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# The Emerging Civil Society in China and Its Impact on Democratization

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# **The Emerging Civil Society in China and Its Impact on Democratization**

A Statistical Study

By Haolu Wang

Under the Supervision of:  
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Honors Thesis

Government Department

Colby College

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## ***Chapter 1: Introduction***

Wan Yanhai is the most-famous AIDS activist in China and the director of Beijing Aizhixing Institute of Health Education, a non-governmental organization (“NGO”) that aims at increasing China’s awareness about HIV/AIDS and advocates on the rights and interests of those infected with HIV/AIDS in China.

Three years ago during an interview with Wan Yanhai in his Beijing office, I had an unexpected encounter. Three farmers that were HIV positive came into his office, all looking exhausted and miserable. Upon the sight of Wan Yanhai, they started rushing their words out altogether uncontrollably, in an accent familiar to my ears. To my surprise, they told me that they came from the same city I lived in. They got affected by AIDS in a hospital through unclean blood transfusion, and the local court would not accept their case when they tried to sue the hospital. After hearing about Wan Yanhai and the assistance Aizhixing offered, they saved enough money and travelled to Beijing in despair because they could not even afford medical care. They tried to win Wan’s sympathy and support to sue the hospital. However, Wan warned them to be careful because they might get into trouble going against the government. It was shocking for me to see that appalling injustice was taking place in my hometown. At the same time, I was fascinated by the emerging grassroots organization under the umbrella of the powerful authoritarian government. Although the cautious manners of Wan suggested that the NGO’s activities were partially underground to avoid detention from the government, its scope of influence within the society was expansive.

The encounter typified a latent trend that China increasingly became a strong advocate of grassroots activism, though the Chinese government was not known for its commitment to democratic transition. The prevalence of social organizations in an authoritarian regime challenges the conventional approaches to the relationship between “civil society” and democracy. It is without a doubt that the interest in civil society has increased over the past decade following the Third Wave of Democratization, which started in 1974 in Portugal and spread over to Latin America and communist Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990’s. Civil society was regarded by the liberal dissidents in Eastern Europe and progressive democrats in Latin America as a space of contending political interests and thus often related to democratization. The number of social organizations registered at the Ministry of Civil Affairs has increased almost one-hundred-fold in the two decades since 1988. Evidently it suggests increasing social involvement in various sectors, undertaking functions previously controlled by the state. However, how much truth does it entail? Neoliberal rhetoric on international development regards civil society as an apolitical field where social groups work with government and market forces to improve governance. Therefore, unlike the early champions of civil society in Eastern Europe and Latin America, the neoliberals link civil society more to modernization and governance than democracy.

In China, however, we see both the social organizations that work with the government but also, emerging NGOs such as Wan Yanhai’s Aizhixing that choose to advocate marginalized political interests. It thus makes me wonder – are social groups organizing at the grassroots level leading to some degree of democratization in China?

What is the relationship between civil society and democratization exemplified by China?

The thesis aims to contribute meaningful answers to this question.

This chapter will start with a critical review of the definition of civil society in past and contemporary political literature, followed by a discussion of civil society in relation to democratization both in general and in the case of China.

### **What is Civil Society?**

The term “civil society” is not a recent invention in political science. Civil society originated within the society as a means to involve individuals in political discussions. In the Classical Age, Greek philosophers grappled with the issues surrounding communal life given the inherent conflicts between individual needs and societal needs. Socrates suggested solving the conflicts by public argument using rational dialogues – the most basic form of a “civil society,” a space for individuals to engage in collective political discourse voluntarily and informally.

The concept of civil society also dwells on the state-society relations. In *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, John Locke states his understanding of “civil society” as a united body of individuals under the power of an executive that protects their property and well-being, and designs legislation to govern their behavior. Thomas Hobbes’s “civil society” is a means for men in the state of nature to escape the state of war and accede to a social contract. The Hobbesian “civil society” resembles Lockean in that civil society is not separated from the state but contained within.

Hegel synthesized the Classical and Enlightenment conceptions of civil society in his *Rechtsphilosophie*. Notably, he drew a clear distinction between state and civil society in a manner that also involved their interpenetration, which marked a big step forward from the civil society ideology represented by Hobbes and Locke. The separation of civil society from the realm of the state marked a significant shift in civil society's role in mediating state-society relations. In particular, Hegel states that civil society intervenes between the family and the state: "The whole sphere of civil Society is the territory of mediation where there is free play for every idiosyncrasy, every talent, every accident of birth and fortune, and where waves of every passion gush forth, regulated only by reason glinting through them"<sup>1</sup>.

Based on Hegel's thoughts, contemporary political discourse has developed the concept of civil society with more complexities, first of which dwells on the independence of civil society from the state. Many more political scientists agree with Hegel that civil society is separate from the state. Francis Fukuyama defines "civil society" as the "social structures separate from the state that underlie democratic political institutions"<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, Seymour Lipset refers "civil society" as "mediating institutions" including "groups, media, and networks" that "operate independently between individuals and the state"<sup>3</sup>. Ariel Armony introduces a "three-sector" model that consists of the state, the market, and the "third" sector – the civil society sector – which includes

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<sup>1</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. "Philosophy of Right", § 182

<sup>2</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. (1995) "The Primacy of Culture", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 6.1, pp. 7-14

<sup>3</sup> Lipset, Seymour M. "The Social Requisites of Democracy Revisited: 1993 Presidential Address", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 59, No. 1, pp. 1-22



“voluntary, nonprofit associations”<sup>4</sup>. The “third” sector associations should be organized, private, non-profit-distributing, self-governing, and voluntary. Hence, Armony contends that civil society locates itself independent of the state and market but within the society, as a loosely defined space where citizens freely associate in social and grassroots political organizations. Although these arguments indicate that civil society is independent of the state, the emerging civil society in authoritarian regimes or transition regimes implies that the presumed division between state and civil society may not be so obvious. Thomas B. Gold argues that civil society seeks to operate independently of the state and the communist party in his analysis of resurgence of Chinese civil society<sup>5</sup>. However, the Centre for Civil Society at London School of Economics points out that “In theory, its [civil society’s] institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated”<sup>6</sup>.

In particular, Chinese social scientist Yang Tuan uses China as an example to illustrate how civil society overlaps with the state. In contrast to Armony’s “three-sector” model, Yang proposes a “four-sector” model to explain Chinese social structure. In addition to the first sector (the market), the second sector (the government), the third sector (the voluntary sector), Yang contends that there should be a fourth sector of “commercial” and “bureaucratic” nature populated by organizations and institutions

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<sup>4</sup> Armony, Ariel C. “The Dubious Link: Civic Engagement and Democratization” , Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 30

<sup>5</sup> Gold, Thomas B. (1990) “Tiananmen and Beyond—The Resurgence of Civil Society in China”, *Journal of Democracy*, p. 20

<sup>6</sup> Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2004.  
[http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what\\_is\\_civil\\_society.htm](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm)

providing public goods and services. The third sector's financial resources come from donations whereas the fourth sector from profits. In this way, Yang argues, civil society – the conventional “third sector” by international standards – is split up into a voluntary sector and a fourth sector. Unlike civil society organizations in liberal democracies that form a space to represent marginalized interests and individuals, those in China largely serve to improve governance rather than advocate political voices. Civil society, therefore, relates more to governance and modernization than democracy. In fact, Chinese government encourages and organizes certain civil society associations to work with government and market forces so as to achieve efficiency in policy implementation.

Moreover, in the case of China, Timothy Brook and Michael Frolic also argue that it is better to regard civil society as a formation that exists by virtue of state-society interaction, rather than something between. Frolic introduces the term “state-led civil society” which is “created from the top down as an adjunct to state power” including social organizations and quasi-administrative units created by the state to manage the economy and society.<sup>7</sup> This is similar to Yang's proposal of constructing a fourth sector of governance purpose. However, Frolic adds that it might also be just a “temporary accommodation by the authoritarian state to forces that will overwhelm it soon enough”<sup>8</sup>. In sum, the above review of literature shows that civil society is not necessarily independent of the state. In authoritarian regimes, civil society is interrelated with the state.

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<sup>7</sup> Frolic, Michael. “State-led Civil Society”, in “Civil Society in China” edited by Timothy Brook and B. Michael Frolic. M.E. Sharpe. 1997. Brook et al., p. 48

<sup>8</sup> Frolic, p. 48

On the relationship between state power and civil society development, Tocqueville says that “a grievance comes to appear intolerable once the possibility of removing it crosses men’s minds”. In other words, a decline of state power gives rise to rights consciousness and civil society activity. Similarly, scholars such as Fukuyama and Minxi Pei argue that the power struggle between the state and civil society is a “zero-sum” game in that civil society develops more when the state power retreats and vice versa. In particular, Fukuyama contends that civil society “often bears an inverse relationship to state power, growing stronger as the state recedes”<sup>9</sup>, and Pei presents evidence that shows “falling repression produces greater resistance mainly as a result of rising rights consciousness among the oppressed”<sup>10</sup>. However, the relationship between state power and civil society bears more complexity than “zero-sum”: Civil society and the state can be both weak/strong at the same time. Vivienne Shue thinks that the state and civil society have grown stronger together in post-Mao China. In her *Book State Power and Social Organization in China*, she argues that “the ongoing decentralization of state power and the simultaneous deminiaturization of social organization have created some of the conditions required for both the empowerment of newly rising social forces and the enhancement of the state’s capacity to govern”<sup>11</sup>. Both the state and society can eventually emerge “strengthened” by the wrenching processes of renegotiation. Furthermore, she writes about the intermediate level arenas in Chinese politics where “the possibility of a convergence of forces will take place in the middle and lower-middle

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<sup>9</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. “The Primacy of Culture”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 6.1, pp. 7-14

<sup>10</sup> Pei, Minxin “Rights and resistance—the changing contexts of the dissident movement”, in “*Chinese Society—Change, conflict and resistance (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)*”, RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, p. 42

<sup>11</sup> Shue, Vivienne. “*State Power and Social Forces—Domination and transformation in the Third World*”, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 82

reaches of the Chinese political system is, thus, apparent”<sup>12</sup>. Yang’s “fourth sector” serves as an example of the “convergence of forces” of state power and social forces.

Therefore, the above critical review of literature suggests that civil society functions as an intermediate associational realm between the state and individuals, populated by voluntary social organizations formed to represent their values and interests. However, I have also shown that civil society is not necessarily engaged in a zero-sum game with the state – in China, both civil society and the state have strengthened in post-Mao years. At the same time, no clear boundary exists between civil society and the state. This is particularly true in authoritarian regimes where states and civil societies overlap.

### **Civil Society and Democracy**

Civil society captures the activities of the social forces at the grassroots level that promote social changes, either obstructing or facilitating democratization. In this sense, the study of civil society serves the purpose of examining democratization in a microscopic perspective.

Robert Putnam is one of the earliest scholars that look at the role of civil society in democratization. He put forward the concept of “social capital” in his book *Making Democracy Work: Civic Transitions in Modern Italy*. In 1970, Italy experienced a drastic power shift when the national government devolved decision-making power to regional

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<sup>12</sup> Shue, Vivienne. “State Power and Social Forces—Domination and transformation in the Third World”, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 75

councils, intermediary institutions between the national and local level. Under such circumstances, Putnam studies and compares the success of the local governments in the North and the failure in the South, and discovers the importance of social capital in the modern Italian experiment of building new institutions of democracy. In the North, there existed “norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement”<sup>13</sup> embodied in tower societies, unions, cooperatives, mutual aid societies and football clubs. Whereas, in the South, social and political relations were vertically structured missing these “horizontal civic bonds” that “undergirded levels of economic and institutional performance”<sup>14</sup>. Hence, Putnam comes to conclude that “civic engagement”, in particular, “a dense network of secondary associations”<sup>15</sup> is important in making the democratic government work, and that “*both states and markets operate more efficiently in civic settings*”<sup>16</sup>. Putnam states that “Tocqueville was right: Democratic government is strengthened, not weakened, when it faces a vigorous civil society”<sup>17</sup>. Likewise, Jean Louise Cohen asserts that “Civil society as the source of influence and control of representative political institutions is the heart of a liberal democracy”<sup>18</sup>. As the intermediary between the state and individual family, civil society addresses the issues in a framework that reflects the changing dynamics of state-society relations.

The role of civil society has been especially heightened during democratic openings, transitions, and consolidations. The emergence of the Third Wave of

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<sup>13</sup> Putnam, Robert. “Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy”. Princeton University Press, 1993. p. 181

<sup>14</sup> Putnam, p. 181

<sup>15</sup> Putnam, p. 90

<sup>16</sup> Putnam, p. 181

<sup>17</sup> Putnam, p. 182

<sup>18</sup> Cohen, Jean Louise. “Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought”. Routledge, 2001. p. 71

Democratization inspired many scholars to study civil society in the context of democratic transitions. The conventional wisdom draws a rather straight line from civil society to democratization. Fukuyama addresses civil society as the third stage in four stages of democratic consolidation – “ideology,” “institutions,” “civil society,” and “culture” by order<sup>19</sup>. A healthy civil society, in his view, is the basis for the construction of democratic institutions. Additionally, Fukuyama incorporates culture in his reasoning of civil society and democratic consolidation. At a cultural level, he argues, civil society has precursors and preconditions of factors such as “family structure, religion, moral values, ethnic consciousness, ‘civic-ness’, and particularistic historical traditions”, any of which plays a role in determining the way civil society develops and impacts democratic transition. Furthermore, many argue that civil society is not only conducive but also indispensable to democratization. Dwelling on similar research perspectives, Lipset emphasizes “civil society” as a requisite for democracy and discusses the factors as well as processes affecting the prospects for the institutionalization of democracy worldwide<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, Linz and Stepan contend that a consolidated liberal democracy can come into existence only under the condition of the development of a free and lively civil society as one of the five arenas. The other four arenas include “a relatively autonomous and valued political society,” “a rule of law to ensure legal guarantees for citizens’ freedoms and independent associational life,” “a state bureaucracy useable by the new democratic

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<sup>19</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. “The Primacy of Culture”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 6.1, pp. 7-14

<sup>20</sup> Lipset, Seymour M. “The Social Requisites of Democracy Revisited: 1993 Presidential Address”, *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 59, No. 1, pp. 1-22

government,” and “an institutionalized economic society”<sup>21</sup>. In regard to the role of civil society in democratization, Adam Przeworski argues along the same line that democracy is consolidated only when compliance, which he refers to as “acting within the institutional framework,”<sup>22</sup> constitutes the equilibrium of the decentralized strategies of all political forces involved. Przeworski shows his conception of civil society contained within the state framework.

The growth of civil society is said to play a crucial political role in democratization because it not only checks authoritarian governments and contributes to the establishment and maintenance of a democratic polity, but also improves the quality of governance within the polity. From early discussions of the concept of civil society, I have shown that in authoritarian regimes such as China, civil society is embraced by the government to improve efficiency and oversee functions previously taken care of by the state. At the same time, Lipset argues that civil society should be capable of opposing and countervailing the state power to maintain balance in state-society relations, and it also serves as the basis of institutionalized political parties which are considered crucial for a modern democracy. In summary, a vibrant civil society is often seen as a positive social force that promotes democratic transitions and a necessary pre-condition for democratization to succeed.

However, is civil society always an unalloyed good thing for democratization? A closer look at how civil society alters social relations tells us another story. Essentially,

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<sup>21</sup> Linz, J. J. and Stepan, A. “Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe”. Baltimore/London, 1996, pp. 5-7

<sup>22</sup> Przeworski, Adam. “Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America”. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. p. 26

civil society makes an impact on democratization by altering state-society relations. As the authoritarian government initiates space for more liberal politics, an active civil society represents increased political engagement from below in forms of public contestation and participation – the two dimensions of democracy according to Robert Dahl<sup>23</sup>. However, democracy requires not only a combination of the two dimensions, but also the right direction in which participation and contestation associate. The flourishing of civil society does not guarantee that it will lead to a liberal democracy. Pluralism at the bottom, after all, must lead to free and fair regular elections and the protection of citizens' civil liberties in order for democratic consolidation to take place. Dietrich Rueschemeyer makes the point that “it is power relations that most importantly determine whether democracy can emerge, stabilize and then maintain itself even in the face of adverse conditions”<sup>24</sup>. Armony points out that civil society realizes its democratic potential only in certain circumstances, because it is the pattern of conflict and co-operation within the civil society realm between state and society which more directly relates to the resultant state-society relations, which determines whether civil society contributes to democratization or not.

The growth of civil society counter-balances state power, and further creates potential for democratization. However, in authoritarian regimes, civil society is not necessarily independent of the state. It is thus ambiguous whether the “state-led” civil society is also effective in counter-balancing state power and promoting democratization. Moreover, civil society is used as a rather broad term and it includes social organizations

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<sup>23</sup> Dahl, Robert A. “Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition”. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971.

<sup>24</sup> Rueschemeyer, Dietrich et al., “Capitalist Development and Democracy”. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992. p. 5



that may actually cripple democratization rather than strengthening it. Whether civil society development leads to democratization or not also largely depends on how the state incorporates and responds to their demands. In this sense, civil society development *can* be motivating for democratization but is not a sufficient condition for it.

Neoliberals embrace the notion that social capital can create negative externalities. Not all forms of associationalism are positive in their impact on the society as a whole. Criminal networks, street gangs and intolerant ethnic groups such as Italian mafia and KKK all draw upon forms of social capital to realize narrow group interests. Mauricio Rubio refers to such negative forms of associationalism as “perverse social capital” that stimulates rent-seeking activities and criminal behaviors<sup>25</sup>. He argues that the deficiencies in Colombian social capital have led to the persistence of economically inefficient institutions in the society. Similarly, Alejandro Portes claims that meetings of merchants ended up as a conspiracy against the public as an example of negative social capital<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, in his book *The Dubious Link*, Ariel Armony uses evidence from Weimar Germany to show that a dense and vibrant civil society could contribute to the demise of democracy rather than the strengthening of it. Focusing on a micro-level of average civic participants, he argues that “civil society may or may not lead to democracy” depending on the “context in which people associate” rather than the fact that “association is inherently and universally positive for democracy”<sup>27</sup>. Furthermore, Armony adds that

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<sup>25</sup> Rubio, Mauricio. “Perverse Social Capital – Some Evidence from Colombia”, *Journal of Economic Issues*, Vol. XXXI, No. 3, September 2007. pp. 805 – 815

<sup>26</sup> Portes, Alejandro. “Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 24, (1998), pp. 1 – 24

<sup>27</sup> Armony, Ariel C. “The Dubious Link: Civic Engagement and Democratization”, Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 2

civil society can develop its democratic potential on the condition that it is firmly rooted in and backed by the rule of law. To conclude, a vibrant civil society activates social forces to engage in politics, but the engagement can be either conducive or destructive to democratization. It is therefore debatable whether civil society leads to democratization. So what factors determine if the development of civil society will lead to democratization? I will tentatively contend that the political structure of the state in relation to the society affects the outcome of civil society development.

However ambiguous the relationship between civil society and democratization might be, evidence has proved that the development of civil society can and often will, support and sustain democracy. I would argue that the following two characteristics

- Civil Society as a “Transmission Belt”

Civil society serves as a “transmission belt” between state and individuals in the society. It facilitates a two-way communication that conditions the relationship between individual citizens and the formal political system – “top-down” from state to households and “bottom-up” from the individuals to the state. On one hand, through organized activities that reflect government policies, civil society organizations help to pass down national politics to individuals. Grassroots groups have far-reaching networks into social sectors that the state cannot take care of. In this way, civil society links the macro-politics at national level with micro-politics at individual level. On the other hand, civil society articulates the demands, voices and interests of individuals to the government. The

German sociologist Jürgen Habermas looks at the emerging public sphere in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe and sees it as developing out of the private institution of the family, and from what he calls the "literary public sphere", where discussion of art and literature became possible for the first time<sup>28</sup>. Habermas emphasizes the role of the public sphere as a way for civil society to articulate its interests. Samuel Huntington says that civil society essentially provides a space for citizens to exercise their "civil and political freedoms to speak, publish, assemble, and organize that are necessary to political debate and the conduct of electoral campaigns"<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, civil society serves as a two-way transmission belt connecting the state and individuals within the society. At the same time, a vibrant civil society encourages direct political participation complementary to periodic elections that entail limited political involvement out-reach. Moreover, it can also economize on the transaction costs of democracy by identifying, "packaging" and replaying political demands which otherwise might remain dormant and unexpressed. In addition, civil society not only contributes to democratic accountability, but also acts as a cushion that mitigates the clash of state interests versus individual interests. In the Third Wave democratic transitions, civil society played a key role in Communist Eastern European countries such as Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary:

*"Hope...lies... [in] the realization of a social order in which the formalized and functionalized structure of society will be regulated and controlled by this*

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<sup>28</sup> Habermas, Jürgen. "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society", The MIT Press, 1991.

<sup>29</sup> Huntington, Samuel. "The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century". University of Oklahoma Press, 1991. p. 7

*‘newly discovered’ spontaneous civic activity, which will be a permanent and essential source of social self-awareness.”<sup>30</sup>*

- Civil Society as an Independent Entity from the State

Thanks to its presumed autonomy, civil society is able to play a disciplinary role in relation to the state by enforcing standards of public morality and performance. When it is truly independent of the state, civil society serves as an effective social force checking the unfettered authority of government officials. Due to their autonomy, actors in civil society are able to represent interests external to the state and to limit and legitimize state behavior. Habermas points out that the rational-critical debate taking place in the public sphere checked domination by the state, or the illegitimate use of power. Furthermore, a vibrant and effective civil society can successfully re-define the political game rules along democratic lines and play a more powerful constitutive role, in the sense that certain organizations of civil society see it in their interest to observe a set of rules of the political game characteristic of democracy.<sup>31</sup> In this way, civil society creates and sustains a set of new democratic norms that regulate the behavior of the state and the character of political relations between state and the individual citizens. Fundamentally, a growing civil society achieves this goal by altering the balance of power between state and society in favor

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<sup>30</sup> R. Battek, “Spiritual Values, Independent Initiatives and Politics”, in Vaclav Havel et al., “The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe”, London: Hutchinson, 1985. p. 108

<sup>31</sup> White, Gordon. “Civil Society, Democratization and Development: Clearing the Analytical Ground”, in Peter Burnell et al., “Civil Society in Democratization”, London: Frank Cass, 2004.

of the latter. By developing and maintaining a balanced opposition, civil society creates and sustains new democratic standards that regulate state actions.

Civil society is increasingly viewed as an exclusive property of liberal democracy. This implies that civil society not only promotes democratization, but that democratization is a prerequisite for the development of civil society. But is this always true? That is, can relatively independent social organizations flourish in the absence of a pluralist culture? The answer is yes. The next chapter will look at the history of Deng's economic and political reforms and explain how civil society came about under an authoritarian government, then overview the development path of civil society in post-Mao China.

## *Chapter 2: The Emergence of Civil Society in China*

In the summer of 2007, during an interview with “Friends of Nature”, China’s oldest environmental NGO headquartered in Beijing, I learned about the unusual history of the organization. The founder of the NGO, Liang Congjie, is the grandson of Liang Qichao – the famous reformist and thinker during late Qing Dynasty – and the son of China’s well-known architects Liang Sicheng and Lin Huiyin. Back in 1993, Liang Congjie took the initiative to establish the first environmental NGO officially registered at the Ministry of Civil Affairs. As a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, Liang had connections within the Party that facilitated the registration and start-up processes. This shows that though the government had tight control over civil society, voluntary societal organizations and networks such as “Friends of Nature” were being formed spontaneously. For my parents’ generation, who spent their teenage years in the Cultural Revolution fervor, the emergence of these voluntary social organizations marked a dramatic departure from the previous totalitarian state under Mao’s leadership. The chapter will first look at what happened in post-Mao China that led to the emergence and development of civil society, then examine whether the growth of civil society in China is a grassroots, bottom-up process, a state-led effort, or a mix of the two.

The three decades since the end of the Cultural Revolution has seen three major trends that I will discuss further: the introduction of a market economy, increasing political participation and the emergence of civil society.

The finale of the Cultural Revolution marked an end to the two decades of domestic social disorder. During mid-1978, a reflection of the previous political deviations of Mao's era triggered heated ideological debates within the party leaders. The main divide was between Mao's dogmatism and Deng Xiaoping's pragmatism that advocated "seek truth from facts". Eventually, pragmatism prevailed in the debate.

In December 1978, the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Chinese Communist Party Congress was held in Beijing. The meeting re-affirmed the newly emerging liberal ideology and shifted the focus of the political agenda from class struggle and the construction of socialism to economic development and stability. After the death of Mao, Deng Xiaoping quickly emerged as China's paramount leader. The Third Plenum of the Eleventh Chinese Communist Party Congress is widely regarded as a watershed in 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese politics because it marked the beginning of the new reform era and paved the way for the initiation of economic and political reforms.

The most imperative task faced by Deng in late 1970's was to re-legitimize the rule of the Communist Party. He conceptualized two ways to achieve the goal – economic development and political liberalization. I will briefly summarize the introduction of a market economy through a series of economic reforms and political liberalization achieved by political reforms. Then I will examine how the increased standard of living and political participation gave rise to the emergence of civil society in China.

## **Building a Market Economy**

The pre-1978 economic system in China was centrally planned and characterized by massive distortions. Deng introduced economic reforms that unfolded from 1979 to 1994.

Central planning played a principal part and market a secondary part during the first five years of economic reforms. It was a step forward from Mao's anti-free market ideology. Five major reforms took place during the period including agricultural reform, economic opening, fiscal decentralization, state-owned enterprise reform, and township and village enterprise reform<sup>32</sup>.

Agricultural reform introduced the household responsibility system that emerged spontaneously in poor areas among peasants and became official in 1980. In 1982, the party issued an official document entitled "National Village Policy Brief" to endorse agricultural reforms. By the end of the year, 80 percent of households had adopted the system nationwide. The reform created income incentives for peasants and consequently resulted in increased productivity. The agricultural reform was particularly important because it contributed to the successful village elections later on that led to grassroots democratization.

In July 1979, the party and State Council passed the proposition to grant preferential policies for foreign trade and to establish four special economic zones (Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou and Xiamen) along the south coast as a major effort to open up to foreign trade and investment. The four zones enjoyed lower tax rates and special

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<sup>32</sup> Qian, Yingyi. "The Process of China's Market Transition, 1978 – 1998", in "China's Deep Reform", Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2006.



institutional environment to attract foreign investment and facilitate trade. Southern coastal provinces Guangdong and Fujian were the forefront of the opening-up policy: The two provinces were allowed to adopt special policies and implement flexible measures, as well as to retain all foreign exchange income after contributing 30 percent to the central government. These areas pioneered the market liberalization process when the rest of China was still dominated by central planning and public ownership.

Fiscal decentralization created multiple power centers at local levels. Local governments had more incentives to run efficient fiscal budgets and improve economic performance. Prior to the reforms, the fiscal system was centralized at the Planning Commission in Beijing. All government revenue and expenditures had to go through the central government who had the authority to determine local budgetary plans on an annual basis. A major fiscal reform entitled *Fenzao Chifan* – “eating from separate kitchens” – was carried out in 1980 to divide fiscal budgetary income between central fixed revenue and local revenue. Fiscal decentralization laid ground for democratization to occur at grassroots levels.

In July 1979, the central government issued five documents to promote state-owned enterprise (“SOE”) reform on an experimental basis. By 1980, about 60 percent of the SOEs (in terms of output) accepted the new terms and gained limited but considerable autonomy. These enterprises obtained rights to produce and sell products to the market after fulfilling the plan quotas, and to promote middle-level management without the central government approvals. Moreover, the SOEs were also allowed to retain profits but required to use them in employee welfare, bonuses and product management.

The last reform brought about Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs) and paved way for private business. TVEs are market-oriented public enterprises under the purview of local governments based in townships and villages. They evolved from commune- and brigade-run industries that had been set up to serve the rural areas during the Great Leap Forward. In July 1979, the State Council issued new regulations that lifted the restrictions for the TVEs to serve certain industries. TVEs consequently experienced significant expansion in the 1980's and 1990's.

By 1984, the success of the first phase of reform proved extraordinary. In the agricultural production sector, the per capita grain production increased by 25 percent from 1978 to 1984, and the per capital rural income increased by more than 50 percent in the six-year period.<sup>33</sup> In October 1984 at the Third Plenum of the Twelfth Party Congress, Beijing called for an overall reform of the planned economy to expand the reforms into urban areas. The Party Congress meeting signified another shift of ideology from “planning as the principal part and market as the supplementary part” to an overall planned “commodity economy”, and hence heightened the role of market in the economic reforms.

Major measures of the second wave of economic reforms included granting enterprises more autonomy, embracing market mechanisms, and separating government administration from enterprise management. Specifically, Zhao Ziyang, who became the main party leader engineering the reforms backed by Deng Xiaoping, carried out the

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<sup>33</sup> Qian, Yingyi. “The Process of China’s Market Transition, 1978 – 1998”, in “China’s Deep Reform”, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2006.

dual-track approach to market liberalization and SOE reform through contract responsibility system (*Qiye Chengbao Zeren Zhi*).

The contract responsibility system increased enterprise autonomy of the SOEs. Enterprises retained more profits and control rights to managers, and had new ways to divide enterprise cash flows from the government cash flows. By the end of 1987, about 80 percent of large and medium-size SOEs had adopted the new system.

A major financial reform also took place during the period. Four specialized banks were established in addition to the dominant central bank – the People’s Bank of China (PBOC). The State Council transferred commercial operations to four specialized banks from the PBOC: the Agricultural bank of China for the rural sector, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China for the industrial sector, the People’s Construction Bank of China for long-term investment, and the Bank of China for foreign exchange businesses. The four banks were allowed to compete for loans in each monopolized markets, and enterprises were allowed to borrow from multiple banks. The financial reform significantly facilitated the growth of enterprises by facilitating the capital flows.

The success of the four special economic zones and two provinces led the central government to promote another fourteen coastal cities including Shanghai and Tianjin as special economic zones. All the fourteen cities successfully obtained authority to accept substantial foreign investments.

The Fourteenth Party Congress in October 1992 set the clear goal to construct a “socialist free-market economy” with “Chinese characteristics” for the first time. Early 1990’s saw price reforms that narrowed the gap between the planned and market prices.

An inflow of foreign direct investment contributed to the rapid growth of private enterprises. By 1994, the Chinese economy had taken a huge step from a centralized to market economy, but still carried some character of a planned economy. In the next stage of economic development, Vice Premier Zhu Rongji centralized the operations of the central bank and minimized local governments' influence on monetary policies in 1994, and the government started privatizing SOEs and laying off state workers on a large scale in 1995. These successful efforts eventually established China as an emerging market economy by 1998.

### ***Increasing Political Participation and Contestation***

Deng was by no means a democrat. He rejected the idea of democratizing China at the very beginning because he did not see democracy as fit for China. For Deng, democracy's potential to create social disorder and anarchy would be destructive after China suffered from the ten-year Cultural Revolution which virtually led to a civil war. He considered democracy essentially a western political invention that would not work in China given the challenges posed by the country's vast territory, diversity of population and average low levels of education. In his eyes, an authoritarian regime was a much better option for its efficiency to implement reforms and yield immediate results. Therefore, democratization was the last thing on his mind on the verge of economic reforms.

When Deng first came to power in 1978, the foremost task was to re-construct national trust in the Chinese Communist Party and to legitimize its rule. In contrast to the “revolutionary legitimacy” in Maoist era, Deng pursued a philosophy of “rational legitimacy”<sup>34</sup>. His famous quote “No matter it is a white cat or a black cat, the cat that catches the mice is the good cat” is a best demonstration of his pragmatism. Deng believed that political reforms were indispensable because the totalitarian political structure in 1978 would render economic reforms ineffective, as he said that “Without political change, economic reform would be impossible to maintain and advance”<sup>35</sup>. In order to ensure successful economic development, Deng carried out a series of political reforms that decentralized state political power and created more political freedoms for Chinese citizens, even though he did not mean to democratize.

Political liberalization in the Post-Mao era traces back to the Beijing Spring, a democratic movement launched in November 1978 right after the Cultural Revolution with the purpose of consolidating Deng’s power within the government. Following the CCP’s promotion of “seeking truth from facts” policy, the intellectuals initiated open criticism of the Communist regime and put up big-character posters (*Da Zibao*) on the “Democracy Wall” on Xidan Street in Beijing. A democratic activist Wei Jingsheng designed a poster entitled *The Fifth Modernization*, the first poster that advocated individual liberties as an important measurement of development, in addition to the goals of Deng’s reforms, namely “the four modernizations” in agriculture, industry, national defense, and science of technology. Although the Beijing Spring movement was shut

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<sup>34</sup> Guo, Baogang. “Political Legitimacy in China’s Transition”, in Loweell Dittmer and Guoli Liu’s “China’s Deep Reform”, 2006. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. pp. 154 - 159

<sup>35</sup> Deng, Xiaoping. “Fundamental Issues in Present-Day China”, p. 151

down within a year and Wei was sentenced to fifteen years of jail-time, the liberal ideas lingered and inspired educated Chinese throughout the 1980's.

The continuing institutionalization of the authoritarian rule of the CCP has generated limited but observable and measurable momentum towards a more open political system. It is yet questionable whether China is becoming more democratic or not, but the institutional foundations for a genuine democracy have been constructed since the late 1970's. The limited extent of democratization induced by Deng's reforms was supported by the following three major institutional changes<sup>36</sup>: 1) experiments in grassroots self-government, namely, the launch of village elections; 2) legal institutional reform that improved the rule of law; 3) reform of representative organizations, chiefly the National People's Congress.

### ➤ **Village and Local Elections**

The village elections promoted by the Chinese government is one of the world's largest grassroots democratic education processes. Elections to the People's Congress have been held at the country and village levels since the early 1980's. The official launch of village elections was marked by the enactment of the *Organic Law of Village Committees* ("OLVC") in 1987 (amended in 1998).<sup>37</sup> The law guaranteed self-governance via self-management, self-education and self-service. The promotion of self-government in rural areas led to a rapid growth of grassroots organizations in the

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<sup>36</sup> Minxi Pei. "'Creeping Democratization' in China", *Journal of Democracy*, 6.4 (1995), pp. 65 – 79.

<sup>37</sup> Kevin J. O'Brien, Han Rongbin. "Path to Democracy? Assessing village elections in China". *Journal of Contemporary China* (2009), 18 (60), June, pp. 359 – 378.

countryside and competitive village committee elections. The term “grassroots democracy” has since then been adopted to describe the political liberalization in rural areas as a result of the grassroots self-governance experiments. Each village committee consists of three to seven members, among them a village director and a deputy, who are elected every three years according to the Organic Law. By the end of 1991, half of the one million villages in China had selected their local self-governing committees through elections<sup>38</sup>. By 1994, half of the Chinese villages had begun elections, and by 1997, 25 of the 31 mainland provinces had adopted a local version of the law, and 80 percent of the villages had begun elections<sup>39</sup>. In 1998, the amended *Organic Law of Village Committees* (amended) promised democratic election, democratic decision making, democratic management and democratic supervision. Therefore, it set the requirements for village committees to implement democratic administration and subjected them to fiscal accountability.

Village elections not only encouraged political participation but also initiated political contestation. The competitiveness of village elections increased over the years. The OLVC requires the candidates to be nominated by villagers – this version of election is called *haixuan*. Before 1998, candidates for the chairman of village committees were often appointed by the township government, although popular nomination, a mixture of government appointment and popular nomination, and nomination by village

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<sup>38</sup> Lin Chongpin et al., “Taiwan and Mainland: A Comparison on Democratization,” *World Affairs*, Vol. 155 (Winter, 1993), p. 120

<sup>39</sup> Shuna Wang and Yang Yao. “Grassroots Democracy and Local Governance: Evidence from Rural China”, *World Development*, Vol. 35 (2007), No. 10, p. 1637.

representatives also existed<sup>40</sup>. However, more villagers increasingly demanded to nominate their own candidates for village committees. Under the pressure of popular demand, *haixuan* has become more popular since 1998, and more candidates have been nominated to compete for the chairman position, which I will illustrate in more detail in Chapter Three. Moreover, an economics study shows that village elections have substantially strengthened the accountability of the village governments but weakened local fiscal sharing and the state's authority in the grassroots society<sup>41</sup>. Moreover, Kennedy, Rozelle, and Shi<sup>42</sup> compared the elections with government-appointed candidates and elections with villager-nominated candidates in Shaanxi Province, and concluded that the latter produced village leaders that proved more accountable to villagers in decision-making regarding land reallocations.

However, there has been much debate on the effectiveness of village elections that are often said to be controlled by the CCP<sup>43</sup>. The amendment of 1998 provided guidelines for democratic elections but failed to alter the way local power was exercised<sup>1</sup>. Assessment of the village elections shows that election procedures have improved significantly via substantial changes on steering committees, voter registration, candidate nomination, campaigning, secret balloting and proxy-voting. Yet the quality of grassroots democracy

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<sup>40</sup> Shuna Wang and Yang Yao, p. 1637.

<sup>41</sup> Shuna Wang and Yang Yao. "Grassroots Democracy and Local Governance: Evidence from Rural China", *World Development*, Vol. 35 (2007), No. 10, pp. 1635 – 1649.

<sup>42</sup> John James Kennedy, Scott Rozelle, and Shi Yaojiang, "Elected Leaders and Collective Land: Farmers' Evaluation of Village Leaders' Performance in Rural China," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 9:1 (Spring 2004): 1-22

<sup>43</sup> Gunter Schubert, "Village Elections in the PRC: a Trojan horse of democracy?", Project Discussion Paper No. 19, (2002), available at <http://homepage.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/david.beckeherm/WiSe%202005-2006/Hausarbeit/Dorfwahlen%20in%20China%20-%20Demokratieansatz%20oder%20Opium%20f%FCr%20Volk/Quellen/discuss19.pdf>



remains low, because the elected village committees are situated in a sociopolitical environment that has changed little over the years<sup>44</sup>.

Growing political contestation is also demonstrated by the introduction of competitive elections into the Communist Party in local elections during the early 90's. Some party candidates had to be eliminated in each election. For instance, the party primaries eliminated 5 percent of the candidates who were conservatives as delegates to the Thirteenth Party Congress in 1987<sup>45</sup>. In 1993, officials backed by the Communist Party Central Organization Department in Beijing lost to candidates nominated by provincial people's congress delegates, in the elections for governors in Zhejiang Province and Guizhou Province<sup>46</sup>. The loss of the Beijing candidates showed the increased power of local governments and the improved legitimacy of the elections. The losses of the Communist Party candidates acted as a catalyst for Party reforms in 1995, which amended the selection rules of the elective office candidates except for the leaders at the very top. In the first set of elections following the reforms, more than 17,000 Communist Party candidates lost to candidates nominated by congress delegates and individuals not on the ballots.<sup>47</sup> The 1995 reform was part of a broad effort to improve the caliber of government officials at local congresses.

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<sup>44</sup> Kevin J. O'Brien, Han Rongbin. "Path to Democracy? Assessing village elections in China". *Journal of Contemporary China* (2009), 18 (60), June, p. 376.

<sup>45</sup> Hu, Shaohua. "Explaining Chinese Democratization". Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000. p. 131

<sup>46</sup> Manion, Melanie. "When Communist Party Candidates Can Lose, Who Wins? Assessing the Role of Local People's Congresses in the Selection of Leaders in China", *The China Quarterly*, 195, (September 2008), pp. 609

<sup>47</sup> Manion, p. 609

### ➤ Legal Reforms

Legal reform was another component of the political reform that improved legal protection of citizens' basic rights and imposed limits on state power. Deng resuscitated police departments and courts that had been damaged during the Cultural Revolution in an effort to establish an institutional foundation of a market economy and constitutional government. In 1979, a comprehensive criminal code and a code of criminal procedure were adopted in which it was stated for the first time that people should not be prosecuted for their reactionary ideas. The codes emphasized the due process of law including the standard public trials and limited detention of suspects. The 1982 constitution re-stated that "all citizens are equal by law", which was first included in the 1954 constitution but deleted later. Remarkably, the 1989 Administrative Procedure Law (revised in 1994) gave the citizens the right to sue the government for the first time. "Counter-revolution" was dismissed as a crime in 1996. It did not mean, however, that the party-state relinquished its control over speech, associations and activities that could be considered counter-revolutionary. Between 1979 and 1992, the National People's Congress ("NPC") and China's legislature together passed more than 600 laws with additional 2,300 laws enacted by local people's congresses<sup>48</sup>, which marked a huge and decisive step towards stronger rule of law. The enforcement of contracts consequently improved. Responding to the demands of a growing market economy, Chinese courts became heavily involved in securing property rights and resolving contract disputes. The involvement enhanced the institutional power of the courts and thus enabled them to counterweight against the

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<sup>48</sup> Minxi Pei. "Rights and Resistance—The Changing Contexts of the Dissident Movement", in "Chinese Society—Change, conflict and resistance (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)", RoutledgeCurzon, 2003 P. 70.

CCP's monopoly of political power. Since March 1993, under the leadership of Qiao Shi who was the chairman of NPC's Standing Committee from 1993-98, the CCP accelerated the efforts towards a more institutionalized rule of law so as to support the rapid economic development. The party emphasized the priority to protect property rights, maintain open competition in the marketplace and strengthen the state's capacity for macroeconomic control.

However, although the legal reforms signified a big step forward from the totalitarian system of Maoist era, rule of law still has a long way to go in today's China. Three years ago, I had a conversation with Professor Wang from Beijing Women's Law Center when she was visiting Colby's campus. She used to be a judge, but continuous government interference in the courts forced her to quit her job. This example shows that the Chinese judiciaries are not independent from the state, which poses a serious challenge for exercising rule of law. Hence, legal reforms have realized rule by law, but not rule of law.

### ➤ **Reform of the National People's Congress and Party Administration**

Until the 1990's, NPC was completely subordinate to the CCP. However, generational shifts and increased education levels of the NPC deputies improved the institution in the 1990's and allowed the NPC to become more independent of the party-state. Over the years, the local people's congresses and the NPC gradually became a court of appeal for Chinese citizens. The NPC received increasing number of letters from

private individual citizens for assistance in various personal matters, and protected the local people's congresses from the pressure of local government officials. Therefore, the NPC slowly began to assert its role as a representative of social interests, some of which the government were reluctant to attend to. Notably, in October 1989, the Standing Committee of the NPC for the first time rejected a law regarding urban neighborhood committees after less than half of the members voted for it. In recent years, the number of opposition and abstention votes increased at NPC meetings for the passage of laws and elections of senior government and party officials. Although the NPC continues to rubber stamp most of the party's policies and recommendations, delegates have become emboldened to abstain from or even oppose some proposals. In 1992, for example, when the NPC passed the "Resolution on the Construction of the Three Gorges Project on the Yangtze River" with 1,767 delegates voting in favor, a high number of 644 delegates abstained and 177 opposed the project. The institutional improvements of the NPC and local people's congresses have therefore established a more independent and effective legislative body that invites increasing political contestation.

When starting the party structure reforms, Deng had three main goals in mind: separating the party and the government, minimizing bureaucratic inefficiency and rent-seeking behavior, and expanding the power of the local governments. To achieve the goals, Deng thought of a way to replace old party comrades with younger college-educated technocrats and professionals in the government. He created institutions such as the Central Advisory Commission ("CAC") as a transition agency to invite 131 old party comrades to step down. The new government officials stressed technical and

administrative feasibility in policy-making, and represented Deng's advocacy of "pragmatism". In addition, for more effective and penetrating governance, Deng installed a civil service system and the Ministry of Personnel in 1988. All these efforts institutionalized and regulated the party administrative system.

Deng's political reform was designed to legitimate party rule and, more importantly, to facilitate economic reforms on a practical basis. What Deng wanted was not a change of the system, but a change within the system. He viewed democracy as a means to modernization rather than a political goal worth pursuing at that point in history. Moreover, he believed that CCP was the only proper vehicle to achieve modernization. However, although Deng did not endorse democracy, his call for political reforms raised hopes for democratization among the general population. The successful and accelerating economic reforms raised the standard of living and education level of the Chinese population who increasingly demanded political freedoms. The increased trade and communication with foreign countries also introduced liberal ideas to China. The above historical account of the economic and political reform has briefly explained the socioeconomic conditions that gave rise to the emergence of civil society in mid-1980's. The thesis will focus on the civil society development beginning from this time period when the democratic ideals started burgeoning and analyze the unique case of civil society development in a fast growing market economy governed by the Communist Party.

## **An Emerging Civil Society**

### ➤ **China under Chairman Mao**

The post-Mao era has to be viewed in perspective with the Maoist era in order to generate a comprehensive understanding on the emergence of civil society in China. I will briefly describe the political and social conditions prior to 1978. From 1949 to 1978, China was characterized as a “total society” (“a world of universal anomie populated by the hybridised subjects of mutual recognition”<sup>49</sup>) in which the government controlled nearly all the resources. The market sector and the private sector were both contained within the realm of the state<sup>50</sup>. The CCP asserted control over the society by strictly restricting the public space to organize and associate.

During the Maoist era the CCP relied primarily on revolution itself as a ground for political legitimation. The party used Mao’s personality cult as a basis of charismatic legitimacy and provided Marxist ideology as original justification. After a brief “Gold Age” of social stability and economic development in the immediate years after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the CCP led the Chinese people through a series of disastrous movements that “ripped apart the ruling elite, caused social dislocation and famine on a massive scale, and culminated in the Cultural Revolution”<sup>51</sup>. Mao Zedong was promoted as the supreme leader in China’s revolution in pursuit of a

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<sup>49</sup> Bull, Malcolm. “You Can’t Build a New Society with a Stanley Knife”, London Review of Books, Vol. 23, No. 19, 2001, p. 7

<sup>50</sup> Sun, Liping. “The Changing Relations Between The State, Civil Society Elites And The Society Before And After The Reforms”, Chinese Social Science Quarterly, 1994, Vol. 1, pp. 37 – 53

<sup>51</sup> Saich, Tony. “Governance and Politics of China”. 2001, London: Palgrave. p. 22.

philosophy of perpetual revolution. At that time, it didn't seem to have alarmed the senior party leaders that the build-up of a Mao cult "negated the stress on collective leadership and loyalty to the CCP as an organization"<sup>52</sup>. The two decades from late 1950's to late 1970's consequently saw one political campaign after another. In 1951, CCP launched the Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries Campaign, Three Anti Five Anti Campaign and Thought Reform of Intellectuals Campaign that targeted at installing a social order that facilitated all-encompassing party control. The Socialist Transformation of Industry and Commerce Campaign in 1955 aimed at transforming and incorporating urban capitalists into state enterprises to strengthen a planned economy. Faced with criticism of the party, Mao started the Anti-rightist Campaign against critics of the party in 1957, followed by "Great Leap Forward" launched in 1958 in an effort to mobilize Chinese manpower for economic development, which had destructive impact on agricultural production. The Cultural Revolution started in 1966 and lasted until 1976. The ten years of Cultural Revolution ate away the social capital in China because CCP encouraged citizens to report and attack "revisionists" and "capitalist roaders" that led to a massive degree of distrust among the population.

### ➤ **Emerging Civil Society in Post-Mao Era**

The 1978 economic reforms marked a turning point in history after which the Chinese social structure experienced a complete make-over. The series of economic reforms liberalized the market and further led to political reforms. Minxin Pei points out

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<sup>52</sup> Saich, p. 27.

that “rapid economic development has brought enormous changes to Chinese society and created a more hospitable environment for individuals to assert and protect their rights”.<sup>53</sup>

Elizabeth Perry agrees with Pei’s point and contends that “advanced economic development may indeed demand new political arrangements that afford far greater autonomy to legal institutions and civil society”<sup>54</sup>.

The initial form of the emerging civil society was non-political. After the government put an end to totalitarian control over the societal affairs in the late 1970’s, the urban population had more opportunities to organize their social life and express views freely. The political fervor of the Cultural Revolution induced the people to shy away from political activities at the beginning of the civil society revival. Grassroots activities appeared including pet raising organizations, martial arts clubs, and so forth<sup>55</sup>. During the 80’s, the official government-led open condemnation of the excesses of Mao-era politics invited the Chinese citizens to engage in political advocacy groups. At the same time, Deng’s promotion of open discussion on reform-era politics made it difficult for the local party officials to restrict and control the formation of popular attitudes. The authorities provided greater latitude for social association and public expression, therefore enabling people to organize and formulate more and more social groups at the local level. The growing conflict within the political elite also contributed to the emergence of a civil society. The criticism and debate about the political system at the

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<sup>53</sup> Pei, Minxin. ““Rights and resistance—the changing contexts of the dissident movement”, in “Chinese Society—Change, conflict and resistance (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)”, RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, p. 23

<sup>54</sup> Perry, Elizabeth J. “Studying Chinese Politics: Farewell to Revolution”, *The China Journal*, No. 57, 2007

<sup>55</sup> Whyte, Martin K. “Urban China: A Civil Society in the Making”, in “State and Society in China”, Westview Press, 1992. p. 88



top had a trickle-down effect to society as citizens found that they were able to find reformists at the top to listen to their political views and provide protection if needed. Furthermore, some articles appeared in the late 1980's stressing the need to encourage the development of civil society and discussing the virtues of interest groups. One article concluded, "We must recognize the existence of different interest groups which conflict and converge, and realize that in the end that very multitude of interests constitutes the general social interest"<sup>56</sup>. In summary, reform-induced and state-led liberalization introduced a new political atmosphere in both economic and social spheres in the 80's, which contributed to the emergence a burgeoning civil society.

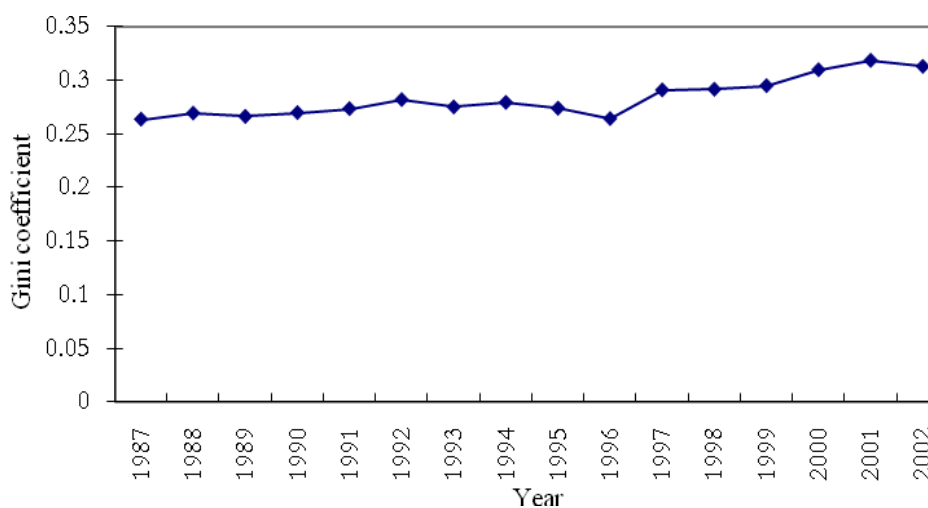
However, civil society came into being not only as a result of the new political environment, but also due to growing discontent with the Chinese government among the society. Although Deng's economic and political reforms were designed to legitimize the rule of the Communist Party, they in fact brought about dissatisfaction and hostility towards the party that resulted in social unrest conducive to democratization. The negative effects of the economic reforms started kicking in by the late 80's. Unsurprisingly, the transitioning economy widened the income gap between rich and poor, caused inflation and helped corruption. Many within the party took advantage of the loopholes of the under-developed markets and capitalized on their party connections, and this infuriated lots of Chinese citizens. Owing to high inflation, many urban residents experienced declining real income.

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<sup>56</sup> Luo Rongxing, Zhu Huaxin, and Cao Huanrong, "Different Interest Groups Under Socialism," *Beijing Review*, No. 48, November 30 – December 6, 1987, p. 18.

According to the United Nations *World Income Inequality Database* (WIID), historical data on China's Gini Coefficient (A commonly used economic metric for income inequality with values from 0 to 1: 1 being perfect inequality and 0 being perfect equality) shows that inequality declined since the 1950s and reached the lowest level by late 1970's, however increased steadily throughout the 1980's and 1990's, as shown below<sup>57</sup> in Figure 1 "Gini coefficient (mean)":

**Figure 1: Gini Coefficient (1987 – 2002)**



In addition to growing income inequality, inflation, unemployment and corruption among party officials gave rise to increasing discontent in the society. Students and intellectuals were among those most affected because of the state's low budget for education and limited job opportunities in the more prosperous market sector of the

<sup>57</sup> Shuna Wang and Yang Yao. "Grassroots Democracy and Local Governance: Evidence from Rural China", *World Development*, Vol. 35 (2007), No. 10, supporting data (not published on the paper but requested from the author)

economy. The social unrest was accompanied by increasing democratic awareness within the society. The previous Beijing Spring democratic movement along with an inflow of liberal ideas from the western media inspired and encouraged Chinese citizens to take the initiative to express their opinions and represent their interests. Deng's reforms also raised people's hopes and expectations for democratization. Decentralization gave more autonomy to local governments, firms and individuals. Under such economic and political circumstances, people started organizing groups and associations to advocate and represent their interests, and a civil society therefore started flourishing from below.

In September 1988, Deng pushed for price and wage reforms in an attempt to fight inflation and unemployment. However, people's fear of an unpredictable market led to hoarding and higher inflation<sup>58</sup>. Numerous students and intellectuals organized autonomous groups in response to social unrest and political dispute. College students organized public demonstrations in several cities for democracy, demanding more rights, liberties and welfare. They protested at Tiananmen Square the following June and received brutal government suppression at the so-called "1989 Chinese Democracy Movement". Thomas Gold sees the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests as a demonstration of the resurgence of Chinese civil society throughout the country that even "tanks and guns cannot prevent".<sup>59</sup> Similarly, McCormick et al. argues that "the 1989 Chinese

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<sup>58</sup> Hu, Shaohua. "Explaining Chinese Democratization". Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000. P. 127

<sup>59</sup> Gold, Thomas B. "Tiananmen and Beyond—The Resurgence of Civil Society in China", *Journal of Democracy*, 1990, p. 29

Democracy Movement is best understood as the expression of a fundamental conflict between a state with totalitarian intentions and an emerging civil society”<sup>60</sup>.

The development of civil society in China follows a different model. The reason for it can be best understood using a “three-sector” model approach. Prior to reforms, the Chinese state contained both the market sector and the third sector (private sector). With economic and political liberalization, the state retreated gradually but simultaneously from the market sector and the third sector, which created new social space for articulation of interests in the society. However, since the growth of the market sector and the third sector was initiated by the government, the two sectors developed high reliance on state power with limited independence. In most western societies, however, society, which includes the market sector and the third sector, is usually not fully contained within the state realm before market liberalization. Hence, the market sector formulates and separates from the society rather than from the state realm as in the case of China. In other words, the “three-sector” social structure in most western societies came into being in two steps instead of one step. Consequently, civil society organizations in China carry distinctive “political” and “commercial” features <sup>61</sup>. The controlled simultaneous detachment of the sectors also complicated the boundaries between the state and the third sector as well as between the market and the third sector. Frolic’s “state-led civil society” theory echoes with the above argument.

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<sup>60</sup> McCormick, Barrett L. et al. “The 1989 Democracy Movement: A Review of the Prospects for Civil Society in China”. *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (Summer, 1992), p. 182

<sup>61</sup> Jia, Xijin et al., “Trade Promotion Association in Transitional China”, Social Sciences Academic Press, 2003, p. 101

The overlapping of state and third sector naturally makes the authoritarian embrace of civil society purposeful. On one hand, the introduction of a market economy and power decentralization have created needs for social organizations to undertake previous state functions. On the other hand, the internationalization of human rights discourse since the 1980's urged the Chinese government to alter the terms through which it enunciated its legitimacy.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, civil society is linked more to modernization than to democratization. The same is true for civil society development in authoritarian Russia. Both regimes rely on social organizations in providing efficiencies that government bureaucracies cannot. In China and Russia, as market reforms eliminated many iron-bowl jobs at state-owned enterprises offering solid healthcare, the state looked to autonomous social organizations to provide health services and support pensioners as well as the disabled. Moreover, the state finds it easier to let the social organizations regulate and monitor their members. Through the control of registered social organizations via party organs, the state achieves effective supervision over the entire society. In South Korea, for example, the government forced all businesses to join associations under Park Chung-Hee's rule in the 1960s, so that the government could easily regulate business activities by controlling the associations through appropriate ministries<sup>62</sup>. In addition, thanks to the expansive outreach into the society, the NGOs can often disseminate information faster than government bureaucracies. The state can therefore take advantage of the "transmission belt" functionality of civil society organizations. At the same time, both

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<sup>62</sup> Clifford, Mark L. "Troubled Tiger: businessmen, bureaucrats, and generals in South Korea", 1998, M. E. Sharpe.

Russian and Chinese regimes use social organizations to monitor local government officials to reduce corruption and ensure policy implementation at multi-levels. In this way, civil society strengthens the state, which is in agreement with Vivienne Shue's argument that civil society and state do not necessarily engage in a zero-sum game.

Michael Frolic points out that the civil society in China is state-led. Subject to restrictive registration regulations, registered social organizations are much less independent than their Western NGO counterparts. National regulations require that civil society organizations have a government-approved "sponsor organization" to register at the Ministry of Civil Affairs. Only designated party and government bureaus and mass organizations may sponsor non-governmental organizations<sup>63</sup>. Procedurally, the sponsor organizations need to submit applications to the Ministry of Civil Affairs and only those social organizations with at least 50 members and ca. \$4000 in capital funds can meet the Ministry's requirements, which prevents small grassroots organizations from establishing themselves legally. Once the Ministry approves the social organization, the sponsor organization and Ministry of Civil Affairs will supervise the organization through a dual administrative system that severely limits the autonomy of registered social organizations. Such a registration scheme takes virtually all the registered social organizations under control of the party umbrella. For this reason, these registered NGOs are given a new name "GONGOs" – government-organized non-governmental organizations.

Nevertheless, recent years have seen a growing social force from below in spite of the state's control over social organizations. Civil society is no longer just a tool for the

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<sup>63</sup> <http://www.chinanpo.gov.cn/web/showBulletin.do?id=20099&dictionid=2351>

government to improve its governance. Despite the state's ability to maintain control of certain organizations, decentralization of state power makes it increasingly unlikely that this ability is all-encompassing. Hence, Tony Saich argues that "There is a significant gap between the rhetoric and practice and between the expressed intent of the party-state authorities, a system that is itself deeply conflicted, and what can actually be enforced for any significant period throughout the entire country."<sup>64</sup>

Mary E. Gallagher categorizes the social organizations in China into three kinds: organizations devolved from the socialist state (previously designated as bureaus or government departments or groups from one of the mass organizations); organizations created by the state (GONGO); and organizations set up through the initiative of private individuals or groups. Groups devolved from or created by the party-state are top-down social organizations; groups initiated within society are from the bottom up.<sup>65</sup> Along the same line, Frolic argues that there are "two types of emerging civil society" in China<sup>66</sup>. Michael Frolic refers GONGOs as one type and the other type as mostly unregistered grassroots organizations that navigate their ways out of the government control. Wan Yanhai's Aizhixing Institute falls into this category. Unofficial reports suggest that the number of non-governmental organizations actually exceed one million in 2006<sup>67</sup> and most of them are not registered to be official. Between 1990 and 1993, the number of social organizations registered at the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs grew fifteen-fold

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<sup>64</sup> Saich, Tony. "Negotiating the State." *China Quarterly*, Vol.161 (March), 2000, p. 124

<sup>65</sup> Gallagher, Mary E. "China: The Limits of Civil Society in a Late Leninist State", in "Civil Society and Political Change in Asia: Expanding and Contracting Democratic Space", Palo Alto, CA, USA: Stanford University Press, 2004. p. 426

<sup>66</sup> Frolic, Michael. "State-led Civil Society", in "Civil Society in China", M. E. Sharpe. p. 60

<sup>67</sup> Fan, Li. "Is Chinese Democracy Sustainable?", *International Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 2, 2006, Global China, p. 367

from 10,855 to 167,506<sup>68</sup>. The numbers only entail limited truth in regard to civil society development as they exclude a large group of active civil society organizations working unofficially. The official statistics, therefore, largely underestimate the actual scale of civil society activity.

Not only have social organizations been increasing in numbers, but they also have begun to play a more important role in policy reform and implementation. In 2005, when the government planned to build the Nu River dams, Chinese environment groups formed a coalition “urging the government to hold open hearings and make public a secret report on the Nu dams before making a final decision”<sup>69</sup>. In 2006, following NGO resistance, the government of Ganzi Prefecture in Sichuan Province canceled a local hydroelectric project, signaling the first success by Chinese NGOs to pressure the government on environmental grounds<sup>70</sup>. Some NGOs might have had a direct impact on enhancing the competitiveness of village elections. For example, “Rural Women Knowing All”, an NGO actively involved in promoting education and microcredit programs for women in rural areas, has effectively increased literacy and self-awareness among women living in the countryside, and enabled them to earn a living by providing microfinance loans. Moreover, some NGOs have strong connections with the foreign counterparts and together formulate a considerable social force from below against the pressure from the Chinese government. Wan Yanhai’s Aizhixing Institute has had massive international support and national impact on the HIV/AIDS community. Groups pushing for greater

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<sup>68</sup> Statistical Year Book, 2009. Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, China Statistics Press, 2009

<sup>69</sup> Yardley, Jim. “Seeking a Public Voice on China’s ‘Angry River’”, the New York Times, Dec. 26, 2005

<sup>70</sup> World Watch Institute, <http://www.worldwatch.org/node/4766>



awareness of HIV/AIDS have been critical in exposing the Henan Province blood scandal, in which thousands of peasants were infected when they sold their blood.

I have shown in this chapter that economic and political reforms in the Post-Mao era introduced a market economy and encouraged political participation, which led to some degree of democratization. At the same time, the reforms have generated fundamental changes in the society that gave rise to an emerging civil society. Since the 90's, social organizations are no longer content with working with the state to provide efficiencies as GONGOs and have become increasingly active and influential. In turn, by promoting political participation and contestation, civil society organizations have induced democratic openings as the above examples demonstrate. The next chapter will further look into the relationship between civil society activity and democratization.

### *Chapter 3: The Statistical Study*

In the previous chapters, I have discussed the emergence of civil society and democratization in post-Mao China as a result of economic and political reforms. I have also shown that civil society development has had an impact on democratization and vice versa. This chapter will probe into the potential correlation between the proliferation of social organizations (civil society development) and democratization at micro- and macro-level. Specifically, in the first section of this chapter, I will use the competitiveness of village elections as a proxy for micro-level democratization in a period of fifteen years. The competitiveness of village elections will be calculated based on the local elections data available in an economics study. In the second section, I will discuss the explanatory variables selected to explain the variance in democratization, including the variable of civil society activity. The data is acquired from the Ministry of Civil Affairs. Then I will conduct correlation analysis between civil society activity and micro-level democratization. The last section of the chapter introduces international indices as rough measures for macro-level democratization and discusses the correlation between civil society activity and macro-level democratization.

If doing a statistical study on politics is difficult, then doing one on Chinese democratization is ambitious. For one thing, the scale of democratization is small and hard to measure. For another, getting relevant data is not easy owing to limited government transparency. My failure to get the data on NPC election votes proves that China remains a strong authoritarian regime and still far from being democratic. Recent

voting behavior at NPC elections shows an increasing number of opposition and abstention votes than 80s. For instance, in the 1998 Ninth NPC Elections, the candidate for the NPC chairman position, Li Peng, received 200 opposition votes and 126 abstention votes. However, in the past, opposition and abstention votes were always fewer than one hundred. Inspired by the trend, I spent two months in December and January making numerous efforts trying to get the data on NPC votes in the past two decades. I contacted people working at the National People's Congress and Local People's Congress, university professors with expertise on NPCs and many research institutions. Unfortunately, I was either told that such a record of past NPC votes was unheard of, or that the government did not keep a record and would not publicly disclose even if it did. I was appalled that Chinese citizens could not find out how many elected representatives voted for or against the president, CMC chairman and vice president at NPC elections, which are broadcasted on national television in recent years. I had to reluctantly give up using NPC votes as a measure for macro-level democratization and use international democracy indices instead, which I will introduce in later sections of the chapter.

### **Measuring Micro-level Democratization**

The economics paper conducted by Shuna Wang and Yang Yao on village elections collected survey data from 48 villages in eight provinces over 17 years (1986 – 2002). The provinces are Guangdong (seven villages), Hunan (seven villages), Zhejiang

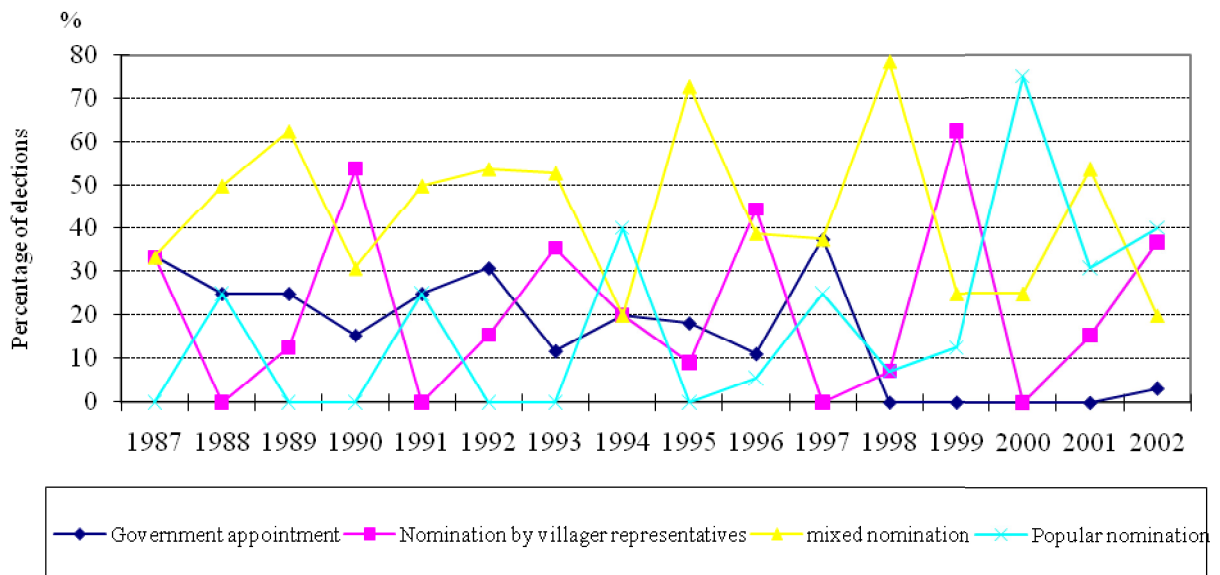
(nine villages), Henan (three villages), Sichuan (seven villages), Gansu (five villages), Shanxi (seven villages) and Jilin (three villages), with a geographical spread from the south part (Guangdong, Hunan, Zhejiang and Sichuan) of China to the north (Henan, Gansu, Shanxi and Jilin). The map below shows the location of these provinces in China for reference.



The sample was drawn from the National Fixed-point Survey (“NFS”) under the administration of the Research Center of Rural Economy, Ministry of Agriculture. The NFS started in 1986 and covers more than 300 villages including 24,000 households in all provinces in the mainland of China. Hence, the sample should sufficiently represent village elections throughout the country for the study purpose.

The NFS data provide information about village elections for the period 1986 – 2002 as shown below in Figure 2 “Procedures used to nominate candidates for the VC chairman”. The survey recorded four types of procedures: government appointment, nomination by village representatives, popular nomination (*haixuan*) and government appointment plus popular nomination (or “mixed nomination”). Figure 2 presents the distribution of the four nomination procedures by year. I use the share of “Government appointments” over the entire period as a proxy for the variable “democratization”, or more precisely, “anti-democratization”. The assumption is that a higher percentage of government-appointed candidates in village elections indicates a lower level of democratization.

**Figure 2: Procedures Used to Nominate Candidates for the VC Chairman**



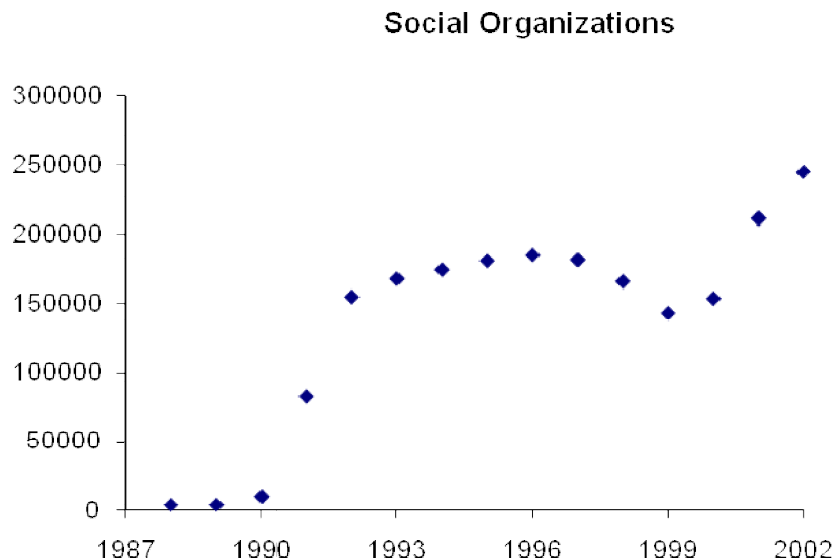
**Table 1: Competitiveness of Village Elections**

<b>Year of Election</b>	<b>Share of Government Appointed Candidates (%)</b>
<b>1987</b>	33.33
<b>1988</b>	25
<b>1989</b>	25
<b>1990</b>	15.38
<b>1991</b>	25
<b>1992</b>	30.77
<b>1993</b>	11.76
<b>1994</b>	20
<b>1995</b>	18.18
<b>1996</b>	11.11
<b>1997</b>	37.5
<b>1998</b>	0
<b>1999</b>	0
<b>2000</b>	0
<b>2001</b>	0
<b>2002</b>	3.33

## Measuring Civil Society Development

For the statistical study, I will use the official statistics on registered social organizations at the Ministry of Civil Affairs, available for the time period of 1988 – 2008. The assumption is that increasing/decreasing number of registered social organizations represents higher/lower civil society activity. Figure 3 below “Number of Social Organizations” illustrates an overall upward trend of registered social organizations with two steep growth periods in 1990-1992 and 2000-2002.

**Figure 3: Number of Social Organizations**



However, the proxy for civil society development is a useful indicator but not a perfect measure because it is far from being comprehensive. Ideally, the variable should have the total number of grassroots organizations including both types of social organizations (NGOs and GONGOs). As I discussed in the previous chapter, the number

of registered social organizations at the Ministry of Civil Affairs underestimates the actual scale of civil society activity in China. Many Chinese NGO activists that I spoke with in the summer of 2007 expressed the difficulty to register with the Ministry owing to restrictive procedures. Many NGOs working on issues that were considered “controversial” by the Chinese government had to register as private enterprises or to find their own ways without any registration.

I have made efforts to get a more comprehensive measure that is less biased than the one provided above by the government. Unfortunately, there are no available statistics on the unregistered grassroots organizations, which also shows the opacity of grassroots activism in today’s China.

Besides the variable of civil society activity, other variables are also introduced as possible explanations for the variance in micro-level and macro-level democratization. These include macroeconomic indicators: GDP per capita, urban population (percentage of the entire population), and education (school-age children enrollment rate). The common assumption is that economic development is conducive to democratization. Additionally, a time variable is included to examine the variation of each variable with time.

The seven variables “GOVT\_APPT”, “POP\_NOMINATION”, “SOCIAL\_ORG”, “GDP\_CAPITA”, “TIME”, “URBAN”, “EDU” all have annual data points for the time period of 1988 – 2002. The descriptions for each variable and the data are as follows:



- ❖ **GOVT\_APPT**: Percentage of government appointed candidates among all candidates in village elections during the time period of 1988 – 2002<sup>71</sup>.
- ❖ **POP\_NOMINATION**: Percentage of candidates elected by popular nomination among all candidates in village elections during the time period of 1988 – 2002<sup>72</sup>.
- ❖ **SOCIAL\_ORG**: Number of registered social organizations at the Ministry of Civil Affairs. Social organizations include three categories: social groups, private non-enterprises, and foundations<sup>73</sup>.
- ❖ **GDP\_CAPITA**: National GDP per capita (purchasing power parity)<sup>74</sup>.
- ❖ **EDU**: School-age children enrollment rate as an indicator of the education level<sup>75</sup>.
- ❖ **URBAN**: Percentage of urban population in the total population<sup>76</sup>.
- ❖ **TIME**: Time series by year.

Table 2 below provides statistics for each variable for the time period of 1988 – 2002, which I will use in the correlation analysis that follows.

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<sup>71</sup> Shuna Wang and Yang Yao. “Grassroots Democracy and Local Governance: Evidence from Rural China”, *World Development*, Vol. 35 (2007), No. 10, p. 1640.

<sup>72</sup> Shuna Wang and Yang Yao. “Grassroots Democracy and Local Governance: Evidence from Rural China”, *World Development*, Vol. 35 (2007), No. 10 p. 1640.

<sup>73</sup> Statistical Year Book, 2009. Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, China Statistics Press

<sup>74</sup> China Data Online, <http://chinadataonline.org/member/macroy/>

<sup>75</sup> China Data Online, <http://chinadataonline.org/member/macroy/>

<sup>76</sup> China Data Online, <http://chinadataonline.org/member/macroy/>

**Table 2: Description of Explanatory Variables**

	<b>GOVT_APPT</b>	<b>POP_NOMINATION</b>	<b>SOCIAL_ORG</b>	<b>GDP_</b>	<b>TIME</b>	<b>URBAN</b>	<b>EDU</b>
	(%)	(%)	(*100)	<b>CAPITA</b>		(%)	(%)
<b>1988</b>	25.00	25	44.46	1048.3	1988	25.64	97.2
<b>1989</b>	25.00	0	45.44	1074.7	1989	26.52	97.4
<b>1990</b>	15.38	0	108.55	1099.3	1990	27.4	97.8
<b>1991</b>	25.00	25	828.14	1184.2	1991	28.2	97.8
<b>1992</b>	30.77	0	1545.02	1335.9	1992	29	97.2
<b>1993</b>	11.76	0	1675.06	1505.5	1993	29.8	97.7
<b>1994</b>	20.00	40	1740.6	1683.6	1994	30.6	98.4
<b>1995</b>	18.18	0	1805.83	1846.9	1995	31.4	98.5
<b>1996</b>	11.11	5.56	1848.21	2010.4	1996	32.28	98.8
<b>1997</b>	37.50	25	1813.18	2175.0	1997	33.16	98.9
<b>1998</b>	0.00	7.14	1656	2322.2	1998	34.04	98.9
<b>1999</b>	0.00	12.5	1426.65	2475.2	1999	34.92	99.1
<b>2000</b>	0.00	75	1533.22	2664.2	2000	35.8	99.1
<b>2001</b>	0.00	30.77	2109.39	2864.5	2001	36.72	99.1
<b>2002</b>	3.33	40	2445.09	3104.2	2002	37.64	98.6

As shown above, the dataset size is unfortunately small, containing only fifteen data points. Therefore, the thesis is unable to use an OLS regression to analyze the data and will instead use correlation method to study the association between civil society activity and democratization. Correlations measure the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables. In a regression analysis, the research focus is on the

causal relationship; i.e., a dependent variable is predicted and the other independent variables are the predictors. But in a correlation study, the research interest is not on causal relations; that is, no variable serves as a predictor. Thus a correlation cannot tell us anything about causation. However, the correlation study is still of strong interest as it entails whether the variation in civil society activity happens simultaneously with the changes in the degree of democratization both at the grassroots level (micro-level) and national level (macro-level).

The calculation of the correlation coefficient is accomplished by STATA software. The value of the correlation coefficient ranges from -1 to +1, with -1 indicating perfect negative correlation and +1 perfect positive correlation, while 0 shows no correlation at all. The sign of the correlation coefficient (+, -) defines the direction of the relationship, either positive or negative. A positive correlation coefficient means that as the value of one variable increases, the value of the other variable increases; as one decreases the other decreases. A negative correlation coefficient indicates that as one variable increases, the other decreases, and vice-versa. The two important factors in a correlation relationship are strength and significance. The absolute value of the correlation coefficient measures the strength of the correlation, whereas the probability/significance level suggests the significance of it. The significance of the relationship shows how unlikely the calculated correlation coefficient will occur if no correlation exists in the variables. Therefore, the larger the correlation coefficient is, the stronger the relationship; the smaller the probability level is, the more significant the relationship.

Based on previous analysis, it is assumed that GOVT\_APPT would negatively correlate with the other six variables since it signifies the degree of “anti-democratization”. POP\_NOMINATION is a positive indicator of democratization, and the growth of SOCIAL\_ORG, GDP\_CAPITA, URBAN and EDU are all assumed to have a positive impact on democratization. In addition, from Figure 2, it is obvious that GOVT\_APPT has declined over the years and therefore negatively correlated with TIME. The output correlation matrix of the seven variables from STATA is shown as below in Table 3 and Table 4:

**Table 3: Correlation Output (Micro-level Democratization, Significance Level 5%)**

	GOVT_A~T	POP_NO~N	SOCI AL~G	GDP_CA~A	TIME	URBAN	EDU
GOVT_APPT	1.0000						
POP_NOMI NA~N	-0.2875	1.0000					
SOCI AL_ORG	-0.3828	0.2683	1.0000				
GDP_CAPI TA	-0.6883*	0.5177*	0.7856*	1.0000			
TIME	-0.6806*	0.4855	0.8285*	0.9910*	1.0000		
URBAN	-0.6848*	0.4904	0.8215*	0.9923*	0.9997*	1.0000	
EDU	-0.6173*	0.4331	0.6678*	0.8637*	0.8869*	0.8811*	1.0000

**Table 4: Correlation Output (Micro-level Democratization, Significance Level 16%)**

	GOVT_A~T	POP_NO~N	SOCI AL~G	GDP_CA~A	TIME	URBAN	EDU
GOVT_APPT	1.0000						
POP_NOMI NA~N	-0.2875	1.0000					
SOCI AL_ORG	-0.3828*	0.2683	1.0000				
GDP_CAPI TA	-0.6883*	0.5177*	0.7856*	1.0000			
TIME	-0.6806*	0.4855*	0.8285*	0.9910*	1.0000		
URBAN	-0.6848*	0.4904*	0.8215*	0.9923*	0.9997*	1.0000	
EDU	-0.6173*	0.4331*	0.6678*	0.8637*	0.8869*	0.8811*	1.0000

In Table 3, the correlation command yields all pairwise correlation coefficients between the variables and stars the correlation coefficients significant at the 5% level<sup>77</sup>. We can see that at this significance level, the correlation coefficients for GOVT\_APPT and POP\_NOMINATION (not significant), SOCIAL\_ORG (not significant), GDP\_CAPITA (significant), TIME (significant), URBAN (significant) and EDU (significant) are all negative. In other words, the percentage of government appointed candidates negatively correlates with the percentage of popular nominated candidates, the number of social organizations, GDP per capita, time, percentage of urban population, and education level. This result is in accord with my previous assumptions.

The absolute value of the SOCIAL\_ORG correlation coefficient is significantly lower than that of other variables: 0.3828 (Social organizations) compared to 0.6883 (GDP per capita), 0.6806 (Time), 0.6848 (Urban population) and 0.6173 (Education). Therefore, though the results indicate that increasing civil society activity is associated with increasing democratization at local level, the strength of the correlation between the two is weak. In addition, the correlation coefficient for SOCIAL\_ORG is not significant at 5% level. That is, there is less than 95% probability that the coefficient will not be zero. In Table 4, further analysis on the correlation significance shows that the optimal probability level on the correlation coefficient between GOVT\_APPT and SOCIAL\_ORG is 16%. Hence, there is a maximum 84% probability that SOCIAL\_ORG

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<sup>77</sup> The level of significance indicates the probability of observing an estimated t-value greater than the critical t-value if the null hypothesis were correct. The null hypothesis is that there is no correlation at all – the coefficient is zero. Therefore, a 5% level of significance (95% level of confidence, the most commonly chosen level of significance), indicates that there is 95% probability that the null hypothesis will be rejected. In other words, the correlation coefficient will not be zero but the calculated value as shown in the matrix. The 5% level of significance is the most commonly chosen confidence level for correlation study.

is negatively correlated with GOVT\_APPT at 0.3828. The probability level of 16% is a threshold – a higher probability level than 16% will always yield a significant coefficient and a lower one will render the correlation insignificant. Furthermore, POP\_NOMINATION positively correlates with SOCIAL\_ORG, GDP\_CAPITA, TIME, URBAN and EDU at 16% probability level as shown in Table 4. Since GOVT\_APPT is the proxy for “anti-democratization” and POP\_NOMINATION for “democratization”, the negative correlation coefficients and positive correlation coefficients, respectively, offer a very tentative conclusion that the growth of social organizations is positively associated with the competitiveness of village elections.

The tentative nature of this conclusion is due to the small correlation coefficient (0.3828) that shows a weak correlation and the low significance level (0.16) that suggests a possible insignificant result. Nevertheless, to a certain degree the results demonstrate that the increasing number of social organizations has a positive correlation with the percentage of popular nomination and a negative correlation with the percentage of government nomination. It is safe to conclude, then, that despite the relatively weak correlation, the statistical results correspond with the initial assumption that increasing civil society activity has a positive correlation with grassroots democratization.

This preliminary conclusion challenges Michael Frolic’s claim in his book chapter entitled “State-Led Civil Society” that civil society encourages democratic governance only in “politically developed” Western systems. In authoritarian regimes, however, civil society simply serves for effective government<sup>78</sup>. Frolic argues that the civil society in

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<sup>78</sup> Frolic, B. Michael. “State-Led Civil Society”, in “Civil Society in China” edited by Timothy Brook and B. Michael Frolic. M.E. Sharpe. 1997. p. 54.

China is entirely “state-led”, created from the top down as an adjunct to state power and denies a spontaneous social force emerging from below. He contends that Chinese civil society is a collection of hundreds of thousands of social organizations and quasi-administrative units created by the state to “help it manage a complex and rapidly expanding economy and changing society”<sup>79</sup>. The correlation results show that civil society activity is not completely uncorrelated with democratization at the grassroots level. If civil society were entirely created by the state, then its growth should not have had any correlation with the competitiveness of village elections, since the peasants demanded the village elections to be more competitive. Neither the number of social organizations nor the competitiveness of village elections is a direct result of state efforts, so the evidence proves Frolic’s argument to be weak and debatable.

However, correlation must be differentiated from causation. The results demonstrate positive correlation between civil society activity and democratization, which can be interpreted as that the proliferation of civil society in China happened simultaneously with the growth of grassroots democratization. As the correlation coefficients suggest, SOCIAL\_ORG has high 0.8285 correlation with TIME and GOVT\_APPT has a -0.6806 correlation with TIME. In other words, over time, social organizations have steadily increased and government nomination in village elections has declined. It suggests a possibility that the growth of civil society and of micro-level democratization have taken place simultaneously without interaction with each other. However, the correlation between SOCIAL\_ORG and GOVT\_APPT, albeit weak, might

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<sup>79</sup> Frolic. p. 48.

imply that civil society development has encouraged the grassroots democratization and civic engagement, so that the percentage of government appointed officials decreased over the years under the pressure of popular opposition. Unfortunately, given the small dataset, it is impossible to draw further conclusions by carrying out causation analysis.

Additionally, the correlation coefficients of government nomination with macroeconomic factors (all significant at 5% level) indicate an unambiguously strong correlation between economic development and democratization, thereby affirming the main argument of modernization theory that an increasing standard of living facilitates democratization. In particular, the higher levels of education and urbanization have positive correlations with the competitiveness of village elections.

The competitiveness of village elections is a micro measure of democratization that is restricted to the local level. The distribution of nomination methods for village committee candidates reflects the quality of democratic election implementation in rural areas and thus the development of grassroots democratization. However, democratization should extend beyond the grassroots level. One would expect local democratization to exert pressure on political elites at the top. That is, local officials in pursuit of local development goals may challenge party-state policies and elite practices, both of which influence the extent of democratization at the national level. Therefore, I will use a macro measure of democratization in addition to the micro measure to examine the extent of the emerging democratization.



## **Measuring Macro-level Democratization**

International indices are the only available measure for democratization on the national level for China. The most relevant indices are these: Freedom of the Press Index, World Bank “Voice and Accountability” and “Rule of Law” Indices, and CIRI Human Rights Index. But of these four, only the Freedom of the Press and the Human Rights Index record more than ten annual data points. As a result, I have opted to use these two indices as indicators for democratization on the macro level to examine whether the growth of civil society has had an impact on democratization beyond the grassroots. However, these measures are far from perfect. The competitiveness of village elections, though microscopic, captures the direct component of democracy – free and fair elections. In contrast, the freedom of the press index and human rights index are only indicators that correlate with the level of democratization based on the prevailing political rhetoric that democracy protects civil liberties and guarantees rule of law and therefore allows for more freedom of the press and reduces human rights violations.

Shown below is a detailed description of the CIRI Human Rights Index and the Freedom of Press Index, which is acquired from <http://ciri.binghamton.edu/> and <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=274>.

### **❖ CIRI Human Rights Index**

The Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Dataset contains standards-based quantitative information on government respect for 15 internationally recognized human

rights for 195 countries annually from 1981 to 2007<sup>80</sup>. The dataset contains measures of government human rights practices including the following three components:

[PHYSINT] Physical Integrity Rights Index

This is an additive index constructed from the Torture, Extrajudicial Killing, Political Imprisonment, and Disappearance indicators. It ranges from 0 (no government respect for these four rights) to 8 (full government respect for these four rights). Details on its construction and use can be found in: David L. Cingranelli and David L. Richards. 1999. "Measuring the Level, Pattern, and Sequence of Government Respect for Physical Integrity Rights." *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol 43.2: 407-18.

[DISAP] Disappearance

Disappearances are cases in which people have disappeared, political motivation appears likely, and the victims have not been found. Knowledge of the whereabouts of the disappeared is, by definition, not public knowledge. However, while there is typically no way of knowing where victims are, it is typically known by whom they were taken and under what circumstances. A score of 0 indicates that disappearances have occurred frequently in a given year; a score of 1 indicates that disappearances occasionally occurred; and a score of 2 indicates that disappearances did not occur in a given year.

[KILL] Extrajudicial Killing

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<sup>80</sup> <http://ciri.binghamton.edu/>

Extrajudicial killings are killings by government officials without due process of law. They include murders by private groups if instigated by government. These killings may result from the deliberate, illegal, and excessive use of lethal force by the police, security forces, or other agents of the state whether against criminal suspects, detainees, prisoners, or others. A score of 0 indicates that extrajudicial killings were practiced frequently in a given year; a score of 1 indicates that extrajudicial killings were practiced occasionally; and a score of 2 indicates that such killings did not occur in a given year.

The CIRI Human Rights Index adds the ratings for the three categories above and formulate one score through the time period of 1981 – 2007. A higher score indicates more human rights violations recorded and correlates with a lower level of democratization. The output correlation matrix is as follows in Table 4 and 5. The pairwise correlation method eliminates missing data points in pairs and reduces the dataset size to 20 since the statistic for SOC\_ORG\_ALL is available only from 1988.

**Table 5: Correlation Output (Macro-level Democratization 1, Significance Level 5%)**

	HUMAN_~L	SOC_OR~L	GDPPC_~L	URBAN_~L	EDU_ALL	TI ME
HUMAN_RI GH~L	1.0000					
SOC_ORG_ALL	-0.3254	1.0000				
GDPPC_ALL	-0.4722*	0.9396*	1.0000			
URBAN_POP_~L	-0.4407*	0.9380*	0.9576*	1.0000		
EDU_ALL	-0.2896	0.7874*	0.7502*	0.8817*	1.0000	
TI ME	-0.4342*	0.9372*	0.9492*	0.9994*	0.8947*	1.0000

**Table 6: Correlation Output (Macro-level Democratization 1, Significance Level 16%)**

	HUMAN_~L	SOC_OR~L	GDPPC_~L	URBAN_~L	EDU_ALL	TIME
HUMAN_RIGH~L	1.0000					
SOC_ORG_ALL	-0.3254	1.0000				
GDPPC_ALL	-0.4722*	0.9396*	1.0000			
URBAN_POP_~L	-0.4407*	0.9380*	0.9576*	1.0000		
EDU_ALL	-0.2896*	0.7874*	0.7502*	0.8817*	1.0000	
TIME	-0.4342*	0.9372*	0.9492*	0.9994*	0.8947*	1.0000

As shown above, the correlation coefficient for HUMAN\_RIGHTS\_ALL and SOC\_ORG\_ALL is negative but not significant at either 5% or 16% level. In other words, there is little or no correlation between human rights violations and civil society activity. Correlation coefficients between human rights violations and GDP per capita, urban population, education and time are all negative and significant at 16% level. The absolute values of the coefficients are all lower than those in Table 4 with GOVT\_APPT being the proxy for grassroots democratization. In summary, the proliferation of civil society organizations in China is not associated with a human rights regime and economic development has had a smaller impact on macro-level democratization (human rights violations) than on micro-level democratization (competitive village elections).

#### ❖ Freedom of the Press Index by Freedom House

The *Freedom of the Press* index assesses the degree of print, broadcast, and internet freedom in every country in the world, analyzing the events and developments of each calendar year. Ratings are determined through an examination of three broad categories: the legal environment in which media operate; political influences on reporting and access to information; and economic pressures on content and the dissemination of news.

Under the legal category, Freedom House assesses the laws and regulations that could influence media content as well as the extent to which the government uses these tools to restrict the media's ability to function. The political category encompasses a variety of issues, including editorial pressure by the government or other actors; censorship and self-censorship; the ability of reporters to cover the news; and the extralegal intimidation of and violence against journalists. Finally, under the economic category Freedom House examines issues such as the structure, transparency, and concentration of media ownership; costs of production and distribution; and the impact of advertising, subsidies, and bribery on content. Ratings reflect not just government actions and policies, but the behavior of the press itself in testing boundaries, even in more restrictive environments. Each country receives a numerical rating from 0 (the most free) to 100 (the least free), which serves as the basis for a press freedom status designation of "Free," "Partly Free," or "Not Free."<sup>81</sup>

The Freedom of the Press is assessed yearly as a sum of several sub-sections and the data is available from 1994 to 2001.

**Table 7: Correlation Output (Macro-level Democratization 2, Significance Level 5%)**

	FR~M_ALL	SOC_OR~L	GDPPC_~L	URBAN_~L	EDU_ALL	TIME
FREEDOM_ALL	1.0000					
SOC_ORG_ALL	0.1150	1.0000				
GDPPC_ALL	-0.0551	0.9396*	1.0000			
URBAN_POP_~L	-0.2397	0.9380*	0.9576*	1.0000		
EDU_ALL	-0.1230	0.7874*	0.7502*	0.8817*	1.0000	
TIME	-0.0973	0.9372*	0.9492*	0.9994*	0.8947*	1.0000

<sup>81</sup> <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=274>

The correlation coefficient of interest is 0.1150 between FREEDOM\_ALL and SOC\_ORG\_ALL. The coefficient is too low to indicate correlation relationship of any kind. Hence, the result shows that press freedom is not correlated with the development of social organizations. In other words, the proliferation of civil society organizations is not associated with freedom of the press in China.

In summary, there is little evidence that a correlation exists between democratization as represented by the international indices and civil society activity. The growth of social organizations did not improve democratization on the dimensions of freedom of the press and human rights violations on the national level. However, it is worth mentioning that the international indices reflect limited truth. The ratings can be arbitrary and contain little variation for analysis.

The comparison between the results from Table 3 and the results from Table 5 and 6 suggest that the growth of civil society, indicated by the number of registered social organizations, has a more certain positive impact on democratization at the grassroots level (the competitiveness of village elections) than on the national level (the human rights violations and freedom of press) – assuming the latter are adequate proxies for democratization at the national level. Therefore, though many social organizations might have developed strategies to avoid state controls and to turn the “traditional “transmission belt” function to their own advantage”<sup>82</sup>, as Tony Saich proposes, the overall democratization has not been initiated in a top-down measure. In other words, democratization has emerged at the grassroots level but hasn’t progressed enough to

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<sup>82</sup> Saich, Tony. “Negotiating the State: the Development of Social Organizations in China”, in “China’s Deep Reform”. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006. p. 297.

manifest the pattern of change nationally. The final chapter will discuss the further implications of the results and shortcomings of the study.

The findings provide limited evidence on the positive correlation between civil society growth and grassroots democratization in China. The correlation is weak but existent. However, the result has shown no evidence for any correlation between civil society growth and national-level democratization. In other words, civil society development is somewhat associated with democratization at the micro-level but not at the macro-level. The proven positive strong correlation between education level, GDP per capita and democratization in both micro and macro measures in the previous chapter suggests that economic development is strongly associated with democracy at the grassroots level.

The analysis of the international indices for democratization offers limited and mixed indication that democratization has improved over the years. On the one hand, in Table 4, the correlation coefficient for human rights violations and time is -0.4342, significant at 5% level, which shows that with time, human rights violations have decreased with medium correlation strength of 0.4342. On the other hand, freedom of press has almost no correlation with time – the correlation coefficient is -0.0973, not significant at 5% level. The two macro measures of democratization yield different results and thus no clear evidence shows that democracy measured on an aggregate level has not developed during the last two decades.

By contrast, grassroots democracy measured by competitiveness of village elections has unambiguously improved over the same time span. As shown in Table 2,

the percentage of government appointed candidates negatively correlates with time at a coefficient of -0.6806, significant at 5% level; the percentage of popular appointed candidates positively correlates with time at a coefficient of 0.4855, significant at 16% level. Both correlation coefficients suggest an over-time improvement of grassroots democracy.

The comparison has led us to believe that in the past two decades since the implementation of economic and political reforms, democratization has occurred but restricted at the grassroots level. Moreover, the proven moderate correlation between civil society development and grassroots democracy and the nonexistent correlation between civil society development and national-level democracy further prove that civil society has contributed to the improvement of grassroots democracy but not national-level democracy. Can civil society exert impact beyond the grassroots level? Can Chinese democracy be developed from grassroots to the national level? The final chapter will discuss further implications of the findings from this chapter and try to debate these questions.



## ***Chapter 4: Conclusion***

The emergence of civil society in China shows that civil society is not an exclusive property of liberal democracy. Relatively independent social organizations are able to flourish in the absence of pluralism. Economic and political liberalization in the post-Mao China has unavoidably encouraged political participation and contestation, at least at the local level, which appears to have cultivated rights consciousness among citizens and grassroots activism. Although the development of civil society in authoritarian regimes such as China and Russia follows a state-led model, I have provided evidence in Chapter 2 that a genuine social force has developed from below and started playing a more important role in influencing state policies. The Chinese government intends to promote civil society for its useful function as a “transmission belt” between the state and individuals in society. As it delegates more authority to state and non-state actors at the local level, the central government seeks to reduce its size and increase its efficiency. At the same time, the authoritarian government does its best to curb the oppositional power of the emerging social organizations, as the dual registration system for Chinese NGOs exemplifies. However, the state is finding it increasingly difficult to assert all-encompassing control over society. Civil society has developed not only to serve state interests, but also to determine them. The cancellation of a local hydroelectric project in Sichuan Province following environmental NGO resistance demonstrates this growing trend.

In China, grassroots activism is linked to grassroots democratization through the promotion of rights consciousness at the local level. The common assumption in Western

literature on civil society is that grassroots activism puts pressure on state elites and contributes to democratic openings that are initiated from the top. In Chapter 3, I outlined conducts a statistical study that highlighted the relationship between civil society development and grassroots democratization (micro-level democratization), and between civil society development and national democratization (macro-level democratization). The results demonstrate that civil society development has a weak but positive correlation with micro-level democratization, whereas it has no correlation with macro-level democratization. The high correlation between micro-/macro-level democratization and macroeconomic indicators shows that economic development, represented by GDP per capita, urban population and education level, has had a more obvious impact on grassroots-level democratization than on national-level democratization. At the same time, the strong correlation results between micro-/macro-level democratization and time suggest that micro-level democratization has unambiguously improved over time, while macro-level democratization has not.

The study unfortunately bears many shortcomings. Firstly, the dataset is small with only fifteen data points. The number of registered social organizations was either not recorded prior to 1988 since only in 1989 did the State Council promulgate the Regulations on the Registration and Administration of Social Organizations, when a new system of administration of social organizations was constructed. The available data for village elections is also restricted to the period of 1988 – 2002. International indices on democracy only provide ratings for China from the 1980's. There is a simple explanation for this: before then, China was a totalitarian regime. The small dataset size provides only

limited evidence of a correlation. Secondly, a study like this cannot tell us anything about causation. In other words, a correlation between civil society and grassroots democracy only suggests that the flourishing of civil society has taken place *alongside* democratization at the local level. It cannot tell us whether the development of civil society is a cause for the emergence of grassroots democratization. Thirdly, there are problems with the data as well. As I discussed in Chapter 3, the government's tally of registered social organizations grossly underestimates actual civil society activity in China. Worse still, it might be misleading – the increasing number probably reflects more of the state efforts to create GONGOs than the spontaneous grassroots initiatives. Compared to the proxy for micro-level democratization, international indices on democracy are not direct measures. Fewer human rights violations and more freedom of press usually correlate with higher level of democratization, but they are not components of democracy whereas competitive village election is a component of democracy – free and fair elections. Moreover, the international ratings are undoubtedly subjective.

The process of constructing such a study has been very challenging since data and measures were not readily available, and I could not find any previous studies of this kind to refer to. The results presented in Chapter 3 are far from perfect; however, it is the closest I can get to an unbiased and useful statistical study on Chinese politics. Nevertheless, the study does yield meaningful results – it shows that civil society activity is linked to democratization – but only at the micro-level. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, whether civil society activity can lead to democratization depends on the political structure. In an authoritarian regime, the state may allow grassroots activity as long as it

does not threaten the government's rule, which explains the result that civil society development has no association with macro-level democratization. Does it mean that an authoritarian political structure is unable to nurture a civil society strong enough to induce national-level democratization? Or is civil society inherently unable to expand its influence beyond the local level in the first place?

Obviously, the Chinese party-state is not pursuing modernization and liberalization to constrain its own power, or cede power to citizens; rather, it is pursuing these projects to increase its own governing capacity by enlisting social forces and to strengthen its legitimacy by regulating the otherwise arbitrary behavior of public officials<sup>83</sup>. But the debate should focus not on the intentions behind the government's economic and political reforms, but on the consequences they have incurred. Michael Frolic's argument that civil society in China merely acts as a vehicle of state control is out of date. In fact, his book chapter "State-led Civil Society" that was published in 1997 and Tony Saich's book "Negotiating the State" published in 2006 represent two very different opinions on the development and impact of civil society in China. The former is pessimistic about civil society's impact on democratization whereas the latter is more optimistic. Timothy and Frolic argue that "The prospects for democratic outcomes to recent social changes, which the model of civil society might have predicted, do not appear promising at this juncture"<sup>84</sup>. By contrast, Saich contends that civil society organizations have developed strategies to avoid state controls and that democratization overall has not been initiated in an exclusively top-down manner. I tend to side with

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<sup>83</sup> Womack, Brantly (1984), "modernization and democratic reform in China", *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 3, p. 422, 435

<sup>84</sup> Brook, Timothy and Frolic, B. Michael. "Civil Society in China", M.E. Sharpe, 1997, p. 12

Saich, and believe this difference of opinion reflects, at least in part, change in state-society relations over the past decade. Mary Gallagher writes that social organizations suffer from a “paradox of legitimacy”: They must get legitimacy from the state and also need to “find legitimacy within market society”<sup>85</sup>. However, the latter legitimacy is more important for their survival in the international environment. Therefore, I would argue that as China becomes increasingly integrated into the international market economy, the development strategy for civil society organizations might gravitate towards a greater reliance on the latter legitimacy – “legitimacy within market society”. In addition, the data used in the statistical study, however, covers a time span from 1988 to 2002. Therefore, it is quite possible that the results fail to capture the recent progress in civil society activity since 2002. If I had been able to include data for recent years, I suspect the correlation study would have shown a stronger association between civil society development and macro-level democratization.

Will the Chinese party-state allow even further progress toward a fully functioning civil society, one that creates unstoppable pressure for democratization, including rule of law and a multi-party system? Or is there a line beyond which civil society cannot go? These are important questions, but they beg a more fundamental one: why does China need a western-style democracy? I think we need to ponder these questions from a different perspective.

In contemporary political discourse on Chinese democratization, observers have begun to refer more and more to “One-party Democracy”. Two articles in the *New York*

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<sup>85</sup> Gallagher, Mary E. “China: The Limits of Civil Society in a Late Leninist State”, in “Civil Society and Political Change in Asia: Expanding and Contracting Democratic Space”, Palo Alto, CA, USA: Stanford University Press, 2004. p. 426

*Times* have shown that the concept of China's "one-party democracy" is more popular now than before. In the September 2009 article<sup>86</sup>, Thomas L. Friedman calls China as "one-party autocracy" and the US a "one-party democracy", criticizing the malfunction of American democracy: Only the Democrats are making any impact on both the energy/climate legislation and health care legislation. However, in the January 2010 article<sup>87</sup>, Roger Cohen raises the question of whether China will ever resemble one-party democracy. He also writes that "Rightful resistance is growing in China. Citizens are...using laws to have a say. Nongovernmental organizations are multiplying to advance agendas from the environment to labor rights". A simple comparison of these two articles suggests two things. One is that China may have the tendency towards one-party democracy over time; the other is that multi-party democracy in a place like the US might not achieve the extent of party competition that the system promises. Indeed, the Hotelling Model<sup>88</sup> tells us that two parties have the inclination to merge their party platforms in the center, producing a single centrist ideology.

China has had some important political developments in recent years. Top Chinese leaders have started using the term "inner-Party democracy" (*dangnei minzhu*) to describe the idea that the party should institutionalize checks and balances within its leadership<sup>89</sup>. Two distinct factions within the CCP have emerged: the populist camp led by Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, and the elitist camp led by Jiang Zemin and Li Peng. In each of the six most important national leadership bodies such as the presidency and the

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<sup>86</sup> Friedman, Thomas L. "Our One-Party Democracy", *The New York Times*, September 9, 2009.

<sup>87</sup> Cohen, Roger. "Single-Party Democracy", *The New York Times*, January 22, 2010.

<sup>88</sup> Shepsle, Kenneth A. and Boncheck, Mark S. "Analyzing Politics", 1997, W.W.Norton.

<sup>89</sup> Cheng, Li. "China's Inner-Party Democracy: Toward a System of "One Party, Two Factions?" *China Brief*, Vo. 6:24, May 2007

Central Military Commission (CMC), the top two positions are now split between these two factions, creating a built-in system of checks and balances. As Tony Saich points out, the CCP is currently riven by internal conflict. However, due to the one-party system, competition within the party and political coalitions still remains largely opaque. If the competition within the party will continue and the CCP improves the transparency of factional politics, political lobbies and campaigns might come into being. In addition, given the large geographical area and ethnic diversity of China, the party-state has seen increasing competition and conflicts between provinces. The homogeneity of the party has “become cracked by regionalism, widespread corruption and various forms of local resistance against the cadre bureaucracy”<sup>90</sup>. Therefore, competition within the party and among provinces may be able to serve as a catalyst for viable one-party democratization.

One-party democracy is not unique to China. In fact, its neighbor Japan had a well-functioning one-party democracy for all but a year between 1955 and 2009, one in which “Citizens maintain all the usual civil liberties, and non-LDP [Liberal Democratic Party] parties contest elections, hoping to topple the LDP”<sup>91</sup>. Evidently, it is important to point out that considerable opposition and other political parties exist in Japan, whereas virtually no opposition is present in China. However, the example of Japan shows that it is possible to have a democracy that is dominated by one party. If a two-party system is what leads to a single centrist party platform, then maybe one-party democracy is a better solution since it eliminates the agency costs incurred by political campaigns and interest group politics, but can at the same time ensure civil liberties for citizens.

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<sup>90</sup> Schubert, Gunter. “Democracy Under One-Party Rule?” *China Perspectives*, vol. 46, March/April 2003.

<sup>91</sup> Schneiner, Ethan. “Democracy Without Competition in Japan”, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

In this sense, micro-level democratization may be as important a measure as macro-level democratization, if the model of democratization in China is intrinsically different than that in the West. Regional and local grassroots activism contributes to rights consciousness as well as political participation and contestation, which puts pressure on local governments in their policy-making processes. This may cause conflict between local governments and the state, since local government officials may pursue policies different than those favored by the central government. Therefore, civil society activity at the local level can lead to competition and conflict between local governments and the central government, as well as within the CCP, which is conducive to one-party democratization.

I am optimistic about the future of China's democratization and civil society development. However, to become an optimistic, I have had to change my perspective and expectation first. Multi-party democracy may just not be in the cards for China. One-party democracy seems to be a plausible and achievable political goal in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the help of an expanding social force burgeoning from below among its 1.3 billion people.



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