

UNITED NATIONS RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

DP 51

**MARKET REFORM  
AND CIVIL SOCIETY**

**A Chinese Case Study**

**by Jude Howell, Sun Bingyao, Wang Ying,  
Gordon White and Zhe Xiaoye**

UNRISD Discussion Papers are preliminary documents circulated in a limited number of copies to stimulate discussion and critical comment.

April 1994

---

The **United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)** is an autonomous agency that engages in multi-disciplinary research on the social dimensions of contemporary problems affecting development. Its work is guided by the conviction that, for effective development policies to be formulated, an understanding of the social and political context is crucial. The Institute attempts to provide governments, development agencies, grassroots organizations and scholars with a better understanding of how development policies and processes of economic, social and environmental change affect different social groups. Working through an extensive network of national research centres, UNRISD aims to promote original research and strengthen research capacity in developing countries.

Current research themes include: Crisis, Adjustment and Social Change; Socio-Economic and Political Consequences of the International Trade in Illicit Drugs; Environment, Sustainable Development and Social Change; Integrating Gender into Development Policy; Participation and Changes in Property Relations in Communist and Post-Communist Societies; and Political Violence and Social Movements. UNRISD research projects focused on the 1995 World Summit for Social Development included: Rethinking Social Development in the 1990s; Economic Restructuring and Social Policy; Ethnic Diversity and Public Policies; and The Challenge of Rebuilding Wartorn Societies.

A list of the Institute's free and priced publications can be obtained from the Reference Centre.

---

**United Nations Research Institute  
for Social Development  
Palais des Nations  
1211 Geneva 10  
Switzerland**

**E-mail: [info@unrisd.org](mailto:info@unrisd.org)  
World Wide Web Site: [www.unrisd.org](http://www.unrisd.org)**

ISSN 1012-6511

---

Copyright © United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). Short extracts from this publication may be reproduced unaltered without authorization on condition that the source is indicated. For rights of reproduction or translation, application should be made to UNRISD, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland. UNRISD welcomes such applications.

The designations employed in UNRISD publications, which are in conformity with United Nations practice, and the presentation of material therein do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNRISD concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

The responsibility for opinions expressed in signed articles, studies and other contributions rests solely with their authors, and publication does not constitute an endorsement by UNRISD of the opinions expressed in them.

---

## PREFACE

In 1989, UNRISD initiated a project on economic reform and social participation in communist countries. Studies were sponsored in China and several Central and Eastern European countries. The present paper reports on the main findings of the research undertaken in China. The study was carried out as a co-operative effort between UNRISD, the UK-China Joint Research Team and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). A monograph based on this research has already been published in Chinese by CASS.

This paper attempts to analyse the character of the new organizations which have emerged in the wake of economic reforms initiated in the 1980s. It is based on field work carried out in 1991 in Xiaoshan City in the central-east province of Zhejiang. There appears to have been a flowering of associations in Xiaoshan County during the Republican period between 1911 and 1949, but after 1949 most of them were either abolished or replaced by mass organizations controlled by the Communist Party. The post-Mao period was characterized by a remarkable upsurge in the number of social organizations. At the time of the survey, 93 social organizations were registered with the local authorities. They ranged from the old mass organizations such as trade unions and women's federation to a variety of economic, scientific, cultural, health and social welfare associations. The loosening of the tight control of the Communist Party, the process of decentralization of power and the diversification and differentiation of economic activities were the principal factors in the growth of new organizations.

To what extent are they autonomous and what is the nature of their relationship with the state and the party? Most of them are best described as semi-official. Before an organization is established, it must receive authorization from the state and be subjected to a network of supervision. In most cases, its officials occupy senior posts in administration and/or in state enterprises. According to the authors, it would, however, be misleading to regard such organizations as totally subordinate to the state or party authorities. They enjoy varying degrees of autonomy. This arrangement appears to suit both the state and the members of associations. From the point of view of the authorities, these associations provide a channel of communications between a state organ and the organization's members, assist in co-ordination of activities of different economic actors and carry out certain functions previously monopolized by state agencies. The members of the associations benefit from access to services, materials and other resources from the state entities. They may also benefit from contacts with influential officials and be able to influence policy in specific areas. The two parties also have a common interest in promoting rapid economic growth and in exerting pressure for policy changes or in obtaining resources from higher level authorities.

These organizations have thus assumed a dualistic institutional form that mirrors the increasing dualism of Chinese economy and society: they represent a mixture of state and private in which the public continues to dominate. The authors argue that with the continuation of economic reforms and the expansion of private enterprises, these associations can be expected to increase their numbers and diversity, enhance their autonomy and become more genuine representatives of society in their dealings with the state.

The UK-China Joint Research Team included Professor Gordon White of the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex; Dr. Jude Howell of the University of East Anglia; and a group of researchers from the Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, which was headed by Zhe Xiaoye and included Li Peilin, Sun Bingyao, Tang Jun, Wang Ying and Xia Guang.

April 1994

Dharam Ghai  
Director

## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CIVIL SOCIETY: A CONCEPTUAL CHAMELEON	1
THE RESEARCH SITE: XIAOSHAN CITY	6
THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS IN XIAOSHAN	9
THE NATURE AND TYPES OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS	10
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE LOCAL STATE	14
THE ROLE OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS IN REPRESENTING SOCIAL INTERESTS AND INFLUENCING GOVERNMENT	17
CONCLUDING REMARKS	21



## INTRODUCTION

“Civil society”, “the market” and “democracy” are the positive conceptual images that dominate current thinking about China’s present and future in the social, economic and political realms respectively. They are three components of an overall conception of societal change wherein the spread of markets creates the social space for the emergence of civil society which in turn provides the social underpinnings of democratization. As such, they provide a useful framework for analysing the dynamics of socialist and post-socialist societies undergoing radical market reforms.

Though each of these ideas is often used in imprecise and ideological ways, they have considerable analytical and practical power; they reflect real processes and point toward real solutions. This paper focuses on the notion of “civil society” and seeks to examine how useful it is in describing and explaining social change in contemporary Chinese society in the era of the post-Mao economic reforms which began in 1979. We shall proceed, first, by clarifying the specific way in which we intend to use the term “civil society” and, second, by investigating the empirical utility of the idea through a case-study of one small city in the central-east region of China.

### CIVIL SOCIETY: A CONCEPTUAL CHAMELEON

It is worth considering why the term “civil society” has come to prominence in general discourse about social and political change over the past decade. It is clearly part of a broader re-evaluation of the role of the state in society and the economy, a sociological adjunct to the conventional state-market paradigm familiar to economists and political scientists. At its vaguest level, “civil society” reflects the desire to curb the power of overweening states through a sphere of social organizations enjoying more or less autonomy from the state. It is not surprising, therefore, that the term gained prominence following the rise of social movements against Communist states in Eastern Europe in the late 1970s and early 1980s, particularly the emergence of Solidarity in Poland. In Hungary, it was given some intellectual substance by Elemer Hankiss’ notion of the “second society”<sup>1</sup> and by an upsurge of theorizing about its role in socio-political change in Eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup> To the extent that the same problematic of changing state-society relations was important elsewhere in the real

---

<sup>1</sup>For discussions of the notion of “second society” and the relationship between the “second economy” and civil society in the Hungarian context, see Bob Dent, “Knowledge on the Black Market”, **Times Higher Education Supplement**, 7 March 1986; Ivan Szelenyi, “Eastern Europe in an Epoch of Transition: Toward a Socialist Mixed Economy?”, in Victor Nee and David Stark (eds.), **Remaking the Economic Institute of Socialism in China and Eastern Europe**, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1989, pp. 208-32; and C.M. Hann, “Second Economy and Civil Society” in C.M. Hann (ed.), **Market Economy and Civil Society in Hungary**, Frank Cass, London, 1990, pp. 21-44.

<sup>2</sup>For example, see the collections in Vera Gathy (ed.), **State and Civil Society: Relationships in Flux**, Ventura, Budapest, 1989; and John Keane (ed.), **Civil Society and the State**, Verso, London, 1988. For post-1989 views, see Robert Miller (ed.), **The Development of Civil Society in Communist Systems**, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1992.

world, “civil society” appeared as a convenient analytical “hat-stand”, in contexts as wide apart as Sub-Saharan Africa and Taiwan.<sup>3</sup>

Given the fact that the issue of overweening state power and the need to change the balance of power between state and society/economy through fundamental reforms have dominated thought about China for least the last 15 years, it is to be expected that the idea of civil society has gained currency both within China and abroad.<sup>4</sup> The events of early to mid-1989 in China gave particularly strong impetus to scholarly use of the term, because of the widespread attempts then, in Beijing and in other cities, to construct a sphere of autonomous organizational space outside of and in opposition to the party-state.<sup>5</sup>

In analysis of China, as in the broader comparative literature, the term civil society has been used to mean a variety of things. Underlying the often bewildering diversity, there are certain common elements. First, the use of civil society reflects an attempt to define a type of relationship between state and society, regarding them as separable, distinct spheres roughly to be equated with the “public” and “private” spheres; second, it implies a certain power relationship between state and society such that there are limitations on the state’s capacity to pervade and control society, and a certain power on the part of members of a society to insulate themselves from, and exert influence upon, the state; third, in this realm of autonomous social power and space, civil society denotes an associational realm in which autonomous organizations are formed through voluntary association to represent the interests and aspirations of members of society.

---

<sup>3</sup>For Africa, see Jean-Francois Bayart, “Civil Society in Africa”, in P. Chabal (ed.), **Political Domination in Africa**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, pp. 109-25; and David Booth, “Alternatives in the Restructuring of State-Society Relations: Research Issues for Tropical Africa”, **IDS Bulletin**, 18(4), October 1987, pp. 23-30. For Taiwan, see Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, “Social Movements and the Rise of a Demanding Civil Society in Taiwan”, **The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs**, (27), July 1990, pp. 163-80; and Chou Yangsun, “Social Movements and the Party-State in Taiwan: Emerging Civil Society and the Evolving State Corporatist Structures”, unpublished PhD thesis, Columbia University, New York, 1988.

<sup>4</sup>For a review of the Chinese debate, see Wang Shaoguang, “Some Reflections on Civil Society”, **Ershivi Shiji** [Twenty-First Century]. Hong Kong. (8). December 1991. pp. 102-17.

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

[https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/云报告?reportId=5\\_21685](https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/云报告?reportId=5_21685)

