

---

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF URBAN COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY  
ORGANIZATIONS IN CHINA

---

Zhou Shaoqing



Research Partnership 4/2006  
The Danish Institute for Human Rights



A critical review of urban community development  
and civil society organizations in China

**Zhou Shaoqing**

A critical review of urban community development and civil society organizations in China

*Zhou Shaoqing*

Research Partnership 4/2006, The Danish Institute for Human Rights

This research paper has been produced as a part of the Research Partnership Programme at the Danish Institute for Human Rights, with financial assistance provided by Danida.

However, the statements, facts and opinions expressed in the publication are the responsibility of the personal author and do not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the Danish Institute for Human Rights or Danida.

© 2007 Zhou Shaoqing

Parts of the report may be photocopied or otherwise reproduced if author and source are quoted.

*Editorial preparations:* Alex K. Tonnesen

*Print:* Det Samfundsvidenskabelige Fakultets Reprocenter

ISBN 87-91836-18-2

ISSN 1600 5333

*Bibliographic information according to the Huridocs Standard Format*

*Title:* A critical review of urban community development and civil society organizations in China

*Personal author:* Zhou Shaoqing

*Corporate author:* The Danish Institute for Human Rights

*Series title:* Research Partnership 4/2006

*Index terms:* China / human rights / urban community / civil society

Printed in Denmark 2007

The Danish Institute for Human Rights

56 Strandgade

1401 Copenhagen K

Tel: + 45 32 69 88 88

Fax: + 45 32 69 88 00

E-mail: center@humanrights.dk

# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>I. Background .....</b>	<b>9</b>
A China of work units.....	9
From “work unit member” to “member of society” .....	10
<b>II. Government initiated community development and its intended objectives and problems.....</b>	<b>12</b>
Government initiated community development .....	12
Lugu community development .....	12
The objectives of community development.....	14
Problems .....	15
Community bureaucratization.....	15
The administrative model .....	15
Self-government model.....	16
Some comments .....	16
Serious lack of skilled personnel .....	17
Financial predicaments .....	18
Poor percentage of participants in community development.....	18
<b>III. Civil society organizations, their current state and contribution to community development .....</b>	<b>22</b>
“Dual (registration) administrative system” .....	23
Excessively restrictive clauses on the establishment of social organizations.....	24
Annual review system.....	24
Reporting system and “purging” as “rectification” .....	25
Some comments .....	26
The current state of civil society organizations and their support to community development.....	27
<b>IV. Community development and civil society organizations, alternative or interactive?.....</b>	<b>32</b>
Closely connected in spirit and in definition .....	33
Functions and roles of community development .....	37
Some comments .....	38
<b>V. Top down and bottom up approaches to community development.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>VI. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>46</b>



## INTRODUCTION

This thesis tries to provide a ground for a critical discussion and reflection on community development and civil society organizations in the context of Chinese social transformation. It is argued that community development and civil society organizations are two important vehicles for the reorganization or transition of current Chinese society. The relationship between community development and civil society organizations is interdependent, mutually supplementary and interactive. Having examined the various problems that exist in community development, the author points out that community development should be and must be based on the development of civil society organizations. In the end, the author also emphasizes the importance of community development to civil society organizations by indicating that community development can provide a protective environment and legitimate support to civil society organizations in the policy framework. The thesis will be divided into six parts.

Since 1978, China has been carrying out a policy of reform and opening up to the outside world. Great changes have taken place. Among these, the most outstanding achievements have been made in the economic sector. In less than 30 years' time, China has doubled its GDP several times. In sharp contrast to, and yet closely related to the economic achievements, serious problems have emerged in the social sector, such as severe unemployment, a widening income gap, deterioration of the environment, social exclusion, and an increasing number of disorganized people. In order to address these social problems, and in particular to cope with the issues of reorganizing society after the disintegration of the traditional work unit system but also to downsize government structures, part of the social security burden has been shifted to society itself.

Since 1986, and on a large scale since 1999, the Chinese government has been implementing a national programme called "community construction."<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that this national programme was initiated and continuously implemented on a background of strictly curbing the development of civil society organizations. It is even more noteworthy, that there are indications of a well designed government plan to replace the civil society organizations with the 'government constructed' communities (or, to put it more accurately, it seems that the government is trying to bypass the full development of civil society organizations). Thus, some critical issues arise: Can this kind of community development substitute the development of civil society organizations? Will this kind of community development be successful without the support of civil society organizations? What is in fact the true nature of the relationship

---

<sup>1</sup> To call it "community construction" rather than "community development" means that the development of the community is "manmade" or carefully planned, as opposed to the historically and naturally developed communities of western countries. There is now a general consensus among Chinese scholars that the so-called community construction is no different than community development. And they are actually the same concept. See "the comparative study on the urban community from an international viewpoint". Edited by Hou Yulan, Beijing publishing house, 2000, pp 16.

between community development and civil society organizations? In the current Chinese context, should the two be interlocked, interdependent and interactive, or just alternative?

A so-called social structure indicates that “the various forces of society come together in a stable relationship.” Undoubtedly, China is now in the midst of social transformation and social reorganization. China’s gradual move from a centrally planned economy to a “social market economy” has produced a dramatic impact on her traditional social fabric. The traditional model of social control, of the state absorbing the work units and the work units absorbing the individuals, has long disappeared. How should we deal with the present organizational vacuum? What is the best way to reorganize the social structure and to adjust it to the market economy so as to maintain a stable society? This is a great challenge for the Chinese government. The government initiated community development programme has a definite positive role to play as one of many important vehicles for the reorganization process. However, if the government takes it as far as to consider the replacement (or bypassing) of civil society organizations by the government initiated community development, the prospects for both community development and civil society organizations will not be optimistic.

This thesis tries to provide a ground for a critical discussion and reflection on community development and civil society organizations in the context of Chinese social transformation. It will look into the traditional social structure; examine the government initiated community development programme and its intended objectives and problems; and analyze civil society organizations and their current state and contribution to community development. Finally, conclusions will be drawn on the basis of a comprehensive discussion of the issues at hand.

## I. BACKGROUND

In view of the fact that the work units used to form the basis of the Chinese social structure in the urban area, it will be useful to take a look at the traditional work units system before delving into the relationship between community development and civil society organizations.

### **A China of work units**

In reconstructing Chinese society after the revolution, the work unit system was established almost as a direct continuation of the war time management system of “the Party’s revolutionary ranks.” The work unit system reached into all corners of society and consisted mainly of the following elements: 1) the integration of the Party, the Party Youth League and the unions into the administrative system of the work units; 2) the work unit administrative ranks of cadres and the system of appointing cadres; 3) a work allocation and recruitment system interconnected with the work unit system; 4) the welfare system implemented by the work units. These elements of the system originated at different points in time under the Party leadership up to and after the revolution. By the mid-1950s, they gradually merged into a unified system and became the standard mould of social organization in the cities, turning China’s cities into “organized societies”.

Through the work unit system, the state on the one hand eliminated all market forces and adopted administrative measures to control the allocation of resources. On the other hand, enterprises were forced to shoulder the responsibility of providing life long employment and welfare for the workers. Workers became completely dependent on their work places; in essence, individuals became dependent on the state. To the individual worker, the local Party organization and administrative authorities not only managed the work related activities but also became the representatives of the Party and government in political and legal matters. Under such conditions of complete state administrative control over social life, many aspects of civil life could not be performed without the approval and certification of the work place Party and administrative authorities (e.g. marriage registration, job transfers, household registration). The basic cause behind the development of the work unit system was the state’s use of administrative measures to organize the people; it is the inevitable result of the state’s not having chosen the law as the primary means to managing society in the process of reorganizing the new China.

The work unit system came to occupy an immensely important position in China over the years. As it holds the key to understanding the unique social structure of our country, it should not be overlooked in the research on the relationship between community development and civil society organizations in China.

The real nature of the work unit system lay in the fact that the state used strong administrative powers to wipe out all private initiative and opportunity for forming associations, and thus the state became a kind of ‘representative’ of the entire society in exercising the right of association for all the people. The result was that citizens became organized on a much wider scale than ever before, but any individual drive toward forming independent associations was lost in the process. The state benefited the most from this exercise of “collective organization” through which it was able to control all tangible and intangible resources and monopolize the people’s opportunities for creativity and development. As a ‘tool’ for ruling and as a means of complete administrative control of society, the work unit system in essence eliminated the rule of law and any possibility of streamlining society through the activities of community or civil society associations, and created instead a “collective”.

### **From “work unit member” to “member of society”**

China has undergone many changes of historical significance since the beginning of the reform and open door policies. The masses of people that had been confined to the work unit system and the people’s communes were “set free” through a series of political and economic reforms and ideological campaigns. In the short time span of 20 plus years, opportunities for employment exploded from there only being three main job categories – i.e. cadres, workers, and peasants – to there being hundreds of different job categories. The disintegration of the work unit system and the coming apart of the people’s communes sent China off on the road to becoming a “non-work unit” society which can not possibly be controlled through traditional administrative measures: 1) The relationship between members of society and the work units has become limited to mere economic contracts, and individuals have changed from being dependent “work unit members” to becoming liberated “members of the market” whose job and work unit change frequently. As the work unit has thus become separated from the residential unit, people’s daily lives have also become separated from their work, and much more time is spent away from work than working at the work unit. 2) The market economy can not possibly realize the goal of “full employment”; on the contrary, it has inevitably created a large reserve labor force. Particularly at the present time, as enterprises undergo reform and structural adjustment in China’s cities, close to 10 million people have been laid off. These people have become “work unit members without a work unit”. 3) As the private sector is developing at a fast pace, ten thousands of members of society from towns and villages are floating around outside of the work unit system; they have from the very beginning been part of the “non-work unit” labor force. According to the statistics up to 2002, among the 0.247 billion of the town and village labor force, about 70% fall within the group of non-public sector, and only 30% belong to the public sector which includes administrative organs and institutions. So the non-public sector work force has already become much bigger than the public sector. 4) With the ageing of the population, as many as a hundred million old persons are now members of work units that are no longer

able to provide for them, and some work units even do not exist anymore. 5) In the wake of industrialization and urbanization, much of the surplus work force from the countryside has migrated to the cities to make a living. Some of them are already working, but because of the restrictions of the land and household registration systems, this part of the work force lives and works in the city but has not been completely “integrated” and has no work unit to rely on. 6) Due to the increased competition on the job market and the right of employers to employ who they want, many of society’s weakest groups cannot compete on market terms and have no work unit on which to rely.

These trends of reform and change of Chinese society are not likely to diminish in the near future. The number of “members of society” belonging to one of the six above listed categories is bound to go up. Now that the traditional work unit system has lost its hold on society, it has become a great challenge how to meet the organizational and participatory demands of these categories of people. This is a matter which not only concerns how the government can most effectively control society, but even more it concerns the basic rights and freedoms of the people.

## **II. GOVERNMENT INITIATED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND ITS INTENDED OBJECTIVES AND PROBLEMS**

### **Government initiated community development**

Communities are not a recent creation. As early as in 1986, the Chinese government began its community development project. At the preliminary stage, the communities acted mainly as assistants to the civil affairs department in providing certain vulnerable groups with some relief service. With the increasing social problems, the functions of the communities have been expanded to include the provision of services which in the past were provided by the work unit and the state. Newly established communities and transformed communities (from the old neighborhood committees) were encouraged to deliver more services to the community residents. In 1991, in order to institutionalize community development, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA) put forward “community construction” at the policy level. Consequently, more community development programmes unrolled.

Based on some of the successful community development programmes in certain large cities, and more importantly, in response to serious incidents (e.g. the fact that the Falungong movement had attracted a large part of the masses), a nation-wide community development “experiment” was launched in 1999. Communities were established in 26 national level experimental districts, and gradually three models emerged: 1) the administrative model; 2) the self-government model; and 3) the mixed model. The administrative model is characterized by the establishment within a government department of a special community management structure. The self-government model is characterized by the separation of government and community activities. As part of the government community development programme, the relevant government departments often allocate funds for community development, but the funds are then administered by the community itself. The mixed model is typically such that the government will provide planning, guidance and appropriate funding to the work and establishment of the community, but government interference will be minimal and the principle of community autonomy is at the core of this model. The community development programme has come about as a response to the disintegration of the traditional work unit system, and some rather successful models have resulted, e.g. the Shanghai model, the Shenyang model and the Jiangnan model.

### **Lugu community development**

The most recent and advanced form of this kind of model appeared in Beijing Shijingshan District, Lugu community.<sup>2</sup> This is the first community established directly at the sub-district (street) level. The emergence of Lugu community has changed the

---

<sup>2</sup> The author is both a member of the community and of the community congress.

traditional government structures. In the traditional government structure, there are actually four administrative levels: Municipal, District, Sub-district (street), and Neighborhood Committee.<sup>3</sup> All of the above-mentioned three community models are established at or transformed from the Neighborhood Committee level. Lugu community is the first and only one to be established directly at the sub-district (street) level of Shijingshan district. It is composed of 20 Neighborhood Committees with a population of sixty thousand and it spans an area of seven square kilometers.

The most striking trait of this community is not its “physical magnitude”. According to the People’s Daily (Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>, 2003), the most important breakthrough in this community development process is that it has promoted democratic self governance from the original Neighborhood Committee level to the present Sub-district (street) level. It is regarded as a great leap forward in the building of grassroots democracy. Lugu community has attracted huge attention from the media and produced a great influence both domestically and internationally. According a statistic of lugu council, there has been more than 40 media to have reported the community. And the community has attracted more than 11 countries 3785 relevant experts, scholars and officials to visit.<sup>4</sup>

One headline of the People’s Daily read: “Lugu community: Sub-district (street) democracy takes off from here”. The article quoted a representative as having said: “I have two ‘never thoughts’. One is that I never thought it would be a truly democratic process until I participated in it. The other is that I never thought it would be a truly transparent process until I experienced it”. An article in the Chinese Civic Journal (No.3 2003) carried the headline: “Lugu community: Setting up a big community, an innovative new system”. The Chinese Reform Daily (Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2003) brought a story with the caption: “Big community sounding out in Beijing”. This report predicted the development prospects for the Chinese government structure through the development of Lugu community and argued that “two levels of government and one level of self governance” should be the future government structure model. In addition, Beijing Daily (Oct.13<sup>th</sup> 2003, Jan.6<sup>th</sup> 2004), Beijing Youth Daily (Oct.13<sup>th</sup> 2003), Chinese Reform Daily (Oct.13<sup>th</sup> 2003), Beijing Social Daily (Sep.17<sup>th</sup> 2003), PChome (Oct.12<sup>th</sup> 2003), News, etc., all carried newsreports on the establishment of this community congress. The reports and articles in these papers saw Lugu community as an experimental model for the construction of democracy and self governance at the grassroots level, hailing the fact that the residents would from now on have a platform and a channel through which to express their opinions in affairs concerning their own lives and interests.

---

<sup>3</sup> According to the Chinese Constitution (Article111), neighborhood committees are “mass self-managing organizations at the grassroots level”. But in reality, they always act as an appendage to the sub-district offices.

<sup>4</sup> A working report for lugu community. Sep.3<sup>rd</sup> 2006. unpublished

It is noteworthy that some reports also emphasized the importance of cultivating social intermediary organizations and other civil society organizations, as they considered such organizations an important force in the community development process.

### **The objectives of community development**

As mentioned above, the direct objective of establishing new communities in China is to reorganize the social structure and to address the increasing and pressing social problems. But it is far from enough. According to official sources,<sup>5</sup> the objective of community development is also to tackle three specific problems, i.e., economic reforms and changes; inefficient local government; and the fact that social development is lagging far behind economic development. At the local government level, the objectives of community development are described as follows: to promote the participation of local people in local affairs, especially to promote self governance by residents in the community area; to build grassroots democracy; to strengthen political construction, etc. Behind this ostensible language, however, lies a clear intention from the top of maintaining social control through community development. This became particularly evident when former president Jiang Zemin visited the Shanghai residents' community twice soon after the central government had become aware of the Falungong movement's large following among the masses.

“Winning over” the masses has always been a top priority of the CCP's agenda. To vie with the Falungong movement for the attention of the masses is one of the most important motivations for the establishment of the different communities. In September and October of 1999, Jiang Zemin twice went on an inspection tour of the Party-established community associations in Shanghai and other locations. He reached the following two conclusions: 1) The disintegration of the work unit system together with other market economic reforms have resulted in scattering large masses of people who are now in need of some kind of organization. Their needs in terms of organizing the resources of society and forming associations must be met. 2) Community development may not be a bad solution in terms of meeting the people's needs for organizing the resources of society and for forming associations.

In the process of establishing the Lugu community, some scholars have argued that in the current Chinese context, government initiated and controlled community development is the only realistic way to maintain social control and political stability. In discussing the relationship between state and society, these scholars reject the “strong society, weak state”-model and criticize the other three popular models.<sup>6</sup> In fact they do not agree at all

---

<sup>5</sup> Li Bo Ku, “Shequ Construction: meanings, goals and principles.” Zhongguo Shequ Jianshe, Beijing Social Sciences, 1999. Supplement.

<sup>6</sup> These three models about the relationship between the state and society are respectively the “good interaction between the state and society”-model, the “strong state and strong society”-model, and the

with the notion of a balanced relationship between the state and society, but are of the view that a strong state is a necessity for the government to be able to control the internal conflicts of society, to maintain state sovereignty and territorial integration, and to develop the economy. These viewpoints are summarized as the “strong state and big society”-model.<sup>7</sup>

## **Problems**

### **Community bureaucratization**

The document “Expand the orderly political participation of the people, and guide the people to manage their own affairs”, issued at the 15th session of the CCP, and the statement “Perfect the system of neighborhood self-government in the cities, and establish well-managed, civilized and peaceful new communities”, issued at the 16th National People’s Congress, can be viewed as a guideline to community development. It appears from this guideline that the people’s political participation and self-government are of primary importance. However, when looking at community development in practice, the situation is quite different: almost all the community models are in fact government centered and controlled.

### **The administrative model**

The administrative model is most likely to give rise to yet another bureaucratic administration below the sub-district level. Some of the experiments show that the bureaucratization of the community is already significant, and the community development – which was initially designed to reorganize the social structure, to streamline government and delegate powers; to expand public participation and build up grass roots level democracy; and to cultivate the people’s “four freedoms” – has turned into an exercise in re-building administrative structures.

From a broad perspective, community development can actually be viewed as a kind of “first aid” to the no longer omnipotent government. The pursuit of flexible and low cost interventions must have been a major consideration in establishing the communities, and the trend toward bureaucratization surely runs counter to the original vision. As for the bureaucratization of communities in relation to the need for streamlining society and responding to the people’s demands for organising the resources, some measure of efficiency can be seen in the short term. But in the long term, the bureaucratization trend will not be efficient in addressing the needs of organising the resources of the communities, especially since it lacks the means of control of the traditional work unit system and because the interests of society have been diversified greatly. From the

---

“third sector model”. See “Theory and practice of institutional innovativeness in Lugu community development”, p. 218. Unpublished materials edited by Lugu community council.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

perspective of the residents and their desire for the organization of resources, due to the lack of common direct benefits, aspirations, interests, and convictions, the government constructed community as a means to popular self-government will have only short-lived appeal to the majority of people. According to German social scientist Tonnies, a community is described as being “an intimate, mutually protective, humanitarian social community composed of like-minded people with similar values”. The government initiated community development with its tendency toward bureaucratization and its participation and planning by public power, seems to lack the important conditions described by Tonnies.

### **Self-government model**

As for the self-government model of community development, it is evidently even more problematic. Scholars who have studied the self-government community model have not fully recognized that the community development is the government’s attempt to find new ways of controlling society under new historical circumstances. It is in essence an attempt to solve the government’s lack of ability to manage society after the collapse of the work unit system. It is not grounded in a recognition of the diversification of interests, and there is not even an attempt to include such diversification because the self-governance of communities is the government’s means of transferring power to the lower levels; it is the government’s approval of an authoritative organization. Within a given community, the government recognizes a legal self-governing organization and then entrusts it with the powers to manage its own affairs. After the elections of local community organization members, the government has to issue proof of the elected candidates; this indicates that the election results are to be approved by the government, which in turn shows that the community self-government powers exist only by permission of the government. The government has not transferred these powers to the lower levels with the intention of creating trouble for itself, but rather with the intention of improving its hold on urban society. This way of transferring power is based on management needs and not on the recognition of a genuine need for developing civil society.<sup>8</sup>

### **Some comments**

In an even wider historical perspective, community development in fact represents an important new creation in the administration’s search for a suitable means of control and government legitimacy. A logical development result is the achievement of efficient administrative control over the community organizations. The Shanghai model shows that its so called system of “two levels of government, three levels of management”, placing the community within the scope of the sub district (street) level, and combining

---

<sup>8</sup> Some Chinese scholars argue that community development in China means a rise to some extent of civil society.

the systems of leadership, enforcement and support with the sub district (street) level management”, has in fact rather successfully replaced the old system of street management offices. As for the experiment with the currently ongoing Beijing Lugu community management, the intention has been from the start to completely replace the old (street) level management. This differs from the Shanghai model in that the Lugu model is not built on the basis of the old street level management but is from the start an entirely new community system. If this Lugu experiment becomes successful, it will have a significant impact on the reform of the sub district (street) level management system and the development of new communities in the rest of Beijing. Clearly, the “community self-government” model is in essence a government initiated reform exercise to set up government power at the grass roots level.

The color of the government is inherent in the community development process in China. Communities are not only quasi governmental, to some extent they are also grassroots organs of local government. A very popular report points out that the government is in fact doing five “from government to community”: government staff is deployed to the community; government work tasks are shifted to the community; services promised by the government now become the responsibility of the community; evaluation and supervision formerly carried out by the government are now undertaken in the community; and government funds are assigned to the community. Such a highly bureaucratized community will not be able to fully meet the demands of various groups of citizens for organizing society’s resources or forming associations and solving the growing social problems.

### **Serious lack of skilled personnel**

In most communities, and in particular in those that are transformed from neighborhood committees, the administrative cadres are mostly pensioners. In communities where the cadres are not pensioners, the average age of leaders or ordinary staff is generally high and the education level is relatively low. According to a survey conducted by Tang Zhongxin based on 300 neighborhood committees in 12 cities nation wide, in 300 committee leaders, the percentage of more than 50 years is 68.5%, among this, the percentage of more than 60 years again occupies 37.1%, the percentage of below 35 years is only 3.6%. Concerning the education level, junior middle school level or below occupies is 66%, junior college level or above is only 8.3%.<sup>9</sup>

Another survey made by a civil affairs department of Chengdu city shows that in 485 neighborhood committee cadres, the retired personnel occupies 90%, the education

---

<sup>9</sup> Tang xinzhong, “outline theory on the urban community construction”, Tianjin people’s publishing house, 2000, pp219.

condition is: the senior middle school level and above accounts for 2.1%, junior middle school and primary school level takes up 75.9%.<sup>10</sup>

What is noteworthy is that there are almost no volunteers among the community administrative personnel. To date, government appointed or recommended elected leaders are still the major source of community administrative personnel. The lack of skilled personnel constitutes a big obstacle to community development.

### **Financial predicaments**

According to a MOCA official, communities have been assigned from 40 to 100 legal obligations or responsibilities.<sup>11</sup> With such a heavy administrative burden, financial support and resources are both insufficient and irregular. Usually, funding to the communities is allocated by the sub district administrative office (for those communities built at the sub district level, e.g. Lugu community, funding is allocated by the district government). Throughout all parts of the country, communities suffer from a lack of funding. Until the present time, the allocation of funds has still not been institutionalized in the annual government plan. And there aren't many financial resources from outside the government either. In case the government shifts its focus away from community development and decreases the corresponding community funding, the communities will be thrown into very dire circumstances.

### **Poor percentage of participants in community development**

Perhaps the most serious problem is the apathy of the residents in relation to community development. This is a fatal problem which poses a serious and direct threat to the existence and development of real self governance communities. This also exposes the weakness of such a bureaucratized community development process.

A large number of surveys and other relevant information reveal that a majority of residents have been unwilling to become involved in community affairs. A survey conducted in Qingdao shows that 36.4% of the residents do not acquaint themselves with the functions and roles of the community council or neighborhood committee. 25.1% do not know the name of the head of the neighborhood committee. 68.9% never propose any suggestion or opinion to the neighborhood committee. 41% never contact the neighborhood committee by their own initiative. The percentage of the participation

---

<sup>10</sup> See "City Neighborhood Committee Communication" Journal, Vol. 3 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Li, Baoku. "Study Carefully, Work Hard, and Improve Steadily." Shequ Construction: Material Collected, Jiangbei District, Chongqing City, Dec. 2000. pp76.

of the residents in the activities of the community service center is only 2.8%. 81.3% rarely take part in the community activities.<sup>12</sup>

Even in Beijing, a survey shows that the percentage of the residents willing to participate in community affairs is only 16.48% -- the percentage will be lower if estimated by actual participation ratio.<sup>13</sup> In Lugu community, a government initiated “volunteer” organization, the percentage is even less than 1%<sup>14</sup>. The survey results are echoed by the community leadership council’s constant complaining about the residents’ apathy toward community affairs.

Whether viewed in the light of the preliminary objective of strengthening the control over society, or in the light of the goal of reorganizing the social structure, or from the point of view of providing solutions to growing social problems through community development, when considering the low percentage of the residents participating in community affairs, one can hardly say that the current community development process is a success.<sup>15</sup>

A brief analysis of the above-mentioned problems reveals that, although there are possibly various factors that may be blamed for the problems, the lack of development of civil society organizations undoubtedly contributes in a crucial way to the problems. If we examine the process of community development, we will find that the only active actor on the community development stage is always the government itself.

Community development in essence is a systematic social project, and it needs a combination of efforts of the government, the private sector, and especially of civil society organizations. Looking back at the historical process of community development in most other countries, we find that civil society organizations at all times play a vital role in the community development process. In the UK, civil society organizations appear as an important partner in government attempts to address problems in inner city areas in its New Deal for community programme, whereby an initial seventeen pathfinder areas have been identified in which unemployment and crime are to be

---

<sup>12</sup> Qingdao Administrative College research programme group, “the choice of administrative model of community in the urban area and its path”. <http://www.mca.gov.cn>.

<sup>13</sup> See “comparative study on the urban community from an international viewpoint”. Edited by Hou Yulan, Beijing publishing house, 2000, pp20.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with wang Xiuzhi, Leader of neighborhood committee of Qixingyuan Xiaoqu

<sup>15</sup> Participation is the soul of community development. In the early stage of community development research, community development is regarded as synonymous with community participation. De kadt argued that community development should be superseded by a more appropriate form of community participation (“community participation for health: the case of Latin American”, World Development Vol.10. No.7 1982); Sheng thought that “community development and community participation are basically the same”, Sheng Y. K., “Community Participation in Low-income Housing Projects: problems and perspectives”, Community Development Journal Vol.25. No.1 1990.

tackled.<sup>16</sup> Emphasizing the role of the civil society organizations is an essential component of the “the third way” of the Blair government. In the US, civil society organizations have been playing a pivotal role in the community development process. They work both as participants in government community development programmes and as advocacy groups in drawing attention to some disaffected communities. In the US, the role of civil society organizations in the community development process is so important that we can draw a safe conclusion that without the support from civil society organizations, there would be no development of the communities. In Israel, community work is best perceived as two ends. One end is the government and the other is the civil society organizations.<sup>17</sup> Community development is closely related to the development of civil society organizations in most places of the world. Returning to the Chinese context, we could view the relationship in another way: We find that the source of almost every existing problem in the process of community development is the lack of the support of civil society organizations. Thus, community bureaucratization has its source in the lack of civil society organizations because it is impossible to support community development and put pressure on the government to empower the community without sufficient well-organized civil society organizations; civil society organizations could be a basis for training skilled personnel for the community development. The full development of civil society organizations could provide a wide range of professional experiences and technological support to the community development process. Many governmental agencies recognize the value of civil society organizations which have developed skills and expertise in organizing participation by the people.<sup>18</sup> Civil society organizations are also a very important source of fundraising for community development. The special role that civil society organizations play in raising funds for the community lies not only in the direct collection of money but is also embodied in their advocacy work and the pressure they put on the government to allocate funds and resources to the community.<sup>19</sup>

The lack of support from civil society organizations is the most immediate cause behind the low percentage of participants in the community development projects. We often

---

<sup>16</sup> Keith Popple and Mark Redmond. “community development and the voluntary sector in the new millennium: the implication of the Third Way in the UK”. *Community Development Journal* VOL.35 NO.4 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Yossi Korazimkōrōsy. “Towards a new balance between governmental and non-governmental community work: the case of Israel”. *Community Development Journal* Vol.35. No.3 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Gerard Hautekeur, “community development in Europe”, *Community Development Journal*, Vol.40 No.4 2005.

<sup>19</sup> This could be seen clearly in the development of colonias (community) in the US. Colonias are predominantly Hispanic, poor, unplanned settlements and neighborhoods along the US-Mexican border. They lack sewer, clean water, safe and sanitary housing and other essential service such as electricity and paved roads. NGO networks successful lobbied the state (Texas) to create an infrastructure funding source to help colonias. Since 1990, the federal government has allocated millions of dollars for the colonias. Details see Angela Donelson. “The role of NGOs and NGO networks in meeting the needs of US colonias”. *Community Development Journal* Vol.39 No.4 2004.

compare civil society organizations to “democratic schools” or “training bases” as they have the powerful function of fostering people’s democratic consciousness and of enlightening and cultivating citizens’ spirit of participating in public affairs. The lack of this kind of democratic schools and training bases over a long period of time has inevitably caused the apathy among the people toward community development.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> There are also some other reasons for this, e.g., work units still have an important influence on many people and for these people work units are more relevant to their own interests than are the residential communities.

### **III. CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS, THEIR CURRENT STATE AND CONTRIBUTION TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, as I mentioned above, the work unit system was established almost as a direct continuation of the war time management system of "the Party's revolutionary ranks." By the end of the 1950s, the work unit system reached into all corners of society. As a result of this, almost all of the old and traditional social organizations were eliminated. The remaining and the newly established social organizations were all firmly controlled by the government. In the 1960s, there were only 100 national level social organizations and 6000 local level social organizations.<sup>21</sup> And these social organizations, strictly speaking, were not "real" civil society organizations as they were closely tied to and even incorporated in the government structure. During the so called "Cultural revolution" (1966-1976), there were hardly any social organizations except numerous chaotic mass movements.

The re-establishment of social organizations began at the end of the 1970s. In the 1980s and 1990s, Chinese social organizations experienced a period of "explosive growth". In those years, the number of registered social organizations reached 220,000, the highest number since 1949. During that same period, the question of how to realize effective social control under the new social circumstances was also on the government agenda, especially after the 1989 student protests and the 1999 Falungong disturbance. In October 1989, right after the student protests, a Regulation on the registration and management of social organizations was promulgated and came into force. The implementation of this regulation in many ways resulted in tighter government control over social organizations, and it marked the end of the period of prosperity for social organizations since 1979.

In 1998, in order to further tighten the control over social organizations, the government amended the Regulation of 1989, thus making it more difficult for social organizations to develop or even to survive, particularly for privately initiated NGOs. The 1998 Regulation which is still in effect<sup>22</sup> lines up very tough criteria for the establishment and operation of social organizations. It is a controlling-oriented administrative regulation of civil society organizations.

---

<sup>21</sup> Zhou shaoqing, bring the freedom of association under the control of rule of law

<sup>22</sup> In addition to this Regulation, there are some other government enacted regulations concerning the social organizations. They are the Provisional Regulations for the Registration and Management of Popular Non-enterprise Work Units (1998); Interim Regulations on Administration of Foreign Chamber of Commerce (1989); Regulations on Administration of Foundations (2004). Since the Regulation on registration and management of social organization is of utmost importance for the development of social organizations, I here provide a detailed introduction to this regulation.

## **“Dual (registration) administrative system”**

Chinese scholars summarize article 6 of the 1998 Regulation as “dual (registration) administrative system”. It means that if you want to establish and operate a social organization, you have to apply to be registered with two authorities and be under the management of these two authorities. Article 6 states that the Ministry of Civil Affairs and local Civil Affairs departments at the county level and above are the basic people’s government agencies for registration and management of social organizations (referred to as “dengji guanli jiguan” in Chinese). The relevant departments of the State Council and of the local governments at the county level and above, or organs empowered by the State Council or the local government at county level and above, serve as the relevant leading units of social organizations in the areas of trade, science and other professional areas (also referred to as “professional leading units” or “yewu zhuguan danwei” in Chinese ).

The Regulation entrusts the registration and management agencies (“dengji guanli jiguan”) and the professional leading units (“yewu zhuguan danwei”) with broad supervisory and management powers. According to Article 13, the registration and management agency will not approve a preliminary application to register an organization in any of the following cases:

- 1, if it can be shown that the objectives and area of work of a social organization applying for the first stage of registration do not comply with Article 4 of these regulations
- 2, if in the same administrative area there is already a social organization active in the same or similar area of work, there is no need for a new organization to be established
- 3, if the persons applying or the intended persons in charge have ever received criminal sanction of being deprived of their political rights, or do not possess complete civil liability IV.
- 4, if deception is employed in the preliminary application.
- 5, other cases prohibited by law or administrative rules and regulations.

Article 28 imposes the following responsibilities on the professional leading units of social organizations:

- 1, it is responsible for investigating the social organization’s preliminary application, establishment, modification or cancellation of registration.
- 2, it is responsible for supervising and guiding the social organization in observance of the constitution, laws, statutory regulations, national policy, and in developing activities in accordance with their charter.

3, it is responsible for conducting a preliminary stage of the annual review.

4, it is responsible for helping the registration and management agency and other relevant departments to investigate and deal with illegal activities of social organizations.

5, it is responsible with other relevant departments for guiding the process of winding up social organizations.

### **Excessively restrictive clauses on the establishment of social organizations**

Article 10 stipulates that to establish a social organization, the following conditions must be satisfied:

1, an organization must have more than 50 individual members or more than 30 institutional members or, if it has both individual and institutional members, a total of at least fifty.

2, it must have a standard name, and organizational capacity.

3, it must have a fixed location.

4, it must have staff with qualifications appropriate to the professional activities of the organization.

5, it must have lawful assets and a source of funds. National level organizations must have a minimum of 100,000 Yuan to cover their activities; local social organizations and inter-area social organizations must have a minimum of 30,000 Yuan.

6, it must be legally liable in its own right.

A social organization's name must comply with the law and statutory regulations and must not offend public morality. A social organization's name must reflect its activities, character and area of operations. Where national organizations use 'Chinese', 'All-China' etc, in their titles, they must be approved in accordance with the relevant state regulations. Local social organizations cannot use 'National', 'Chinese', 'All China' etc in their names.

### **Annual review system**

Article 31 stipulates:

Social organizations must submit to their professional leading unit an annual work report for the preceding year by March 31; after preliminary investigation and approval by the professional leading unit, the report must be submitted, by May 31, to the

registration and management agency, which will then carry out an annual review. The work report should include the following contents: the organization's situation in respect of complying with laws, regulations and national policy; its situation in respect of these regulations' registration requirements; activities carried out in accordance with its charter; any changes in membership, administration; financial situation

### **Reporting system and “purging” as “rectification”**

In addition to the above mentioned administrative legislative measures, in practice, government organs have developed other controlling measures which bear the same legal binding effect. One of those controlling measures is “reporting system for significant activities”, which means, for activities such as organizing a large –scaled seminar or putting together an exhibition, the social organizations must seek the approval of the registration and management agencies and professional leading units. The Shanghai provisions on the management of social organizations require social organizations to report to the registration department and professional leading unit 15 days before they hold the general assembly to set up the organization, and before an election meeting regarding the change to a leading post, when they organize activities across provinces, or before any other activities that may have a significant social impact. The Chongqing Provision requests social organizations to report in advance to the relevant registration department or the leading units if they are going to organize significant activities.<sup>23</sup>

The most severe controlling measure is the technique of “purging”. From the latter half of 1989, there have been nation wide purges on two occasions. One happened in 1990, the other in 1997. As justification for the purging, the Ministry of Civil Affairs issued the following purging guidelines:

- 1, Abolition of social organizations that opposed the four cardinal principles and advocated bourgeois liberal thoughts, especially those who showed serious wrongdoing during the June Event in 1989.
- 2, Postponement of registration, or revocation of social organizations whose target was profit, or were engaged in business activities that were irrelevant to the purposes of the organizations, or engaged in activities that were contrary to the charters of the organizations.
- 3, Dissolution or merging of social organizations that were not needed by society, duplicated, or did not meet the basic conditions for carrying out activities.

---

<sup>23</sup> Yuwen li, edited, “Freedom of association in China and Europe: comparative perspectives in law and practice, Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 2005”

4, Rejection of order to dissolve social organizations that were established without official registration. As to those social organizations that were really needed for society and met the conditions prescribed by law, they had to be reregistered.

5, Clarify the relationship between social organization and their leading units.

6, Strengthening supervision, promoting social organizations' management according to their charters and law.<sup>24</sup>

After the first “purge”, the number of national level social organizations was reduced from 1600 to 1200, and the local social organizations dropped from 200,000 to 180,000.<sup>25</sup> The second purging lasted from 1997 to 2000 and after the purging, by the end of 2000, the total number of national level social organizations dropped from 200,000 to 136,000, and the national level social organizations reduced from 1500 to 1849.<sup>26</sup>

### **Some comments**

At the 16th National People's Congress, the central government issued a strategic objective of building a “well-managed, civilized and peaceful new community”. This was an inspiring and timely decision. However, when we aspire like other developed countries to using mature, civilized community associations to bring “humanism, harmony and good order” into our daily lives, we must not overlook the fact that the evolution and maturation of civil society associations in developed countries came about through a natural historical process in which, under the protection of the rule of law, the people's multitude of organizational activities was a decisive factor. Tocqueville realized that “Americans of all ages, all stations of life and all dispositions are forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types - religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, very large and very minute.” This course of history in America is not of a universal nature and we do not need to repeat every step of the American way, but it is without a doubt that compared with Western development countries, China currently suffers from a lack of organizational activities and is faced with an organizational crisis. To adapt to the changing social structure and to support community development through implementing the freedom of association in a rule of law

---

<sup>24</sup> “Reform of china's social organizations- from a government choice to a social choice” , edited by Wang Ming, Beijing Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2001, pp51. Also see Yuwen Li, edited, Freedom of association in China and Europe: comparative perspectives in law and practice, Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 2005. PP62

<sup>25</sup> Ge yunsong, “the system on the third sector”, in Su li et al(eds), “the regulatory system and development- the legal environment for the third sector”, Zhejiang Renmin Publishing House, 1999, pp71-73.

framework is the only way to the successful transition of Chinese society. As a scholar once asked: “How much freedom of association will the Chinese state afford its citizens; and how much freedom of association can it afford to deny them?”<sup>27</sup>

It is said that the regulation of 1998 is being considered for amendment. And some scholars even cannot anticipate the basic direction of this possible amendment.<sup>28</sup> As I understand it, even if the amendment has some positive results, e.g. to loosen control over some kinds of social organizations or even to abolish the system of management by professional leading units, the perspective remains grim as long as the administrative system of social organizations and the entire environment remain unchanged.<sup>29</sup>

### **The current state of civil society organizations and their support to community development**

Through the combined work of the 'registration and management agencies' and the 'professional leading units' as well as a variety of control measures, the quantity, quality and the structure of civil society organizations are all reshaped by the government authority. One of the necessary results of such reshaping is that the quantity of the civil society organizations is fairly disproportionate to the large population. According to statistics (table 01), there is only 1.5 civil society organization for every ten thousand Chinese persons. With this small number, it is hard to imagine that we can be successful in mobilizing community residents to build their own communities.

Table 01 Association figure of per 10,000 people in 15 states and regions

NAME OF COUNTRIES	NUMBER
France	110.5
Japan	97.2
Belgium	80.4
Denmark	78

<sup>26</sup> Zhou Shaoqing, “Bringing Freedom of Association under the Rule of Law: An Effective Path to Solving our Nation’s Problems of the Right of Association”, PHD dissertation, 2006.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.cucc.org.cn/list.asp?unid=586>.

<sup>28</sup> Professor Yuwen li expresses her uncertainty about the possible forthcoming regulation as “it is difficult to predict whether any substantive improvement will be made, or whether some setbacks will occur”.

<sup>29</sup> Professor Wang Ming stated that “in the short term one can not expect that a comprehensive and liberal system charged with promoting NGO development and standardizing their activities will appear in China. The existing and forthcoming regulations and policies, no matter how detailed and logical their contents are, the control and restrictive nature and the more and more complicated procedure and framework, constitute an element of limiting china’s NGO growth for a long time to come”. See “Reform of china’s social organizations- from a government choice to a social choice” , edited by Wang Ming, Beijing Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2001, pp21. Also see Yuwen Li, edited, Freedom of association in China and Europe: comparative perspectives in law and practice, Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 2005. PP66.

US	51.8
Hungary	35.5
Germany	26.2
Indonesia	17.2
Singapore	14.6
Brazil	12.7
India	10.2
Taiwan, China	9.3
Poland	7.7
Romania	5.3
Egypt	2.4
China	1.5

As for the quality of civil society organizations in China, there are even more problems because of the government's strict control. The registered social organizations view themselves more often as objects rather than subjects. Their relationship with the government is more or less like the relationship of mice and cats. The lack of a sense of responsibility for the welfare of society is a big problem.

In sum, in regard to the situation of the civil society organisations themselves, due to a variety of causes, certain overall characteristics are emerging among civil society organizations in China: "Legal" (the registered) organisations are increasingly becoming "government-run" in nature – they lack independence. It is a widespread problem among civil society organisations that they do not have sufficient capacity to sustain themselves. Many civil society organisations lack public credibility due to greatly destructive short-term behaviour. As for the majority civil society organisations, the organisational structure, management system, decision-making process, financial system, motivational system, supervisory system, and internal self disciplinary mechanisms are incomplete, and irregular accounts is a common phenomenon. Some civil society organisations collude with the work unit with which they are associated and thus seek illegal benefits for themselves through the exploitation of administrative powers. In the name of not-for-profit, some civil society organisations gain fame by deceiving the public, their deeds do not match their words, and through various means they seek irregular profits for themselves or for a small group of people; thereby they corrupt the public's sense of social responsibility and volunteer spirit.

For the unregistered organizations, the critical problem is that most of them are motivated by and centered around short-term interests; this is partly because of their unstable status vis-à-vis the law.

The structure of the civil society organizations is also problematic. In practice, the civil society organizations that are most developed, relatively speaking, are those that deal with issues related to the developing market economy. Trade associations and intermediary associations are among these few kinds of well developed organizations. The civil society organizations that are involved in community development are the least developed. In a work report of the Lugu community, the community official points out that one of the weaknesses of community development is that the government has left too little space for the development of civil society organizations. He argues that this weakness is also an important reason for the under-development of the community resident self-governance system.<sup>30</sup> One official concluded that in the absence of civil society organizations, the so-called community self-governance is practically a situation of “shared governance between the local government, the local CCP organization and community residents”.<sup>31</sup> At the community level, except for some government initiated “social organizations”, what is commonly seen are some temporary small-scale mass organizations, such as hobby groups, “yangge” group (a mass dance activity, participants are mostly old women) and so on. They can be characterized more as “rights” and “welfare” recipient organizations rather than real participants in the development of the community.

From the experience of developed countries, especially from some developing countries, community development needs systematic support from civil society organizations.

There is a civil society organizations network for community development. According to Bennett,<sup>32</sup> this network includes:

#### 1, CBOs

Among these civil society organizations, the CBO (community based organization) is the basic one. The CBO is the grassroots organization of community development. CBOs are often regarded as the bottom organizations of an NGO hierarchy. They always work on a very small scale and have either no access or very little access to funds, training and consultancy. Their strengths are that they are very large in numbers and have close contact with the community; they understand well what the community residents need and therefore can deliver what is most needed to the community residents.

#### 2, Membership organizations, typically labeled NGOs

---

<sup>30</sup> Working report on the management innovation in Lugu community\*, unpublished internal material.

<sup>31</sup> An interview with a government official.

<sup>32</sup> Bennett, Jon, ed. “NGOS and governments: a review of current practice for Southern and Eastern NGOs”, Oxford : INTRAC, 1997. pp132.

This kind of NGO contains all the possible components of an organization. Apart from their own projects, they also work with CBOs in order to replicate projects in different parts of the country. Thus, CBOs are highly dependent on NGOs for funds and networking while these NGOs are partially dependent on CBOs for legitimacy. NGOs are characterized as facilitating the inception and development of CBOs, enabling CBOs to grow not only in size but also in quality.

### 3, Intermediary support organizations

Financially, both of the above types of organizations are largely dependent on the intermediary support organizations. Support organizations are mainly those NGOs who have partnerships with donor NGOs from the north. As such, they not only provide funds for projects but are also active in capacity-building in terms of training, equipment and consultancy. In addition, Intermediary NGOs may also forge links between beneficiaries and levels of government, donors and local financial institutions.<sup>33</sup>

### 4, International donor agencies

This kind of organization distributes most of its financial resources through support organizations and membership organizations and rarely approaches CBOs directly.

The above mentioned four kinds of organizations constitute an integrated chain in the support of community development. And it is well accepted as an internationally effective experience, especially in developing countries. A dense network of civil society organizations apparently strengthens community development: “it channels new information and resources to the community. It increases the community’s stock of knowledge and makes it more adept in using it. It augments its political voice and increases its capacity to quickly organize around issues when they become critical.”<sup>34</sup> And it is said that when community problem solving is embedded in dense networks of social interaction, inside the community, incentives for selfness are minimized and generosity can become the norm.”<sup>35</sup>

Without this chain of relationships between the different levels of organizations, the development of the community becomes either completely bureaucratized or it ends in failure in terms of the real meaning of community development. Noteworthy is that the Chinese government seems not to be aware of the relationship between fostering the development of NGOs and developing good communities. What the government wants is a developed community without a corresponding full development of the “trouble making” NGOs. What the government is doing can be compared to constructing a

---

<sup>33</sup> Leo Thomas, “NGOs in Cities, an Annotated Bibliography”, INTRAC, Oxford, 1995.

<sup>34</sup> John Friedmann, “Empowerment, The Politics of Alternative Development”, Blackwell, 1998, pp161.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Hibbard. “Devolution and Community Development in the US”. Community Development Journal. Vol.34 No.1 1999.

beautiful second floor without giving any consideration to the troublesome, tiresome first floor.

Thus it is quite imperative to undertake more in-depth theoretical research on the relationship between community development and civil society organizations.

#### **IV.COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS, ALTERNATIVE OR INTERACTIVE?**

In the global and especially in the European context, the issue of the relationship between community development and civil society organizations is by no means a new issue, and the relationship between the two (in particular the role of community development in the formation of civil society organizations) is almost completely settled and clarified, as is evident from the Budapest Declaration:

Community development is a way of strengthening civil society by prioritizing the actions of communities, and their perspectives in the development of social, economic and environmental policy. It seeks the empowerment of local communities, taken to mean both geographical communities, communities of interest or identity and communities organizing around specific themes or policy initiatives. It strengthens the capacity of people as active citizens through their community groups, organizations and networks; and the capacity of institutions and agencies (public, private and non-governmental) to work in dialogue with citizens to shape and determine change in their communities. It plays a crucial role in supporting active democratic life by promoting the autonomous voice of disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. It has a set of core values/social principles covering human rights, social inclusion, equality and respect for diversity; and a specific skills and knowledge base.

Some scholars even view “civil society itself as a community outcome”. Ferenc Myszlivetz stated that “civil society is ...a public zone, a sphere of solidarity, where various interests are articulated and confront each other, where conflicts take place between individuals, groups and organizations... civil society is a relation of all these, a kind of reflexivity, not a collection of organizations. It is the mutual interaction that is important, that is what generates a force field in which...civil society comes to being”.<sup>36</sup>

As for the role of civil society organizations in the process of community development, it needs no further argumentation. “One feature of the UK voluntary sector has been community development”<sup>37</sup>. It is well known that on the European stage of community development, civil society organizations were, are, and will be the most important actors.

---

<sup>36</sup> See Iona Vercseg. “Central and Eastern Europe in the Limelight”. Community Development Journal, Vol.40 No.4 2005.

<sup>37</sup> Keith Popple and Mark Redmond. “Community development and the Voluntary sector in the New Millennium: the Implication of the Third Way in the UK”. Community Development Journal VOL.35 NO.4 2000.

However, in the context of China, community development and civil society organizations are not regarded as closely related aspects as in the European context. In China, people usually think of community development as governmental “business” and consequently they step aside and hesitate to participate. Meanwhile, people have always regarded civil society organizations as “grassroots” organizations and tended to view them as antagonistic to government initiated community development. Thus, it is of much urgency to further analyze the relationship between community development and civil society organizations in China.

### **Closely connected in spirit and in definition**

Ife once stated that modern society is too “secular” and has left little room for notions of the sacred or for spiritual values. “This can be seen to have denied one of the most important aspects of human existence. Hence, there is strong need for community development to incorporate notions of spiritual development”.<sup>38</sup> Here, community development is viewed as closely connected to the spiritual pursuit of human beings. If we probe into the spiritual aspect of civil society organizations, we would also find a strong need for a spiritual purpose. As we know, the freedom of association is at the heart of civil society. At the heart of freedom of association is a kind of human need and desire to connect with other people.

Fromm stated that “The physiologically conditioned needs are not the only imperative part of man’s nature. There is another part just as compelling, one which is not rooted in bodily processes but in the very essence of the human mode and practice of life: the need to be related to the world outside oneself, the need to avoid aloneness. ... An individual may be alone in a physical sense for many years and yet he may be related to ideas, values, or at least social patterns that give him a feeling of communion and “belonging”. “The spiritual relatedness to the world can assume many forms: the monk in his cell who believes god and the political prisoner kept in isolation who feels one with his fellow fighters are not alone morally.....the kind of relatedness to the world may be noble or trivial, but even being related to the basest kind of pattern is immensely preferable to being alone. Religion and nationalism, as well as any custom and any belief however absurd and degrading, if it only connects the individual with others, are refuges from what man most dreads: isolation”<sup>39</sup>.

It is in the sense of spiritual needs that the notions of community development and civil society organizations overlap and become closely related. There are many common characteristics in the way different scholars define community development and civil society organizations. According to a so called “Classic definition” of community,

---

<sup>38</sup> Ife, “Community Development “Creating Community Alternatives: vision, analysis and practice”, Longman, South Melbourne, Australia, J.1995.

community is “A body of persons living together, and practicing, more or less, community of goods”. “Common character”, “quality in common”, “commonness”, “agreement”, “identity”. “Social intercourse”; “fellowship”, “communion” are the main elements. This definition implies a certain degree of commonality between individuals and can be extended to include understanding, trust, cohesiveness, group commitment, sharing, and conviviality between individuals<sup>40</sup>. Tonnies defined the community as being “an intimate, mutually protective, humanitarian social community composed of like-minded people with similar values”. Communitarians regard the acknowledgement of community as the essential component within the formation of individual identity and as the means for citizens to achieve an improved level of personal well-being.<sup>41</sup> Love M. Chile and Gareth Simpson define community development as the process in which members of community attempt collaboratively to promote what they consider to be their collective well-being through unity of action.<sup>42</sup> In their view, community development has six dimensions: economic, social, political, spiritual, cultural and environmental. Bauman writes that community “is like a roof under which we shelter in heavy rain, like a fire place at which we warm our hands on a frosty day”.<sup>43</sup> In the UK, community development is described as “building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about changing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives”.<sup>44</sup> The aim of community development is regarded as being “to enhance the social bonds among members of the community, motivated the citizens for self help”.<sup>45</sup> “Community development has at its foundation an ideology that motivates people to link with each other”.<sup>46</sup> Most definitions invoke “a sense of belonging, of solidarity, of shared identity and interests”.

Above I have provided examples of various definitions of community and community development. Now let us turn to the definition of civil society organizations or (the freedom of) association. According to international human rights covenants, (the

---

<sup>39</sup> Erich Fromm, “Escape From Freedom”, Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, Limited., 1972, pp 19-20.

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.tela.bc.ca/ma-thesis/>.

<sup>41</sup> John Dixon, Rhys Dogan and Alan Sanderson. “Community and Communitarian: A philosophical Investigation. Community Development Journal Vol.40 No.1. Oxford University and Community Development Journal 2005.

<sup>42</sup> Love M. Chile and Gareth Simpson, “Spirituality and community development: Exploring the link between the individual and the collective”. Community Development Journal, Vol.39 No.4 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Bauman, Z. “Community, Seeking Safety in an Insecure World”, Polity Press, Cambridge 2001, pp1.

<sup>44</sup> Alison Gilchrist “community development in the UK- possibilities and paradoxes”. Community Development Journal, Vol.38 No.1 2003.

<sup>45</sup> Barker, “the social work dictionary”, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, NASW press, Washington, DC. 1995, PP69.

<sup>46</sup> Love M. Chile and Gareth Simpson, “Spirituality and community development: Exploring the link between the individual and the collective”. Community Development Journal, Vol.39 No.4 2004.

freedom of) association is described in the sense that “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests”. In the Chinese regulation on social organizations, a social organization is described as “a voluntary group formed by Chinese citizens in order to realize a shared objective”. In the dictionary, we find that association is explained as “an organized body of people who have an interest, activity, or purpose in common”<sup>47</sup>

Through a brief analysis we discover that community development and civil society organizations have many common characteristics: “shared interests”, “shared identity”, “solidarity”, “mutual understanding”, “social inclusion” and so on. In fact, in the broadest sense, we may categorize a community as a civil society organization. As argued at the Conference of Civil Society and Community Development (18–20 April 2004), community “is not necessarily constructed by geography”. “Communities cannot simply be conceptualized in geographical terms. The importance of communities of interest has been increasingly understood, along with the importance of respecting diversity, and diverse and potentially competing interests in terms of race and gender, sexuality, age and disability, as well as in terms of class”.<sup>48</sup> “Community development is about social entrepreneurship whilst civil society is about political entrepreneurship”, “the community should be at the centre of civil society”. In this sense, community development itself is a part of civil society (organizations).<sup>49</sup>

Apart from being closely related to civil society organizations in spirit and in definitions, community development also shares other common characteristics with civil society organizations, particularly as concerns their activity mandate. This can be illustrated by the key concepts, principles, functions and roles of community development.

### Key concepts and principles of community development

According to Hautekeur<sup>50</sup>, the following are key concepts of community development:

- Delivers professional and independent support to groups of people
- Identify, together with local people, community problems

---

<sup>47</sup> See the Free Dictionary by FARLEX

<sup>48</sup> Gary Craig and Marjorie Mayo, “rediscovering community development: some prerequisites for working “in and against the state”. *Community Development Journal*, Vol.30 No.2 1995.

<sup>49</sup> Oakley observes, “In most of the recent studies, the term ‘community development’ is no longer used much, and has been replaced by a plethora of new terms like grassroots organizations, non-governmental organizations and so on”. Here community development is the same thing as civil society (organizations). See Helen Hintjens, “community development in the third world: continuity and change”. *Community Development Journal*, Vol.33 No.4 1998.

<sup>50</sup> Gerard Hautekeur, “community development in Europe”, *Community Development Journal*, Vol.40 No.4 2005; “VIBOSO+ CEBSD questionnaire: community development in Europe” VIBOSO, Brussels 2003 .

- Increases the empowerment of local people so that they can organize themselves in order to solve problems.
- Turns its attention primarily to people struggling with social deprivation and exclusion
- Contributes to a sustainable community based mutual respect and social justice
- Challenges power structures that hinder people's participation
- Contributes to the sociocultural development of the neighborhood by the local people themselves

Hautekeur also summarized the basic principles of community development developed by the CEBSD (the Combined European Bureau for Social Development) by Henderson<sup>51</sup>:

1. Individual and collective: community development work is involved in changing and in developing both individuals and groups. Inextricably linked to the growth of individual is the transformation process of group.
2. Process and result: in relation to the first principle, there is creative tension between the learning process of the individuals and the group on the one hand and achieving concrete results-outcomes on the other.
3. Focus on disadvantage: community development work is not a neutral activity because it gives priority to the struggle against exclusion and neglect. This focus on the most disadvantaged groups and local communities explains why, in concrete terms, groups of women, ethnic-cultural minorities and the unemployed are supported. Given that the structural causes of disadvantage often go beyond the level of the local community, community development workers are not only active in the local community but, together with other partners, they seek to influence policies at various levels.
4. Participation: community development workers mobilize people.
5. Prevention: through their involvement in the development work, they acquire social and educative skills. In this way problems can be avoided or can be prevented from escalating and getting out of hand.
6. Transformation and influence: in community development, it is a question both of a commitment to change, and of helping local people cope with the process of

---

<sup>51</sup> Henderson, P. "Social inclusion and citizenship in Europe: the contribution of community development", Dr. Gradus Hendriks Stichting, Den Haag, 2002.

transformation. Community development work supports and stimulates local people to organize themselves in order to achieve the desired objectives.

## **Functions and roles of community development**

The functions of community development vary depending on the different states or different periods in which countries are:

In 1950s, community development was raised by the UN as a means to address the increasing poverty. In the 1960s and 1970s, in response to the visible inequalities within society, community development adopted radical social action strategies. In the 1990s, community development became enmeshed with social justice alternatives in order to counterbalance the negative agenda of globalization and neo-liberalism.<sup>52</sup> To date, except for dealing with poverty, community development is increasingly used as tool to address a variety of societal problems: to combat social exclusion; to bring about social integration; to devolve power to the grassroots level; to provide services; to prevent crime; to build social capital, etc. In practice there are many examples of each of these functions.

In Ireland, community development has different functions in different periods. Prior to 1960, more than a century ago, community development was not primarily about tackling poverty but about strengthening community solidarity, generating local enterprise; from 1960-1990, community-based social services, operated by local organizations, functioned as a substitute for state-provided welfare. By 1978, there were 300 such community service organizations; from 1990 onwards, the community functioned as a way of addressing poverty and social exclusion.<sup>53</sup>

The role of community development has been characterized as follows: horizontally, community development has to support elected council members or members of parliament (representative democracy), or support local community organizations (participative democracy); vertically, community development has to provide information and advice to citizens in the context of government programmes, or give priority to support local community groups.<sup>54</sup> To be more specific, the role of community development can be summarized as follows: “participation, strengthening civil society and local democracy, employment opportunities, housing, upgrading of the neighborhood, social inclusion, sustainable development, rural development, diversity,

---

<sup>52</sup> Jeff Karabanow, “Creating community: a case study of a Montreal Street Kid Agency”. *Community Development Journal*, Vol.34 No.4 1999.

<sup>53</sup> Anna Lee, “Community development in Ireland”, *Community Development Journal*, Vol.38 No.1 2003.

<sup>54</sup> Gerard Hautekeur, “community development in Europe”, *Community Development Journal*, Vol.40 No.4 2005.

intercultural mediation and communication”.<sup>55</sup> Noteworthy, on the background of globalization, community development is moving toward an increased concern for human rights and social justice in a global context, and this will “lead to the emergence of an active worldwide civil society”.<sup>56</sup>

### **Some comments**

Through the above analyses, we arrive at the conclusion that there are many overlapping aspects between community development and civil society organizations, and the two can be said to be interlocked and interactive: In the spiritual pursuit of connecting to each other, in combating poverty, in promoting social inclusion, in fostering citizen participation and democracy, in helping social vulnerable groups, in building social capital...in this sense it seems correct what some western scholars have concluded with respect to community development in western countries, namely that community development is an integral part of civil society (organizations).

What must in particular be emphasized is that although the argumentation about the relationship between community development and civil society organizations is mainly based on the “western experience”, it may also be applied to China’s national conditions, especially since China has wholeheartedly embraced a market oriented and globalized economy and is carrying out a strategy of “small government, big society”. In the current Chinese situation, community development is neither part of, nor interacting positively with, civil society (organizations) but is rather a replacement for civil society (organizations). The reason for this is not that community development is in itself faulty, but rather that the ongoing community development initiative has been seriously bureaucratized. As for this bureaucratization, it is the logical result of the government having chosen the “top down” model of community development.

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Campfens, H. *Community Development around the World*, University of Toronto Press, 1997, pp466.

## **V. TOP DOWN AND BOTTOM UP APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

In any sense, China is now in the midst of a social transition. The Chinese government is, to some extent, obliged to launch a nationwide programme of “community construction” as a measure of uniting the growing number of “members of society” within a controllable framework and as a means of solving numerous societal problems. From the very beginning, the government has been faced with a dilemma: on the one hand, it needs some forms of social organizations to support community development; on the other hand, it fears that social organizations may win the support of the community and make it a base for anti-government activities, or at least a base for campaigning in favour of alternatives to the government’s social policy, such as had been the case in Iran<sup>57</sup> and South Africa.<sup>58</sup>

The aim of promoting social order and political stability was a top priority when the government began its community development programme. In the eyes of the government, however, civil society organizations tend to protect their own rights and to promote goals of social reform and social change that may differ from the goals of the government. The deep contradiction between the government and civil society organizations is both apparent and correlated: the core value of civil society organizations is to promote change whilst the government’s main objective is to promote stability; civil society organizations initiate community development from the bottom whilst the government, to be on the safe side, prefers to implement the programme from above. Ironically, in its efforts to control the “grassroots” organizations, the government may actually have stimulated the needs and instigated the discontentedness of community residents, thus causing social unrest. What should have been a participatory, socially grounded project of “community development” thus inevitably became seriously bureaucratized.

The community development programme can be seen as the government’s reaction to the social transformation that comes with industrialization, urbanization and modernization.

What China is currently experiencing is not unique. Historically, e.g. during the period of 1945-1960 in Holland, community development was seen as an instrument to combat the disrupting consequences of industrialization and modernization and to remedy the backward social development which was considered a threat to society’s norms and

---

<sup>57</sup> In Iran, mosque centered community organizations and institutions contributed greatly to the 1978-79 revolution. See Cyrus Vakili-Zad, “Community power in Islam: the case of Iran”. *Community Development Journal*, Vol.33 No.4 1998.

<sup>58</sup> In South Africa, approximately 2000 community based civic organizations had contributed greatly to the collapse of the apartheid government. See Scott Bollens, “Community development in democratic South Africa”. *Community Development Journal*, Vol.35 No.2 2000.

values.<sup>59</sup> Community development in this period was primarily concerned with culture as a “whole way of life” and the establishment of “a set of behaviors and values”. In the 1970s, accompanying the economic recession, community development boomed in many countries as a means to cope with social problems. Most strikingly, civil society organizations played a pivotal role in this process.<sup>60</sup>

Also, according to Stohr, community development had its roots in the United Kingdom and the United States, where there was a need to assist with the social needs of the urban poor in the industrializing cities.<sup>61</sup>

The roots “in its modern sense in Britain was begun in the nineteenth century by upper- and middle-class idealists and reformers who sought to ameliorate the often appalling conditions under which working –class people lived in the new industrial towns”<sup>62</sup>

China is now confronting social problems that are similar to what many western countries experienced in the early stages of industrialization, urbanization and modernization. This implies that similar measures should perhaps be adopted in order to cope with the problems in China. With this as a point of departure, the role of civil society organizations in community development should be thoroughly re-examined.

In Europe, civil society is so closely related to community development that community development is itself regarded as an inextricable part of civil society. With the European Union prioritizing strategies to strengthen civil society and promote social inclusion, member states are being pressed to develop policies and action plans for community development.<sup>63</sup> In China, community development is practically regarded as governmental business. Thus, as the community development programme unfolds, civil society organizations stand aside, not aware that community development should in fact be their business too.

When examining the current community development practices of many countries in a historical perspective, it becomes apparent that government is a very important force in the building of communities. And in some cases, government even plays a vital role, especially in the preliminary stages of community development. However, community development is, after all, a social business, and a community is made up of the

---

<sup>59</sup> Koos Vos, “community development policy and legislation: The Dutch case”, *Community Development Journal*, Vol.40 No.4 2005.

<sup>60</sup> There are many such examples in the articles published in the “Community Development Journal”.

<sup>61</sup> W. B. Stohr, “Developing from Below: the Bottom-Up Periphery-Inward Development Paradigm”, in “Develop from Above or Below?” Wiley Series, Chichester 1981.

<sup>62</sup> T.R.Batten, “The non-direct approach in group and community work”, Oxford University Press 1967, pp9.

<sup>63</sup> Paul Henderson and Andrew Glen, “from recognition to support: community development workers in the United Kingdom”. *Community Development Journal*, Vol.41 No.3 2006.

community residents themselves. Some scholars argue that even the completely publicly funded community workers are facing the problem of how to keep their distance from the government and how “to work in and against state”.<sup>64</sup> Due to its very nature of a society, the community’s operating logic is independent from the state. Community development is a social process of forming the mechanisms for social integration and cultivating the community’s ability to solve its own problems. This implies the need for a “bottom up” rather than a “top down” approach to community development.

Tony Blair once argued that previous policies had failed because “too much has been imposed from above, when experience shows that success depends on communities themselves having the power and taking the responsibility to make things better”<sup>65</sup>.

From an American perspective, we find that “the trend toward devolution – ‘shifting responsibility for various public services from higher to lower levels of government and from government to community -based organizations’ – has intriguing implications for community development”. The idea of devolution is believed to have arisen because the top down approaches to community development have not been effective in addressing local community issues and local communities are themselves an important source of solutions<sup>66</sup>.

“The opportunity is to realize the ideal of devolution - more effective community problem solving - because ‘the public interest’ is more tangible and visible at the local level. It is presumed that local communities have a degree of cohesion that makes it possible for people to think of themselves as something more than just taxpayers and services recipients - as citizens with collective responsibility for the great collective good”.<sup>67</sup>

The above mentioned remarks on “bottom up” approaches are both informative and inspired. It is true that only the grassroots organizations can possibly understand the true needs of the community and therefore find suitable and practical solutions to these needs. The residents are the real owners of the community both in terms of solving the practical issues and in terms of their spiritual world. However, as a member of Lugu community, what I am experiencing is exactly the opposite. In Lugu community the government

---

<sup>64</sup> Craig, G and Mayo, M. “editorial introduction: rediscovering community development- some prerequisites for working in and against the state”. Community Development Journal, Vol.30 No.2 1995.

<sup>65</sup> SEU Social Exclusion Unit, 1998, Bring Britain Together: A National Strategy for Neighborhood Renewal, Stationery Office, London, UK.

<sup>66</sup> Michael Hibbard. “Devolution and Community Development in the US”. Community Development Journal. Vol.34 No.1 1999.

<sup>67</sup> Michael Hibbard. “Devolution and Community Development in the US”. Community Development Journal. Vol.34 No.1 1999.

agency is almost the only actor that is active in various government initiated programmes. Resident representatives were organized as supervisors and were told they have the rights to put forward advice or even launch complaints on the activities of the government agency. Furthermore, they were “promised” a very good living environment. It is apparent here that people were treated as objects rather than as subjects – they “do not interpret their social meanings through who they are and what they have experienced, but instead focus on who they will become”<sup>68</sup>, “the liberal self is left to lurch between detachment on one hand and entanglement on the other”<sup>69</sup>.

Although I do not agree that “unrestricted human autonomy will result in greater social cohesion”<sup>70</sup> in community development, the top down approach is undoubtedly contradictory to the nature of communities. The government can not “build communities”. Community development must be based on the self governance of residents. And the residents must be well organized through the exercise of their freedom of association, thus forming civil society organizations which become part of the dense network of civil society organizations.

Nevertheless, no matter how much we emphasize the bottom up approach and the role of civil society organizations, it is not suggested that this then entails the complete withdrawal of the government from community development activities. On the contrary, the government’s responsibilities in certain aspects should be strengthened. The government’s positive role includes the following aspects:

- To create an enabling, facilitating and supporting environment through legislative, administrative and judicial measures, one of the important parts of this “environment” is the full, healthy development of civil society organizations. This is the macro role;
- To launch programmes that aim at supporting community-based organizations. This is the micro role;
- Financial support. In most parts of the world most of community funding is provided by government. That is to say, the money of the “government” is only a metaphor – the money of course comes from the taxpayers.

---

<sup>68</sup> John Dixon, Rhys Dogan and Alan Sanderson. “Community and Communitarian: A philosophical Investigation. Community Development Journal Vol.40 No.1. Oxford University and Community Development Journal 2005.

<sup>69</sup> Sandel, M. The procedural republic and the unencumbered self, in S.Avineri and A.de Shalit, Eds, Communitarian and Individualism. Oxford University Press. 1992. pp24

<sup>70</sup> John Dixon, Rhys Dogan and Alan Sanderson. “Community and Communitarian: A philosophical Investigation. Community Development Journal Vol.40 No.1. Oxford University and Community Development Journal 2005.

The government's role in community development can be best illustrated by the practice in Ireland. In 1980, in order to address poverty and social exclusion through community development, the government formed the Community Workers Cooperative (CWC); in 1986, in order to support community development as a way of bringing about social change, the government established the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) with the specific statutory responsibility to support and promote community development. At the local level, in order to make room for active participation of the community, local governments carried out series of reforms aimed at the establishment of new forms of local governance and participative decision-making structures.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, the government launched numerous programmes to promote the role of community development. The good practice of the Irish government did not appear out of the blue. The government policy-makers had come to realize that "an active community and voluntary sector contributes to a democratic, pluralist society, provides opportunities for the development of decentralized institutional administrative structures and fosters a climate in which innovative solutions to complex social problems and enhancement of quality of life can be pursued and realized"<sup>72</sup>.

Traditionally, China has always been a strongly government-centered society. The government has played an extremely important role in almost all areas of the society. As was pointed out in the former part of this thesis, the government controlled approach has many negative impacts on community development. However, in the Chinese context, the government's role in the community development process also has some positive aspects. One of those is that in Jilin province, for example, the provincial government invested 460,000,000 Chinese Yuan in the construction of 1439 infrastructure facilities in communities, each reaching an area of 308 square meters. Jilin is the first province in China in which community infrastructure facilities covering the entire province have been realized, and such infrastructure provides a very important platform for the development of the communities. In 2004, President Hu Jintao went on an inspection tour to one of the communities of Jilin province and he highly praised the work of the province.

However, as has been mentioned, community development is a systematic project. It is not just an issue of "hardware". Hardware, in some sense, is just a problem of money and could be tackled relatively easily in the short term. A more important and critical issue in community development is the building of "software" which is almost an impossible task

---

<sup>71</sup> Anna Lee, "Community Development in Ireland", Michael Hibbard. *Community Development Journal*. Vol.38 No.1 2003.

<sup>72</sup> Anna Lee, "Community Development in Ireland", Michael Hibbard. *Community Development Journal*. Vol.38 No.1 2003.

for the government but a suitable task for civil society organizations. Both Chinese and western scholars have done much research in this area.<sup>73</sup>

Noteworthy, nowadays community development is not only regarded as having to do with the relationship between “hardware”, “software”, the government actor and the civil society organization actor, but it is also seen as having to do with the following range of issues: 1. the relationship between individual and group; 2. the relationship between the state and society, more concretely, the issue of “active citizen”, “construction of citizen”. In this connection community development is regarded as a distributive process concerned with the allocation of resources and power to citizens within a pluralist framework and as a developmental process which articulates both “franchisal” and “social” dimensions of citizens and as effective means to remedy “democratic deficit”<sup>74</sup>.

It is necessary to analyze this issue more in depth. In his book *Strong Democracy* Benjamin Barber complains that the traditional representative democracy is a “thin democracy” which marginalizes citizens from the decision making process. He likens the process of “thin democracy” to “politic as zookeeping” in which “democracy is undone by a hundred kinds of activities more profitable than citizenship; by a thousand seductive acquisitions cheaper than liberty”.<sup>75</sup> Fred Powell and Martin Geoghegan further point out that “thin democracy shifts power to distant representative institutions, far from communities where citizens live. Instead of participation in decision-making, citizens are reduced to a passive state like animals in a zoo waiting for their keepers to decide their lives for them. Strong democracy on the other hand ‘urges that we take ourselves seriously as citizens’”.<sup>76</sup> In relation to participatory democracy, community development is more closely associated with civil society organizations through which residents can have a strong voice, especially in the affairs affecting them.

Nowadays, community development is no longer just the Tonnies version of an idyllic “intimate, mutually protective, humanitarian social community composed of like-minded people with similar values”. In many senses, it has transcended its original implication to such an extent that any political values could possibly be linked to community

---

<sup>73</sup> To develop and increase social capital through civil society organizations or through the exercise of freedom of association is an old academic topic and a lot of research has been done on this topic. No examples will be provided here.

<sup>74</sup> Mae Shaw and Lan Martin, “community work, citizenship and democracy: re-making the connections” *Community Development Journal*, Vol.35 No.4 2000. In China, there is also some similar kind of “democratic deficit”. For example, the insufficiency or inefficiency of traditional people’s congress and political consultative system. Community development is being used as an important channel to attract sufficient and efficient participation of local people to the local affairs.

<sup>75</sup> Barber B. “strong democracy: participatory politics for a new age”, university of California press, 1984, ppXVII.

<sup>76</sup> Fred Powell and Martin Geoghegan, “beyond political zoology: community development, civil society, and strong democracy”, *Community Development Journal*, Vol.41 No.2 2006.

development. From the democratic pluralist model to the distinctly radical line, from liberalism to socialism, community has already become a new flexible ideological weapon by which many even opposite viewpoints find their pragmatic channel of expression. This trend has made community development more complicated, especially in relation to civil society organizations in current China.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing discussions, some initial conclusions can be made:

Firstly, in any sense, the nation wide community development that is being launched in China constitutes a great change to the traditional Chinese social structure. Although the government remains watchfully attentive to this change, it jealously guards its power and keeps on high alert with respect to civil society organizations in the process of community development. A trend towards change is apparent and to some extent irreversible. It heralds a positive signal from the highly centralized power structures to the decentralized ones.

Secondly, the ongoing community development will soon meet its dead-end unless the government changes its stifled policy on civil society organizations and encourages such organizations to play a key role in community development. It is well accepted that every sector (according to the three sector theory) has its own carriers. Various government organs are the carriers of the government sector; numerous corporations are the carriers of the market sector; and civil society organizations are the carriers of the civil society sector. As a part of civil society, community development cannot proceed any further without the support of civil society organizations. Community development and civil society organizations are inherently similar in spirit. Therefore it is impossible to put one of them in a position of oppressing the other. Community spirit and the freedom of association are inextricably correlated. Their common characteristics are rooted in the deepest needs of human beings for leading social lives, establishing cooperation, building trust and therefore escaping from isolation, and so forth.

On the other hand, a more constructive look at the ongoing government controlled community development initiative reveals that it does have some positive impacts on civil society organizations. For example, the community could be very helpful to the development of a large number of grassroots organizations which are otherwise under unfavorable conditions under the current relevant regulations. The MOCA has recently delegated to Hubei province the task of drafting a new piece of regulation concerning the administration of the community based grassroots organizations. One of the three possible schemes is to make the community based grassroots organizations exempt from registration and to let them exist and work legally on the condition that they are put on record in the relevant department.<sup>77</sup> This is a big breakthrough compared to the current regulation (of 1998). In the current context of China, this kind of government controlled community development can provide a protective environment and legitimate support to civil society organizations, especially to the community based organizations in the policy framework.

---

<sup>77</sup> Li Qing, Shang Mulin, Huang Mingbing, "Exploration on the Put-on –file System of Grassroots Social Organization". A report from Hubei Department of Civil Affairs.

Thirdly, the possible failure of the ongoing government controlled community development initiative will for sure be accompanied by the failure of government reforms toward a more effective, responsible and democratic aim. The so-called “small government, big society” may become an empty concept. This will in turn worsen the legitimacy of the government.

Fourthly, judging from the preliminary motivation of the government for launching this community development initiative, the experiment can hardly be called successful. One of the most important aims of the government initiated community development is to control the “people of society”. The idea of community control is apparent throughout the entire community development process. However, due to the fact that very few people have been attracted to this kind of community building, the community development process has practically failed to realize the government’s expectations.

To sum up, the Chinese government is now facing two basic tasks, and the community development initiative is designed precisely to tackle these tasks. The first one of these tasks is to strengthen the control over the grassroots in the urban area through strengthening the construction of grassroots government; the other is to mobilize urban residents to solve their own problems. The process of the second task is also called “democratic building”. One of its important functions is maintaining the legitimacy of the government through widespread participation of the residents. In practice, however, the government’s desire for control is so strong and overwhelming that the second task has been neglected. The originally planned dual-task community development programme has eventually evolved into a one-man show by the government. The unavoidable corresponding outcomes are: community residents are not attracted to the programme and therefore are not organized; social problems are still huge and pressing; and the government still carries a heavy burden.

The above situation reflects the following reality: In China, the government is too powerful to be balanced. And society is too weak to act as a counter-balance to the government. The development of society is completely controlled by the government. Therefore, with respect to the two important social forces, it is no wonder that civil society organizations are strictly limited; and that community development is strictly controlled and extensively bureaucratized. It is predicted that in the years to come, there will be no strong civil society organizations and no real sense of developed communities in China. This makes the current social transformation more difficult and even more dangerous: once the external force (government), which has for a long time been controlling the integration of society from above, collapses or changes, society will fall into complete chaos due to the long term serious lack of mechanisms of self-integration.

Noteworthy and interesting enough, in recent years, the central government has attached great importance to building a “harmonious society”. From a hermeneutic perspective, the articulation of the need to build a “harmonious society” is actually the same as

admitting to the widespread existence of disharmonized elements, and therefore the pursued objective should be a reconstruction of social inclusiveness, social consensus and social solidarity. In this process, community and civil society organizations, rather than the government, should play a pivotal role.





ISSN 1600 5333  
ISBN 87-91836-18-2