WOMEN AND CIVIL SOCIETY:

by

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Abstract

In searching for evidence of civil society in contemporary China, scholars have used empirical data or case studies on social organizations during the reform era to assess whether there is indeed the emergence and development of civil society in China. However, there is a lack of literature on the importance of Chinese women organizing and the future of civil society in China despite the recent surge in number and diversity of women organizing and women’s organizations in the reform era. This thesis explores the complex issues surrounding the current debate on the future of civil society in China from the perspective of Chinese women organizing in the reform era from 1978-2003. Through in-depth studies on the All-China Women’s Federation, the Shaanxi Association for Women and Family, the Maple Women’s Psychological Counseling Center, the Rural Women Magazine and the Network Against Domestic Violence, this thesis analyzes the legal, leadership and international influence, three of the major factors that facilitate or inhibit the growth and development of women’s organizations in China and recommend strategies and policies that will help strengthen the growth and development of women organizing and women’s organizations and therefore the development of civil society in China.
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List of Abbreviations

ACWF All-China Women's Federation or Fulian
CASS China Academy of Social Sciences
CCP Chinese Communist Party
CDC Beijing Cultural Development Center for Rural Women
CIDA Canadian International Development Fund
CLS China Law Society
DWSN Domestic Workers' Support Network
FWCW Fourth World Conference on Women
MoCA Ministry of Civil Affairs
MWC Migrant Women's Club
MWPCC Maple Women's Psychological Counseling Center
NADVC Network Against Domestic Violence in China: Research, Intervention and Prevention
NEUR Provisional Regulations on the Management and Registration of People-Organized Non-Enterprise Units
NGO Non-governmental organization
NGORC NGO Research Center at Tsinghua University
NWC National Women's Congress
PRC People's Republic of China
PTC Practical Skill Training Center for Rural Women
RSO Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Groups
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>RWM</td>
<td>Rural Women Magazine</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRAWF</td>
<td>Shaanxi Association for Women and Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
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<td>WRI</td>
<td>Women’s Research Institute</td>
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Introduction

Nowadays if you walk down the boulevards in Wangfujing District, the city center of Beijing, you see mega shopping malls, five-star hotels and glass-paneled high rise office buildings lining both sides of the roads. You see men in business suits and women carrying designer handbags going in and out of these modern buildings, and traffic jam is as common here as in any other metropolitan cities in the world. If you take a taxi in Shanghai, you will be greeted by an English recording when you get on the taxi, the meter in the taxi works and you will be given a machine printed receipt for your taxi fare when you get off the taxi. The People’s Republic of China (PRC or China) has indeed transformed in the last twenty five years, especially economically. There is no question that China has achieved miraculous economic development, but how about ‘civil’ development? More specifically, is there a developing civil society in China, and if not, are the existing social, economic and political factors conducive for the emergence of civil society in contemporary China? Finally, is there a role for Chinese women in the development of a civil society in China, and if so, what are the relationships between Chinese women and Chinese civil society?

Civil Society is a Western concept. Although discourses on civil society were vibrant in Western theories during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the relationship between society and the state was being transformed with the growth of capitalism and market economy, the term civil society died down and was seldom used by the late nineteenth century. However, the concept of civil society was taken up again by Antonio Gramsci after World War I and “revived in the late 1970s by Eastern European intellectuals/dissidents” (Madsen 1993, 188). According to some scholars, global debates on the
concept of civil society have returned "with a vengeance" (Colás 2002, 25) in the last two
decades after the Tiananmen incident in June 1989 and the fall of the communist regimes in
Eastern Europe. Some scholars take it even further and argue that civil society has established
itself as a "significant, even paradigmatic concept in the field of development policy and
practice" (Howell and Pearce 2001, 1). Civil Society has returned in the social science discourse
variously as public sphere, condition of democracy, social movements or autonomous
associations. And even though civil society is a Western concept, the notion of civil society has
been "openly and widely discussed" (He 1997, 2) in China since the 1980s, especially before and
during the June 4 Tiananmen incident in 1989.

Nevertheless, debates on civil society have peaked in the early 1990s, with conferences
and special issues in scholarly journals dedicated to the debates on civil society such as the
symposium on civil society in China held in Toronto in 1995 (Brook and Frolic 1997, 4), and
volume 19, number 2, April 1993 of the Modern China with a special emphasis on civil society.
Then global discourses on civil society subsided again in the latter part of the 1990s. In the
mean time, economic, legal and even political reforms have continued in China. The Chinese
state has revised the PRC Constitution and amended the laws to extend the rights and protection
of individuals; privatization and marketization of the economy has continued at full speed;
attempts have been made to separate the party from government; autonomy has been returned to
the household level with the implementation of the household responsibility system; and some
central power has been devolved to the local levels.

Further, some Chinese are helping to lay the foundations for the development of civil
society in China by their actions. In the beginning, it was the elites, the professionals and the
entrepreneurs who were organizing out of their own initiatives, but in recent years, more
autonomous associations or social clubs have been formed across the country, and some of them have spread from the cities to the countryside. In this rapidly changing reform era, what is the role of Chinese citizens, especially Chinese women in relation to the state and society, particularly in the development of a civil society? To address this question, this thesis will assess the situation of civil society in China from the perspective of the organizing of associations in China, specifically the organizing of women’s organizations in contemporary China. Similar to Jaschok et al., I have opted to use the term “women organizing” instead of “women’s organizations” in this thesis “to reflect a feminist analytical approach as to how women organize themselves to address gender and other inequalities in society, and to improve their own and/or other people’s lives” (Jaschok et al. 2001, 6) by focusing on the process of activities and networking within and between organizations, state institutions and international institutions as well as the transformation of women’s organizations and women themselves in the course of organizing.

Although many scholars have questioned the “autonomous” status of associations in China and some scholars such as Baogang He state that Chinese “autonomous” organizations are neither completely autonomous from the state nor completely dependent on the state (He 1997, 7-8), I will argue that although totally autonomous and independent political associations are not yet allowed in China, more autonomous and independent economic or social associations, especially small ones, have found their space in Chinese society, and that from the study and analysis of some women’s organizations in the reform era from 1978 to 2003, there are evidences that the number of women’s organizations have been growing during the reform era and some of these organizations have become more autonomous and democratic and are contributing to the emergence of multiple civil societies in China. However, the presence of
civil societies in China varies greatly among regions and is only in the embryonic stage. The majority of these civil societies are state-led civil societies “created by the state, principally to help it govern” (Frolic 1997, 56) but other smaller, more autonomous civil societies are emerging in China, especially since the mid-1990s. Although most of these smaller civil societies are still weak and lack resources, some of them are growing in size and strength. While the civil societies that are led by dissenters are very much suppressed, those that are led by state actors and not in opposition to the state are growing stronger everyday, aided by international funding and support. These state-actors-led civil societies emphasize more autonomy from the state but do not challenge the state’s power or legitimacy.

The aims of this thesis are three fold. First, it will demonstrate that there is indeed an emerging civil society in China from the perspective of social organizations, particularly women’s organizations in contemporary China. It will use the sociological concept of civil society, referring to civil society as the “intermediate associational realm” (White et al. 1996, 3) or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which is one of the most popular models of civil society today. Data and information on these groups are based on the Statistics in on Chinese Women: 1949-1989), 250 Chinese NGOs: Civil Society in the Making as well as scholarly case studies/articles, newspaper articles and information contained in the websites hosted by these organizations. Second, it will analyze some of the major factors that facilitate or inhibit the growth and development of women’s organizations in China: the legal, leadership and international factors. It will show that under the state’s hegemonic rule, the leadership factor is the dominant factor for the growth and development of women’s organizations. Third, it will assess the prospects on the development of civil society in China and offer some
recommendations on the further strengthening and development of civil society in China in future.

Since the term civil society is "amorphous" (Schwartz 2004, 34) and can be used in "contrary ways" (Friedmann 2004, 2), Chapter 1 will begin by giving a brief overview on the various discourses on civil society, including the Western and Chinese discourses, and the feminist perspectives. This overview will demonstrate that "voluntary associations," whether they are economic, social or political are the mainstream nowadays. And in the case of contemporary China, civil society is where associations interact civilly, not in opposition to the state, and working for the public good.

Chapter 2 will evaluate some of the major changes and development in Chinese laws and regulations on social organizations during the reform era from 1978 to 2003. This evaluation will provide a basis for an understanding of the state's strategies to control and limit social organizations' autonomy as well as the women's organizations' coping strategies to survive, develop, and even grow more autonomous. This chapter will show that even though the overall number of women's organizations has continued to grow, the growth and development of women's organizations are concentrated in a few municipalities/provinces depending on the ingenuity of the leaders of these women's organizations and the patronage of the leaders of the local state agencies, particularly the support of the senior cadres of the local Women's Federations. It will show that the state's attempt to control the autonomy of social organizations through the "rule by law" has intentionally or unintentionally strengthened the needs for patronage.

Chapter 3 will elaborate on the leadership factor. By analyzing existing literatures on some of the women's organizations in China, ranging from the official All-China Women's
Federation to the more autonomous organizations such as the Shaanxi Association for Women and Family, the Maple Women's Psychological Counseling Center, the Rural Women Magazine and the Network Against Domestic Violence in China, it will identify evidences of the relationship between the growth and development of these organizations and their leaders who are also state actors. It will also point out how the various coping strategies are adopted by these leaders to the benefits of their organizations.

Chapter 4 will analyze the international factor: the role of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, as well as other international influence including funding on the growth and development of social organizations, thus the development of civil society in China. It will suggest that while the focus or priorities of funding agencies affect the development of organizations, identification of and funding to state actors who are also women activists as well as smaller, grass roots organizations will make the most impact on the development of organizations and civil society in China.

The conclusions in Chapter 5 will assess the future prospects for the development of civil society in China, specifically the important role of women and women's organizations. It will also make recommendations on how to further strengthen the state, women's organizations and international NGOs' tripartite relationship for the development of a more robust civil society in China.
Chapter 1: Women, Civil Society and the Chinese Context

Nearly three decades have passed since the end of the Chinese Cultural Revolution led by Mao Zedong and the beginning of Deng Xiaoping's era of reform. However, despite a series of reforms implemented in the social, economic and legal sectors in its efforts to "modernize" and *jiegui* (to link up or connect with international movements or trends), China continues to lag in its political reform and remains one of the most authoritarian countries in the world. While China seems set to become the world's next super power, China observers and Western scholars today still struggle with debates over the future of democracy in China, including the future and development of civil society in the most populous country in the world.

While China is undergoing tremendous changes, the meanings and features of civil society have also changed in the global discourse in recent years. According to Richard Madsen, definitions of civil society have been broadened in the 1980s to include nearly all forms of non-state social activities and are no longer confined to economic forms of associations as in the 1980s. Madsen asserts that "It is clear that the emergence of civil society (broadly conceived) fatally undermines rigidly authoritarian regimes" (Madsen 1993, 189). And Madsen is not the only scholar to link civil society with democracy. Other social scientists are also emphasizing the relationship and, more importantly, the contribution of civil society to democracy, democratization or good governance. As well, many scholars are assessing civil society or democratic consolidation by analyzing different forms of associations: Gordon White, Jude Howell and Shang Xiaoyuan selected social associations for their study of civil society in China (White et al. 1996, 6); while Baogang He chose to focus on political associations (He 1997, 4).
Up until the mid-1980s, many scholars including Chinese scholars were skeptical with applying the notion of civil society to China. However, with continued economic reform and marketization before and after 1989, private share of the economy has increased steadily. At the same time, there has been an emergence of the formation of various associations in the PRC though they are still mostly controlled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and only “partially autonomous from the state.” China scholars such as Dorothy Solinger opines that civil society has not emerged in China due to the hazy relationship between social associations and the state (He 1997, 11), and in a different but similar fashion Frederick Wakeman cautions that it might be overly optimistic to perceive a civil society in China due to a general lack of awareness of the notion of “rights and responsibilities” among Chinese citizens (Wakeman 1993, 134). On the contrary, Baogang He finds that some specialists argued that “whether civil society is defined by autonomous organizations, entrepreneurial activity, or autonomous public discourse, there is clear evidence of an emerging civil society in contemporary China,” (He 1997, 46) while Vivienne Shue states that some scholars even “concluded” that an emerging civil society is taking shape in China after over a decade of reform (Shue 1994, 82). In view of these contradictory views, how do we assess if there is indeed an emerging civil society in contemporary China and if so, is there a “connection between a renewed civil society and the development of a democratic public sphere” (Madsen 1993, 189)?

Even though the concept of civil society has been debated over the last two hundred years, civil society is still an ideology, a concept. The definition and nature of civil society is fluid and changing (Shue 1994, 83; Colás 2002, 25), and the boundary between civil society and the state is blurry and is being constantly re-drawn (He 1997, 12). Since the concept of civil society has
been contested, debated, challenged, suppressed and supported, a reflection on the various
discourses on civil society will be useful.

An Overview of Various Discourses on Civil Society

Major Western Theories on Civil Society

The ancient Greeks valued political virtues and “conceived the polis as the arena where
men became moral beings and put the common good before their own” (Howell and Pearce 2001,
20). The Greek model of civil society as a politically constituted moral community with the
ultimate goal of achieving a harmonious and socially just society dominated Western Europe for
many centuries (Islamoglu 2002, 1891). Civil society as a political arena or a political
community where individuals are free to make rational decisions for the common good is
therefore the first form of civil society.

In the sixteenth century, the term civil society was used to describe the individual rights
of the elites to oppose the autocratic monarch. Individual rights, especially the rights of the
“elites” to oppose the “absolutist” power of the monarch began to emerge. This influenced the
development of a new concept of civil society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with
the rise of the modern states simultaneously with capitalism, as well as attempts to separate the
state from society. As a result, civil society was conceived as a space for self-governing
autonomous bodies outside or sometimes even in opposition to the state and this became the
second form of civil society (Islamoglu 2002, 1892). These two major forms of civil society
continue to influence the discourse of civil society today.

On the other hand, different understandings of civil society have been put forward by
some major theorists in the last two to three hundred years due to changing political, economic
and social environment. For the purpose of this thesis, these major discourses on civil society

are divided into the economic approach, the dissent/revolutionary approach and the democracy approach though there is some overlapping among these three approaches, and some of the theorists such as Marx or Hegel also straddle the three approaches. It is noteworthy that although the three models adopt different approaches, the relationship between state and society are relevant in all three instances.

*The Economic Approach*

With the rise of capitalism and market economy since the eighteenth century, the discussion of society as an “economy” has dominated the Western world. Though Adam Smith (1723-1790) and Karl Marx (1818-1883) have been credited for helping to define civil society purely in economic terms, it was John Locke (1632-1704) who actually laid the ground for the “civilization” of economic development, the formation and accumulation of private property, and economic autonomy. His ideas were further taken up by G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), Smith and Marx. For Hegel, the self-regulating, entrepreneurial economy relatively free from the domination of the state is one major component of civil society. Hegel’s concept was further developed by Smith who argues that civil society is a civilized society made up of “self-regulating and interdependent networks of economic relations among individuals and groups, originating in the decisions of individuals competing in markets for goods, labor and capital.” A firm believer of the doctrine of *laissez faire, laissez passer*, Smith proposes that the economic activity of the civilized society and the political sphere of the state should be separated and argues that the market could be trusted to distribute resources equitably if individuals could be free from economic intervention by the state. Although he has faith in the market forces, he nevertheless proposes that the civil state has the duty to provide justice, security and protect private property in the civil society (Islamoglu 2002, 1893).
On the other hand, based on Hegel's association of civil society with tensions between market and private interests but viewed from a different perspective, Marx challenges Hegel and Smith's theory that markets were self-regulating and could be trusted to distribute resources equitably and advocated that "only a transformation of material conditions including the abolition of private property" (Islamoglu 2002, 1898) could the tensions be overcome. Due to the preeminence of economic reform including privatization in China and the current criticisms on the weaknesses of the economic approach including failure to protect the poor and the disadvantaged, the economic approach proposed by either Marx or Smith is not a suitable approach for the development of civil society in China.

The Dissent/Revolutionary Approach

Though not distinctly promoting conflict or revolution, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was one of the first Western philosophers to romanticize people rising up against "evil autocracy." Apart from the romanticization of people's revolutionary power, Rousseau also argues for social harmony through the force of another people's power, and that is to use a universal will to transcend the wills of individuals to achieve "social unity" (Calhoun 2002, 1898). Rousseau therefore identifies more with the democratic approach that emphasizes consensus and common goods than with the dissent/revolutionary approach that stresses conflicts and revolts.

Thus the dissent/revolutionary approach is best represented by Karl Marx who believes that society should be transformed through conflicts between different interest groups, class struggles and the abolition of private property. He also insists on the separation of state and society and he envisions a totalitarian state possessing all economic and political powers. But the most controversial and problematic issue with Marx is the fact that he challenges the notion
of civil society as a sphere of freedom and unity (Calhoun 2002, 1898). The Marxist theory is so destructive for civil society that Baogang He even posits that the Marxist ideology nearly destroyed civil society in communist countries (He 1997, 55).

On the other hand, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) perceives civil society as the site where “independent institutions” of civil society and the state negotiate for the “hegemony of the ruling class” (Islamoglu 2002, 1895). However, Gramsci’s notion of civil society is “ambiguous and contradictory” and has been used to either emphasize the oppositional position of civil society and the state or demonstrate the hegemonic control of civil society by the state (He 1997, 178). In any case, the first model is not acceptable to the Chinese state and the second model is too oppressive for the development of civil society. Therefore the dissent/revolutionary approach is not useful for the development of civil society in China.

The Democratic Approach

The democratic approach is by far the most popular model today. As pointed out earlier, Rousseau is one of the early advocates of the democratic approach by perceiving the force of the universal will for the collective good and the use of reason (He 1997, 178). Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) takes another view and he conceives civil society and the state as co-existing and indispensable of each other. He believes that “civil society cannot function without the state” while the state “will not be complete” without a functioning civil society (He 1997, 53). For Kant, debates on state policies could help to restrain the absolute power of the state while legitimizing its power at the same time (Islamaglu 2002, 1898).

With rapid expansion of autonomous charitable societies in the eighteenth century, John Ferguson (1732-1816), one of the thinkers of Scottish Enlightenment, puts forward the idea of civil society as “networks of self-governing and self-regulatory voluntary associations.”
Ferguson believes that the autonomous voluntary associations would be able to “engender” civility which he thinks is the basis for “social cohesion” (Islamoglu 2002, 1893). Thus Ferguson pioneers the notion of civil society comprising voluntary and autonomous associations, and civility as the basis for social cohesion. Similarly, Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) also promotes and stresses the role of voluntary associations, not so much in engendering civility but in providing services to the people as a check and balance to “administrative despotism” in view of the state’s nearly monopoly of public services including education, health care and welfare (Islamoglu 2002, 1895).

But by far the most influential and controversial thinker of the democratic approach is Hegel. “Subjective freedom” is an important issue with Hegel and he was unequivocal that individual freedom and autonomous public participation are necessary for the elimination of inequality which will persist or even accelerate with the growth of capitalism and market economy. And according to Howell and Pearce, Hegel was the first thinker to conceive civil society, the state and the market as integral building blocks “of the Western project of modernity” (Howell and Pearce 2001, 22).

However, some of Hegel’s theories are contradictory or even controversial. While individual freedom and autonomy remains a core issue with Hegel, he is also adamant of the state’s “primacy over other spheres of society” while insisting on allowing civil society “to retain certain autonomy from the state” (Colás 2002, 41-2). Some scholars using the democratic approach are of the view that Hegel’s endorsement of the need for the state to intervene in civil society for the public good is problematic for the analysis of the relationship between civil society and social movements. As well, for Hegel, civil society seems to be both “the problem
(egoistic individualism of commercial self-interest), and part of its solution (social integration)” (Howell and Pearce 2001, 23).

Hegel’s most important contribution to the notion of civil society is his theory of civil society which proposes two major concepts. First, Hegel posits that “independent association and public opinions” are two major components of civil society and that social organizations have a role in mediating the political relationship between the individual and the state. Second, Hegel points out the important role of “conscious, reflexive individuals” in the building of modern civil society (Colás 2002, 42). These two concepts form the basis of most discussion on civil society and democracy today. Since China already has a culture and history of associations, though most of them not totally autonomous and since the democratic approach is more socially just than the economic approach and does not challenge state power or promote conflict like the dissent/revolutionary approach, the democratic approach using the model of voluntary organizations as a tool may be most useful for analyzing the development of civil society in contemporary China.

**Chinese Discourses on Civil Society**

As alluded in the beginning of this thesis, civil society is a Western concept and is alien to China. In fact, Huri Islamoglu, a political economist and historian states that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the discourse of the “civilized” Europe in the West created the notion of the “uncivilized” non-Europe, meaning the East (Islamoglu 2002, 1893). Hegel even “theorized China as a state without society” (Brook and Frolic 1997, 3). In more recent years, scholars such as Marie O’Brien posit that “China has no history or experience with a civil society” due to the absence of a democratic culture (O’Brien 1998, 7). Also, from the historical perspective, Frederic Wakeman refutes the claims on the emergence of a public sphere in
eighteenth and nineteenth century China by deconstructing Rowe’s analysis of nineteenth century Hankow and Rankin’s case on Nanxun (Wakeman 1993, 113-128). Heath Chamberlain also finds Rowe and Rankin’s approach to demonstrate the presence of a civil society in Chinese history by the expansion of the public sphere after the Taiping Rebellion problematic because they conflate the terms society and civil society. Since the increase of local elite controls may have the effect of “reinforcing parochialism and traditional patriarchy outlooks,” Chamberlain thinks that they may have in fact deterred the development of a civil society (Chamberlain 1993, 204). And even though there was a fledgling existence of a quasi-civil society independent of the state in the early twentieth century, (He 1997, 20-1) the development of a civil society was blocked by cultural factors, factionalism, civil war, Japanese occupation, and revolutionary dictatorships including the nationalist government and the Maoist state.

Since civil society is a Western concept and is alien to China, Chinese discourse on civil society is highly influenced by Western ideas. However, if debates on civil society in the West is inconclusive and contradictory, as evidenced from the above overview, is it useful to discuss this Western “ideology” of civil society in contemporary China? More importantly, is it relevant to apply this foreign concept of civil society to a country that has no culture or history of civil society?

Although some scholars have indeed rejected the notion of civil society in contemporary China because it is foreign (Brook and Frolic 1997, 4); dismissed the emergence of civil society in China because of the hazy relationship between social associations and the state (He 1997, 11); or argued that civil society has not emerged in China because the social forces are not yet able to combine as a “counterbalance against the state,” (He 1997, 49) the fact remains that debates and discourses of civil society is lively in China, and the number of associations, whether they are
totally autonomous or semi-autonomous, have grown substantially in contemporary China despite the continuing domination of the Chinese state.

Due to the Chinese state’s hegemony, ideological constraints on capitalism, and negative connotation of the term “bourgeoise,” Chinese scholars have used the Marxist doctrine in various ways to promote the concept of civil society during the early period of reform in the 1980s. For example, Shen Yue uses the Marxist approach to justify market and private sector in China and to draw distinctions between bourgeoise and civil society while Rong Jian, Tong Xin and Yan Qiang argue that “the state should give power back to society which should have final control over state affairs” by referring to Marx’s model of the Paris Commune (He 1997, 39).

However, not all writers agree with the Marxist approach. Some Chinese intellectuals including Jin Guantao, Yan Jiaqi and Fang Lizhi therefore started a “new civil discourse” in China where politics and social practices are discussed and even rejected, while other writers such as Liu Zhiguang and Wang Shuli made use of Rousseau’s philosophy to argue that Chinese citizens “should have a strong citizenship consciousness” and that they should have “natural rights independent of the state” (He 1997, 39-40). Wu Jiaxiang, an “advocate of neo-authoritarianism,” proposes that China should adopt the notion of “profession society” (zhiye shehui) whereby “income is distributed according to merit and contribution,” and where “the individual is liberated from oppression and political power is limited” (He 1997, 41). These various discourses on civil society using different approaches and perspectives gave the semblance of an emerging civil society in China.

Discourses on civil society subsided for a while after 1989, however debates on civil society revived in the early 1990s with the state’s continuous reform and relaxation of policies, albeit mostly in the economic sphere. One of the Chinese writers who emphases the economic
side of civil society is Xie Weihe who argues that a “redistribution of economic resources” will facilitate the development of civil society. Still other writers such as Deng Zhenglai and Jing Yuejin agree that although state intervention is necessary for the redistribution of income and resources, they also stress that the state should be limited to the legal and economic sphere in their “theory of benign interaction” between civil society and the state (He 1997, 51). Further, as a strategy to develop Chinese civil society, Deng and Jing suggest adopting a “gradual two-step approach or two-phase development” whereby the state will implement reforms from the top and members of society will co-operate rationally from the bottom leading ultimately to members of society to “participate in and influence state policies, and set up positive interactive relationships with the state” (He 1997, 53). Therefore, debates on civil society in China have been vibrant, various and even contradictory, and the state’s increased tolerance indeed helped the discourse on civil society to be truly bai hua qi fang (let a thousand flowers bloom), one of the pre­conditions for the emergence of civil society. So what do feminists and Chinese feminists think about the concept of civil society?

Feminist Perspectives on Civil Society

The term “civil society” is highly gendered. The development of the concept of civil society in the West is based on practical and theoretical exclusion of women. Aristotle views the state as consisted of the interaction of individual citizens (the male Athenian property owner) in their political and economic capacity. Hegel’s ideal civil society is made up of male bourgeoisie and his claims that man has “substantive life” in the state and civil society while woman pursues her “substantive destiny” in the family exclude women from public debates in the public sphere (Phillips 2002, 72). Other democratic theorists are equally gendered. For example, de Tocqueville identifies civil society with “political association,” and political associations have
always been the "boys’ clubs" and male-centered. Finally, when major theorists such as Rousseau, Ferguson or Smith refer to the "public" or analyze the conditions of "human beings," they normally mean men and not women.

Feminists therefore challenge the distinctions between the public and the private sphere which perpetuate the exclusion and oppression of women, and civil society was not "a significant organizing category for feminists" (Phillips 2002, 72). However, notwithstanding the historical gendered and oppressive elements of the concept of civil society, feminists have become attracted to civil society in recent years because in modern context, civil society refers to "the terrain of voluntary associations that exist between economy and state," a realm where women are especially active and thus "seem peculiarly woman-friendly" (Phillips 2002, 73 & 76). With the increasing number of voluntary associations being established every day, many of them women's organizations, women are also increasing their share in the management and participation in these associations. Even political associations are no longer dominated by men. And in the event of women being kept out of the "public," feminists would propose a network of "counter-publics," that is, other self-governing collectives (Phillips 2002, 79). More importantly, most feminists advocate autonomy, pluralism, equality, inclusion, participation and agency, and they believe that these qualities can be found in the ideal civil society. For some Chinese women activists, especially the intellectuals and the elitists, they are making use of the CCP’s rhetoric on gender equality to address the "regressive" status of Chinese women during the reform era compare to the pre-reform era by establishing women’s organizations to help other Chinese women.

The foregoing overview and analysis demonstrate that the notion of civil society is nuance, ambiguous, changing and inconclusive. However, there are two common themes that
continue to emerge in the various debates, theories and practices proposed by leading thinkers. The first is the “state” and versus “society.” This concept of civil society is articulated by the Greeks as a politically constituted moral community with the goal of achieving a harmonious and socially just society; in the eighteenth century in the attempts to separate the state from society; by the economic theorists to separate the economic activity of the civilized society from the political sphere of the state; by the dissent/revolutionary theorists on the separation of state and society or even society versus state; by the democratic theorists as a product of both state and society, albeit sometimes with tensions, but also with integration; and finally by the feminists as a sphere between state and economy where women are having an increasing role to play.

The second common theme in the notion of civil society is “autonomy,” used variously as autonomous, independent or voluntary. Again, autonomy is valued by the Greeks in their notion of the autonomous moral beings; in the eighteenth century as self-governing autonomous bodies outside or sometimes even in opposition to the state; by the economic theorists in their notion of economic autonomy; by the dissent/revolutionary theorists to pursue the forming of independent institutions in opposition to the state and by Marx who challenges the notion of civil society as a sphere of freedom and unity; and finally by democratic theorists and feminists in the formation of voluntary and autonomous associations.

A quick inventory of current literatures on civil society indicates that “voluntary associations,” whether they are economic, social or political are indeed the mainstream nowadays. Madsen points out that in recent years, civil society has been broadly defined as “almost any form of social activity independent of the state” (Madsen 1993, 189). Similar to Madsen, Larry Diamond also notes that civil society includes a wide spectrum of organizations, both formal and informal and he categorizes them into seven types, namely the economic,
cultural, informational and educational, interest-based, developmental, issue-oriented, and civic
groups (Diamond 1994, 6). So most contemporary social theorists agree that civil society is
where autonomous associations interact civilly, not necessarily in opposition to the state, and
working for the public good. Finally, even though Philippe Schmitter states that the “mere
existence” of social organizations are not sufficient evidence for the existence of a civil society
since these organizations can be “uncivil,” or “manipulated by public or private actors,”
(Schmitter 1996, 3) he also points out the significance of the emergence of something resembling
“transnational civil society” in recent years to intervene in “neo-democracies” due to the
networking of non-government organizations mostly based in “established” civil societies
(Schmitter 1996, 18). As will become clear, the case of women organizing in China during the
reform era has been led in part by some Chinese women’ organizations aided and supported by
international NGOs, foundations and quasi-governmental agencies.

Development of Social Organizations and Civil Society in China during the Reform Era

In the past twenty five years, some scholars have used empirical data or case studies on
social organizations in China during the reform era to search for evidence of the emergence of
civil society. In a study of civil society in post-Mao China, Gordon White uses the sociological
definition of civil society to argue that there is a growing sphere of “intermediate social
associations” in China possessing the basic characteristics of a civil society. However, White
surmises that these social organizations which he categorizes into four strata: “the caged sector,”
“the incorporated sector,” “the interstitial,” and “the suppressed sector,” encompasses diversified
sectors ranging from progressive to reactionary, liberal to ultra-leftist and legal to illegal
including triad societies and may bring chaos rather than smooth transition to democracy in their
struggles for power (White 1996, 208-217). In his discussion, White overlooks the increasingly important role of “the incorporated sector” where new social organizations with more autonomy and not in opposition to the state have grown exponentially in the last few years. According to a research, it is estimated that the number of private nonprofit organizations in China is 1,039,170 in the late 1990s (Ma 2002 b, 319). Their sheer number and diversity cannot be ignored.

Minxin Pei’s empirical analysis of Chinese civic associations based on the patterns of growth and changes in these associations leads him to conclude that they “do not yet constitute a full-fledged civil society” (Pei 1998, 315). Although Pei’s paper provides a broad understanding of China’s civic associations by detailed analysis of data and comparison between civic associations in China and Taiwan, he does not include in his analysis the role of international influences, specifically the effects of international funding for projects in China which exceeds $100 million each year since the 1990s.

By a study of and interviews with the All-China Women’s Federation (ACWF) and some new women’s organizations in China, Jude Howell concedes that the space for non-governmental actors have expanded in the reform era and women’s organizations in China have grown rapidly although “The regional fragmentation of women’s groups points to the more general unevenness of civil society” which she attributes to restrictive government regulations (Howell 2003, 207-8). But Howell fails to explain why limitations imposed by the government have been unable to curb the growth of women’s organizations or the uneven growth of women’s groups. For example, the number of women NGOs in Beijing recorded by the 250 NGOs in China: The Making of a Civil Society has grown from one in 1988 to eleven in 2003, comprising 35 percent of the 31 Chinese women NGOs contained in the report.¹

¹ Two mass organizations, i.e. the ACWF and the China Women’s Development Fund have been excluded in the calculation.
Finally, B. Michael Frolic posits that there is a “dual civil society” emerging in China: one that emphasizes democracy and the rights of autonomous groups which is not quite developed, and another more dominant “state-led civil society” which is created by the state to help it govern (Frolic 1997, 56). Frolic’s “state-led civil society” is based on the assumptions that the new organizations and groups are part of the state; they assist in the development of civil consciousness and that they function as intermediaries between state and society. However, Frolic’s state corporatist approach focuses on the state’s intention to exert control on society and risks obscuring the reality that the state’s capacity to control is waning and more and more autonomous associations are sprouting in various parts of China. These new, more autonomous organizations have their own agenda and are not necessarily the transmission belts of the state.

Therefore, there are obvious gaps in the current literature on civil society in rapidly changing China. Following the call of Madsen “to find ways of assessing the qualities that contribute to a civil society,” (Madsen 1993, 190) this thesis will attempt to fill in the gaps and shed some lights on the complex issues surrounding the current debate on the future of civil society in China. Through some “snapshots” on the ACWF as well as on some more autonomous women’s associations, it seeks to find out some of the reasons for the success and growth of these associations as well as problems and issues they have to face, and recommend policies to further strengthen the growth and development of more autonomous women’s associations in China, thus the development of civil society in China.

Chapter 1 has pointed out that the legal factor is one of the major factors that directly foster or inhibit the growth and development of social organizations, particularly women’s organizations in China during the reform era. This chapter will therefore focus on the legal factor by giving a brief overview of the changes and development in Chinese society as well as changes made to the regulations on social organizations from 1949 to 2003.

This chapter will demonstrate that in the case of women’s social organizations in contemporary China, patronage and various strategies including coping strategies help explain firstly why some of the older, more established women’s organizations have been able to grow more autonomous and develop horizontally and secondly why the number of new, more autonomous women’s organizations has grown. This growth and development have continued in spite of the government’s effort to tighten control over them through the enactment of the “Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Groups,” (shehui tuanti dengji guanli tiaoli) (hereafter the 1989 RSO) in October 1989; a nationwide investigation of social organizations in 1991 whereby all social groups were required to re-register; the suspension of registration in early 1997; and the promulgation of two sets of even stricter regulations, the new Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Groups (shehui tuanti dengji guanli tiaoli) (hereafter 1998 RSO) and the Provisional Regulations on the Management and Registration of People-Organized Non-Enterprise Units (minban feiqiye danwei dengji guanli zanxing taioli) (hereafter 1998 NEUR) on October 25, 1998. In general, activists and their organizations have become more “regulated” by the requirement of having a sponsoring unit, but
they have also maneuvered strategically by making use of the “general flexibility of the system” and finding a sponsoring unit that would be of “the greatest benefit and the least cost” by giving a lot of freedom to the subordinate groups and charging the minimum fees (Wesoky 2002, 164). Thus state-level units have been given two roles, first by imposing limits on any perceived subversive activities and second for facilitating organizing by granting legitimacy to the groups.

1949-1977: Provisional Rules of 1950

After 1949, the government gradually nationalized all land, property, enterprises and co-opted or eliminated all autonomous organizations including those providing social welfare services. Political groups or ideologically undesirable social groups were banned while eight big (ba da) mass organizations were created by the CCP party to help transmit and implement state policies to special constituencies including women, youth, writers and overseas Chinese. During this period, education, employment, residence and even marriage and fertility were either controlled by the state or fell under its watchful eyes. Thus the state was almost in total control of every aspects of society ranging from social, cultural, economic to political during these thirty years of the pre-reform era.

Since groups independent of the CCP or the government were not allowed to exist, there were no laws or rules governing the registration of organizations except for a set of loosely drafted provisional rules promulgated by the State Council in 1950. According to one report, the number of associations was around 6,100 in 1965 (HRIC 2003, 22). This figure included a small number of “private” organizations such as the Chinese Medical Association and the Chinese Red Cross that represented the educated elites, and mass organizations such as the ACWF which was the only women’s organization and has the mandate to represent all women in China. The small
number of organizations as well as the lack of diversity was a clear indication that China was a totalitarian country and the CCP was the dominant player during this period.

**1978-1988: The Continuation of the Provisional Rules of 1950**

Since 1978, the gradual implementation of economic reform, especially the shift from planned to market economy, brought changes to the social landscape of China. On the one hand, the more liberal atmosphere made full state control more difficult to maintain. On the other hand, various reforms including price reform, land reform as well as ownership reform created an increasingly diverse and differentiated social structure and the country was faced with skyrocketing number of diversified needs and grievances. Thousands of groups with various interests, including research groups and salons in the universities, sprung up across the country.

Under these conditions, Chinese society enjoyed ten years of minimum interference from the CCP. Approval and registration of social organizations were carried out at various levels of government departments in a “fairly flexible process” and the number of associations rose to some 200,000 by 1989 (Liang 2003, 11). The increase in number as well as diversity of social organizations during the 1980s reflected new social and economic interests arising out of market reform, the growth of the private sector and a more liberal cultural and intellectual climate. However, the rapid growth in numbers or diversity did not mean that state control had been relaxed.

During these ten years of “heyday” for organizing, periodic crackdowns on “illegal” organizations were carried out and sometimes these crackdowns were even considered a “top political priority” for the CCP. For example, the numerous autonomous organizations formed to push for democratization during the Democracy Wall movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s were suppressed when the CCP ordered a crackdown on all “illegal organizations and...
publications” in the early 1980s. The growth of new associations again fell drastically in 1983 due to the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign organized by conservatives against increasing “economic and political liberalization,” but this subsided in early 1984 with the acceleration of economic reform (Pei 1998, 299). But on the whole, the Chinese state did not know how to deal with the rapid growth of organizations since this was a new phenomenon in the history of the PRC. This was reflected in the absence of both a regulatory policy and an official bureau responsible for the registration and management of social organizations. Later, the former director of the Division of the Social Organizations government at the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) would regretfully refer to this time as “a chaotic period when there was no rule to follow and no person in charge” (Ma 2002 b, 309).

The biggest women’s organization in China is the ACWF which enjoyed a monopoly in carrying out work on women before the reform era. As the official agency of the CCP, the ACWF had worked in line with the CCP’s directives and acted as the CCP’s transmission belt for its policies on women. But the decline of the work unit system (danwei) had made it harder to organize and motivate women through administrative measures, and its capacity was also increasingly constrained by its limited funding. With a total of 68,355 branches across the country (Statistics on Chinese Women: 1949-1989 1991, 576), the ACWF was clearly unable to serve the interests of all women. And the ACWF has been left with a fundamental dilemma since the early 1980s. On the one hand, the CCP expected the ACWF to continue its role as a transmission belt between the state and society and to help protect and maintain stability. On the other hand, there were pressures from women and women’s groups who wanted the ACWF to be a real representative of their interests. When the ACWF was unable to meet the women’s needs, women’s began to self organize across the country. According to Jin Yinhong, women started to
organize themselves into groups on the basis of occupation, profession or age from 1984. By the late 1980s, it was estimated that there were over 2,000 women's organizations in China (Jin 2001, 131). Although most of these organizations were institutional members of the ACWF, they were voluntarily organized by their members to network and promote their own interests. Most importantly, they broke the monopoly of the ACWF (Zhang 1996, 488-9).

Major challenges posed by the rapidly growing number of women's organizations as well as the rapidly changing social landscape forced some of the leaders of the ACWF to gradually change their way of thinking and the ACWF began to pay more attention to women's studies when it was apparent that the process of reform had brought to the surface many problems related to marriage, family and gender differences. In 1984, the ACWF established a Research Office in its headquarters in Beijing to examine problems women encountered in the reform era. Other provincial levels of the Women's Federation soon followed in establishing women's research centers. However, many local Women's Federation offices had problems with insufficient funding and lack of interest or personnel in theoretical research (Gao 2001, 195) and some women state actors, including cadres inside the ACWF who wanted to pursue women's studies, decided to organize outside of the ACWF.

It was in this context that Gao Xiaoxian, then a deputy director of the Research Office of the Shaanxi Women's Federation founded the Shaanxi Association for Women and Family (SRAWF) in June 1986. The SRAWF was one of the few first generation women's organizations that were established prior to the rush to establish women's organization during preparation for the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW). From 1986 to 1989, the SRAWF organized two training workshops on women studies, a forum and two meetings of a monthly women's salon before it halted its activities after the Tiananmen event.
1988 was a “watershed” for Chinese women. This year witnessed the first massive laid off of workers from state-owned-enterprises (xiagang), and in most of the cases, women workers were the first to go. In an effort to assist women who had been laid off work and to find out more about women’s issues, Wang Xingjuan, Prof. Jia Xiaoming and a group of women intellectuals founded the Women’s Research Institute in Beijing (WRI) in October 1988, another of the handful of first generation women’s organizations. Similar to Gao, Wang and Jia are also state actors. Wang is a retired journalist who had worked at the Xinhua Daily, Chinese Youth Daily, and the Beijing Press while Jia was the Director of the Mental Health Guidance Center, Beijing Institute of Technology (Palmer 1998, 21). Thus from the brief overview of the two cases mentioned above it would appear that some of the women’s organizations founded during this period were interested in research in women’s issues and some if not most of them were founded by state actors. These state actors were either scholars at state education institutes or senior cadres at state institutions. Legal factor was not relevant during this period of “chaos.”

So what was the CCP’s reaction to these various organizing and perceived “chaos”?

Even before the Tiananmen incident in 1989, the state had started to reassert some control over social organizations in view of their spectacular growth and diversity in the reform era. The first regulatory step was taken in September 1988 when the State Council approved the Methods for the Management of Foundation which laid out the scope of work and finance of a foundation. In the same year, the State Council approved the unification of the registration and management process for social organizations under the MoCA. After the tragic incident of the Tiananmen, the state clamped down on all social groups that were seen to be politically threatening and hurried to promulgate a set of rules to better govern social groups.

In the aftermath of the Tiananmen event in June 1989, the MoCA rushed to issue document no. 43 in October 1989. Thus the "Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Groups," (shehui tuanti dengji guanli tiaoli) (hereafter the 1989 RSO) replaced the 1950 regulations. This new document stipulated that all social organizations (shehui tuanti) including associations (xiehui), federations (lianhehui) and friendship societies (lianyihui) have to register with their county-level Civil Affairs department. The 1989 RSO also outlined the detailed requirements for registration and the scope of activities and sources of funding. In particular, two "corporatist" provisions of the 1989 RSO limited the abilities of more independent organizations to register. First, Article 9 required all associations to be affiliated to and sponsored by a supervisory body (guakao danwei) before they could register with the MoCA. Second, Article 16 stipulated that only one organization can represent a particular interest or constituency within the same administrative jurisdiction essentially granting recognized social groups a monopoly of representation.

The 1989 RSO therefore gave local Civil Affairs departments more administrative power in their management of social organizations. However, the regulations were sometimes ambiguous and there were frequent discussion and debates among cadres on what exactly were permitted or not permitted (White et al. 1996, 105). For instance, the 1989 RSO did not outline the details of the duties of the sponsor so many social organizations were able to operate with minimal or sometimes no interference from their sponsors. It is noteworthy that instead of passing a law in the National People's Congress, the government had chosen to rely on administrative regulations to govern social groups and that the application of these regulations varied among different regions due to different interpretation at the local level, indicating the CCP's intention to give its administration more flexibility in the regulation of organizations. As
well, the CCP can tighten or loosen regulations more quickly and easily than a set of law which takes time to enact and pass through the Congress.

Further regulations issued in the early 1990s "prohibited the organization of associations along religious, separatist, or gender lines" (Howell and Pearce 2001, 141). Thus new women's organizations as well as women's organizations that were set up before 1989 were required to be registered or re-registered under a larger "non-gendered" body. For example, the China Women's Journalists Association and the China Women's Lawyers Association became a second-level association under the China Journalists Association and the China Lawyers Associations, subordinating gender interests to other interests such as professional interests.

The negative effects of these regulations are very noticeable in the growth pattern of social organizations. The overall number of social organization in China nearly halved from some 200,000 in 1989 to 115,738 in 1991 before rising again to 186,956 in 1996 (Liang 2003, 11; Law Yearbook of China 1992, 1997). Some scholars, however, speculate that the actual number of social organizations is much larger than the registered number as some have not bothered to apply for registration whilst some are waiting to be registered. Surveys in 1994 estimated that Anhui had over 800 "illegal social organizations" and Hubei over 600. A report revealed that in June 1995, only 13 of 100 non-profit foundations in Yunnan had formal approval to operate while a 1996 report suggested that around 20,000 social organizations were operating illegally nationwide (Saich 2000, 136). One MoCA official even admitted that in the urban area, the number of unregistered social and cultural groups was probably more than registered social organization (Ma 2002 b, 320).

Obviously, the 1989 RSO did not have any negative effects on the ACWF, the official women’s organization. On the contrary, the requirement of a sponsoring unit in the registration of social organizations gave the ACWF even more power over other women’s organizations. But some of the non-official women’s organizations have been able to maintain or even expand their autonomy by maneuvering strategically and using various coping methods including patronage, negotiation, evasion, circumvention and international influence/connection/pressure. In the China context, patronage means making and maintaining useful connections (guanxi) with some prominent figures or state agency/agencies. The most notable case of patronage in women organizing is Xie Lihua, the founder of Rural Women Magazine (RWM) (formerly known as Rural Women Knowing All), who signed up Wu Qing, a Deputy to the Beijing’s People’s Congress and daughter of the well-known female writer Xie Bingxin to be a co-initiator and adviser of the RWM (Jacka 2002, 13). The RWM was founded in 1993 under the sponsorship of the ACWF and has been a legal social organization since its establishment.

Other women’s organizations have also selectively adopted various strategies of negotiation and evasion in dealing with the government to arrive at more beneficial terms for their organizations. Since the SRAWF was affiliated to the Shaanxi Women’s Federation and its founder Gao Xiaoxin was a senior cadre at the Shaanxi Women’s Federation, it was able to continue its existence without registering under the 1989 RSO. As for the WRI, it changed its name to the Maple Women’s Psychological Counseling Center (MWPCC); changed its registration from non-profit to for-profit (Zhang 2001, 164) and set up the first women hotline in China in 1992 with funding support from the Ford Foundation (Web page of the MWPCC). However, both the MWPCC and the SRAWF were very quiet in the aftermath of the Tiananmen incident and did not embark in any major activities until 1992 when international funding
became more widely available in preparation for the FWCW. In the mean time, numerous women’s groups emerged in the months before and after the FWCW and they were tolerated without registration because the state needed to demonstrate some non-governmental activities for the NGO Forum that was held in Beijing simultaneously with the FWCW.

The art of circumvention of the rules and regulations at the local level is best illustrated by the case of the Network Against Domestic Violence in China: Research, Intervention and Prevention (NADVC) which has remained un-registered since its establishment in the mid-1990s. The NADVC was founded by Chen Mingxia, a professor at the Law Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and a group of professionals, and they have refused to register the NADVC because “the process was too lengthy and was becoming increasing difficult, if not impossible, to complete” (Keith et al. 2003, 44). The NADVC was able to exist as a non-registered social organization because it was affiliated to the China Law Society (CLS). And, more importantly, like Gao and Wang, Chen and the other co-founders of the NADVC are mostly state actors who are able to negotiate with the CLS for patronage and linkages for overseas funding (Keith et al. 2003, 14).

It is evident from the above analysis that the state wanted to reassert control over social organizations by more stringent regulations. However, some of the women’s organizations were able to evade registration under the 1989 RSO through patronage and some other women’s organizations avoided the restrictions imposed by the 1989 RSO by other coping strategies such as seeking a business registration or registering as a “secondary organization” of an established institution. One of the factors that emerged during this period that really facilitated the growth and development of women’s organizations in China was the hosting of the FWCW in 1995.
In the meantime, the CCP was faced with challenges on its legitimacy as well as pressures to further reduce the government bureaucracy and the cutting back of more government functions principally as a result of rapid reform and the need to curb government spending. To avoid unrest or social instability, the CCP finally recognized there was a need to expand the social organization sector to fill the vacuum left by the government’s shrinking functions (Saich 2000, 128). In 1997, Jiang Zemin, the CCP General Secretary, stressed the need to “cultivate and develop” what he termed “social intermediary organizations” in his speech to the 15th Party Congress. Luo Gan, State Councilor and secretary general of the State Council also called for the need to expand “social intermediary organizations”. However, neither journalistic nor academic review of the Congress and Jiang’s speech highlighted his comments on “social intermediary organizations” in their reports (Saich 2000, 128). This may be an indication that there was no consensus among the rulers either on the need to expand “social intermediary organizations” or the strategies of implementation. In any event, two new sets of stricter and clearer regulations were drafted and approved by the State Council and enacted on October 25, 1998 in an effort to close off the various loopholes in the 1989 RSO.


The 1998 RSO and the 1998 NEUR provide a clear example of the attempt to incorporate social organizations more closely with existing party-state structures by subordinating second-level social organizations to first-level organizations (national organizations) through supervision or patron-client relations. From the perspectives of people organizing, these two sets of regulations made five major changes to the 1989 RSO. First, the 1998 NEUR covers a newly-invented category of non-profit groups, extending the registration of control from social groups to all non-enterprise initiatives (HRIC 1999, 16). Under the 1989 regulations, one of the most
popular strategies for evasion was for a social organization to register as a business under the relevant industrial and commercial bureau because registration as a business operation required a minimal management structure with a high degree of autonomy. However, the 1998 NEUR closed off this loophole.

Second, Article 28 of the 1998 RSO and Article 20 of the 1998 NEUR state clearly the role and responsibilities of sponsors to “supervise” and “guide” the affairs of the social group or organization to ensure that the “supervisee” complies with the PRC Constitutions, Laws and national policies. Third, Article 10 of the 1998 RSO suggests that a group must have at least 50 individual members, or 30 institutional members; has a fixed location for operation as well as asset or funding sources of 100,000 yuan or more for a national organization and at least 30,000 yuan for a local organization while Article 8 of the 1998 NEUR, though relatively less stringent, states that the organization should have an office and unspecified “necessary” organization structure and qualified personnel. Fourth, Article 3 of the RSO required that all social groups also be legal persons (faren) meaning that social groups are directly legally liable and can sue and be sued. Fifth, Article 19 of the 1998 RSO and Article 13 of the 1998 NEUR prohibit national groups from establishing any kind of regional level branch office, thereby severely restricting the coordinating capacity of any social groups or non-enterprise organizations from setting up any branch offices (HRIC 1999, 17-8). In view of the additional hurdles posed by 1998 RSO and the 1998 NEUR, especially on minimum asset and number of members, the number of registered social organizations fell from 181,318 in 1997 to 165,600 in 1998 (Website, China NPO) before stabilizing around 133,000 in the early 2000s.² More significantly, only

²According to the figures provided by the MoCA at an international conference on “Development and Administration of Non-profit Organizations,” held in Shanghai in November 2002, some 129,000 social organizations were registered by mid 2002. Also registered were 82,000 non-profit enterprise units, that is, social
9,088 applications (27%) were approved out of a total of 33,560 applications for registration compare to the investigation exercise that was conducted in 1991, when 118,691 social groups applied for registration and 89,969 (75%) were approved (Law Yearbook, 1992 and 1998). On the other hand, the CCP is seen to be more receptive to the growing importance/legitimacy of the “social intermediary organizations” by its endorsement for the establishment of the NGO Research Center at Tsinghua University (NGORC) in 1998.

While the 1998 RSO and the 1998 NEUR give the ACWF mandate to supervise all women’s organization, it is questionable whether the ACWF could do the job properly over some 3,500 women’s organizations (Saich 2000, 134). The new regulations have therefore further the needs for patronage or guanxi, created huge barriers for individuals or groups with low income and no connections, and generated more income for the ACWF and other national organizations (first-level organizations) that are allowed to supervise second-level organizations because the former usually receive a “fee” or “levy” to give the latter legal status and political protection (Ma 2002 a, 124) even though “supervision fee” is forbidden under the regulations.


While the drop in the number of social organizations could be due to various factors including merging or non-registering, the new regulations might also have the effect of forcing people to organize into larger groups of people with similar interests. Social organizations could also use networking and establish similar social organizations across geographical boundaries. For example, the Friends of Nature (FN), a prominent Beijing based environmental organization has limited its membership to 1,500. Instead of increasing its membership or establishing more organizations carrying out social service activities of a non-profit nature, run by enterprises and institutional work units, social groups or private individuals using non-state assets.
offices, the FN has encouraged those who are interested in environmental protection to set up their own groups or organizations (Schwartz 2004, 39). So, what were some of the strategies that were adopted by the women’s organizations so that they could continue to survive and to pursue their own agenda?

Funding from Hong Kong Oxfam enabled the SRAWF to finally set up an office and purchase office equipment and the SRAWF registered in 1999 under the sponsorship of the Shaanxi Social Sciences Federation and the supervision of the Shaanxi Women’s Federation (Gao 2001, 203). Despite the various restrictions of the new regulations, the SRAWF has continued to expand horizontally and extend its activities. With initial funding from the Ford Foundation, it founded the Shaanxi Women Law Studies and Legal Services Center, the first such center in Northwestern China in March 1999 and established the Counseling Hotline on Domestic Violence in May 2001 with funding assistance from the U.S. Global Fund and Hong Kong Oxfam (Website, SRAWF; 250 Chinese NGOs, 101).

The NADVC has remained un-registered but was formally established under the CLS as a “secondary organization” (Keith et al. 2003, 44). Taking advantage of its affiliation with the CLS, the NADVC continued to work across discipline and geographical area by networking with domestic and international organizations, think tanks and local universities. In defiance of the 1998 RSO and the 1998 NEUR, its experimental projects have been extended to selected rural and urban areas.

Finally, the RWM is the most prolific of all the women organizations. Since its founding in 1993, it has established the Migrant Women’s Club in April 1996, the Practical Skill Training Center for Rural Women in October 1998, the Beijing Cultural Development Center for Rural Women in 2001 and the Domestic Workers’ Support Network in 2003. Xie, founder and Deputy
Editor-in-Chief of the RWM, has been able to circumvent the 1998 RSO and the 1998 NEUR’s restrictions that only one organization can represent a particular constituency within the same administrative jurisdiction due to her close relation with her patron, her status as a state actor, and her ingenuity of using various terms in the names and purposes in the founding of additional organizations though they all provide services to rural women. Though it is possible that these additional organizations were formed to get more funding or expand Xie’s power, it is more likely that they were established to give Xie and the RWM more autonomy to pursue their agenda. These will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

3 Xie Lihua is known to be very close to some leaders in the central government, including Wu Qing, a deputy to the People’s Congress. More details will be provided in Chapter 3.
Chapter 3: Creating Civil Society in China: Some Case Studies

As previously noted, some of the multiple civil societies in China are the creation of state actors using various strategies and aided by international funding, training or other resources. These state actors have taken the "political opportunities" (McAdam 1996) and "economic opportunities" (Sperling 1997) that are available during the reform era to organize (Wesoky 2002, 31-4). Incentives for Chinese women's organizing are created by "political opportunities" in the form of more liberal government policies as well as government's decentralization process during the reform era as well as "economic opportunities" in the form of the gendered nature of layoffs which adversely affected millions of Chinese women. Dissatisfied with the generally lower status of Chinese women during the reform era compare to the pre-reform era, Chinese women activists are using the CCP's own discourses on gender equality to criticize the CCP's underachievement in eliminating gender discrimination (Honig & Gail Hershatter 1988, 308; Wesoky 2002, 55). No longer contented with the CCP's rhetoric, women's activists began to form women's organizations to help other Chinese women: to raise Chinese women's consciousness/self awareness; to raise women's status; to fight inequality; and to seek influence over government policies.

While genuinely independent and fully autonomous social organization generally had a "short life-span" in China even during the reform era, there are a wide range of social organizations with varying degrees of autonomy which have been able to exist and even "to thrive" (Wesoky 2002, 160-1), contributing to the emergence of civil society in China. Those women's organizations which are semi-independent and affiliated to the ACWF have more resources and support from the ACWF and the state, but have less autonomy and contribute less
to the development of civil society; while those which are more independent have to struggle on the perseverance of their founders/leaders, membership fees, and last but not the least, overseas contribution and support, but have more autonomy and are contributing more to the development of civil society.

In this chapter, five case studies of women's organizations will be used to assess how successful they have been in creating civil society in China. Specifically, this chapter will demonstrate the major role of the leaders of these women's organizations in helping their organizations to expand and grow more autonomous despite various restrictions and regulations imposed by the state. The five cases that will be discussed in detail in this chapter are the ACWF, a national women's organization; two first generation women's organizations, namely the Shaanxi Research Association for Women and Family (SRAWF) and the Maple Women's Psychological Counseling Center (MWPCC) (formerly known as the Women's Research Institute); and two second generation women's organizations founded around the time of the FWCW, the Rural Women Magazine (RWM) (formerly known as the Rural Women Knowing All) and the Network against Domestic Violence in China (NADVC). These five women's organizations range from the least autonomous ACWF, to the more autonomous MWPCC, SRAWF, RWM and NADVC. Whilst four of these women's organizations are based in Beijing where most women's organizations are located, the SRAWF is located in Shaanxi province in northwestern China. Since the ACWF is by far the largest and most prominent women's organization in China, it will be used as the first case study.

**The Case of State-Led Leadership: The All-China Women's Federation (ACWF or Fulian)**

The ACWF was founded on April 3, 1949 as a "mass organization" dedicated to the "mobilization and representation" of Chinese women. Since there is no government department

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4 According to Naihua Zhang, the ACWF calls itself "the largest NGO in the world" (Zhang 1996, 3).
in China in charge of women’s affairs, the ACWF has the authority to carry out women’s work under the leadership of the CCP, however it has no administrative or legislative power over the making of state’s policies on women since it is not a government department (Zhang 1996, 1-2). During the Cultural Revolution from 1967-1976, all mass organizations were “disbanded” and the ACWF was stripped off all its functions.

The ACWF was restored its pre-Cultural Revolution functions in 1977 when the CCP declared its intention to “rectifying and building these [mass] organizations and letting them fully play their proper roles” at the 11th CCP Congress held in August 1977, though the newly revised CCP Constitution also stipulated that the mass organizations “must accept the absolute leadership of the Party” (Zhang 1996, 396), thus reinstating the CCP’s control over these mass organizations. The same Congress also adopted the economic reform and open door policy. The work report produced for and passed at the Fourth National Women’s Congress (NWC) held in September 1978 responded to the demands of the CCP and stressed the role of the ACWF in helping to promote the “four modernizations”5 while the revised Constitution of the ACWF emphasized the class nature of the ACWF as a mass organization. Phrases concerning women were few and included rhetoric such as “strive for the complete liberation of women” (Zhang 1996, 399-40). Kang Keqing, the “Girl Commander” during the revolution and wife of General Zu De, became the chairwoman of the ACWF. The old revolutionaries were back in charge of the ACWF.

As economic reform was implemented, the problems Chinese women were facing including the double burden of work and family, and the abuse of women both at work and in the family began to surface. Discussion of gender inequalities was not only “tolerated,” but also

5 The “four modernizations” are the modernization of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology.
actively encouraged by the official media (Honig & Hershatter 1988, 310). Taking advantage of the more relaxed political atmosphere as a result of economic reform, the ACWF became more vocal and took a stronger stance on women's issues. In its attempt to become more responsive to women's needs, the ACWF began to re-structure, training its staff to be more professional and finding new ways to reach out to women. At the Fifth NWC in 1983, the ACWF declared that “its main tasks were to represent the interests of women and children and to work on their behalf” (Zhang, 1996, 421). But the conflicts arising from ACWF's dual role as a "mobilization" apparatus of the state and a "representation" of women's interests remained un-addressed and unresolved. Kang Keqing was again elected Chairwoman of the ACWF, but this time the ACWF leaders were joined by some young cadres newly assigned to do woman work, and by specialists in areas relating to women and children. The ACWF began its transformation as a younger and more professional institution.

As reform accelerated the number of layoffs, there were suggestions for women to return to the home to help alleviate the problems. However, the ACWF and other advocates of women’s studies rejected these proposals and continued to support women having the equal rights to work in society (Wesoky 2002, 65). As pointed out by Sharon Wesoky, a scholar on Chinese women’s social movements, the gendered nature of layoffs as well as the decline of state funding to social services in the reform era actually provided “economic opportunities” for social movements (Wesoky 2002, 139). They increased the needs for women’s organizing as well as new forms of women’s organizing. A number of new women’s organizations sprung up but most of these groups, especially those founded before 1986, were founded under the local Fulian (Wesoky 2002, 114). Perhaps more significantly, these newly founded women’s organizations broke the monopoly of the ACWF and the ACWF was no longer the only women’s organization
in China. Within the ACWC, local Fulians also demanded more autonomy to organize their work according to their own needs as local offices of the Fulian were given greater autonomy as a result of the decentralization process. While there was tension between different levels of the Fulian as well as between the Fulian and the new women’s groups, there were also many instances of collaboration between them, especially at the local level and on an individual basis. With increased autonomy, women’s organizing was no longer confined within the parameters set by the state. There was a strong push from below due to the awakening of women’s consciousness, increased awareness of women’s issues and the need to change the situation.

Chen Muhua, head of Chinese People’s Bank, became Chairwoman of the ACWF at the Sixth NWC held in September 1988. For the first time, the ACWF was led by “an expert in economic work rather than in political work” (Zhang 1996, 499) signifying the preeminence of economic development on the CCP’s agenda. In the newly revised ACWF Constitution, the ACWF abandoned the CCP expression of qunzhong zuzhi (mass organization), and referred to itself as a “shehui qunzhong tuanti (social mass group)” (Zhang 1996, 500). It also clearly stated that “in the primary stage of socialism, the fundamental social functions of the Fulian are to represent and safeguard women’s interests and promote equality between men and women,” thus gender equality again became the ACWF’s organizational goal (Zhang 1996, 501).

The revised Constitution also added a section on fund that stated that in addition to subsidies from the government, Fulian may set up “industrial or commercial enterprises” and also accept personal or corporate donation and financial sponsorship (Zhang 1996, 501-3). For the first time, the ACWF’s assets and the enterprises it run are declared the property of the ACWF and establishing economic enterprises has become one of the major focuses of Fulian work since 1992. By the end of 1992, Fulian had 9,055 economic enterprises above the county
level, 6,451 of which were set up in 1992, a 3.6 times increase over the number in 1991 and an increase of 12.7 times over the figure of 1988. In 1992, 43,401 income generating projects were found, a 3.5 time more than 1991 (Zhang 1996, 540). The ACWF has successfully transformed itself to be more financially self sufficient and thus more autonomous from the state.

On the other hand, the ACWF was less successful in influencing state’s policies on women. It failed to include its proposition to establish quotas to guarantee a certain proportion of women delegates to the People’s Congress at county, township, provincial and national levels into the law on the protection of women’s rights. And although the Law of the PRC on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women was eventually promulgated on April 3, 1992, it was in a more diluted form and the enactment was probably due to pressures arising from China’s application to host the FWCW than pressures from the ACWF. In fact, the ACWF stressed the passing of the Law as “the basis of the convening of the women’s conference” during one of its national committee meetings (Wesoky 2002, 130).

But by far the most distinctive and important issues raised by the Sixth NWC were put forward in a document entitled the “Plan of Structural Reform of Fulian” which proposed structural reform of Fulian in eight areas including the nature, legal status, organization structure, leadership and decision making process of the ACWF. The ACWF now defined itself more as a pressure group for women’s equality and liberation and for the first time, used the term “political leadership” of the Party instead of the “leadership” of the Party, trying to grow more autonomous from the Party by limiting the control of the CCP to principles and policy matters only. Further, the document “demanded making specific laws to protect the rights and interests of women, to protect ACWF’s status in state politics and specify its obligations and rights in participation and supervision of state affairs” and it “demanded establishment of a government agency to take
charge of women’s affairs; and it encouraged development of voluntary women’s organizations” (Zhang 1996, 502-3). In response to the ACWF’s call for the development of voluntary women’s organizations, the first independent women’s organization was formally established in Beijing under the China Academy of Management Science: the Women’s Research Institute (WRI) was founded in October 1988 outside of the ACWF umbrella and the ACWF agreed to accept it as a group member (Wesoky 2002, 124). Thus, there were many bold ideas on the reform of the ACWF in 1988, but these were interrupted by the Tiananmen incident on June 4, 1989. After June 1989, the CCP exerted much tighter control over organizing and the ACWF reverted back to its previous role of towing the party line. In fact, the ACWF publicly declared its support for the crackdown of Tiananmen and “there was a renewed emphasis on the importance of CCP leadership of the Women’s Federation and other mass organizations” (Wesoky 2002, 125).

Although tighter political controls after June 1989 curbed the ACWF reform, the ACWF had nevertheless managed to push for the establishment of a “Coordinating Committee of Work among Women and Children” under the State Council in February 1990. This Coordinating Committee which was subsequently renamed the National Working Committee on Children and Women (NWCCW) comprises senior members from relevant departments of the State Council and thus it has the power to act on the protection of the rights and interests of women and children (Zhang 2001, 166). The CCP’s 14th Congress held in October 1992 declared that the aim of China’s economic reform was to establish a “socialist market economy” and the ACWF responded by giving renewed stress to economic development.

The Seventh NWC was convened in September 1993 and Chen Muhua was again elected Chairwoman of the ACWF. The ACWF work report indicated that the ACWF was trying to
change its working style of “focusing on propaganda and mobilization campaigns” and search for new ways to do “more solid, practical work” (Zhang 1996, 546). However, the ACWF also retreated from its more liberal position, probably as a result of the CCP’s tightened control over organizing after 1989. The first point on the ACWF work report under “experiences about the women’s movement in China” was “adhering to the leadership of the CCP and adhering to socialist road with Chinese characteristics are the fundamental guarantee of the women’s movement advancing in the correct direction” (Zhang 1996, 546-7). The “leadership of the CCP” was emphasized, replacing the “political leadership” used in 1988.

In the revised Constitution of the Seventh NWC, Fulian’s mission for the state was put first, followed by its basic function of representing women and striving for equality. In the article pertaining to the kinds of organization that could be institutional members of Fulian, it added “the national and local women’s organizations that have registered themselves with the civil affair agencies” as part of the condition, in line with the requirements of the 1989 RSO. Finally, in the 1993 summary of experiences of the women’s movement, it added another point that was not included in the 1988 statement: “to build a unified women’s organization…for the advancement of the women’s movement,” identifying the ACWF as the organization for the advancement of women’s movement without acknowledging the importance of other autonomous groups as in 1988 (Zhang 1996, 549-550). Perhaps because of these changes, new women’s social organizations began to be founded under universities and other types of state units instead of the ACWF, showing increasing diversity in their forms as well as increasing agency in the new women’s groups. Indeed, no women’s organizations registered to become a group member of the ACWF after 1995 (Howell 2003, 196), indicating more autonomy in the new women’s organizations as well as the declining influence of the ACWF.
During this period, the ACWF and Chinese women expanded their contact with the outside world and the ACWF gained even more political power and leverage when it was entrusted with helping the government organize the FWCW held in Beijing in 1995 though it was forced to collaborate with other Chinese women’s organizations as required by the UN and the NGO Forum. In the end, thirty Chinese women’s organizations including the ACWF participated in the preparation for the NGO Forum which was a great learning experience for both the ACWF and other Chinese women activists. One woman activist who went to the Manila preparatory conference for the FWCW concluded that the symposium was a “milestone in my life and work” (Wesoky 2002, 93). Many of the Chinese women activists came out of the FWCW “transformed” and one woman activist even asserted that the FWCW “changed every person that attended it” (Wesoky 2002, 94).

According to Jin Yihong, the hosting of the FWCW in Beijing gave the ACWF “an unprecedented opportunity of development.” First, with increase funding and networking, the ACWF was able to reinforce its position as the “lead” women’s organization in China. Second, the ACWF was in a stronger position to hold dialogues with upper-level government (Jin 2001, 124-5). In the course of preparation for the FWCW and the NGO Forum, the ACWF began to refer to itself as an “NGO” and was driven to learn more about the concept and role of NGOs. As a result of the experience and exposure gained through preparing and organizing the FWCW, the ACWF became less forbearing and more embracing. For instance, the ACWF convened a meeting in December 1996 and invited other women’s studies researchers to make suggestions in its activities to implement the Program for the Development of Chinese Women (1995-2000) (Wesoky 2002, 134) which had received a great deal of attention and publicity at the FWCW.
The hype of the FWCW was however unsustainable. In its revised Constitution presented to the Eight NWC held in 1998, the ACWF continued to define itself as a “mass group” qunzhong tuanti and there was no mentioning of the impact of the NGO spirit and notion on the Chinese women’s movement in its congress documents despite the fact that the ACWF has referred to itself as an NGO when attending overseas conference and the term NGO has frequently appeared in ACWF publications and has inspired many of its most active cadres since the time of the FWCW (Zhang 2001, 159-160). Peng Peiyun, who has a background in family planning and party work, became Chairwoman of the ACWF, and the priorities for the ACWF were set at strengthening its organizational functions and networking to complement China’s economic reform (Web site of the ACWF). The euphoria arising from the FWCW subsided and it was left to the more progressive women activists to follow-up on the more sensitive women issues such as domestic violence and prostitution.

The Ninth NWC was held in 2003 and Gu Xiulian, who was the Minister of Chemical Industry from 1989 to 1998 and vice president of the ACWF and the China Women’s Development Fund from 2001, was elected the new Chairwoman of the ACWF. Both Peng Peiyun, the outgoing Chairwoman and Gu Xiulian, the incoming Chairwoman, reiterated the needs to follow the direction of the party’s “Three Represents”6 and re-emphasized ACWF’s commitment to improve Chinese women’s status and welfare (Gu 2003, 5; Peng 2003, 4). To help more women find employment and re-employment, reduce the number of women in need and increase the number of women cadres and women in politics were the top priorities identified for the next five years (Xinhua News Agency 8/23/2003; China Daily 8/22/2003).

6 The important thoughts of the Three Represents are that the CCP must always represent the development trend of China’s advanced productive forces, the orientation of China’s advanced culture and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people.
Stability was top of the agenda, especially after the massive demonstration by the Falun Cong followers in 1999.

The example of the ACWF raises a number of points on the relationship between leadership and the development of social organizations and therefore the development of civil society. First, the leaderships of the ACWF have been “selected” and “appointed” by the state, thus the development and growth of the ACWF have been dependent on the state’s policies, especially its policies on social organizations. Since the state’s policies have been constantly changing, the role and focus of the ACWF have changed as well as can be seen by the constant revision of the ACWF Constitution and priorities in its work reports. The ACWF is clearly not autonomous but state-led and this state-led civil society is fragile because it can be easily manipulated or even suppressed by the state.

Second, the ACWF has attempted to transform itself in the face of challenges to its monopoly status by the growth of more autonomous social organizations in the reform era. But, reform and transformation at the headquarters of the ACWF have encountered obstructions from the CCP after 1989. However, some enlightened leaders, especially those at the grass-roots levels are aware of the importance of working together with the more autonomous women’s organizations, and are overtly or covertly supporting the development and establishment of more autonomous women’s organizations, laying the foundation for further networking and the development of civil society. Third, the preparation for and hosting of the FWCW in Beijing have a huge impact on the ACWF leaderships at all levels. By being “forced” to call itself an “NGO,” leaders of the ACWF were driven to learn more about the notion of NGO and to adopt some of the spirits of the NGOs. In the process of connecting track with the world, or jiegui, and

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7 For example, Wang Shuzhen, head of the Fulian in Qianxi County, Hebei province has organized leadership trainings for women (Howell 2003, 201) and helped to found the Women’s Legal Services Center in Qianxi County with the aims of promoting and protecting women’s rights (250 Chinese NGOs, 162).
the popularization of the term NGO in China, the ACWF has become less forbearing, more embracing as well as more professional. By cooperating with other women's organizations, the ACWF has provided more channels for grassroots women's participation and fostered the development of institutionalized activism which is conducive for the development of civil society in the long term.

**The Case of Charismatic Leadership: The Maple Women Psychological Counseling Center (MWPCC)**

The Women's Research Institute (WRI), the predecessor of the MWPCC, was founded in 1988 during a more liberal atmosphere when the ACWF was at its height of transformation and explicitly called for "the development of voluntary women's organizations" (Zhang 1996, 503). The WRI was founded by Wang Xingjuan, a retired journalist and a veteran party member who had worked at the *Xinhua Daily, Chinese Youth Daily* and *the Beijing Press* with the goal "to help women adjust themselves to the changing times, build a new mental support system, and to become victors in social competition and promoters of social progress" (Wesoky 2002, 72).

Motivated by the desire to help the millions of women workers who were made redundant by economic reforms and in response to the call of the ACWF in September 1988 to develop more voluntary women's organizations, Wang founded the WRI on October 8, 1988, the first formally established independent women's organization in China since 1949 (Wesoky 2002, 124).

As an independent women's organization, WRI has to struggle with problems with funding from the initial stage. Wang herself provided half of the setting up funds which totaled 20,000 yuan (Liu, 2004) and other group members donated the rest of the money themselves. In the beginning, the WRI could only afford an office that was six-square meter with no heating apart from a stove, and in the summer, the furniture was soaked by the rain which leaked from
the ceiling. There was no telephone because it was too expensive. In the mean time, Wang and the other members of the WRI tried to find means to support the running of the organization by selling clothes, but they were not able to make any profits. In the end, the WRI organized some training classes for women cadres that brought in some money. These training classes were made possible probably due to Wang’s good relationship with the ACWF and the ACWF’s desire to raise the qualification and number of women cadres.

It is noteworthy that Wang has maintained a close relationship with the leadership of the ACWF even though her organization is not affiliated to the ACWF. Besides being admitted as the first “group member” that was founded outside the ACWF’s umbrella, WRI’s special status was further confirmed by the presence of high ranking members of the ACWF at its first meeting. Though the ACWF does not fund the WRI, the assistance of Kang Keqing, the former Chairwoman of ACWF, enabled the WRI to secure funding for its first research project (Wesoky 2002, 73). This first research project undertaken by the WRI was on women’s employment, motivated by new state policies on the restructuring of state-owned enterprises, in which millions of workers would become unemployed, most of them women. According to Wesoky, “despite the potentially subversive nature of such a research project,” the findings were in line with state policies and “none of these [policy recommendations] particularly focused on the gendered effects of reform” (Wesoky 2002, 141). In fact, the report was not at all critical of the state’s reform programs. Besides the research on women’s unemployment, Wang also took up the sensitive issue of prostitution and the WRI conducted the first extensive research on prostitution in China and organized the first symposium on prostitution in April 1989 (Wesoky 2002, 128). These two instances demonstrated that Wang was able to pursue studies on sensitive issues such
as unemployment and prostitution, probably due to her good relations with people in high
positions and her status as a veteran state actor.

Though tightening political control over organizing after 1989 curbed the activities of
social organizations, Wang was able to establish a Singles Weekend Club for educated men and
women in Beijing in 1990. On one occasion, Wang invited Wu Qing, a high ranking ACWF
official and a representative of the Beijing Municipal People’s Congress to attend a function
organized by the Club and to listen to the needs of its young, single members. Moved by these
educated people’s desperate needs for affordable housing, Wu later took up their case with the
Housing Reform Office of the Beijing Municipal government (Wesoky 2002, 73), thus Wang
was able to use her good gunaxi with Wu and the ACWF to influence some government policies.

Wang’s contribution to the development of the WRI can be shown in the following
incident. In 1991, the WRI and China Women’s News co-sponsored a conference on women’s
political participation. This conference discussed how to improve women’s political
representation, and even debated the best ways to represent women’s interests (Wesoky 2002,
125-6). The hosting of this conference indicated that discussion on some women’s issues can be
acceptable to the state, even during a sensitive time; but more significantly it demonstrated
Wang’s ability to network, especially with the media and government.

Similar to other social organizations not funded by the government, money continues to
be a big problem for the WRI. A big breakthrough came when Wang met an American who
helped her to make applications for grants from foreign foundations. The WRI received its first
foreign grant six months after China was granted the FWCS – and in September 1992, WRI
started operating the first nationwide women’s hotline in China with funding support from the
U.S. Global Fund for Women. It also changed its name from WRI to Maple Women’s
Psychological and Counseling Center (MWPCC) and changed its registration from non-profit to for-profit (Zhang 2001, 164). With funding from the Ford Foundation, the MWPCC opened a second women’s hotline that continues to provide regular counseling service and a women’s expert’s hotline that provides expert advice on law, health and sex in 1993.

In 1996, the MWPCC re-registered as a not-for-profit social organization under the Industrial and Commercial Bureau (Website, MWPCC updated October 17, 2004) probably as an effort to maintain its independence and evade supervision of the ACWF as required by the 1989 and 1998 RSOs. According to Tony Saich, a China expert, the state tried to stop the operation of the Women’s Hotline by having the sponsoring organization remove its support (Saich 2000, 132-3), but this apparently failed due to Wang’s strategies of changing registration. Driven by the enthusiasm, dedication and ingenuity of Wang, the MWPCC went on to become one of the “most prominent and the most active women’s organizations in Beijing” (Wesoky 2002, 72). Wang has also used the characteristics of the hotline service to overcome some of the restrictions imposed by the 1989 and 1998 RSO over geographical boundaries. As a telephone hotline, the Women’s Hotline and the Women’s Expert’s Hotline are able to provide counseling service to women from all parts of China and not just Beijing. In 1997, the ratio between calls from Beijing and other provinces was 54% to 46% for the Women’s Hotline and the ratio for the Women’s Expert’s Hotline was half and half (Palmer 1997, 22). To expand its services to other parts of China and yet not contravene the 1998 RSO, Wang has established a national hotline network with more than 40 group members from across China. As well, the MWPCC has provided funding support for other women’s organizations that wanted to duplicate its model in
other parts of the country, thus helping to spread these activities beyond Beijing. In addition to the Hotlines, Wang has set up the “Ark Family Center” under the MWPCC in May 1998 to provide services to single-parent families in Beijing. And to further expand its services outside of Beijing, the MWPCC has cooperated with the Tianjin Women’s Federation on a three-year pilot project “Family Problems and Community Intervention” from 2001 to provide family intervention for women in one urban and one rural community in Heibei District, Tianjin (Website, MWPCC).

Finally, Wang’s leadership is not confined to organizational development. She is one of the inspirations and driving forces in the development of Chinese women’s volunteerism and has been instrumental in the recruitment of expert volunteers, especially for the Women’s Expert’s Hotline. For instance, a university professor, one of the earliest volunteers, agreed to become a volunteer of the Hotline at the invitation of Wang (Wesoky 2002, 83). Wang has always emphasized the importance of volunteers and volunteer training and in an interview conducted in 1997, Wang estimated that the Hotline has trained about 150 volunteers and has about 70 volunteers working on the Hotline. Regular lectures and seminars are provided to the volunteers by experts, some of them from overseas (Palmer 1997, 23) and in the course of volunteering, some of these volunteers have been transformed to be women activists. Wang’s volunteers have proposed greater legal and government intervention on issues such as domestic violence and sexual harassment and even advocated certain “unconventional” proposals including the founding of women’s shelters (Wesoky 2002, 69). Thus, through the leadership of Wang, some Chinese women have become women activists and some of them have been able to address previously neglected women’s issues and to look at them from new perspectives. As one expert

8 For instance, the MWPCC has provided training and guidance for the founders of the Guangxi Green Shade Women’s Hotline prior to its establishment in 1999 and provided a total of 68,763 yuan to the Oasis Women’s Welfare Hotline in Hebei (250 Chinese NGOs 2002 supplement).
volunteer says, “At the Hotline, I can educate myself. I can study women’s issues and think about some things” (Wesoky 2002, 83).

It should be noted that it would not have been possible for Wang to set up the hotline service in 1992 without foreign funding because the installation of one telephone line cost more than 4,000 yuan in 1992 when GDP in China was only 2,063 yuan per capita. Later, with the assistance of the Ford Foundation, the organization was able to rent an office of ninety-square meters complete with a conference room, office furniture, equipment, and separate rooms for the women’s hotline (Wesoky 2002, 146).

In sum, the MWPCC has become one of the best known and prominent women’s organizations in China in just 17 years and there is no doubt that Wang Xingjuan, the charismatic leader, is the reason behind MWPCC’s success. The leadership of and status accorded to Wang have enabled the MWPCC to obtain funding for its growth and development, and to evade the restrictions imposed by the RSOs. Wang’s ingenuity has enabled her to “expand” her service to other parts of China through networking and sponsorship; and Wang is an inspiration for the development of women’s activism and volunteerism in China. While Wang’s total loyalty to the state is problematic, her staunch support for the CCP and cooperation with the ACWF have given her status and clout and enabled the MWPCC to sometimes influence government’s policies on women.9

The Case of Versatile Leadership: The Shaanxi Research Association for Women and Family (SRAWF)

9 For instance, the MWPCC received official recognition for its report on women’s right, submitted in January 1996 and its documents on domestic violence (compiled with three other social organizations) were published in the overseas edition of the People’s Daily.
Similar to the MWPCC, SRAWF is one of China’s few first generation women’s organizations. SRAWF was set up by Gao Xiaoxian in June 1986 when she was deputy director of the then newly formed Research Office of the Shaanxi Women’s Federation. As previously noted, Gao was “forced” to work outside the ACWF because of her interests in theoretical research and the lack of opportunity for research within the ACWF. However, the SRAWF was faced with funding problem from the very beginning because the Shaanxi Women’s Federation has announced that “all groups affiliated with it had to be self-funded.” Thus Gao became the SRAWF’s only official full time staff and had to work from the Research Office of the Women’s Federation. Nevertheless, motivated by a desire to promote women’s studies, Gao seized the opportunity of a conference in Shaanxi to arrange for a group of Chinese scholars on women’s studies to hold a first theoretical training workshop on women studies in China. Between 1986 and 1989, Gao was able to organize two theoretical training workshop on women studies, a forum and started a monthly women’s salon without any official funding before most activities came to a standstill after June 4, 1989.

1992 was a turning point for Gao and the SRAWF. When the Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women was passed in 1992, Gao was very concerned with the progress of the regional legislation of the Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women and approached a foreign expert for help when she had the chance. She was advised to apply for overseas funding to hire specialists “to train all those responsible for the drafting of the local regulations, nationwide.” Gao made an application and subsequently received funding from the Ford Foundation to hold a three–part symposium on the Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women. Although the hosting of a nationwide symposium was obstructed by the ACWF’s headquarters in Beijing, Gao was able to circumvent the restrictions of the ACWF by
reducing the scope of the participants to ten provinces and districts in Western China. To prevent further possible intervention from the ACWF, Gao also decided to collaborate with the Judiciary Sub-Committee of the Standing Committee of the Shaanxi People’s Congress for the hosting of the symposium (Gao 2001, 198-9). Thus Gao demonstrated her abilities to identify the space for organizing and to negotiate for the optimal partners for organizing.

In 1993 to 1994, Gao had the chance to participate in an overseas conference and to be trained in feminist theory and research methodology in reproductive health. After Gao returned to China, she started to plan for the establishment of a women’s legal aid center. Gao submitted application for funding to the U.S. Global Fund and the Ford Foundation and though the Ford Foundation was unable to support the project, the Global Fund responded by agreeing to fund the establishment of a women’s hotline and the Shaanxi Women’s Hotline was established in September 1996. In Gao’s conviction that the counselors of the Hotline should adopt the gender perspective, she tried to obtain funds to provide additional training for the counselors to raise their gender consciousness. Through funding by the Asia Foundation, Gao was able to send five Counselors on a study tour and was finally able to “transform the counselors from taking the Hotline as a site for psychological counseling to one charged with a feminist stance” (Gao 2001, 200-1). Therefore Gao helped to transform some women volunteers into women activists and a gender perspective was incorporated into their work.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, funding from Hong Kong Oxfam enabled the SRAWF to finally set up an office and purchase office equipment and the SRAWF registered in 1999 under the sponsorship of the Shaanxi Social Sciences Federation and the supervision of the Shaanxi Fulian. In spite of the various restrictions of the new regulations, the SRAWF has continued to expand horizontally and extend its activities (Gao 2001, 203). With initial funding from the Ford
Foundation, it founded the Shaanxi Women Law Studies and Legal Services Center, the first such center in Northwestern China in March 1999 and established the Counseling Hotline on Domestic Violence in May 2001 with funding assistance from the U.S. Global Fund and Oxfam Hong Kong (Website, SRAWF & 250 Chinese NGOs 2001, 221).

Gao's trajectory has a number of implications. First, Gao has been able to set up the SRAWF due to her position as a cadre at the ACWF, that is, as a state actor. Second, Gao has been able to organize activities and develop the SRAWF, even in the face of limited resources and intervention from state agencies, by using the strategies of international funding/influence, guanxi and most importantly, securing the patronage of a state agency that is most sympathetic to her cause. Third, Gao has been able to make use of opportunities to link up and cooperate with local and foreign experts, the ACWF as well as other women's organizations to carry out activities. Finally, Gao has been transformed from a pure researcher to a woman activist through her work at the SRAWF, and exposure to and training by international women activists and she in turn has helped to transform other women into women activists.

The Case of “Well-Connected” Leadership: The Rural Women Magazine (RWM)

The RWM (formerly known as Rural Women Knowing All) was founded in 1993 by Xie Lihua under the sponsorship of the China Women’s News, the only nationwide daily on women under the ACWF, and the RWM has been a legal social organization since its establishment. The RWM is the most prolific of all the women’s organizations and its founder and Editor-in-Chief Xie Lihua makes a good example of the use of patron and guanxi in the growth and development of a social organization. Since 1993, Xie has made use of her connections and funding source to set up four additional, autonomous organizations to serve rural women: the Migrant Women’s Club (MWC) in April 1996, the Practical Skill Training Center for Rural
Women (PTC) in October 1998, the Beijing Cultural Development Center for Rural Women (CDC) in 2001 and the Domestic Workers' Support Network (DWSN) in 2003. Xie, who is also a Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the China Women's News, is renowned for her good guanxi with some prominent Chinese leaders. For example Chen Muhua, former Vice-Chairperson of the Standing Committee of the NPC and the then Chairwoman of the ACWF, and the late Bin Xin, a famous Chinese writer, both wrote words of congratulations on the debut issue of the Rural Woman Magazine (Website, RWM). Xie also invited Wu Qing, a professor at the Beijing Foreign Languages University, deputy to the Beijing People’s Congress and daughter of the late Bin Xin to be a co-initiator and adviser of the RWM. Since then, Wu has been very active with the various activities of the RWM (Jacka 2002, 13) and went on to become a director and legal representative of the CDC and a director of the PTC.

Being affiliated with the China Women’s News, the editorial office of RWM is able to draw on the institutional support from the larger paper. The RWM has been very successful as a magazine and has been the “the only monthly magazine for rural women in China” (Website, WRM) with a circulation of more than 230,000 (Jacka 2002, 13) and a distribution net that reaches more than 400 counties in 26 provincial-level regions. In addition, through connections with the China Women’s News, Xie has been able to attract large sums of money from private companies and individuals donors in China and abroad. According to the RWM web site, in 1995 the RWM’s only overseas grant was from the Ford Foundation, but the number of foreign funders has increased to 11 in 1998 and over 20 in 2000.

By helping to raise the quality of millions of rural women, the RWM’s aims and objectives are complementary to the state’s “socialist spiritual civilization” agenda. The RWM does not criticize the fundamental gender inequality inherent in the system or the state’s reform.
policies. Instead, Xie and the RWM have focused on raising the quality of rural women by providing them with training and education. As well, Xie and her staff have tried to publicize the problems of gender inequality for female migrant workers and rural women in the countryside by running grievance letters and horror stories sent in by rural women and women migrant workers, the first time in a Chinese media. Further, Xie and her group have continued to lobby the state and the ACWF to protect the rights of rural migrant women by organizing forums, debates and encouraging other media to report on the activities of the RWM and the plights of rural women. Though some of the women migrant workers felt that Xie and her staff's methods were “elitist and matronizing,” nevertheless the RWM and the MWC have helped thousands of rural women to be more aware of their legal rights and provided them with the resource and opportunity to exercise their agency. It is not surprising that some of the staff who had worked for Xie has been transformed. Zhou Ling, a migrant from Anhui who used to work for the MWC and had left the MWC due to personality conflict with Xie, acknowledged that she learned that she should fight for her rights from taking part in the meetings at the MWC and that rural women “have to organize to fight for our rights ourselves” and not rely on the help of urbanites (Jacka 2002, 21).

Xie's case clearly demonstrates the importance of guanxi and leadership in the growth and development of a social organization in China. Xie has been able to circumvent the 1998 RSO and the 1998 NEUR due to her close relation with her patrons, especially Wu Qing; her senior position within the ACWF; and her ingenuity of using various terms and leeway in the founding and registration of additional social organizations though they all serve rural women. Though it is possible that these additional organizations were formed to get more funding or expand Xie's power, it is also possible that they were established to give Xie and the RWM more
autonomy to pursue their agenda because at one stage the state had attempted to transfer some “key members” of the RWM “to state jobs where they will be too busy to engage in the work of the social organization” (Saich 2000, 132-3). According to information provided on the web site of the RWM, Xie set up the CDC and registered this newly established social organization with the Changping Branch of Beijing Industrial and Commercial Administrative Bureau (ICAB) - a Bureau that is well known to be more open and tolerant of organizations, in September 2001. Then Xie and the RWM removed the MWC and the PTC from under the umbrella of the RWM which is “supervised by the ACWF and administered by the China Women’s News” to be a subsidiary of the CDC.

As an organization under the ICAB, the CDC has been able to extend mental health services to rural women in six villages in Hebei province, and to conduct literacy classes for rural women in two counties in Gansu province and one county in Guizhou province, two of the poorest provinces in China. By setting up a “Rural Women Grant-Aid Fund,” the CDC has been able to offer financial assistance to girls from poor families in Western China to attend school. It is obvious that Xie and the RWM have find ways and means to evade the confines of the state’s boundaries and to organize and create “civil societies.” The web site of the CDC states that it is “independently responsible for all administration and organization decision” and that it has set up a board of directors to be in charge of its operation. Although more in-depth studies are required to assess the “democratization” of the RWM, there is no doubt that the RWM has become more autonomous through its “organic growth” and Xie is the major factor for its subtle transformation.

The Case of Elitist-Participatory Leaderships: The Network Against Domestic Violence in China: Research, Intervention and Prevention (NADVC)
The NADVC was set up informally in the 1990s around the time of the FWCW, and has remained un-registered though it was later established under the CLS in 2000 as a “secondary organization.” Thus the NADVC is not a registered social organization. The NADVC began as an informal network of legal experts interested in women’s rights and domestic violence in the mid-1990s but has since adopted an interdisciplinary approach and its leaderships have now evolved to include some fifty legal scholars, academics and feminist activists. According to a case study conducted by Keith et al. in 2003, the NADVC advocates a democratic and participatory approach in its operation. Although the NADVC has a managing committee that sets the overall agenda and supervises its operation, individual project participants are expected to participate in program design and implementation. To promote transparency and democracy, project meetings are open to all members, and the minutes are available to all members. To emphasize its collegial spirit and collective leadership, Chen Mingxia, the person who is in charge of the project, is designated “contact person” lianxi ren and not president or chairperson. Finally, the NADVC does not receive any government funding and relies on volunteers for its work and has no full-time staff.

Even though the NADVC has chosen not to become a “secondary organization” under the ACWF, it is associated with the ACWF and has cooperated with the ACWF as partners on various projects. And Ding Lu, director of the ACWF’s Women’s Rights and Interests Department, serves as a special adviser to the NADVC, therefore the NADVC is able to maintain a close working relationship with the ACWF. The NADVC is, however, different from the ACWF both in its organization and approach. Its social activism is generated by its members and not led by the state and it pursues a two-way relationship with the state, with the NADVC
providing most of the background research and recommendations for the drafting of and revision to domestic violence laws and marriage law.

A further sign of the NADVC's ability to circumvent the 1998 RSO is that although the NADVC is based in Beijing, it networks with other organizations interested in domestic violence and women's rights both in China and abroad and publishes a bi-monthly newsletter highlighting activities and development against domestic violence in China. In yet another horizontal fashion, the NADVC advocates "community comprehensive intervention," shequ zenghe ganyu (Keith et al. 2003, 40), emphasizing the importance of integrating state and society and has initiated to help train and sensitize law enforcement and public health officials to issues related to domestic violence. The NADVC has completed a nine-volume series which has served as a handbook on domestic violence for officials in the judicial system, social workers, medical personnel, and others who work in relevant social and legal organizations. In June 2000, the NADVC also conducted lectures and training programs on gender and violence for government authorities, social workers and hospital staff. According to Chen Mingxia, it was the first time in China that authorities and professionals were being specially trained to fight violence against women. Separately, in a pilot project conducted at a hospital in the outskirts of Beijing, doctors and other paramedical staff are being trained to identify abuse with the ultimate aim of "empowering women victims to speak up for themselves" (Wen, 2001). Thus although the NADVC is an advocate of women's rights through law and action, it believes that ultimately it is the women who should exercise their agency and fight for their own rights. Finally, the NADVC's socio-legal strategies reflect a new grass-roots activism through NGO networking while acknowledging at the same time the state's role and responsibility in protecting women's rights and the complementary relationship and partnership between state and social organizations.
Finally, by advocating women's rights, the NADVC is also promoting human rights since women's rights are human rights.

The NADVC is an interesting case. It is not a legally registered social organization and the government does not directly approve its executives. Although the 1998 RSO does not allow for the operation of un-registered social organizations, the leaders of the NADVC have refused to apply for registration, claiming that "the process was too lengthy and was becoming increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to complete" (Keith et al. 2003, 45). The NADVC was probably allowed to continue its work due to its close relationship with the CASS and the CLS because Chen is a professor at the CASS and some other members of the Management Committee of the NADVC are members of the CLS. When the leaderships of the NADVC finally decided to establish itself under the CLS in 2000 as a "secondary organization," the move was probably made to avoid being forced to choose between "registration" and "closure." Most importantly, the NADVC decided to become a "secondary organization" to avoid the complication of the registration and to evade the stringent requirements of regulations; and it chose to be affiliated to the CSL instead of the ACWF because it "enjoys almost complete administrative autonomy from the CLS" (Keith et al. 2003, 44). This decision clearly demonstrates the autonomy of the NADVC leaderships to exercise their agency and to select an option that is most favorable for its development and operation. The case of the NADVC demonstrates that despite the new restrictions and regulations on social organizations, some social organizations are able to pursue their own agenda, even in the more sensitive area of human rights, due to their leaders' ingenuity, status, loyalty to the state and good relationship with the state agencies.
To conclude, the “leadership” of a social organization is a decisive factor for its success and development in China. Moreover, almost all or most of these leaders are state actors who have the trust and confidence of the state. These leaders are motivated or forced to organize outside of the official organizations due to a combination of various factors including and not limited to: have more autonomy to pursue their interests; fill in the service gap in society; contribute to society; and to influence the state. According to Sharon Wesoky who conducted a detailed study on the women’s organizations in Beijing during the 1980s and 1990s, many of the women’s organizations in Beijing did not go through the process of being founded and searching for a sponsoring work unit. Instead, they were often founded by women activists working in state units, which then became their sponsoring units. Wesoky concludes that founding women activists “had pre-established institutional ties which facilitated their desire to found independent women’s groups.” These pre-existing social networks are useful in “micromobilization” processes in women’s activism and “The existence of such a network is especially significant because it shows that woman’s groups, whatever their guakao danwei and pre-existing ties to the state, do not merely exist as object of state power but also as subjects pursuing their own agenda” (Wesoky 2002, 166-7).
Chapter 4: Creating Civil Society in China: International Influences

The previous chapter demonstrated that the leaderships of some of the women's organizations have made use of the economic and political opportunities available during the reform era to organize, and these leaders are instrumental for the creation of some of the multiple civil societies emerging in China, especially in Beijing but also in some other parts of China, including Shaanxi. This chapter will turn the attention to another major drive for the creation of multiple civil societies in China – international influences. And in the case of Chinese women's organizing and the creation of civil societies in China, most if not all scholars and women activists would agree that the FWCW and the NGO Forum that were held simultaneously in Beijing in 1995 were the turning point and marked a new phase in Chinese women organizing.

Image Matters: Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995 (FWCW)

Preparation for the FWCW

In January 1991, China invited the UN to host the FWCW in Beijing. This came less than two years after the Tiananmen incident, and many scholars consider this a strategy of the CCP to change its international image created by the crackdown of protests on June 4, 1989 (Wang 1996, 193 & Wesoky 2002, 129). Wang Zheng, an overseas Chinese scholar in women's studies, points out that the Chinese leaders "believe that the degree of liberation among women in China is higher than that of women in the West," therefore they would like to use the FWCW as a showcase for its achievements (Wang 1996, 193). Therefore when China applied to host the conference in 1991, its delegate to a meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women highlighted that "the Chinese government consistently has paid attention domestically to women's work for realizing male-female equality, and it promotes women's great effort in
participating in the country’s development.” Furthermore, to stress its eligibility for hosting the conference, the Chinese delegation “was careful to note” that the Chinese government was about to pass a new law on women’s rights before the UN announced the conference location in early 1992 (Wesoky 2002, 129-130).

When China’s application to host the FWCW was approved in March 1992, China formed its organizing committee in August the same year and preparatory work involving different government departments began in full swing. In October, the State Council issued a circular to all provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, requiring them “to take measures to advance women’s development as a way to prepare for the upcoming conference” (Zhang 1996, 542). In an effort to emphasize the importance of women’s issues on its political agenda, the government began its propaganda on raising women’s status. For instance, the ACWF launched a project called “Welcoming the FWCW, Millions of Loving Hearts Devoted to Spring Buds” and coordinated resources from both the government and the public to help thousands of girls from poor regions begin schooling. In a country that scrutinizes every move of its leaders, journals and newspapers hurried to print special issues to either display women’s achievements or discuss issues related to women; and special TV programs were produced to spread information about the FWCW and its accompanying NGO Forum.

In anticipation of the FWCW, the Chinese government issued two important documents on women. One was the “State Report on the PRC on Implementation of ‘Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for Advancement of Women’” issued in October 1994. The other was the “Chinese Women’s Development Program: 1995-2000,” the first special program on women in PRC’s history that was published in August 1995 just a few weeks before the hosting of the NGO Forum (Zhang 1996, 552). More importantly, due to China’s status as a host country,
these two documents had to adopt the international standards and terminologies on women’s issues instead of the CCP’s usual rhetoric\textsuperscript{10} (Zhang 1996, 554). And, according to the overseas edition of the \textit{People’s Daily}, the China Organizing Committee printed 100,000 copies of the Chinese translation of the Nairobi Strategy and information on the FWCW, and distributed them to rural and urban localities. Furthermore, seminars for the FWCW and the Nairobi Strategy trained about 300 officials from across the country and these in turn organized 379 training classes for over 30,000 people (Zhang 1996, 551). On one hand, this clearly demonstrated the CCP’s power to mobilize people and resources. On the other hand, it showed that FWCW has served as a catalyst in promoting the advancement of women’s status and women’s issues in China which in turn helped some women activists to become more aware of the disparity between reality and rhetoric and encouraged them to “rise up” and organize to help other women.

The logistical arrangements for the preparation and hosting of the FWCS also assisted in the establishment of more autonomous women’s organizations in China. According to UN regulations, workshops or seminars at the NGO Forum must be hosted by at least one women’s NGO so the Chinese government had to “encourage” the founding of women’s organizations and also approved them with unprecedented speed. By the time of the NGO Forum, China was home to some 5,800 women’s organizations (Cai et al. 2001, 212; Howell 2003, 195). More significantly, while most if not all women’s organizations in China were under the umbrella of the ACWF before the FWCW, many of the organizations founded around the time of the FWCW were totally independent of the ACWF and were more autonomous. One scholar estimates that while 75% of the women’s organizations founded before March 1992 had Fulian as their supervisory unit, 75% of the new organizations founded after March 1992 had units other than

\textsuperscript{10} For example, the official speeches made by the Chinese delegation at the first three World Conferences on Women were on anti-imperialism and revisionism; supporting Cambodia; and supporting Palestine respectively and not focused on women’s issues (Zhang 1996, 554).
the Fulian as their supervisory unit (Wesoky 2002, 131). As well, due to the preparation inside China and the busy exchanges between China and the international community, a large number of women’s groups and friendship groups were founded in the cities, and women’s studies centers were established in universities (Du 2001, 240), adding to the number and diversity of women’s organizations.

In the end, a total of thirty women’s organizations including the ACWF participated in the preparation for the NGO Forum. The Organizing Committee sent its members to attend preparatory meetings, international workshops and seminars to familiarize themselves with the concept and mechanism of non-governmental organizations and to observe and study issues of concern (Liu 2001, 144). For many if not most activists, it was their first opportunity to travel abroad and the lively exchange at some of these meetings were eye-opening experience for them (Zhang 2001, 159). One activist noted that she had learned how to convene an NGO forum by attending an NGO meeting while another came back from attending the Vienna preparatory conference and the Asia-Pacific in Manila in 1993 and helped the ACWF to recognize issues such as violence against women, women’s rights as human rights, and sustainable development which was a new term for the Chinese (Wesoky 2002, 93). The preparatory process therefore helped the development of women’s organizing in China; increased attention to women’s issues; expanded the scope of women’s studies and women’s issues; enriched Chinese women’s knowledge on the international women’s movements and the NGO concept; and facilitated Chinese women to connect with international NGOs.

**Impacts of the FWCW**

The hosting of the FWCW and the NGO Forum in China enabled some 5,000 Chinese participants (mostly women) to attend, and it was a source of inspiration for many of the Chinese
women activists. The Chinese government originally planned to organize 30 panels by various government branches including the ACWF at the NGO Forum. But, with more knowledge about the NGO Forum, Chinese women activists finally managed to persuade the Organizing Committee to increase the number of panels to 47 and to include the participation of women’s organizations other than the ACWF (Wang 1996, 195). For example, Wang Xingjuan, co-founder of the Women’s Research Institute (WRI) organized a workshop at the NGO Forum entitled “Women’s Groups and Social Support” to discuss the work of WRI and other social groups (Zhang 1996, 553) and received a lot of international and domestic media attention for the hotline service and the issue of domestic violence.

Other than encouraging and enabling the emergence of new, more autonomous women’s organizations in China, the FWCW also had some other long term impacts on Chinese women organizing. First, the convening of the FWCW in China generated a greater awareness of the international women’s movement, both for the Chinese state and the Chinese women activists, one that was characterized by a “social construction of similarity” that women around the world face “common problems,” so they were social problems and not necessarily government problems. Second, the Chinese government became more aware of women’s issues and gender inequality in China and made international commitments to improve women’s status. This was widely reported in both the Chinese and international media and has been used by women activist to demand more action from the Chinese government. Third, the Chinese media began to give more coverage to women and women issues. Topics such as domestic violence and women trafficking that were tabooed before the 1990s were reported and discussed in the Chinese media. Hundreds and thousands of copies of the excerpts of the FWCW and articles discussing plans for the implementation of the Platform for Action were printed and distributed.
by the Chinese women’s journals and periodicals, raising general awareness of women’s issues.

Fourth, the FWCW fostered the creation and development of women’s collective identity, women’s agency and inspired women activists to look at things from a gender perspective.

Finally, Chinese women activists were able to compare and learn from the international women’s grass roots organizing during the preparation for and hosting of the FWCW as well as the meaning of some foreign concepts such as “gender” and “feminism.” In fact Wang Zheng refers to the FWCW as “A Historic Turning Point for the Women’s Movement in China” in the title of the article she wrote for the autumn issue of the Signs in 1996.

Concept Matters: Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Due to government’s tight control over media and overseas travel, and limited international exchange and exposure before the 1990s, the preparation for the NGO Forum therefore gave many Chinese, including both the Chinese officials and women activists their first chance to come across the term, concept and spirit of NGO. For example, Liu Bohong, a senior cadre at the ACWF and a member of the China Organizing Committee states that “Our country had no tradition of NGO, but because of the Conference, we had to familiarize ourselves with it and develop relevant mechanisms” (Liu 2001, 143). Thus, the FWCW provided the impetus for the discourse on and development of NGOs in China.

The Chinese delegation “had their first direct encounter” with NGOs and the NGO concept at the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory meeting for the NGO Forum held in Manila in November 1993. When Huang Qizao, the ACWF Vice-President and Deputy Director of the China Organizing Committee for the Conference referred to the ACWF as an NGO in China, she was immediately challenged by many Forum participants. But perhaps more significantly, this was the first time that the Chinese delegation witnessed the “vigorous, spontaneous interaction
and exchange among the participating NGOs” (Zhang 2001, 159) and the first time they heard a senior government official declaring publicly that the ACWF is an NGO. To counteract the challenge and legitimize the ACWF’s role in the organizing of the NGO Forum, the Chinese government had to formally confirm that the ACWF is “China’s largest NGO” in its “Report of the PRC on the Implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women” in February 1994 (Liu 2001, 144). In view of this new identity and international pressures, the Chinese government and the ACWF were therefore driven to learn more about the work and impact of NGOs.

Before the FWCW, NGO is a concept that did not exist in the Chinese vocabulary. Social organizations were called non-official (feiguanfang) or popular (minjian) organizations, but the term NGO quickly became fetish due to the NGO Forum and the Chinese government’s desire to jiegui. However, both the Chinese state and the Chinese people are still not comfortable with the term NGO which is difficult to be translated into Chinese. The literal translation of NGO, feizhengfu zuzhi, can be understood by most Chinese as anti-governmental. Although the ACWF has used the NGO title when attending international functions concerning women since 1994, it had not formally adopted the NGO title in domestic politics until recent years. Even at the Eight NWC held in 1998, the ACWF continued to define itself as “a mass group” instead of an NGO and did not mention any NGO spirit, impact and concept on the Chinese women’s movement in its congress documents. According to Zhang Naihua, a Chinese overseas scholar, some Chinese scholars told her that “the reasons for the omission of NGO in the Congress was that it did not fit the Chinese context and that this could also be a deliberate strategy to avoid using a politically sensitive word to avoid unnecessary troubles” (Zhang 2001, 172), thus the state still perceived that NGO posed a threat to its rule with its implication of a
move away from the government. Zhang shrewdly points out the avoidance of using the term NGO as a reflection of the Chinese government which though “embraces incoming concepts, such as NGO and gender, taking them straight over into the official rhetoric, even at the risk of distortion, yet resisting and postponing further engagement with them (Zhang 2001, 171), an example of the strategy of “selective adaptation” – a coping strategy for balancing local needs with the requirements to comply with outside norms (Potter 2004, 478).

Selective adaptation of the usage of NGO is not limited to the Chinese state. While women activists frequently use the term NGO when dealing with international organizations, especially when applying for funding support, there has not been much interests in the further exploration of the NGO concept by women activists or Chinese scholars when the fetishness of NGO faded with the euphoria surrounding the FWCW. Zhang notes that at the “Women Organizing in China” Workshop held in Oxford in July 1999, several Chinese participants “expressed the opinion that the debate over whether China has NGOs or not, or which organizations are NGOs and which are not, or who are big NGOs or small NGOs is not important, and could even be harmful for the Chinese women’s movements, because it could cause division and friction among different organizations” (Zhang 2001, 159-60). Thus harmony and stability were top of the agenda for Chinese women organizing and not the discourse on NGO. Finally, when the six first generation women’s organizations convened its first meeting in Beijing in November 2003, the name of the conference was Conference on Capacity Building for Chinese Women’s NGO, zhungguo funu NGO nengli jianshe yantaohui, co-opting the English term and avoiding the sensitive Chinese translation of the term NGO.

Notwithstanding the ambivalence toward the NGO terminology, the concept of NGO has been adopted by the state in regulating the activities of social organizations and by women in
their organizing. In the 1998 RSO, the Chinese defines social organizations as those organizations that are not funded by the government, not run for profit and are voluntary, much in line with the UN’s definition of an NGO as a “non-profit citizens’ voluntary entity organization” (Zhang 2001, 163). On the other hand, women’s organizations have emphasized their “NGO” status by the fact that they have not received any government subsidies and are independently run by their members. Inspired by encounters with international NGOs, many women quickly began to popularize and adopt the NGO concept of women empowering women, and women’s organizations grew and multiplied. Furthermore, many of the larger women’s organizations such as the five cases cited in this thesis have follow the international practice of NGOs and have formed management committee or board of directors to manage their affairs, making these social organizations more democratic and autonomous. It is interesting to note that at the conference of the six first generation women’s organization held in November 2004, some participants pointed out candidly that most of management committees formed by women’s organizations have not been successful because they were either “window-dressing” or became another tool for the sponsoring units to exercise control over the organizations. The SRAWF then shared its successful experience in establishing the management committee and avoiding the control of the sponsoring unit (Web site, China NPO). Thus some women’s organizations are networking to support each other to become more genuine NGOs.

At about the same time as the issuance of the 1998 RSO, the Chinese state also endorsed the setting up of the NGO Research Center at Tsinghua University (NGORC) in October 1998. Many scholars have interpreted these two moves as indications of the rising importance of NGO on the CCP’s agenda, therefore the need to further encourage as well as regulate NGOs. It is interesting to note however that the Chinese name for the NGORC is tsinghua daxue feiyingli
jigou yanjiu zhongxin which literally means Tsinghua University Non-profit Organization Research Center and not Non-governmental Organization Research Center. And even though the title of the book written by Wang Min, Director of the NGORCV in 2003 is called Chinese NGO Public Administration, zhungguo feizhengfu conggon bumen, the term “NGO” feizhengfu was qualified by the term “public administration” gonggong bumen which conveys some connections with the state.

Further evidence of the state’s endorsement of the NGO notion includes the state’s active promotion of the discourses on the organization and role of NGOs. In 1999, Beijing hosted two international conferences on Chinese NGOs to discuss various issues concerning social organizations and non-enterprise units in China. But perhaps more significant is the fact that Lester Salamon,\(^\text{11}\) was asked to speak on the international interpretation of the term NGO at the conference in 1999, while Helmut Anheier was invited to give the opening remarks and chair one of the sessions at “The Third ISTR Asian and Pacific Regional Conference on Professionalism and Accountability in the Third Sector” (another name for voluntary sector) held in Beijing from October 24-26, 2003. Of the 23 sessions conducted at the conference in 2003, six were focused on enabling legal environment, governance or accountability for NGOs in China. There was even one session on “Rural Development and NGO in China,” indicating some attention toward the need for further development of NGOs in rural China. Indeed, some of the titles of the sub-sessions such as “Prickly Ambivalence: State, Civil Society, And Quasi-Democracy in Malaysia,” “Empowerment of Local Civil Society in Japan,” or “Civil Society and Participatory Local Governance in the Philippines” can be considered sensitive or even provocative according

\(^{11}\) Lester Salamon of the Johns Hopkins University and Helmut Anheier of the London School of Economics have collaborated in a major, comparative study of the non-profit sector in 42 countries and are renowned for their definition of NGO as “not only formal, private, and non-profit distributing, they are also self-governing and voluntary” (Ma 2002, 309).
to the usual Chinese standard. The fact that these sessions were allowed to be conducted in China, albeit only for a small and elitist group (representatives from China were mainly academics from top Chinese universities such as Peking University and Tsinghua University), indicated Chinese government's relaxing attitude toward NGOs.

Other foreign governments are also helping to promote the development of NGOs in China. GTZ, "a service enterprise with a development-policy mandate" owned by the German government held a workshop on “NGO Development and Legal Framework in China” on July 15, 2003. The Chinese government has in fact organized or participated in four such conferences or workshops in 2003. Indeed, the two conferences held in the second half of 2003 “were paid for solely with government funds” (U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China, 2003, 37).

Thus discourses on the role and function of NGOs, whether it is called NGOs, NPOs, social organizations or minjian zuzhi is vibrant and acceptable to the government. However, with the unease over the term NGO, maybe the Chinese can consider the case of Hong Kong where NGOs are usually referred to as Voluntary Agencies (VAs) in English and ziyuan jigou in Chinese.

Money Matters: Funding, Training and Expert Supports

On the more practical side, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) allocated its first development aid to the PRC in 1978, and by the early 1980s, there were some 200 UN projects in China. With the normalization of relations between China and the United States in 1979, American foundations and NGOs such as the Ford Foundation and Asia Foundation also established or re-established ties with Chinese institutions and began to identify and sponsor Chinese projects as China embarked on its reform era. The Ford Foundation was the first international NGO to establish an office in China during the late 1980s. However, projects
sponsored by the UN or international NGOs were limited to government projects during the early reform period, and the state prevented Chinese social organizations from forming partnership with international NGOs by limiting the contact of international NGOs to state institutions. Even the Ford Foundation was mainly sponsoring government programs up until the time of the FWCW (Zhang 1996, 535). As foreign funders later seek to link up with more autonomous organizations in an effort to promote the growth of civil society in China, social organizations not funded by the state became aware of the availability of international funding and also learned to canvass for international grants through contacts and connections. Leaders of women’s organizations who are also state actors are especially privileged because they already have pre-established ties with some of the international NGOs in their official capacity.

For other women’s organizations and their leaders, participation at the FWCW and NGO Forums gave them excellent opportunities to publicize their work and to connect with international NGOs and foundations to help them with their financial needs. The pursuit of foreign funding is a real necessity for the survival of Chinese NGOs. All grassroots and autonomous organizations have financial problems because they receive no government funding or subsidies. Many social organizations would even identify funding as their “single, most pressing need” (250 Chinese NGOs, 18). For instance, Wang Xingjuan, the charismatic leader of the MWPCC says during an interview that most of her time is spent on raising funds to keep her organization running (Liu, 2004). The five cases cited in this thesis have all received international funds and at least 23 of the 33 women’s organizations (70%) recorded in the 250 Chinese NGOs have received or are receiving international funding or support. Others, for example the Jinghong Xishuanbanna Women and Children’s Psychological and Legal

12 According to Naihua Zhang, during the five years from 1991-1995, the Ford Foundation supported some 40 projects with six to seven million dollars, but more than half of the recipients of its aid were official organizations, including the ACWF.
Counseling Center in Yunnan Province was established as an independent organization with the assistance of an international NGO, in this particular case the Save the Children (UK) (250 Chinese NGOs, 277). And even though it is not a healthy development, some of the "independent NGOs are almost 100 percent funded by international sources" (U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2003, 23). On the average, membership fees and domestic donations including enterprise and individual donations amount to less than 30% of the Chinese NGO's income. Further, a great majority of the NGOs in China runs on a very small budget due to financial constraints. According to a research conducted by the NGORC in 2001, some 90% of the Chinese NGOs had an annual expenditure under 500,000 yuan (approximately USD 59,000), and only less than 2% of the NGOs spent more than 1 million yuan per year (Li, 2002).

Nick Young of the China Development Brief estimates that China is receiving at least USD 100 million each year in project funding directly from or channeled through international NGOs and foundations (Young 1999, 1). This is a substantial sum and is approximately 10 percent of the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for the Philippines or Thailand in 2002. The Ford Foundation alone has allocated about USD 128 million to China projects in the 13 years from 1988 to 2001 (Web site, Ford Foundation). In addition, there are also some 500 international NGOs working in China: some 70 grant making foundations including the Starr Foundation and Kunstater Foundation; 70 advocacy groups such as environmental groups and human rights watch; 200 humanitarian organizations including Caritas Internationalis and EZE, who work in close partnership with Chinese organizations in the implementation process; and at least 150 church-based charitable groups such as Christoffel Blindenmission which supports a huge blindness prevention program (Young 1999, 2). While some international NGOs focus on
poverty alleviation projects, others have explicitly stated their roles as “agents for social change” (HRIC 2003, 31) and their interests in helping to develop a civil society in China.

As agents for social change, some international players are increasingly focusing on “creating and enabling legal and regulatory framework for non-governmental and community organizations and improving public understanding of the roles civil society participants can play” (HRIC 2003, 29). The Ford Foundation has allocated about USD 5 million annually to its “human rights” (law) and civil society programs, while the Asia Foundation allocates about 1 million annually towards legal reform, governance, civil society and women’s rights (HRIC 2003, 28). Beginning in 2000, the Ford Foundation has supported the research and implementation of legal education experiments at ten Chinese universities, including Peking University and Fudan University; and from 2001 to 2002, it has allocated nearly half a million to fund university-based legal aid centers in China. Other international donors, namely the EU, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and Australia Aid (AusAid) each provide more than half a million dollars a year in multi-year grants to civil society projects. Apart from funding, staffs in some of the embassies also follow up on civil society development (U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2003, 13). Quasi-government agencies such as the GTZ, which has worked in China for 24 years and provided USD 720 million for projects, have branched out from focusing on vocational education, poverty alleviation and environmental protection to economic and structural reform including legal reform in recent years, adding more impetus from the international community on the development of governance, the rule of law and ultimately civil society in China. Finally, international corporations are also supporting civil society development “in the spirit of corporate social responsibility.” Global companies like Levi Strauss, Adidas, Microsoft, General Motors and the US-China Business Council have supported
a wide range of activities including rule of law and policy research (U.S. Congressional-
Executive Commission on China 2003, 11).

International NGOs have provided more than just funding. They have provided expert
advice, overseas professional training and exposure as well as training on the management and
role of NGOs to facilitate and strengthen the development of NGOs and civil society in China.
For example, funding provided by the Ford Foundation on a research project on the reproductive
health of Chinese women has helped the ACWF to shape the term “reproductive health” in
Chinese (Zhang 1996, 534), while the training and supervision of foreign experts in the same
project helped some of the participants to understand “for the first time, feminist theories,
qualitative analysis” (Gao 2001, 198). And, out of the 36 women activists that Wesoky
interviewed who have traveled abroad for reasons directly relating to women’s work, 11 of them
(30%) had been sponsored by foreign funding including the Ford Foundation, UNDP and CIDA
(Wesoky 2002, 92). With the stipulations laid down with the granting of funds, Chinese NGOs
have learned how to run an NGO, how to do accounting, reporting and last but not the least, how
to structure their organizations to be more transparent, accountable and democratic, thus
becoming genuine NGOs. However, there are also some pitfalls relating to too much reliance on
overseas funding. First, some of the funds are one-off or only available for one or two years,
leaving the recipients to fight for the survival of the project before it is even off the ground.¹³
Second, some funding agencies have their own agendas and sometimes women’s organizations
have been forced to postpone their plans or change their goals and conform to the preferences of

¹³ Even though there has been no complaints from the receiving organizations, probably with the intention of not
jeopardizing future funding opportunities, some projects were conducted for only one year or on a short term basis
due to lack of continued funding. For instance, the MWPCC conducted a short term counseling and medical
services for migrant women with funding from Canada Fund and the Guangxi Nanning Huaguang Women’s Training
School was able to conduct a research and health promotion activities with commercial sex workers for only a year
with funding from the Ford Foundation (250 Chinese NGOs).
the funding agencies to receive funding.\textsuperscript{14} Thus it is important that both funders and recipients are aware of the dangers of the unequal donor-donee relationships and work for "global feminist solidarity"\textsuperscript{15} from identifying local needs in the Chinese context.

In the long term, Chinese women's organizations will have to cultivate more permanent and reliable donor groups, especially domestic donors to secure financial sustainability, and to foster bonding with and legitimacy from their own communities. Recently, some of the more prominent women's organizations have already started their domestic fund raising campaigns. For example, the CDC set up by Xie and the RWM in 2001 held a charity dinner in 2003 and a fundraising lunch in 2004 and raised 30,000 yuan and 110,000 yuan respectively for the "Emergency Relief Fund for Migrant Women" and literacy classes for rural women in Western China respectively. In this respect, the Chinese government can help to further foster the spirit of philanthropy in China by amending its 1999 Public Welfare Donation Law which is so vague on tax exempt donations that even if donors could provide evidence of donation, tax benefits is "a matter of negotiation between donors, recipients, and the local tax authorities" (Young 2004, 27). With rising disposable incomes and corporate profits in the reform era, a tax exemption set explicitly at 10 to 15 percent for individual or corporate donation to legitimate charitable organizations will help to alleviate much of the financial difficulties faced by Chinese social organizations.

\textsuperscript{14} For example, the Chinese Society for Women's Studies, a U.S.-based feminist organization "had to postpone its plan to collaborate with feminist scholars and activists in China to theorize the findings of women's studies in China" because it was not able to secure funding from the Ford Foundation which focused on developmental projects in China (Bao and Xu 2001, 99).

\textsuperscript{15} "Global feminist solidarity" is a global women's movement that emphasizes the links among the various kinds of oppression women in all parts of the world experience.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

Findings, Implications and Recommendations

This thesis has shown that after 25 years of reform, China is witnessing a vibrant growth of more autonomous social organizations scattered in different parts of the country, thus the emergence of multiple nascent civil societies. However, this thesis has also shown that the presence of civil societies in China is vulnerable and varies greatly among regions across China because of unequal resource distribution including human and economic resources and the state’s explicit prohibition for the formation of autonomous “national” organizations. It is evident that the Chinese state has been attempting to invent an alternative civil society, a state-led civil society, by various strategies including cooption and coercion. There is also evidence that some social organizations, especially women’s organizations led by state actors, have been creating more mainstream multiple civil societies by growing more autonomous and even expand despite the state’s tightening control on social organizations due to the leaderships’ ingenuity, guanxi and international support. Under this complex situation, what are the prospects for social organizations and civil society in China?

As demonstrated in this thesis, the Chinese government’s attitude toward social organizations during the reform era has been contradictory and ambivalent. On the one hand, the government is well aware of the needs for services, its fiscal constraints, important role that social organizations can play and have played in filling service gaps and helping to build a “harmonious society,” a new slogan for Chinese leaders. On the other hand, the government fears the potential “chaos” posed by organizing outside and beyond the state’s control because it is not fully confident of its one-party rule and has therefore imposed restrictions on the formation
and management of social organizations in an effort to assert control over social organizations. The 1998 RSO and NEUR, though more restrictive, do provide two positive outcomes. First, they eliminated some “rogue” organizations that were using the NGO status to make a profit, evade tax or even cheat donors. Second, by giving the non-enterprise units similar treatments as social organizations, the new regulations have created “a sense of a united NGO sector with a common legal and political ground” (Ma 2002 b, 311), giving them an even stronger voice and laying the foundation for the development of civil society. And these are not accidental outcomes as evidenced by the government sponsored workshops on NGOs and the Third Sector in recent years that were aimed to raise the accountability, transparency and governance of NGOs.

There are further signs that official attitudes have become more accommodating toward genuine service providers. For example, the MWPCC has been able to operate a project in Tianjian which is outside of Beijing; the RWM has been able to “spawn” new organizations such as the PTC and MWC; and both the NADVC and the MWPCC have been able to carry out activities similar to “national” organizations by networking with organizations working for the same cause across the country. *Cai Jing*, an outspoken and influential monthly financial magazine in China, reports in 2002 that the Chinese State Department and the MoCA have been discussing whether non-political social organizations can be exempted from sponsoring units (Li 2002), one of the major hurdles in the registration process for social organizations.

Although women’s organizations appear to have formed a critical mass, they seem to be concentrated in the urban areas, particularly in Beijing. Much more networking and collaboration among women’s organizations are necessary to reinforce and support each other, and more importantly, to communicate and spread the spirit of organizing to other parts of China,
especially rural China. While cultivating funding resources, especially domestic donors, are important for long term survival of social organizations, the building of human capitals cannot be ignored. Training of personnel experienced and knowledgeable about NGO organizations, approaches, methods and management are necessary to provide more future leaders for the establishment of new NGOs. In these respects, international NGOs, foundations and funders can act as important agents of change by providing funding, training and exposure to their Chinese partners including both Chinese social organizations and the Chinese government. As Iris Marion Young, professor of political science argues, “State institutions have unique capacities for co-ordination, regulation, and administration on a large scale that well-functioning democracy cannot do without. Though civil society stands in tension with state institutions, a strengthening of both is necessary to deepen democracy and undermine injustice, especially that deriving from private economic power” (Young 2000, 156).

Thus democracy and social justice can only be achieved by limitation and balance of power among state, economy, and civil society. Rather than over-regulating the NGOs, the Chinese government should try to prevent civil society activities that may “exacerbate problems of inequality, marginalization, and inhibition of the development of capabilities” (Young 2000, 185-6) by limiting the power of large private enterprises and dominant groups and acting as a genuine and prominent partner in the tripartite relationships firstly among civil society and market, and secondly among local and global civil society. Ultimately, the transformation of the individual’s thinking and practice is most important for organizing and therefore the strengthening of civil society in China. International players interested in promoting the development of civil society in China should continue to help strengthen the Chinese state’s governance capacity, legal reform, and its rule of law. At the same time, they should also
identify progressive state actors and new, small grassroots organizations, especially in the rural areas for training and sponsorship. Indeed, only when the notion and practice of organizing and self-organized social organizations reach the women in the remote Chinese countryside then a robust civil society has been created in China since most scholars agree that Chinese rural women are the most marginalized and disadvantaged group in China and they are on the lowest rung of the social, economic and political ladder. Barring further interruptions such as the Tiananmen or Falun Gong incidents, there are prospects for much more organizing and the development of a more robust civil society as China proceeds further into the reform era.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This thesis has only provided “snapshots” of some Chinese women organizing, particularly on Chinese urban, elitist women organizing. Limited literature and publicly available information on registered women’s organizations have made it difficult to map a more detailed, in-depth or comprehensive picture of Chinese women organizing in the reform era. Further, the economic factor and economic organizations, a major factor and major players of civil society respectively, have not been included in this thesis. More research, especially participatory research is also needed to explore whether the “secondary organizations” spawned by the large social organizations are indeed more democratic and independent by examining the composition of the management boards and studying its operations and strategies. Recently, there have been reports that some senior staff from some first generation women’s organizations such as the RWM and the MWPCC have left and established new social organizations on their own (China Development Brief, 2003, 9). Further research and case studies are needed to assess whether these “splits” are the results of dissatisfaction with the leadership; differences in
management styles; disagreements on organizational objectives; or symptoms of organic growth within civil society.
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