LOCAL CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIALIZED GOVERNANCE
LINKING CITIZENS AND THE STATE IN
RURAL AND URBAN TIANJIN, CHINA

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

(Sociology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

October 2011

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Abstract

This study uses the China case to revisit some of the central assumptions of the literature on citizenship, showing how citizens and states are formed in and through the local places where citizenship is practiced. It suggests that the location of the political and of citizens have been an understudied aspect of citizenship orders, not just in relation to the growing impact of global and transnational forces, but also in sub-state entities.

Through fine-grained examination of the daily interactions between citizens and state agents, this study shows how citizenship in China is embedded in local relationships of belonging, participation and entitlement anchored in institutions that organize people in workplaces, urban neighborhoods and rural villages. Based on 10 months of ethnographic fieldwork in four communities in Tianjin, China, the study examines how two such institutions, the villager and residents committees, act as a nexus for participation and formal rights, while also providing social welfare to the needy. The practices of these institutions bind citizens to the state through a face-to-face politics that acts both as a mechanism of control and a channel for claims-making and pressure from below, a mode of rule I call “socialized governance.” Both enabling and constraining, this exists in tension with bureaucratic-rational forms of governance, such as the current Chinese leadership’s objective of “ruling in accordance with law.” While the frameworks for citizenship are set at the national level, its local, cellular character means great variation among places in both form and practice. My model of local citizenship helps explain patterns of economic and social inequality and of contentious politics in contemporary China.

While the unsettling of the congruence between the national and citizenship has been widely noted, this study points to how local, national and global institutionalized dimensions of citizenship have consistently been mediated through or exercised in sub-state entities. The narrative of the nation-state has so dominated the literature on citizenship that it has generally made invisible the actual techniques and processes through which citizenship orders are made, re-made and contested. As a unitary state with a strong national project, the China case provides intriguing material for rethinking how the local shapes citizenship.
Preface

The research for this thesis was conducted with approval from the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board. The approval certificate number is: H08-01569, and the principal investigator was Amy Hanser. The research plan, the data collection and data analysis were conducted by K. Sophia Woodman, and the resulting thesis is entirely her work.
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List of abbreviations

CCP—Chinese Communist Party
DPF—Disabled Persons Federation
LPCSC—Local People’s Congress Standing Committee
NPCSC—National People’s Congress Standing Committee
PC—People’s Congress
PRC—People’s Republic of China
OLURC—Organic Law on Residents Committees
OLVC—Organic Law on Villager Committees
RC—Residents Committee
VC—Villagers Committee
Glossary of Chinese words commonly used in transliterated form

*Baojia* 保甲 imperial era household registration system, revived in the republican period (1911-1949)

*Danwei* 单位 work unit, literally “single” + “unit,” the Maoist form of collective organization to which most urbanites belonged by the beginning of the reform era in the late 1970s

*Guanxi* 关系 relation, literally “concern” + “tie,” generally denotes a particular form of interpersonal connection that combines emotion and material exchange

*Hukou* 户口 household, literally “household/family” + “mouth” (a measure word for persons), often used as a short form for the household registration system

*Shequ* 社区 generally translated as “community,” literally “social” + “territory,” used to translate texts on community in sociological literature since 1930s
**Acknowledgements**

Years ago, Stuart Schram inspired my interest in Chinese politics with his insistence on careful reading of primary texts, and on the way those texts shaped political reality. But it took me 20 years to heed his advice and embark on doctoral study; I am glad I finally did.

During this process, two communities at the University of British Columbia have been warm and supportive environments for my study, research and writing. Many people in the Department of Sociology helped me to make the transition to becoming a sociologist, particularly Rima Wilkes, Neil Guppy, Becki Ross, Jennifer Chun, Thomas Kemple, Gerry Veenstra, Dawn Currie, Amy Hanser, Graham Johnson, Silvia Bartolic, Renisa Mawani, Wendy Roth, Dan Zuberi, Leslie Wang and fellow students including Zhang Feng, Rachael Sullivan, Bonar Buffam and Fang Xu. The Institute for Asian Research has been a wonderful place to do my daily work, and I have found help and intellectual engagement thanks to Pitman Potter, Rozalia Mate, Julian Dierkes, Karen Jew, Paul Evans, Marietta Lao, Tsering Shakya, Alison Bailey, Xin Huang and Tim Cheek. Also, I have received invaluable financial and intellectual support from Pitman Potter’s Asia Pacific Dispute Resolution Program. My supervisors Amy Hanser and Julian Dierkes, and committee members Tom Kemple and Pitman Potter, have been unfailingly generous with their time in discussing my ideas for this project and as I went through the long process of writing my thesis. They provided insightful comments and questions on my drafts and pushed me to think about what I found in new ways.

The research in Tianjin on which this thesis is based was made possible by the Fulbright Program in the form of a U.S. Student Award. I am most grateful to the helpful staff at the Institute for International Education who administer the Fulbright Program, Janet Upton, Julia Ji Yingnan and Jonathan Akeley. Nankai University was a welcoming institution during my Fulbright term, and I would particularly like to thank Professors Zhu Guanglei, Yang Long and Bai Hongguang, as well as the staff of the Nankai Foreign Affairs office, who were unfailingly helpful and friendly. Jiang Lu and Guo Rui assisted me in important ways in my research. Chen Lanyan and Jane Duckett generously helped me with finding avenues for my research in China. Most of all, I am grateful to the staff, activists and residents at the RCs and VCs where I did my research in being willing to let me observe their daily lives and answer my questions. I found Tianjin to be a genuinely hospitable place, living up to its reputation as gregarious and full of humor. Of course none of the people who assisted me are responsible for what I have written here.
My father has been a great source of help and encouragement, as I carry on what is becoming something of a family tradition of self-reinvention, a path on which he showed the way. Last but not least, I would not have survived the daily travails of course work, exams, field work and writing my thesis without the love and support of my husband Alex Carr and our son Owain, who have been tolerant of my physical and mental absences, while saving me from my capacity for overwork by insisting that they not be too prolonged, and in Owain's case, constantly reminding me how to play.
To Alex and Owain, who have been with me every step of the way
Introduction
Local citizenship, socialized governance and Chinese modernity

Why citizenship?

Images of the relationship between the Chinese state and its citizens in international media reporting on China switch between two seemingly incommensurate extremes, reflecting confusion about where this new giant on the global stage is heading. In the first set of images, China represents a model of neoliberal governance, in which the state is increasingly withdrawing from people’s lives to allow the market to take charge. A skyline of glittering glass towers testifies to China’s embrace of global capital, while a hands-off approach to governing allows affluent young people to exercise unprecedented freedom to shape their own life choices. Study abroad? Set up an internet company? Buy global brands? Speculate in real estate? Travel the world? Blog about your sex life? The world and the future is theirs. The second image is that of the police state. Here the authorities are ever-present, prying into everyone’s daily lives. A consistent image is an impassive uniformed police officer holding a hand over the camera lens to block the picture of people being dragged away to an uncertain fate for doing little more than complain about injustice. Censorship, torture, disappearances are the everyday fare of an overly-present, oppressive state that blocks any criticism of its officials or policies.

I encountered a parallel set of disconnects in my many years as a “true believer” engaged in transnational advocacy to promote human rights as solutions to problems of injustice in China. Fairly extensive provisions for rights have been incorporated into the Constitution, including a 2004 amendment which asserts that “the state respects and protects human rights.” But the Chinese government actively seeks to prevent the leakage of international discussion about human rights practice in China in venues such as the United Nations into domestic media (Woodman 2005). The language of claims-making in China rarely incorporates explicit rights frames, although episodes of contention on the ground are often translated into such a form by transnational Chinese-language media and advocacy organizations associated with the Chinese diaspora (Woodman 2011b).

How can these disjunctures in images of the state and citizens, and the experiences they reflect, be understood? What do they say about how relations between citizens and the

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state in China are changing, and about how these shifts are shaping patterns of governance there, now and in the future? Is China a “social volcano” waiting to explode, or a stable system in which an authoritarian regime has institutionalized mechanisms of social feedback? These and other contrasts led me to wonder about the language of entitlement and obligation used in daily interactions between state agents and citizens over a variety of matters of concern, and the register of such engagements. How did rights feature in these interactions, if at all? What other language was employed? What kind of power dynamics operated in these encounters? How did people experience the state in their daily lives? I set out to address these concerns in my research into the everyday routines of the organizations that are the interface between state and society in the neighborhoods and villages of Tianjin. As I hoped to gain an understanding of both what people did and what they said, as well as how where these actions occurred shaped both aspects, I chose ethnography as the principal methodology for this research.

Since it focuses on the mutually-constitutive relationship between state and citizens, the concept of citizenship provides a theoretical entry point to address my concerns and frame specific research questions. As an analytical device, it concentrates on the articulation of different dimensions of relations between the state and individuals, particularly looking at membership, participation and entitlement/obligation, and how these are defined and practiced through specific institutions. Linking back to T. H. Marshall’s classic formulation in *Citizenship and social class* (Marshall 1992 [1949]) and drawing on some of the burgeoning interdisciplinary literature that has critiqued and expanded on his initial ideas (See for example, Greer 2009; Holston 2008; Somers 2008; Lister 2007; Ong 2006; Sassen 2006; Lister 2003; Isin 2002; Bosniak 2000; Ong 1999; Janoski 1998; Kymlicka and Norman 1994; Turner 1990; Turner 1986), in this thesis I engage with citizenship as a social process, the political construction of a particular time and place (Wincott 2009). Marshall’s contribution was to show how in the English case the development of rights and citizenship were bound together. Citizenship in this sense is a historically-contingent mutual bargain between state and citizen, entailing rights and obligations on both sides. As such, citizenship is always both normative and substantive; it incorporates both ought and is (Somers 2008; Wincott 2009).

Such a conception of citizenship helps to illuminate how its forms and practices are embedded in and constitutive of the specific institutional environments with which they are associated (Marshall 1992 [1949]; Turner 1990; Somers 1994). One of the major concentrations of studies using this conception has been to show how a particular
citizenship “regime”—comprising a complex of laws, policies, institutions and practices—
contributes to shaping patterns of inequality, including serving to legitimize certain forms of
inequality in a given social order (Isin 2002; Wincott 2009). Examining these arrangements
becomes particularly relevant in times of change, when the relationships that comprise a
citizenship regime are being contested and reformed, and the terms of legitimate inequality
are shifting, whether in the context of the rollback of the welfare state in Britain or in China’s
shift from a planned to a market economic system.

My research questions arose from China’s changing environment, focusing on
institutions of citizenship, and the ways in which the three dimensions identified by Marshall
are articulated in their form and practice. My central question is: how does the state feature
in the daily lives of citizens? To specify this, I ask: How is citizenship practiced in urban and
rural Tianjin? What kind of entitlements do people have, and how are these experienced?
How do people participate and on what terms? What types of membership categories matter
for entitlements and participation? How do these arrangements differ from place to place,
and what are the implications of these distinctions for the overall citizenship regime?

Responding to these questions, this study shows how citizenship in China is
embedded in local relationships of belonging, participation and entitlement anchored in
institutions that organize people in workplaces, urban neighborhoods and rural villages.
These institutions act as a nexus for participation and formal rights, while also providing
social welfare to the needy. They bind citizens to the state through what I call "socialized
governance," a face-to-face politics that acts both as a mechanism of control and a channel
for claims-making and pressure from below. But these institutional settings are also a site for
the formation of a local moral sociality that shapes the kinds of claims that people consider
thinkable, and mediate the technologies and rationalities of government in particular ways.
In other words, the state’s categories and modalities of citizenship are realized in a specific
social field that shapes what they mean and how they contribute to ordering people’s lives
(Isin 2002). In crucial ways, belonging depends not only on the location of a person’s
household registration (hukou 户口), but also on intimate and largely unmediated forms of
social recognition and inclusion. My perspective contrasts with a literature that has largely
seen citizenship in contemporary China as fundamentally binary, based on the distinction
between urban and rural in the state-mandated hukou system (the definitive statement of
this view is Solinger 1999).

In analyzing these citizenship arrangements, I read Marshall as providing an account
of citizenship’s emergence that is genealogical in showing how one set of institutional forms
and practices sets the conditions for what comes next (1992 [1949]). Such an approach highlights several interlocking dimensions in the formation of a citizenship order: the historical genealogy of its emergence; its specific meanings and aspects; and the dynamics of the various institutional locations of these dimensions. In other contexts, analogs to the civil, political and social rights Marshall describes in England emerge in very different historical circumstances with a particular configuration of political, social and economic intent and are anchored in different sets of institutions, as my empirical material shows. But the spatial location and material forms of these encounters are also crucial in shaping the citizenship order and the social field in which it is realized (Isin 2002). Identifying, describing and analyzing the terms, institutional locations and material, embodied form of the civil, political, social and cultural relationships of entitlement and obligation that bind the state and individuals, families and communities is central to understanding the nature of citizenship in particular contexts.

While focused on institutional locations in both their symbolic and material form, the model of citizenship I use here identifies three dimensions of the state’s engagement with citizens that draw on Marshall’s categories: membership, participation and entitlement. These three are analytically distinct, but often intertwined in practice. Membership asks the question of who belongs, and how and where this is determined. Participation looks at both what the state expects of citizens, and at how citizens actively engage in reshaping the terms of their engagement with it. I use entitlement as a more elastic term than rights—which is intertwined with specific institutional frameworks of Euro-American modernity, as I discuss below—to capture what citizens expect from the state, what the obligations of the state towards citizens are.

The China case presents an intriguing focus for an inquiry into the ways national citizenship is made in and through both the materiality and the imaginary of the local. It provides productive ground to revisit and revise some of the nation-state dominated assumptions underlying much theorizing about citizenship, showing how even in a state with a strong unitary form and domineering national project, citizenship can be predominantly performed in and through the local. Such an inquiry requires attention to the materiality and location of citizenship practices, as well as revealing the state’s composite character and how it comprises a variety of sites and levels. In so doing, it draws attention to a relative neglect of the local as a location of the political, thus adding another layer to the analytical approach proposed by Fraser for analyzing issues of representation as an aspect of claims for justice (2005). This focus on the local as a site for citizenship suggests new theoretical
avenues for the literature in this interdisciplinary field.

Thus my study focuses on practices, as observed through ethnographic fieldwork. From 2008 to 2009, I spent 10 months conducting participant observation in four “basic level organizations” in Tianjin Municipality, China’s fifth largest city, located on the Bohai Gulf. Two of my field sites were in residents committees (RCs) in urban neighborhoods in different districts of the city, and two were in villager committees (VCs) in areas designated as “rural,” although one of these was at the edge of the city, and was rapidly becoming urban. While RCs and VCs are not the only possible focus for such a located inquiry into citizenship practice, as successors to Maoist collective institutions that play a constitutional role in organizing people at grassroots level and acting as a channel for their representation, they are a key locus for citizenship, and thus a legitimate entry point for addressing my research questions. Below I outline some of the central concerns that informed my methodological approach, and provide more information about how I went about addressing them in my research project.

Starting points: place, history, practices, language

Inspired by Bruno Latour’s call for a sociology that traces the intertwined nature of the material and social worlds, I seek to locate and specify the state and its operations. My motivations emerge from an uneasiness similar to that felt by Torpey that “much sociological writing about states is insupportably abstract, failing to tell us how states actually constitute and maintain themselves as ongoing concerns” (Torpey 2000, 3). This abstraction is often pronounced in writing about the state in China (Pieke 2004). To counter such tendencies towards abstraction, I have sought to follow Latour’s suggestion that research should start by tracing connections, or associations, to see how the social—of which the state is undoubtedly part—is actually constructed (2005).

An “analytics of government” is a useful complement to such an effort to locate the state. Drawing on Foucault’s ideas about “governmentality”—essentially the development of methods of governing through certain types of “rationality,” often designed to control the actions of free individuals in such a way as to bolster the power of the state (Foucault 2003; Foucault 1991a)—Lemke proposes three levels of analysis of state practices. First is the ways the state is constituted through “knowledge and political discourses,” or what Foucault terms “specific rationalities” (Foucault 2003). Second is a broad concept of technologies of

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2 While such rationalities are usually based on assumptions about the need to base modern state operations on scientific and rational principles, such a focus calls for attention to their *internal* logic rather than assuming they reflect an abstract standard of rationalization.
rule that incorporates both material and symbolic aspects, including "technologies of the self." Technologies are an expression of the materiality of state practices, the "how" of practical governing. The third aspect is the way the state is "an instrument and effect of political strategies" of different groups and individuals (Lemke 2007, 43).

While locating the state involves a concentration on place and the local, this does not mean that either should be reified. Places are made through the interaction of the material and social in networks of engagement that move across time and space (Massey 1994). Just as much as the national, the formation of the local needs to be specified: "Locals are localized. Places are placed" (Latour 2005, 195, emphasis in original). These processes are dynamic, and bring in the temporality, historicity and connectedness of the local. The "articulated moments" of places also reflect a specific "power geometry," as Massey puts it (1994, 151).

Places exist in relation to other places, as sites of positions and dispositions formed in imaginary and material counterpoint. They are sites for the accumulation and conversion of different forms of capital—economic, social, political, cultural and symbolic (Isin 2002; Bourdieu 1986). Capital inheres in various forms of materiality and embodiment of both places and people, and logics of scale and distance operate to differentiate and measure their relative quality. As I show, the symbolic capital of the state—which seeks to monopolize the power to create universals—has particular weight in these social comparisons (Feuchtwang 2004; Isin 2002; Bourdieu 1998; Bourdieu 1986).

Tracing connections requires a genealogical sense of history that shows how the layering of practices forms institutions. Thus my study does not aim to provide a historical account, but one that observes the multifarious origins of specific practices in a heterogeneous history, rather than assuming that institutions are composed of sets of rules (Bray 2005). Such an approach requires following the links between current practices and their historical antecedents, tracing the social across time as well as space. Every local encompasses multiple temporalities; it is not synchronous (Latour 2005). A complex of history and practices makes up the "topography of reality-possibilities" for any action (Law 2002, 32-36). In China, as in post-socialist Eastern Europe, without inquiring into the characteristics of "actually existing socialism," one cannot pose useful questions for inquiry into the present (Verdery 1996, 10-12). Many studies of workers in China show how they experience a "trajectory" from the socialist past to an uncertain future, with a relational sense of the past conditioning their strategies for dealing with the present (Hanser 2008; Lee 2007; Rofel 1999).
These methodological concerns informed my choice of an ethnographic research strategy and the ways in which I conducted my study. (My methodological approach is presented in more detail, along with information on the field sites, in Appendix 1.) Ethnography has traditionally been seen as among the most situated forms of research, focusing on “natural” environments as opposed to ones set up by the researcher; involving participant observation; and aiming to describe how the actors it observes see their world (Goldthorpe 2000, 74). Inquiry within the contexts of daily life can capture relations between symbolic categories and social relations, between meaning and practice, and reveal the mutually-constitutive character of subjective meanings and social, political and economic environments. This form of research incorporates a concentration on place, but problematizes this, with the ethnographer being “less a chronicler of self-evident places than an interrogator of a variety of place-making projects” (Gille and Ó Riain 2002, 278). Given these advantages, for me an ethnographic approach seemed an obvious choice, although it is not the most common one adopted to pursue questions on rights and citizenship aside from in the work of a few anthropologists (for some notable recent examples, see Goodale and Merry 2007; Merry 2006).

For continuous periods of from five weeks to three months, I went every day to the offices of two RCs and two VCs in Tianjin Municipality. As a province-level city under the direct administration of the central government, Tianjin comprises both an urban core and peripheral rural districts and counties. Thus the sites included a variety of differently situated locations within one administrative territory. RCs and VCs deal with a range of matters, but are a key site for local citizenship as they administer both welfare entitlements not related to employment and political rights of self-government.

In each RC and VC, I observed the daily work of their staff and their interactions with residents, and participated in various activities and celebrations. Although I conducted 18 semi-structured interviews\(^3\) and a number of other informal interviews, the main material for my thesis was generated through my daily ethnographic observation.\(^4\) While my principal vantage point was what took place in the offices of the RCs and VCs, I also walked around the territory of each committee and noted their physical layout as well as the ways that they used public spaces to communicate with residents, such as through notice boards. Although I began my research with a number of questions and a thematic focus on welfare issues—highlighted in the letter of introduction I presented to people in my field sites—I sought to

\(^3\) The number of people interviewed was 20; two of these interviews were with two people at a time. Eleven of the 18 interviews were recorded.

\(^4\) In the text, I note any quotations that came from these interviews.
observe the fullest possible range of daily interactions and the mutually-constitutive relationship between these and the institutional, human and physical landscape where they took place. I started with the presumption that my initial questions may have been the wrong ones to ask, and did not only record information that related to these questions. In order to capture the specific terms of citizenship and the way language is deployed to create categories and fix entitlements, I tried to document the actual language of interactions and record as accurately as I could what people actually said.\(^5\) Throughout my observations, I openly took notes in a small notebook that I typed up into detailed field notes on a daily basis. These notebooks and field notes have provided the principal source of data for this thesis. As I have been concerned to present an accurate picture of these encounters, I generally use the past tense to describe events and conversations, while using the “ethnographic present” in my analysis to indicate the general conditions that I propose to explain these happenings.

I describe the field sites in Appendix 1, although I present information about them throughout the four chapters of this thesis. (Basic information about them is presented in Table 1, on the following page.) As institutional and social fields, the four sites presented distinctly different environments for citizenship practice. In the neighborhood I call “Progress,”\(^6\) socialist rhetoric has a salience that shaped membership, participation and entitlement in ways that constitutes public space as an emergent sphere of opposition to prevailing capitalist economic logic. “Rising China” is a site of distinctions between upwardly-mobile urbanites attached to a prestigious work unit and laid-off workers and displaced people, often expressed as differences in “quality” (素质). “Zhang Family Village” is in a rapidly urbanizing location on the edge of the city proper where ideas about how to be urban meant neglect of the concerns of people struggling to make a living in the new environment. Despite its remote mountain location, in “Dragon Peak Village” the local elite is intent on transforming the village through a strategy of dedicating all collective resources to tourism.

In the following sections of this Introduction, I identify the specific theoretical angles through which I engage with place, history and practices in my thesis. I begin by showing why revisiting some of the key assumptions of the citizenship literature through a

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\(^5\) In this thesis, I follow the practice advocated by Duneier (1999) in only putting words in quotations when these are what people actually said (although the translations are mine), using paraphrases and summaries when I did not remember or record the specific words.

\(^6\) All real names of RCs and VCs and the people I encountered in them have been changed to protect the confidentiality of informants, except in one instance where a person I interviewed requested that her real name be used.
### Table 1
Field Sites, Tianjin Municipality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban Residents’ Committees (RCs)</th>
<th>Location/Type</th>
<th>Residents</th>
<th>Main Occupations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rising China RC</strong></td>
<td>Nankai District Central urban area</td>
<td>±4,000 residents</td>
<td>University, research institute and hospital staff and service workers Some rehoused people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most residential buildings from late 1990s, replaced informal housing</td>
<td>±10% “outsiders”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Progress RC</strong></td>
<td>Hexi District Central urban area</td>
<td>±3,500 residents</td>
<td>Mixed professionals and workers Commercial housing contains some richer people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment blocks from 1950s to 1980s</td>
<td>Includes compound of commercial housing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural Villager Committees (VCs)</strong></td>
<td>Beichen District Suburban</td>
<td>±4,000 villagers</td>
<td>1/3 of villagers already have urban <strong>hukou</strong> registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No land still being farmed</td>
<td>±8,000 “outsiders”</td>
<td>Mixed commercial, renting and wage labor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village housing still exists, but some live in urban style blocks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dragon Peak Village</strong></td>
<td>Jixian County “Remote” mountain valley, tourist destination</td>
<td>±250 villagers</td>
<td>Mostly tourism A few people still farm, but no help with marketing Some sell “mountain products” to tourists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most villagers live in the guesthouses they run</td>
<td>400+ outsiders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All real names of field sites have been changed to maintain informants’ anonymity.*
consideration of “local citizenship” can be a productive empirical and theoretical approach to this subject. Locating citizenship in this way, I argue in the second section, requires questioning the dominance of categories derived from the specific institutional forms associated with Euro-American modernity, particularly “rights,” not by jettisoning these forms, but by interrogating how they travel and by “provincializing” this version of modernity by revealing its specificity. As an aspect of this, I outline how theoretical approaches to citizenship have been applied to its development in the PRC in the third section. And finally, I explore the relationship between citizenship and governance, with a particular focus on my concept of “socialized governance” and how this shapes local citizenship.

Locating citizenship

*We must never assume that local practice conforms with state theory.*

James Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (1998, 49)

To endeavor to think the state is to take the risk of taking over (or being taken over by) a thought of the state, that is, of applying to the state categories of thought produced and guaranteed by the state and hence to misrecognize its most profound truth.


In its common-sense form, citizenship has become such a creature of the national state that it becomes difficult to think it otherwise. Although Marshall wrote, “Citizenship is a status bestowed upon those who are full members of a community” (1992 [1949], 18), and thus evinced a certain ambiguity about the location of membership, he thought of the social citizenship that was the focus of his essay as a specifically national project (Wincott 2009). For his contemporary Hannah Arendt, citizenship outside the national frame was a dangerous illusion, as the horrendous fate of those excluded from belonging to a nation-state before and during World War II had demonstrated (Arendt 1979 [1951]). Much subsequent literature has presumed that citizenship and the nation-state produce each other and are coterminous (Bosniak 2000).

The membership dimension of Marshall’s argument has “attracted surprisingly little detailed analysis,” writes Wincott (2009, 39). Its vagueness about the location of the political community in which membership inhered has allowed for a number of creative re-readings of Marshall’s theoretical starting points that view citizenship, like identity, as having multiple layers and including both formal and informal dimensions (Yuval-Davis 2007; Yuval-Davis 2006). This has taken inquiries relating to the location of citizenship in a number of different directions.
The most dominant direction in such research has been towards conceptions of citizenship that go “beyond” the nation-state (Bosniak 2000, 449), scaling up to examine phenomena that point to how citizenship can overflow this “container.” Using a variety of empirical cases, disciplinary foci and theoretical perspectives, scholars have proposed that citizenship is becoming “postnational,” “flexible,” “denationalized,” or “mobile” (Sassen 2006; Sassen 2005; Bosniak 2001; Urry 2000; Ong 1999; Soysal 1994). These efforts to unsettle citizenship’s association with the nation have largely focused on the effects of global and transnational processes, and the emergence of regional entities such as the European Union. In her examination of the question of “representation” as an under-explored dimension of justice, Fraser points out how such processes have undermined the nation-state as the main “frame” for addressing justice claims (Fraser 2005). In their normative dimension, some such approaches challenge the “methodological nationalism” of both social science and policy and politics, arguing that this makes it impossible to address the transnational origins of many of the issues facing the world today (Bosniak 2000; Beck 2002).

Scaling “down” from the national, there have been two related areas of focus in the citizenship literature: how membership in civil society conditions enjoyment of formal citizenship; and historical tensions between location of citizenship in the city and the nation-state. Ways in which formal citizenship equality can be fatally undermined by inequalities in civil society and the economy were starting points for Marshall’s original essay. Yet his optimism about the potential of the welfare state to mitigate these arguably masked the extent to which social and economic arrangements seen as outside the purview of the state undercut formal equality (Somers 2008; Lister 2007; Lister 2003; Oxhorn 2003; Fraser and Gordon 1994). Inquiries into how certain forms of civil society have the potential to transform inequalities through active citizenship and community-making have been another dimension of the decentering of national membership (Somers 2008; Lister 2007; Kabeer 2005). Here, consonant with increased scholarly attention to participation as opposed to rights, discussed in more detail in the following section, the local is seen as a site more conducive to democratic decision-making and inclusion than the distant national (Andrén 2007). For example, Gordon and Stack assert that living traditions of citizenship in towns and cities can create conditions for autonomy of voice and livelihood that may be more valuable than the rights that states proclaim and then fail to guarantee (2007).

Revisiting the city-based origins of classical and modern citizenship in Europe, Isin claims that only in the city can citizenship be “actual,” but in relation to the state it is always
“virtual.” The opposition he proposes is not between real and unreal, but between the embodied material and the imaginary. “Urban citizenship has been the building block of national citizenship,” but the image of the state as encompassing and above the city, based on scalar concepts that situate places in a hierarchy of levels, has obscured this genealogy (Isin 2007, 224). In a related strand of theorizing that links scales “above” and “below” the state, some have argued that global cities are becoming partially decoupled from the nation as they are increasingly connected to global and transnational circuits (Sassen 2006; Ford 2001; Isin 2000). The strange assemblages these forces produce in cities can make them catalysts for emerging forms of citizenship (Sassen 2005; Holston and Appadurai 1996).

But specific scalar imaginaries of the state are made, transmitted and viewed in particular locations, and perpetuated through specific place-making and representation practices (Latour 2005). As well as standardizing, the modern state has also constantly made “compromises with the particular” inherent in the local (Feuchtwang 2004, 19). Thus I seek to interrogate the production of place, size and scale (Latour 2005), and identify some of the specific metaphorical and practical techniques involved in “spatializing” the state (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). As Sassen has pointed out, the global may be embedded in the national, and the two should not necessarily be seen as separate and mutually exclusive domains, in theory or in practice (2000). I apply the same logic to conceptualizing the mutual constitution of the local and the national.

Applying the insights of this new “spatial turn” to an account of citizenship, then, should involve consideration of how local, national and global institutionalized dimensions of citizenship, both formal and informal, have consistently been mediated through or exercised in sub-state entities, whether in cities, villages, or elsewhere. As I show in this thesis, the local is a nexus both for citizen-making and for state-making, as well as their un-making, re-making and transformation. The local is a site to witness both the production of the national, and the ways the dominance of the national makes certain locations and modes of citizenship relatively invisible. The narrative of the national state has so dominated the literature on citizenship that it has generally made these actual techniques and processes invisible.

While the unsettling of the congruence between the national and citizenship has been widely noted (Holston and Appadurai 1996), I will argue in this thesis that the case of China provides an opportunity for rethinking the role of the local even in the moments of apparent congruence, and thus for revisiting some of the assumptions of the citizenship literature. Even articles aimed at challenging the congruence between the two frequently
present narratives of a “classical” or “traditional” form of citizenship in which it fit into and was fully articulated with the nation-state as container, opposing this to a changed reality in which this is no longer the case (see for example, Blank 2007; Holston and Appadurai 1996). But as Soysal writes, even the imagined dominance of the national was relatively short-lived: “Only quite recently has national citizenship become a powerful construct” (1994, 139). And the role of social science in the political project of constructing national societies has been noted (See for example, Latour 2005; Beck 2002). Below I point to some avenues in which such an inquiry can revisit and revise certain assumptions about aspects of modern citizenship.

The first concerns the role of the local in the formation of the national. Studies of the formation of national citizenship have indicated how this emerged in and through local political communities. Constructing national identity also sought to reframe the particularity of local landscapes and cultural norms as national forms, infusing the local with national meaning (Confino 1997). The modularity of national forms of the local may have obscured continuities in local administrative and political institutions. Just as the identity of individuals may be layered, re-naming and re-shaping institutions to conform to these modular forms adds new layers over older ones. The extent of continuity and change is a matter for empirical investigation. In the contrary direction, the Italian national project made Rome the symbol of the new state, displacing the identities of other cities (Andrén 2007). Skinner and Stråth’s warning about the teleology inherent in writing about the “rise and triumph” of the state, and their reminder that the state continued to have rivals to its “absolutist and centralizing tendencies” until quite late in Western European history, is apposite (2003, 4).

A second point is that the state is a composite, comprising a variety of sites and levels. Local government has never been merely the outpost of a uniform national bureaucracy, even if the central state seeks to present it as such. Even unitary states have some degree of division of powers between different levels of government—formalized or de facto—and the roles of the local are not only fixed by the demands of the center, but also reflect a history of local place-making and continuity in administrative practices and forms. For example, arguing partly against Marshall, Somers has shown the importance of specific configurations of local political economy in the development of the type of national citizenship that emerged in the English case (1994; 1993). A neglected aspect of the genealogy of “social rights” is an “absolute right to public relief” in some English localities under the Poor Laws (Powell 2009, 35).

Although this dispersed and multi-level conception of the state is obviously relevant
to formally federal systems, the implications of federalism for citizenship have rarely been addressed in the literature. In a rare exception, Jackson has pointed to distinctions arising from the “multiple” citizenships that exist in a variety of federal states (2001). Recent comparative scholarship on welfare states looks at the impact of federalism and territorial politics on social policy (McEwen and Moreno 2005; Obinger, Leibfried, and Castles 2005). Some such works have found that “democratic federalism limits welfare state development” (Wincott 2006, 169, emphasis in original). Although unitary polities are seen as more favorable environments for the emergence of welfare states, in practice territorial variations and the distribution of powers between the center and localities can affect social citizenship provision in these states as well (Wincott 2006). As Clarke points out, in fact nations are in part an achievement of welfare states, an aspect of the building of them, rather than the containers in which social policy occurs (2005).

How the local contributes to the complicated relationship between identity and identification (Caplan and Torpey 2001) is another possible avenue of inquiry for citizenship studies. Efforts to form national citizens involved projects of rationalizing and reordering the local to make it legible to the state, such as through imposing surnames (Scott 1998). Here the question arises how the technologies of documentation that make citizens legible through fixing their names, locations, possessions, family relationships and attributes have relied on or been interpreted through earlier local record-keeping mechanisms, and how and in what ways such variations have mattered for recognition as a citizen. As Blank points out, the determination of who belongs, the *jus domicili* (right of residence), has generally been the domain of local government. This legal aspect of citizenship has been relatively neglected, as compared to the *jus soli* (right of the soil, birthright citizenship) and *jus sanguinis* (right of blood, descent citizenship) that have been seen as the two main grounds of qualification for citizenship (Blank 2007). Even in relation to the most central state-dominated element of citizenship, that of determining legal status as citizens, local administrative practices in this area have sometimes diverged from those advocated by national laws and policies. Illegal immigrants have found effective citizenship in certain cities in the U.S. and Japan, for example (Spiro 2010; Villazor 2010; Tsuda 2006).

Bringing in the local raises questions about the purposes of state systems of identification, which are often assumed to be intended to distinguish citizens from non-citizens. For example, Torpey writes that these developed because “states wanted to embrace their inhabitants more firmly, and to be able to distinguish them from outsiders more clearly” (Torpey 2000, 17). Arguably, however, distinguishing them from “outsiders”
was generally less important than *locating* them, and thus fitting them into schemes of nation-making, whether social, economic, or political. Situating people in local places and the drawing of administrative boundaries have been contentious political processes, and differences in local systems of representation, elections, voting and procedures for boundary-setting have not only shaped the terms of participation, but also the extent and character of local entitlements.

The local is also a site for the formation of social fields in which forms of capital are accumulated, exchanged and converted one to another. The concept of a “field” situates those within it in relation to each other, while their strategies for accumulation, exchange and conversion of capital are shaped by the politics within that space (Isin 2002; Bourdieu 1986). This relates to the ways citizenship serves to legitimate forms of inequality, as mentioned above. While Bourdieu’s focus is on practice, he has been criticized for failing to “investigate fields spatially” and “assuming a straightforward homology between the social and material space,” although he recognized that social relations were always situated in specific locations (Isin 2002, 41-42). Addressing this gap is one of the aims of the concept of local citizenship, since “groups cannot materialize themselves as real without realizing themselves in space, without creating configurations of buildings, patterns and arrangements, and symbolic representations of these arrangements” (Isin 2002, 42-43).

As a state that pursues a strong national project, one that continues more than a century of efforts at combined citizen- and state-making (Culp 2007), the China case presents an intriguing focus for an inquiry into the ways national citizenship is made in and through both the materiality and the imaginary of the local. In this study, I explore this through an institutional focus on successors to Maoist collective institutions, the RCs and VCs, considering the three dimensions of citizenship practice of membership, participation and entitlement, thus contributing to elucidating features of citizenship in China, while also developing new avenues for citizenship theory in the light of this case.

**Beyond Euro-American modernity**

*Concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality, and so on all bear the burden of European thought and history… [T]here is no easy way of dispensing with these universals in the condition of political modernity. Without them there would be no social science that addresses issues of modern social justice.*

Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (2000, 4-5)
Citizenship is a multivalent and contested concept, whether in social science or in public discourse. It encompasses an array of meanings: normative, substantive, philosophical, political and historical. Arising out of Euro-American modernity, the related elements that comprise this notion have always travelled along circuits of capital and power through exchanges of “meaning value,” and been constantly transformed along the way (Liu 1999b). Citizenship has served contradictory purposes: it has formed the basis of claims for inclusion and social justice, and also operated as justification for exclusion and violent expulsion. It has been a rallying point for emancipatory politics, and also a disciplinary mechanism to induce citizens to conform to the perceived needs of state projects. As Lister puts it, it is a “Janus-faced” concept (Lister 2007, 11; Lister 2003).

Both in normative terms and in practice, citizenship and the modern state have been mutually constitutive. Marshall’s account explores this in England, highlighting the sequential emergence of different sets of citizenship rights—civil, political and then social. This sequence is widely accepted, although often criticized for assuming an inevitable evolutionary progress (Barbalet 1988). Yet the implications of this sequencing are not often made clear: the fact that social rights came to be considered rights in the English case is linked to the fact that civil and then political rights were established and then extended to previously excluded groups. The idea of equality before the law inherent in civil rights is a key element both in the extension of the franchise and then in claims for the social rights that make equality meaningful (Marshall 1992 [1949]). In this sense, Marshall’s is an evolutionary argument, but this does not mean his account implies that these extensions of rights were in any sense automatic, or occurred as an ineluctable result of the expansion of markets as some have asserted (Solinger 1999). It is an account that is genealogical in showing how one set of institutional forms and practices sets the conditions for what comes next.

Another key element of Marshall’s argument is that the different sets of rights are embedded in specific institutions with which they are associated. For civil rights, these are legal institutions; for political rights, parliaments, political parties, electoral systems; and for social rights, a range of institutions, such as welfare bureaucracies, schools and public health systems (Marshall 1992 [1949]). Citizenship is thus an “instituted process,” as Somers puts it, adapting a term borrowed from Polanyi. In her view, citizenship emerges from “the articulation of national organizations and universal rules with the particularisms and varying political cultures of local environments.” Citizenship is thus achieved through social action and is only a possible outcome of a particular configuration of national and
local institutions and practices (Somers 1993, 589).

The Polanyi essay from which Somers borrows argues that many key concepts in the study of economics are implicitly based on norms of markets and exchange derived from capitalist economies. He picks apart the normative from the substantive in these concepts through considering their applicability to a variety of economic processes and institutions in different historical periods, thus articulating a broader range of possible meanings for terms such as money, trade and markets that those commonly used by economists. In this endeavor, he focuses both on motion (process) and continuity (institutions), highlighting the values, motives and policies underlying particular patterns of economic activity (1957).

In my view, applying a similar approach to citizenship brings into question the foundational position of rights, revealing how different types of historical experience may result in varying permutations of participation, membership, entitlement and obligation, as well as altering the specific meaning of each of these elements. Complicating this picture is a similar phenomenon to that Polanyi describes for economics, where a dominant language (in his case that of exchange, in the case of citizenship that of rights) can come to overlay institutions that vary significantly from the conceptions of these terms in Europe or North America. Even within Europe, distinctly different legal orders shape both form and practice of citizenship rights in varying ways (See for example the discussion in Lister 2007). In fact, the universal of rights is always expressed in a particular, local language and embedded in institutional forms with a specific material history (Balfour and Cadava 2004).

Yet despite the insights of critical legal studies, the meaning of rights is often assumed to be a philosophical, rather than an empirical question. There is no one, true version of rights; throughout their history, rights have had multiple, contested and even contradictory meanings, and have been used for opposing purposes. In the context of political “dissensus” rights may hold the potential for upsetting existing orders and empowering the excluded (Rancière 2004); yet as established juridical forms they also reflect the symbolic capital of the centralized state that monopolizes the granting of justice (Bourdieu 1998).

Rights have been both a rallying cry in liberatory struggles, and part of the justification for colonial domination and imperialism. From the perspective of non-Western societies, direct experience of the reality of rights for the few and the exclusion of the many inevitably makes rights appear contingent and contradictory (Baxi 1998) in a way that is less immediately evident from a contemporary Euro-American vantage point, although it certainly

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7 This goes beyond what Somers does with Polanyi’s concept.
was clear to Marx in the late 19th century (Marx 1906). Rights also have multiple roles: they may be moral or political in nature, serving as claims on the state for inclusion, for access to resources, or for protection, often framed in universal terms; and they may also be forms of incorporation, recognized legal rights that the state is obligated to respect and protect, representing an already-agreed social contract between the individual and the state.

In a very real sense, legal rights in China today legitimize the central state and discipline the local state and its officials for failing to realize the unfunded mandates that same central state has created (Lee 2007; O’Brien and Li 2006). The emergence of rights in China have comparable dimensions to their role in the concurrently “individualizing” and “totalizing” directions Foucault observed in the development of the European centralized state. They both reflect sovereign power and invoke certain types of subject, thus serving to “structure the possible field of action” (Foucault 1982, 221).

Folding rights into citizenship means that sociologists have often failed to interrogate the relationship between the two ideas, and how different forms of each affect the other. Brett’s analysis of how rights and citizenship were conceptualized in early modern Europe shows that the association between the two terms “is not necessarily obvious or self-explanatory,” but relates to how they were employed in particular political projects there (2003, 97). Between 1500 and 1700, the implications of European discourses on rights and citizenship led in opposing directions, with some theorists proposing that rights limited the polity’s power to subject individuals to the “common good.” Grotius and Hobbes then used emerging conceptions of sovereignty and the state to disallow such a sense of rights, proposing that individuals made a contract to surrender their rights in return for protection from the state. In Locke’s writing, the main aim of membership in a community is protection of private rights against depredation from others (Brett 2003, 99-105, 110-111).

Similar tensions can be observed in the ways that liberal rights and civic republican participation are combined and balanced in particular European polities (Lister 2007). There, and elsewhere, as the idea of finding grounds for a “common good” is challenged by claims for the recognition of difference, liberal rights have become increasingly dominant in the citizenship nexus (Holston and Appadurai 1996). Critiques of the passivity of liberal citizenship and concerns for reviving more deliberative forms of democracy have led an increased emphasis on participation among some theorists, including some feminists (Lister 2001; Habermas 1998; Mouffe 1992).

Such contradictions point to the need to “provincialize” Europe by challenging the idea of a hegemonic version of modernity resting on common universal norms. “European
thought has a contradictory relationship” to modernity in a non-European country like India, writes Chakrabarty. “It is both indispensible and inadequate in helping us think through the various life practices that constitute the political and the historical in India” (2000, 6). This comment could apply equally well to China. As Rofel argues, the “other modernity” of China is neither on a trajectory of teleological progress towards a universal modernity, nor removed from these universalizing projects by virtue of being culturally other. Rather, in an ambivalent and power-laden process, differently situated groups engage with terms such as “rights” and “citizenship” in distinct ways that reflect their own embodied experience and location (1999).

With a starting point in the fundamental ambivalence of rights, I consider how conceptions of rights are employed in form and practice—linking them to their Western historical origins, but showing how they have been transformed in their peregrinations—as well as seeking to identify other concepts used to form a citizenship nexus. As I show in Chapter 2, ironically “political rights” in contemporary Chinese practice are more often a means for top-down mobilization of citizens in scripted rituals of state legitimation than an avenue for expression of bottom-up concerns. As mentioned above, rather than rights, I use the term “entitlements” to describe relations of obligation between the state and citizens as it is less freighted with implications deriving from the specific institutional contexts of Euro-American forms of modernity. In Chapter 3, I take up the question of entitlements specifically in relation to social citizenship. China’s identification as “socialist,” the priority the Chinese leadership gives to “the right to subsistence” and the shift away from a strategy of full employment and state planning make this dimension a particularly salient aspect of citizenship to examine. I explore how the concept of the “guarantee” (保障) associated with the welfare benefits provided by Maoist collective institutions continues to shape how people conceptualize and experience the entitlements of social citizenship in China today.

Parameters of differential citizenship in China

When “citizenship” is assumed to be a concept with universal meaning that has certain specific content—essentially based on an ideal type model of Euro-American modernity—contemporary China is mainly characterized as a place lacking in citizenship. Thus in Harris’ assessment, citizenship in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) “may be an idea and practice whose time has yet to come” (Harris 2002, 192). This reflects a normative approach common in the literature. For example, Somers argues that citizenship rights can only be achieved in contexts where a popular public sphere coexists with a strong civil
society that is sufficiently insulated from both state and market (Somers 2008).

By contrast, some scholars trace the components of modern citizenship back to imperial forms, making no distinction between “subjects” and “citizens.” For example, Li and Wu write, “In Chinese, the word ‘citizen’ has a very long history.” They go on to point out that the meaning of the term is different to that of the Western concept, in that it means a person who “worked for, and would be protected by, the state or the emperor” (1999, 157). As a constitutional or legal status, however, citizenship was not formally recognized until its codification in laws and the 1954 Constitution in the early years of the PRC. But the Constitution did not specify who the citizens were, and divisions between “the people” and those considered class enemies made the position of those who advocated equality before the law politically dangerous (Yu 2002).

A guarantee of equality before the law for all citizens was incorporated into the 1982 Constitution as part of the reform-era project of establishing socialist legality. Rights in many areas are now codified, but their enforcement remains “a significant task,” write Li and Wu. They attribute this to two factors: a conception of rights that sees rights as a gift of government to citizens in return for their performance of certain duties; and the lack of familiarity with legal institutions and law as a mechanism for protecting people’s interests. “We like to think that the citizen and the government are in mutual dependence; many think of the government as their father and themselves as the government’s sons and daughters. We have never seen citizens’ rights as a product of a contract between individual and state on an equal basis” (Li and Wu 1999, 165).

This view assumes a uniform hegemonic meaning of citizenship, rights and law in China, both now and in the past. Exploring both contestation and consensus around conceptions of nation, state and citizens in the early part of the 20th century has been a very productive field of inquiry for scholars of modern Chinese history, as Culp’s survey of relevant studies shows. Evidently, the idea of citizenship has been central to the making of Chinese modernity (Culp 2007). Euro-American ideas on the subject were translated through the medium of a language saturated with historical meanings in a context where predatory European powers threatened the very existence of an independent Chinese state (Liu 1996, 1-34; Liu 1999a, 127-164). For example, the term “citizen” was initially translated

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8 In the 1982 Constitution, citizens are defined (somewhat tautologically) as all people who have Chinese nationality. The provision on equality states: “Chinese citizens are equal before the law” (中华人民共和国公民在法律面前一律平等) (Art. 33). This is not a guarantee of equal citizenship per se, but a statement of equality in relation to the law.
as “person of the state/country” (国民), a reverse loan from Japanese, but one that had an ancient etymology signifying subject-hood in the imperial Chinese order (Culp 2007).

Culp identifies four main related strands in recent investigations into the meaning of citizenship in the late imperial and republican eras: the question of Chinese national identity; ideas about civic participation; social citizenship; and formation of a “modern” culture of civility. In the main, these aspects have been studied separately, and there is much value, he asserts, in examining the relations between them. A synthesis reveals a common strand of civic republicanism, an orientation of citizenship towards “active contribution to the national community.” This is highlighted in the word for citizen that became dominant in the People’s Republic, 公民, which literally means “public person” (Culp 2007, 1849, 1836-1837).

In my synthesis of the different elements of citizenship for contemporary China, I find significant continuity in the emphasis on the collective and the common good.

In China’s modern history, the local has been seen as a key site for the formation of a new Chinese nation. Some scholars of modern China have identified a tension between the project of nation-building and the emergence of a “civil society” based on localism. Yet as Tsin points out, as conceptualized by late Qing and early republican thinkers, the formation of “society” was aimed at creating the constituent units of a national state through the formation of disciplined local groups based on moral commitment to the public good. Here the formation of society is a distinctly political project. This also involved practices of identification that sorted new citizens into differential categories—most notably classes—useful to this nation-building project. Those belonging to different classes were seen as making variable contributions to the project of building a national society, thus legitimizing distinctions based on status in the name of the public good (Tsin 1997, 231). As Zarrow points out, such a conception of the citizenry was simultaneously “inclusive and elitist” (1997, 12).

The theme of differentiated citizenship that this implies is reflected in one of the most prominent concentrations of scholarship on this subject in contemporary China. Solinger’s widely cited work on rural-to-urban migrants proposes that there is a fundamental division in China between two unequal classes of citizenship based on the distinctions in the hukou system between “agricultural” 农业 (rural) and “non-agricultural” 非农业 (urban) categories. Urban residents enjoy “full” citizenship, while people from rural areas are “denied genuine

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9 These distinctions are based on place of residence, rather than occupation, and remain difficult to change. For a recent summary of the state of China’s system of residence registration, see Chan and Buckingham (2008). For a historical overview of the system’s antecedents and current manifestations, see Fei-ling Wang (2005).
This division reflects historically generous (though now much reduced) state provision of housing, work, welfare and even food to urban residents, and the denial of these to the large numbers of incoming rural migrant workers and traders who arrived in cities from the 1980s onwards.

While it provides an empirically rich picture of the effects of exclusion on rural migrants to the city, Solinger’s bifurcated conception of citizenship in China is problematic. There are significant and important exceptions to her urban/rural line of exclusion, even in formal terms. Urban-registered people who cross an administrative boundary to work or live (whether to an urban or a rural area) can become just as much excluded outsiders as rural migrants. In their places of origin, rural people from areas with successful collective economic endeavors may enjoy higher levels of welfare than many urbanites, while excluding migrant workers from other places from those benefits (Smart and Smart 2001).

Urban citizenship has been far from unitary: hierarchical rankings of cities, workplaces and districts meant that those attached to them had access to varying levels of entitlements (Cheng and Selden 1997). Such differentiation continues today, and means that establishing membership in the highest ranking urban locations—Beijing and Shanghai in particular—can be even more difficult than gaining citizenship in a country like Canada (Li and Li 2010; Li, Li, and Chen 2010; Ho 2010).

While building on Solinger’s argument, Wu proposes a more complex model of “differential citizenship” that goes beyond the simple urban/rural binary. This is based on the hukou system, he argues, which has been a consistent aspect of the PRC’s approach to governance and nation-building. To the urban/rural distinction, he proposes adding two additional elements: distinctions between cadres and non-cadres; and between native and non-natives of a particular place. He argues that rather than moving towards universalization of citizenship rights, the current trajectory is one of increased differentiation based in both social practice and state categories. The current scheme of differentiation serves as a “precondition [for] and a by-product of China’s road to capitalism,” turning migrant workers into a proletariat ready for the requirements of a globalized economy (Wu 2010, 80-81).

However, like Solinger, Wu conceptualizes the categories he employs as a scheme of differentiation that operates on a national scale. Zhang sums up this view: “[U]rban citizenship in socialist China is the site of an enduring spatial politics whose terms have been set by the hukou system, which divides national space into two hierarchically ordered parts: the city and the countryside” (Zhang 2002, 313). Although all these accounts contain rich specification of the discriminatory potential of hukou distinctions, they adopt an oddly
disembodied conception of spatial location, projecting a simple binary (or set of binaries, in Wu’s case) across the vast territory of the PRC.

This reflects a relative neglect of the spatial manifestation of practices of governing in Chinese studies, with a few notable recent exceptions (Feuchtwang 2004; Bray 2005). Some of the works on citizenship take up issues of space: Smart and Smart argue that a form of “local citizenship” is created through particular configurations of inclusion/exclusion in rural communities (2001), although they do not apply this term beyond their particular example. “Village citizenship,” according to He, links participation rights in particular villages with access to economic resources and welfare services (2005).

Identifying mechanisms for the cultural production of citizenship differentiation in contemporary China has been another key strand in this literature. The urban/rural divide is one such mechanism, but the authors who have explored such processes have pointed to a number of others. Generally, these legitimize distinctions among citizens based on their contribution to national projects. In both social science and popular representations, sharp Maoist class distinctions have now been replaced with divisions of status along cultural lines (Anagnost 2008). For example, measurements of people's relative “quality” (素质) array them in hierarchies based on their relative distance from or nearness to an ideal of modernity, and thus serve to determine their entitlements to such goods as welfare and education (Jacka 2009; Fong and Murphy 2006). Sun shows how hierarchies of place are reflected in the attribution of a specific level of “quality” to people depending on their origins (Sun 2009), while mobile citizens who are “out of place” as “outsiders” have no claim on local social networks (Yang 1989). These authors vary in the extent to which they see such cultural distinctions as technologies of direct state control (Zheng 2007) or forms of governmentality that seek to govern at a distance through self-discipline (Tomba 2009).

While I take up this general theme of citizenship differentiation along the lines of both state categories and cultural distinctions, as I show in this thesis, the local is a key site for determining how this complex of features operates. The relations involved in citizenship are not abstract; they are enacted in a specific place and time, and in the context of contemporary China, the forms of governance give the local a particularly influential role in shaping the way differentiation affects the “conditions of possibility” for membership, participation and entitlement of individuals, as I show below.
Citizenship and governance

While citizenship is generally assumed to be a “hurrah word” (Bosniak 2000, 451) it also operates to differentiate and govern. Marshall himself recognized citizenship’s role in legitimating inequalities, intimating the importance of this feature in the nationalizing function of citizenship (1992 [1949]). Thus although equal citizenship alters the predominance of economic capital in the overall distribution of forms of capital in the social field, it justifies distinctions among citizens along parameters, notably cultural measures, based in education systems, as Marshall himself notes. Wincott asserts that Marshall was wrestling what he calls a “differentiated universalism” in this regard (2009, 52).

This differentiating feature is highlighted by Chatterjee, who argues that what Marshall terms “social rights” are in fact relations of “governmentality,” based not on citizenship equality but on distinctions within or among the members of a heterogeneous population. Social rights, he asserts, are a form of care that state agencies dispense unevenly to government-created categories of the population, such as “backward castes” or “the unemployed.” “[G]overnmentality always operates on a heterogeneous social field, on multiple population groups, and with multiple strategies. Here there is no equal and uniform exercise of the rights of citizenship” (Chatterjee 2004, 41, 60). In this form, citizenship becomes a strategy of differential governance that naturalizes distinctions among people, and differences in what the state provides for them.

In this vein, Ong contrasts the dispersed “regulative” aspects of liberalism in Western democracies—which make people fit into capitalist orders—and the way these functions are “gathered into the state apparatus” in Asian “liberal economies.” In Malaysia and Singapore, the state uses claims of cultural appropriateness and professional expertise to justify its regulation of society and individuals (1999, 194-203). She describes social benefits in Southeast Asian capitalism as a targeted form of “pastoral care [that] seeks to produce citizens attractive to capital” (1999, 202) This cushions those who meet the prescribed regulatory norms from the effects of neoliberal policies, while subjecting those who either explicitly reject them (dissidents) and those who have not met the relevant status requirements (these may be based on citizenship, ethnicity, gender, education, or social background) to the full force of the resulting insecurities. Ong labels such distinct entitlements a form of “graduated sovereignty” that reflects “graduated citizenship.” Such regimes of differentiation, she argues, prescribe varying levels of freedom and state control

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10 Ong employs a definition of sovereignty as the highest authority over places and people (1999, 215).
to sets of people even within one sovereign territory, rendering ideas of citizenship equality moot (2006, 78; 1999, 201-209, 217).

Such distinctions are based on a set of “specific rationalities” that serve to construct, justify and police distinctions and boundaries among people and places. These rationalities include both procedural rules and ideas about what is true and false (Lemke 2007; Foucault 2003; Foucault 1991b). They are incorporated into formal rules and institutions, expert knowledges and informal norms and practices. They generally reflect the supreme symbolic power of the modern state, which seeks to monopolize the “universals” that are to be used to differentiate among citizens (Bourdieu 1998). These rationalities shape the differentiation of citizenship by depoliticizing changes in people’s entitlements and status through making them the subject of expert judgments about optimal social ordering and matters of individual characteristics rather than political choices or priorities. In the context of contemporary China, a statistical rationality that has become hegemonic in the post-Mao era assumes that the economy and society are subject to general laws, which become the “regulating rules of history and society,” measuring China against an “advanced” Western other (Liu 2009, 52, 58).

Among the most dominant strains is the particular form of “economization” adopted in the state project of liberalization launched by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s (Muniesa, Millo, and Callon 2007, 3), in which the logic of economic efficiency is deployed to depoliticize painful social dislocations (Fourcade and Healy 2007). Economization applies “laws” of economics to the reordering of social life, and deploys “the market” as an impartial arbiter of value, relying on “calculative collective devices” as technological approaches to social problems (Callon and Muniesa 2005, 1229-1250). Another rationality identified here is “medicalization,” which involves expert systems that categorize some bodies as weak and incapable of certain types of activity based on inherent biological characteristics. A third is “individualization,” premised on the concept of “the average man,” a central component of the dominant statistical rationality (Liu 2009, 79). Linked to a long-term process of state-directed individualization in China, this approach distinguishes individuals from their various collectivities to make them legible and governable (Yan 2009). It is also very much in evidence in new regimes of labor discipline that seek to separate workers from their previous collective identifications to better manage them and make their labor “efficient” (Rofel 1999).

The role of such rationalities as forms of governance “from afar” (Zhang and Ong 2008) has become a major focus for some scholars of China. Sigley points to ways in which
the neoliberal conception of “governance” has been adopted and adapted in post-Mao China, but particularly since Deng Xiaoping’s reformulation of the aims of Chinese modernization. In particular, this is evident in the use of the conception of “autonomy” through which subjects self-govern (Sigley 2006). As Liu points out, differential institutions and practices of citizenship are consciously shaped in conversation with a global modernist imaginary (2009). A major focus, as mentioned above, has been how rationalities such as “quality” (素质) operate in disciplinary mode to internalize and individualize responsibility for people’s relative lack of citizenship entitlements, or conversely, their economic success as citizen-consumers (Hoffman 2010; Murphy 2004; Keane 2001). Like Ong, however, scholars have noted differentials in the application of these modes of governance, with those in the putative “middle class” deemed more able to exercise such self-discipline, with the state serving as midwife to the “entrepreneurial subject” responsible for realizing her/his own potential through accumulation and consumption of various types of capital (Anagnost 2008; Bray 2006). Hoffman shows how rationalities that view people as “human resources” in national projects and “technologies of the self” combine to evoke “acts of individual self-development” on the part of young urban professionals (2010, 19-21).

Such forms of disciplinary power co-exist with another central technology of rule that I term “socialized governance.” This is analogous to Foucault’s notion of “pastoral power,” which derives from the Catholic confessional, and involves personalized attention to each individual, including care of the soul (Foucault 2003; 1982). In contrast to the distanced approach of many modern forms of this power, which involve rationalities that internalize self-governance within the individual psyche, socialized governance seeks to ensure that each individual is integrated through a direct personal connection with a superior, activist, or leader, within a collective institution. Bray has noted the importance of this “pastoral” form in the work of Chinese communist cadres, with the crucial distinction that the aim of the communist cadre is to foster participation in collective endeavors (Bray 2005).

Socialized governance involves two connected modes, the first relating to dyadic relationships and the second to forms of local governance, both of which are in genealogical relationship to traditional forms of authority. The first of these represents a transformation of Confucian dyadic relationships\textsuperscript{11} that echoes the relationality of traditional conceptions of personhood (See for example, Zarrow 1997), while reformulating these in the context of the

\textsuperscript{11} Lo and Otis summarize the Confucian guanxi form as follows: “Institutionalized through the state and the patriarchal family, and with its principles of reciprocity, respect for hierarchy, and the ritual materialization of sentiment, Confucian doctrines played a dominant role in structuring and sustaining social relationships” (2003, 137).
embeddedness of all individuals in institutions that contribute to a national project. This kin-inflected mode of making individuals legible to the state and disciplining them through direct observation, bonds of personal obligation and emotional connection is a relatively neglected dimension of the operation of connectedness (guanxi, 关系), which, following Mayfair Yang’s influential work, has in recent years been studied more as a means of subverting state mechanisms (Yang 1994; Yang 1989).

In contrast to Yang, then, this suggests that guanxi is ambivalent: it may be a site for “reconstructing civil society after state fragmentation of social bonds” or act to “counter the new social fragmentation brought by capitalism” as Yang asserts (2002, 475); but it may also be a mechanism through which state or capitalist logics are brought to bear on individuals. Its adaptability reflects the “modularity” of the guanxi form, which has been progressively “deinstitutionalized” as it shifted from its location in fixed familial or authority relationships to new contexts, first in socialist institutions and then in the market (Lo and Otis 2003, 138-139). The ambivalence of guanxi means that this form of reciprocity can become a way of manipulating and speaking back to power (Yang 1989). An example of this is provided by Bray, who points out that the personalized nature of authority wielded by cadres meant that they were often the first to be targeted in Maoist campaigns; their powers of discipline over their subordinates were limited by the requirement that they, too, be seen as above reproach. The very intimacy of their relations with those in their pastoral care provided potential ammunition for these attacks, while at the same time, if they neglected the obligations they incurred in inducing compliance through the mechanism of guanxi this could make them vulnerable when the political climate changed. Such relationships cannot be captured in the instrumentalist, rational-actor terms of so much writing on the subject (Bray 2005). For citizens, then, socialized governance in its manifestation in dyadic relationships situated in collective institutions can provide mechanisms for holding leaders accountable through guanxi-produced obligation.

As Kipnis points out, guanxi should not be abstracted to mean just any kind of connection: “practices of guanxi production invoke a world where depth of feeling and material debt go together” (Kipnis 2002, 24). Yet at the same time, in its modularization guanxi has evolved into different forms that have distinct inflections with variations depending on the location of the practices and those involved in them (Wank 1998). In the service of state projects, guanxi production points to emotion management as a technology of governing. Perry notes the extensive use of such emotional management in the CCP’s political campaigns, beginning in its struggle for social revolution, and continuing on as a key
strategy in consolidating state power. As she points out, this has been studied more as thought control, rather than a matter of emotions (Perry 2002). The deployment of this technology in routines of governing has yet to be studied, a gap I begin to fill in my examination of the role of emotion in collective sense-making and governance in Chapter 4.

Liu observes the power of personal transformation through fusing individual experience with a collective narrative that was part of the Maoist project, crucially combined with specific collective participatory practices. This “was not simply an ‘order of things’; it was an ordering of things in practice” (2009, 157, emphasis in original). It involved uniting people into a mass to fight common enemies, but also becoming part of the mass through “unrelenting self-scrutinization” (2009, 168). “For both the inward looking self and the outward social being, every distinction for the subject was a qualitative distinction, a moral one, an ethical judgment of value, rather than a quantitative evaluation” (2009, 169, emphasis in original). The “good” was “a total quality that could not be measured by any means but could be only articulated or narrated in and as positionality or perspectivity” (2009, 170, emphasis in original).

The operation of these intimate yet collectively-situated forms of sense-making points to the importance of the location of socialized governance in the social field of collective institutions. The second dimension of socialized governance I propose is the way it draws on a mode of rule that blends formal and informal power. This is evident in local governing in the late imperial and early republican eras. Li describes “substantive government” in the villages of north China during the late Qing dynasty (to 1911) as “the fusion of government purposes into local, unofficial arrangements.” Fusing formal and informal powers, often in the same person, this kind of authority contrasted with formal bureaucratic administration, which only existed at higher levels. Such posts represented “a common ground where the interests of the state and the village society converged” (Li 2005, 10). Huang terms this style of governance “centralized minimalism.” While the center evinced a maximalist program of social ordering in its discursive pronouncements, it allowed these to be interpreted according to local norms and intervened only when intractable disputes arose. He asserts that there is significant continuity into the contemporary period in such practices, for example, in blending the role of local cadres as representatives of both the state and of local people (Huang 2008a).

This strategy of rule has a modular quality that has allowed for transformation of purposes within a similar institutional frame, analogous to the transformations of forms of authority in Europe described by Sassen (2006). In processes of growing
governmentalization of everyday life in China that continued throughout the 20th century, such forms of governance were extended to incorporate the entire population, by expanding participation as a means of recruiting new personnel to take on such roles. In the neighborhoods and villages, such positions were semi-formal, in the mass organizations and precursors to the institutions on which I focus here. In urban areas, this kind of “socialized governance” became an increasingly gendered project in urban neighborhoods outside the purview of the work unit system, as I outline in Chapter 1 (Wang 2005a; Wang 2005b). In certain rural areas, too, women’s emergence to domesticate the public sphere contributed to a similar governmentalization of daily life (Manning 2010). The mobilization of women became a means to bring order to local social life, by enmeshing each individual in a web of relations that linked them to the state through a series of dyadic chains. This represented a distinctly feminized aspect of the modularization of guanxi noted above, one that blurred the social and political as a means of integrating new sectors of the population into state projects. Socialized governance thus combines pressure for social conformity and political reliability by relying on an overarching moral discourse that seeks to harmonize public and private purposes. The metaphor of governance is overwhelmingly familial, with distinct Confucian echoes; but this is a family already transformed by modernity.

In this “culturalist” mode of rule, ideological prescription is the principal technology deployed by the center to integrate the practices of localities (Herrmann-Pillath 2006). Now frequently dismissed as mere verbiage, ideology remains crucial to legitimation, argues Holbig (2009). Yet it not only signals the limits of the aims of “reforms,” it also sets parameters by which the government itself may be judged (Holbig and Gilley 2010; Holbig 2009). Schoenhals emphasizes how the Party seeks to dominate through identifying “correct formulations” and enforcing rules of language, such that even critics need to phrase their complaints in these terms. “To gain access to the agora, PRC citizens must employ as their means of expression what in the eyes of the state count as ‘appropriate’ formulations” (Schoenhals 1992, 14). Yet even such apparently compliant claims-making can seek to expand the sense of official language to encompass meanings for which it may not have been intended, and divergent aims may be pursued under the guise of verbal conformity (Liu 2009; Wang 2005b). In this way, ideological pronouncements set the stage for a cultural politics at all different levels of the polity. Discourse does not have intrinsic meaning; its power effects are situational, and people can subvert official language in their uses of it, as I show in Chapter 2. Such strategies are used to varying effects, depending on the social and
institutional settings in which they occur. Describing and analyzing the resulting locally-situated politics of citizenship is the aim of this thesis.

Chapter outline

Each of the following four chapters in this thesis addresses a dimension of the model of citizenship I have presented in this Introduction, dealing respectively with institutions, participation, entitlements and membership as interlocking aspects that together form the citizenship order. Below I outline the main points of each chapter in turn.

Chapter 1 presents the institutional environment of the sites for local citizenship which are the focus of this study, the residents committees and villager committees. Here I concentrate on the specific institutional form for the “instituted process” of citizenship in my field sites, both in terms of a general inquiry into their historical genealogy and in terms of their present specificity in the context of rural and urban Tianjin. I show how their form reflects the importance of the legacy of Maoist collective institutions, as well as more recent projects of economic and social reform and restructuring. As well as their similarities, I highlight distinctions that can be mapped in part on the urban/rural divide, and shape the ground for the local politics of citizenship and socialized governance within them. RCs are a largely feminized sphere that depends on minimal resources from the local state to fulfill the mandate of “constructing society” and is thus ultimately reliant on the unpaid or underpaid labor of women, while their role in controlling collective property makes VCs a site for a more contested politics of distribution. As well as providing a genealogy of citizenship institutions, this comparison contributes a gendered perspective on institutions that have rarely been compared despite their parallel constitutional, legal and administrative frameworks.

In Chapter 2, I consider RCs and VCs as a site for politics, concentrating on different forms of participation that take place within them. Given their institutional role as the locus for formal political participation in the form of elections, dealing with complaints and acting as a channel for feedback to government from the grassroots, this chapter focuses on these dimensions of participation. However, it shows how, in their reliance on socialized governance for their performance of the script, these controlled formal processes create the grounds for a local politics of collective sense-making and assertion of claims over resources, including through apparently compliant talk. Here, given decreased controls on expression of opinions, the institutions on the edges of the state can become a site for the formation of an emergent public sphere in which collective norms are defined and contested
through what I call a “politics of gossip and talk.” This is not to say that there are no limits: I show how the treatment of people who violate the unwritten norms that restrict the scope of this public sphere are subject to social and political shunning, thus revealing the boundaries of the permissible through negative example. This chapter contributes to an understanding of the dynamics of local politics.

The specific character of entitlements, and concomitant state obligations, shape how claims can be made and on what terms. Chapter 3 focuses on social citizenship, showing how the concept of the collective “guarantee” that emerged from the responsibility of Mao-era institutions such as work units and communes for the welfare of their members, and continues to inform people’s sense of citizenship entitlements in contemporary China. It considers a variety of different incarnations of the guarantee in forms of welfare and practices in the field sites, including new hybrid forms that blend more bureaucratic systems for determining eligibility with elements of these older forms, such as the “minimum livelihood guarantee,” the principal welfare program for the poor. It looks at the rationalities expressed in these forms, and how these are variously interpreted through the differing environments of the local institutions and social fields in the four RCs and VCs. Socialized governance is a key element in the operation of these welfare systems, in that it makes individuals legible to the state and is thus a feature of determining their eligibility for welfare. But it also provides people with avenues for seeking to have their needs met. This mode of welfare delivery is in tension with the move towards bureaucratic and professionalized administrative practices.

Both participation and entitlements are contingent on local membership, as I show in Chapter 4. This depends in part on the hukou system, but in the distinctive social fields of the four field sites, the terms of recognition and inclusion conferred by membership could be quite different, thus revealing how social and cultural dimensions mediate the effects of these state categories. Local processes of collective sense-making shape the terms of this mediation. Membership is defined both socially and by the effects of spatial strategies of place-making that distinguish not only between people who belong and those who do not, but also justify differing entitlements among citizens. The effect of rationalities of government such as economization depends in part on local political and social culture, formed through socialized governance, as well as on comparisons and value judgments about other places and other people, both visible and imagined. The gathering together of the various dimensions of citizenship within the institutional location of RCs and VCs magnifies these effects. This chapter contributes to a new focus on emotions as a
technology of rule in contemporary China by considering the management of feeling as a routine aspect of governance, one that is particularly important as part of the *guanxi*-based exchange situated in socialized governance. In the social field of each location a complex array of forms of distinction linked to local, national and global levels legitimize differentials in the citizenship entitlements of people within its space, thus forming the local citizenship order.
Chapter 1
Institutions of local citizenship: residents and villager committees

In the middle of my field work, I often traveled between two sites in different parts of Tianjin Municipality during the course of a day on a journey that took me from 40 minutes to an hour. Moving from one to the other, I found two contrasting institutional landscapes.

Scene one: At the end of a long, low temporary-looking building in the back alley of a residential compound, a family runs an indoor storage for bikes and the cherished (and frequently stolen) electric scooters where these can be left for a small fee. The other end of the building has several offices with ill-fitting wood-frame and glass doors and small windows. Rusty metal gates are pulled across the doors at night and secured with padlocks. No one would find this place unless they came with someone familiar with the locale. Inside the unadorned main office, facing the door, are two rows of desks arranged at right angles to each other, in the manner of inquiry counters, at which, if all are present (which is rare) seven women sit. All the desks are piled with papers and notebooks. Along one wall there are two computers and an ancient dot matrix printer, and a phone. Against another wall are a row of metal cabinets filled with files and paper visible through the glass in the upper parts of the doors, some stacked neatly, some higgledy-piggledy. Immediately to the right of the main door is another metal cabinet with a display of contraceptives and literature on population planning. To the left, two empty wheelchairs are parked adjacent to a glass table.

Scene two: Polished granite steps lead up to an automatic sliding glass door which opens on the lobby of a three storey office building forming part of the L of a recently opened strip mall next to the subway line. The red lettering of the illuminated sign on the top of this three-storey building is visible from the elevated subway platform when alighting from the train. Inside the building, immediately facing the door, a ceiling-high carved screen obscures the corridor behind. Large golden carp swim in a tank at the side, and a massive yellowish-marble fountain tosses a yellow marble ball, filling the echoing lobby with the sound of running water. From his spacious office to the right of the door, a concierge looks through the glass window into the lobby. Around a corner to the left is one of the building’s seven large offices, all bigger than the room where the seven women work, some twice the size. Tall windows let in a lot of light, and small sounds are magnified in the cavernous marble-floored space. Two women and two men are at the four big wooden desks set facing each other by the windows. A row of tall metal cupboards covers the wall opposite. The
computer on a computer desk at one end is shared by the staff of this office, and at the other end of the room is an institutional photocopier and a telephone.

In contrast to what assumptions about urban privilege relative to rural deprivation would lead one to expect, the first is the site of the model urban residents’ committee (RC) I call “Progress”—one of only a handful of RCs chosen as “experimental points” in Hexi District—while the second is the office of the rural villager committee (VC) of “Zhang Family Village” in the rapidly urbanizing Beichen District. My description of their material conditions is allegorical, seeking to reveal the array of meanings expressed through this medium (Law 2002). As noted by Bray, configurations of built space in both imperial and socialist China are consciously designed to manifest a set of relationships of power (2005). The differences between the two sites reveal a great disparity in their access to resources, as well as distinctions in their social position as institutions, in their relationships to their constituents and in the aspirations of their leaders. Whereas making do is the main impression derived from the RC’s office space, in the case of the VC, its building expresses an aspiration to corporate status in a globalizing economy.

The two other field sites evoke similar contrasts. Although situated in the remote mountains of Jixian County north of the city, what I am calling “Dragon Peak Village” has a similarly imposing building: a three-storey purpose built structure, draped with enormous banners extolling the VC’s political and economic achievements (see picture on following page). While “Rising China’s” office in Nankai District is in a purpose-built community building in the center of the main residential compound it serves, it occupies a small part of this building, and the place where most of the staff do their daily work is a barely heated add-on with a flimsy recycled interior door for its entrance way. (See also Appendix 1.)

As “basic level organizations,” RCs and VCs take on many of the same tasks in their respective jurisdictions. A set of national laws outline the main features and tasks of these two types of institutions in very general terms. In texts, reports and speeches by local leaders, these laws were regularly mentioned as guides for the operations of RCs and VCs, and consulted to find guidance on disputed issues. (See Appendix 2 for more details on the regulatory arrangements.) Their main purpose is as institutions of self-government, but they have a key role in ensuring the implementation of law, developing democracy and creating socialist material and spiritual “civilization” (文明) at the grassroots.

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12 Tianjin Municipality is composed of seven urban districts, four suburban districts, two rural districts and three rural counties. (All these administrative divisions are “county level” divisions.)
In the 1982 Chinese constitution currently in force, RCs and VCs are conceived of as institutions that are self-governing, elected by their constituents and responsible for managing “public affairs and social services.” Formally “autonomous,” they are conceptualized as an intermediary between the state and the people, a linkage point between “state” and “society.” As the Constitution describes them:

The residents committees and villagers committees established in urban and rural areas on the basis of place of residence are basic level self-governing organizations of mass character. The chairperson, vice-chairperson and members of each residents or villagers committee are elected by the residents. The relationship between the residents and villagers committees and the grass-roots organs of state power is prescribed by law.

The residents and villagers committees establish sub-committees for people’s mediation, public security, public health and other matters in order to manage public affairs and social services in their areas, mediate civil disputes, help maintain public order and convey residents’ opinions and demands and make suggestions to the people’s government.¹³

Despite their divergent histories outlined below, the 1982 Constitution made the VCs and RCs parallel institutions with a single set of responsibilities. Subsequently, in the late 1980s and 1990s, separate laws were enacted for each type of body.\textsuperscript{14} This institutional parallelism has largely gone unremarked as one of the driving forces of their subsequent development, but it is clearly an important factor. Aside from their constitutional role, the fact that the Ministry of Civil Affairs is the government agency responsible for both means that rationales applied to one have later been applied to the other. This is an important aspect in the development of contested elections to the RCs—pioneered in the VCs—and now of the spread of the idea of “building communities”—policies that revitalized the RCs—to the VCs. Laws on the two types of bodies, drafted around the same time, are broadly similar.

These institutions are seen as the building blocks of the state. As replacements for earlier institutional forms, such as work units and agricultural collectives, they are “surrogates of state-corporatist structures” (Benewick, Tong, and Howell 2004, 23). As a street office official responsible for Progress and other RCs in the area put it to me in an interview, “If you don’t put down a good foundation, as soon as the wind blows and the grass moves the structure above will become unstable, and the house will fall down.” Ensuring that people are clothed and fed is vital to such a foundation, she said. RCs are also known as “nerve tips” of the local government (Wong and Poon 2005; Read 2000), and both RCs and VCs have been key sites for “Party building” at the grassroots (Benewick, Tong, and Howell 2004). Yet these institutions are not government agencies. Their leadership is primarily drawn from among the residents or villagers, thus blending both formal and informal dimensions of authority in an approach that echoes late imperial models of local self-governance (Li 2005).

In this form, the penetration of local communities by the state has a long history in China (Read and Chen 2008; Li 2005). This is not to say that their form or function is determined by tradition, but to point out that these reflect a certain degree of historical continuity. In the emphasis on the novelty of rural elections and the idea of “community construction”—both often linked with global discourses in different ways—the way the current incarnations of RCs and VCs are layered over earlier institutional forms is often neglected.

\textsuperscript{14} Organic Law on Villager Committees (for Trial Implementation) 《中华人民共和国村民委员会组织法（试行）》, 1987; Organic Law on Urban Residents Committees 《中华人民共和国城市居民委员会组织法》, passed December 28, 1989, effective January 1, 1990 (below OLURC); Organic Law on Villager Committees 《中华人民共和国村民委员会组织法》, passed November 4, 1998, effective the same day (below OLVC).
Reflecting a common rural/urban bifurcation in scholarly work on China that is also replicated in the mainland Chinese academy, the two types of institutions have rarely been compared by scholars. One exception is the “preliminary comparison” by Benewick et al. that focuses on the evolving regulatory and policy framework of the two types of institution, and considers how the official policy of “community building” might affect the role of the RCs and VCs. It concludes that there are significant tensions between autonomy and governance, and that on balance the latter is stressed over the former (2004).

Work on these foundations of the Chinese state structure has concentrated on their role in remaking urban governance, and as the site for rural experiments in direct elections. Here I consider them as parallel sites for the formation and exercise of citizenship, grounding the personal connection of individuals with the state. This focus draws on my conception of citizenship as an “instituted process” (Somers 1993; Marshall 1992 [1949]; Polanyi 1957). The institutional form of RCs and VCs—both its nationally-mandated character and its specific, local manifestation—sets the conditions for the practice of citizenship in the field sites in my study. I begin this chapter by considering the terms of the autonomy exercised by RCs and VCs, proceeding to outline the historical origins and basic characteristics of their current form and how this manifested in the forms of administration practiced in each of my four field sites.

“Autonomy”: a technology of governance

Generally my hosts always pointed out that the RCs and VCs were self-governing (自治) as part of introducing their institutions to me. Quite what this meant was not entirely clear, but it seemed to relate to the provision of very limited resources to them and the fact that staff of the RCs and VCs were not civil servants (which was also related to the limited resources). Rising China’s Party Secretary Dai told me in an interview that the RC was an “agency of the street office,” 15 while at the same time it was self-governing.

As pointed out by a number of scholars, the English word “autonomy,” with its current connotations of relative independence and non-interference by the state, is a poor translation for the Chinese term 自治 (Sigley 2006; Potter 2011), although it is the translation officially chosen by the PRC state. The Chinese term, which combines characters for “self” and “govern,” has a long history, and was associated with both late Qing (1850-1911) and republican-era (1911-1949) projects of building up local government as a form of state-building (Tsin 1997; Li 2005). It also reflects the tradition of local autarky built up in the

15 The street office (街道办事处) is the lowest level of formal government in urban China.
course of the CCP’s history of governing dispersed territories in the context of the guerrilla war prior to 1949 (Bray 2005). Neoliberal imperatives emerging from globally-circulating discourses on individual and organizational autonomy and choice as motors for economic expansion and diminishing the scope of state responsibilities—for example, the professionalization of RC staff and the formation of self-governing communities—are thus layered over these diverse historical strands of meaning and experience in current practice.

Perennial debates about the applicability to China of distinctions between state and society, including the relevance of the concepts of “civil society” and “corporatism,” continue to engage scholarly attention (Gui, Ma, and Mühlhahn 2009; Huang 2008a; Huang 2008b; Shue 2008; Xiaoguang and Heng 2008; Wank 1998; Perry 1994). I am concerned here to identify the ways such distinctions are justified in rationalities of government, and how they operate in practices that reflect differing political strategies. The construction of “society” is an aspect of various state projects, as I will show in the following chapters. “State” and “society” become operators that distinguish conceptual and physical spaces, indicating differently-valued roles for those within them (Wang 2005b).

From this perspective, “autonomy” is a technology of governance that is deployed for purposes which include differentiation of spaces and allocation of resources. Sigley cautions against assuming that the Chinese terms “autonomy” and “governance” mean the same as their English equivalents (Sigley 2006). In relation to the role of RCs, Bray highlights distinctions in who can exercise “self-governance” within them: autonomy, he writes, “does not imply any inherent equality amongst citizens in terms of the right to govern, but rather turns on a moral division between those fit to govern and those fit only to be governed” (Bray 2006, 544-545).

What self-governance meant in practice varied in my field sites, although the urban sites and the rural sites each had some similar features. In both urban sites, the Party secretaries also headed the residents committee, and ran the local Party branch. These were largely composed of older residents, most of whom were also activists on whom the RC relied for its work. Yet this arrangement was not simply a system of Party control; there was a variable mix of formal and informal power in each neighborhood, as I describe below, that constrained the Party secretaries.

In the rural areas, by contrast, the VCs were headed by subordinates and the Party secretary ruled through his position as head of the Party branch. In both villages, Party secretaries derived their authority from their management of the collective economy. The Zhang Family Village Party secretary was so much in a different sphere that I never saw him
in the office where most of the VC staff did their work, although they regularly referred to him by pointing to his office upstairs. I was never formally introduced to him at all; I only met him once when his chauffeur came to pick him up from the subway in the pouring rain and I happened to arrive at the same time. “Do you know who I am?” he asked me, offering me a lift around the corner to the VC building in his black Mercedes. In Dragon Peak, at the regular meetings of the Party branch, loud and disputatious discussion could often be heard.

In the Constitution, RCs and VCs are described as self-governing (自治).\(^{16}\) But within the regulatory framework, the term has varying weight. Self-governance has a more prominent place in the regulatory regime for VCs; it is stated as a key purpose for the establishment of these institutions.\(^{17}\) For both types of organizations, self-governance is defined through three elements: “self-management, self-education and self-service.”\(^{18}\) They have a certain degree of autonomous legislative power: bodies called “villager assemblies,” incorporating all adult villagers or heads of households, are empowered to enact their own “charter of villager autonomy” and “village compact,” as long as these do not violate the Constitution or the laws and regulations, or infringe the personal, democratic and legitimate property rights of villagers.\(^{19}\) The residents assemblies in urban areas, analogous to their rural counterparts, can also enact a “residents compact” that accords with the Constitution, laws, regulations and policies.\(^{20}\)

Rising China had drafted such a document, and it was mainly composed of a list of policies the RC was responsible for implementing. Interestingly, however, two very different versions were in the files, and Party Secretary Dai was not sure which was the authoritative one. In Progress, they had not heard of such a document. Zhang Family Village had a very formal compact, presented in a booklet bound in red with gold letters. Its stated aims were to ensure that village practice accorded with higher-level rules and regulations, and its 14 printed pages covered the gamut of village affairs, starting with the economy, and ending with provisions on banning “feudal superstitutions” and their attendant practices from the village. In addition, the village had a stand-alone compact on population planning, outlining the applicable rules, sanctions for their contravention and rewards for compliance.

The subtle gradations in self-governance were apparent in the extent to which RCs and VCs were bound to a specific vertical state administrative hierarchy. RCs reported to the street office, the lowest level of formal government in the cities, each covering an area with

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\(^{16}\) Art. 111, see above.
\(^{17}\) OLVC, Art. 1.
\(^{18}\) OLURC, Art. 2; OLVC, Art. 2.
\(^{19}\) OLVC, Art. 20.
\(^{20}\) OLURC, Art. 15.
about 40,000 to 50,000 residents. For both Rising China and Progress, their respective street offices were less than 10 minutes away by foot or bicycle. In the case of the VCs, the township was the lowest level of formal government. This was situated in a town at least 20 minutes by car from each village.

A measure of the relative autonomy of the RCs and VCs was their procedures for accepting me, a “foreign” researcher, as a “practicum” (实习) student. For both the RCs, I was introduced from the street office level (professors at the university introduced me to officials in the respective street offices) and then placed in an RC, which, presumably, had little choice in the matter. (I did give them a letter about my research that tried to make clear that they could ask me not to observe or record certain matters.) For both the VCs, they apparently made the decision to accept me on their own, independently of the township. Zhang Family Village certainly did not get higher level approval to host me; this became clear later, as when the township officials did find out that I was working there, they were angry that they had not been consulted and said that their approval should have been sought (see Chapter 2 and Appendix 1). In the case of Dragon Peak Village, Manager Zheng, the head of the Dragon Peak Tourism Company, apparently made the decision on my case by herself, although a recently-established institutional arrangement between the village and my host university in Tianjin under which the village would be a base for practicum assignments for students had paved the way for me to go there.

One of the main methods for disciplining these institutions and their workers was the mechanism of “normalizing” or “standardizing” (规范). This mainly took the form of written laws and policies outlining responsibilities. Although I did not hear about the kinds of “responsibility systems” now imposed on officials to meet predetermined targets in their work (Minzner 2009a; Minzner 2009b)—as none of the RC or VC workers were officially “state cadres” such measurements would be inappropriate—these kinds of administrative targets obviously affected the committees indirectly in a variety of ways, most notably in the ways they dealt with complaints, described in Chapter 2. While the relevant norms have been codified in some way at national level, with one example being the laws on RCs and VCs, the origins of most of the institutional forms and policies described here are local experiments. In the case of VCs, and the elections to them, this is well known. The process of policy making in the case of the minimum livelihood guarantee (see Chapter 3) is similar. The center endorses “models,” in some cases a number of competing ones, and then localities try them out and there are later assessment exercises to see which ones work best. Such experimentation has been a signature element of the rationality of reform in China.
(See for example, Herrmann-Pillath 2006). In Chapters 2, 3 and 4, I discuss the way such standards played out in the RCs and VCs I studied, along the three dimensions of citizenship I have identified.

**Urban residents committees**

**Historical origins**

RCs have been in existence since the 1950s, and although not mentioned in the 1954 Constitution, were specified in an Organic Regulation on Urban Residents Committees passed that same year. They replaced republican-era urban institutions that had been based on the *baojia* (保甲) system of household registration and mutual responsibility that operated in late imperial-era cities (for a historical overview of the relationship between the *hukou* and *baojia* systems, see Wang 2005). Operating on a similarly small scale to the RCs, the *baojia* has been mainly seen as a system of mutual surveillance and delivery of taxes and corvée labor, but as Bray points out, it was also a mechanism for community self-help, including welfare (2005). Similar institutions still exist in other East Asian countries (Read and Chen 2008). The *baojia* was revived in cities under republican governments in the 1930s (Ma 2011). As the communists took over the cities in the late 1940s, establishing RCs became a key aspect of organizing city residents to support the new social order. The RCs were involved in everything from propaganda campaigns to setting up cooperatives to provide income for unemployed residents, from basic sanitation to immunization of children (Wang 2005a; Wang 2005b; Wong and Poon 2005).

Although an increasing number of people were associated with work units (*danwei* 单位) —most urbanites belonged to such a multi-purpose institution by the close of the Maoist era (Bray 2005)—RCs remained important for those outside them, whether only in residential terms, or for those few who did not have work unit employment. The RCs attempted to emulate the productive role of the work units in that they set up collective enterprises to provide employment for those people under their supervision (Read 2000). However, with the marketization of the economy, this productive role has gone into decline. RCs that I visited and studied had no role in “production,” but did still regulate livelihoods in important ways.

From the start, these institutions had a distinctively gendered character: they were seen as a key site for encouraging urban women’s participation in establishing the new socialist state. In a survey of new RCs in Beijing in 1953, 44 percent of RC members were women (Ma 2011). In Shanghai, working-class and middle-class “housewives” were
recruited to take over neighborhood administration, replacing male baojia heads associated with the old regime. By 1954, women already constituted 55 percent of RC members in the city. Women’s unpaid labor was mobilized to bring the socialist state into every family’s daily life through these organizations and their work. “Many a lower-class woman who had been a subaltern by both gender and class became a speaking subject for the first time in her new role as a neighborhood cadre,” writes Wang Zheng (2005a, 541). The gendered character of this mobilization led to tensions between local women’s federations and local government over leadership and over the extent to which women’s special concerns should be addressed in neighborhood work (Wang 2005b).

Despite these origins, gender has not been an analytical focus in the many articles on the subject published in the last decade, even when the predominance of women on the staff of RCs is noted (Lu and Li 2008; Read 2000). In the post-Mao era, the widely-repeated image of the RCs is that they were staffed by nosy women of low status. In the 1980s, during Yang’s fieldwork in Beijing they were known as the “bound-footed KGB” (1994, 20), while Read notes that the term RC “connotes ageing, officious busy-bodies poking into people’s personal matters” (2000, 806) and Lu and Li state that in the past RCs were “dominated by elderly, poorly educated female members—so much so that the ‘residents’ committee granny’ became a stereotype” (2008, 183). In the light of the tensions in the formation of these institutions unearthed in Wang’s historical inquiries, the implications of such gendered tropes should be reexamined (Wang 2005a).

The role of RCs was reshaped and strengthened by their inclusion in the 1982 Constitution and in subsequent legislation and policy-making. While changes began in the 1980s as part of the process of “reform,” since 2000 the central state has given them an expanded mandate and new face as “communities” (Shieh and Friedmann 2008; Yan and Gao 2007; Bray 2005; Read 2000). This transformation was one of a number of official responses to the mass layoffs that followed industrial restructuring, with the model of “community residents committees” (社区居民委员会) originating in one of the places hardest hit by layoffs, Shenyang in China’s northeastern rust belt (Bray 2006; Bray 2005). In this new incarnation, RCs were seen as a key institution charged with creating the “society” that would provide a new anchor for displaced workers. Both scholars and government agencies generally present the development of such “communities” as vital in facilitating a number of related processes of “transition” envisaged as necessary for the development of a socialist market economy, including the change in people’s identification “from work unit to society” that was mentioned by a number of my informants (see for example, Tian and Qi 2005).
Furthermore, it is surely no accident that the policy document making the building of communities a priority was issued at the height of the crackdown on the Falungong sect, which drew a large proportion of its membership from the urban laid-off and retired, particularly women.

The shift in identity envisages “work unit” and “society” as parallel and complementary, rather than contrasting concepts, each designating a specific spatial unit, rather than one being specific and the other unbounded or amorphous. As Bray puts it, the transition in identity is from one collectivity to another (Bray 2006, 530-549). This can be observed in the linguistic composition of the term “community” (社区, shequ) in Chinese, which is composed of two elements: society and territory. While scholarly works and textbooks on “community building” refer to Western sociological texts on the meaning of the term “community”—particularly the work of Tönnies (see for example, Wei and Sun 2003)—my informants talked about shequ as a spatially bounded entity linked to specific boundary designations drawn by local government, and situated in a scalar relation to other institutions that make up the Chinese state.

Some commentators assert that the shequ is a new form, and thus use this transliterated term rather than referring to them as RCs. One rationale for this is that they are not seen as part of government, and are an aspect of the transfer of responsibilities to “society” (see in particular Shieh and Friedmann 2008; Derleth and Koldyk 2004). However, both form and practice in the field is heterogeneous: a variety of different “models” have been promoted, and localities have implemented the “community” mandate in very different ways. The methods of “constructing communities” has included both top-down and bottom-up initiatives (Lu and Li 2008; Xu 2008; Bray 2006; Benewick, Tong, and Howell 2004; Derleth and Koldyk 2004). Since starting points were already divergent, this has led to a very diverse picture even on the level of institutional form across cities in the country. Here I have decided to continue to refer to these units as “RCs” because this was what they were called in my field sites—the “shequ” label was tacked on at the beginning of the formal name of each place, but not used in daily speech at all.

Although they are now presented as the model for the organization of all urban neighborhoods, as in the past RCs do not dominate the scene. In commercial housing compounds, aspects of their role may be taken on by home owners committees, often elected by the residents (Chen 2009; Shieh and Friedmann 2008; Read 2003). A substantial proportion of urban residents still live in large work units, and in these the RCs also play a
marginal role. In some areas with substantial amounts of informal housing—particularly those inhabited by rural-to-urban migrants—there may be no RCs at all.

Feminized (ad)ministration of the social

Rising China and Progress, the two RCs I studied, were both very evidently administratively-defined communities resulting from the decision of higher-level bureaucrats to parcel out space in units of a set population size. While each had a large residential compound as its core territory, each also comprised a larger cobbled-together territory which its staff struggled to incorporate into a coherent unit. At times, these marginal spaces were just left out of day-to-day work. The extent to which spaces were included or ignored depended on the institutional priorities set for each RC by its overall framework and the continual demands of its superior agencies, on the capabilities and local knowledge of its staff members, and on the extent to which its responsibilities overlapped with those of other institutions (such as the police, the departments of industry and commerce and property management companies) that might be better placed to deal with particular matters.

One of the key tasks of the RCs, mentioned by both Party secretaries, was to generate “cohesion” (凝聚). This task was an obvious problem for them as institutions: with a heterogenous population, some of which had no need of the RCs’ services, the RC could be quite marginalized. The relative irrelevance of RCs was evident in relation to Richview Terrace, the commercial housing compound that was part of Progress’s territory, as well as in some parts of Rising China. I explore the spatial dynamics of these distinctions further in Chapter 4. In another location, a well-off couple I interviewed who lived in a large compound of commercial housing were not even sure where the RC was or what its functions were.

As mentioned above, neither of these two RCs had purpose-built offices, although at Rising China the RC occupied the ground floor of a pink building, decorated with whimsical crenelated towers, that had been constructed as a center of some kind when the compound was built in the late 1990s. Prior to 2005, the entire building was used by the property management staff, with the RC working from a one-room apartment in the compound, as many of the other RCs in the area still did. That year, the RC was given the building’s ground floor space. During the time of my field work, the RC had an activity room with two small offices adjoining it, one for the Party Secretary, and one for the labor management assistants (see below); a very small room in which a row of computers had been installed that was almost always locked; and a small, cramped office space filled to capacity with desks and chairs where most of the RC staff did their daily tasks. This room was on the side
of the building and had once been a shop of some kind. In the frigid north China winter it was barely heated, and through much of my field work had an ill-fitting glass-paneled interior door that looked as if it had been scavenged from one of the many renovations undertaken in the compound.

In Progress, the RC offices and activity room were in the long, low, temporary-looking building in between two of the residential blocks described at the beginning of this chapter. The Party Secretary had her own separate small office, and all the other RC staff worked together in an open-plan room. Their desks were arrayed like counters facing the door, which was always open if someone was working there. Next door was a long activity room and library, which was in regular use for meetings, socials and dances, as well as various street office meetings. (One reason for the location of such meetings was that Progress had better facilities than other RCs in the area!) At the end of the block was a “rehabilitation room” containing various exercise machines that were used daily by a number of the elderly women residents.

As will be seen in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, RCs were responsible for dealing with disputes and complaints, addressing a range of welfare needs, administering all non-employment related welfare, and making sure that sanitation standards in the neighborhoods were met. The daily work of RCs was divided into administrative fields, with each staff member taking on specific areas, while the Party secretary was responsible for overall leadership. These were: security (including crime prevention, monitoring “targeted people” such as Falungong members, ex-convicts and “petitioning households,” and legal education); population planning; sanitation and environment; education and culture; women’s affairs; civil affairs (mostly welfare work); and labor. Women’s affairs seemed to be a “floating” responsibility that someone usually took on in combination with another job. One staff member assisted the Party secretary in administration related to Party affairs, including payment of dues and calling and servicing Party meetings. The kinds of administrative duties that were generally involved were typed as “detailed” work that was seen as suitable for women.

As well as their thematic responsibilities, each of the staff took on one section of the neighborhood as their “beat” (片儿). They were supposed to get to know the residents of their beat; to keep track of and record changes there; to make sure that official notices got to the residents; and to regularly visit people in difficult circumstances. These tasks were made easier for those who were residents of the neighborhoods themselves, even if they had
subsequently moved out. In both places, about half the staff were or had been neighborhood residents; but both Party secretaries had been drafted in from elsewhere.

Three main categories of workers were employed in the committees: those now called “social workers,” who come under the municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs; those called “labor protection management assistants,” employed by the Labor and Social Security Departments; and CCP cadres, some of whom could be concurrently one of the first two types. In Rising China, the two management assistants had their own separate office, but in Progress Section, they shared the same office with the other workers and two of the four such assistants were not actually doing labor-related work at all, but had been internally reassigned to other duties. Both types of employees now have similar salaries and benefits, they are paid at minimum wage (820 yuan\(^{21}\) gross per month in Tianjin at the time of my fieldwork) and get contributions to four “lines” of social insurance: old age, unemployment, workplace injury and major medical (they currently pay about 120 yuan per month in contributions, and their employer also contributes). Party cadres at the level of RC Party secretary or deputy secretary generally get about 100 yuan more in salary. There was no distinction in salary for seniority—even workers who had been at the RCs for 10 years or more were still on minimum wage.

Employment in the committee was thus a kind of welfare benefit; the majority of such workers I encountered had been hired under programs of reemployment for displaced workers.\(^{22}\) All of the regular workers in the committees I studied were female,\(^{23}\) as were the overwhelming majority of RC workers and volunteer activists I met. Based on limited data, this picture seems to reflect national trends: in 2000, 90 percent of residents committee workers nationwide were women (Read 2000), while a 2002-2003 survey of such workers in Shanghai and Shenyang found respectively 86 percent and 92 percent female workforces (Lu and Li 2008). Several of the Progress workers, and almost all of the workers at Rising China, had been engaged in these institutions from the time of their 2000 rebirth. Eleven had been laid off from previous long term jobs, almost all in factories. One had been “waiting for work”—thus had never been allocated a job. Four who had retired early—itself a form of layoff, through which women were sent home at the age of 45 with a minimal pension—were

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\(^{21}\) About $120, $1 = 6.8 yuan at the time of my fieldwork.

\(^{22}\) This is just one example of a number of types of informalized state jobs. These were also found in other areas of management of public order. One example is the “traffic management assistants” who had the unenviable job of helping maintain traffic order during rush hour, often being situated at major intersections where they were responsible for holding back the flood of bicyclists and electric motor bikers when the lights were red.

\(^{23}\) In both places there were additional residents committee members who were not actually employed, but participated in their work on a volunteer basis (all retired people), or ex officio (for example, in one place, the local community police officer). There were a few retired men in this category.
redeployed Party members who chose to go on working, partly for the money, or because they had been asked to do so. One was a graduate of a college, a professional training institution, who was employed under the program for college graduates to work in such posts for a two-year “training” period.\footnote{This program was extended after I had stopped going regularly to the two sites. I was told this was a response to a crisis of unemployment among university graduates. Each committee had taken on two more such staff by the time I left China in August 2009.}

Workers in the RCs I studied did not have contracts. They had no job security, and many worried about whether they would be able to continue in their posts. In the months prior to the triennial elections that were held in March and April 2009 (described in Chapter 2), the question of whether the districts would change the requirements for RC workers, including setting a maximum age for them, was a regular topic of discussion. Such changes would mean that some workers would no longer have a job. When I asked one of the younger workers at Rising China whether she planned to go on working there, she said, “If they let me have the job, then I will continue to work.” During the run-up to the RC elections in Hexi District, the street office held several meetings in the Progress activity room, at which officials lectured to RC workers from the locality about what was expected of them. They were told that if they didn’t do well in election work, they would have no job. There were always lots of applicants for these posts, so they could easily be replaced. Complaining about poor pay and conditions would not only be a waste of time, I was told, but could lose someone their job. However, this didn’t actually happen to anyone while I was there.

Workers at Rising China told me that, just a few years before, their salaries had only been 300 yuan per month, so conditions were much better than in the past. Improved salaries were part of a project to institutionalize residents committees. The project of “community construction” requires that residents committees be built up as institutions, in terms of physical space, authority and professional capacity. The “professionalization” of committee workers was a topic of significant controversy during my fieldwork, being raised as an objective in many quarters, including by street office officials, in \textit{China Society News}\footnote{This is the newspaper of the Ministry of Civil Affairs.} and other publications. Yet hardly any graduates of the growing number of social work programs in Tianjin went to work in RCs; the pay and status were regarded as too low for university graduates.

The aspiration to professionalization was an implicit dismissal of the current RC workers. The transitional state of these institutions implied that their current composition, particularly their staff, was temporary and inadequate to the task. Workers had to take
exams on government policy to prove their professional quality, including people who had already had their jobs for many years. In Progress, all the workers who were standing for election, including the Party secretary, had to sit an exam; in Rising China, those staff members who had not stood for election had to take the national exam to become a “social worker.” Most had been initially recruited through processes that involved written and oral exams. The tests constituted these workers as largely interchangeable, giving no weight to their long-term investment of care in their communities, their knowledge of residents, or to the skills they had developed in the process of doing their work. They were, after all, mere welfare recipients, and middle-aged women to boot.

In contrast to Read’s finding that RCs had “embraced the market with gusto” (Read 2000, 813), in my field work locations the committees did not run businesses and had very few sources of income apart from the limited operating funds they received from the street offices that supervised them, or from the district or municipal level offices of the Bureau of Civil Affairs. Shue argues that RC efforts to raise money were related to a period of fiscal crisis (2010). I was not aware of any collection of fees by the two RCs, although the street office-organized “property management” of Progress collected about six yuan quarterly from each household to cover costs of cleaning and garbage collection. Rising China earned about a thousand yuan per year from a contract with an agency that placed advertisements in RC notice boards. Salaries were paid directly by the street office, and the total expenditure for Progress RC in 2008 came to 10,000 yuan, of which 4,295 yuan went on office expenses, and a large proportion of the rest on gifts to activists, the sick and people in need.

Creating linkages with productive entities—companies, shops, individual businesses and public service institutions (事业单位) such as hospitals—was an important new task that was presented as an aspect of their recent designation as “communities.” One of the RC members in Progress told me that inclusion of local “work units” in the community was the main reason for the addition of this term to the RC’s names. Working with the local units involved keeping track of them—all the data for the economic census was collected by the two RCs—and trying to make them good local “citizens” through contributing to local events and donating resources to people and causes in need. These tasks were often difficult to do, as the RCs had no administrative identity that required privatized economic units to pay attention to them; they did not have the authority of the taxation department or the Bureau of Industry and Commerce. Dealing with old style work units could be easier, but this was not always true. It was often only possible through the personal connections that eased
communication; for example, in Progress Section, a manager at a nearby bank branch was a resident of the section, and so he would often be called on to help with this or that, even though the bank itself was not within Progress’s territory.

Beyond such direct contacts with residents, “propaganda work” was one of the core tasks for all the different thematic areas, but particularly education and culture and security. The RCs were constantly being tasked by their respective street offices with disseminating campaigns and slogans, and also had to update and maintain notice boards displaying public education posters and other information. Staff regularly had to design and make notices and information boards of various kinds. Relatively speaking, Progress RC did much more of this work than Rising China, but both had a number of glass fronted notice boards in their main compound that provided space for such materials. Outside both their offices, five or six-foot-high full-color printed posters in glass-fronted notice boards provided information about the staff composition of the RC, as well as some key policies.

There was a major gap in Progress’ propaganda work: the RC was not allowed to post materials in Richview Terrace, except in one display case by the back gate. The relationship between the RC and the Richview property management office was not an easy one: the latter could just refuse to allow the RC workers to post their information and they would have no recourse. There was no way the RC would be allowed to put up its monthly one-page newsletter to residents in the lobbies of Richview, as it did in the buildings of the main compound. Thus the residents of Richview were shielded from politics, as marketing took command of the available eye-space. Although the property management office of Rising China was part of a large public institution, the university, it too could be difficult: the relationship between the RC and the management was prickly. This antagonism seemed to be part of a broader tension: Party Secretary Dai complained to everyone who would listen about the attitude of the university to the RC, with most of her grievances focused on the lack of recognition and failure to provide adequate resources.

The “private” nature of the Richview space added to the difficulties of RC workers in developing their network and doing their work there. RC workers indignantly described being left in the hallway to wait while residents they were visiting at home to collect information from filled in forms, emphasizing that these people even closed the door on them. One said she thought people who behaved in such a way did not want RC staff to see their lifestyle, that they were wary of class envy. Finding activists from Richview was difficult, too. As well as its staff, each RC depended on a core group of “activists,” predominantly retired women Party members, but also including some men. Progress had a much larger and more
cohesive group of activists than did Rising China, with the core group being long-term residents of the neighborhood, several of whom were not Party members. In Rising China, many people’s strongest connection remained with their work unit, the university, and the key activist was a woman who was married to a retired university staff member, but had herself worked somewhere else.

Activists in the two RCs were being relabeled as “volunteers,” a process which had apparently begun in the run-up to the Olympics, when volunteer security patrols were instituted in Tianjin neighborhoods. During my field work, RC staff were required to compile a list of all the volunteers in the area indicating their areas of “interest.” Recording the contributions of activists for reporting to higher levels was seen as important. At Progress, the names of the people making up each daily patrol round the compound were written down in a logbook.

Progress claimed that 21 different social organizations were active in its territory. These included the Old People’s Association (老年人协会), various exercise groups, a singing group and the Shequ Calligraphy Group.\(^{26}\) However, the Old People’s Association seemed to be the only one with a formalized structure with specific officers, and regularly organized activities for older residents. Apparently, this organization had been set up by the street office as part of a city-wide initiative to establish such associations within all RCs. As with volunteers, this enumeration of social organizations seemed to be largely a response to administrative exercises in reclassification of existing practices according to new names.

Such practices reflected a common method of dealing with the constant demands of street office officials for data and reporting, which was the subject of many complaints among RC workers. For example, when asked to compile a list of “volunteers” in the neighborhood that was supposed to include input from the volunteers themselves—such as their areas of interest—staff at Rising China consulted their files and wrote down the names of all the activists and Party members. When signatures were required, staff would sign themselves, passing the forms around to colleagues and using different pens so it wouldn’t be too obvious. Gui et al note that avoidance of the tasks assigned by street offices and other forms of slacking were pervasive among RCs in Shanghai (Gui, Ma, and Mühlhahn 2009).

Although she could talk the talk, Rising China’s Party Secretary Dai evidently didn’t feel the job of RC worker should be taken that seriously. This opinion was controversial however, as Sister Li who did the social welfare work and Sister Ma, the planned

\(^{26}\) “Brief Introduction to XXX Community,” undated document on file with the author.
reproduction (计划生育) worker, were always busy. The others sometimes made fun of them for working so hard, and the two of them complained about this when the others were out of their shared office. At 3pm, Party Secretary Dai herself could regularly be found in the RC activity room watching soap operas, and a lot of knitting, crocheting, chatting and newspaper reading was done in work time. Everyone there regularly took three-hour lunches. This attitude was also reflected in a relaxed culture of accommodation to family responsibilities.

By contrast, Party Secretary Zhu in Progress Section was a stickler for proper procedure, so much so that people made jokes about her rigidity behind her back. Soon after the election there, she held a meeting of committee workers that turned into an impassioned tirade on the need to abide by the established “systems” set by the street office, with a principal focus on people not being on time for work, taking unauthorized time off, or disappearing on personal business during work hours. In this official version, there was no space for the rights of care givers, or recognition of the low pay and extra hours committee workers often had to put in on weekends and evenings. Officially, they were supposed to “volunteer” these hours, and not even take time off in lieu. But as soon as she was out of the office, Progress workers also spent much of their time chatting, doing their nails, reading about Korean pop stars on the computer, and so on.

Street offices evidently tried to prevent this kind of work avoidance through direct administrative supervision over RCs. RC staff regularly mentioned the possibility of being “fired” if they did not meet certain expectations of street office superiors, including passing inspections and preventing the lodging of complaints at higher levels (Minzner 2006). RC workers were constantly going back and forth to the local street office: attending meetings, filing reports, participating in trainings, doing tasks, collecting their monthly salaries. They were also regularly anticipating “inspections” of one kind or another, with the level of anxiety increasing with the relative scalar “height” of the unit doing the inspecting. These visitations were always known in advance, but exactly when the day would be was often uncertain. Preparing for them required a lot of extra work, cleaning and scrubbing and, sometimes, the preparation of a dossier to present the RC’s progress in the specific area under review. In Progress on more than one occasion, RC workers had to forgo their lunch-hour to sweep the alleys around their office prior to such a visit, about which they grumbled mightily. A 2008 work summary noted that during that year, Progress RC had hosted 10 inspections by municipal or district level officials of the Disabled Persons Federation alone.
Rural villager committees

Historical origins

VCs were first formed independently by villagers in the wake of the dissolution of the communes that had been the predominant form of organization in the countryside from the late 1950s to the early 1980s, and were subsequently adopted by the central government as the formal institution of local governance for all rural areas (Tan 2010; He 2007). As mentioned above, they were incorporated into the 1982 Constitution, although at the time it was drafted they had only begun to be adopted as a nationwide form of organization. Later, they became a key site for experiments in electoral democracy, directed at developing local self-governance, rather than representing the interests of villagers in a wider polity.

The VCs reflected a long tradition of state-mandated rural self-governance. Although the lowest level of the formal bureaucracy in the late Qing (1850 to 1911) was the county magistrate, village-level representatives already existed in the imperial era in varying forms, and in the late Qing and early republican period, the institution of “village head” (村长, 村政) was established as part of a policy of local self-governance (地方自治). In some parts of China, such posts were filled through a ballot (Huang 2008a; Li 2005). Shue describes the order in which such representation operated in the following terms: “China’s traditional rural order rested on a conscious fusion of economy, society, and polity, on the basis of locality and by means of interlocked networks of formal and informal ties” (1988, 96).

After the founding of the PRC in 1949, institutional forms changed during the process of collectivization (Li 2009), yet in some capacity the village continued to exist as a unit of governance, despite variance in what it was called. The current VCs can be seen as a rural analog to the urban work units, incorporating production and all other facets of life into one institutional whole. Administratively, they are the successors to the “production brigade” (生产大队), the basic productive unit in the countryside in the late Maoist period (He 2007; Benewick, Tong, and Howell 2004). Villagers in both of my rural field sites still referred to the VC as the “brigade.” “Off to the brigade then?” would be the greeting I heard as I walked down the steep mountain road each morning to the VC office in Dragon Peak Village.

This comment pointed to the fact that economics still dominates the VC institution in these locations, as is highlighted in the Organic Law on Villager Committees, which gives pride of place to their role in organizing the village economy and exercising stewardship over collective property (see Appendix 2). However, the problems the VC form was established to address were not primarily economic. Their formation and constitution
through elections are seen as a state response to problems of social order in the countryside. As mentioned above, they initially emerged as a self-organized response to the vacuum created by the dissolution of the communes following the revival of family farming in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This change led to a collapse of administration and funding for collectively-organized activities such as welfare, education and infrastructure, and autonomous village organizations were set up to address such concerns (Tan 2010).

But the promotion of elections addressed an actual and perceived lack of local leadership, and was largely promoted from the top down, initially spearheaded by Peng Zhen, a top leader in the National People’s Congress in the 1980s who had pioneered the use of elections in pre-1949 communist base areas, and by the Ministry of Civil Affairs after it was tasked with developing elections at the grassroots (Tan 2010; Saich 2004). “Villager elections became a safety valve designed to let peasants vent their dissatisfaction, but one meant to point the responsibility for continued poverty and poor village leadership away from the central authorities” (Oi 2004, 276-277).

This initiative has spawned an enormous literature in English on village elections, from both a policy and a scholarly point of view (for an excellent recent survey of the subject, see Schubert 2009). These elections have been seen as a barometer for the question “Will China democratize?” Proponents of an affirmative answer have claimed that they are “the world’s largest grassroots democratic education process” which is “forging a path toward the rule of law” (Horsley 2001, 44) and that they are achieving a “quiet revolution” that will “reshape the polity of China” and affect the rest of the globe as a result (He 2007, 1).

Yet in the terms of a more sober recent assessment, while much has been achieved in implementing democratic procedures for VC elections across the country, this has not always meant a great deal of change in the way power is actually exercised (O’Brien and Han 2009). One problem is that the VC has limited power, even within the village; it may be overridden by the Party branch, the leadership of which is still appointed (Guo and Bernstein 2004). Government at township level and above may also constrain and even control what happens in villages, while clans, religious organizations, and even gangsters, can also limit the power of elected leadership (O’Brien and Han 2009). Other types of institutions in rural areas, such as religious and lineage organizations, can exert a more beneficial influence over distribution of public goods in rural communities even in the absence of democratic elections (Tsai 2007). O’Brien and Han conclude that “[T]he quality of democracy in much of the countryside remains stubbornly low, mainly because village committees, once an

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27 The township is the lowest level of formal government in rural areas.
election is over, are situated in a socio-political environment that has changed surprisingly little” (O’Brien and Han 2009, 376).

In addition, VC elections are designed to address issues of governance and administration within the village itself, not representation of its members in a larger political community. Even when leadership is elected through fair and democratic procedures, this does not necessarily mean that they have increased input into policy-making that affects them, or even control over village resources (Sturgeon 2009). Elections may become a struggle between elite factions, rather than a means of ensuring collective decision-making (Yao 2009; Hu 2008).

As for RCs, this view situates VCs in a larger social space. Aside from the discussion of their role in distribution of public goods, however, in contrast to RCs, their social dimensions have been relatively neglected, as the focus has been on political participation and economic development, and the relationship between them (Yao 2009).

Despite the broad institutional parameters outlined in national law, heterogeneity is the norm rather than the exception in both form and functioning of VCs, reflecting both differing historical experience and local institutional choices in both dimensions. In some parts of the country, the *shequ* policy is now being applied to VCs as well, for example, but this was not the case in my field sites. In some peri-urban locations, VCs are being transformed into shareholding cooperatives as villages are “reterritorialized” to become urban districts. The resulting separation of control over collective economic assets and political power creates new conditions on the ground, the implications of which are far from clear (Po 2011).

**Managing the collective economy**

While RCs were modeled on work units—especially in the popular imaginary—VCs existed in a social field where collective institutions that had taken up a role beyond economic production had been systematically eliminated. This had both discursive and practical effects; the pooling of funds for collective endeavors was eliminated with the dissolution of communes and production brigades, as mentioned above, but also, the revival of the household as the unit of production implied that family was the institution that people’s welfare should depend on.

In Dragon Peak Village and Zhang Family Village, collective space was devoted to the market, and their rationale as collective entities was the promotion of economic success and “development.” Both VCs had set up corporations to run the collective enterprises of the
village, which co-existed with private, family-run businesses. Each VC was considered a successful model, achieving plaudits from higher levels and generating a great deal of wealth for some villagers.

In contrast to the rather marginal role of the RCs, then, the VCs are the dominant local institutions through which everything had to pass. Although much production has now moved to a smaller scale with the revival of family farming in the household responsibility system, both the VCs I studied retained crucial responsibility for providing infrastructural support for productive activities, whether in terms of roads, industrial parks, and sites for tourists to access local nature, or in terms of shaping the local model for “development” and working out the necessary access this approach required to the relevant state institutions. Despite marketization, then, the VCs retained a fusion of economic, political and social roles similar to that of earlier collective institutions.

Crucially, they had various autonomous revenue raising powers. For example, during my stay in Dragon Peak Village, the VC decided to raise an additional levy on visitors to cover new environmental responsibilities. In Zhang Family Village the dominance of the VC was already changing, as there were spaces that had recently been within its territory which it did not control, primarily commercial housing compounds built on land expropriated from the village which then set up their own RCs encompassing all residents within the bounds of that compound. When I asked about the functioning of these RCs, one of which could be seen from Director Guo’s second-floor office window, I was told they didn’t know anything about them. Part of the very near had become distant and unknown.

This fact indicated that the main basis for VC operations was the collectivity of villagers, while the boundaries of the territory could be somewhat amorphous or fragmented. The sense of belonging to this collectivity was a kin-inflected type of naturalized identity based on family ties and place-based belonging, rather than actual residence. This identity was apparently not thought to require the kind of nurture that the fragile collectivities being formed in the RCs did. The VC and the village corporation represented villagers’ economic interests, and participation centered around these.

Neither VC provided space for villagers to gather informally as did the RCs. Zhang Family Village had a board-room style conference room, with a sign saying “Home of Party Members” (党员之家) outside the door, containing a very long oval table surrounded by black leather armchairs. Dragon Peak Village had no less than three conference rooms, with two large ones on upper floors often rented out to visiting groups, and a small one on the ground
floor used for the regular business meetings of the VC and the Party branch, also labeled "Home of Party Members."

There were no recreational facilities in either VC building, and people only came in to conduct business. Beside an earth-floored public square in the old part of Zhang Family Village were an old people’s association and a wrestling club, but these were far away from both the old VC building and the new current one. The only social space in the Dragon Peak VC offices was a large black imitation leather sofa in the lobby where VC cadres and occasionally their friends would congregate in front of the TV and watch soap operas.

In both villages, the actual members and operations of the VC shared space with a village corporation. Dragon Peak’s was referred to as “the tourism company” while Zhang Family Village had set up a formal corporate structure for its businesses, here called the Prosperity Corporation. While there was some separation of personnel and accounting, institutionally the two were fused. In Dragon Peak Village, four of the village’s cadres were VC members, while the other four were officially attached to the corporation. The VC was evidently the junior partner; neither the Party Secretary, nor Manager Zheng, the dynamic woman who headed the Dragon Peak Tourism Company and ran the most successful guesthouse in the village, were VC members. The pattern was even more pronounced for Zhang Family Village, where most of the 20 staff in the building housing the VC worked for the Prosperity Corporation, including two young village men who had obtained masters degrees and come back to be “village officials.” Along with the five VC members, there was one population planning worker, and two “assistants” hired by the township specifically to work on birth control among the large migrant population in the area.\(^{28}\)

When it suited the ruling elite, however, the corporation and VC could be separated to prevent full disclosure of economic interests. In Dragon Peak Village, the notice board for “public reporting of village affairs” (村务公开), a requirement of the Organic Law on Villager Committees, remained empty during the entire time of my fieldwork, or was filled with materials on other matters. I was told by the village accountant that the finances of the VC were not reported because the villagers “would say ‘So much money! What is it being used for?’” But there evidently had been some pressure for public reporting on certain financial

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\(^{28}\) These workers are another example of the growth in informalization of state work. The township of which Zhang Family Village was a part had started recruiting Planned Reproduction Management Assistants the previous year, holding written and oral exams for these posts. Their main responsibility was to ensure that the large migrant population in the area complied with the planned reproduction policy. Two such workers were employed at Zhang Family Village, both village residents. They were paid minimum wage and had no social insurance. In the area of Dragon Peak Village, such jobs were all at the township level. One local official told me that of the 80 township workers, 20 or 30 were informals.
matters; the only issue on which the VC did report publicly was the allocation of visitors to
guesthouses. These figures were written down on several large boards in a corridor of the
VC building. In Zhang Family Village, quarterly accounts were posted in a glass-covered
notice board in the village outside the former VC building. However, these did not contain
any details about the finances of the Prosperity Corporation, and thus consisted mainly of a
list of the VC’s expenditures.

“No one in this village is farming any more, it is all tourism,” Manager Zheng told me
on my first day of fieldwork at Dragon Peak Village. The dominant narrative was of a rapid
transition from extreme poverty to relative prosperity through the development of tourism.
The collective economy of the village has been devoted to this project since the current
Party secretary took office in 1993. The collective earned regular income from the tourists in
the form of entrance tickets to the scenic area and car park fees, and from small levies on
tourism-related transactions. But millions of yuan were being spent on building more
infrastructure for tourism that would bring most benefit to the families who ran the largest
hotels and facilities. The village accountant told me the village had borrowed five million
yuan for building projects, and was paying a very substantial amount per year to service this
debt.

In Zhang Family Village, the economy was more diversified, but the Prosperity
Corporation also had a clear development strategy that focused on one main type of
business. It had long since contracted out collective enterprises involved in manufacturing
and commerce. Following the expropriation by Tianjin Municipality of more than half of the
village’s land from the late 1990s on, the VC had become a major landlord and property
manager, using some of the compensation it received from the city to construct the buildings
and infrastructure for industrial and commercial premises. The first venture had been an
industrial park, the second an enormous apparel wholesale market and the third, two strip
malls bordering on the subway line, with major retail clients as tenants, including a major
supermarket chain, McDonalds and the Bank of China. This mall also included the
Corporation’s venture into a different type of business: a fancy hotel, part of a global
franchise, and a banqueting hall next door, that had just opened at the time of my field work.

In both villages, providing jobs for some villagers was seen as an important function
of the collective economy. In Dragon Peak Village, 38 people were employed during the
seven months of the tourist season, not all of them villagers, mostly as gate-keepers and
ticket sellers. The villagers among them were mainly younger men, and the jobs aimed at
keeping young people in the village—thus avoiding the locally-perceived decline in status
involved in becoming a migrant worker—but also as a division of labor within families. Women, it was assumed, would do most of the daily work of running guest houses.

The gender balance in VC-generated employment in Zhang Family Village was more mixed, but equally focused on low-status, low-wage jobs. One of the reasons for building the hotel had been to provide employment for villagers, I was told, but most were low-level cleaning and service jobs. About 100 villagers in total were employed by the various companies the Prosperity Corporation had set up to manage its leased properties, as well as in the hotel, a small number of posts relative to the enormous amount invested.

In contrast to the feminized RCs, as the key organizing force of the collective economy in their areas, the VCs were a predominantly masculine space, with the few welfare functions performed by women responsible for “women’s work.” Overall, in both the VCs, the majority of the staff was male. Because their main focus was production, these entities were typed as masculine. In Zhang Family Village, women working in the VCs were paid less than men,\(^\text{29}\) I was told this was because “Women pay a lower price” (女的付出的代价少) in doing this work than men. This statement involved an assessment that the greater earning capacity of men meant they gave up more in working for the VC rather than being employed outside.

As in RCs, VC welfare work was a gendered sphere, with all the staff engaged in administration of welfare programs being women. The token woman on the Dragon Peak VC was responsible for women’s work, planned reproduction, welfare and bookkeeping, and there was a similar division of labor in Zhang Family Village. In addition, in both VCs, administration was a decidedly feminized task, with its detailed character seen as appropriate work for women. I hardly ever saw any papers on the desks of the men—just the occasional book or newspaper—but the women dealt with lists, forms, receipts, bookkeeping and reporting. Dragon Peak Village employed two young women as receptionists and assistants, to provide administrative support for the Tourism Company and the VC.

These two women were the only ones regularly at the VC office building; Dragon Peak Village had not become a bureaucratized entity. The eight cadres dropped in and out, and spent a lot of the time they were there either watching the TV in the lobby or playing cards. Much of the time a group of them, often including the Party secretary himself, could be found in Sister Jia’s office playing poker and drinking tea, with most of the men smoking. The door was closed or left ajar, but they did not try to hide the playing cards when I

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\(^{29}\) In Zhang Family Village, VC salaries were 700 yuan per month for women, and 900 for men.
knocked. I was even invited on one occasion to join the game, but I said I didn’t know how to play. The only cadre who never played cards was Manager Zheng.

In Zhang Family Village, work was more formalized, but the male staff members often disappeared out of the office for long periods without apparently feeling the need to explain their absence. Sometimes they were evidently off dealing with their own business. It was mainly the women who were there doing administrative tasks and receiving villagers who came in to deal with such matters.

In comparison to the RCs, higher-level administrative supervision was much less evident in the VCs. VC cadres did not often go to the township for meetings, although township officials came “down” to visit on occasion. In both cases, the township was some distance away, too far even for a casual bike ride. On occasion these visits were inspections—planned reproduction work in Zhang Family Village was subject to such a review during my field work—but more often the visitors were coming to “observe” or learn. When I asked Director Guo about a group of visitors to the VC in the first weeks of my work there, she said they were there to “learn about” Zhang Family Village’s data management system. Visitors to Dragon Peak usually came to eat and enjoy the scenery, it seemed; regularly township officials arrived late in the morning and were soon taken up to Manager Zheng’s guest house for a delicious lunch of home-style mountain cooking, usually washed down with such an amount of beer and white liquor that a long siesta was required afterwards to recover. I was invited to join such a lunch for the township cadre responsible for Dragon Peak, with all the village cadres as well. Even though the salaries of the four VC cadres were paid by the township, this did not seem to mean that the VC was dependent on the township in the way the RCs were on their respective street offices. Yet Dragon Peak’s Party Secretary Fu complained volubly to visiting academics (including fellow Party members) about the constraints imposed on village leaders by the setting of targets and policies at higher levels, and the ways in which enumeration of these measures distorted village priorities.

**Conclusion**

The distinctions in the daily work of RCs and VCs described above presents another perspective from which to view the images with which I began this chapter, and contributes a neglected gendered dimension to the analysis of their institutional character. In contrast to the feminized social space of the RCs, in which RC staff must make do with what resources they have in the face of the retreating state, the VCs, as a material expression of the
Figure 1
Self-described Divisions of Administrative Work in the Four Field Sites
villagers’ collective economic endeavors, demonstrate their importance in buildings that represent their successful conquest of the uncertain terrain of the market economy. A comparison of their self-described internal administrative divisions of labor shows how these distinctions map onto their overall institutional identities (see Figure 1). While there are common areas of administrative responsibility (see the shared section of the figure), the economic focus of VCs is evident from the additional areas (right-hand side). By contrast, the RCs take over responsibility for those who no longer have work units, and actively attempt to form a collectivity of citizens in this new role (left-hand side).

These institutional environments represent parallel, but very different, terrains for the practice of citizenship in the territories which they administer, contributing a comparative perspective on institutions which have rarely been compared in the literature (Benewick, Tong, and Howell 2004). The economic role of VCs makes them a key location for contestation over distribution of resources, while the dependence of RCs on the local state means that the resources they can access are not only more limited, but also only indirectly at their disposal. The predominance of economic logic in the overall regime of governance provides VC leaders with opportunities to justify the pursuit of their personal economic interests in the name of state priorities, thus harnessing the powerful symbolic capital of the state (Bourdieu 1998) to the fortunes of themselves and their families. Through such linkages, they are able to convert political capital into economic capital. By contrast, given the RCs lack of control over resources and the limits on their access to spaces dominated by the private economy, RCs often struggle to fulfill their task of generating citizen participation in the territories they administer. The feminized character of the RCs as institutions contributes to this difficulty and relative lack of authority. In Chapter 2, I outline some of the ways these variations in the terrain affected the political participation of citizens, while in Chapter 3, I show how these factors shaped the variable terms of citizens’ entitlements. In Chapter 4, I consider how the local terms of membership in each place shaped the life chances of the people within them in significant ways.

Despite the differences, there are also significant similarities in the citizenship terrain of RCs and VCs. Their autonomous status means the practice of citizenship is administratively and discursively distanced from the formal apparatus of the state, while the blending of formal and informal sources of authority in RCs and VCs creates mechanisms of socialized governance that continue in modern form a tradition of individualized “pastoral” engagement with citizens. They thus combine on the one hand, a sense of the state being distant, and on the other, intimate involvement in the daily lives of citizens. The form of
citizenship these institutions evoke involves engagement with affairs that are distinctly local, separated from the bureaucratic administration of society and economy that is the sphere of government agencies. Although it is nationally-mandated, then, this local citizenship is constrained in its scope, with the relations between institutional units at this level being a matter for management, rather than within the purview of citizens themselves. Thus the institutional history and character of the RCs and VCs, both in general and in the specific forms they took in the four sites I studied, created a localized form of citizenship that is not well captured by the existing theoretical perspectives on the subject.
Chapter 2
Participation: elections and the politics of gossip and talk

“This election has no meaning whatsoever!” retorted Aunty Feng, when Progress residents committee (RC) staff member Sister Bai asked for her help in collecting signatures on a candidate nomination form on a busy morning 10 days before election day. Aunty Feng, a small woman in her late 60s with wiry grey hair and a voice growly from too many cigarettes, is a core activist in Progress, one of the neighborhood’s longest residents, a building leader and member of the foot patrol. Although not one of the paid RC staff or an RC member, she came in to the office almost every day. Just as Aunty Feng was leaving, another older woman came in and, when asked by Sister Bai to sign the form, said she’d follow Feng’s lead. As Aunty Feng went out the door, Sister Wang, the Progress welfare worker and Aunty Feng’s close friend, hissed at her: “Don’t talk so much!”

Aunty Feng was expressing a common sentiment, prevalent also among the RC workers themselves: the idea that the triennial elections were just “going through the motions” (走形式) became something of an alternative “formulation” (提法) for the three different elections I observed. Schoenhals argues that for PRC officials, adopting the correct “formulation”—a formalized political expression—is one of the most crucial aspects of policy implementation, reflecting a tradition of attention to language that long predates contemporary emphasis on spin in politics (1992). The convergence of oppositional speech on a common term indicated a mirroring of such practices in the informal sphere.

Despite their expressed ambivalence, people like Aunty Feng, and the network of people she could mobilize in her neighborhood, had a key role to play in delivering an election procedure that met the standards set by local and national governments, and which reconfirmed Progress’ status as a model community. So what is the relationship between the politics of gossip and talk exemplified by Aunty Feng’s comment, and the politics of compliance evidenced in the conduct of elections where there is no choice of candidates and no debate over local issues?

30 A group of retired residents of the neighborhood undertook regular patrols around the main compound in its territory—in Progress, once a day, in Rising China, once a week. These were apparently started as a security measure during the run up to the Olympics. The one I went on was a leisurely tour around the compound, chatting with people encountered along the way.

31 I heard the phrase “going through the motions” used in relation to all three of the election processes I observed, and also in an overheard conversation outside a polling station for another RC near where I lived.
Insofar as there is a legitimate sphere for political participation of the general public in China, whether in law or in practice, it is located in the VCs and RCs. Formal political participation manifests itself here in a number of ways: direct elections to RCs and VCs; the mandate of RCs and VCs to act as representatives of the people in their territories vis-à-vis various forms of government, and deal with complaints originating in their territory; and other mechanisms for input on local matters, such as regular meetings between RC and VC staff and government officials. As organizations of self-government, their institutional form invites the people in their respective administrative territories to engage in deliberation and decision-making on local affairs.

In the elections and other formal participatory aspects of the RCs and VCs, laws and regulations acted as a kind of script for participation. Going through the motions outlined in the regulatory regime, people were supposed to embody a certain conception of administered democracy through which scripted rituals of participation served to legitimate both the people elected and the broader state system. But persistent expressions of ambivalence towards this “fake” (假的) performance showed, among other things, that these rituals required significant expenditure of social and symbolic capital by the leaders directly involved, particularly those who were elected to positions in the RCs and VCs. Activists like Aunty Feng were totting up the balance sheet of this expenditure, and might claim some sort of pay-back later on. A local level legitimacy dynamic is apparent in this interaction, highlighting how the priorities of the local state—which may be set at higher levels—then obligate a certain level of responsiveness to claims, particularly if these are made by people who have “earned” such an audience for their problems through their active participation in political rituals.

However, these dynamics are not merely an instrumental game of interests; they are grounded in a localized moral sociality resting on bonds of connection, emotion and obligation, the dynamics of which I address in Chapter 4. In the gossip and talk of face-to-face politics in the bounded public space of the neighborhood or village, collective moral norms are defined and articulated that constrain both leaders and led. But the limits of the permissible are made clear by negative example: coercive surveillance and discipline of the small minority who refuse to comply with the script, effected mainly through socialized governance, is aimed at ensuring that the politics of talk does not go beyond certain limits.

Participation is a site for reiterating and performing the more formal dimensions of citizenship, yet it also acts as a space for challenging the terms of entitlements, membership and even of participation itself. The boundaries between state-sanctioned expression of
political engagement and the politics of everyday life are often fuzzy, and as I show here, this is certainly the case in the intimate setting of the RCs and VCs, despite the efforts of central and local governments to script processes such as elections. Socialized governance induces participation, at least of activists, but also in its direct engagement with citizens provides opportunities for reformulating the terms on which the state relates to citizens, at least in small incremental ways. As such, the politics of citizenship is always an achievement of a particular time and place (Somers 2008). This chapter explores the types of participatory citizenship that take place in and around RCs and VCs. I begin with a review of what participation means in the broader Chinese context, then proceeding to describe aspects of the formal and informal politics of these institutional sites through examples I observed.

(Post)socialist participation

Participation is a core aspect of modern citizenship, the “seminal” meaning of which is drawn from the origins of the term in the Greek polis. In this sense, being a citizen means that each person has the right to participate in a self-governing polity on a variety of different levels (Smith 2002, 105). The literature on citizenship in the modern state assumes that participation occurs through democratic institutions, with associational life in civil society playing a role in aggregating interests so that they may be brought to bear in formal politics (Somers 2008). Modeled on the experience of Euro-American liberal democracies, and on democratic political theory, an ideal type of the practice of such states has become the norm against which politics elsewhere are measured (Chatterjee 2004).

Accounts of participation in China are no exception. The rational-actor model adopted by many authors—whether explicitly or implicitly—implies that the purpose of participation is the pursuit of specific personal interests. In the absence of democratic institutions on the Euro-American model, it is assumed that state officials and institutions lose a sense of obligation towards those they rule (see for example, Tsai 2007; Cai 2004; Shi 1997). In many of these accounts, participation in authoritarian contemporary China is seen as marginal, and the question becomes how “citizen resistance” is possible. Thus Cai states, “Appeals have become the most important mode of political participation in state-society interaction” in China today. His list of “modes” of participation all involve some form of opposition to official policy or practice (Cai 2004, 427, 430).

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32 Statements of the application of this model to participation in China are contained in Shi (1997) and in Cai (2004).
Valuable as such a focus is, concentrating on contentious claims and protests leaves out a great deal of participation that occurs where, as Schubert puts it, government operates "noiselessly" (2008, 198). Such participation may contribute to explaining the relatively high levels of satisfaction with government found in surveys, although support for central and local authorities differs (Chu et al. 2008; Shi 2008; Chen, Lu, and Yang 2007; Chen 2005; Chen 2004).

Participation in China takes place in a context where politics has been primarily a local affair, situated in multi-purpose institutions that combine social, economic, political and cultural functions. The Chinese word for participation (参与) does not limit its scope to matters of a political nature. Work has been a key form of participation, and the distinctions between political and social participation have been blurred. With some notable exceptions in moments of mass mobilization, in the Maoist period, direct political participation occurred mainly through small groups of varying sizes (Townsend 1967). Such a context requires going beyond the interest model to encompass a broader range of involvement in state projects.

Drawing on the work of Tang Tsou, Blecher points to two main “modes” of participation in Maoist China: top-down “mobilization” and “mass line” politics that allowed for a greater degree of bottom-up popular input into local decision-making (1991, 129-152). Rather than two opposing modes—“mobilization” is at the top-down end, but “mass line” politics is still orchestrated from above—these might be usefully conceptualized as arrayed along a spectrum. Most available accounts of the Maoist era stress the former, ritualistic dimension over the latter (Townsend 1967). Shifts between these two forms reflected the changing dynamics of national politics at the local level. Blecher posits that bottom-up participation was most meaningful when the local-level institutions through which it took place had a degree of influence over issues of “material life” (1991). Mass line-type participation was institutionalized through organizational forms, procedures and practices. However, it still required mediation through cadres, rather than direct engagement by the governed.

In the Deng era, “indirect” participation through elections was replacing direct participation, Blecher asserts. Not only was society becoming more autonomous, but the state too, by disengaging from direct participation, was becoming more autonomous from society (1991). Some have characterized this as a shift from a politics of the masses, emphasizing mobilization and the mass line, to a politics of citizens, emphasizing individuals and rights (Tsou 1986). Unlike the transformative personal narratives of the Mao period, the
logic of governance through law conceptualizes people as interchangeable citizens (Liu 2009).

Yet these forms of what Zhang and Ong term governing “from afar” (2008) coexist with socialized governance, a mode of rule that is embedded in social relationships. Analogous to Foucault’s idea of “pastoral power” and originating in the CCP’s guerrilla bases; aimed at fostering participation in collective endeavors, it is exercised through grassroots cadres maintaining face-to-face relationships with those in the units they lead (Bray 2005). This has been bureaucratized in certain ways, for example through the practice of maintaining detailed files or “archives” (档案) on each person (Yang 2011). This kin-inflected mode of making individuals legible to the state and disciplining them through direct observation and personal bonds is a neglected dimension of the operation of connectedness (guanxi, 关系), which has been studied more as a means of subverting state mechanisms (Yang 1994; Yang 1989).

While guanxi is used as a means of achieving compliance with social and political norms, given relaxed controls on freedom of expression in post-Mao China, socialized governance also potentially allows for increased talking back from below. The CCP’s emphasis on adopting the correct textual formulations for political analysis of the current situation creates an environment in which cultural politics is central to public life (Schoenhals 1992). In such a context, even apparently compliant talk can be an attempt to alter the meaning of hegemonic norms (Liu 2009; Wang 2005b). What is contentious can’t necessarily be inferred from the content; an example beyond China is Tuğal’s account of how routine religious practice becomes part of contentious politics in an Islamicized district of Istanbul (2009). As well as being institutions of rule, state-oriented social spaces like RCs and VCs can be sites for the articulation of resistance and critique. Here the way the state’s discourses, categories and institutions form spaces for politics is comparable to Chatterjee’s concept of “political society” in India (2004).

Participation is shaped not only by what is at stake but also by where it takes place. Farrer shows how, in the context of a Shanghai neighborhood where much social space is shared, gossip can be a key form of communication as well as a mechanism for defining and making sense of emerging community norms (2002). But as Guha points out, history from the French revolution to peasant uprisings in India has repeatedly shown that scurrilous talk can also be a political weapon, reflecting the importance of direct verbal and nonverbal communication for the possibility of a subaltern politics (1983). There is a lively

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33 The Chinese word for archives and these personal files is the same.
tradition of political jokes, puns and double-entendres in contemporary China (Saich 2004; Thornton 2002a; Thornton 2002b). Zhou He argues that this “nonofficial discourse universe” is now pervasive on the internet and in SMS messages (He 2008, 182). Such a “situational reality” in which alternative political and social norms are defined and debated can be “a significant political force,” particularly in a context where the state seeks to dominate public discourse (Goldfarb 2006, 7).

**Performing democratic participation**

Elections to RCs and VCs are the most direct form of electoral participation available to people in the PRC today; in principle all RCs and VCs should be directly elected. In 2009, all RCs and VCs in Tianjin were supposed to hold their triennial elections. I observed the elections in both of the RCs, and heard a great deal of discussion around the election in Zhang Family Village, where the VC was attempting to restart an election process that had been stalled because of allegations of voting fraud. In Dragon Peak Village, the election had been completed just prior to my first visit.

Having a direct election does not require that it be competitive; elections I observed had little to do with choosing between different candidates or policy platforms. In the case of RCs, given the fact that the ones I studied had no control over resources and that membership in the RC is not prestigious and does not represent a means of advancement to anywhere, there was little likelihood of competition for these posts. Here I describe the election in Progress, but the process in Rising China followed a very similar pattern. For the VCs, both did have significant resources, and where these were not seen as being fairly distributed (as in Zhang Family Village), this could lead to leadership challenges, particularly at times of transition when some VC members were retiring and new members had to be chosen.

As scripted performances of citizenship, the elections I observed were ironically closer to the “mobilization” end of the spectrum. Even among the most committed activists,

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34 There is an extensive literature on the village elections considering such questions as how democratic they are and what impact they have on village governance (see for example, Tan 2010; He 2007; O’Brien and Han 2009; Tan 2009). Urban elections to RCs have been less studied, but have recently received some attention (see for example, Gui, Ma and Mühlhahn 2009; Heberer 2009; Gui, Cheng and Ma 2006).

35 In addition, voting for members to district or county People’s Congresses (PCs), the lowest level of PCs and the only such bodies that are directly-elected in the PRC system, is also situated in the RC/VC, and acting PC members represent the particular part of the district/county. Since I did not observe these elections, I do not consider them here.

36 In the “same as quota” (等额) type of election, there are the same number of candidates as seats, and in the “different from quota” (差额) variant in my field sites there was at least one more candidate than the number of seats available, so, for example, in a five-seat RC, there might be six candidates on the ballot. There is usually space on the ballot for write-in candidates as well.
the elections were about “implementing the law” rather than deliberating over local issues. Democracy was to be enacted as an expression of harmony rather than a means of resolving conflict. They thus represented a top-down state initiative for mobilizing society. But achieving compliance in this ritual relied on the power of socialized governance, in two ways: RC and VC workers and local activists needed to use their relational networks to ensure participation, despite their own ambivalence; and local leaders demonstrated that they recognized the future obligations they were incurring as a result of this participation.

More democratic than the rest

Soon after the Spring Festival, exhortatory slogans handwritten in red ink on bright yellow paper urging people to exercise their rights were posted on walls all around the main compound at Progress. “Cherish your democratic rights—cast your precious ballot well!” “Build democracy at community level, participate in the RC elections!” This initial salvo in the election process reflected the Hexi District government’s aim that the election process be used as an opportunity to “educate” cadres and people on their legal rights and obligations and the meaning of self-governance in the RC. This formulation implies that without education, the people and the cadres will not know the norms of appropriate democratic participation.

Progress Section was one of the first RCs in Hexi District to be chosen to experiment on implementing “democratic autonomy.” The elections I observed there in 2009 were the third round of direct elections for RC members. Following a model developed in neighboring Heping District, Progress adopted a “mixed system,” that is, the director and one deputy director would be paid RC workers, while another deputy director and two ordinary members were volunteers and not members of the paid staff. The Street Office Party Work Committee specified that in this type of “mixed” election, there could be the same number of candidates as seats available, so there was no competition involved.

In other RCs in the area where all the members were paid staff, there was one more candidate on the ballot than the number of seats available. Two of the Progress staff, Sister Han, the longest serving worker there, and the newest worker, Sister Wei, who lived in

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38 “Brief Introduction to XXX Community,” undated document on file with the author.
Richview Terrace, had been asked by the street office to play the role of the “extra candidate” for nearby RCs. Although neither of these women were Party members, they evidently felt they could not refuse. This role involved significant work for them—they had to sit the exam required of all RC members who were paid staff of the organizations and give a public speech, among other things. While preparing the speech she would give to the voters who would inevitably reject her, Sister Han jokingly grumbled: “I said Director Lu [the head of civil affairs at the street office] should give me compensation for mental harm!”

In the run up to the first stage of the election, RC staff had to ensure that a representative from each stairwell or building had been identified. In the laws on both RCs and VCs, an assembly of residents or villagers is supposed to supervise the work of the elected officials (see Chapter 1 and Appendix 2), paralleling the structure of the PRC state in miniature. This stage of the process was largely a matter of finding enough people to be pressed into service and then calling them “representatives of the residents.” In Progress, the process started some time before the election season officially opened, including a gathering just before Lunar New Year at which representatives listened to a report on the work of the RC in the years since the last election. The report focused mainly on the “practical work” the committee had done to improve conditions in Progress, such as providing and improving facilities and activities for the elderly and the disabled, ensuring that people suffering hardship got help, dealing with problems related to water pipes and corridor lighting. At the conclusion of the meeting, the neighborhood’s “volunteers” were each presented with a red booklet commending them for their service and a bag of flour, which had to be signed for. Those who had not come had their gift and award taken to them at home later.

The first formal election meeting, which a banner proclaimed as a “meeting of residents’ representatives,” began with the young newly-appointed deputy Party secretary reading out a six-page typewritten document detailing the rules for elections formulated by the street office. Party Secretary Zhu then announced that the Progress Party branch had met to propose names for the seven-member election committee, which were duly approved

40 A recent Chinese novel describes pressure on such an “extra candidate” in an internal Party election in a rural county not to actively campaign for the post in question (Zhan 2009).
41 The street office rules for the election specified that all candidates for RC membership who were also paid staff had to sit an exam to be eligible for election. Volunteer members were not required to do so. Hexi District XXX Street Office Communist Party Work Committee, “XXX implementing program for work on the 2009 elections to the community residents committees” (XXX 2009年社区居民委员会换届选举工作实施方案), Document No. 1, February 2009. Document on file with the author.
without discussion. The 70-odd attendees at the meeting were mostly older people; no questions were asked or objections raised.

Almost all the Progress election meetings were called by word of mouth, with each worker responsible for informing those in her beat, and were only for the invited. The door of the activity room where these meetings were held was often locked. During the second major meeting when the election committee was introducing the candidates to the residents’ representatives—the only moment when candidates talked publicly about why they should be elected—a “granny” who was often seen at the RC office but had not been invited poked her head in the door. Sister Wang firmly hustled her out of the room, saying, “This is no business of yours, go off on patrol.”

Following correct procedure and avoiding any appearance of impropriety was the major concern of local leaders at the street office and the Party secretaries. The ad hoc election committee of retired local worthies, mainly Party members, was responsible for ensuring adherence to the rules. As these had changed for every recent election—with alterations to the membership of the committee, the eligible voters and the specific rules for each stage—there was some confusion about what the correct procedure should be. The election committee also had to deal with the different regulatory instruments issued by various levels of government—national, municipal, district and street office regulations all contained varying provisions on election procedure—and decide how to proceed. Unsurprisingly, the election committee’s meetings were protracted, and often resulted in new tasks for the RC workers. After one of these marathon sessions had taken a decision to hold two meetings to be attended by the same group of people on two consecutive days, one worker remarked that the committee wasn’t concerned about saving trouble for everyone; another quipped: “Well, the kind of people who want to save trouble wouldn’t choose to be on that committee!”

Exercises such as registering voters—like many RC and VC tasks—served several functions: an aspect of the ongoing struggle to maintain up-to-date records about the territory’s population; fulfilling a requirement of the law that a complete list of voters be made public; creating opportunities for citizenship education; and seeking to ensure a complete network of information dissemination and collection through activists. Registering voters was a huge task, as the names of eligible persons for each household needed to be collated from the handwritten books in which the RC maintained its register of residents, a list of voters compiled and posted publicly (lists were posted in the beat in which people lived) and a voter card written out and issued to each person. In addition, at every stage of the election,
public notices about relevant matters were written up and posted around the area, mostly once the issues in question had already been decided. For example, the names of the members of the election committee were posted and, once they were decided, the names of the candidates for election.

The control of Richview Terrace by a private property management company frustrated the RC workers in their election work. For notices on the elections, workers had to go to the Richview property management office and get special permission to put up one letter size sheet in the lobby of each building asking voters to register. They had wanted to put the notice by the lifts, where residents would be more likely to see it, but this request was refused by the property management office, which said they could only post it in a display case in each lobby. They could only post regular election notices on one board near the back gate of Richview, which was not necessarily used by all residents.

Public notices did not always encourage participation. In the notice announcing the nomination period, there was no indication of where a nomination form could be obtained or how to propose a candidate. When building leaders came into the office to ask about how to

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Illustration 2.1: An election banner displayed on the fence around the main compound of Rising China reads: “Do a good job of the elections to the community residents committee to promote the building of a harmonious community!”

Commercial housing developments are usually run by private-sector property management companies, either linked to the developer, or independent entities. These are responsible for issues of maintenance, security and sanitation in the compound.
complete the nomination forms they had been given, they usually asked who should be nominated, and the list of “approved” candidates was indicated to them, sometimes by showing them forms filled in by others. Evidently the workers weren’t supposed to tell people whom to nominate, but everyone was aware that it shouldn’t be just anyone.

The street office supervised the elections more closely than any other area of RC work. Section Chief Ling, a dynamic and animated woman in her 30s who was directly responsible for the RCs in the street office above Progress, came to almost every election meeting, and was present along with all the RC workers from 6:30am until the end of the day on polling day, a Sunday, not usually a work day for the RC. Chief Ling’s boss, Director Lu, in charge of all civil affairs work at the street office, also came regularly to Progress during the weeks running up to the election, and on the day itself. Written reports also had to be prepared by the RC worker in charge and filed with the street office.

In the end, proper procedure was frequently dispensed with in the face of explicit pressure to achieve a high turnout. A specific target of 80 percent had been informally set for Progress by Director Lu. As he was leaving after meetings at the RC, he said, as if casually, “Let’s try and keep the voting rate over 80 percent!” However, it was understood that turnout had to be above this, as Progress had to be progressive in everything—which meant exceeding targets and beating other RCs. Chief Ling mentioned in a pep talk just before the election that in the past, Progress had achieved a 95 percent turnout. Thus although she also talked about the need for strict enforcement of the rules on proxy voting—which required that those casting votes for others have their written permission—on election day these rules were ignored as activists brought in voter cards from people in their whole building and voted on their behalf. Generally they did this discreetly, coming with five cards at a time, voting for them, and then coming back later with another five, and so on. It was also understood that they should not do this when Chief Ling was around.

The Progress workers and activists had tried hard to ensure that turnout would be high. Every voter in the election in 2009 was given a small plastic bag of soap powder after casting their ballot. The RC had had to ask the street office for the money to buy the soap, so that Progress could live up to its reputation. I spent much of the day handing out soap powder to people who had just voted in the polling station, eliciting wide smiles from residents. (It gave them face to be handed the soap powder by me, a “foreigner,” the RC workers said.) These gifts, and the bags of flour mentioned above, can be seen as repayment for people’s participation. But even this inducement wasn’t considered enough in the end.
Polling finished first at Little Progress—the three buildings across the highway, which had some of the poorest conditions in the territory, but housed some key activists. Sister Han, who lived there, brought back the ballot box to the main polling station less than two hours after the polling had begun, saying that all the residents there had already cast their votes. One-Armed Fang, an activist who also lived there and was involved in the various groups of people with disabilities, said proudly that Little Progress had achieved 100 percent turnout in the previous two elections as well.

Towards the end of the day, RC workers were sent out with a couple of mobile ballot boxes—cardboard boxes covered with red paper—and a list of the people who hadn’t voted yet. I went along with Sister Wang to knock on doors in her beat. We tramped up the stairs in a few buildings—all the absent voters seemed to live on higher floors—but no one was home. After a while, we went along to the small room of a friend of hers who was the concierge for one of the two bike garages in the compound, which was in the opposite corner to the RC office and the polling station. I had been there before with Sister Wang to smoke a cigarette; there was a flat kang bed and a stove, and it was quite cozy. We found Sister Han and Sister Wei, who had been out on a similar mission to us, already squeezed in there, filling out the ballots for the missing voters, and putting them into the boxes. Sister Wang joined them in the task. None of these three were Party members. They were careful about it, perusing the list and deciding who wouldn’t mind them voting on their behalf. They did their work, we sat and chatted for a while, and then went back to the polling station with the ballot boxes.

Later, when it was announced that out of the 1,070 voters, 1,007 had cast ballots—a turnout of 94 percent—Director Lu, Chief Ling, Party Secretary Zhu and the members of the election committee positively glowed with pleasure. Of these ballots, 82.5 percent were “correct,” in that they voted for all the approved candidates. (Voters who weren’t sure about how to vote had been shown by poll workers how to vote “correctly” by putting circles under the names of the five candidates whose names were listed on the ballot. The space for write-in candidates was not mentioned in these explanations.) Along with 13 spoiled ballots, there were a handful of write-in votes for popular members of the RC, with a total of ten votes divided between three candidates: Sister Wang; Sister Bai, who ran the management operations; and an activist who had apparently refused to be involved in the process because she had complaints about some members of the RC. The remainder of the ballots that were not “correct” showed disapproval for one or other of the candidates by not voting for them.
The election process was all about procedures rather than providing a platform for discussion about the issues facing the neighborhood. At meetings people were expected to come and listen and assent, and perform the tasks that they were asked to do, and largely they did. Leaders expended a great deal of energy and social capital to bring in an election that appeared to be run by the book. But elections also cemented the network of activists the RC needed to perform its required tasks, through a series of participatory rituals. The neighborhood’s activist network was envisaged as having several overlapping centers—Party members, building leaders, members of the foot patrol, activists in social organizations—who were to lead the area’s “team of volunteers” in implementing “one-to-one assistance to provide neighborly mutual help, alleviate poverty and relieve hardship and ensure those whose children have left, the orphaned and the old are not alone.” Participation thus both relied on and guaranteed socialized governance.

**The silence of political contention**

There is a longer history of elections in rural areas. The regulatory regime is more detailed, and there has long been greater attention to procedural issues. In both rural field sites, however, it was clear that the officially-approved slate of candidates had been decided in Party meetings many months prior to the holding of an actual vote.

In 2004, Dragon Peak Village received the rare honor of being designated a national model “democracy and rule of law village,” as a three-storey banner hanging from the VC proudly proclaimed. Yet the results of the 2009 election had been decided before the vote—a list allocating cadre responsibilities dated March gave the names of those who were standing for election as if they were already the incumbents, although the election was in April. The Party secretary, not a VC member, had just been reappointed for the sixth time. This election did involve a transition of leadership from one generation to another; a younger man in the same extended family took over the post from the retiring VC director. The new director had already served for many years as village accountant. Manager Zheng, the head of the village’s Tourism Company, told me, “Unlike in other villages, we are rather disciplined here, the village cadres do not need to do much work for the election because the villagers are conscientious and have high quality, so there is no need for canvassing for votes, and no bribery.” Here, the quality of the election was judged by the lack of contention over the result.

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43 “Brief Introduction to XXX Community,” undated document on file with the author.
Zhang Family Village was also undergoing a generational transition, and the presumptive inheritors had already taken over the posts they would hold once the election confirmed them. But charges of electoral fraud derailed the election, and eventually led to my being banned from the village.\textsuperscript{44} Months after the municipal deadline for the completion of RC and VC elections, the VC had still not begun the first stage of the electoral process. I found out about this gradually, as initially the VC staff had evidently hoped to keep me in the dark about it. When I first met my contact at the VC at the beginning of May, Mr. Sun, a Party cadre in his 30s, one of a couple of graduates of masters’ degree programs running the VC’s collective businesses, he told me that on some days I would probably have to stay at home and “rest.” I didn’t understand the import of his comment until later. There was no public indication that an election process was underway; I never saw any slogans about exercising democratic rights or other non-administrative election-related notices in the VC building, and few in the village itself.

Director Guo, with whom I spent my first couple of weeks at the VC, diverted my questions about the elections, talking about how there had been vote-buying and other irregularities in other villages, but Zhang Family Village was not like that. But in mid-May I found a faded VC notice posted on a wall in the village which set April 18 as the date for the first stage, the election of the villager representative assembly. I also started observing in the VC office, and heard talk about what was going on. In the first week of June, the VC office was busy copying an “Open Letter to Villagers” from the proposed candidates for election. The one-page Open Letter admitted that there had been some “inadequacies” in VC work, but said that the candidates would put their utmost effort into “pursuing the people’s well-being” in their new term. Under the rubric of “ensuring a harmonious and stable environment,” they would focus on sustaining the development of the collective economy so as improve villagers’ welfare. Economic development should be carried out in an open, transparent fashion, to the benefit of all, the letter said.

Two of the ostensible signatories to the Open Letter worked in the VC office where I spent most of my time, Xu and Big Sister Jiang. Xu dealt with security issues in the village, and Big Sister Jiang was taking over the position of token woman on the VC from Director Guo, administering welfare, women’s affairs and population planning. Both complained bitterly that they had not been consulted on the text or the idea of the Open Letter. “It’s all empty talk, it’s all fake,” said Xu. They worried that they might not get elected if their names

\textsuperscript{44} This happened after township officials found out I was doing research there, and ordered the VC not to allow me to come back.
were associated with the two prime movers of the Open Letter. “They are old cadres,” said Xu, slipping his right hand between his left arm and his body as if pocketing something.

After I had stamped all 1,500 copies of the Open Letter with the VC seal, the pile sat on the windowsill beside Big Sister Jiang’s desk for weeks, the top copy covered with newspaper, the paper eventually discoloring in the sun. A second open letter was prepared, but also shelved. Someone who asked to read it was told it was “top secret.” The “higher ups” had not given permission for this effort to repair the reputations of the officially-backed slate of candidates. The informal prohibition on “canvassing for votes” (拉票) meant that candidates were not supposed to present an election platform outside the one opportunity provided by the formal election process, when the candidates are introduced to the villager representative assembly.

In the absence of a public space for open discussion of the issues surrounding the election, the allegations of electoral fraud made by the challengers could only find expression in postings on internet bulletin boards. These said that in the April 18 election for villager representatives, after only “two or three” people had voted, the ballot box was seen to already contain “dozens” of ballot papers. Complaints were lodged immediately, as officials from the township and the public security bureau were present at the scene. A fight broke out between village security and the complainants, at least one of whom ended up being held for 10 days’ administrative detention.

On one of my occasional forays into the village proper in mid-June, I found a four-page Xinhua News Agency report on a central government statement on rural issues posted in three different locations. On the third page of each, a section entitled “Resolutely investigate illegal acts in elections to villager committees such as vote-buying” was emphasized by curly brackets hand-drawn in black pen, the implication being that these standards should be applied to the current impasse.

By this time, everywhere else in the township had already held elections. Evidently, the fraud charges and the response to those who raised them had opened a can of worms. The complainants began to challenge the overall legitimacy of the incumbent village leadership, including its stewardship of collective property and commitment to the collective welfare. In conversations in the VC office, workers talked about “leaflets” that had been distributed in the village detailing wrongdoings of the village power-holders, including the claim that village land had been sold off cheaply, at a lower price than in a neighboring

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45 Similar posts appeared on a number of different bulletin boards, posted on May 15, 2009. Links are on file with the author.
village. This claim was repeated indignantly by the VC staff on more than one occasion.
Said the VC worker responsible for administering welfare benefits, Lin Hong: “That isn’t how it is! It was a government action, nothing to do with us!”

From day to day, talk continued to swirl around. There was discussion about the procedures for nominating candidates, and the two camps were said to be jockeying to bring in groups of votes. The consensus among VC workers was that one to two thousand of the villagers were “in the middle”—not supporting either side in the dispute. At the same time, they were preparing for the election to proceed: Jiang was busy compiling a list of candidates for the villager representatives. As long as people are not opposed to us we should include them, said Xu, but some he labeled “reactionary.” It was agreed a few of the “bad people” needed to be included on the list.

When I spoke about the elections to a group of village residents running small businesses along the main thoroughfare, they were not excited about the challenge to the existing order. “There’s no way to change anything through elections,” said Li, a lively middle-aged woman with three gold rings in each ear and hands grimy with bicycle grease from her repair shop next door. “It is always the same group of people in charge, no matter what happens. The elections are pointless. The Party is in charge, and they call the shots.”

The election process could only proceed once the dispute had been resolved through informal processes of socialized governance and the outcome of the election agreed among the centers of power inside and outside the village. In the end, however, the election dispute appeared to be a battle between factions, rather than a thoroughgoing effort to deal with inequalities arising from the development of the village. Yao considers such battles over collective property to be emblematic of systemic contradictions arising from the system of collective land ownership. The lack of resolution, despite changes in leadership, can be attributed to this system, he argues, since it “gives village cadres enormous power without effective institutional checks and balances” (2009, 143). In Zhang Family Village, there was much at stake in participation: evidently the issue of villagers’ long-term security as they made the transition to urban status was at the core of the contention.

Prior to a last visit to the VC in August to say goodbye (at the invitation of Director Guo), I took a short walk around the village. Outside the elementary school I saw a notice announcing the elections for the villager representative assembly. The VC staff said that the election itself had been scheduled for September 5. One of them told me, “We’ve just started doing elections, so we need to learn more about it.” He was evidently taking a very
long-term view of the learning process: the 2009 election would be the seventh round held by Zhang Family Village.

**A circumscribed public sphere**

While the formal democratic process provided space only for compliant citizens and administrative tasks, in several ways the RCs and the VCs could be a site for the definition of norms and the disciplining of cadre behavior.

As a gathering place for certain groups of people—those who had business to transact with the committees and the formal and informal leaders of the neighborhood or village—the RCs and VCs could become a site for discussion of public affairs, including the circulation of critical comments about local leaders and policies. The politics of local gossip and talk could have real effect, particularly when engaged in by people who were older and had the kind of authority accrued from long-term residence in an area. Those who thought of themselves as persons of standing were concerned about their reputations, and such talk could be of real concern to them.

But limits to what could be said, and particularly to *where* claims and statements could be made, were evident in the treatment of persons designated as “factors of instability” (不稳定因素) or “factors of disharmony” (不和谐因素). Conflicts, complaints and disputes were permissible, but were not supposed to go beyond the borders of RCs or VCs. The Party leadership’s vision of a “harmonious society” involves discipline as well as care.

**The right to complain**

The RCs and VCs are the location where people can legitimately exercise their constitutional and legal right to complain about official actions and policies and to receive an answer, while these institutions have a constitutional mandate to pass on opinions and demands of their constituents, thus institutionalizing mass line-type participation. They are required to deal with *all* complaints brought to them, no matter what the subject. In the place where you belong, someone must always hear you out, and the various authorities of that place have an obligation to assist you. In practice, the majority of complaints are reportedly made through such institutions (Michelson 2008).

A manual for RC workers made clear that they had to seek to resolve any complaint brought to them, and were required to listen to people’s grievances. RCs were thus supposed to exercise a form of emotion management: even if they could not resolve the

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grievance in question, they had to try to defuse the emotional charge it carried. This capacity for patient listening was supposed to apply regardless of the status of the person doing the talking—provided of course that they were actually a resident. Most people who came into the RC offices received solicitous treatment, but RC workers could be abrupt, even rude, to those thought to be “outsiders.”

Materials from Progress articulated specific rights of participation for residents in relation to the affairs of the neighborhood: “the right to know, the right to speak, the right to participate and the right to make decisions.” The exercise of these rights was aimed at “fully mobilizing the activist spirit among residents to participate in community activities.”

Progress had formed a consultative body (议事会) composed of a few of the local elders that met once a month to provide input to the RC. This type of forum apparently originated in VC practice (Saich 2004), pointing to the way institutional innovations spread through the civil affairs system. The law on VCs mandates democratic decision-making and explicitly eschews coercion.

It is expected that members of RCs and VCs will raise concerns relating to people who belong in the areas under their jurisdiction with higher-level officials or local people’s congresses, and there are regular opportunities for them to do so. Those communities that are designated as models have increased chances for such interactions as there are more official visits and “inspections.” Progress workers were constantly complaining about the number of these they had to prepare for.

Members of both the VCs I studied were concurrently members of the local People’s Congresses. They thus had both the authority and the connections to raise questions for constituents, or for their own villages. Dragon Peak’s Party Secretary Fu told me how due to his position in the County PC, he had been able to prevent the county from taking 15 percent of the large sum the central government had allocated to build a geological museum in the village. His history as a cadre outside the village helped in securing bank loans for the collective enterprises before banks regularly made such loans to VCs and had been critical in getting the required permissions for the village to become a tourist destination and for villagers to open “farm family guesthouses.”

When I was working there, Rising China RC submitted an appeal to one of the District PC members representing the area about the lack of street lights on a local road and a dangerous intersection near the neighborhood’s main compound. A board with the names, pictures and affiliations of the District PC members was displayed on one wall of the RC’s

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47 “Brief Introduction to XXX Community,” undated document on file with the author.
activity room. Residents committees could thus be advocates, representing the people in their areas and their interests; they could also shift and represent the state and the Party vis-à-vis those same people.

Such role switching was in evidence at a meeting with two members of the district Political Consultative Congress on the “scientific development perspective” (科学发展观) in Rising China. Party Secretary Dai focused on issues of local poverty. Before the visitors arrived, she prepped the residents she’d invited to the meeting—most of whom were from “marginal households” that were not eligible for welfare benefits, but found it difficult to manage on their income: a woman who was too sick to work, but hadn’t yet been able to retire and thus had no income; a man who had an adult child with a disability and a sick wife and only a very small pension; another woman who couldn’t work because she had an adult son with a mental disability that she had to care for full time, but wasn’t eligible for welfare benefits because she could theoretically have a job; and a woman from the local Old People’s Association, who talked about the lack of services for the many elderly people in the area. Secretary Dai told them they should see their own problems in the context of the overall development of the country. But when the visitors arrived, she switched positions, implicitly calling for expansion of the limited scope of welfare benefits. She let each person talk a little, but mostly described their difficulties herself. Secretary Dai then asserted that the RC’s limited space and resources constrained its capacity to address these and other problems.

The politics of gossip and talk

Given the severe constraints on expression in the recent past, the kind of local voice people have in the RCs and VCs can be significant. As Goldfarb points out, in the context of overwhelming state control, a kitchen table or a private apartment can become part of the public sphere when it is used as such. “When people talk to each other, defining a situation on their own terms and developing a capacity to act in concert, they constitute a democratic alternative to terror and hegemonic force,” he writes (Goldfarb 2006, 8). Although RCs and VCs are state-sponsored institutions, they are designated as a space for the organization of “society.” Through engaging in political gossip and talk, groups of people could constitute physical spaces as an alternative public sphere in which community norms could be defined,

48 This is an advisory body that is composed of local notables, such as successful business people, intellectuals, writers and film stars.
49 This is a concept proposed by China’s President Hu Jintao.
50 A recent survey found that Chinese respondents indicated the greatest improvement in democratic practice compared with the past was in the area of freedom of expression (Shi 2008).
contested and elaborated. They thus reclaimed state-oriented space and “reterritorialized” it as a place of local deliberation (Feuchtwang 2004).

This is not to say people felt there were no constraints: “We don’t have the same kind of freedom of expression here [as in your country],” one RC worker said to me, after someone made a joke about corruption among municipal officials. At the Rising China meeting on “scientific development” described above, when the Old People’s Association representative began comparing the level of welfare provision in the PRC’s version of socialism unfavorably with that in countries that followed what she termed “socialist democracy,” there was a palpable frisson of disapproval from the RC workers present, and they tried to gesture to her to stop—but she ignored them, and finished what she wanted to say. Whether the RC workers would have been as concerned had I not been present is hard to say, but clearly there were limits to what could be said and where.

The four sites provided distinctly different spaces for political talk. In general, the VCs were not so much a space for social interaction as a corporate HQ. While villagers referred to the Dragon Peak VC office by its Mao-era name, “the brigade,” the village cadres called it “the Tourism Company.” It was not a social space, except for the cadres and their close associates, who spent a lot of time there watching TV and playing poker. On scorching hot summer days, a group of old men could be found chatting and smoking in a patch of deep shade outside the Zhang Family Village office; it appears they were not welcome to enjoy the air-conditioned comfort within. Those who did go inside had specific business to conduct, and sometimes political talk went on around those transactions, including around the elections, as mentioned above. Whether, as Yan found, the sphere of commerce had become the main space for public talk was hard to say, but it was mainly outside the VC (Yan 2009, 12).

By contrast, the two RCs both provided a certain degree of public space for informal gatherings, as people dropped by to chat and meet each other there. But their distinctive political cultures meant that these were used in different ways. Although Secretary Dai at Rising China acknowledged that there were residents suffering hardship due to poverty, in general she characterized the neighborhood as well-off, and talked about the opportunities reform had created for entrepreneurship. Status distinctions between the working-class VC staff and the middle-class university staff in the compound, expressed by some in terms of “quality,” mitigated against commonality (see Chapter 4 for more on this).

At Progress, however, a heterogeneous population did not preclude common ground: a continuing tradition of strong socialist rhetoric and a core group of long-term residents
created spaces for complaints about inequality which often took the form of comparing the present unfavorably to the past. Even though most of them had held administrative jobs, the RC staff shared an identity as "laid-off workers." Retired people got together to sing revolutionary songs, and gripes about the common people being left out of the benefits of reform were a frequent theme of conversations.

Complaints about unspecified “leaders” were another often-heard topic among the staff in the RCs and the VC in Zhang Family Village. Usually this was directed at the respective Party secretaries of the three places, and although the name of the person was generally not mentioned, there was often a gesture that pointed in the direction of his or her office. There was no distinction in these gripes between workers who were Party members and those who were not; they all made common cause against the “leaders.” This divide between leaders and led echoes the findings of Lee, many of whose interviewees saw inequality as a division primarily between officials and ordinary people (2009). According to the VC workers in Zhang Family Village, the “leaders” were unreasonable, corrupt and nepotistic, and bent the rules for their friends. Much was made of the Party Secretary’s new black Mercedes Benz sedan. The implication of the statement “It must have cost more than 100,000 yuan!” was clearly that he was taking too much money from the collective pot.

In the RCs, complaints were more mundane. Rising China’s workers criticized Party Secretary Dai for being arbitrary and imperious, and playing favorites, getting people to report on each other. She was more interested in pleasing the street office officials than in advocating for people in the neighborhood, said welfare worker Sister Li, when she was criticized for submitting too many welfare claims (described in Chapter 3). In Progress, Party Secretary Zhu was castigated for being rigid and sticking to absurd rules, for tiring everyone out with her insistence on going beyond the call of duty.

Party Secretary Zhu’s irritation about the questioning of her leadership style erupted one day in dramatic form. As mentioned in Chapter 1, at a meeting soon after the elections, she gave an angry lecture, at some moments shouting with frustration. While initially the theme was the requirement that everyone abide by the “systems” set by the street office for the RC workers, soon she was challenging the workers to take over from her if they thought they could do a better job as leader, and to tell her to her face what mistakes they thought she was making and discuss problems with her—rather than through proxies, was the implication. Thus she showed how her authority was backed up by official rules, and challenged the RC workers’ informal critique of her leadership style.
The most likely channel through which the complaints had reached Zhu was the most outspoken of the Progress activists, Aunty Li, a close friend of Aunty Feng, described at the beginning of this Chapter. In her mid-70s, Aunty Li headed the foot patrol, and told everyone what she thought in no uncertain terms, and she regularly visited Zhu’s office to give her a piece of her mind. She was not a Party member, but her age, long residence in the neighborhood and outspoken reputation often counted for more. She was a formidable character, but had a warmth and sense of humor that made her endearing rather than intimidating.

In Progress, the prevailing attitude of generalized irritation about the arbitrary behavior of leaders spread beyond immediate superiors to encompass a vague horizon of officials. This went along with skepticism about the newspapers and all recitations of official policies. If anything, the Party members (aside from Secretary Zhu) were more openly critical than those who were not. Even the keen-as-a-blade young deputy Party secretary, fresh out of school and brimming with enthusiasm for social service, said there was nothing interesting in the papers. “It’s all fake,” she opined. This dismissal of fakery was central to a pervasive ambivalence expressed even by the most loyal of the urban activists and RC workers, who could be heard on occasion expressing sharp criticism of the formalism of self-governance. In this critique, the idea that self-government was primarily cheap was one theme; the street office got funding for projects that it then passed on to the RCs which carried them out for next to nothing or even collected money from residents for the purpose. The informalization of state work was thus creating the potential for an oppositional “society.” This echoes the findings of Gui et al’s study of RCs in Shanghai, which notes that these were not merely representatives of the state in the neighborhoods; the interests of the RCs and the street offices often diverged, even if this was not always apparent from what the RC staff would say publicly or to outside interviewers (2009).

By contrast, in the VCs the predominant critique of practices—of all kinds of people, including officials—was that they were “immoral” (缺德). This term was applied to official behavior, from sloppy administration to outright corruption, and to personal failings of all kinds. Underlying such talk was an implicit sense of a universally-applicable set of correct moral norms. On one occasion when Xu, the VC worker in Zhang Family Village, used this term to criticize “the leaders,” he checked with me that I knew what the Chinese words meant, as if to reinforce the point. In fact, the most radical critiques of the existing order came from people in leading positions in the two villages I studied. People in Zhang Family Village were keenly aware of the discrimination their children faced because they did not live
in a proper city district—if they wanted to attend top schools, they had to pay enormous fees. On several occasions in the VC office, Xu, who was also a member of the Party Committee and an official candidate for election to the VC, told me how he compared “pervasive corruption” and the closed character of the Chinese political system to the “openness” of American politics and the principle of independence of the judiciary there. I never initiated these conversations, and mostly just listened to what he had to say, except when asked a question. At a dinner with visiting academics in Dragon Peak Village, Party Secretary Fu complained about the way “models” and priorities imposed from above created unrealistic targets and perverse incentives. Overall, the system remained too authoritarian to make the best of development opportunities, he claimed.

**Establishing a community norm**

Within the neighborhood itself, new community norms could be established through the strategic use of officially-sanctioned forms of participation. Mrs. Zhang’s open letter of praise for Progress RC was a key example.

In the middle of winter, bedridden Mrs. Zhang was left without care when her husband disappeared. As I describe in Chapter 3, Sister Wang, the Progress welfare worker, became her lifeline. Other Progress staff and activists also visited, and eventually, they managed to find Mrs. Zhang a paid care-giver, a migrant woman willing to accept the minimal salary she could afford.

The need for the RC to care for Mrs. Zhang was controversial; the workers, including Sister Wang, complained about it. They obviously felt that such responsibilities should not routinely fall on them. Sister Wang talked about how exhausting it was, others found the squalor of Mrs. Zhang’s living space hard to tolerate.

Once her new care-giver was in place, Mrs. Zhang wrote an open letter thanking Sister Wang, Party Secretary Zhu and the RC in effusive terms. Zhu asked Sister Bai (whose calligraphy was the best) to copy the letter onto a four-foot high sheet of red paper. It was then posted in a glass-fronted notice board in the center of Progress for all to read.

This public accolade endorsed Mrs. Zhang’s personal claim for future care from the community, as well as asserting a generalized responsibility to provide similar assistance to others. The poster also reflected Secretary Zhu’s expansive notion of the role of the community in ensuring that “everyone is cared for and loved,” as she put it in an interview with me. It expressed a distinctly socialist vision of what should be provided, but with a humanist tinge in the inclusionary “everyone.” It also put the issue of the care deficit faced
by people like Mrs. Zhang—in Hexi District, there is no public system of home care, although this is appearing in other parts of Tianjin (Shue 2010)—onto the public agenda.

No space for “enemies”

The policing of the boundaries of acceptable citizenship was distinctly different in urban and rural locations. For the RCs, keeping track of specific people deemed to be “factors of instability/disharmony” was a key task, but one that reflected the priorities of government institutions, rather than their own. I never heard this mentioned in the VCs although they have the same institutional mandate to prevent complaints from reaching higher levels. In the VCs, the conception of “security” was more about policing boundaries, but the involvement of village security in the Zhang Family Village election dispute is instructive: here they acted as an informal local police force.

The central state makes its preference for local resolution of complaints abundantly clear. A nationally-mandated “responsibility” system means officials who do not prevent petitions originating in their areas from reaching higher levels face various disciplinary consequences that can affect their political careers (Minzner 2009a; Minzner 2006). Localities unofficially punish petitioners who repeatedly take their complaints to higher levels. In the Zhang Family Village case, the administrative punishment system was used to retaliate against the people who complained about fraud in the election.

In the RCs, the state project of constructing a “harmonious society” was linked to issues of “security.” This meant constant attention to “designated people” (重点人口) such as petitioners, former members of the Falungong “evil cult,” the mentally-ill and ex-convicts. When her report on security in Progress was returned as “not up to standard” but with no other explanation, an irritated Sister Lin speculated that perhaps the 40 “designated people” the RC had identified in the area was considered too many. This list represented a bit more than one percent of the population in the RC’s territory. Each RC had at least two regular “petitioning households.” From what I learned about these households, their grievances were about personal injury and property, and by no means presented any kind of challenge to the existing order.

At a meeting to report on “overall governance” (综合治理)—the term for security used by the street office responsible for Rising China—attended by representatives of four RCs in

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51 Human rights groups have documented the forms such unofficial punishment can take: in Beijing, different localities have groups of personnel known as “interceptors” whose job it is to abduct people from that place, hold them in illegal detention facilities and forcibly return them “home” (Chinese Human Rights Defenders 2007; Human Rights Watch 2009).
the locality and two street office officials, a major focus was the surveillance of the “designated personnel” in their areas, including when these people traveled to other parts of the country. Several of the RC’s reports stressed how they had used social inclusion as a strategy for dealing with such people, encouraging them to participate in neighborhood activities, such as fundraising for the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. Workers from one RC described the large number of people from outside the city as a potential problem, and there, inclusion had also been used, with the RC recruiting “outsiders” as activists and informants. Rising China emphasized the work done by building leaders and Party members to control the problem people through maintaining regular social contact with them; enmeshing them in such social relations was an attempt to obligate them to conform to social norms. All complained that this work took up so much of their time that not enough was left for their other responsibilities. One of the street office leaders gave a short speech to conclude the meeting, saying that achieving a “peaceful community” was the basis for all other work, and that the best way to do this was by creating a “big family” that concentrated on “humanist development.” Evidently, socialized governance was a key aspect of security work.

Achieving such harmony required that workers forestall emerging problems to prevent disputes from reaching outside RC boundaries. Although RC workers and members are not state officials, the responsibility systems mentioned above are thus passed on to them. Seeking to prevent regular petitioners from complaining to higher authorities was a constant concern, especially at the time of major national events. This approach extended even to preventing complaints to the street office, as became clear in the case of Second Brother, a Progress resident of over 50 who had been severely affected by polio at the age of eight. Second Brother came regularly to the RC office in his motorized three-wheeler to inquire about his request that he be given his own housing. He lived with his elderly father in an apartment rented from his younger brother. Sister Wang’s patient work on Second Brother exemplified the proper attitude of RC workers towards persistent complainants. She would welcome him into the office, unbolting the second door to allow him to drive his three-wheeler right in. She was never sharp with him, usually offering him a sip from her own jar of tea and smoking several cigarettes with him. She talked about how smart he was as she explained yet again that he was not eligible for housing.

One day when I was leaving the street office building with a group of RC workers, we saw Second Brother sitting in the foyer of the new glass and steel building chain-smoking and waiting quietly for someone to talk to him. This was not the first time he had done this. His silent protests caused great consternation. On this occasion, after Sister Wang had
persuaded him to leave, she and I walked back to the RC with him. Party Secretary Zhu
cycled along with us the first part of the way. She said to Second Brother, “You know, if you
keep doing this, Sister Wang could lose her job!”

The only person the Progress RC workers tried to persuade me not to talk to was a
member of one of their petitioning households. This family was receiving the minimum
livelihood guarantee, and I had seen the wife and husband coming into the RC office to get
their benefits booklet stamped by Sister Wang. They were quite distinctive looking: both very
tall, she wore her hair in a long plait and leaned on a shoulder-high wooden staff, and he
looked as if his face had had some of the stuffing removed; he wasn’t quite present. Their
clothes were threadbare; they looked like pilgrims. It turned out they were in a sense:
pilgrims for justice.

Having obtained their address from the publicly-posted list of Minimum Livelihood
Guarantee recipients (see Chapter 3), I arranged an appointment with Mrs. Shen, who was
very happy to talk to me. Mrs. Shen welcomed me into the small room just inside her front
door, which doubled as her dental clinic. She had a sign in the first floor window advertising
her services, and her instruments were laid out on a table covered with a white cloth. Almost
before I had sat down, she began a torrent of talk, showing me sheaves of documents
relating to many years of appeals. When I showed her my introduction letter which talked
about keeping informants’ names confidential, she insisted several times she wanted her
real name to be used.

Through a series of unfortunate circumstances, her family had become enemies of
the city government, which made absolutely everything difficult, she told me. In Mrs. Shen’s
case, she said the starting point was a traffic accident, when a vehicle carrying two
journalists from This Evening’s News, one of the main popular papers in the city, knocked
her down in the street. After they shouted at her and kicked her for almost an hour, she said,
she was finally taken to hospital, but had not received proper treatment there, and had
suffered permanent disability. This explained her limp and the staff she carried around.

Despite years of effort, the newspaper and the two staff involved in the accident
refused to pay for her medical care or give her any compensation. They could avoid
responsibility because they had connections to top officials in the city, she claimed. Her
attempts to seek justice had led to the persecution of her whole family, including false
accusations against her schizophrenic eldest son, which had resulted in him being

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52 This is a very small cash benefit dispensed to certain people without any income who are deemed to have “lost
the ability to labor,” see Chapter 3.
sentenced to death for robbery, a sentence eventually commuted to life in prison. She said he had been tortured into confessing to this crime, which had occurred when he was in a secure mental hospital, so he could not have done it. This evidence had been suppressed, she claimed. Their livelihood had been destroyed: her husband and her other son lost their work unit jobs and the family had not received full compensation for the demolition of their apartment. “Without the Guarantee, we couldn’t survive at all. If things had been done according to state policies and laws, how could we have reached such a pass?” she said.

The persecution went from the extreme to the petty. She told me that the RC, the street office and the local police station interfered with their lives in every possible way, destroying relations with their neighbors and the housing department, creating problems with their water supply and electric light in the corridor. Her grandson, aged around 10, loved to play soccer, but when the school found out about his petitioning family, he was dropped from the soccer team. “They are worse than it is possible to imagine,” she said. It was hard to credit that my friends at the RC would have had such disregard for basic decency. Speaking to Mrs. Shen, I felt I had entered another world, the place I had heard about in reports from human rights organizations, a world in which every dealing with officialdom became an opportunity for further persecution. This world was routinely denied by anyone with a relationship to the state. She asked for my help, but there was nothing I could do except listen, and express my sympathy. When I went back to the RC office, the staff asked me, “Did you believe her?” I said I didn’t know. But I had heard many similar accounts of persecution and it seemed to me there was some kernel of truth in her story.53

Opinion on the petitioners and other types of “trouble-makers” was divided in Progress. In one conversation about the latest round with the other petitioners, whose dispute centered around water pipes, Sister Lin remarked, to no one in particular, that it was “their freedom, their human rights” to continue pressing their case. In another conversation about Falungong members posting notices on people’s doors, one of the RC regulars, a tall, thin and very dour woman, said, “Why don’t they just shoot them? Or lock them up?”

Conclusion

The central state sees RCs and VCs as a key location for the shaping of appropriate citizen behavior. Here laws and regulations act as a script for participation, with procedure operating as a set of staging directions, and the regulatory texts providing the appropriate

53 A number of reports on the treatment of petitioners have been issued (Chinese Human Rights Defenders 2008; Human Rights Watch 2005).
“formulations” that specify the meaning of each scene. At each step, there is a public announcement that the rules have been properly carried out. Citizens are interchangeable, but they need to learn their roles through practicing the performance. As well as mobilization, this kind of performance could be interpreted as a version of the “orthopraxy” characteristic of imperial Chinese rule (Herrmann-Pillath 2006, 549). However, the center is not the only initiator of such rituals: similar locally-scripted performances of citizenship were also a regular occurrence in the field sites, often staged for reporting to higher levels or in local media.

Yet at the same time, these institutions can be a public space where alternative “definitions of the situation” are circulated. The RCs, in particular, provide a space for the circulation of a “partially submerged discourse at odds with the official one,” as Saich puts it, pointing out the spread of forms of participation outside the ambit of state control (2004, 202-203). Even revolutionary songs can be subversive in the current climate (Saich 2004), and there was an aspect of this in the socialist environment of Progress. Thus formulations do not have a fixed, immutable meaning; resistance may use official scripts for purposes for which they were not intended (Liu 2009; Wang 2005b). In addition, formulations may emerge from non-state spaces, as the example of the alternative formulation relating to the scripted election performances showed. Ironically, performing as scripted requires that people engage in the fakery they disparage among themselves, but outright manipulation—such as the stuffing of ballot boxes—has to be done secretly, out of the sight of the leaders, in whose eyes the performance must meet the standards set by the higher levels. In Zhang Family Village, some people rejected this faking, but they were punished for exposing it. The process could not continue until the script could be performed without conflict or disagreement being publicly expressed.

But those who refuse to perform the script of good citizenship, like Mrs. Shen, move outside of this calculus and become non-persons, who cannot expect any dealing with state or quasi-state institutions to be on reasonable terms. Their right to be heard is denied a priori. As I show with another story in Chapter 4, socialized governance buffers the formal state from direct involvement with this kind of treatment of individuals who become labeled as “factors of instability,” thus antagonistic to the harmony and compliance the government prioritizes. Social shunning and state persecution blur in an effort to force compliance. While this disciplining of individuals and households is almost invisible to those beyond its direct effects, it still acts as an exemplary force that constrains how others choose to act. Crucially,
it polices the boundaries of participatory citizenship, blocking the entry of citizens to participation outside the local spheres designated as legitimate by the central state.

Mrs. Shen’s history of petitioning meant that everything she did was interpreted in the light of her previous conduct. In the environment of the RCs and VCs, people have a history and hold differing amounts of political and social capital, built up over years of participation and observation in the neighborhood or village. One measure of this is the extent to which they contribute to the performance. Many contributions are recorded; for example, in Progress a log book was maintained listing the names of the people who went on the foot patrol each day. As One-Armed Fang put it, “There’s no point in doing something if it’s not written down!” Thus there is an instrumentalist logic of activist involvement; the activists contribute to building the leaders’ symbolic capital through making the performance possible.

This kind of accumulation of political capital was one of the ways activists could generate informal power that might be used to constrain local leaders. Situated as they are in an intimate space, leaders are likewise enmeshed in locally-defined and enforced norms of acceptable behavior, articulated through the politics of gossip and talk. I explore the dimensions of this local sociality further in Chapter 4. Sometimes, the politics of talk forms an opposition between the rationality of leaders and of ordinary people, creating a commonality of feeling among the governed. The largely unmediated politics of citizenship gives it a very different character to mediated public politics where elites dominate the terms of the discourse. In the intimate context of the former, the scope of entitlements can be shifted by the assertion of new norms justified through creative use of official formulations, as Mrs. Zhang’s letter demonstrated. But as Sister Wang and Party Secretary Zhu remarked, Mrs. Zhang had a strong web of personal connections, and these were undoubtedly one of the reasons why her letter was received so favorably. If Mrs. Shen had written such a letter, however couched in official formulations, its reception would likely have been very different.

But few people’s status is as fixed as Mrs. Shen’s. Socialized governance means the distinction between leaders and led is often ambiguous—such as among the workers in the RCs and VCs—as some people switch from being in one group to being in another in different situations. And only a limited number of neighborhood residents are actively engaged in the RCs, pointing to the limits in what is at stake in these institutional settings. The economic role of the VCs meant a contested politics around collective assets and economic priorities. The Party is not separate from this kind of logic, it is embedded in this local milieu. Hierarchies of age, length of residence and popularity (有人缘) mean that
Politics is situational, and the outcomes are not necessarily fixed by state rules or categories. In the following chapter, I consider how such logics play out in the field of citizen entitlements.
Chapter 3
Entitlement: relying on a local “guarantee”

“Welfare” has historically been minimal in the People’s Republic of China (Wong 1998). But measured in comparison to some of the subcategories of the Western welfare state—pensions, health care, child care—many urban areas and some richer rural locations developed extensive social provision during the Mao era, and to some extent even since then (Saich 2008). However, when I asked informants in urban and rural Tianjin whether they had a “right” to social welfare, they looked bemused and seemed to think that I was mixing up categories that did not belong together.54

This is not to say that no sense of entitlement is associated with social provision in China, now or in the past. The sense that the state should ensure people’s basic security has been noted in a number of studies of attitudes toward the changing welfare environment (Croll 1999). In recent surveys, the majority of people polled express attitudes that favor state-provided welfare (Wright 2010). For example, in a 2004 national survey seeking to assess people’s sense of injustice, Han and Whyte found that 80 percent of respondents agreed that the government should guarantee a minimum standard of living, while 75 percent agreed that the state should ensure that everyone has employment (2009).

So what form does this sense of entitlement take? Writers on the subject variously refer to “social rights,” “social citizenship” or a “social contract” (see for example, Liu, Serena 2007; Thelle 2003; Croll 1999; Kent 1993). But these terms reflect a very different historical experience, and do not capture the specific relations associated with welfare entitlements in China. As I outline below, the characterization of welfare as “rights” reflects a particular genealogy of welfare provision, and the institutional form of welfare depends on the specific environment, purposes and rationalities in which provision emerges. Thus rather than using the term “social rights”—which emerges from a particular engagement with modernity—in this chapter, I explore the specific form and institutional locations that questions of welfare and livelihood have taken on in the “other modernity” of China (Rofel 1999).

In contrast to T. H. Marshall’s conception of nationally-universal “social rights” as exemplified in the mid-20th century British “welfare state” (1992 [1949]), socialist China’s

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54 I asked this question in nine interviews with urban residents, a total of 12 people, seven of whom were recipients of the minimum livelihood guarantee or (in one case) had applied for the benefit on behalf of an elderly parent; four interviews with RC workers, including the Party Secretaries of my two field sites; one local-level civil affairs official; and two villager committee cadres.
welfare system provided a “guarantee” (保障) anchored in an individual’s relationship with a particular local institution acting as the guarantor for the fulfillment of this obligation.\textsuperscript{55} The person holding the guarantee had an obligation to work, if they could, with support only being provided if they were no longer able to do so. Alongside this, a minimalist welfare system addressed those outside such a guarantee relationship. Although the guarantee reached its apogee in the Mao era and has been undermined by radical changes to the organization of the economy in the wake of Deng Xiaoping’s assumption of power in 1978, as I will show it persists both as practice and as a cultural norm that shapes a range of social phenomena.

This chapter shows how local citizenship shapes conceptions of entitlements and practices relating to claims-making around them. In the communities I studied, face-to-face politics established an arena for citizens to make claims that depended on personal relationships and skill at asserting entitlements in terms of the rhetoric of the day. This environment was shaped by the specific character of each place, as I highlight in Chapters 1 and 4, as well as by the types of participatory citizenship described in Chapter 2. Here socialized governance, intended as a means of ensuring close supervision of new welfare programs and managing the emotions of people coping with straightened circumstances, gave people opportunities for demonstrating their needs that are absent in bureaucratic welfare systems where individuals are interchangeable and criteria are intended to be uniformly applied. But the articulation of needs was constrained by dominant rationalities that made certain types of claims unthinkable. Under the broad rubric of statistical rationality, these brought various forms of expert knowledge to bear on people’s everyday experience.

In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the meaning of “social citizenship” and the historical evolution of welfare provision in the PRC, with a focus on the specific institutions and relations involved. Then I examine the changing nature of the local guarantee through different forms of welfare provision in the four field sites, with a focus on controversies around the livelihood and welfare needs of people disadvantaged by lack of income or employment, by disability or ill-health, or a combination of these.

**Dimensions of social citizenship**

In T. H. Marshall’s classic formulation in *Citizenship and social class*, what he calls the rights of social citizenship enable those disadvantaged by the capitalist system to

\textsuperscript{55} As I show below, this term appears in a number of different compounds, most notably 社会保障, literally, “social guarantee,” often translated as “social security.”
exercise their civil and political rights; by moderating the polarizing effects of the class system social citizenship makes possible a modicum of substantive citizen equality (1992 [1949]). Marshall uses the idea of social citizenship in an expansive fashion, incorporating much of what are now considered economic, social and cultural rights: “the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society” (1992 [1949], 8). In the subsequent literature on social citizenship, there is no uniformity about what it includes—it is a traveling term in a global lexicon, often used as a measurement of provision of social welfare, a yardstick for the degree to which needs for social support (however defined) are met in a particular society. For example, Janoski’s measures of “social rights” in particular states are the percentage of GNP spent on “social transfer payments” and the presence or absence of workers’ compensation, pensions, healthcare provision, unemployment insurance and family allowances (1998, 192, 208-209). It is in this sense that state socialist countries, including pre-reform China, were said to have given priority to social rights. Accounts on the subject in modern China have generally adopted similar definitions, using the extent of social welfare provision as a yardstick for measuring enjoyment of “social rights” (Liu, Serena 2007; Thelle 2003; Kent 1993). Goldman and Perry even describe commitments to welfare in Imperial China as “social rights” (2002, 5-6).

Authors who have taken up Marshall’s social citizenship theme on a more theoretical level emphasize how social rights were often an outcome of popular struggles (Turner 1990; Turner 1986). By contrast, in cases where the state established social provision or other rights of citizenship in the absence of such struggles, these more “passive” citizenship forms are important in setting patterns of interaction between state and citizens (Turner 1990; Mann 1996). Thus the particular political, social and economic intent and circumstances of the extension of social provision shape its subsequent character. From the state’s point of view, the rationale for different types of social provision may vary, and the study of “welfare” should not presume a focus on care and concern, or mitigation of inequality (Orloff 2005). For example, Ong argues that generous social provision for middle-class people in Southeast Asian “tiger” economies such as Singapore and Malaysia is aimed at creating a workforce ready for the needs of international capital (1999). Political legitimacy and economic development—rather than equality or general welfare—have been the main objectives of state welfare programs in East Asian countries, some say (Walker and Wong 2005).
Comparative studies of welfare states and welfare regimes have found no simple relationship between industrialization—or capitalism—and the development of welfare across the Western states that have been the main focus of these studies (Esping-Andersen 1990; Hicks and Esping-Andersen 2005). While a common set of notions and activities are usually involved, from pensions, social insurance, health care and unemployment benefits to public provision for the care of the elderly, people with disabilities and pre-school children, there is great variation in matters such as the extent of state involvement in specific areas, the division of responsibilities between public and private, market and family, and the ways needs are interpreted and defined (Lister 2007; Orloff 2005; Fraser 1989).

Studies of post-communist welfare in Eastern Europe indicate that the transitions in social provision in these states have not followed a singular logic, and differing outcomes have depended on a range of factors, including institutional, political, cultural and religious elements. For example, despite similar approaches to women’s “emancipation” in the communist period—official promotion of equality and labor market participation combined with continuing traditional divisions of labor in the family—post-socialist transitions have had very variable effects, and the situation is more complex than the caricature of a return to tradition for women might suggest (Verdery 1996; Haney 2002; Haney and Pollard 2003; Pascall and Kwak 2005). Conceptions of entitlement, risk and need are shaped by cultural norms propagated through institutions, media and popular discourses (Orloff 2005; Kremer 2007).

In East Asia too, practice is more heterogeneous than some scholars have claimed. White and Goodman conclude that the idea of an East Asian welfare “model” is largely a reflection of “welfare Orientalism” (often put into service in neoliberal projects of welfare downsizing in the West). However, “welfare systems” in the region do share some common features: a combination of low spending on social provision and “achieving welfare goals by other means.” Most notable of these is state-directed economic development (White and Goodman 1998, 12-13). For China, showing the continuing impact of the Maoist strategy of full employment and the role of local collective institutions in social provision is essential to understanding the nature of the social citizenship that exists there.

**An institutional genealogy of Chinese welfare entitlement**

In the PRC context, there is no one term that encapsulates the broad and various endeavors expressed by the English phrase “social welfare.” Often when I described my research to informants in China, they responded by presenting me with a typology of various
distinct components of practice and administrative responsibility. These distinctions pointed to how productive entities had encompassed most of these endeavors in the past, with the sphere of “welfare” being a marginal one reserved for situations or people seen as outside the norm, such as disaster victims and those without families. The typology they presented indicated a bifurcation that parallels the distinctions in many Western welfare systems between “contributory benefits” and “charity” (Fraser and Gordon).

On the side of the latter, “charitable” (慈善) social provision under the departments of civil affairs has historically addressed emergencies and the needs of the minority of people without a connection to an institutional guarantor. Such unfortunates were marked by the “three lacks” (三无)—deficiencies that have changed specific content over time to reflect the shifting institutional landscape. As Wong writes, the civil affairs welfare system was truly “marginal” in the PRC’s recent past, as it addressed only exceptional circumstances (1998). My informants divided the current incarnation of these endeavors into two main categories. “Social relief” (社会救济) relates to responses to emergency situations, whether collective, such as disasters, or individual, such as a health crisis. In the latter case, however, relief is largely informal, and depends on the resources of the particular community. It also includes programs of income support for people with disabilities and for those without income, notably the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee scheme (described in more detail below), although this benefit adopts the “guarantee” frame. In this category, then, relief is given largely to persons living at home. “Social welfare” (社会福利), which also falls under the administration of civil affairs, relates to live-in institutions that provide publicly-funded care for those without family support, mainly orphans and the lone elderly.

By contrast, “social protection” (社会保障) incorporates the “guarantee” frame and is increasingly moving towards a contributory benefits system. These are employment-related benefits and are under the supervision of departments of labor and social security. Five “lines” of protection are included: pensions, health, unemployment, occupational injury and maternity. In Tianjin, specialized bureaucratic agencies called Social Protection Centers have been set up in the last few years to administer these benefits, and it is there that people go to deal with issues such as reimbursement for medical expenses. In this area then, there has been a shift towards a relatively standardized set of minimal entitlements to which employers and employees contribute set proportions, and which should be relatively portable, at least within an administrative territory such as Tianjin Municipality.

56 In my self-introduction letter I grouped three Chinese terms under what I thought of as the umbrella category of social welfare: 社会保障 (social security/guarantee), 社会救济 (social relief), 社会福利 (social benefits/welfare).
Yet as described below, for most people some form of guarantee anchored in a relationship with a specific local institution remains the mechanism through which they achieve these contributory benefits. The social meaning of the guarantee reflects its origins in the collective era. In the system developed from the 1950s onwards, the institutional location and delivery of social provision was decentralized, and depended on an individual’s membership in a specific collective body: a rural production brigade, a collective farm, a work unit, a government department, or an urban residents’ committee. Although urban and rural institutions in pre-reform China were very different—some scholars have gone so far as to claim that there were "two societies" (Whyte 2010)—they shared some key common features. While focused on production, they were multipurpose institutions, expected to cover all the needs of their members, regardless of their individual capacity to contribute to the productive endeavors that were their principal raison d’être (Saich 2008). Although the leadership propagated a consistent anti-welfarist line (Wong 1998), these institutions essentially adopted the socialist principle “to each according to his needs.”

Elements of the guarantee echo imperial practices, notably the *baojia* (保甲) household registration system that operated in cities (see Chapter 1). This is not to claim that the guarantee is a continuation of the *baojia*; the guarantee emerged from conscious efforts to establish the institutions of a modern state. While the Chinese word for guarantee originally meant “protect,” in its social provision connotation, the word was a “return loan” from Japanese, coming into use through its adoption in this modern sense in Japanese texts translated into Chinese, and was thus associated with modernist conceptions of the state and its operations (Masini 1993). Its use in the sense of “social security” is a neologism, and was not applied to any aspect of the activities of traditional charitable institutions.

The direct roots of what became the socialist guarantee lie in the first half of the 20th century, before the communist party came to power. Bray shows how the idea of a guarantee of basic social provision institutionally anchored in the workplace was a central aspect of the communist strategy for taking over urban enterprises and establishing CCP power during the late 1940s and early 1950s. This strategy was envisaged as "envelopment" (包下来) in which people were incorporated into institutions that would take care of all their needs. Yet he also points out how this form of relative institutional autarky—collective institutions as self-sufficient “small societies”—drew on both the experience of institution-building in the communist base areas of the 1930s and 1940s and Japanese-inspired characteristics of work-place welfare in Shanghai and other republican-era cities.

57 The first character of the compound words guarantee (*baozhang*) and *baojia* is the same.
As incarnated in the “work unit” (单位) that emerged as the dominant institution for ordering urban life and work from the 1950s on, the guarantee was inextricably intertwined with belonging and participation, both in politics and in labor, mediated through a pastoral-style relationship with unit cadres. It was thus both a welfare arrangement and a mechanism for transforming people into new socialist citizens (Bray 2005). As such, social provision was not given a separate name, but was incorporated into various related terms that incorporated the characters for guarantee. Here I refer to these terms as aspects of “the guarantee.”

In rural China, throughout the collective era (from the mid-1950s on) the village played a similar institutional role in encompassing the collective welfare, participation and membership, and thus served as the location of the guarantee for residents. This notion was expressed in part through the nationally-mandated “Five Guarantee” (五保) program that required collectives to provide support for those who were unable to contribute their labor and did not have family members to care and provide for them (Saich 2008; Wong 1998).

In both of these models, differing resources and status of institutions made the actual extent of social provision variable. How the obligations of a collective towards its members were interpreted depended on local resources and traditions, as well as on the status of the person or family involved. Yet the rule was relative intra-institutional equality, along with significant inequalities among collectives, even within the same administrative area (Li and Li 2010; Saich 2008; Hassard et al. 2006; Logan and Bian 1993).

The state project of economic liberalization that was launched under the banner of “opening and reform” by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s led to the dissolution of the communes in the countryside in the early 1980s and a massive restructuring of state owned industry in urban areas in the 1990s. Large numbers of people were laid off from jobs in state-owned enterprises, with women being disproportionately affected (Liu, Jiuyu 2007). Employment under contract was introduced to replace the “iron rice bowl” (Hassard et al. 2006). A return to family economy in the countryside meant a retreat from collective endeavors, including equitable distribution among collective members, as well as allocation of a certain percentage of revenue to welfare (Saich 2008). Among the aims of the liberalization project has been “socializing welfare” (社会福利社会化) by diminishing the “burdens” of social provision on enterprises (Hassard et al. 2006; Hassard et al. 2010), while at the same time discouraging welfare dependence on the state (Wong 1998).

58 For example, Logan and Bian found that even in late 1980s Tianjin, the rank and character of the work unit was the most important factor determining the resources available at community level, including the quality of housing (1993).
Clinging on to a guarantee

Despite these changes, the guarantee remains an anchor for entitlement to social provision in China, as a reality or a desired goal. “Having a work unit is always better than not having one,” said Sister Bai in one of many discussions among workers at Progress RC about strategies for maintaining relationships with the enterprises they had long ceased to labor at—in some cases, more than 10 years before.

Social policy texts and some academics in China and beyond insist that the work unit is dead (see for example, Tian and Qi 2005), but in the everyday imaginary reflected in daily conversations at my field sites it remains a central concept defining the desirable life. Its actual demise has been overstated; the most prestigious, favored employment involves permanent attachment to a work unit which provides many of the same benefits as in the past. The most sought after positions are in the civil service, large government-owned companies and universities and research institutes. In Tianjin, a significant minority still work within such units: approximately 31 percent of urban employed people and 65 percent of rural employees.

But the numbers of people whose work is separated from their guarantee has clearly been on the rise: recent figures put rates of “informal sector” employment (including self-employment) in China above 50 percent, with women making up the majority according to some studies (Huang 2009; Cook 2008). While most of these informal sector workers are rural-to-urban migrants, this type of work has been the solution to problems of livelihood for many, if not most, urban laid-off workers (Cooke 2006).

In the talk of people in Tianjin, “having work” (有工作) signified much more than the drawing of a salary to perform certain tasks at specified times. It implied a long term social relation of entitlement and obligation. Retirees from work units were still referred to as “having work” and their retirement money was a “salary” (工资). They speak of their “guanxi being at a work unit” (关系在单位), being embedded in a web of social relations that grounds their existence and provides them with security. Here socialized governance is central to

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59 During my field work, I was told by all the university teachers I met that the top choice of occupation for their graduating students was civil service jobs. A second choice was often continuing study and hoping for better luck in the next round of civil service exams, or a career in academia.

60 In Tianjin Municipality, 5.031 million urban and rural people counted as “employed” in 2008, out of totals of 9.08 million and 2.68 million respectively. Of the 3.094 million urban employed, 875,000 were working in the state-owned sector, and 79,000 in the collective sector, while 2.172 million were working for private firms. (I added the state-owned and collective to get the total in work units.) For rural Tianjin, the number of total employees was 1.864 million, while the number in township and village enterprises was 1.21 million, with only 76,000 in private firms. Rural people working in agriculture would not be counted as “employees” (State Statistical Bureau 2009, 91, 112-113).

61 Huang uses the ILO definition of informality: workers who do not have job security, few or no benefits and are not protected by labor laws fall into this category (2009).
feeling secure and providing for unforeseen circumstances. Describing someone as “without work” did not mean they were either unemployed or, if of retirement age, had never worked: it indicated that they had never been attached to a work unit.\(^{62}\) These people were thought of as particularly vulnerable; many were older women who had no pensions.

People who had been laid off years before still spent a great deal of energy maintaining relations with their work units, travelling across the city for hours on the bus to sign a document, for example. One of the staff at Progress, a woman in her 30s, had accepted a buy-out from her work unit that severed any future obligation towards her. She and her fellow RC staff agreed that this had been a mistake; everyone said that it was always better to maintain the relation, even if it meant foregoing substantial short term gain. Another woman in her 40s was negotiating her exit from her work unit, but was being advised by several others that “entering entrustment”\(^{63}\) was a better option than a buy-out because she would maintain a relationship with a successor organization that stood in for a work unit. Many of those who had never been in a work unit defined working life by its absence: they were “waiting for work” (待业), doing “temporary work” (临时工), or had not had “proper work” (正式工作).

Work units remained practically important for most RC workers, as their former employers still covered their social insurance contributions. Prior to 2007, the civil affairs departments that paid their salaries did not contribute to social insurance for RC workers. Even the few who did have coverage, since they were technically employed by the labor departments to deal with the local unemployed, assiduously retained relationships with their old work units. RCs were not considered a real work unit. Why was this connection so important? “This is old thinking,” Sister Bai told me. But she herself was the strongest advocate for taking less money while maintaining a work unit connection.

Even in the rural areas the work unit exerted its allure, representing a desired status against which people measured their own lack. Those who were said to “have work” could not receive the relatively generous benefits accorded to villagers in suburban Zhang Family Village (described below), as it was presumed their work units would cover all their needs adequately, and would continue to do so on an indefinite basis. These arrangements

\(^{62}\) While the focus groups conducted by Henderson et al in the mid-1990s found that definitions of what is 工作 (work) in China were changing, with significant differences among informants in what sort of activities were included in this category, most of those surveyed agreed that a full-time permanent work unit job did constitute 工作 (work) (2000). This thus seemed to operate as a reference category against which other types of activities were assessed.

\(^{63}\) Entrustment (托管) is a measure introduced in 2006 as part of a three-year program to wind up “enterprises in difficulty.” Under this policy, a government agency takes over responsibility from defunct enterprises for all former employees over a certain age, and henceforth plays the role of their work unit.
implicitly characterized village welfare as an inadequate substitute for the kind of guarantee relationship a work unit member would enjoy.

If people were in serious difficulty, due to a health crisis or family emergency, the work unit remained the last resort to which appeals for help would be addressed. In contrast to the local state, work units were seen as more likely to be responsive to such appeals, and to be able to provide discretionary assistance. When bed-ridden Mrs. Zhang was abandoned by her husband (as mentioned in Chapter 2 and below), Progress welfare worker Sister Wang went to the work unit that had employed Zhang, appealing to the leaders to help with some extra money. She was hopeful that even though the leaders said they were in debt they would give Zhang a one-off payment to tide her over. Sister Wang did not mention trying to approach the street office to request special help for Zhang. In another case at Progress, a 41-year-old man who asked for help was told to approach his former work unit. He and his wife were both unemployed, and their young child was in hospital. They were told by Sister Wang that if there were any help available for them through the local government, she would tell them about it, with the implication being that nothing at all was available on that front.

Crucially, the personal relationships attendant on belonging to a work unit or other collective institution provided grounds for making claims that the newer bureaucratic systems of welfare provision did not. Being connected to such an institution was thus an important survival strategy, while being unconnected was seen as perilous and to be avoided. Each person has to know where their formal connections are in case they need to draw on them. Although this has a formalistic or bureaucratic dimension—in that the location of an individual’s membership is to a large extent determined by the location of their hukou—it is also bound up with emotional dimensions of belonging, including mutual recognition, friendship, ritualized expressions of concern, provision of care and gifts of food. Collective institutions and their successors aspire to being a “big family” (大家庭), and this entails unshirkable obligations.

**Corporate welfare as guarantee**

In suburban Zhang Family Village, as the land the villagers had once worked was disappearing under concrete, villagers were facing a future without secure prospects. Some of the revenue from collective enterprises run by the VC under the Prosperity Corporation was being used to provide a new form of guarantee, to make up for their historical relative welfare deficit as compared with their urban-registered counterparts. An identity as a Zhang
Family villager was crucial to being able to access this security, and there were disputes about who qualified to be included in this category.

Money alone was not sufficient for establishing long-term security for villagers in their new urban context. One of the first efforts the village had made towards establishing a guarantee was enrolling villagers in pension schemes. In Tianjin, the paradigmatic subject of the pension system remained an urban worker. People could only contribute to a government pension scheme if they were registered as an employee of a formally-registered and officially-recognized enterprise or organization, and the five “lines” comprising the social insurance package (see above) were not supposed to be provided separately. In practice, however, in both Zhang Family Village and Dragon Peak Village, through the connections of township and village leaders, the VCs had started to find ways around these rules, with villagers becoming fictitious “employees” of village collective enterprises. In Dragon Peak, this meant that 25 villagers were now making their own pension contributions, while in Zhang Family Village in 2003 the VC had paid a lump sum into a pension plan to purchase 15 “work years” for people then still under retirement age, and after that both villagers and the VC were required to contribute annually to the plan. 64 In mid-2009, 250 Zhang Family villagers were already receiving pensions through municipal social insurance, while the village itself had to find the funds for pensions for a further 650 people who had reached retirement age. Pensions were the largest item in the VC’s budget, with expenditure on contributions and directly-funded pensions projected at over 11 million yuan in 2009.

The main daily business of the VC office in Zhang Family Village was processing claims for reimbursement of villagers’ medical expenses. The largest category of claims was for supplements to the amounts paid through the rural cooperative medical insurance, launched in the village more than 10 years before. 65 Under this scheme, for hospital treatment costing between 501 yuan and 40,000 yuan, villagers could obtain reimbursement from the district at varying rates, and the VC would reimburse a further 40-45 percent, depending on which hospital provided the treatment. 66 (In all the health insurance policies I encountered, reimbursement rates were higher for more local-level hospitals and clinics at a lower administrative scale.) Above this 40,000 yuan cap, some reimbursement could be

64 The minimum amount of contributions required for a pension was 15 work years, but this could be covered in a lump-sum payment.
65 The township had launched the rural cooperative medical insurance there in 1999, but only 900 of the villagers had signed up at this stage, even though the annual premium was only 2 yuan. In 2007, the insurance scheme was rolled out across Beichen District, with an annual premium of 20 yuan. The scheme covered major medical expenses at designated hospitals, with reimbursement starting at costs above 500 yuan, and set at 40 percent up to 20,000 yuan, and 100 percent up to a ceiling of 80,000 yuan.
obtained from the district for amounts up to 80,000 yuan. Each week, the VC paid out tens of thousands of yuan in medical reimbursements, and Big Sister Jiang, the woman in charge of welfare and women’s affairs, spent most of her time processing piles of receipts from people who came in with medical claims. Due to this system, Zhang Family Village’s medical coverage was the most extensive of that in any of the field sites, with the villagers there paying less for their care than the RC workers, for example. The village also supplemented the minimum livelihood guarantee payments (see below), adding on a further 50 percent to the amount for those eligible. This “supplement” would not be counted as “income” and thus diminish the amount paid in the minimum guarantee. “Disability and hardship households” who were not found to be eligible for the benefit could also receive this supplement at the same rate.

Another dimension of VC contribution was what might be termed the “future security” of villagers through support for the education of their children. In Dragon Peak this was limited to the VC paying for a bus service to take village children to school in the nearby township. The families of young Zhang Family villagers who stayed in school beyond the nine years of compulsory education received 750 yuan per year for as long as they continued at senior high. Those continuing to higher education would receive 1,200-1,500 yuan per year of attendance (depending on the type of course), while villagers who went on to study for masters degrees were to receive a one-time payment of 8,000 yuan, 10,000 yuan for doctoral students. The few villagers who had studied for masters’ degrees in the past had had all their fees and costs paid for by the VC.

Villagers and some VC workers seemed to assume that these guarantees, collectively known as “villager remuneration” (村民待遇), would continue indefinitely into the future. Lin Hong, who administered the minimum livelihood guarantee in Zhang Family Village and was the mother of a boy in elementary school, talked with her friend about how they would get this educational funding for their children when they were ready for tertiary education. But this assumption was not what the economic managers of the village were planning for: they were already discussing how to shift from being a guarantor for all future liabilities to a shareholding structure, where people identified as villagers at a certain date would receive dividends from collective businesses based on the number of shares they held. They were worried that the status of villager was being extended too far—primarily

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67 In the absence of a comprehensive program of old-age security, rural people have been even more reliant than their urban counterparts on the expectation of inter-generational support (Croll 1999).
68 Rules on Receiving Villager Treatment in XX Village, February 2008, document on file with the author. These rules changed from year to year, and the document includes a variety of different arrangements listed by year of their application.
through married-out women seeking to maintain their status, and hand it on to their children. And a significant minority of villagers were already angry about the way the profits from the VC’s business dealings were being distributed, resulting in the acrimonious dispute described in Chapter 2. While Po claims that the shift towards making villagers shareholders in a corporation was easing tensions over mismanagement of collective property in villages on the outskirts of Beijing (2011), in this case and others the attempt to sever the guarantee relationship could result in more, not less, contention (Woodman 2011b).

“Just for eating”: the minimum guarantee

For those without an income and who were not attached to a guarantee institution, the last resort might be the “minimum livelihood guarantee” (最低生活保障). Considered the bottom line safety net for poor households, people who received this benefit were described as “eating the minimum guarantee” (吃低保). As Sister Li, Rising China’s welfare worker, put it, the benefit was “just for eating.” Set at 400 yuan per urban person, half of the urban minimum wage rate, and 200 yuan per rural person in Tianjin at the time of my field work, as its name indicates it provided only for a bare minimum, hardly sufficient for survival (Solinger 2008). This was particularly so when recipients were suffering health crises or depending on the benefit long-term, as was the case for most people on the minimum guarantee in my field sites.

The minimum livelihood guarantee has now been available in urban Tianjin for 10 years, but was extended to rural residents of the municipality only in 2007. Although it is a benefit provided through the civil affairs departments, this form of welfare adopts the “guarantee” frame. Directly administered by RCs and VCs, it is thus anchored in a collective institution and establishing eligibility relies on direct connections with RC or VC workers, but it also involves compliance with a bureaucratic process of “meeting conditions” (符合条件). It is thus a hybrid form, incorporating elements of different models of welfare provision. Yet seen from the perspective of the RCs and VCs, the legacy of the guarantee was predominant.70

Obtaining the minimum guarantee depended on socialized governance: RC or VC workers were expected to identify people who might be eligible through keeping track of the changing living circumstances of people in their beat and thus finding out about those facing

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69 This amount was increased to 430 yuan in mid 2009. 城乡困难群众生活救助政策调整—低保标准提高了(Policy adjusted on livelihood assistance for hard-up masses in urban and rural areas—minimum guarantee raised) 今晚报 May 21, 2009.

70 Observing from the vantage point of the street office, Cho found a much more impersonal bureaucratic system in operation than I describe here (2010).
emergent problems, such as a health crisis. This responsibility of care was highlighted when a Progress worker I was helping to post notices around the territory was accosted by a woman complaining that no one from the RC had sought to help a disabled man in his 50s living in her building who had been laid off and was suffering hardship. Her assumption was that RC workers should take the initiative in extending care, at least on an emotional level, and people should not have to go and apply for help. The RC or VC was thus expected to be the initiator of applications, which they then processed and verified, checking that all the necessary documentation was provided and reflected the person’s actual situation. They did not make any effort to inform potential recipients about the benefit: minimum guarantee eligibility standards and application procedures were not made public, and eligibility rules were not entirely clear even to RC staff members.

Yet some people did approach the RCs to ask about applying for the benefit. Two brothers resident in Rising China, whose elderly mother had a serious heart condition that had already cost her children tens of thousands of yuan in medical bills, had heard on the grapevine about an extension of the minimum guarantee to people in her situation “without work.” Although Sister Li knew them well and felt theirs was a clear-cut case—as she put it, all the working-age adults in the family were laid off or unemployed—it took several months for them to collect all the relevant documentation and file the application. By contrast, when Fan, a widowed laid off worker in her 30s with a child in school, came to inquire at the Progress office about the minimum guarantee, Sister Wang was initially a little hostile, as she did not recognize Fan, plus she was below 40, the crucial age limit. “I have lived here since I was a child, when there were one-storey houses here, I lived here,” said Fan, mentioning common friends and acquaintances. Sister Wang was eventually convinced, and changed her tone, helping Fan to apply for the benefit.

Assembling an applicant’s dossier was not an easy process: any discrepancy in a person’s documents had to be explained and an official notice on the matter issued by the relevant body, whether the RC, a work unit, or a government agency. Such discrepancies could lead to the rejection of an application by the higher levels. RCs and VCs were regularly asked to issue “certifications” (证明) for people, explaining discrepancies or lacuna in their documents. Thus personal knowledge of individual and family circumstances was essential to making such determinations. On more than one occasion, Sister Li told people at Rising China who were making copies of documents to obscure an entry that might provide grounds for a rejection. Thus the cooperation of the RC or VC could be crucially important to the completion of an application. Sometimes, even when RC workers had no
way of determining the veracity of what someone told them, they would issue such a
certification based on their overall assessment of that person’s trustworthiness and their
familiarity with them. Recognition through the mechanism of socialized governance was a
crucial dimension of the application process.

While the RC and VC workers were gatekeepers for determining who could apply for
the benefit, the ultimate decision to approve or reject an application rested with higher levels,
where a significant degree of discretion on who would receive it and how much they would
get was exercised. To potential applicants, the RC and VC workers usually presented the
criteria as rigid, although they all knew of cases in which officials higher up had allowed
some flexibility in particular cases. “They say the policy should be flexible, but all the
flexibility is in their hands!” complained welfare worker Sister Li, referring to the attitude of
the street office officials to the applications she had filed. In several cases in Progress,
people were said to be receiving more than they were technically entitled to because they
had made a fuss. In Zhang Family Village, the VC workers complained about how applicants
for minimum guarantee could get approved on the say-so of village leaders, regardless of
whether they fit the criteria or not. One person on the 2009 list of guarantee recipients in the
village was receiving double the maximum amount, but no explanation was forthcoming
when I inquired about this.

In Dragon Peak Village, minimum livelihood guarantee eligibility had largely been
shaped by the rubrics for earlier forms of collective support. All the cases that had been
either filed or were in process involved older men who had not married or had no surviving
family members, including the Wei brothers, described below. I heard several conversations
at the VC about people applying for the benefit, and all were in this category.

Across the field sites, however, the numbers receiving minimum guarantee were
extremely low as a proportion of the overall population, representing one percent of
residents or less in all except Zhang Family Village, where the rate was around 2.5
percent.71 The higher rate there reflected the insecurities attendant on the village’s transition
from rural to urban. In the rural areas, the minimum guarantee co-existed with the Five
Guarantee system, the earlier incarnation of rural welfare mentioned above. This latter
benefit was almost exclusively aimed at the “orphaned,” that is, single people unable to

71 These low rates were similar in the municipality as a whole: In Tianjin in 2008, of a total population over 11
million, there were 71,277 urban households containing 149,070 people receiving the minimum livelihood
guarantee; and 21,536 rural households with 49,787 people, according to the municipal department of civil
affairs. Figures from: 2008 民政统计数据 (2008 Civil Affairs Statistics), retrieved from Tianjin Municipal Civil Affairs,
support themselves due to disability or age, and without immediate family members. Dragon Peak Village had two households receiving support under the Five Guarantee system, which the village was solely responsible for funding.

The low rates for minimum guarantee recipients did not appear to be a result of stigmatization of benefit claimants, contrary to what is generally claimed about welfare benefits being stigmatizing in China (Saich 2008; Leung 2008; Wong 1998). On a number of occasions, I heard staff members in the RCs and VCs discussing applying for minimum livelihood guarantee for members of their extended families. The fact that they were considering doing this suggests they did not think it would reflect badly on them or their family members. The fact that the benefit incorporates the “guarantee” label implies that it belongs in the same family as employment-related benefits, to which people are seen as being entitled. There were some differences in attitudes evident among the sites, however. Rising China’s self-identification as “well-off” meant that claims for welfare were apparently seen as something to be kept hidden. The number of people receiving the benefit was not made public, and even other RC workers were not sure how many there were. When I asked her to put me in touch with minimum guarantee recipients I might interview, Sister Li told me that these people did not want to “expose” their situation.

In Progress, by contrast, where socialist rhetoric was more extensively used in the informal sphere, the benefit recipients I approached to interview were not overly worried about talking to me (although some were concerned about saying things that might be considered critical). Every month an announcement was posted in a glass-fronted notice board just outside the door of the office, listing the details of how much money each of the households receiving the minimum livelihood guarantee would get in their next disbursement. But the monthly postings did not seem to have the effect of stigmatizing them. Sister Wang told me repeatedly that she did not look down on those who were poor, which implied that some other people may have done, however. But I never heard such sentiments being expressed at either RCs or VCs.

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72 The figures in the Tianjin Civil Affairs statistics for 2008 show almost the same number of households as people for five guarantee recipients, indicating that they were in this “orphan” category. Figures from: 2008 民政统计数据 (2008 Civil Affairs Statistics), retrieved from Tianjin Municipal Civil Affairs, www.tjmz.gov.cn, accessed February 2, 2010.

73 This was the only field site where such notices were posted. In Rising China, notices on individual applications were posted as a final step once they had been approved by higher levels, giving residents three days to object. A similar procedure was followed in Zhang Family Village.

74 Cho points out that such public notifications continue a practice started in the pre-reform era of announcements made in work units about people being given additional help due to their categorization as being “a household in severe difficulties” (特困户) (2010).
To be eligible for minimum guarantee at all, however, recipients had to be defined as essentially deficient persons. While both the national regulations and the Tianjin rules on implementing the minimum guarantee establish an unqualified right to assistance for those whose income falls below a certain level, they later go on to qualify this. In the Tianjin rules, eligible recipients are defined in terms of three negatives: a lack of income, a lack of ability to labor and a lack of family or other obligated support. In practice, the determining factor establishing eligibility was not income or need, but the designation that a person had “lost the ability to labor” (丧失劳动能力).

This concept involves ideas of what is and is not labor and who is able to perform it. Essentially, it defines “labor” as wage labor or other productive work, thus implicitly making reproductive labor into a form of non-work, and the market an objective arbiter of people’s relative labor value. It makes the conditions for receiving assistance a matter of a person’s status, rather than a result of social or economic conditions. People are defined in terms of their relative “lack,” in a fashion comparable to the way lack is measured in the use of terms such as “civility” (文明) and “quality” (素质) (Yan 2003; Anagnost 1997). It is also consistent with practice in the earlier incarnations of the guarantee, in that people are expected to work if they possibly can. While there is significant continuity from both traditional and pre-reform ideas in targeting welfare to those seen as lacking, previously the lack was one of family (Wong 1998), but now the condition has become more individualized.

This condition of lack is conceptualized as calculable, relating to varying combinations of age, disability and gender, and is of varying degree. People over the government-set retirement ages—which are different for men and for women—are deemed a priori to have lost the ability to labor. Thus in practice, women below 40 and men below 50 were excluded from eligibility, unless sickness or disability prevented them from working. Disability is seen as a condition of measurable levels of impairment that relate to comparable degrees of loss of labor ability. Chronic illness in the form of certain specified

75 Art. 2 of the State Council’s Regulations on Minimum Livelihood Guarantee for City Residents (城市居民最低生活保障条例, effective Oct. 1, 1999) reads: “All those urban residents who are holders of non-agricultural hukou for whom the per capita average income of all family members living together is below the standard for the city residents minimum livelihood guarantee have the right to receive basic material support for their livelihood from their local government.” Art. 2 of Tianjin Measures for the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee (天津市最低生活保障办法, July 6, 2001) repeats this text, but specifies that all “residents and villagers who are holders of permanent hukou” in the city have this right.

76 Article 7, Tianjin Measures for the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee.

77 This distinction echoes earlier categorizations of work as “productive” and “non-productive” made during the 1950s and used to prioritize the former over the latter (see for example, Cheng and Selden 1997).

78 In Shenyang, since 2005 special committees have been set up for the “scientific” determination of this lack according to prescribed criteria. See 于智博, 低保人员劳动能力认定标准出台, 时代商报, January 29, 2005. Available at: http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2005-01-29/03544980531s.shtml, accessed Oct. 5, 2010.
conditions was also considered to constitute such a lack. The three dimensions of statistical rationality I identified in the Introduction—economization, medicalization and individualization—were all operative in these calculative practices.

But such rationalities were largely urban, and by contrast, in Dragon Peak almost everyone who could move around and see was involved in some kind of income-generating activity. Thus the idea that some persons were “non-productive” was largely related to the spheres where labor markets dominated, and did not have so much validity in the rural places where livelihood focused on family economy. This negative example shows how the specific rationalities of the urban-focused welfare system shaped people’s expectations and assessments of their own and others’ capacities.

The devaluation implicit in having “lost the ability to labor” did not appear to operate as a disincentive to applicants. The main barriers were administrative: vague and restrictive eligibility criteria indicated that the priority at higher levels of government was to keep numbers down. The local origin of funding for the minimum guarantee gives local officials a strong incentive to limit applications, a situation which is even more acute for rural areas. Nationally, a significant proportion of spending on welfare comes from funds at the level of city districts or rural counties, while the overwhelming majority of funds for this purpose come from provincial level or below (Shi 2009). In Tianjin, urban districts have to cover 50 percent of the cost of the benefit, while the other 50 percent comes from municipal coffers. For rural areas, a proportion of the minimum guarantee funds must come from village level, and the rest from the township or district/county, with no contribution from the municipality at all. In Zhang Family Village, the VC had to pay 10 percent of the benefit and Beichen District covered the remaining 90 percent.

Even when local changes in eligibility criteria enlarged the pool of possible recipients, RC workers were under pressure to ensure that the numbers did not increase too rapidly. During my fieldwork at Rising China, Nankai District extended minimum guarantee eligibility to people who were chronically ill. This new policy was never announced publicly, but Sister Li was told about it in a meeting at the street office, and was issued a list of 37 medical conditions that would establish eligibility, but was not given a policy document. Immediately after this, she and her colleagues began discussing who would be eligible, including people in their own extended families. However, Sister Li’s efforts to identify potential candidates for the benefit got her into trouble; she later complained that officials at the street office were

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blocking the applications she had filed, and that she had been reprimanded by Party Secretary Dai for increasing the number of applications. This controversy points to a tension between the obligation to care inherent in the idea of the guarantee and of socialized governance, and more bureaucratic, distant forms of welfare administration concentrating on the strict application of eligibility criteria.

In Zhang Family Village, one person who inquired about the benefit on behalf of a family member was told that people with rural registration (农业户口) were not eligible, although several people in this category were already recipients. Others who came to ask about applying, including some who had been referred to the VC by the township government, were also put off with excuses. Only those with good connections to the VC leaders could overcome this bureaucratic inertia by pleading their case directly.

The failure of the eligibility criteria to take actual need into account came up repeatedly in discussions about the welfare system, both generally and in relation to specific cases. Although applications might include information about a person’s situation, such as their medical or care needs, this was not apparently considered. Both the RCs enumerated what were called “marginal households” that had too much income to be eligible for minimum guarantee but were unable to manage. People facing emergency circumstances could not get help if they were below the crucial age limits. For the purposes of socialized governance, a more responsive and contextual policy seemed to be required, but the imperatives of the bureaucratically-oriented welfare system at the levels of government above the VCs and RCs militated against this.

**Who provides care?**

With such a system of minimal benefits, what happens when people really have no one to look after them? Under the work unit system, care responsibilities (largely of women) were informally accommodated, and so employers subsidized care indirectly, by continuing to pay wages to people who were spending a lot of their time and energy providing care (Liu, Jieyu 2007). Accommodation could be extensive: waxing nostalgic, one RC worker at Progress said, “Life in the unit was so sweet, I never did my laundry at home!” Such accommodation also operated in rural collectives. But the dominant logic of economization has led to a concerted effort to expel such responsibilities from “productive” organizations and to privatize and socialize reproductive work. This is also reflected in the way the judgments of labor markets are used to define whether someone has “lost the ability to labor,” as mentioned above.
A case that highlighted the care deficit created by the expulsion of many people from work units was that of Mrs. Zhang, described in Chapter 2. Confined to her bed by severe rheumatoid arthritis, there was no one to care for her after her husband abandoned her one day in the middle of winter. Sister Wang told me that he was mentally unstable, but the consensus of opinion was that he had just gotten fed up with caring for his wife, which he had done for 10 years.

Sister Wang had to step in to help. Mrs. Zhang could not rise to a sitting position without assistance. For several weeks, Sister Wang later told me, she went twice or three times a day to help Mrs. Zhang to use the toilet and wash, tending the stove in her room which provided the only source of heating and bringing her cooked food to eat. When Sister Wang took me to visit her about a week after her husband’s departure, Mrs. Zhang’s face looked puffy and yellow. She didn’t dare to drink much, she said, as she couldn’t urinate by herself. Her hands were purplish and painfully twisted, and attempting to sit up to welcome us caused her great pain.

Other staff of the neighborhood committee also visited Mrs. Zhang; one young woman was shocked by the squalor of her living arrangements, particularly the smell. The need to provide care to Mrs. Zhang was the subject of some controversy among the workers; some felt that such care was beyond what they should be expected to do. “The residents committee isn’t an old people’s home,” said one. Wang herself agreed with such sentiments, and was critical of the fact that there weren’t any public services that could step into the breach in cases like Mrs. Zhang’s. She found the burden of care exhausting, and described Mrs. Zhang as demanding as she always wanted her to stay and talk when what she wanted to do was leave.

Wang’s burden was relieved after she found Mrs. Zhang a “nurse” (baomu 保姆), a migrant woman from the countryside. Mrs. Zhang lives in one room in a multi-family apartment with a filthy shared kitchen and toilet, and it was hard to find someone willing to live in her room and accept the low salary she could afford, about 1,000 yuan monthly for full-time care. This meant spending all of her 700 yuan pension and the 100 yuan she received in minimum livelihood guarantee, in addition to receiving support from relatives. On one occasion, someone said Mrs. Zhang’s 23-year-old son, who lived with his aunt, should come and care for her. But apparently no one said this to him. He had a job and went to see his mother on weekends. Besides Sister Wang, Mrs. Zhang also got help from neighbors, but these were not deemed a worthy subject for wall posters or newsletters in the same way the efforts of the RC were. I only found out about the regular visits made by her elderly
downstairs neighbor when I bumped into this woman coming out of Mrs. Zhang’s flat when I was visiting one day with another RC worker. Evidently Mrs. Zhang was receiving care and assistance from a number of sources in the community and beyond.

Although incidents like this one did establish new community norms, as I discuss in Chapter 2, how far this kind of informal care might extend was unclear. Despite the claim that RCs should be “a big family” for residents, this is certainly more the exception than the rule, and in the main care is provided within families. Yet the socialization of caring was part of the rationale for RCs, where promotion of ideas about “volunteering” and “partnering” poor families with people who would help them mobilized mainly female labor. All of these norms created gendered expectations of care that fall largely on the shoulders of women, particularly the middle-aged and older. Such burdens are lessened for those with resources, who can afford to pay less affluent urban women or women migrants to care for their children with disabilities and dependent elderly. Whether paid or unpaid, the “burden” (负担) of care is distinctly gendered. In the countryside, given the minimal nature of rural welfare, care is almost exclusively a family matter, largely seen as the “natural” preserve of women. Where provision of welfare was just beginning—as in Dragon Peak Village—the only cases deemed urgent enough to qualify for minimum guarantee were those of families in which there were no women at all, as in the case of the Wei brothers, described below.

Institutional care for “orphaned” children or adults was acknowledged by some as an ultimate recourse for those overburdened with care responsibilities: on several occasions I heard people speaking about families threatening to “throw out” children with disabilities to the street office, implying that they would then be put into a welfare institution of some kind. This also indicates that people felt the street office had some sort of obligation towards families facing a care crisis. Yet this was contested; asking for too much help was looked upon unfavorably. Sister Wang said of the family of Second Brother: “They are not self-reliant. A disability isn’t given by the government, you have to take responsibility for it yourself.”

Welfare institutions were evidently to be avoided, people said, as conditions were thought to be poor. Mrs. Zhang was desperate to stay out of such a place, although Sister Wang had raised the possibility with her. Director Hu of Dragon Peak Village told me the institution for old people in the nearby township was “dirty and had poor food.” However, the welfare institution I visited in Zhang Family Village, which catered for retired people and

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80 As described in Chapter 2, Second Brother, a man in his 50s who had been severely affected by childhood polio and could not walk, engaged in silent protests at the street office in an effort to get housing for himself.
adults with physical and mental disabilities, presented a distinct contrast to these views, being clean and seemingly well-run. \(^{81}\) But, crucially, such an institution would likely be distant from the person’s existing social networks and remaining family. In a sense, then, entering such an institution one becomes a non-person, without the kind of embeddedness that obliges others to care.

**“We have no welfare here”**

When I arrived in Dragon Peak Village, the local cadres were somewhat confused about how they could accommodate my research interests. “We don’t have any welfare here,” I was told separately by both Manager Zheng, the director of the village’s collective enterprise, the Dragon Peak Tourism Company, and Director Hu, the token woman on the VC, who was responsible for population planning, health insurance and all welfare benefits. “Social welfare” (社会福利) was not the term used by the cadres for the activities of the VC that might be thought of as being part of this sphere.

Even in a rich coastal municipality like Tianjin, the idea of the state providing social welfare was only just beginning to reach into those areas where urbanization is distant, although city people in their cars invade Dragon Peak Village every weekend during the summer and fall. For most residents of places like Dragon Peak Village, the critical questions were about how state policies, as mediated through the VC and other local institutions, shaped people’s livelihoods and created opportunities for them to deal with their own need for services and security through purchasing provision in the marketplace. Here the guarantee had been almost entirely displaced by the local elite’s concerted campaign of “thought work” (思想工作) aimed at inculcating rationalities of economization and individualization among villagers.

Most families in Dragon Peak Village lived in a part of the concrete and breeze-block buildings that housed their “farmer guesthouses,” while the wealthier residents had built three-storey brick and stucco “holiday villas” embellished with Greco-Roman motifs. Several more such villas were under construction while I was there (see the photo on the following page). A few of the newer hotels were modeled on the traditional courtyard homes that can be seen in the cities and towns of north China. But these were not the traditional houses of the area, which still predominate in most of the neighboring villages: one-storey stone and grey brick buildings with grey tile roofs and latticed wooden windows, two rooms built around

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\(^{81}\) This was a superficial impression based on a short tour around the facility, which was run under contract by the family of one of the VC cadres.
a kitchen in the middle that channeled heat to a “kang” (炕), the brick platform where people traditionally slept and sat. Only a handful of these traditional houses remained in the village, but they were mostly dilapidated and uninhabited.

However, just down the road from Manager Zheng’s extensive villa was such a house, but this one was in good repair, and was fronted by a vegetable garden filled with fruit trees and several of the circular thatched huts in which villagers stored their maize. I had noticed this house on my first visit, and thought it the most attractive dwelling in the village. Eventually I got to know its inhabitants, the Wei brothers, aged 54 and 58, both bachelors. Director Hu told me the elder brother was a “simpleton” (傻子), implying he was mentally retarded, while the younger brother was “a normal person,” although on another occasion she referred to him also as “a bit simple.” Each day during the seven months of the tourist season, the elder brother, dressed in a Mao suit and cap of olive green camouflage cotton and wearing cheap army cotton sneakers, the usual outfit of laborers and other poor people in the countryside, meandered up and down the main road snaking through the village with a grain sack and a stick with a nail in the end picking up garbage, a job for which

Illustration 3.1: This grand villa in the middle of Dragon Peak Village was being constructed by the family of the former village barefoot doctor at a cost of 650,000 yuan, excluding the cost of the land use rights.
he was paid 600 yuan per month by the Tourism Company. He had been doing this job for the past five years, he told me.

The Wei brothers were the only minimum livelihood guarantee household in Dragon Peak Village, Director Hu told me. The benefit had not been available in their area until 2007, and the VC had applied for it on the brothers’ behalf. Officials from the township and the county had come to investigate their circumstances, and after seeing their “shabby house” (破房子) and hearing about the elder brother’s illness, they decided they met the conditions for the benefit, she said. The type of houses people lived in was one of the most frequently cited measures of improvement in the livelihood of local people. As Manager Zheng put it, “Before, the villagers were extremely poor, with only a few hundred yuan in income per person per year, and lived in shabby houses. Now they are quite rich (富裕), people have new houses and live pretty well.”

Although the minimum guarantee money was given to the VC for the brothers, they were not actually getting it. They had not received any formal notice or paperwork informing them of their entitlement and were not sure how much the benefit was supposed to be or whether it had started to be disbursed. They had been told it was being saved for “when they couldn’t move around” any more, but Director Hu told me the 300 yuan monthly, 150 yuan for each brother, was being saved for them, but could be paid out in winter time or if they got sick. Later, when the elder Wei asked about whether they could get the benefit, the VC Director told him that he was “not old enough yet.”

“We both have some illnesses, but mainly it is elder brother who is sick,” Wei the younger told me as we looked around the well-kept garden in front of their house. “[My brother] has problems with his stomach, his leg feels numb and he has pain in his neck and shoulder. Sometimes he’s in such pain that he can’t get out of bed, he cries with pain. Sometimes he faints. He’s been to the county-level Chinese medicine hospital, as well the hospital in the township. He’s taken a lot of medicine, but it doesn’t seem to do much good. He’s taking some more at the moment. Medicine is more expensive than meat. The few thousand we earn a year has all been spent on medicine.” The elder brother had spent 40 days in hospital recently, for which he had to pay 40 percent of the cost—the cooperative medical insurance covered only 60 percent. He had only a few teeth left, which made eating difficult.

The brothers’ house had been built by their father about 30 years before, they told me (see the photo on page 118). They lived in one room, and used the other as a store-room. The space inside the front door was used both as a kitchen and storage area for their
collection of hand-made farm tools. The arched ceilings were covered with the brown patina of age and wood-smoke. Apart from two small panes of glass, the latticed windows were covered with paper in the traditional style. Nearby the wooden entrance gate to their yard, several apple trees were weighted with ripening apples, and at the rear of the house, a walnut tree was full of pale green nuts. To feed themselves the brothers were growing radishes, beans, cucumbers, cabbage and potatoes in front of the house, and on their land in another part of the village, maize and beans, and some fruits and nuts to sell. Semi-wild cats and kittens scampered in and out the front door. Just beside the house, an open-sided square of tumbledown stone walls was all that remained of what used to be a pigsty and a goat pen.

When the area in which the village is situated was designated a nature reserve in the mid-1980s, villagers were banned from herding goats, as most families had done before, apparently without any compensation being provided. Manager Zheng, whose villa was in the same small valley as the Wei brothers’ house, had imposed an informal prohibition on keeping any domestic animals (except pets). Wei the younger told me that they could no longer raise pigs or chickens, even for their own consumption, because the animals would “pollute” the Dragon Peak “scenic area.” But other families living a little way outside the main village continued to raise chickens, ducks and geese.

Until quite recently, the brothers had also received a monthly income from an iron-ore mine on the village’s territory, for which the subcontractor had paid the village enough for each family to receive about 300 or 400 yuan in dividends per month, but the mine had been shut down in 2007. They used to get rice and flour sometimes from the VC, but now they only got a bit of money before Spring Festival. “Now the Brigade is spending big money on building a reservoir up there,” said the younger brother, pointing up towards the mountain. “So they don’t have any to give out.” Several people in the village said similar things when I told them I was studying the village’s welfare endeavors.

As described in Chapter 1, these vast expenditures were justified by a rationality of economization, in which investment to create positive market conditions for future revenue generation was preferable to spending on welfare. As the Party Secretary put it, in a phrase repeated admiringly by other VC cadres who felt it expressed the brilliance of his vision for the village, “The temple was poor, but the monks were rich” (庙穷和尚福). In other words, the

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82 While the initial reason for halting production was a national ban on the sale of explosives in the run up to the 2008 Olympic Games, the VC thought that the operation of the mine was detrimental to the tourism business and so did not allow it to resume after the ban was lifted. The contractor was said to be challenging this decision.
collective had exhausted its resources to create the environment in which villagers could make a good living from the market. But this vision elided the fact that not all villagers were becoming wealthy. The focus on earning a living through tourism had not only displaced all other possible modes of livelihood, but also threatened the subsistence of poor households like the Wei brothers, who were forced to buy meat because they were barred from raising it themselves. Their poverty, articulated in terms of mental deficiency and inability to keep up with “advanced thinking,” was attributed to their own incapacity rather than to the orientation of the village.

Manager Zheng’s assertion that no one in the village was farming was contradicted by what could be seen in the fields and orchards all around the village, many of which were still being worked. Some of this production was certainly for personal consumption, or for feeding guests, and some of the orchards were run to provide opportunities for tourists to pick fruit, but the avenues for pursuing income from farming appeared to have been closed off by the lack of VC support. Aside from a small market for “mountain products” pitched at tourists—for which the VC charged rent to stallholders—there seemed to be no VC role in
marketing the plentiful fruit and nuts that had provided a principal source of income for villagers before the tourism boom. Thus the exclusive focus on tourism had actually led to other sources of income and self-sufficiency being eliminated.

Dragon Peak’s new status largely meant increased market opportunities, thus exacerbating inequalities within the village for those who could not take advantage of them, rather than more welfare provision. Cadres told me that in the future, when the village became a money earner, there would be funds available for welfare. But there seemed to be little pressure for this, as most village families were doing well from tourism, buying their way into a neoliberal, pay-as-you-go type of social citizenship. As for marginalized residents like the Wei brothers, the VC did not even bother to let them know about the status of the small amount of money being paid out for them, which was presumably being laid aside to save the village from future welfare expenditures.

While the Wei brothers were the most extreme example of the debit-side of the village’s single-minded focus on tourism, they were not alone. A significant minority of the families in the village did not run guesthouses and those whose houses were sited in out of the way locations often had little business, with bookings only during the two “golden weeks” of the year. As competition from other villages promoting tourism in the area increased, as well as from guesthouses operated in Dragon Peak by people from outside the village, the situation of these more marginal businesses was uncertain. The impact of these kinds of “outside factors,” said Party Secretary Fu, was one of the downsides of this approach to developing the village economy.

Both Party Secretary Fu and Manager Zheng, the two principal advocates behind Dragon Peak’s conversion to development-through-tourism, talked in interviews about the ways they had had to work on people’s “thinking” to get them to accept tourism as a route to development of the village. Fu said that the difficulty in this strategy was that “it is bound up with the quality of each peasant.” He compared the process of villagers learning “advanced” city ways to the civilizing of “Indians” in North America by white settlers. Manager Zheng said her own family and other villagers thought that she and Fu were “mentally ill” when they first proposed the idea of making the village rich through tourism.

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83 Manager Zheng said 95 percent of families had them, but Sister Hu said only 85 percent, while in the lobby of the VC, there were photos of 54 proprietors of guesthouses, constituting 79 percent of the 68 households in the village. However, since these photos had been posted some time before, it is possible that the number had subsequently increased.

84 In these weeks, around the May 1 holiday and the October 1 holiday, all the accommodation in the village was reportedly full to capacity.
By classifying opposition to marketization as an issue of rationality and locating the barriers to prosperity in the “quality” of individuals, these discourses made debates over fairness in the distribution of benefits from the village’s transformation virtually impossible. As Liu indicates, the rationality of economics has come to be accorded the status of absolute truth in the PRC today (2009). There was no doubt that the biggest and busiest guesthouses in the village belonged to the cadres and their families. But their model had been affirmed at the highest levels: national and municipal endorsements of various aspects of the village’s strategy were emblazoned on three-storey high banners in primary colors hanging from the VC’s new building, the most imposing structure in the village. I look at the role of such strategies in creating a local moral order in more detail in Chapter 4. All people could do was grumble about the amounts of money being spent on constructing amenities for tourists, and the lack of welfare benefits for villagers who needed them.

Bureaucratic disentitlement: weeding out the undeserving

In the absence of a guarantee relationship, strictly-applied eligibility criteria could mean “bureaucratic disentitlement” similar to that observable in the shrinking welfare systems of North America (Herd, Mitchell, and Lightman 2005, 66). I witnessed this in action when I accompanied a group of people from Dragon Peak Village to a neighboring VC where county officials from the Disabled Persons Federation (DPF) were to assess whether or not people from several villages in the vicinity should be registered as disabled, and thus become eligible for a monthly 50 yuan disability benefit from the DPF. No one was yet receiving this benefit at Dragon Peak— it was “being processed” at the time I started my field work, according to the cadres there—and thus few villagers had had any incentive to register in the past.

Just the day before, the VC director had received a call about the exercise, and this was the one chance people in the area had to get registered, or to renew their existing registration. Director Hu quickly started phoning around all the people in the village she deemed to be in this category to tell them “the collective” would charter a bus to take them. Six people in the village were already on the list of registered disabled, and needed to re-register, but Director Hu called 15 to come, and in the end 11 showed up. Director Hu had other business that day, so one of the young administrative assistants, Little Dong, was deputed to accompany the group. Before we left, Little Dong was given the documents Director Hu had already collected from everyone— hukou booklets, ID cards and photos. She also gave Little Dong some of the VC’s headed stationery, and showed her how to write
a certification (证明), if one should be needed. As Director Hu was doing this, she wondered aloud, “What do they say for ‘simpleton’ (傻子)? Is it ‘stupid’ (痴呆)?” Dong did not know. I said I thought the term she was looking for was “cognitive disability” (智力残). “Oh yes,” she said.

At about 7:15am, 18 of us—the 11 potential registrees and people accompanying them—were driven through the early morning mist in a minibus chartered by the VC down the winding mountain road, and through a flat area of orchards. After arriving in Pagoda Village, our party got out and went along an alley to a dusty yard below a one-storey brick building standing above ground level. Little Dong went off to get the Dragon Peak villagers’ documents copied in a nearby shop; people from Pagoda Village had to do this themselves. People milled around, chatting. It seemed that some of the disabled from neighboring villages knew each other. Women were talking and exchanging notes about how to apply for minimum livelihood guarantee and who could get it.

The building looked as if it may have been a school, as there was a very rusty children’s metal slide in the yard. Someone said the place used to be a kindergarten, but now it is the VC office. Inside, the village cadre in charge of women’s affairs and welfare was writing down people’s names and giving out numbers. The youngest VC cadre from Dragon Peak, whose mother was there for re-registration, had driven down earlier on his motorbike to get numbers for the group.

The VC office consisted of one room with a CCP flag on the wall so covered in dust the red looked grey. On the walls were some handwritten notices extolling the virtues of village cadres and the composition of the supervision committee. A few other notices had fallen to the floor. The glass-fronted cabinets against the wall farthest from the door contained a few books, and assorted sundry items stood in dusty piles in the corners of the room. Apart from that, the room contained just a few wooden tables and some folding chairs.

The mist was fast burning off, and it was turning into a hot summer’s day. The team from the county DPF, scheduled to arrive at 8am, showed up at 8:45. It was composed of an older man wearing a baseball hat and glasses, three young women with pale skin and city clothes, and a young man. None of them looked happy to be there. Without formalities or greetings, they went straight into the room and set up at the row of tables, and began calling out people’s numbers.

Each villager first had to go to a table where a Pagoda Village cadre checked that they had the correct number, and then they went to stand or sit in front of the man in the baseball cap. After calling the person’s number, and impatiently gesturing for them to stand
in front of his table, he made the initial determination of whether someone had a valid
disability. He would say, “What’s your defect (毛病) then?” A man held out an injured arm.
There was a large scar on his elbow, which seemed swollen, and he could not straighten his
arm. The official touched the injury and stretched the man’s arm until he pulled back in pain.
To Grandpa Gao from Dragon Peak, blind in one eye, the man said, “Well, you can see just
as well with one eye as with two!”

The official doing the assessments was particularly abrupt with two families who had
older children with mental disabilities. Before the Federation team arrived I had observed
one young man sitting with his mother in the room, winding and rewinding a cord around a
phone charger plug. Several similar items hung from his belt. I would have categorized him
as autistic.\textsuperscript{85} He was well dressed, compared to many of the other people, wearing a smart
white t-shirt and clean jeans and sneakers. When it was this family’s turn, the young man’s
father was with him. The official asked the young man to walk up and down, lift up his arms
and do some other physical movements. He asked his age, “Twenty-two,” replied the young
man. Then the official said, curtly, “No physical problems.” He ordered his father to get a
medical evaluation for him. His father tried to explain that they had already done that, but
the official ignored him and threw his papers along the table to the next person on the
Federation team.

A mother and son from Dragon Peak Village were treated similarly. I had been told
the boy, around 16 and wearing an orange basketball outfit, went to school, but was unable
to learn very much. His mother had been keen to get him registered because she wanted
another child, and this would be allowed if her son had a disability. When, after asking the
boy a few questions, the Federation official told his mother he should not be classified as
disabled, she became very agitated. She said they had already obtained a medical
evaluation in Tianjin some time before, and her son had been registered as disabled. But
the officials could not find the paperwork in their pile, and told her she had to go and do it
again. She repeated that it had already been done, but they ignored her. As her son hung
his head, she became quite red in the face from arguing with them.

Even though he was equally rude, and made no allowances for their mobility
difficulties, the Federation official was more accommodating on the claims of older people,
or those with physical disabilities, than those who were younger and whose disabilities were
mental. Quite a substantial proportion of those making claims had been injured, some while

\textsuperscript{85} As a child, I lived for some time in a school and community for people who were then called “mentally
handicapped.” I encountered many adults who were labelled autistic, and the behaviour of this young man
seemed similar to that of many of them.
doing agricultural work. Only one of the team from the county spoke to people in a civil tone, the others were equally curt and contemptuous. It was very evident that they found it hot and bothersome to have to come to a village and do this work. None of them took any notice of me, or remarked on my presence. I sat in the office observing their work until all the people from Dragon Peak had finished being seen; Little Dong then gathered us all together and we went to the bus and returned to the village.

A few days later, Little Dong told me that three or four of the Dragon Peak villagers who had tried to register had been deemed to “not meet the standard.” Going all the way to the designated hospital in the city, several hours away on the train, to get the required medical evaluation that would enable them to challenge these decisions would be a very significant expense for many families.

**Conclusion**

The depersonalized, bureaucratic determination of welfare entitlement evident in the registration of villagers in the area of Dragon Peak Village stands in stark contrast to the way people were generally treated by the local officials in the VCs and RCs where they belong. Outside the sphere of the guarantee relationship, anchored in a collective institution where people are known and have voice, benefit claimants can be disrespected, even dehumanized, with no apparent recourse. Here the question of whether people fit the criteria or not is entirely determined by officials and their rules, and there is no way for the subjects to negotiate over the application of these rationalities to them.

Yet as I show in this chapter, the collective guarantee continues to be central to how people conceptualize their entitlements and which parties are obligated to fulfill them. As this is a locally-defined category, in practice, the specific institutional location and its history shapes how needs are interpreted and acted upon. What people expect is based on what has been provided in their community in the recent past, and what others in their area were receiving. This could mean significant differences in practice even within a territory covered by a relatively uniform policy, such as urban Tianjin. The urban/rural divide, and historical distinctions between those labeled “workers” and “peasants,” remains a key determinant of content, with much more state-funded and employment-linked welfare provision in the urban locations than in the two villages.

Tianjin is said to be moving towards elimination of the urban/rural divide, and indeed some progress has been made in that direction. But this divide remains a major factor in creating inequality between places, with welfare provision being one of the most notable
indicators of this. However the inequality effect of the urban/rural divide could be significantly moderated by the characteristics of a particular place, a point I develop further in Chapter 4. The connections of leaders, could, for example, lead to the bending of rules about pension insurance being extended separately from the other social insurance “lines,” and thus lead to rural people having pensions through the public system. Unsurprisingly, given the history of comprehensive welfare benefits in urban areas, the sense of entitlement to them is more apparent in the urban sites; but claims for such entitlements were directed at local level institutions, and often went along with a discourse distancing “the state” from welfare endeavors. Thus both RC workers and welfare recipients talked about how in this “transitional period” the state had limited resources for welfare, meaning that they had to cope with very little. They also spoke of how the important projects in which the state was engaged—such as asserting China’s place on the international stage—made it impossible for it to focus on the problems of “small” people. Such practices reveal another way the boundaries of local citizenship are articulated, adding to those described in the previous chapter.

As a hybrid form, the minimum livelihood guarantee embodies some of these tensions, emphasizing the incommensurability of the collective guarantee and bureaucratic systems of administration in social provision. The focus of the minimum guarantee’s eligibility criteria on measurable lack reflects emerging rationalities of economization, medicalization and individualization, which serve to depoliticize the needs involved. But while procedures and lines of authority certainly favor “bureaucratic disentitlement” (Herd, Mitchell, and Lightman 2005, 66), there is an inherent antagonism between this goal and the location of the processing of claims for the guarantee in RCs and VCs where potential recipients belong, their needs are evident and they require a response, as described in Chapter 2. The state relies on the socialized governance exercised through the direct knowledge and connections of the RC and VC workers to make citizens legible and governable; but these personal contacts, especially given greater localized freedom of expression, give people suffering hardship personal resources to mobilize in gaining attention for their problems.

Compared with how people understand the entitlements of the guarantee of the past, in each of the field sites there was a growing divide between current practice and people’s expectations. The legitimacy of local leadership—measured in participatory exercises such as periodic elections to RCs and VCs—could be challenged by such gaps. When claims about inequity become generalized, political challenges to the leadership can result, as was
evident in both VCs, where cadres characterized opposition to their policies as either "backward thinking" or the political machinations of "reactionaries." Their need to deploy political labels indicated that economization did not always succeed in depoliticizing decisions about the distribution of resources. These contests involve a cultural politics—largely using state-generated terms—that challenges leaders’ attempts to monopolize the state’s symbolic capital. As I show in Chapter 4, such contests take place within the specific social fields formed by each neighborhood and village, which provides varying environments for them, as well as defining who can bring such claims forward, and how they may do so, in different, locally-inflected terms.

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86 Zhu Jiangang shows how the deployment of political labels is used in local contention in Shanghai, revealing the resources that it provides for both challengers and the local state, but also raising the stakes for the former, since it indicates the possibility of their claims being ruled "out of bounds" (Zhu and Ho 2008; Zhu 2007).
Chapter 4  
Membership: equality and differentiation in local citizenship

About 15 minutes’ walk away from the subway and the VC building along two extended blocks of the dusty boulevards of peri-urban Tianjin, the main street of what is left of Zhang Family Village meanders along, mimicking the lazy curves of the river. It is lined with small store-fronts and small restaurants selling noodles and other simple food; fresh fruit and vegetable stands; there are several sex shops; a doctor’s clinic; hardware and clothing stores; repair shops for bicycles and motorbikes; and employment and rental agencies. Most are family businesses, with commerce in front, and living quarters behind. Some shops double as living rooms. Along several side streets, recycling depots can be seen piled high with plastic, cardboard and other assorted refuse of the city.

These businesses, I was told by VC officials, were not run by villagers, as it was “too hard work.” Instead, they rented out their properties to outsiders. The Xinjiang food restaurant was very likely not run by a villager, and perhaps the prostitutes visible just inside the bead-curtained door of the shop-front brothel were not locals, but I did talk to a number of villagers who ran stores and repair shops.

Since the village’s agricultural land has been expropriated or assigned to other purposes, none of the villagers still engage in farming, and all have reportedly either found jobs or become self-employed. Some villagers still pursue agriculture-related occupations, however: for example, two collected night-soil for use as fertilizer by nearby farmers. And quite a number face difficulties in their livelihood, as highlighted by the dispute over the VC elections described in Chapter 2, and the fact that Zhang Family Village had the highest number of minimum livelihood guarantee recipients of all four field sites, noted in Chapter 3.

Despite the importance of the main street’s small scale commerce for the livelihood of many villagers, plans for re-housing those still living in the old-style village houses did not include compensation for the demolition or replacement of their small businesses. Those who run their businesses in rented spaces would be even more unlucky. The future was already visible in two residential compounds inhabited by relocated villagers, and one more under construction: these are just like the gated enclaves of much of the city proper, making little or no provision for commercial space, with enclosure blocking the entry of potential customers. The high-end storefronts the VC has built for rent are obviously beyond what
poorer villagers can afford. Also, many villagers rent out all or part of their village houses to some of the thousands of “outsiders” working in the area, and this income was under threat by redevelopment plans.

The vision of urban life promoted by the village elite reflects a normative conception of a Zhang Family villager who no longer engages in certain types of economic activity. Despite its ostensible role in representing all villagers, the VC’s ideal prioritizes the needs of some villagers over others. While it favors younger villagers who pursue higher education, its approach to managing the transition to city life elides the needs of less upwardly mobile villagers. But this is not the only distinction in operation in the village. As noted in Chapter 3, the thousands of migrant workers, some of whom live in the villagers' houses, are excluded from local citizenship altogether. A variety of forms of differentiation of citizenship operate within the village’s territory: between villagers and non-villagers; between people with *hukou* registration in the area and those without; and divisions between villagers who embody the dominant ideal of becoming urban, and those who do not. These distinctions are reflected in the different spaces of the village and how these are valued in the plans for redevelopment.
At this local level, while there is formal citizenship equality among the bounded collectivity of villagers, rationalities of governance—notably a teleological conception of "progress" from a "backward" rural towards "advanced" urban life that privileges certain forms of economy and cultural capital—legitimate the production of inequalities among villagers. Not all forms of economic capital accumulation are equal; certain forms are privileged over others, with cultural capital adhering to economic endeavors associated with a vision of urban globalized modernity. The collective ethos of the village is formed in relation to other groups and places, both real and imagined, and is aligned, at least symbolically, with various national projects. In ways that echo late imperial forms, local “sovereignty[ies]” employ “the imaginary state” to create their own sets of inclusions and exclusions (Feuchtwang 2004, 9). In the social field of the village, then, a complex array of forms of distinction linked to local, national and global levels legitimize differentials in the citizenship entitlements of people within its space.

Despite the enormous physical changes evident in all four sites, and increased mobility, both in terms of migration and moving within administration locations, the more common story is relative stability over time in people’s places of residence, thus increasing the importance of shared history in belonging. In all but one of the four sites, the overwhelming majority of the population has remained in place, and while administrative boundaries have expanded and contracted and nomenclature has changed depending on the political fashions of the times, there has also been significant continuity in the basic territorial units within which people have lived since the 1950s. In Rising China, the exception, even though much of the population had moved into two new housing compounds built by the university in the late 1990s, the linkage to the work unit provided a similar continuity, and a significant minority had lived on the site before and been rehoused there.

In this chapter, I consider forms of belonging in the spaces of the RCs and VCs, and how, in different ways, the processes involved create distinctions among citizens that affect how they conceptualize and act upon their entitlements, and how they participate. As I show, the institutional imprimatur of the RCs and VCs gives these distinctions a significance that they might not otherwise have. Distinctions are made on the basis of state categories, such as the place of hukou residence; but how these play out, and what meaning they have, depends on a complex set of relationships between people and the places in which their lives unfold. Places develop a particular character built up over time in processes of collective sense-making, and these local values filter the effects of governing technologies.
such as the *hukou* and of rationalities such as economization and individualization. These interactions form the local citizenship order.

**Locating membership**

Although exclusion from citizenship, absolute and relative, has been the subject of much of the literature on this subject, the membership dimension of Marshall's argument has been much less analyzed than rights and participation (Wincott 2009). Following Arendt, membership has been largely dealt with as a matter of inclusion or exclusion, with access to the rights of citizenship being dependent on whether or not an individual is recognized as belonging, primarily through a legal status as a citizen of a national state (Arendt 1979 [1951]). Somers has elaborated on Arendt's argument to show that even those who are formally citizens may be made effectively stateless due to their social exclusion as a result of the unchecked extension of economic logic under “market fundamentalism” (2008).

At its most formal, membership can be defined as a legal status of belonging. But should this be considered either as a form of state technology, an aspect of a regime of governing, or as a sense of inclusion in a “political community” as the normative sense of citizenship would imply? From the perspective of the former, membership and thus relations with the state are inherently heterogeneous, while the latter expresses an aspiration to universality (Chatterjee 2004). To complicate this further, exercising membership in a political community often effectively depends on residence, on *jus domicilii*, which may not be congruent with legal citizenship (Blank 2007). As Soysal points out, increasingly long-term residents who are not citizens of a state can access citizenship rights there (1994). Feminist scholars have shown how gendered distinctions underlie apparently equal formal citizenship categories (Lister 2007; Lister 2003). And even officially “race-neutral” constitutional provisions for membership can combine with other formal elements to legitimize exclusion on the basis of skin-color and indigeneity, as in Brazil (Holston 2008).

Formal membership interacts with social recognition to form a citizenship order, a point made most clearly by feminist scholars (Munday 2009; Lister 2007; Lister 2003; Fraser and Gordon 1994; Orloff 1993; Fraser 1989). Here, however, the binary of inclusion/exclusion becomes less helpful. Isin argues that while citizenship has been defined by the different forms of alterity against which it is counterposed, these are largely *within* the social field, rather than external to it. Groups are formed in a “dialogical” relation to other groups, and alterity may take a variety of different forms. “Whether the relationship is solidaristic (affiliation, sociation, identification), agonistic (conflict, competition, resistance,
tension), or alienating (exclusion, estrangement, oppression, expulsion), it involves the conduct of conduct, or the government of the self and the other” (Isin 2002, 29, 32). These relationships involve power and domination, often expressed in terms of relative virtue or superiority.

Yuval-Davis identifies three analytical levels involved in constructing the sense of belonging. The first concerns a person’s “social location” in a particular historical, socio-economic “grid of power,” which is a dynamic, contested and intersectional position. A second level relates to identity and its emotional resonances and attachments. And a third dimension involves valuation of positions and identities. The interplay between these three aspects in a specific territorial space creates the grounds for a “politics of belonging” (Yuval-Davis 2006).

Belonging is constituted within, and shapes, a particular place. In its “actual” (as opposed to imagined) form, citizenship incorporates a sense of attachment to place (Isin 2007). In discussing how architectural layout set parameters for the Islamization of everyday life in Istanbul—particularly the segregation of women—Tuğal shows how spatial formations are “a part of identity formation” that also serve as resources, but can be equally constraining (Tuğal 2009, 443). Drawing on a number of theorists, Isin argues that “space is the machine” that forms groups in the city. “[G]roups cannot materialize themselves as real without realizing themselves in space, without creating configurations of buildings, patterns, and arrangements, and symbolic representations of these arrangements” (2002, 42-43). This spatial grammar of group formation can take a number of different forms, but often expresses itself through the making of a specific, named place. Feuchtwang points out that in the wake of the deterritorialization of places that results from both state and capitalist inroads into the local, space then has to be reterritorialized, in forms that follow state and/or capitalist logics, through local strategies of place-making that contest these logics, or more usually, a combination of these (2004). This remaking of places is also a struggle for citizenship in the newly constituted place.

In the Chinese context, citizenship has emerged from local places, both urban and rural. In traditional thinking, belonging to a specific, local place was an integral part of being Chinese, and native place was “one of the major ascribed statuses” (Cohen 1991, 121). As Pieke puts it, “Belonging is represented ultimately as both an attachment to a place and an unfolding and continuous line of descent and a history that, in turn, are but part of the much larger history of China’s growth and expansion as a whole” (2003, 120).
From the late 19th-century onwards, reformers have envisaged the local as a key site for the formation of the national. Reformers in the last years of the Qing dynasty asserted that the weakness of the Chinese nation should be addressed by building up the self-governing capacity of local communities, while in the republican period, Mao Zedong wrote that the “great union of the masses” needed to be based on “small unions of the masses.” Native place associations played a central role as vehicles for assertion of claims and entitlements within semi-colonial cities such as Shanghai (Goodman 1995, 409).

This attention to the local reflected the problematics shaping the engagement of Chinese elites with the social in late 19th and early 20th century: social cohesion became a central concern in state formation, in contrast to the incorporation of a restive working class in Europe (Orloff 2005). Chinese thinkers sought to build up capacity for relationships between the state and territorial units through the formation of “society” within specific spaces. In the face of the disintegrating imperial state and the depredations of foreign powers, they sought solutions through finding a new moral order in local places (Tsin 1997; Zarrow 1997).

This focus on the role of “society” also represented the reformulation of a long-standing mode of rule that blended formal and informal power and allowed significant flexibility in local implementation of state rules (See for example, Huang 2008a; Shue 2008; Herrmann-Pillath 2006; Li 2005; Shue 1988). In the era of Mao and Deng, this form was retooled as a vehicle for Maoist mobilization and then capitalist experimentation. In its modularity, it shows similarly adaptable features to the European and North American institutional forms studied by Sassen (2006). A key continuity is the importance of the local in shaping the specific terms of membership through a complex blending of imperial/national state cultural directives and local norms that do not distinguish between social and state rules. These may be contested, as local elites and people struggle over the meaning of officially-sanctioned ideological terms such as “the people as the root” and “a harmonious society” and thus seek to deploy the symbolic capital of the state to support their own, or their group's, accumulation of social, political, or economic capital (Bourdieu 1998).

**Beyond hukou**

As I have shown in Chapters 2 and 3, in the place where you are a citizen, you cannot be turned away: you have both the local “guarantee” and the local voice to make a claim for it. Yet this status is not solely determined by the location of hukou registration, although this is obviously important. The hukou system is both a state technology and a
local cultural norm; belonging is a government-created status and a local (variable)
achievement.

In China, each person is allocated to a place of residence under the residence
registration system (hukou 户口), and, in most places, classified as either “agricultural” or
“non-agricultural” (For the most recent statements of its operation see, Cai 2011; Chan 2010;
Chan and Buckingham 2008).\(^\text{87}\) This has been a subject of some controversy, with a group
of newspapers carrying a joint editorial in 2010 calling for the abolition of the system (Joint
editorial in 13 Chinese newspapers 2010, 405-407). Changing registration is difficult, often
even impossible, for most people. This is not just a problem for rural people; even for
urbanites, moving their registration from one part of Tianjin to another can be a complicated
procedure.\(^\text{88}\)

A person’s hukou is located within a specific administrative territory served by an RC
or a VC. Although maintaining the hukou register is the responsibility of the police, RCs and
VCs play a key role in collecting data about residents. Indeed police are dependent on these
institutions: residents are not legible to police in the same way they are to RCs and VCs, so
these may be called upon by the police, or other agencies, to verify that a person is actually
resident in a certain location. As mentioned in Chapter 3, these certifications could be
important in making claims to various kinds of benefits, as well as for other reasons. One
such purpose that I observed in RCs on a number of occasions was establishing co-
residency—household rather than family—which could be important for a will, for example.
The difficulties of people—including migrants—who could not draw on such resources of
semi-bureaucratic recognition were evidenced by small notices, plastered all around the city,
advertising services relating to “issuing documents” (办证).

Yet all the places had a certain degree of discretion about who to include and how.
This was most evident in the two VCs, which had the power to determine independently who

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\(^{87}\) Although systems of registration by household have been in existence for more than 2000 years in China, the
PRC’s arrangements are considered by scholars to be the most comprehensive and restrictive, particularly
between the late 1950s and the early 1980s, when they combined with rationing and market controls to severely
limit mobility (For a comprehensive overview of the history and recent evolution of the system, see Wang 2005,
304).

\(^{88}\) According to a recent response to an inquiry on a bulletin board run by the Tianjin Daily newspaper group, a
man who wished to move his hukou from Nankai District to Beichen District, where his wife’s hukou was
registered, had to do the following: 1. Bring their marriage certificate and their hukou booklet to the police station
at the husband’s place of hukou registration to obtain a “certification of hukou record”; 2. Take this certificate,
along with their marriage license, their ID cards and a certification from the RC to the police station at the new
place of residence and fill in a form, to be submitted to the Public Security Bureau for approval; 3. Once approval
is granted in the form of a “certification of permission to move hukou,” this certificate needs to be taken to the
police station at the husband’s place of origin, which then has to prepare a “certificate of moving hukou”; and 4.
The “certificate of moving hukou” and the hukou booklet need to be taken to the police station at the new place
of registration for finalizing the process. Available at: http://bb.tianjinwe.com/detail.php?mid=16115, accessed June
15, 2011.
had the status of “villager” without reference to the hukou system. In Zhang Family Village, this status was in demand, and some people in the VC were concerned about limiting its expansion. People who had moved out of the village, especially women who had married out, tried to hold onto their villager status and to pass it on to their children. One day a distraught woman came in to the VC office seeking help. Originally from Zhang Family Village, she was recently divorced, and had no income and no pension. She was seeking to apply for minimum guarantee, but there was some dispute over the location of her hukou. Li Hong, the welfare worker, said that a significant number of “daughters” of the village were in a similar situation to hers. I was told that people in a neighboring village had been offered urban hukou, but they had refused it because they wanted to remain villagers in order to keep the benefits they received as their “villager remuneration” (村民待遇).

Rising China, Progress and Zhang Family Village all maintained their own hand-written records of people within their jurisdiction. (I did not have the opportunity to see the records in Dragon Peak.) In the case of the two RCs, this was a record of people actually residing there, with each RC worker being responsible for keeping the records of people in her beat. In the case of Zhang Family Village, this was a register of villagers. These records, rather than the hukou register, were used to draw up the voter roll for the elections. The two villages I studied were similar in that they did not allow outsiders to become voters or take on other attributes of villager status. One woman from another part of Tianjin who ran a small employment and rental agency in Zhang Family Village had lived there for 10 years, but looked incredulous when I asked her whether she might be able to get status as a villager.

Other well-off villages also show such a connection between political participation and other elements of local citizenship. Until recently, provincial-level regulations studied by He made residence a requirement for electors, and only allowed the township government to make exceptions. While this was changed in Zhejiang Province in 1999 to allow villager assemblies to decide whether to allow in-migrants to become electors, such status remained discretionary. Where substantial collective funds were available for social welfare services, communities were not likely to make migrants electors as they might then claim entitlement to the other benefits of village citizenship (He 2005). This was certainly the case in my two rural field sites.

By contrast, both the RCs I studied allowed people who had been resident for a year or more to vote in the election for RC members. When I asked if a notice in Rising China which stated that all residents could register to vote in the upcoming election was applicable
to me, Sister Bao seriously went to ask the Party Secretary if I could register. The answer came back that I hadn’t been resident for a year, so I couldn’t. The fact that I was not a PRC national was not mentioned as grounds for exclusion. Evidently, then, political citizenship in villages was more exclusive than in urban areas, in contrast to what the idea of urban citizenship as privileged status might lead one to assume.

But recognition depended on social status: even if your hukou was registered in a particular place, if you were not known to the RC as a resident, getting heard could be difficult. The Progress widow who sought to apply for minimum guarantee, described in Chapter 3, had to show she belonged before Sister Wang would consider taking information about her situation. Unfamiliar people could not expect so much help with surmounting the inevitable administrative hurdles attendant on any bureaucratic business.

Those thought of as “outsiders” could be given short shrift in RCs, in contrast to the polite and solicitous treatment generally provided to residents (however bothersome). One day at Progress, a young woman came in the door and shyly approached the desk of Sister Wang which was right opposite, asking in a low voice if this was where she could apply for a temporary residence permit. Sister Wang, usually a model of politeness and acceptance—she had told me that she prided herself on not looking down on people who were poor—asked her sharply which street office she lived in, and then the number of her building, and when the woman didn’t know, irritably said, “Go next door!” and waved her away. The neighboring office was occupied by the community policemen. When the woman went out, Wang said in a dismissive tone, “She’s an outsider (外地人)” as if to say that all such people were not even worthy of being spoken to properly. Yet this term did not uniformly apply to migrant workers: members of a migrant family who ran a “canteen” in a small prefabricated building in the Progress compound were well-liked, and when they had a baby (their second), the husband brought fruit around to the RC office, to share his family’s good fortune, and the workers congratulated them heartily and went to see the new arrival. No one raised the issue of whether this child was “out of plan.” Evidently, here social recognition could overcome the inferiority implicit in both rural origins and outsider status.

In Rising China, a constant battle to prevent the posting of small ads for services such as plumbing and appliance repair reflected not only a concern with cleanliness, but a judgment about those who pursued such petty trades, and about outsiders who came into the compound hawking such services. Once a member of the RC’s “security patrol” brought in a woman he had found posting these notices. This man, invariably garbed in military fatigues, led the reluctant culprit into the RC office by her arm. She was a middle-aged
woman from Anhui, and her accent marked her as an outsider. After a brief interrogation about who her boss was, and a warning not to return, she was escorted off the RC’s territory. This was one aspect of a broader distinction evident in this RC, described in more detail below.

**Establishing eligibility**

In Tianjin, people could only claim benefits such as minimum guarantee and disability supplements at their place of *hukou* registration. About one quarter of the minimum guarantee recipients in Progress no longer lived in the area; while in Rising China, two of the three people whose cases were posted prior to approval for minimum guarantee during my field work resided elsewhere. The public notices listed their *hukou* addresses, but the RC workers involved knew where they were actually resident. Some of the minimum guarantee cases in Zhang Family Village were of people whose *hukou* was registered there, but who were not classified as villagers.

As the location where residents were considered most legible to the state, RCs administered most of the welfare programs available to city residents, and also established their eligibility for these and other benefits, issuing special identification documents certifying people as senior citizens and registered disabled (although a medical evaluation is also necessary for such registration). As well as the minimum livelihood guarantee, they were responsible for benefits for people with disabilities, benefits and price subsidies for the elderly, retraining and finding employment for the unemployed and provision of social insurance for people not covered through employer-based programs.

VCs played a similar role in establishing entitlement to benefits, by registering people over 60 and people with disabilities, although these types of benefits had a much shorter history in the VCs than in urban areas. VCs administered and delivered minimum livelihood guarantee and the monthly subsidy given to people over 60. They also did all the administration and collected premiums for the health insurance program for rural people, the rural cooperative medical insurance, launched in 2002 after Hu Jintao became Chinese President and Wen Jiabao, Premier, and gradually spread across the country.

Aside from such nationally-mandated programs, Zhang Family Village had developed its own system of local welfare, as outlined in Chapter 3. The VC had drawn up a local regulatory document on this, although this seemed to be for internal guidance, as I was

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89 In both urban and rural Tianjin, in 2009 this subsidy entailed monthly payments of 60 yuan to people over 60, 70 yuan to people over 70 and 80 yuan to those 80 and over. In the rural areas, the previous year the amounts had been half the urban rate.
told it was not made available to villagers. This document began by defining who was eligible: “All those villagers who are long-term residents, have permanent hukou and have direct roots in the village (纯本村) can receive villager treatment,” with the exception of those who “are employed in district or township-level enterprises or public institutions and receive salaries, pensions or welfare benefits.”

As in Zhang Family Village, local rules for welfare and social services generally excluded migrants from benefits. Both the VCs I studied had large numbers of migrants: in Dragon Peak’s parlance, “people from outside villages” (外村人), in Zhang Family Village, “outsiders” (外地人). In some locations, this can mean that the vast majority of residents of an area receive no services from local government, while a privileged few benefit from locally-funded health, pension and other services (Smart and Lin 2007; Smart and Smart 2001). This was the case in Zhang Family Village, where the 8,000 plus “outsiders” in the area were not eligible for any of the benefits administered by the VC, regardless of how long they had lived there. The only contact VC workers from Zhang Family Village had with such people—many living in rented rooms in the village itself—was to check on their compliance with birth planning policies, for which the township had recently made the VC responsible, as noted in Chapter 1.

In Dragon Peak Village, several hundred workers from nearby villages were engaged in construction or working in the guesthouses. The VC paid almost no attention to them, except insofar as it employed some of them on construction teams, paid on a daily rate. Since these workers were employed directly by the VC, some sort of minimal accident insurance was in place to ensure that no liability would be incurred by the VC. But other workers had no such insurance. I was told by the foreman of the work gang building an artificial white-water rafting feature right outside the VC building—which involved the shifting of boulders, welding metal pipes and other potentially dangerous work—that there was no accident insurance for these workers. This was a “private” project, contracted by the village Party secretary, and run by his son. The foreman said he had told the laborers before starting work that if they had a minor accident, he would pay for their treatment, but if it was major, they would be on their own. There was likewise no regulation of the employment situation of the many women from other villages working in guesthouses in the village. I asked a township labor official who came to the village about supervision of employment conditions, and he said they only provided this when workers were employed by a formally-registered township enterprise. All of these laborers, then, did not count as “workers” for

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90 Rules on Receiving Villager Treatment in XX Village, February 2008, document on file with the author.
either the VC or the lowest level of government. Neither VC played any role in monitoring employment conditions in their areas, a matter which did fall within the competence of the RCs.

However, as the “others” against whom local citizenship was defined in a relationship of alterity (Isin 2002), the situation of these migrant workers also shaped villager status. As mentioned above, since migrants were engaged in commerce in Zhang Family Village, this became an occupation that was deemed unfit for people aspiring to “advanced” urban status. Another example of this attitude could be seen in relation to jobs in the industrial park run by the VC. Most companies there did not like to offer villagers jobs as they came with “too many issues” (太多了), I was informed by a villager who ran the management office there. He related these “issues” to the strict labor regime imposed on workers in the companies there, including deductions in pay for infringements of various workplace rules. His presumption was evidently that villagers already saw themselves as being in a class above such employment conditions.

One of the aims of Dragon Peak’s employment policies was to prevent the out-migration of local youth. Since the daily operation of the guesthouses—particularly cleaning and cooking—was largely seen as “women’s work,” there were few opportunities for the young men of the village. Those employed in VC jobs, then, were mostly young men, and some had little to do. The Dragon Peak traffic check point, situated at the edge of the village, was an example: at most times in the summer months during my field work there were six to eight young men manning it, even on weekdays when there were few visitors. The check point collected fees from visitors to enter the “scenic area,” and those who had not booked accommodation ahead of time would be distributed among the guesthouses according to a rotation system. (This was the one area of transparency in the VC’s accounting, mentioned in Chapter 1.) Effectively, the village put some young people on the payroll so they would not become migrant workers.

But another category of outsiders were seen very differently: the rich incomers who were threatening the livelihood of villagers by setting up guesthouses in the area, as mentioned in Chapter 3. A number of city folk had purchased property in the village and some ran them as guesthouses. For example, one family had just built a grey-brick courtyard in the style of north China traditional elite houses, obviously investing a significant amount of capital in the venture. This guest house was much more stylish than most of the places in the vicinity run by villagers, and thus meant increased competition for business. But unlike in Hou’s model of “community capitalism” (Hou 2011), the Dragon Peak village
elite’s commitment to the rationality of the market and of business success depending on personal “quality” made significant measures to protect villagers’ livelihoods by preventing the involvement of outsiders in the tourism business difficult to justify.

(Re)territorializing belonging

The complex social geography of each of my four field sites reflected efforts to form a collective sense of belonging, as well as contestations among different groups within their space. Following pervasive “deterritorialization” of places in the service of state and capitalist projects, these logics also shape the process of their reterritorialization, although this could be contested by local place-making (Feuchtwang 2004).

Such processes can be observed from several different perspectives, but from the vantage point of the RCs and VCs, each aspires to produce a particular sense of collective membership, and adopts different spatial strategies to achieve this end. The leaders of these institutions depend on developing at least a sufficient sense of group membership to enable them to carry out their work and avoid complaints. “Constructing society” entails physical building as well as emotional and psychological formation. Caught up in the feverish building and rebuilding which is a ubiquitous feature of life in China today, none of these places were settled, all were in formation as idea and as practice. Everywhere, layers of earlier collectives that had inhabited the same spaces were evident.

While important, as I discuss below, boundaries are not the only markers of place. As Feuchtwang points out, “The extent and peripheries of a territorial place may be understood from its centres without being marked out by active inscription” (2004, 5). RCs and VCs sought to be the centers of their territories, but this could be contested, and reflected the differing resources at their disposal for the formation of a collective, as noted in Chapter 1. For the RCs, this centering reflected a disjunction between the territories they were supposed to administer, and the extent of their actual operations, between the boundaries drawn by the local state and the groups that the RC could actually engage. While Progress’s office did act as an effective center for the compound in which it was situated, it struggled to perform a similar role for the affluent Richview Terrace, where the dominance of the private economy made it possible for people to opt out of the bonds of local citizenship. Rising China also did little work outside its main base, relying on the work unit organizations in the two other large compounds for its main information gathering and other functions.
As mentioned above, both VCs were positioned more as a symbolic representation of villagers as a corporate entity than an actual space of villager community. Dragon Peak’s building deployed the symbolic capital of the state to legitimize both the rule and the economic dominance of the village elite, draping the three-storey edifice with banners testifying to the endorsements it had received from national and provincial governments (described in more detail below). The main gathering places for villagers were around the few open-fronted small shops and along the roadside. Despite the intermediary nature of the VCs as institutions, however, they were more clearly a locus of state authority than the RCs, which enabled the mobilization of the state’s symbolic capital by their elites. The people who worked in the VCs were called “cadres,” thus were clearly part of the state apparatus. There was also a greater concentration of authority here, as essentially the VC, and particularly its leadership, represented the state. For the villagers in the two communities, that meant essentially that the cadres were an embodiment of that authority. The centering efforts of the elites in each village were in complex relation to the changing environments of each place. I have already noted the distance between the Zhang Family Village VC building and the places where most people lived and socialized. This prefigured the dissolution of the village as a social collectivity, envisaging the future as one in which villagers only remained as shareholders, meeting to discuss economic decisions of the corporation. Yet clearly, this vision was a contested one that not all shared.

For Dragon Peak, the geological museum in the VC building and the pictures of villagers as “tourist guides” in its lobby situated the institution as the nerve center of the village’s transformation process. During my stay, a public relations company submitted a proposal for rebranding the entire village that used fancy computer graphics to present different options for turning it into a tourist resort, with unified signage deploying traditional Chinese motifs. While this particular proposal was not accepted, village leaders approved the idea of creating a harmonized image, but saw no value at all in the existing style of village buildings. I have noted the relation of buildings to a sense of prosperity in Chapter 3. When I asked Party Secretary Fu if Dragon Peak had any kind of local knowledge that outsiders could learn from, he said there wasn’t, and that the villagers needed to learn the “advanced culture” of their urban visitors. This reterritorialization of the village was in service of capital, rather than a local sense of place.

Although the spaces of the RCs were more similar to each other, as I describe below, they constituted solidarity and difference in divergent ways. The effects of a housing market on changing configurations of urban space—particularly larger apartments and increasing
division of residential patterns according to class—are said to be diminishing sociality in shared public space, and thus opportunities for collective sense-making, especially across class boundaries (Read and Chen 2008; Farrer 2002). But in my field sites, history was more influential in shaping the sense of belonging and the hierarchies among residents in each RC.

**Productive boundaries**

Most of the urban residential compounds I regularly visited had some kind of barrier around them, although the level of exclusion this imposed varied considerably. The extent of enclosure was contentious in the RCs, and spatial factors such as the extent of capacity to enclose and non-contiguity of RC territory were seen as crucial in how hard or how easy it was to form communities within them. This structure also reflected varying conceptions of the ideal to which each institution aspired. For the RC cadres and activists, enclosure was an ideal that they felt would improve the neighborhood environment and their capacity to deal with problems arising there.

As Bray has pointed out in his study of the work unit, walled enclosures should not necessarily be interpreted as mechanisms of exclusion, but as *productive* strategies aimed at the formation of a collective (2005). Even in relation to the growing spread in Chinese cities of expensive gated housing compounds on the American model, Huang and Low caution against assuming that these spatial configurations have the same social meaning in the two contexts. “Despite dramatic changes in the housing system and significant transformation in the basis for collectives, collectivist tradition and culture continues to contribute to gating in the reform era,” they write (2008, 198).

The walls around the territory of the RCs can be interpreted as an aspect of their effort to emulate work units, and produce a similar collectivity in a new context. Yet use of this strategy was variable. An RC I visited that had been chosen as one of the top 10 in Tianjin presented a similar picture of ordered space to the model encountered by Bray in the two recently-built Wuhan neighborhoods he studied, with the RC serving one enclosed residential compound with purpose built facilities, both recreational and commercial (2008). By contrast, one RC near where I lived had permanently open gates, and even within Nankai University, there were varying degrees of enclosure of residential space, as the larger university compound was open to the public. A high-status residential complex inhabited by professors had its own gates and security within the larger perimeter of the university, while older, less prestigious compounds were unenclosed, and the university was
open to the public during the day. A number of the RCs in Hexi District near my field site also had open access, although gates were used to block vehicle access between some buildings.

For the VCs, enclosure was also variable, but less an ideal than for the RCs, and less apparently productive in character. In Zhang Family Village, greater enclosure was a function of becoming urban, as mentioned above. The residential compounds in which some villagers had already been rehoused were surrounded by fences and had their own property management companies, although gates were loosely guarded. Both Dragon Peak and Zhang Family Village had check points positioned at the main entrance to the village and manned by village security personnel (invariably male). In the case of Zhang Family Village, the check point had a metal frame set up around the entry that restricted the height and width of vehicles that could enter the village. But on the several occasions when I went through this checkpoint in a three-wheeler taxi, there was no security in evidence, and when I visited their post, the staff were all inside their one-room brick office. The main road through the village was a thoroughfare into the city with a bus route that stopped along the way, but there were no check points for this. Evidently, different regimes of security pertained to various parts of the village.

Although the two RCs I studied were both seen as models by their respective street offices, they had quite different situations regarding enclosure. The three constituent parts of Progress Section had distinctly different regimes: Little Progress, the three buildings across the highway from the main compound, were not enclosed at all and had no security; the compound where the RC was located had eight entrance gates, two allowing vehicle access, some of which were closed at night and monitored by night–time guards; and Richview was entirely enclosed and at both entrances had 24-hour uniformed guards who were employed by the management company. On a number of occasions, I saw these guards refuse entry in the day time to people who wanted to walk through Richview.

As it was composed of a number of separate compounds, Rising China’s territory incorporated various different regimes as well. The most stringent security was at the research institutes and the compound inhabited by university academic staff. Although the latter had an activity room, the RC could not organize events in it as the security guards at the gate would not allow people living in other parts of Rising China’s territory to enter. The largest residential compound, where the RC had its office, was fully enclosed with a high metal fence topped in parts with barbed wire and had only one entrance. But the security was rather lax, reflected in the crumpled uniforms of the motley crew of guards, who were all
laid-off men over 50. During the day most people passed through the gates without challenge.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, these distinctions reflect different degrees of engagement of the RCs with spaces within their jurisdictions. In addition, one key area of tension in the differing strategies of enclosure was the relationship between commerce and markets and residential space. The two RCs dealt with this issue in different ways that expressed divergent conceptions of the qualities of the valued citizen and the styles of life appropriate for them, as I outline below.

With one exception—a shop near the entrance gate where a resident sold liquor, cigarettes and candy out of her living room window—small businesses were kept firmly out of the Rising China compound, with the “citizen’s arrest” of the woman posting small ads previously described being one example. Vendors wheeling carts of fruit and vegetables could only hawk their wares outside the gates. But a number of residents collected old things for sale. The extensive collections of junk—scrap lumber, old doors, broken furniture, pieces of metal and plastic, parts of old bicycles, sheets of cardboard and boxes—amassed by some families became an issue when Rising China was preparing for an inspection by municipal-level environment and sanitation officials. A particular focus for this clean-up was the large building that housed many of the former residents of the low-rise housing the current apartment blocks had replaced when they were built in the late 1990s. These “demolition households” (拆迁户) were more likely to be poor, and the RC staff told me they were looked down on by the “university teachers”91 in the compound for having “low quality.”

Two RC staff members, Little Fang and Sister Li, went out one morning to persuade the owners of the junk to get rid of some of it. They focused in particular on three families who had large piles of stuff stored below the windows of their first floor apartments. Little Fang’s attempts to persuade Mr. Liu, an elderly resident, to get rid of two worn black imitation leather armchairs quickly degenerated into a shouting match, in the course of which Little Fang burst into angry tears. Sister Li calmly reasoned with him: “Elder brother Liu, why do you want these old chairs? Who would want them? What are you keeping them for?”

After Mr. Liu stomped off into his apartment, we walked round the corner and bumped into Mrs. Liang on her electric three-wheeler motorcycle. Little Fang, holding Mrs. Liang’s arm as she walked along beside her, began talking about clearing away some of her

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91 University staff were divided into two categories: “logistics” (including all service and plant workers) and “teachers.” Administrative staff were included in the category of “teachers.”
collection of stuff. As Mrs. Liang was parking her motorcycle next to her vegetables growing in several rows of ceramic kitchen sinks, she began arguing with Little Fang and a heated conversation ensued. Mrs. Liang’s family is a “marginal household,” a category discussed in Chapter 3. Between themselves, the RC workers called her, “The one with two simpletons,” a reference to her husband and son. The husband used to do maintenance for the university, and receives a small pension which is not enough to support a family that also includes his elderly parents. Mrs. Liang’s son is around 19, a large, heavily built youth with the mannerisms and language of a young child. He could often be seen roaming around the compound, sometimes screaming in a high-pitched voice. Despite the burdens of care on her shoulders, Mrs. Liang is considered able to work so is unable to claim any benefits.

Soon after these incidents, Little Fang went to fetch Party Secretary Dai to help persuade the residents to cooperate for the inspection. Dai also had to repair relations with Mrs. Liang and Mr. Liu, who had evidently been offended by Little Fang. Dai explained the importance of the inspection, and said she was sympathetic to the needs of people who had to recycle junk to make a living. In the course of the conversation, Mr. Liu and Mrs. Liang both talked about their daily difficulties, asking, “Why don’t the leaders help the common people by giving out a bit more welfare?”

Illustration 4.2: Mrs. Liang’s three-wheeler motorbike, garden and pile of recyclable items took up much less space than the bags of construction waste from apartment renovations, but were the subject of controversy.
In Rising China, then, in the name of keeping the main compound “clean” there were attempts to make invisible the relative poverty of households reliant in part on recycling for their livelihoods. Although the growing number of cars and piles of bagged construction waste from apartment renovations took up much more space than the piles of junk, they did not attract the same kind of attention. This is not to say the area was anti-business: the 400+ businesses in this RC’s territory were situated in a large commercial building and in several street-level blocks, but these were outside the residential compounds. To operate, businesses thus needed ownership or rental of dedicated space. And big business was welcomed in: Ping’an, the major insurance company, was regularly allowed to promote its products within the residential compound; and on Children’s Day the RC hosted an event for local children sponsored by Kentucky Fried Chicken.

This pattern of incorporating large and formal businesses while excluding the marginal economy was even more apparent in the gated compounds of “commercial housing.” Such a contrast was visible in the two adjacent residential compounds comprising Progress. Richview Terrace had a few shops within its territory, and TV monitors in the elevators of its highrise blocks broadcast ads to residents. But vigilant gate guards excluded any outsiders, whether they were trying to do business or just walk through. And as mentioned in Chapter 1, even the RC itself was restricted in disseminating information to the Richview Terrace residents.

In the main residential compound of Progress, by contrast, under the rubric of "services convenient to the people" micro-enterprises proliferated. Residents of this area were a heterogeneous group, not dominated by any one work unit or social class, and there was a core of elderly activists who had lived in the neighborhood for 30 years or more. As mentioned in Chapter 3, socialist rhetoric in the area had a salience that was absent in Rising China, where neoliberal ideas were more often heard in the RC. The gates of the main Progress compound were open during the day, so trades people and hawkers could go in and out. An older woman resident wheeled around a hand cart selling piece goods, underwear and other items, but complained that since the economic downturn, business had been poor. Many small businesses operated out of first floor apartments, including a clinic, a text-book store, a marriage introduction agency, several shops selling cooked food, one selling alcohol and cigarettes, and Mrs. Shen’s dental office (see Chapter 2). Such businesses made use of the one asset the families of most middle-aged or older working-class people had: an apartment. Next to an open area, a family brought out a mobile kitchen offering breakfasts and lunches every day. But the open gates policy that made these
businesses viable was regularly questioned by some older residents who presumed that “order” meant closed boundaries enforced by security, as in Rising China.

The differing physical and cultural environments of the residential spaces in the RCs thus provide distinctive opportunities for residents without regular work to engage in income generating activities, with the open gates of the main compound in Progress and its recognition of the difficulties many residents had in finding jobs making it a more viable space for such ventures. By contrast, the closed nature of the residential compounds in Rising China and in Progress’ Richview Terrace privilege the supposed preference of the emerging middle class for an “orderly” environment that excludes small businesses, giving their space over to cars and business advertising. In these latter environments, divisions between impoverished residents—and outsiders—and those in formal employment are emphasized through distinctions of “quality” (Kipnis 2006; Anagnost 2004; Yan 2003). These spaces and the type of citizenship to be practiced within them are constituted in such a way that being poor became a difference in value. In Chapter 3, I noted the potential effect of such distinctions on people’s entitlement to welfare, and the degree of stigma associated with it.

**Managing feelings, producing solidarity**

However, the pressure on Mr. Liu and Mrs. Liang to make the disorderliness of their poverty invisible elicited an emotional reaction, which had to be managed by Party Secretary Dai. Such “emotional work” was a central part of the daily work of RCs, particularly in their role in dealing with grievances and disputes and addressing the needs of those facing a crisis. It was also an aspect of their efforts to form a collectivity within the neighborhoods by generating a sense of belonging among residents.

Perry describes how the CCP and its cadres became expert at managing emotion as a mobilization strategy in the transformative social revolution both before and after 1949. She points to ways such management continues in new forms—particularly through the media—as well as how communist tactics such as “speaking bitterness” have become part of the repertoire of contentious politics in China today (2002). However, “moving the masses” as a routine practice is a neglected dimension of governmental administration. The important role of emotional management in dealing with disputes is highlighted by Michelson’s finding that villagers who took their complaints to local cadres were more satisfied with their experience even when they did not achieve their favored outcome than people who pursued other forms of dispute resolution (2008).
Given their more tenuous relationship with most residents, RCs worked more actively on developing emotional bonds as a basis for community in their areas. Party Secretary Zhu was constantly going out to mediate disputes among Progress residents. As a document from Progress put it: “For a number of years the RC, under the leadership of the community Party committee and basing its work on the ideal of ‘with fervor, with amity, with kin-feeling, the work of the community stresses true sentiments,’ giving full play to its function as an autonomous organization of the masses, has organized the residents to carry out extensively ‘love and build the residential compound that you live in,’ joining together in activities to build a harmonious community.”

The warmth of this kind of inclusion was linked to RC efforts to generate “cohesion” (凝聚力) through ritualized participation and exhortation. This was apparent in the RCs as a public endeavor, evident in a constant stream of public banners and notices, many of them exhorting residents to adopt certain attitudes and behaviors, as noted in Chapter 1. Such public work was less apparent in the VCs I studied, where villager status was seen to generate networks of kin and association almost automatically.

RCs generated community support on an informal basis for what they called “hardship households” (困难户), raising money from local businesses and sometimes individuals, and distributing extra money and foodstuffs to the needy before the Chinese Lunar New Year to ensure they could celebrate this festival properly. RC workers often visited residents who were sick or recently bereaved at home to express sympathy and concern, and went to pay their respects to older activists and Party members. This was part of a number of rituals of “sending warmth” (送温暖), which usually involved expressions of emotional care and concern as well as gifts, usually of food. VCs also had similar projects of gift giving and visits, generally focused around both traditional and state holidays.

Cadres of Dragon Family Village repeatedly emphasized the extent of spontaneous mutual aid in the village, with examples being giving gifts to families with new babies and money to help families in which a member was suffering a serious illness. This generosity was presented as making up for the relative dearth of formalized welfare provision in the village. In Zhang Family Village, before each Chinese New Year the VC gave substantial sums of money to older people, the disabled and those living in straitened circumstances.

These relationships were historical, in that the longer you belonged, the more you were enmeshed in emotional bonds. Furthermore, the development of belongingness linked

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92 “Brief Introduction to XXX Community,” undated document on file with the author.
93 In the case of Taishi Village in Guangdong, the failure of village leaders to undertake such rituals was cited as one of their offenses in an open letter challenging their right to rule in the village (Woodman 2011b).
to status, as people’s “contribution” (贡献)—a combination of their work history and participation in public life, including Party membership—became a crucial determinant of their entitlements. Thus in practice, political citizenship and social citizenship were connected through personal history. While a minimum of care and attention was required for all those in the area, past “contributions” could mean more solicitous treatment and better quality gifts at such times such as Lunar New Year. While a poor disabled resident might get a bag of flour for making dumplings (饺子) and a bottle of cooking oil, a senior Party member would receive a box of organic apples. Zhang Family Village budgeted more than ten times as much for taking retired villagers on trips as it did for assistance to the local “hardship households.”

**Model places**

One of the principal methods the RCs and VCs used to legitimate their leadership and their work was deploying the symbolic capital of the state, expressed in the form of awards and citations received for their work. These awards positioned the particular institution on a scale of virtue expressed in terms of its closeness to the models promoted by the municipal or central governments. This form of interaction between local and national echoes the “culturalist” mode of rule described by Herrmann-Pilath, and discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 1 (2006).

RCs and VCs all displayed plaques, banners and framed citations in prominent positions attesting to their being models of various kinds. These were most often arrayed in meeting rooms where visitors might be entertained. In the case of Dragon Peak Village, many of the awards were also displayed to the public. Five of the seven three-storey high banners in primary colors that draped the front of the VC’s office building referred to awards the village had received. Three related to tourism, with one reading “X Village, the first nationally-approved agricultural tourism model village,” another “Heartily applaud X Village being chosen as one of the 300 most famous villages in China” and a third, “Congratulate X Village on being designated as Tianjin’s most distinctive and beautiful village.” A fourth exhorted the viewer to contribute to continuing the excellent example of past practice: “Extensively implement the approach of scientific development so as to preserve X Village’s character as a national-level model village in democracy and rule of law” (bestowed in 2004 jointly by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Civil Affairs). A version of this latter award was also carved on a large polished stone standing by the side of the road running through the village. A fifth banner referred to the village’s status as a “rural credit
community,” a new institutional form for marketization in rural areas. These banners affirmed the state’s incontestable support for the development model chosen by the village elite, deploying the symbolic capital of the state to endorse the village elite’s accumulation of economic capital.

Progress had received a number of municipal awards as a model in Party building, as a “Five star grade community” and in facilitating good relations between the people and the PLA, and had been recognized by the Old People’s Association as a district level “advanced collective.”\footnote{“Brief Introduction to XXX Community,” undated document on file with the author.} The higher the institution granting the citation, the more valuable it was considered. When preparing a text and photo collage on the work of Rising China RC prior to the launch of the election campaign, Party Secretary Dai discussed with the workers doing the task the importance of mentioning the municipal-level award the RC had won. Winning an award as one of the top 1,000 legal workers in Tianjin was one of the reasons Sister Wu dared to presume that as the “beyond quota” (差额) candidate she could win against the two Party members who were the other candidates for election to the posts of deputy director of the Rising China RC. (She lost, and was so bitterly disappointed, she moved to a different RC to work.)

Maintaining a reputation as a model was an important consideration in how work was carried out. “Progress has to be the most progressive,” was a comment I heard several times. This meant going beyond what would be good enough, usually according to criteria set by the higher levels. Places, as well as persons, could be exemplars. “You have a good eye,” said Director Guo, my minder at Zhang Family Village, soon after I first met her. “You chose this VC. You wouldn’t have much to study in other places.” The implication was that one couldn’t learn anything useful from those places that were not advanced, or models. This hierarchy of power/knowledge was also apparent in people’s responses to my research project: I was asked repeatedly why I would want to study China which had a “backward” welfare system, when I could research “advanced” welfare systems in the US or Canada. But these hierarchies were not only global, or related to rural areas: even in the context of urban Tianjin, comparisons were constantly being made between the benefits and services available to residents in the two RCs and their respective districts and what people elsewhere in the city could get. Other places reputedly had more relaxed eligibility criteria for certain benefit programs, and also paid out more money. Whether this was true or not, it testified to a sense that there were distinct regimes within the scope of the city.
The status of both Dragon Peak Village and Progress Section RC as “models” attested to the political resourcefulness of their leaders and meant that they continued to attract a disproportionate share of local material and political resources. As an “experimental point” in the territory of its street office, Progress was expected to outperform its fellow RCs in the area. This meant a great deal of attention from the street office leaders, but also the allocation of funds for purposes such as gifts to ensure high turnout in the election, as described in Chapter 2. It also meant the allocation of “better” staff and the provision of resources for community residents, such as the rehabilitation room at Progress.95

Local moral order

But while Dragon Peak’s model status was deployed to make it a space for capitalist projects, activist-residents of Progress formed their sense of place partly in opposition to both the capitalist restructuring of urban housing (as represented by Richview Terrace) and the local government’s efforts to use the RC as a technology of governance to ensure uniform administration of the territory in the jurisdiction of the street office. The core group of these activists—notably Aunty Li and Aunty Feng, but also incorporating some of the RC workers—had lived in the territory now called Progress since before 1949, and nostalgically recalled the sense of community and shared belonging when they lived in low-rise housing. Despite the inconveniences of that life, they said, they did not find apartment living more congenial. Their sense of neighborliness seemed to hark back to those days, when children could eat at anyone’s home, and people exchanged dishes at dinner-time. These rules of mutual assistance did not apparently distinguish among residents according to status. Mrs. Zhang’s letter praising the care extended to her by the RC, described in Chapter 2, could thus be seen as reformulating an existing community norm for new circumstances.

The importance of this ethos to Aunty Li and others was highlighted by her response to a public challenge to the fairness of the RC. An elderly woman who lived in a building almost opposite the RC office sometimes stood outside her door and cleared her throat loudly when members of the foot patrol came out. She had also done this to some of the RC workers as they came and went, and they interpreted this as a gesture of disrespect to the RC, but there was nothing they could do, as they were supposed to be polite to all residents. I was told the woman felt resentful towards the RC because she had been excluded from a

95 This room, equipped with various machines and equipment designed for rehabilitative exercises, was intended for people with disabilities, but was mainly used by older women residents.
10,000 meter walking marathon for older people because she had a limp and was deemed not to be able to compete for Progress.

Aunty Li, who later told me that she was the one who had been responsible for this decision, heard about the woman’s behavior, which was particularly directed at Granny Ji, another older woman who was part of the foot patrol. Aunty Li said Granny Ji was too “decent” (老实) to do anything to defend herself against this woman. One day, Aunty Li and Granny Ji came into the RC office together, and the woman was doing her usual throat-clearing. Aunty Li went out the door and began shouting curses across the lane at the woman. Soon insults were being exchanged across the lane. “Broken shoe, broken shoe” (破鞋), they shouted at each other. But Aunty Li’s voice was louder and she repeatedly ran towards the woman as if she was about to hit her, but then slapped her own hand loudly instead. Party Secretary Zhu and some of the RC workers came out into the lane, and endeavored to calm things down, including restraining Aunty Li. Several times, Aunty Li went back into the office, but then left again and resumed her cursing. The throat-clearer was eventually reduced to tears. By now, several of the other regular RC activists, all women, and a couple of the workers, were standing in a group outside the RC office across the lane from the woman, laughing loudly and mocking her.

Aunty Li phoned the police emergency line from the RC office phone to complain that someone was “cursing in the streets” (骂街) and thus preventing the foot patrol from going on their rounds. About 10 minutes later, three police officers arrived: they went and spoke to the woman, and then came in and talked to the people in the office. “How can she be allowed to curse at people all the time?” asked Aunty Li. The young officer who was doing most of the talking said, “I am sorry, we are not allowed to use forcible measures in such cases.” For some time, there was a back and forth between the office and the doorway where the woman still stood, with the police officers, Secretary Zhu and the RC workers who had not joined in the earlier taunting of the woman trying to resolve the dispute. The woman complained that she was being “targeted” by the foot patrol, and that she was being followed. After writing down the complainants’ numbers and a brief report, the police finally left. The consensus among the RC activists and some of the RC workers was that the woman’s behavior should not be allowed. Aunty Li threatened to suspend the foot patrol if she was not stopped. At one point, Sister Wang commented, “How can such a great rule of law country not be able to deal with her?” A few days later, Aunty Li took the initiative to talk to

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96 This is a traditional curse word meaning “loose woman.”
the woman when she came outside again, and although voices were raised, in the end things calmed down, and the incident appeared to be resolved.

This incident expressed Aunty Li’s public defense of the RC’s fairness. Even though she herself could be critical, joining in the dismissal of the elections described in Chapter 2, for example, a public challenge had to be addressed, she felt. But it was also indicative of the coercive means by which such local moral imperatives could be enforced, similar to the social shunning of Mrs. Shen’s family described in Chapter 2. The approach taken by the police officers distanced this moral policing from the state, and made it a dispute between residents. At the same time, however, the activists clearly drew on the symbolic capital of the state to reinforce their convictions, and the association of their position with the RC and the public space this occupied accorded their actions a moral and political weight that was not available to other groups in the neighborhood.

In each of the field sites, similar deployment of the symbolic capital of the RC or VC could be observed, with different groups mobilizing it as aspects of strategies aimed at varying purposes. Where the core group in Progress held on to a socialist moral order that involved both equality of inclusion and political policing, in Rising China, divisions of class and status between upwardly mobile educated university staff, on the one hand, and laid-off workers and rehoused residents, on the other, mitigated against such a collective sense. Distinctions in “quality” were used to naturalize the unequal outcomes of people’s struggles to succeed in the new economy, and the RC workers, themselves laid off in industrial restructuring, promoted this view.

In both VCs, the ruling elite led the charge to make the villages amenable to the accumulation of economic capital. The VCs were seen largely by villagers as the space of the ruling elite. Thus they could become primarily an arena for the playing out of factional politics, as in the cases described by Yao (2009). This seemed to be the case in Zhang Family Village, as one of the opposition faction had been a member of the VC and had resigned some time prior to the election. In both villages, the ruling elite’s deployment of political labels to denigrate their critics—“reactionaries” in Zhang Family Village, “backward thinking” in Dragon Peak—pointed to continuing political struggles over the distribution of benefits from the exploitation of each village’s resources.

Other authors have noted the formation of collective moral norms, and the role these play in determining patterns of distribution and resistance. In two of the three cases she describes, Hou’s village-level “community capitalism” institutionalized rules that policed individual and family economic behavior in similarly authoritarian ways. Yet these strong
moral communities, founded on “common values and group boundaries created by community membership,” also resulted in the provision of social entitlements (2011, 51). Likewise, Tsai shows how revived traditional collective forms such as temple societies and lineages, when they incorporate local cadres, can become the mechanism for the definition of collectivist community norms that favor the provision of public goods within villages (2007).

Studies of urban workers have found similar processes of collective norm generation, with understandings of their situation and attitudes towards economic restructuring varying according to place. Hurst refers to these “coherent worldviews shaped in large part by the structurally rooted collective life experience of social groups” as “mass frames.” He emphasizes the structural production of these collective understandings, and notes that they vary according to “regional political economies” (2008, 71, 74, emphasis in original). Here I show that institutions of local citizenship like the RCs and VCs are key sites for the formation of such “mass frames,” and as such have critical consequences for how people conceptualize their entitlements and participation in the state’s projects, as well as for practices around these dimensions of citizenship.

**Conclusion**

As I show in Chapters 2 and 3, in the place where you are a citizen, you cannot be turned away: you have both the local “guarantee” and the local voice to make a claim for it. Yet this status is not solely determined by the location of hukou registration. The hukou system is both a state technology and a local cultural norm. All the places had a certain degree of discretion about who to include and even more on how to include them. The kinds of local mechanisms of collective sense-making described here shape local belonging, and condition local voice and entitlements, setting the terms of local citizenship within a social field. But these collective understandings are formed in the process of change and are often contested.

In this chapter, I have pointed to two related dimensions through which the local shapes membership: first is the formation of collectivities; and second physical place-making in the form of boundaries and centering. Both dimensions are relational within the space of the RC or VC, but are also formed in relation to other groups and places, visible and imagined, and in relation to state projects of various kinds. In both institutions, however, social recognition is central to a local, kin-inflected form of citizenship which draws on rich

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97 Hou only mentions in passing that migrant workers are excluded from this "community," and does not address this issue as a challenge to the "model."
traditions of place-based identification as well as on modern Chinese ideas about the local as a crucial building block for the nation. Those who are out of place are situated in a relation of alterity to this locally-rooted citizenship.

One aspect of the local social field relates to the character of institutions: RCs practice an inclusionary logic that seeks to achieve cohesion among residents, with RC workers and Party members as social glue. The lack of independent economic resources at their disposal means that RCs can only draw on social, political and symbolic capital to achieve these aims. However, the rise of the private economy creates spaces that can shut out these state-sponsored efforts, partly due to the relative lack of authority of the feminized sphere of RCs. Given such a context, spatial boundaries are seen as an important mechanism for producing local identity, yet these also identify “outsiders,” and construct urban space partly in contrast to an imagined rural hinterland of excluded others.

By contrast, the VCs practice an exclusionary logic that limits membership to a kin-like group of villagers so as to restrict the scope of (actual or potential) redistribution. The VCs’ control over collective economic capital makes them a key arena for the politics of redistribution. Here the questions of belonging are gendered, relating to the entitlement of married out women and their children in their natal communities. Again, gender distinctions weaken the claims that can be made by certain people on the collective. Settled village citizenship is imagined in contrast to excluded yet visible migrant laborers from less privileged locations, while the “advanced” urban is an imaginary against which local practices are measured and evaluated.

The citizenship distinctions made within the social field in each site were not just about imposing state rules, emphasizing Brown’s point that historically state and social categories have been formed in dialogue with each other (2008). Each place was the site for the formation of a local moral sociality that conditioned how people perceived and acted upon their entitlements, and how they participated in the local state’s projects. In this form of socialized governance, the specific terms of membership involved a complex blending of formal and informal authority that blurred distinctions between social and state rules. But the association of the local moral order with the institutional form of the RC or VC gave it increased power, as it drew on the symbolic capital of the state to legitimize distinctions among citizens.

Care and discipline are inextricably linked in this local citizenship, and the efforts to include those who belong are simultaneously part of ensuring their compliance with certain key rules. On occasion citizens can also deploy the language of the state to create their own
norms, challenging the local state to live up to rhetorical commitments made at local and national level through strategies that mobilize state discourses and forms of recognition for their own purposes. In these efforts, they often rely on the social and political capital they have accumulated through a history of engagement with the institution and the local elite. Yet the rationalities of the state are mediated by the specific history, space and collectivities in these local places, and, depending on the location, can mean very different things.

But places are not static: both people and structures are constantly in motion, and in formation. They represent moments in a trajectory, with sedimented history as memory and as spatial form shaping the practices of the present. They are the sites for an interplay between, on the one hand, state technologies that seek to locate people and ensure uniform administration of space, and rationalities of governance that specify roles for and distinctions among citizens; and on the other, local strategies of group formation and place-making that sometimes accord with, and sometimes resist, state projects. The resulting divisions among people and places determine what is at stake, and thus set the stage for the local politics of entitlement and belonging.
Conclusion: Locating citizenship, locating the state

In this thesis, I have used the China case to revisit some of the central assumptions of the literature on citizenship, showing how citizens and states are formed in and through the local places where citizenship is practiced, and how citizenship orders are made, re-made and contested through the local. Continuities in the historical form of local political relationships have often been retooled by national states for new purposes in the process of state-making, as I show through my examination of contemporary China. Locating citizenship in place is a productive strategy for showing how multiple scales coalesce in shaping its form and practice, and in showing how degrees of mobility and fixity are a feature of the way citizenship is constructed.

Thus I show that in Tianjin today, the entitlements of citizenship are not portable; they are attached to membership in particular places, intertwining participation and social provision. In examinations of daily practices relating to participation, entitlement and membership, I have demonstrated how nationally-mandated institutions, laws and policies relating to citizenship are realized through the local institutional settings of RCs and VCs. This citizenship order has been shaped by local experimentation, local procedural rules, local history and political cultures. Although the national state formulates social policy concepts, such as the minimum livelihood guarantee, and political frameworks, such as institutions of self-governance at the level of RCs and VCs, what this actually means for how citizenship is experienced depends on local policies, resources, political culture, history, institutions and leadership. Local citizenship also depends on personal relationships, often developed over many years, and on people’s history of political participation. The local, cellular character of this form of citizenship entails significant variation among places in both form and practice. While here I have concentrated on local citizenship in RCs and VCs, it also exists in work units and possibly in other institutional locations.

The local citizenship bonds and the security they can provide—particularly when people face a life crisis—are critical to maintaining state legitimacy in a time of rapid and destabilizing social and economic change. The socialized governance through which these bonds are realized is critical to understanding the operation of the state and its relations with citizens in China today. It combines pressure for social conformity and political reliability by relying on an overarching moral discourse that seeks to harmonize public and private
purposes, yet at the same time, it creates avenues for those governed to make claims and hold leaders accountable. The personalized, face-to-face politics of RCs and VCs means that socialized governance can be a medium for actors with formal or informal power to pursue their objectives. Although still limited, the relative expansion of freedom of expression means that as well as being institutions of governance, these institutional spaces on the edges of the state can also become spaces for the articulation of resistance and critique through what I call the “politics of gossip and talk.” Here the ways the state’s discourses, categories and institutions form spaces for politics is comparable to Chatterjee’s concept of “political society” in India (2004). This form of governance exists in distinct tension with bureaucratic-rational forms of governance, such as the notion of “ruling in accordance with law,” which is a core element of the current program of the Chinese leadership.

Although the emerging civil freedoms associated with such a rule of law are only weakly supported by regulatory instruments and legal institutions, associated economic freedoms are creating new realms in which people may be able to opt out of certain relationships of obligation to the state, while limited, situated freedom of speech allows for the articulation of claims and resistance. Although political rights are codified, the efforts of central and local governments to impose detailed scripts for the performance of these rights severely limits the uses of the formal system for claims-making and critique, yet at the same time, the state’s concentration on promoting specified scripts (“harmonious society,” “the new socialist countryside,” “the scientific development perspective”) as a means of articulating action can provide significant resources for informal claims and resistance, provided they stay within the scope of set administrative boundaries. The local character of citizenship is policed by discursive boundaries and negative examples that demonstrate the dangers of going outside the limits set. In this citizenship order, local redistribution can be contested, but the national and global terms set for those arrangements are clearly out of bounds.

However, the discursive resources set by the state in formulations such as the “harmonious society” are crucial in accessing local social citizenship. Citizens’ entitlements to social security are embedded in specific, historical, territorial relationships, expressed in the form of a “guarantee” that makes certain local level institutions ultimately obligated to provide for those connected to them. But the meaning of the guarantee is situational, and depends on a complex set of calculative practices through which need is assessed. Citizenship is always both normative and substantive, a relation between is and ought that is
constantly being negotiated through the interaction of citizens and state institutions or agents. The local is the key site for these negotiations, and the particular characteristics of local places and the groups that compose them create distinctly different conditions for them.

As I have shown, each of the four places in my study represents a distinctive social field in which forms of capital are differently evaluated, and which thus shape the strategies of groups and individuals in the accumulation, exchange and conversion of the capitals to which they have access. Despite China’s shift toward a market economy, political capital and the symbolic capital of the state remain central in mediating people’s access to economic capital, as well as in the strategies of elites for holding on to the economic gains they have already achieved. Yet not all economic capital is equal: local, national and global cultural norms privilege certain types of accumulation over others, based on visions of Chinese urban modernity that draw on global discourses. But the private economy is creating spaces that wall out the local state’s efforts to engage them, especially when these attempts are made by informalized state workers of low social status, such as the women of the RCs. The terms for the accumulation and conversion of capital in these social fields are shifting.

Collective moral orders formed in local places condition the kinds of claims people can make by mediating the governing rationalities in locally-specific ways. While the rationalities of economization, medicalization and individualization are rarely explicitly questioned, a more egalitarian moral order can make even these rationalities a logic for claims on resources. The association of the local moral order with the institutional form of the RC or VC gives it increased power, as it draws on the symbolic capital of the state to legitimate the specific local interpretation of the broader discursive rationalities. Of the two principal components of rationalities—truths and programs of action (Foucault 1991b)—the dimension of “how to go on” appears to be the most amenable to manipulation in this way.

Through my examination of the role of the local in forming the regime of citizenship in contemporary China I have demonstrated the value of a focus on identifying and describing the specific, located practices through which both state and citizens are made. In contrast to the more commonly-made argument that global, transnational and cosmopolitan features of how citizenship is practiced are eroding the nation-state, my approach reveals how the local, national and global are constructed and reshaped in the materiality and symbolic character of the places where people engage with the state and practice their citizenship.

This is not merely an inquiry into distinctions between form and substance, but a way of looking at how entities like “the state” or “civil society” are actually materialized through
and in social fields. It involves disaggregating the state, and interrogating the formation of
the national and the global through their situated incarnation in local places. It points out that
Fraser’s questions about who is represented and how (Fraser 2005) should also be
addressed to sub-state spheres of politics, and that the location of the political should be
interrogated on multiple levels. As well as locating the state, this approach suggests that
locating *citizens*—often realized through local practices of identification and place-making—
has been an understudied aspect of citizenship orders, and points to a need for more
attention to the *jus domicili* aspect of citizenship in future studies. Finally, this approach
requires more systematic attention to the interactions between social fields and the practice
of citizenship.

**Limitations of the study**

My research concentrates on RCs and VCs as sites for citizenship, but these are not
the only possible locations for local citizenship. For rural China, they are usually the only
game in town, but for urban China, a significant minority of people remains in work units that
play this role. For urbanites, citizenship anchored in RCs is a distinctly second-class
alternative. Even among RCs and VCs, there is significant variation in the form and
functions accorded to these institutions across the country, and in some locations, certain
welfare provisions may be more bureaucratized than is the case in the field sites described
here. These distinctions mean a number of questions could be asked about the various
forms local citizenship takes, and how these shape people’s sense of what this means.

A different research design could have concentrated on differently situated people
and how they practice their citizenship, thus potentially capturing a greater range in its local
scope. I do not argue that local citizenship is exclusively practiced at the administrative level
of RCs and VCs; this is an empirical question that points to issues for further study.
Comparing the kinds of interactions people experience at different administrative levels, and
the ways these shape their choices in participation as well as their sense of who is
responsible for their entitlements would be a productive extension of the current project.
Although the model of citizenship I propose would still be applicable to such an inquiry, it
would be helpful to expand further on the local meanings of some of the central concepts,
participation in particular. For example, in socialist China, work has been a key avenue of
participation, and the work place has been a central site for the politics of distribution.

In addition, this study has focused primarily on the local and national aspects of
citizenship. The role of global and transnational discourses, cultural forms and processes in
constituting the form of local citizenship could be explored further, both in the context of the field sites and more broadly in how the citizenship order is changing. I consider some of these dynamics elsewhere (Woodman 2011a), but this is an aspect of the study that requires more systematic attention.

Another issue that could be explored further, but for which the RC and VC focus did not provide sufficient entry points, is what happens when people leave their place of belonging. The writing of other authors suggests that then they become only “citizens” in a neoliberal sense: the state merely provides a regulatory regime of contracts and “neutral” institutions for its enforcement that they may mobilize in the market—if they have the cultural and financial resources to do so. For the newly rich, this means they can opt out of connections to local communities, buying security in the form of insurance and homes in gated communities. For the huge number of migrant workers facing exploitative conditions of employment in cities far from their places of residence the consequences of such a model of citizenship are often dire. If they face emergencies, they generally have to go back to their places of origin.

Neoliberal citizenship—at least on the level of welfare entitlements—also applies to some of the most affluent people in Dragon Peak Village and Zhang Family Village, with the most successful of these being cadre-entrepreneurs who could both set the development agenda and benefit from the economic opportunities so created. In fact this neoliberal version of citizenship depends on having resources: without them it becomes unsustainable, since resources are essential in dealing with unforeseen events, such as illness or accidents; with children’s education; and with failures of market-based providers to deliver on their promises. Yet this form of citizenship is dependent on the access to economic resources enabled by these people’s participation in state-oriented activities and institutions.

In relation to neoliberal citizenship, one question that might be asked is to what extent people who move actually opt out of local citizenship, and why they might do so. In fact, many people who work away from their place of hukou registration maintain their local citizenship. This raises a number of questions. Who opts out, and who maintains connections? To what extent do people actively cultivate local citizenship in their new locations, and how do they do this? Do the rich who opt out perceive entitlements differently? Would this change if, for example, they suffered a catastrophic illness and could no longer work? What are the perceived boundaries between connections involved in socialized governance and personal guanxi, if any?

Overall, the perspective of local citizenship provides a number of very promising
suggestions for further research. The present study could certainly be improved by pursuing some of them.

**Contributions of this research**

In showing how the local acts as a site for citizenship, even in a state with an avowedly unitary structure, my research contributes to theory-building on the role of the local in formal and substantive citizenship. This is a neglected dimension of a burgeoning interdisciplinary literature, and has been considered mainly as an *exception* to national regimes—as cases where migrants are accepted as citizens by cities even when excluded from national citizenship (see for example, Spiro 2010; Villazor 2010; Tsuda 2006)—rather than as a constitutive part of them. It points to ways the formation of national states is contingent on these local processes. Attention to the practices of citizenship and their spatial dimensions are an important aspect of demonstrating these relationships.

My work responds to a number of calls for more focused attention to the specific *practices* involved in the operation of the state, and the Chinese state in particular, including the effects of the official endorsement of a division between state and society (Huang 2008a; Schubert 2008; Pieke 2004). The micro-political focus of my work, and the concept of socialized governance I develop, helps to explain the dynamics of relations between people and the local state “where local governance works well and ‘noiselessly’” (Schubert 2008, 198). My elaboration of the opportunities socialized governance provides for citizens to engage with and potentially influence local state practices contributes to explaining the relatively high levels of satisfaction with government found in recent surveys (Chu et al. 2008; Shi 2008; Chen, Lu, and Yang 2007; Chen 2005; Chen 2004).

This study also adds a comparative focus on RCs and VCs as parallel institutions that have hardly been compared, with the exception of Benewick et al (2004). It offers a gendered analysis of the distinctions between the two types, a point I develop further elsewhere (Woodman 2011a). It also contributes to understanding of how different, sometimes contradictory, modes of governing in China operate together through specific local institutional practices. My study provides a perspective on what the idea of “small government, big society” means in the context of contemporary China. It shows how socialized governance connects people to the state through institutions at one remove from the formal state. This concept is analogous to the idea of the “embeddedness” of emerging environmental organizations (Ho and Edmonds 2008; Ho 2007). Ho argues these groups are embedded in a variety of ways, including personal ties of activists to state officials and
institutional links to state agencies: “Through their guanxi, NGO leaders and politicians are tied together in a symbiotic situation in which they are mutually dependent on each other: the NGOs for their legitimacy and political influence granted by the central state, while the central state relies on the NGOs for their contacts with society, and for exerting pressure on local authorities and polluting industries” (2007, 198). My study specifies the forms and practices that constitute embeddedness in the institutional settings I describe, raising the question of the variable extents of “governing at a distance” (See for example, Hoffman 2010; Jeffreys 2009; Zhang and Ong 2008) and socialized governance in practice, as well as about the relationship between the two modes in the lives of differently situated individuals, groups and places.

In his survey of literature on citizenship in China’s modern history, Culp points out the value of an approach that considers all the dimensions of citizenship together—membership, participation and rights. This is rarely done, as different aspects are generally studied in isolation. My study is the first to attempt such a “synthesis” for the post-Mao period. The genealogical approach I adopt reveals linkages between past and present institutional forms and practices of citizenship, and finds in current arrangements a similar emphasis on the civic republican elements of citizenship to that posited by Culp for the late Qing and early republican period (2007).

This synthetic approach informs my model of “local citizenship,” which I propose as a key organizing principle for the Chinese polity, rather than a phenomenon related to intra-rural migration, as Smart and Smart suggest (2001). My conception of local citizenship contrasts with the dominant approach to the subject, which is based on a national-level bifurcated system with two classes of citizenship, urban and rural, as advanced by Solinger and others (1999; Wu 2010).

The local character of citizenship I propose, particularly the idea of the "guarantee" and its institutional anchoring, adds a crucial piece to the puzzle over why the rising tide of contention over livelihood in China remains spatially and institutionally circumscribed. Although incidents of collective action have risen exponentially over the last 15 years (Chung, Lai, and Xia 2006), and contagion effects are apparent, cross-regional and cross-sectoral organizing has been mostly absent (Perry 2009; O’Brien 2008; Lee 2007, 325). This has been a key issue raised in important recent works on contentious politics in China (O’Brien 2008; Lee 2007; O’Brien and Li 2006). Lee argues that the patterns of “cellular activism” can be attributed to the state strategy of “decentralized legal authoritarianism”: this combines capital accumulation at the local level with legitimation through law at the central
level. She attributes the local nature of labor contention to the pro-business policies of local
governments that make violations of workers’ rights and entitlements “endemic” (2007, 9-12,
111-113).

As Lee shows, the exclusion of migrants from social citizenship in the locations they
move to for work elicits quite different strategies from what they might use at home. In her
comparison of worker protest in the northeastern rustbelt and newly industrialized southern
China, Lee attributes these differences to distinct urban and rural relationships with the state
(2007). Local citizenship could, however, be part of the reason for this distinction, as it is
only at home that people feel entitled to make claims on the state, as opposed to against
private parties. Repressive state policies are certainly part of the explanation for the lack of
broad-based challenges to rising inequality in China, but local citizenship also contributes:
collective action is directed at the authorities obligated to resolve the problem in question;
people go to the institutions that they know are responsible for dealing with their claims.

The idea of local citizenship, and the ways this shapes welfare provision, also
contribute to understanding patterns of inequality. The concept suggests a need to focus
research into inequality on intermediate levels between large aggregates (such as cities, or
even counties and districts) and individuals or households. Zhou points to a need for such an
approach, stating, “[T]o understand patterns and sources of social inequality in China, we
need to shift attention from individual (and extended family) basis [sic] to the corporate
bases associated with regions, groups and categories” (2009, 108). Logan and Bian
highlighted the importance of the work unit in determining inequalities in community
resources in the late 1980s (1993); so with the decline of the work unit, what other
institutional factors shape such inequalities in the new context? My work suggests some
possible avenues for answering this question.

Another aspect is to consider how local citizenship shapes the ways inequality is
experienced. Some recent studies suggest that the combination of relative equality with
fellow citizens at home and distinctions between places moderates people’s sense of
injustice about growing inequality (Whyte 2010; Davis and Wang 2009). The sense that
each person has a voice and entitlements in the particular place where they belong may
reduce people’s insecurity and feelings of grievance in the face of rapid unsettling economic
and social changes. In addition, in articulating the operation of local social fields and some
of their effects on people’s perceptions of inequality, my conception of local citizenship
contributes to a growing body of scholarship that shows how people’s sense of class
position, status and economic achievement is dependent on local, situated processes of
sense-making (See for example, Hurst 2008; Blecher 2008). It shows how these processes are not just about state categories, adding to new perspectives on the socio-cultural processes that contribute to the making of these divisions (Brown 2008).

Local citizenship may also provide a helpful perspective on economic processes, pointing to factors that statistical models have found it difficult to explain. Hermann-Pilath asserts that much research on economic disparities among places uses units of analysis that are not very helpful in explaining the reasons behind patterns of inequality. “Statistics show that determinants of spatial disparities in China have become increasingly complex over the years, and that the aggregation above a certain level leads to misperceptions of the factors contributing to divergent development” (2009, 138). Developing the concept of local citizenship in some of the ways suggested above could help to identify the specific units that might be most useful to such studies, pointing to potential synergies between qualitative and quantitative methods.

**Looking forward**

The combination of local citizenship and socialized governance creates a structure in which citizens are connected to, but at the same time, distanced from the formal state apparatus and from the arenas of regional and national politics. In the localities where they belong, they are recognized as having entitlements to the forms of collective support to which other citizens also have access, and they have the voice to make claims when these bargains are not respected. Yet what is at stake in the local is limited by the character of the specific place, including its access to political and economic resources, and these arrangements give citizens little or no say in the larger distributive arrangements, whether regional, national, or global. Such a citizenship order is evidently aimed at insulating the formal state, at regional and national scales, from the claims of citizens, separating the business of government as a rational bureaucratic process from the disorderly politics of citizens.

Citizens are located in place to make them governable, both through making them legible and through situating them in a complex net of social entanglements that blends pressures for social conformity and political compliance. But the central state’s aim of bureaucratizing welfare arrangements, professionalizing the administration of the social and establishing uniform rules for entitlements could break down this structure of intimate and socially-embedded controls. The two modes of governance seem to point in opposing directions, and as the trend towards bureaucratization continues, it may undercut or even
destroy socialized governance. Will it be possible to shift the kind of emotion-management that is currently a key feature of socialized governance into the work of bureaucratic systems that operate in a very different key? This seems unlikely, especially given the history of how recognition has been personalized in the current system of entitlements.

The importance of such recognition to citizenship is often highlighted by its absence. This dynamic is evident in a number of fields. An example is the treatment of people enslaved by brick-kiln operators in the Chinese provinces of Shanxi and Henan in recent years. In this widespread practice—cases have been uncovered in 2007, 2009 and 2010—traveling migrants are promised jobs or abducted and forced into working without pay in horrendous conditions in brick factories. Without pressure from outside, such as from families who have managed to locate the disappeared relatives, local officials in the brick factory locations have no incentive to rescue the workers, as they are non-people in that place. Similar non-recognition is also evident in other forms of trafficking of workers and children. The idea that migrants who are out of place are “floating” (流动) points to their lack of connections in the locations where they are living or working.

The importance of connectedness to recognition as a person means that anxiety about its lack is deeply felt, and shapes life strategies in a variety of ways. Situating citizenship in place, then, is not only a concern of the state, but also a key dimension of people’s perception of what security means, and of their ways of achieving it. Such a view of the practical value of interdependence is constantly reinforced by both social and political practices that reinvigorate traditional practices in distinctly modern forms.

But increased economic freedom, and the institutional forms associated with it, present challenges to maintaining the kinds of connections on which citizenship in contemporary China has depended. Where village elites have tried to sever the linkage between the collective economy and the guarantee, such as by establishing a shareholding structure, the failure of the collective to provide for the needs of members has sometimes resulted in conflict (Woodman 2011b). The trend towards divisions along class lines in residential patterns as the housing market develops points to RCs becoming a potential site for class politics. But this potential may be moderated by the feminized character of RCs, which can devalue them as spaces of politics (Woodman 2011a). However, the importance of state-mandated public spaces that foster collective sensibilities in generating oppositional frames should not be underestimated, especially when the interests of local government and these basic level organizations come into conflict. Where the social is central to daily governance, a shift in social understanding of the appropriate roles for citizens could lead to
rapid and unexpected changes in how people assess and act on the conditions they face, creating the potential for significant bottom-up mobilization, even in the absence of a “civil society” that constitutes oppositional spaces outside the state structure.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Research location and methodology

Field work and field sites
Between October 2008 and August 2009, I conducted participant observation in two residents committees and two villager committee in Tianjin. I received a US Student Fulbright Award to conduct my research in China, and was affiliated with the Zhou Enlai School of Government at Nankai University. Three out of four introductions to my field sites were arranged through professors at Nankai.

The two urban sites, which I call Progress RC and Rising China RC, are located in the central urban area of the city, in Hexi District and in Nankai District respectively. Both the RCs were considered progressive models by their respective street offices, and this was an important factor in my assignment to them. In both cases, a professor from my host university introduced me to an official at the street office who then arranged for me to be placed as a “practicum” (实习) student in the RC. I spent about two and a half months doing research in each of the RCs.

Practicum was also the rationale for my placement in the VCs, Zhang Family Village and Dragon Peak Village. The former is on the outskirts of the city proper, in Beichen District, a suburban area of Tianjin that is rapidly becoming part of the city, and the latter is in the mountainous north of Tianjin Municipality, in Jixian County. In both cases, the village leaders made the decision to accept me on their own, without apparently consulting leaders at the township level. In Zhang Family Village, I was introduced to the VC through a personal contact, who put me in touch with a relative of the Party Secretary of the VC who worked in one of the VC’s main business ventures. I spent two months observing in this VC. I first went to Dragon Peak Village as part of a group from my host university that went to discuss cooperation between the university and the village, mainly the placement of practicum students. I later asked the professor in charge of this cooperation to request that I do my fieldwork there, which he did. Since this location is about four hours’ traveling time from Tianjin city, my family lived in the village during the five weeks of my fieldwork there.

All real names of specific places and people have been changed, unless specifically requested by interview subjects.
Soon after arriving at each RC or VC, I presented a self-introduction letter in Chinese to all the people I was observing, and showed it to anyone who asked for more information about my work. This letter gave some brief information about me and my research interests, indicating that my main focus was the social welfare work of the RCs and VCs. It provided my contact information as well as that for my host and home universities. This letter sometimes elicited discussion about the social welfare role of the RC or VC, in particular, the allocation of administrative responsibilities (see Chapter 3), and, in the case of Dragon Peak Village, the view that they had “no welfare.”

Rising China RC’s territory incorporates a number of different residential and business locations. At its core are two enclosed residential areas housing staff of a major university, both outside the university’s main compound. For the RC, the most important of these is the one in which its office is located, which is also the largest. Its territory also includes a compound containing office and residential buildings for an official scientific research institute; a commercial building dominated by IT-related companies but with some residential accommodation as well; and two hospitals, a small, private one and a medium-sized public one. All these buildings have been constructed from the 1990s onwards, before that there was low-rise housing in the area. Rising China has more than 400 businesses in its jurisdiction, mostly individual or small-scale businesses.

According to the RC staff and written reports I saw in the RC office, Rising China has over 1,200 households, incorporating close to 4,000 people. Although a substantial proportion of these are university staff, many in the main compound were in the “logistics” side of the university—workers in its service and maintenance components—and some taught in elementary and high schools attached to it. Some of these workers had already been laid off from university associated businesses. There was also a significant minority of people who were “demolition and relocation households” (拆迁户)—residents of the low rise informal housing that had been torn down to build the current six storey apartment blocks. An indication of the fact that some compound residents were struggling to make ends meet was the piles of assorted recyclable junk in some corners of the buildings’ courtyards. Also, according to the RC staff, about 10 percent of the population of the compound were renters like myself.

Also included in Rising China’s territory were several research institutes. However, since these still functioned on the work unit model, the RC had little to do with them, apart from occasionally asking for contributions in fundraising drives. For example, these institutes had their own planned reproduction workers, and if there was a question regarding someone
who lived in one of the institutes, the RC worker responsible would just make a call and get the information from her. Rising China had a total of 79 Party members, but only 35 of these were attached to the RC’s branch. Judging from the people who came in to pay their dues, the vast majority of these were retired people.

My family resided in one of the compounds in the territory of the Rising China RC throughout the duration of my fieldwork, but our becoming residents there was unrelated to my fieldwork placement: we found our apartment there through a real estate agency before I had been placed there, and my adviser at my host university subsequently made an introduction for me to the official in charge of RCs in a street office, which then assigned me to this RC, without being aware that I lived there.

Progress RC is composed of three residential compounds bordering a major thoroughfare. At the core of the RC’s territory is a large compound which includes some apartment buildings constructed in the 1950s and a larger number that replaced low-rise housing there in the 1980s and 1990s. A small outlying compound composed of three buildings belongs to Progress, but is difficult to access as it is located across a six-lane road that pedestrians may only cross at certain points. Progress’s territory also includes one of the first developments of commercial housing in the city, built in the late 1990s, composed of four blocks, some high-rise, some lower. At each side of this compound where it meets the road there are some commercial entities that are included in the RC’s territory.

With just over 1,000 households, Progress’s total population is around 3,500. This is a very mixed population, without one dominant former employing work unit. The commercial housing compound includes some of the city’s *nouveaux riches* who had the money to buy into commercial housing long before everyone was doing it, but also includes a more low-rise block at the back (with no lifts) in which the people originally living on the site were rehoused. The population of the main compound at Progress is also quite heterogeneous, with some residents still living in multi-family apartments sharing toilets and kitchens with their neighbors; and some who have bought in and are living very comfortably in renovated apartments that are not far from the center of the city.

Neither of these two RCs had purpose-built offices, although at Rising China the RC occupied the ground floor of a building that had been constructed when the compound was built in the late 1990s as a center of some kind. Until 2005, the whole building was used by the property management staff, and in that year, the RC was given space to use. Prior to that, the RC had worked from a one-room apartment in the compound, as did many of the other RCs in the area. During the time of my field work, the RC had an activity room with two
small offices adjoining it, one for the Party Secretary, and one for the labor management assistants; a very small room in which a row of computers had been installed, that was almost always locked; and a small, cramped office space filled to capacity with desks and chairs where most of the RC staff worked. This room was on the side of the building, and had once been a shop of some kind. It was barely heated in the frigid north China winter, and through much of my field work was accessed from the outdoors by an ill-fitting glass-paneled interior door.

In Progress, the RC offices and activity room were in a long, low, temporary-looking building in between two of the residential blocks. The Party Secretary had her own separate small office, and all the other RC staff worked together in an open plan room, spacious in comparison to conditions in Rising China. Their desks were arrayed like counters facing the door, which was always open if someone was there. Next door was a long activity room and library, which was used for meetings, socials and dances, and seemed to be in regular use by the street office for meetings. At the end of the block was a “rehabilitation room” containing various exercise machines. This was used daily by a number of the elderly women residents, but I never saw anyone there showing people how to use the equipment.

Zhang Family Village is located on the edge of the formally urban area of the city of Tianjin, in sight of one of the urban districts, and near to a stop on the subway line. Beichen is a very large district that has parts designated as “urban” (with RCs) and parts designated as “rural” (with VCs). A substantial proportion of the village land had been expropriated by the city for housing developments in the late 1990s, and by the time of my fieldwork, two-thirds of the 4,000 plus villagers already had non-agricultural household registration, although they were still referred to in the VC as “villagers.” Some villagers had already moved into two urban-style housing compounds composed of apartment blocks, but the majority still lived in traditional-style brick courtyard family houses in a low-rise village. No one in the village still made a living from farming, and there were only a few fields remaining. The village collective had a number of businesses under a corporation, mostly rental of commercial and industrial buildings constructed by the village, including a large wholesale apparel market and an industrial park. The village corporation’s most recent venture was an upscale hotel that was part of a major global chain. In addition, there were lots of small businesses in the village, some run by outsiders, and a substantial number of villagers were individual rentiers, letting rooms in their homes or renting commercial space to some of the approximately 8,000 migrants who lived in the territory of the VC.
Located deep in the mountains to the north of Tianjin Municipality in an area traversed by the Great Wall, Dragon Peak Village is a major weekend holiday location for urbanites from Tianjin and Beijing. It is located in a nationally-designated nature reserve, and has a purpose-built access point to the very steep and rocky mountains, which tourists pay the village to enter. The village is very small, with only about 250 villagers, but it usually has several hundred outsiders working in construction, tourism and hospitality. In the past, villagers raised sheep and goats, grew fruit trees and subsistence grains, and engaged in iron-ore mining. Both animal husbandry and mining are now banned in the village, and the economy is dominated by the tourism business, with around 85 percent of the families in the village running “farmer guesthouses” (农家院) or the more upscale “mountain villas” (别墅). There is also a “mountain products” market with stalls selling dried fruit, nuts, local eggs, fresh fruit and a few handicrafts, as well as a few roadside stalls with similar offerings and a small row of kiosks selling daily necessities and snack food. There are two big times for tourism every year—the May 1 and Oct. 1 “golden weeks”—but outside those times, most visitors come only for Friday and Saturday nights, and the village is mostly quite quiet during the weekdays.

Both the VCs had large purpose-built offices with activity rooms and meeting facilities. On top of the three-story Zhang Family Village building, a sign proclaimed it as the headquarters of both the VC and the village collective enterprise, the Prosperity Corporation. The building was quite far from both the two compounds and the village where most villagers live—about 10 minutes walk—but right near the subway stop, and the hotel and two strip malls owned by Prosperity. With shiny marble floors, and a lobby decorated with a tank of big gold fish and an ornate carved screen, the building attested to the success of the village collective and its aspirations as a corporation. It had recently replaced another VC building situated within the village, also quite sizeable and new, that had become a dormitory for workers in the hotel. The previous building still had a sign reading “Zhang Family Villager Committee” on its roof.

Dragon Peak Village also had an imposing office, three stories high, draped with colorful banners running the full height of the building announcing the accolades the village had won as various kinds of “model” village. Dominating the center of the village, the building also housed a geological museum. Each of the village cadres had their own office, and there were two meeting rooms that were frequently rented out to people holding conferences and work retreats in the village. Apart from meeting rooms, there were no facilities in the building that village residents could make use of.
Neither VC provided space for villagers to congregate as did the RCs. There were no recreational facilities in them, and people only came in to conduct business. Zhang Family Village did have some recreational facilities, an old people’s association and a wrestling club, next to an earth-floored public square. But these were far away from both the old and the new VC buildings. The only social space in the Dragon Peak VC offices was a large black imitation leather sofa in the lobby where VC cadres and occasionally their friends would congregate in front of the TV and watch soap operas.

Methodologically, I started my research from the presumption that the best place to find answers to my questions was on the ground, by following the action in all its materiality and specificity, and seeking to describe processes in particular locations. As a committed skeptic, I accepted from the start that I may well have posed the wrong research questions, and had to be prepared to jettison them if they did not fit what I found. As Latour puts it, the social is made up of associations, and these need to be followed or “traced,” including in the ways they implicate and meld with non-human elements (Latour 2005). I thus began my research determined to record as much as I could in the environment around me, rather than limiting my focus from the start.

Research based on participant observation was unfamiliar to my host institutions, but I was presented to them as a student doing “practicum.” Although apparently all except for Zhang Family Village had had local student interns, I stayed longer and was more consistent in going to the RCs and VCs than seemed to be the norm. If the weather was bad, I was often chided for showing up, as if it was unnecessary for me to come so often. In Dragon Peak Village, on a number of occasions groups of students who were on “practicum” came into the VC office and had their pictures taken in front of the computers, or otherwise “helping” and were never seen there again.

I usually observed the work of the RCs and VCs on a daily basis. I openly took brief notes in a small notebook during my observations, and typed them up at the end of the day in detailed field notes. Occasionally, my note-taking was remarked on, such as when someone made a joke or a critical comment (the two were often combined), and wondered if I knew how to write it down. At some of these moments, I was asked not to write things down, but in a half-serious way. This happened most frequently in Progress, where the RC workers integrated me in a way that did not happen elsewhere, and thus talked quite critically about many issues of concern to them in my presence.
In the two RCs, my observation mainly involved sitting in the office where most of the workers did their daily tasks, and occasionally helping with administrative and other work. I also participated in activities they arranged, such as celebrations of festivals and meetings, and helped with cleaning and setting up before big events or the regular “inspections” of RCs by higher ups. In one of the two RCs, towards the end of my fieldwork I was sometimes invited to accompany workers on visits to people at home.

I also collected documents relating to the work of the RCs and VCs, photographing most of the public notices that were posted while I was working there, and reading some of the reports and papers produced by the RCs themselves that the Party secretaries in each RC there allowed me to read. Both were quite open in letting me read their material; in one location I was allowed to view anything in their general file cabinet in the Party Secretary’s office; in the other, I was given the 2008 complete file of documents to look through and wrote down pertinent information. I made copies of some documents and took notes on others. In Zhang Family Village I was shown documents explaining welfare policies and lists of welfare recipients on the VC computer. Since Dragon Peak Village had little welfare to speak of, there I relied mainly on conversations with the village cadres.

I conducted open-ended semi-structured interviews with the Party secretaries in both RCs and with the worker in each directly responsible for the civil affairs portfolio, and thus the administration of most of the welfare benefits under the RC. I also interviewed a number of residents in the two RCs, mainly minimum livelihood guarantee recipients (see Chapter 3) in Progress, who I found through the public list of such people posted monthly outside the Progress office. In Rising China, arranging such interviews proved more difficult: there was no public list, and the civil affairs worker told me that minimum guarantee recipients did not want to “expose” their situation. I did interview a son who had applied for minimum guarantee on behalf of his elderly mother, and sought other interviewees through posting a notice on a wall by the RC gate. But there were few responses to this notice.

As well as my observation at these two RCs, I visited a third RC in the city, and met staff members from other RCs in the vicinity of Progress and Rising China when they came for meetings or on other business. On a few occasions, I visited the street offices responsible for the two RCs. I talked with officials from the street offices responsible for the work of the RCs, as well as with some officials in a district-level Department of Labor and Social Security. I interviewed the director of civil affairs in the street office responsible for Progress.
In the VCs, conducting more formal interviews proved to be difficult, but I was able to carry out informal interviews with all the people involved in welfare work in Zhang Family Village, conducted three formal interviews with the leaders in Dragon Peak Village and had informal conversations with most of the other cadres there. In both VCs, I spent some time exploring the localities, chatting to local people as I went. In the small community of Dragon Peak, everyone knew who I was and I talked with a number of residents about my research and about their experience and views. Since my research at Zhang Family Village was cut short, I only had a few opportunities to talk with villagers outside the setting of the VC.

During my fieldwork, all RCs and VCs in Tianjin held their triennial elections. I observed the elections in both of the RCs, and heard a great deal of discussion around the election in Zhang Family Village, where the VC was attempting to restart an election process that had been stalled due to allegations of voting fraud. In Dragon Peak Village, the election had been completed just prior to my first visit. The fact that elections were occurring across Tianjin during the period of my fieldwork actually posed a difficulty in finding rural research sites. I was told by academic contacts that village elections were often “complicated” and that local officials were wary of having a foreigner observe in such unpredictable circumstances. Indeed, this proved to be the case in Zhang Family Village.

My being American and a PhD student put me into a high status category that created some difficulty for assigning me work at the RCs and VCs; although I offered to work as much as they wanted, in practice I was not often allocated jobs. This was particularly the case in Rising China where from the start I was called “Teacher Su.” Once, however, I was sent to the street office to do data entry on behalf of the RC: as part of the economic census, each RC was asked to send workers to help with inputting the data, and the RC workers were busy, so Party Secretary Dai asked me to go instead. Little Fang, the youngest of the Rising China workers, in particular regularly tried to stop me if I joined in with cleaning or other physical tasks that were being done, saying that I should go and “rest.” She was also the one who apparently spread rumors among the other RC workers that I was a spy for the street office, a matter discussed by two of the others when she was absent.

I tried to help with whatever the RC workers were doing. In the context of Progress, which was generally busier in any case, this was much appreciated and I established a strong bond with the workers there. I am of a similar age to most of the RC workers I encountered, and this created an immediate commonality; we spent many hours talking about different perceptions of the proper roles for women of our age in our different
environments. They were very curious about my life and about the U.S. and Canada, and I felt that answering their questions as fully as I could was a small recompense for their hospitality.

In Zhang Family Village, I spent my first couple of weeks with Director Guo, a dynamic woman with a broad, square face and short hair who was approaching 50 and thus imminently retiring from her post as deputy chair of the VC. She had already handed over her day-to-day work to Big Sister Jiang, groomed as her successor in the post of the token woman on the Committee. Director Guo seemed to have little left to do apart from read the newspaper and attend the occasional meeting, so she gave me her undivided attention, answering my questions and giving me materials to read.

After the first few weeks with Director Guo, I was allowed to go down to the office where four of the VC workers—responsible respectively for women's work, security, environment and sanitation, and welfare—had their desks. I was introduced to others by the VC staff at Zhang Family Village as “a volunteer from Canada.” Everyone thought this was very good, that a volunteer would come and work with the VC. I was not given a lot of work to do, but helped doing a number of administrative tasks, such as stamping the VC seal on documents, and once looking through the household register to check names on a list. I also helped to hand out gifts given to families with children under 14 on June 1 International Children’s Day.

In Dragon Peak, they were not sure what to do with me. My wish to actually study the operation of the VC—rather than just use my practicum as an opportunity to take a holiday—caused some consternation. Manager Zheng seemed especially worried, until I settled down into a routine. I spent most of my time in the VC sitting in the small reception office where two young women who assisted the Tourism Company did their work, but also walked around the village, and talked to the different cadres.

As a result of the election dispute, I was eventually made persona non grata in Zhang Family Village. Director Guo was unfailingly friendly and helpful to me, but she had a steely edge, and I guessed it would certainly be a mistake to cross swords with her. The only time I actually experienced it was when she called me at the end of June to tell me that I could not continue my research at the VC office.

Some township officials had come to the VC for a meeting about the elections, and were evidently surprised to see me sitting in the office. In the course of the meeting, Mr. Sun was called and came downstairs holding my self-introduction letter. The next day, Director Guo called me to cancel a meeting we had arranged, and asked me not to come to the VC
that day. She said some “serious things” had happened in the village, and I shouldn’t come any more. Township officials were all occupied by meetings and couldn’t receive me. I had been trying to arrange interviews with villagers, and wanted to interview Big Sister Jiang and Lin Hong, the VC workers who dealt directly with most welfare issues. I asked about this, and was told that it would be impossible. When I said that I would try to go to the village and find interviewees myself, Director Guo’s tone changed, and she told me sharply that I was not allowed to go to the village any more, and that I should wait for her to contact me before coming again.

Since the VC staff had done so much to help me, I decided I should respect their wishes, as otherwise I might bring more trouble down on them than I already had. Much later, just before I left China, when I went to the VC, at her invitation, to say goodbye, Director Guo told me that the Township government had ordered the VC to terminate my research, and that the leaders had been angry that the VC had hosted me without their approval.

However, this suspicion was more the exception than the rule. Yang recalls the “climate of fear” when she conducted her fieldwork in Beijing in the 1980s (1989, 20-24). I didn’t find anything like that, although occasionally it was clear that people were worried that what they said to me might get back to someone who could use it against them. In Rising China, none of the people I interviewed wanted me to record the interviews, and one interviewee noted how people had been enjoined in the past to “keep secrets.” When I first arrived in Dragon Peak, I chatted to a middle-aged man who had hurt his hip and neck on one side quite severely in a fall six years before. When I told him I was doing research on social welfare in the village, he said, “What social welfare?” I explained my research, and asked if he would be willing to talk to me about his experiences, he said he was worried about “exposing things” in the village, and looked around anxiously to see if anyone was observing our conversation.

On the whole, however, I found that after I had been around for a short while, the novelty of my presence seemed to wear off and people I was observing on a daily basis were overtaken by their own routines. As mentioned above, I became a “part of the team” in Progress (in the words of some RC workers and RC members at the conclusion of my fieldwork there), and this meant relatively uncensored conversations went on in my presence (as far as I could tell). But even in Rising China, occasionally people would discuss things in my presence as if I were not there at all, although it was also true that the Party secretary often took people away to have certain discussions out of my hearing.
Methodological issues

Research design and approach

In my research project, I set out to explore the “conditions of possibility” for citizenship in specific locations. My focus was thus not on causation but on considering how differing aspects of the citizenship nexus are conceptualized, performed, produced, justified and contested. This meant concentrating on tracing the processes through which identities are made, disputed and remade, and power is exchanged, accepted, or denied (Latour 2005). My research design was linked to my concern that observing rights and citizenship only in the context of legal institutions or engagement with social movements could easily fail to show how everyday performances ground and situate these practices. It heeded Latour’s injunction that abstractions like rights must not be allowed to float, but should be located in places and configurations of people and things and the interactions that take place (2005). It also reflected my concern to avoid focusing on the absence of categories emerging from Euro-American history, but to consider, as Kohrman suggests, what is actually produced and how (2002).

I have adopted a constructivist approach that seeks to capture the process of construction, in all its messy materiality and multiplicity. Rather than separating out the elements of the phenomenon being studied according to a series of binaries—action and context; social and natural; objective and subjective—Latour suggests research should “Deploy the content with all its connections and you will have the context in addition” (2005, 1-13, 146-147, emphasis added). Separating out the context is already making an arbitrary division between what belongs in here and out there. “[W]henever anyone speaks of a ‘system’, a ‘global feature’, a ‘structure’, a ‘society’, an ‘empire’, a ‘world economy’, an ‘organization’, the first [Actor-Network Theory] reflex should be to ask: ‘In which building? In which bureau? Through which corridor is it accessible? Which colleagues has it been read to? How has it been compiled?’” (Latour 2005, 183)

Such a focus leads inevitably to a concentration on place. I have been concerned not to reify these aspects, but to note the ways interaction takes place in and through materiality and embodiment. As Massey puts it, “[O]ne way of thinking about place is as particular moments in… intersecting social relations, nets of which have over time been constructed, laid down, interacted with one another, decayed and renewed… They are not so much bounded areas as open and porous networks of social relations” (1994, 120). This points to a dynamic picture, in which attention to location is not static. Urry emphasizes how an account that brings in materiality must observe a variety of mobilities, including those of
“people, objects, images, information and wastes.” Research that can take in the networks and flows along which these mobilities occur involves problematizing the notion that distinct national “societies” are or should be the main ordering principle of how people and territory are related, since these are “only one of various emergent levels of social life” (Urry 2000, 1-20).

Further complicating this, the past is always implicated in the practices of the present. Seeking to identify the layers of practice sedimented in institutions and places has been an important focus of my study, and I have been inspired by Bray’s approach to genealogy in his study of urban social space in China. This approach is summarized neatly in his statement on the origins of the socialist work unit: “The socialist ‘sciences’ of economy and population were layered upon the pastoral methods from Yan’an and urban traditions of collectivist oriented labor organization. It was the subtle and distinctive combination of these influences that created the danwei system of socialist China” (2005, 121).

Capturing the language of interactions, and considering how the discourses that circulate in places differ or are similar, has been an important aspect of my project. This concern arises in part from my wish to capture as accurately as possible the specific terms in which citizenship is conceptualized, including what this says about relations between national and local forms. But it also relates to my status as an outsider, and is part of questioning my own assumptions as well as those of the theoretical literatures with which I engage. Cross-national and cross-cultural research is always complicated by questions of language, translation and commensurability. As Liu writes, “I see the relationship between languages as one of the central issues that it is incumbent upon comparative scholarship to address” (1996, 2). She argues that the commensurability of language(s) assumed in bilingual dictionaries should not be accepted as a given (Liu 1999b). The meanings of key words in an inquiry may be multiple and contested, and these meanings and their histories should be brought into the picture to the extent possible. This is especially the case with such a weighted vocabulary as that of citizenship, which is loaded with assumptions derived from Euro-American modernity, as I have outlined in the Introduction.

**Data analysis**

My principal method of data analysis has been the writing of an adequate account of the processes I managed to trace in my fieldwork (Latour 2005). I have tried to be transparent in how I went about my research, and to explain my methodology and specific techniques as part of this account.
A central focus in writing this account has been “controversies” around the formation of groups, including both the discourses and spatial formations involved in these processes. Latour articulates a series of five sources of uncertainty about the ontology of the social, thus seeking to create space for accounts that can go beyond the set categories for which he derides the “sociology of the social.” These uncertainties are encapsulated in “controversies” over the nature of groups, actions, objects, facts and the types of studies to be done about them. Rather than muting these controversies, researchers should explore their “full range” and trace connections between them (Latour 2005, 21-24). The actively constructivist ideas surrounding the RCs, in particular the “construction of community,” indicates the unsettled character of the groups involved. In the VCs, constructivism was also in play, but in more economic terms. Attention to the ways embodied, physical experience and the construction of buildings, streets and so on shapes the forms of citizenship has been a key part of my inquiry. Citizenship is a construction of particular people situated in space and time.

Yet the actual always exists in relation to real and imagined other places and other times. And in my view, comparison is a staple of all inquiry, since any account involves judgments of what is similar and what is different, and generalizing labels (“state,” “bureaucracy,” “authoritarian,” “rights,” and so on) imply comparison. The subjects of my research, rights and citizenship, are inherently comparative, both in the transnational sense of drawing on experiences of polities elsewhere, and in the historical sense of being logics of a certain version of modernity.

Thus my account is explicitly comparative, in that my fieldwork has incorporated four different sites, among which I moved. But my frames of reference—particularly theoretical perspectives on citizenship—have also been a point of comparison, shaping what I noticed and wrote down in my account. Tracing the different temporal layers that intersect in the moments I observed has added an additional level of comparative complexity.

Writing an account that incorporates all these dimensions has been a challenging exercise, as the “tracing” becomes very complex given the multiple intersections present in each moment. In this process, I have been guided by the narrative logic of the controversies that arose. What seemed to me to be “controversial” is inevitably related to my own position and perspectives.

I start from the understanding that my location, history and experience as a researcher will be a central aspect of my work, and that my research contributes to forming the reality I document. Firstly, this requires that at all stages of my research—from research
design to writing—I should adopt a position of skepticism, being prepared to constantly interrogate the assumptions I bring to my subject.

But I have been concerned to uncover, as much as I could, how “the conditions of possibility” were understood in each of the locations where I did my fieldwork. Such an approach makes accessible aspects of the “hinterland” that might otherwise be obscured. This term from Law captures all the factors that make certain possibilities “thinkable and real” in a particular situation—history, beliefs, language, topography, climate etc (Law 2002, 32-36). Understanding these features is a specific challenge for a project like mine that studies one time-period. In post-socialist countries, recognizing how the configurations of the past shape the present meaning of terms like “capitalism,” “market,” “civil society,” “rights” and “citizenship” is essential (Davis and Wang 2009; Hanser 2008; Lee 2007; Verdery 1996). Otherwise it is too easy to assume that meanings of such terms coincide with those used in liberal democracies and theories emerging from their experience.

Finally, while writing an account involves bringing order to the messy reality of fieldwork—I couldn’t bore the reader with its many longeurs, for example—I have tried not to banish this disorder and incompleteness from my account. As Latour puts it, accounts need to be built on the uncertainties of the controversies around the formation of the social: “We… should find our firm ground on shifting sands.” However, these accounts will necessarily be “incomplete, open-ended, hesitant,” recognizing that “action doesn’t add up” (2005, 243, emphasis in original).

Likewise Law’s approach to method seeks to create space for inclusion of what has traditionally been silenced by proposing new “vocabularies” to describe a world which is “overwhelming, excessive, energetic, a set of undecided potentialities, and an ultimately undecidable flux.” His test of method is how well it can include realities that exceed or defy rationalist assumptions, incorporating the multiple, the different, the partially-connected, the emotional, the spiritual, and alternative world views. In particular, it focuses on being conscious of what is absent in an account, as well as what is present (Law 2002, 144). I have tried to allow such multiplicity into my writing, while still telling a good story!
Appendix B: Regulatory framework for RCs and VCs

Below I outline the common features and differences between the Organic Law on the Villager Committees99 and the Organic Law on Urban Residents Committees,100 while also pointing out some additional Tianjin municipal legislation that adds to this regulatory scheme.101

RCs and VCs are said to have “mass character”—a characteristic they share with corporatist “mass organizations” such as the All-China Federation of Trade Unions and the All-China Women’s Organization—which marks them as being outside the formal government apparatus. Their main purpose is as institutions of self-government, but they have a key role in ensuring the implementation of law, developing democracy and creating socialist material and spiritual “civilization” at the grassroots.102 Yet RCs are clearly seen as “assisting” in the work of local government, which is to “guide, support and help” their work.103 Although VCs should receive similar guidance, support and help from township-level governments, these “may not interfere with the affairs that lawfully fall within the scope of the villagers’ self-government.”104 While the Tianjin Measures on VCs repeat this prohibition, additional provisions state that VCs should “assist township-level people’s governments with developing their work, and accept and complete the tasks [the governments] assign them.”105 In the context of Tianjin, then, the relationship of the two with government was envisaged as very similar.

In the 1998 revisions to the OLVC, a provision was added requiring that Communist Party branches in the countryside exercise their role as the “leadership core,” but failed to specify the relationship of the Party branch to the VC.106 The Tianjin Measures on VCs mandates that before any major matter is brought before the villagers assembly (see below),

100 Below OLURC, NPCSC, 中华人民共和国城市居民委员会组织法, effective January 1, 1990.
101 Tianjin Municipality has passed implementing legislation for both the OLVC and the OLURC. These regulations were designed to “incorporate the actual conditions of the municipality.” Such rules were first enacted on the OLVC in 1991, but a new set of regulations was promulgated after the OLVC was revised in 1998, and those are the ones I rely on here. Measures of Tianjin Municipality Implementing the Organic Law on Urban Residents Committees 《天津市实施<中华人民共和国城市居民委员会组织法>办法》 (below, Tianjin Measures on RCs), passed January 27, 1992; Measures of Tianjin Municipality Implementing the Organic Law on Villager Committees 《天津市实施<中华人民共和国村民委员会组织法>办法》 (below, Tianjin Measures on VCs), passed September 12, 2001.
102 OLVC and OLURC, Art.s 1 & 2.
103 OLURC, Art. 2.
104 OLVC, Art. 4.
105 TMVC, Art. 4.
106 OLVC, Art. 3.
it must be discussed in the village Party organization. There is no mention of the Party in either the OLURC or the Tianjin Measures on RCs.

The central economic role of VCs is one reason for the OLVC’s guarantee of autonomy. VCs are given general responsibility for “public affairs and public welfare undertakings” in the villages, as well as mediating disputes, maintaining public order and relaying complaints to higher levels of government. But their key role is leadership of the collective economy and supporting other economic ventures in the village, with the aim of developing the “socialist market economy” in the countryside, as well as exercising stewardship of collective land. VCs are also tasked with promoting knowledge of law and policy among villagers, and ensuring that they abide by these, and generally advancing “the construction of spiritual civilization” in the villages.

In contrast to the rather limited provisions of the OLVC on their specific responsibilities, the Tianjin Measures on VCs contains an extensive list, with 11 sub-articles that include such tasks as economic planning; promoting education, culture, science and technology and sport; and ensuring that villagers fulfill their duties under the law regarding planned reproduction, military service and compulsory purchasing of agricultural products.

The tasks of the RCs highlight their role as a conduit for state laws, policies and priorities. They are to promote compliance with state laws and policies among the residents; carry out public works; mediate people’s disputes; protect social order; assist local governments in carrying out work that includes sanitation, planned reproduction, support for veterans and education of children and young people; and pass on residents’ opinions and suggestions to local governments. There is an emphasis on providing services to residents. RCs and VCs are also supposed to carry out “supervision and education” on people (usually ex-convicts) who have been deprived of their political rights according to law. Additional elements in the Tianjin Measures on RCs emphasize their contribution to social cohesion and the maintenance of social norms: they must promote “civilized families, civilized buildings, civilized residential compounds,” as well as family harmony and

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107 TMVC, Art. 3.
108 OLVC, Art. 2.
109 OLVC, Art. 5.
110 OLVC, Art. 6.
111 TMVC, Art. 9.
112 OLURC, Art. 3.
113 OLURC, Art. 4.
114 OLURC, Art. 18; OLVC, Art. 26.
neighborhood solidarity.\textsuperscript{115} They are given particular responsibility for women, children and the elderly, and for ensuring overall social order.\textsuperscript{116}

In terms of their composition, the law requires that RCs be composed of five to nine members, including a director, deputy director(s) and ordinary members, with these members to be chosen through elections.\textsuperscript{117} In their work, they are to use “democratic methods,” with the minority following the decisions of the majority, but are not to give orders or use force.\textsuperscript{118} They may set up subcommittees for various areas of work, such as mediation, public order and so on.\textsuperscript{119} In Progress, the person responsible for each area of work had to set up such a committee. The Tianjin Measures on VCs lays out a similar committee system for VCs.\textsuperscript{120}

VCs are envisaged as smaller, with three to seven members in total, but otherwise having the same structure as RCs, although there is a requirement that they must include “an appropriate number” of women, as well as representation of any ethnic minority group resident in the village.\textsuperscript{121} A similar stipulation on women is absent from the OLURC. As Benewick et al point out, this reflects a problem of underrepresentation of women in VCs, as well as the need for their participation due to the VC’s role in implementing the planned reproduction policy (2004). The law specifies that VC members must be elected in a competitive vote where there are more candidates than seats available, and members may not be appointed.\textsuperscript{122} The general outline of an electoral system is laid down in the law, and it also includes a number of provisions that mandate democratic procedures.\textsuperscript{123} These include the requirement for “open administration of village affairs” that mandate public reporting of certain types of information such as accounts.\textsuperscript{124} The Tianjin Measures on VCs include additional items that must be publicized, including the amount and usage of funds provided in compensation for land requisitioned by the government.\textsuperscript{125} Throughout the OLVC, there is an emphasis on democratic procedure. An article requiring that the VC operate by majority rule states: “In its work, the villagers committee shall adhere to the mass line, give full play

\textsuperscript{115} The Chinese word for civilized used here is 文明, echoing the political orthodoxy of the time that called for building “socialist spiritual civilization” 社会主义精神文明.

\textsuperscript{116} TMRC, Art. 4.

\textsuperscript{117} OLURC, Art. 7 & 8. These may take the form of a direct vote, voting by heads of households, or voting by head of residents’ small groups. The Tianjin Measures on RCs also specifies these three forms, but states that the Municipality will enact rules for the conduct of elections. However, it did not do so until 2002.

\textsuperscript{118} OLURC, Art. 11. This provision was not included in the Tianjin Measures on RCs.

\textsuperscript{119} OLURC, Art. 13.

\textsuperscript{120} TMVC, Art. 7.

\textsuperscript{121} OLVC, Art. 9.

\textsuperscript{122} OLVC, Art. 11.

\textsuperscript{123} OLVC, Art.s 11-16.

\textsuperscript{124} OLVC, Art. 22.

\textsuperscript{125} TMVC, Art. 23.
to democracy, carefully heed dissenting opinions, and unremittingly exercise persuasion; it
may not resort to coercion, commandism, or retaliation.”

Both VCs and RCs are supposed to be accountable to a sort of local council, the
“residents’ assembly” or the “villagers’ assembly.” This is supposed to meet at least
annually and “supervise” the work of the committee, and is usually composed of
“representatives” of the residents/villagers, although it could include all adult
residents/villagers. The assembly may draw up a local charter for the village or residential
area. The Tianjin Measures on RCs state that the responsibilities of the residents’
assembly include hearing work reports, dissolving the RC and holding by-elections,
supervising the RC’s management and use of RC property. By contrast, for VCs there is a
substantial list of specific matters on which it is required to consult the assembly, including
local taxation, the launching of collective enterprises and the distribution of their profits,
infrastructure and public works, projects to be contracted out and distribution of village land
for housing.

The Tianjin Measures on VCs give a larger role to a villagers representative assembly,
rather than the villager assembly. As its name suggests, the former is composed of
representatives of villagers, while the latter includes all adult villagers, or at least heads of
household. While the OLVC provides for a villager representative assembly in cases of
villages with a large or dispersed population, an element incorporated in the 1998 revision
of the law (Saich 2004), the Tianjin Measures provide additional detailed provisions, clearly
indicating that this is the preferred form. These regulations require that representatives to
such an assembly be elected, set the proportion of representatives to households, specify
that it meet at least four times a year and that it may be entrusted to deal with most major
village business by the villagers’ assembly.

In terms of their geographical scope, for VCs the provisions are vague, stating that
the specifics will depend on the population of the village and the pattern of residence, and
should “facilitate self-government.” Villager assemblies can propose changes, although
these must be approved by higher levels. For RCs, the law sets a size based on

126 OLVC, Art. 24.
127 OLURC, Art.s 9 & 10; OLVC, Art.s 17 & 18.
128 OLURC, Art. 9; OLVC, Art. 17.
129 OLURC, Art. 15; OLVC, Art. 20.
130 TMRC, Art. 19.
131 OLVC, Art. 19.
132 OLVC, Art. 21.
133 TMVC, Art.s 16-22.
134 OLVC, Art. 8.
population, although this has now been substantially enlarged in the process of reviving and relabeling RCs as “communities.”

Rates and sources of operating expenses and staff salaries for the RCs are determined by the local governments supervising them, with some of these funds coming from any income generated by the RCs. Office space for the RCs is provided by local governments. The Tianjin Measures for RCs specifies that buildings housing RCs should be included in the municipal plan, and states that those RC workers who are retired but do not have a secure income can receive a “subsidy” for their work.

While the OLURC specifies that government organs, organizations, enterprises and public institutions do not participate in RCs, they are required to support their work, and if matters of concern to these entities are discussed by the RCs, they should send representatives to attend the meetings. Any local government department that needs the assistance of RCs or their subcommittees must first obtain government approval for this, but these departments can give “professional guidance” to RCs. Reflecting the reality that RCs are seen as subordinates by government agencies, the Tianjin Measures on RCs state that government departments should provide funds for tasks they assign to RCs, and if they do not, the RCs may refuse to do the work. They also specify that the Department of Civil Affairs is the supervising agency of the RCs, thus indicating the proper chain of administrative command.

By contrast, local governments are not made responsible for any of the expenses of running VCs. Local people’s congresses are required to ensure that the law is implemented. However, the Tianjin Measures on VCs state that when local governments enlist VCs to assist in their work, they should “provide the necessary conditions and take on the relevant responsibilities according to law.”

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135 According to OLURC Art. 6, RCs were to be composed of between 100 and 700 households. The TMRC Art. 9 specified 500 to 700 households as the size. However, in the Ministry of Civil Affairs documents related to the “community construction” program, the size specified is substantially larger, from 1,000 to 3,000 households, thus being based on the amalgamation of several RCs (Yan and Gao 2007, 222-236).
136 OLURC, Art. 17.
137 TMRC, Art. 24.
138 OLURC, Art. 19.
139 OLURC, Art. 20
140 OLURC, Art. 6.
141 OLURC, Art. 3.
142 OLVC, Art. 28.
143 TMVC, Art. 4.