 per cent are either unregistered or registered as a for-profit entity (Wang, 2009).<sup>3</sup> Article 13 of the 1998 'Regulations on the Administration of Social Organisations' (*Shehui tuanti dengji guanli tiaoli*),<sup>4</sup> prevents NGOs from operating outside their registration area. This limits NGOs' diversity and prevents any attempts to scale up an organisation's operations (Hasmath and Hsu, 2008; Hsu, 2009). Given this and other measures that regulate the NGO sector, what models of state-NGO interaction may best explain how the Chinese state engages with migrant NGOs?

Using Coston's article (1998) as a starting point, this study seeks to present three models of state-migrant NGO relationships: symbolic, asymmetric and strategic. Coston delineates eight types of government-NGO relationships: repression, rivalry, competition, contracting, third-party government, cooperation, complementarity and collaboration. While her models are not country-specific, they do suggest a progression from a repressive regime to a liberal democracy (Coston, 1998, p. 363). Similarly, Ullah *et al* (2006) have worked with this continuum to show that state-NGO relationships range from parallel to competitive. Neither this case study nor China itself fits so comfortably into this continuum. Chinese NGOs operate in an unfavourable institutional environment. However, the dichotomy is that various levels of the state have tacitly acknowledged the growing pluralism of social stakeholders. Thus, symbolic cooperation denotes the state's acknowledgement and acceptance of NGOs' presence and work. The cooperation with NGOs gives the state legitimacy and validity (Gao, Li and Quan, 2009, p. 913). Within the Chinese political context, cooperation between state and NGO would serve little practical purpose for the state other than as a symbolic gesture.

The second relationship model, asymmetric, primarily benefits the state and creates a dependent NGO sector. Despite the imbalance, NGOs seek to extract as much benefit as possible. Their need for resources and the ability to develop a competitive advantage necessitates their engagement with the state and/or other institutions (Dickson and Weaver, 1997; Gray and Wood, 1991). Within this relationship, tension exists between state and NGO simultaneously with cooperation, as both state and NGO realise the value of the interaction (Najam, 2000). The asymmetry in power is an issue that Matlin (2001, p. 12) argues must be addressed in state-NGO relationship as it will shed light on 'who controls the process of the relationship'.

The third model of interaction described is strategic collaboration. A strategic alliance between state and NGO, especially in China's political context, serves the state's interests. The gains from such engagement would meet a political and/or economic agenda. In both asymmetric and strategic models, it is necessary to look at the varying and converging interests of state and NGOs to achieve an appropriate understanding of the relationships (Najam, 2000).

The typologies of state-NGO interaction presented here denote a starting point for my analysis and the basis to construct a more solid understanding of state-NGO relations. While using typologies is helpful, Ramanath (2005, p. 12) asserts that it 'scratches the surface of tensions that characterise NGO-NGO interactions'. To understand state and NGO relationships and the power dynamics at play—especially in China—detailed empirical evidence is required: 'The ways in which these power relationships are ultimately worked ... is an empirical question. This means ... charting the interactions among different agencies' (Teamey, 2010, p. 33-34). Perhaps one could go as far as Tvedt (2002, p. 365-366) suggests: 'The main challenge to NGO research at this stage, then, is not to develop grand theories ... but to develop research designs that are able to analytically integrate both the homogeneity

and heterogeneity of the NGO scene'. I aim to delve beneath the surface of these relations and to analyse the factors that shape state-NGO interactions. In particular, I seek to draw out the strategies at play between state and NGO and the growing importance of the urban local state, this will help us broaden our understanding of the kinds of models/typologies that could be useful for studying China.

The case study of migrant NGOs demonstrates the need to account for the urban local state in order to gain a comprehensive picture of state-NGO interactions. The following section will continue to contextualise the study by looking at existing literature on the Chinese local state.

### **Chinese Local State**

The focus given to the local state in the literature reflects the complexity of linkages, spaces and layers that is inherent in the Chinese state. For example, Oi (1992, 1995) examines the local state as a business corporation. Oi observes the local corporatist state in the context of the 'workings of a *local* government that coordinates economic enterprises in its territory as if it were a diversified business corporation' (1995, pp. 100-101). Nevitt (1996) and Unger (1996) believe the business activities are driven by personal motives such as direct economic gains from close association with the business sector. Blecher and Shue's (2001) study of the Xinji fur and leather industry is framed within the development state model, suggesting that while members of the local state are economic actors, where they place their support can inadvertently determine the fate of other industries in the same locale. Foster (2001, p. 94) suggests that the local state's 'control impulse is mixed with strategies aimed at promoting social and developmental agendas as well as more parochial organizational and individual goals'. More recent research concurs with those findings (Fewsmith, 2005; Alpermann, 2006). Zhang (2007, p. 220) writes: 'the growth of the private sector and the spread of market relations, together with the willingness of government to leave space to societal actors, are critical structural requisites for bottom-up organisations'.

Using this background, I will outline and analyse migrant NGOs' relationships and interactions with different levels of the state: central, municipal, district, street neighbourhood committee (*jiedao*) and residents' committee (*juweihui*).<sup>5</sup> As a point of methodology, the selection of Beijing and Shanghai is an acknowledgement of the growing and vibrant urban NGO sector in both cities.<sup>6</sup> Interviews for this research were conducted between 2006 and 2007. The fourteen NGOs outlined here vary in size and in the services they offer for migrants.<sup>7</sup> Migrant NGOs represent a small part of the NGO sector in both cities. As such, interviewees personally introduced the researcher to other NGOs' contacts.

The NGOs can be divided into four work categories: legal/advocacy, service delivery, community integration and migrant children's education. The interviews do not provide a national representation of the changes NGOs are making at the urban level. Rather it is a case-study to demonstrate the importance of the urban local state in the development of migrant NGOs, and it is the first step towards more research into this area.

### **The Work of Migrant NGOs**

Beijing and Shanghai demonstrate that the local state, particularly at the district level, determines the type of relationship that exists between NGOs and the state. Factors such as confidence in NGOs, as is the case in Beijing, or a certain level of innovativeness on the part of Shanghai's local authorities, have shaped the experiences of NGOs and the opportunity to collaborate with them. Table 1 categorises the NGOs based on their primary focus and their interactions with the various levels of the state. By exploring these four categories, I seek to draw out the layers of the state through their interactions with migrant NGOs to show a state that is renewing itself in order to extend its presence vertically and horizontally through social organisations. Consequently, success in service delivery is dependent on migrant NGOs' ability to participate in the informal arrangements as established by the urban local state,

particularly at the district level. This section will therefore give an overview of the organisations and their engagement with various levels of the state which will provide the basis for drawing together the patterns of interaction.

**Table 1: Categories of NGOs Work and Engagement with the State**

Work Category	NGO	Levels of the State				
		Central	Municipal	District	Street N/hood	Residents'
Legal Advocacy	Beijing Legal Aid Office for Migrant Workers (B)*	X	X	X		
	Facilitators (B)	X	X	X	X	
Service Delivery	Gongyou Zhijia (B)		X		X	
	Migrant Women's Club (B)	X		X		
	Tongxin Xiwang (B)					X
	HAIKEYI (S)*			X		
Community Development/ Integration	Shining Stone Community (B)			X	X	X
	Grassroots Community (S)			X	X	X
Migrant Children's Education	Compassion for Migrant Children (B)			X	X	X
	Loving Heart Association (S)		X			
	Co-worker (S)			X		
	Project Integration (S)			X		
	Roots and Shoots (S)		X			
	Sunrise Library (S)			X		

\* 'B' denotes Beijing and 'S' denotes Shanghai

### **Legal Advocacy**

The legal advocacy focused migrant NGOs interviewed (all in Beijing) have co-operative relationships with the central state due to the focus of their work on migrant workers' legal rights.<sup>8</sup> The

proximity of migrant NGOs in Beijing to state departments affords them better chances of interacting with the central state. The state has allowed migrant workers some room to exercise their frustration and pursue justice in meeting the various challenges of the urban work environment. Consequently, this has created space for NGOs to represent migrant workers in their disputes against their employers.

#### *Beijing Legal Advocacy Office for Migrant Workers (BLAOMW)*

Based in Beijing, BLAOMW's work is supported by the All-China Lawyer's Association (ACLA) with an initial start-up grant of one million *yuan* (US \$160,000). The four main goals of the organisation are to help migrants with legal advice, represent migrants, provide education on legal matters, and provide consultation on migrant policies. The organisation is not a lobby group and it is not set up to challenge the state (Personal communication 26 September 2006), yet the desire to be closer to the state suggests that there are tangible benefits for BLAOMW. BLAOMW has established a number of legal education programs and workshops with the All-China Federation of Trade Unions in delivering legal education to migrants. It is BLAOMW's close cooperation with the state that has enabled its expansion to other provinces, as provincial authorities know BLAOMW has a safe record with the central state and therefore poses minimal risks.

#### *Facilitators*

Established in 2003, Facilitators seeks to 'transform workers from the helped to the helper ... in order to promote urbanization and harmonious society<sup>9</sup> in China' (Facilitators website, n.d.). The mission suggests an affinity with the state's goals of harmonious development. Its programs include a range of legal education workshops, legal consultancy and public education activities. Facilitators has proven to be a dependable organisation, one that the government has welcomed, along with BLAOMW due to Facilitators successful SARS programs with migrant workers in 2003.

#### *Migrant Women's Club*

Founded in 1996, the Club's mission is to 'empower migrant women' (Migrant Women's Club website, n. d.). Although the Club's primary work focus is service delivery (see Table 1), it also provides legal services and consultation for migrant women (Personal communication 24 November 2006). However, its most coveted role is policy consultant with the central state. The Club spent many years drafting a proposal for industry regulation and has pushed hard for the state to introduce legislation to protect domestic workers.

Engagement with the central state is clearly not the norm: only three migrant NGOs are working at this level. To understand the extent of their work, it is necessary to turn our attention to the categories of service delivery, community integration and education. Exploring these other categories will unveil greater insight into the role of the local state and the informal arrangements that exists between state and NGO.

#### *Service Delivery*

As indicated in Table 1, interaction between service delivery NGOs and the different levels of the state are not as uniform as the NGOs in the other three categories.

#### *Gongyou Zhijia*

Founded in mid-2002 by a group of migrants in Beijing, Gongyou seeks to improve the lives of migrant workers through *wenhua* (culture), particularly music concerts. With the revenues received from their first CD, the band members were able to set up a private migrant school, Tongxin Experimental School in a Beijing suburb. The school is transformed into an evening college providing a range of

classes for adult migrant workers. Along with permitting substantial media coverage, Beijing municipal authorities have praised and awarded Gongyou for its work with the migrant community.

### *Tongxin Xiwang*

Tongxin's goal is to empower migrant women by offering social networks and basic skills training. Founded in 2005, the organisation is currently working at the micro level. Its activities are primarily conducted in a migrant settlement on the outskirts of Beijing. Its location allows Tongxin to frequently interact with the residents' committee, liaising with the local authorities to obtain permission to carry out its ad hoc events. Moreover, it rents its administrative office space from the local residents' committee.

### *HAIKEYI*

Within this category, Shanghai's HAIKEYI has the most sustained relationship at the district level. HAIKEYI delivers health workshops to the migrant population. Its original focus was on HIV/AIDS education, but, after it partnered with Minhang District Family Planning Association its focus shifted to reproductive health. According to XS of HAIKEYI: 'The Family Planning Association has one central aim of not exceeding the birth rate quota of their district and this makes the aim of HAIKEYI difficult for the Association to accept readily' (Personal communication 29 January 2007). It is the district authorities that are tasked with maintaining birth quotas. Such collaboration has led to some frustrations, as other health needs are not being met and health education is not offered (*Ibid*).

### *Community Development and Integration*

Community development and integration NGOs connect local residents with migrant workers through community activities. NGOs in this category provide a range of services for migrants. These services are framed within the context of integrating migrant workers into their new urban environments.

### *Shining Stone Community Action*

Beijing's Shining Stone Community Action has actively tried to engage with local authorities, as community development is framed within the 'harmonious society' ideology. Shining Stone invited officials from Beijing's Haidian district on study tours of its migrant integration project in Ningbo. The tours are intended to educate local Beijing authorities about the benefits of an integrated approach to community development. However, the authorities adopted a cautious approach to implementing similar programs in their district due to their 'radical nature' (Personal communication, 31 October 2006).

### *Grassroots*

Grassroots' work with migrants in Shanghai is also framed within the broader context of community development. One of its primary migrant programs provides educational activities to migrant children. Overall, Grassroots has a diverse set of projects. Established in August 2000, Grassroots' mission is to assist underprivileged community members through the promotion of community development. Since its inception, the organisation has designated four themes to guide their projects: legal service, workers' education, young volunteer recruitment, and community development.

### *Migrant Children's Education*

As Table 1 indicates, educational service providers are the most prevalent, particularly in Shanghai. Education is a preferred method for integrating migrants into their new communities (Hasmath, 2010).

### *Compassion for Migrant Children*

Beijing's Compassion for Migrant Children has proactively promoted their own work to local district authorities, and in the process seeking partnership with the local authorities. It is working to provide several after-school activities for migrant children through partnership with local migrant schools. This requires constant maintenance and cultivation of relationships with school principals and local education authorities to ensure all parties are comfortable with their partnership with this NGO.

### *Loving Heart Association*

Established by two former teachers, the NGO's goal is to improve educational standards across Shanghai by designing curriculum materials and supporting financially disadvantaged school children. Loving Heart is registered with the Shanghai Municipal Education Committee, a significant benefit for the NGO in terms of space and autonomy to conduct its programs as it means they do not have to seek MCA registration. According to CH,<sup>10</sup> Education Committee's has enabled Loving Heart to conduct any project they want to (Personal communication, 7 March 2007). The directors of Loving Heart are 'well-connected to municipal officials' and 'part of the establishment' (*Ibid*) which ensures the organisation's ability to obtain funding from a variety of sources.

### *Roots and Shoots*

Roots and Shoots started its operations in China in 2000. It established regional offices in Beijing, Shanghai and Sichuan. Roots and Shoots Shanghai has developed many school projects related to environmental protection. Its foray into working with migrant children began at Limin Migrant School. The organisation has designed a comprehensive curriculum emphasising physical education. It is also well supported by the Shanghai municipal authorities (Personal communication 1 March 2007). This has led to the municipal authorities wanting to learn from the NGO, to find new and innovative ways to address some of the city's social problems.

### *Co-Worker*

Unlike other NGOs, Co-Worker did not initiate its current migrant children programs. Instead the district authorities, specifically the Pudong Communist Youth League (CYL) approached the NGO to collaborate with them. Co-Worker while having worked with migrant children prior to its partnership (established in 2005) with the CYL, the current level of support ensures relative longevity of its after-school program for migrant students in grades four to six. According to THQ, the collaboration between the NGO and the League is beneficial for both: 'For the League to be involved with Co-Worker is an experience for them as they too are new to the migrant children theme' (Personal communication 1 March 2007).

### *Sunrise Library*

Sunrise Library, established in 2005, is a registered non-profit voluntary organisation dedicated to bringing libraries and books to China's poverty-stricken regions. Working with local district authorities has given Sunshine the opportunity to distribute their Shanghai manual for migrant workers, but not without encountering some difficulties. The manual was first distributed to the Shanghai railway station prior to the Spring Festival of 2007. However, subsequent distribution requests were denied by the Public Security Bureau due to security issues. Despite the setback, Pudong authorities listed Sunrise among the Top Ten Best Organisations for its work with migrants.

### *Project Integration*

Established in 1999, Project Integration is an initiative driven by a group of expatriates in Shanghai. It is run solely by volunteers. The organisation's primary activity is collecting donations to help pay migrant children's school fees. Project Integration has also worked closely with the education authorities in Minhang and Putuo districts. Because this program needs to connect with appropriate schools and students, Project Integration must work closely with both schools and education authorities. However, the NGO's lack of human resources has led to increased reliance on its partners (the schools and education authorities) to carry out its activities.

Delivering educational programs to migrant children has proven to be a reliable method to establish collaborative relationships with the local authorities. As one Shanghai NGO representative noted, 'Education is the entry point for most organisations in working with the migrant community because it is seen as easy and safe because there is already a well-established path' (Personal communication 5 March 2007). In this section, I have overviewed organisations that are the subject of this study and their interactions with the state at various levels. The following section will examine the importance of the local state across various levels in Beijing and Shanghai to understand the impact on NGOs and their work.

### **New State-NGO Engagements**

The previous section presented a picture of migrant NGOs working across a number of sectors. Moreover, it demonstrated that engagement, collaboration and partnerships with the local state enable the majority of the NGOs to conduct their work. The nature of state and NGO engagements vary, and in the case of migrant NGOs, we see primarily three models used: symbolic, asymmetric and strategic collaboration. I will discuss how state and NGO interact in each of these three models. Such model will prove useful to understand how state-NGOs interact across different levels.

The central state regulates the formal boundaries of state-NGO partnerships, but it is at the urban local level where we see the actual operations of migrant NGOs and their dealings with various levels of the state. Furthermore, in order for migrant NGOs to plan and implement projects, they must adapt and operate within the informal arrangements as determined by the local state. The strategies as adopted by the local state in engaging with new social actors is as Foster (2001) notes, mixed, with the goal of achieving social and developmental objectives.

As demonstrated previously, it is clear that the district authorities have played a significant role in the work of the NGOs. It is the urban local state that is increasingly tasked with social welfare responsibilities. 'It is primarily local urban governments that are charged with finding the solutions and supplying most of the funding for the promises made by the central government' (Saich, 2008, p. 182). This social welfare responsibility has pushed the district level to engage with migrant NGOs in an asymmetric manner, creating a sector that is dependent on the local state to ensure progress with their work. Consequently, the local district authorities are of immense importance particularly within the wider scope of NGO developments in China.

### ***Engagement with the Central State***

The central state is able to apprehend individuals and take punitive actions against NGOs if they are deemed to be a socio-political threat. Such a position indicates that the central state is not compelled to engage with NGOs, thus relationships with NGOs maybe of symbolic value only.

The strength of the central state is reflected in the MCA's powers to regulate and govern NGOs. For example, the recent 'colour revolutions' that swept across Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005) has worried the Chinese authorities. The suspicion that these democratic revolutions were sponsored by Western interests piqued the attention of the authorities. The political transition of

China's neighbours not only placed Chinese NGOs in the spotlight but led to scrutiny of the sector. Consequently, the central state launched an investigation into China's burgeoning environmental NGOs. With only a small percentage of the environmental NGOs officially registered, they were an easy target for the central state (Yongding, 2005). Although the central state is engaging with NGOs such as BLAOMW, Facilitators, and Migrant Women's Club, their involvement is within the confines of migrant workers' rights and related issues that the central state has deemed appropriate. Against this backdrop, the central state's engagement with the three NGOs is symbolic in nature: Symbolising a central state that is working with relevant stakeholders to meet the needs of the migrant population. Moreover, the relationship validates the legitimacy of the central state as it works towards a harmonious development. The central state is legitimate insofar as it provides stability and to a lesser extent, economic growth (Shue, 2004).

BLAOMW's sponsorship from the central state is one method to ensure that NGOs are managed and monitored and still provide the state's legitimacy. BLAOMW's support is reminiscent of studies on local business associations and the local state in China where the state has interceded. Foster's (2002) study of Shandong's business associations suggests that it is not unusual for the sponsored organisation to receive a range of resources from the local state. BLAOMW's collaborative opportunities with the central state can be attributed to what both Foster (2002, p. 42) and Thiers (2009) have observed as organisations emerging from the constructs of the state. Thiers notes that 'a state institution can take on an NGO identity as a matter of choice and opportunism' (2009, p. 160). BLAOMW's institutional identity may shift from NGO to a 'semi-state institution' (Thiers, 2009, p. 160) given its support from the ACLA. Undoubtedly, BLAOMW's representative believes in his organisation's ability: 'at times there are organisations ... more skilled in the work, and the government wishes to ... enlist their help and this leads to a professional way of resolving matters' (Personal communication 26 September 2006). LT of Facilitators echoes the idea that NGOs are more equipped to deal with migrant issues: 'As we can see from the Sunshine Training Program,<sup>11</sup> how ineffective it is, yet the government continues. In this situation, we can say that NGOs probably have a better success rate in devising and conducting training programs' (Personal communication 12 October 2006).

The central state, through its circulars, has identified delayed wages and legal representation as high priority issues. Consequently, NGOs working within these boundaries are likely to receive collaborative opportunities with the central state. Facilitators' collaborations with the central authorities are a result of its successful 2003 SARS program with migrant workers. Concomitant with idea of a 'best practice', its success gained the attention of the central state and has subsequently led to consultation on state policies. Migrant Women's Club is also working hard to engage the central state on the issue of regulating the domestic workers' industry. NGOs that are operating in this legal advocacy realm have the greatest access to the central level.

By establishing cooperation with the three migrant NGOs, the central state signifies a willingness to acknowledge the role of NGOs. However, by controlling the boundaries of cooperation it appears the manner of cooperation is largely symbolic. Nonetheless, NGOs have gained from this symbolic cooperation. For example, BLAOMW has capitalised on the cooperation to establish operations in other jurisdictions, essentially scaling up its services in an environment where such opportunities are rare. As emphasised by Dickson (2000/2001), the state has moved from strategies of coercion to one of 'inclusion'. Essentially, the state incorporates an array of social and economic organisations in order to continue enunciating its goals and interests. The symbolic cooperation between central state and NGO furthers the state's ideology, but also builds trust and perhaps most crucially, legitimises its management of social organisations.

### ***Engagement with the Urban Local State: Municipal***

The municipal authorities in both Beijing and Shanghai have used symbolic cooperation to manage NGOs. Rather than take punitive actions, the authorities bring potentially threatening elements into its fold by officially acknowledging certain migrant NGOs. The awards may be official, but the practice of managing possible threats is not formalised, thus indicating the cooperation is again symbolic. The awards give the appearance that municipal authorities in both cities acknowledge the presence and work of NGOs, but like the central state, the symbolic cooperation denotes an attempt to manage the NGOs that are operating in its jurisdiction through a ‘best practice’ idea.

The NGOs within the embrace of the municipal authorities are subtly encouraged to create service delivery ‘models’. This notion is echoed by representatives of Compassion and Roots and Shoots, where both organisations are actively working to mould themselves into models. If successful, their programs and the organisation become measures of good practices which the local state can promote and replicate. Consequently, the municipal authorities in Beijing and Shanghai, through this informal process of identifying a ‘model’ NGO, are attempting to shape the migrant NGO sector. The symbolic cooperation of awarding NGOs for best practice requires very little effort on the part of the municipal authorities, but it produces the desired results. A sense of competition is palatable amongst the NGOs in order to launch a ‘model project’ that may meet the approval of the authorities. Hence, the result of the symbolic cooperation reveals that the local state is making subtle incursions into the NGO sector.

### ***Engagement with the Urban Local State: District Level***

At the district level the ability of migrant NGOs to carry out their work is contingent on the willingness of district authorities to engage with the NGOs. The result is an asymmetric relationship, where NGOs have come to depend on the district authorities to ensure commencement and continuation of their projects.

Shanghai’s district authorities took a bold step by initiating collaboration with Co-worker. However, the interviews hint at the Shanghai district authorities’ propensity for taking a ‘hands on’ approach with NGOs. Project Integration’s operations further indicate a pro-active district authority that again results in an asymmetric relationship. Project Integration also relies on the capacity of the district authorities to facilitate its work with migrant children.

The pro-activeness of Shanghai’s local state authorities can also be understood within the context of Shanghai’s importance on the national stage. Due to Shanghai’s importance to the national economy and its prominence as a global city, the central state must tread carefully with Shanghai. Consequently, local authorities have substantial sway in managing their territory (Wu *et al.*, 2007, p. 221; Han, 2000).

Beijing’s district authorities are ambivalent about partnering with migrant NGOs. It is Beijing’s NGOs (Compassion and Shining Stone) that are proactively pursuing the district authorities. Although Beijing and Shanghai district authorities use different approaches, both have successfully adopted the same strategic ploy to shape their engagement with migrant NGOs. That is they both use their degree of willingness to collaborate with migrant NGOs as a means of maintaining control over them. This creates a dependent NGO sector, dependent on district authorities to provide permission to operate in the area. State-NGO relationship in China is therefore much more complex and neither state or NGO should be dichotomised (Lu, 2007; Ma, 2000).

Given the increasing responsibility of the local urban state in providing social welfare, it is unsurprising that the district authorities are active across all four NGO categories. The local state authorities ‘prefer that the sector be dominated by organizations in which the government plays a strong role’ (Saich, 2008, p. 198). Their desire to be involved in the work of NGOs reinforces the asymmetric dependent model of state-NGO relationships at the district level. Such participation is demonstrated in HAIKEYI’s case, where the district authorities have influenced the migrants’ health programs. However,

it is in the community integration and education sectors where we see the greatest activity by NGOs and the state.

Migrants are not entitled to a range of social welfare benefits in the urban areas due to the *hukou*, the household registration system, where state-provided benefits are tied to one's place of residence and are not easily transferred. Thus NGOs are critical for meeting the needs of migrant workers. Moreover, these NGOs are readily available resources that the local state can tap into to provide social services for the wider community and, more specifically, to the migrant community. This explains the district level's involvement with both cities in the areas of migrant children's education and community integration. Migrant children's education has become a hotly debated topic in Chinese cities: 'Many scholars have pointed to the need to educate migrants' children ... and integrating them into the urban education system' (Fan, 2008, p. 81). Without addressing this issue in a timely manner, it is very likely that the marginality and inequality will become intergenerational and potentially destabilise Chinese society. Education is a means of integrating migrants but clearly this will take several generations (Cai, 2003). This belief may also explain the relative lack of involvement of the district level authorities in the provision of social services, where it is not through the current generation of migrant workers that integration will occur, but rather through their off-spring. Therefore, local authorities assume partnerships with NGOs would be most fruitful if focus is shifted to the children of migrants. While engagement between district authorities and NGOs is asymmetric, with the authorities crafting the relationship, the case of migrant children's education suggests that engagement can be strategic. It is a strategic move for the district authorities to ensure future stability of the area.

Nevertheless, NGOs such as Compassion and Shining Stone are proactively pursuing the local authorities for partnerships, indicating that they are dependent on the authorities to ensure the longevity of their programs. Shining Stone has invited local Beijing authorities to study tours. Compassion has engaged with education officials to determine their issues of concern in Compassion's work with migrant schools. Its direct approach has indeed strengthened its contact with the district authorities.

The cases of Compassion and Shining Stone show a strong desire to be closer to the local state. These two NGOs are actively educating local officials about their work. Their actions indicate they are fully aware that in order to expand their work, the local state needs to be involved. While it is the NGO that is attempting to direct the course of the relationship, the power lies with the district authorities through their willingness to partner with the NGO. Ultimately, this is an asymmetric dependent relationship where it is the district authority that has the control in shaping the partnership with NGOs and the outcomes of their work.

Like Beijing, all but two of the Shanghai NGOs have connections with the district level authorities. Due to Project Integration's lack of human resources, it is dependent on the education authorities to select their partner schools. What Zhou (1993) refers to as institutional collective action applies to the case of Project Integration. That is, when institutional mechanisms to mediate disputes are lacking, individuals and organisations readily approach the state to resolve their conflicts. Zhou also notes the lack of self-organisation and thus the dispersal of social interests.<sup>12</sup> Although Project and other NGOs share similar goals to provide educational opportunities to migrant children, there is no collective force amongst NGOs directed at handling this issue. Hence, organisations such as Project have sought to resolve the matter by seeking assistance from local authorities. As a result, it is allowing the authorities to permeate its space leading to greater state control and coordination. Furthermore, it reinforces the asymmetric relationship between state and NGO, and NGOs' dependence on the local state.

Again, we see an active urban local state in Shanghai. It initiated partnership and projects with Co-Worker. Indeed such proactive measures are a sign of the 'progressiveness' of Shanghai's local authorities to address the social issues that are affecting a substantial proportion of its population. And

certainly, these local authorities should be commended for their efforts, especially in an era of declining state services. Nonetheless, the local state permeates and defines the parameters of NGOs' work.

Co-Worker's representative noted that 'it would be difficult if the organisation had approached the school directly as the school would be uncertain of the organisation's background' (Personal communication, 1 March 2007). Having the support of the Pudong Communist Youth League provides Co-Worker with legitimacy. The case of Co-Worker evokes memories of Foster's (2002) and Thiers' (2009) observation of organisations emerging from the constructs of the state.

For Sunshine Library, it must contend with the fluctuating disposition of the authorities. Local authorities can change the conditions of their collaboration with migrant NGOs without warning or cause. This negatively affects their work. Sunshine's case clearly illustrates that NGOs are dependent on the district authority and must comply with their ideals to ensure the success of their projects.

The experiences of NGOs in Beijing and Shanghai with respective district authorities uncover differences in how the cities respond to NGOs and their work. District authorities in Beijing are much more likely to engage with NGOs if the organisation is well-established and has made some impact in their work, as shown in the case of Facilitators. In contrast Shanghai has two well-established NGOs that are without significant district level collaboration. This difference suggests that Shanghai's district authorities are perhaps more responsive to NGOs operating at the community level, whereas Beijing's authorities need to be assured of the NGO's wider success before granting collaboration. Both cities demonstrate that the NGOs and their work are predicated on the openness and willingness of district authorities in partnering with the NGOs.

The district level is emerging as a significant level of urban governance when it comes to the provision of social services (See Yusuf and Saich, 2008). As responsibilities are pushed down from the central to the local levels, it is here where we will see greatest activities in terms of local state and NGO partnerships. At the same time, the importance of the district level has led to an asymmetric relationship. NGOs are left with little choice but to seek collaboration with and ultimately dependence on the local state to continue their work.

### ***Engagement with the Urban Local State: Street Neighbourhood and Residents' Committees***

Previous works cited with regards to the local state as an economic actor are reinforced by observing the grassroots levels of the state, the Street Neighbourhood Committees (SNC) or Residents' Committees (RC). Collaboration between NGOs and these two levels of the state is very much a strategic collaboration. While Blecher and Shue (2001), Foster (2001, 2002) and Oi (1992, 1995) suggest that the local state may be an economic actor, such behaviour occurs within the context of promoting local development and growth. No doubt, the SNC and RC that have rented property out to migrant NGOs (including Tongxin, Compassion and Grassroots) are economic actors, where decentralisation has led to the local state becoming responsible for acquiring its own revenues. This type of collaboration, borne of economic necessity, is a strategic move on the part of the local state. Such business transactions may denote an informal and implicit acceptance of migrant NGOs, however they do not suggest a long-term relationship. Shanghai's Grassroots representative suggested in the interview that while the RC did rent out its property to the organisation, they were unhappy about the disturbance caused by the weekly congregation of migrant children (Personal communication, 3 February 2007). The likelihood of the RC withdrawing its unspoken support through the informal arrangement is palpable. Although such a mutually beneficial rental arrangement is one method an NGO can use to gain implicit for its work, it is nonetheless an informal arrangement that can be withdrawn at any time.

These varying types of relationships between NGOs, SNC and RC make it difficult to generalise conditions and situations. But, it highlights the need to further consider state and NGO relationships and ascertain the impact of the local state's strategic decisions on the NGO sector. It is evident that the local

state is comprised of layers upon layers, each having different objectives and concerns. Therefore, state-NGO relations viewed from the perspective of migrant NGOs is not one-dimensional. The informal arrangements at the local urban level, such as the case of rental property, reaffirm the notion that migrant NGOs are governed by the local state.

## Conclusion and Future Outlook

Analysing the different layers of the urban state in their interactions with migrant NGOs has unveiled different informal strategies adopted by the local state to ensure its own relevance within a rapidly changing social environment. Moreover, the three models of engagement—symbolic, asymmetric, and strategic collaboration illustrate that varying types of relationships exist across different levels of the state.

The management of NGOs as envisioned by the central state is clearly communicated by the MCA. Within the framework of portraying harmonious development and maintaining the legitimacy of the Party/state, cooperation with NGOs is very much a symbolic gesture. This symbolic cooperation is also reflected in the municipal authorities' engagement with migrant NGOs. However, it is subtly used to create 'models' of NGOs, essentially delineating the types of NGOs the municipal level seeks to promote. It is at the district level that we see dynamic engagements between authorities and NGOs. The district level's degree of willingness to engage with migrant NGOs is a mechanism that has proven useful for the authorities to craft NGOs' boundaries and their operations. This asymmetric relationship has generated a dependent NGO sector. The strategic collaboration that occurs at the SNC and RC level is indicative of the changing role and responsibility of the local state since liberalisation began. The economic survival of these lower level authorities rests on their ability to procure financial resources.

As the local urban state faces greater pressure to provide social services, collaboration with NGOs allows both parties to address and resolve a problem that neither could tackle alone. Yet, within the broader framework of political change, can migrant NGOs be conduits of change?<sup>13</sup> NGOs have greater freedom to conduct their work than they did prior to economic reforms, but it is an environment in which both local and central states have managed to insert their presence. Three models of state-migrant NGO relationships—symbolic, asymmetric, and strategic—provide a springboard for understanding the dynamics of wider state-NGO engagement.

Migrant NGOs are a clear indication that the theoretical discussion of state-NGO relationship cannot be confined within the parameters of a single homogenous state. Migrant NGOs are servicing a large portion of Beijing's and Shanghai's marginalised urban population. Hence, the focus ought to shift to the local level, particularly the district authorities to comprehend the contributions of migrant NGOs and the local state in the wider context of state-NGO interaction. This paper has sought to draw out the various layers of the state's engagements with migrant NGOs to demonstrate that informal arrangements at the urban local state level are equally important as the central state in shaping the development and potential trajectory of migrant NGOs. Within the broader picture of social change at the local urban level, the example of migrant NGOs in Beijing and Shanghai demonstrates that this will require a partnership between NGOs and the local state, in which the local state is the leading partner.

## Notes

1. NGOs working at the municipal, district, street neighbourhood and residents' committee levels.
2. I use the term non-governmental organisations to describe many different types of social organisations. These organisations include unions, trade/professional associations and government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs). In the context of China, an NGO's linkages with the state does not necessarily preclude it from being an NGO, the state's regulation pertaining to NGOs unavoidably requires partnership with the state.
3. Nonetheless, the migrant NGOs interviewed for this research with a for-profit entity registration status perceive and present themselves as NGOs.
4. Available at: [http://www.law-lib.com/law/law\\_view.asp?id=399](http://www.law-lib.com/law/law_view.asp?id=399)
5. Approximately 2000 people are under each SNC's jurisdiction. These committees are responsible for a range of community issues from safety to birth control. The Residents' Committee is the lowest level and it assumes some of the responsibilities of the SNC.
6. At the end of 2003 Beijing had a total of 2448 NGOs and 2774 in Shanghai, registered with the MCA (Lu, 2005).
7. As outlined above, many NGOs have difficulties registering with the MCA. The migrant NGOs presented here are registered as for-profit entities unless otherwise specified.
8. The Chinese state has issued several circulars regarding the treatment of migrant workers, including: 'An emergency circular on speeding up to process cases involving delayed payment of construction projects and delayed wages', Supreme Court, 21 December 2004; 'Circular on the improvement of the services and management of migrant workers', State Council, 5 January 2003.
9. 'Harmonious society' refers to the current socioeconomic ideology of the Chinese state, where equity, justice, rule of law and other such factors are seen as essential to the development of China. See "Building harmonious society crucial for China's progress: Hu" (*People's Daily Online* 2005)
10. Interviewees are anonymised to ensure their privacy is protected.
11. The Sunshine Training Program launched in 2004 is an example of central and local authorities working together for migrants. The central state has provided 1.25 billion *yuan* (US \$184 million) and 102 provincial authorities have contributed 1.5 billion *yuan* (US \$220 million). The Program offers training in the manufacturing, construction and service sectors.
12. Ngai and Lu (2010) observes that in the labour subcontracting industry, personal acts of violence are not unusual as workers search for justice from employers.
13. Certainly, NGOs are not immune to questions of legitimacy or accountability. Moore and Stewart (2000), believes that a self-regulating system is beneficial for the NGO sector as it does not require centralised administration but can occur in a decentralised manner. There are discussions within China for self-regulating measures of the NGO sector. In 2005, ActionAid International China initiated exploratory research project with local NGOs in understanding accountability and transparency of the NGO sector (See Hasmath and Hsu, 2008).

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