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# Graduated Controls

## The State-Society Relationship in Contemporary China

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On the basis of a large number of empirical observations, this article explores the state-society relationship in contemporary China. Through an examination of the actual state controls over a great many organizations, this article proposes the concept of a “system of graduated controls.” In this system, the state, in its own interests, exerts various control strategies over different types of social organizations according to the capacities of the social organizations to challenge the state and the value of the public goods they provide. After comparing this system with other types of state-society relationships, this article concludes that the system of graduated controls is an ideal type that best characterizes the state-society relationship of contemporary China.

*Keywords:* graduated controls; state-society relationship; social organization; NGO

Since the late 1970s, Deng Xiaoping’s economic reform has brought about a dramatic and extensive transformation in China and has inspired more and more scholars to discuss China’s ongoing development trajectory. In the 1980s, scholars most often resorted to modernization theories, among which “neo-authoritarianism” and “democratism” were significant and conflicting theoretical approaches, to explain China’s transition.<sup>1</sup> The 1989 Tiananmen Student Movement changed this situation, and the breakdown of post-communist regimes in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe redirected China scholars’ attention to the study of the state-society relationship. The advocates of a new theoretical paradigm began to focus on the social arena outside the state apparatus and pinned their hope for reform on the emergence of independent civil organizations.

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In studies of state-society relationships, civil society (*shimin shehui*) is the most popular analytical framework. Clemens Stubbe Østergaard introduced civil society theories into contemporary China studies when he proposed a thesis of “civil society against the state” to analyze the 1989 Tiananmen Student Movement (Gu, 1994).<sup>2</sup> Based on an examination of social organizations in Xiaoshan city, Gordon White suggested that a civil society was emerging in contemporary China (White, 1993). Later, using the concept of civil society in a sociological sense, White and others analyzed the changes of social organizations brought by economic reform and pointed out that a strong and growing sphere of social association in China exhibited the organizational features of a civil society (White, Howell, and Shang, 1996: 208). Considering that in China no social organization exists independently of the state, some scholars qualified the concept of civil society as defined in the West and proposed concepts like “semi-civil society” (He, 1997) and “state-led civil society” (Frolic, 1997) to analyze contemporary China.

The concept of civil society emphasizes the existence of a social arena independent of the state. This is, however, obviously not the case in contemporary China. Thus some scholars completely abandoned the concept of civil society and turned to the corporatist framework to analyze the state-state relationship in contemporary China. Based on research on trade unions and business associations, Anita Chan and Jonathan Unger argued that the state-society relationship in contemporary China fits the corporatist model (Chan, 1993; Unger and Chan, 1995; Unger, 1996). Tony Saich also analyzed the state-society relationship during the reform period by using the concept of corporatism (Saich, 2001: 207–10). In addition, Jean C. Oi explained local economic growth and the role local government played by using the concept of local corporatism (Oi, 1992).

Some scholars questioned the validity of applying the Western concepts of civil society and corporatism to the Chinese case.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, some Chinese scholars proposed new analytical concepts on the basis of China’s experience. For example, Wang Ying and others proposed a “social mesosphere theory” (*shehui zhongjianceng*) through a survey of basic-level social organizations in Xiaoshan, Zhejiang (Wang, Zhe, and Sun, 1993; Wang, 1994).

Why are there so many different theoretical models for explaining the same social phenomenon in contemporary China? It is probably because China is so huge and complex that any theoretical model can find empirical support as long as one is willing to look hard enough and to ignore data that contradict it. In general, studies of the state-society relationship in China have up to now been limited in scope and far from comprehensive. Scholars who pay more attention to the 1989 Tiananmen Student Movement regard

China as a civil society against the state. Scholars who are concerned more with newly formed social organizations (*shehui tuanti*) believe civil society has emerged in contemporary China. Scholars who are concerned with mass associations (*renmin tuanti*) consider China in terms of corporatism, while scholars who focus on the semi-governmental nature of these associations define this phenomenon as a “social mesosphere.” The proliferation of new classification schemes and labels reminds Richard Baum and Alexei Shevchenko of “the parable of the blind men and the elephant” (Baum and Shevchenko, 1999: 333–34, 346). This article attempts to go beyond such partial explanations. It summarizes previous research and proposes a new analytical framework according to data drawn from field work.

### Developing a Theoretical Model

How government supervises social organizations is a common starting point in the literature on the state-society relationship. To a great extent, differences between conclusions by different scholars can be attributed to differences between types of social organizations that they have surveyed. As far as their respective local surveys are concerned, their conclusions are correct. However, the conclusions are flawed since they are one-sided generalizations, that is, generalizations about the whole on the basis of the local. This also hints that the government controls social organizations with not a single method but plural methods. That is to say, the government uses different strategies to regulate different social organizations. In this article we call such plural methods “graduated controls.” A system of such controls is a basic feature of the state-society relationship in contemporary China.

For an authoritarian government, social organizations have double attributes. On the one hand, they are potentially challenging enemies, for they are the strongest carriers of collective behavior. On the other hand, they can perform an instrumental role by providing some public goods to society, and thus can share some responsibilities with the government. At the same time, the capacities of various social organizations to challenge state power differ from organization to organization and the public goods they provide differ as well. Therefore, any government that pursues maximization of its own interests must supervise various social organizations differently, according to their different capacities to challenge state power and the nature of the public goods they provide.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, this is what any authoritarian government would wish to do. But the wish can become reality only if the government has the necessary capacity. The Chinese government

today has precisely the right capability. China's reform path started from totalitarianism. At the onset of the reform, the government absolutely dominated the balance of power between state and society. The reform did not really change this situation because it was a top-down, government-initiated reform. The dominant position of the government in the state-society relationship gave the government the capability to carry out reform as it wished. Moreover, the piecemeal character of the reform process gave the government ample time to adjust its strategies of control over social organizations. Therefore, the government was able to establish a system of "graduated controls" for implementing different strategies tailored to different social organizations.

Accordingly, one can make two inferences. If the vital interest of the government is to monopolize political power and the biggest challenge comes from the collective actions of the public, the government will choose different control strategies according to the capabilities of social organizations in organizing collective action. Therefore, the first inference is that the government exerts different controls over social organizations according to their different capabilities in challenging its power or organizing collective action. Furthermore, the government undertakes the function of providing public goods, and if the function is not accomplished, its stability will be threatened. So the government must apply differentiated control strategies over social organizations according to the attributes of the public goods they provide. Therefore, the second inference is that the government exerts different controls over social organizations according to the public goods that the social organizations provide.

We use five variables to describe the way government regulates social organizations: A, the attitude of the government toward the establishment of social organizations: Does the government permit their existence or not? If it does, is the government's attitude toward their registration positive or negative? During the registering, does the government arrange everything for social organizations or does it not intervene? B, the attributes of the administrative supervising agency (*yewu zhuguan danwei*): Is there an administrative supervising agency to supervise social organizations? If so, is the administrative supervising agency full-time or part-time? C, the government's administrative control of the governance of social organizations: Who make important decisions (such as key personnel appointments)—the administrative agencies or the social organizations, or both? D, government control of resources needed by social organizations, such as financial and human resources: In terms of financial resources, does the government exercise control over social organizations via laws and regulations, or by administrative

measures, or does it simply not intervene at all? On personnel matters, to what degree are appointments, salaries, and the welfare of personnel controlled by the government? E, government control over the routine daily activities of social organizations: Does the administrative supervising agency stipulate and/or interfere with the daily routine or is it decided autonomously by the organization itself? If the organization is autonomous, does it need to report its daily routine to the administrative supervising agency?

### **Case Analysis: Description of the System of Graduated Controls**

To demonstrate the usefulness of the above theoretical model, we examine eight types of social organizations: politically antagonistic organizations, trade unions, business and commercial associations, urban community organizations, religious organizations, official non-governmental organizations (NGOs), grassroots NGOs, and informal organizations (see Table 1).<sup>5</sup> These organizations differ in their capacity for organizing collective action and for providing public goods. For instance, what we call politically antagonistic organizations have the greatest ability to challenge the government. Both trade unions and business and commercial associations (that is, interest groups of owners of enterprises) have a strong capability to organize collective action. Religious organizations challenge the official ideology. Urban community organizations provide important public goods as well promote collective action. Generally speaking, nonprofit official NGOs, grassroots NGOs, and informal organizations have no obvious challenging power. Nevertheless, as far as the government is concerned, official NGOs and grassroots NGOs are of more importance than informal organizations in providing public goods.

Exploring the correspondence between types of social organizations and the five control variables of the government, we identify five “grades” of control strategies for the eight types of organizations, as presented in Table 2.

The Grade I control strategy targets politically antagonistic organizations. Such organizations are strictly prohibited by the government, and any existing ones that were secretly established will be banned if detected. The Public Security Bureau is responsible for watching out for such organizations. These organizations obviously have total autonomy when it comes to vital decisions, appointment of key personnel, resource acquisition, and daily routine. Compared to other social organizations, politically antagonistic social organizations face particularly harsh governmental control measures.

**Table 1**  
**The Survey Samples**

Primary Classification	Secondary Classification	Name	Type	Location
Functional organization	Trade union	SG General	State-owned enterprise	Beijing
		SG Steel Factory	State-owned enterprise	Beijing
		SK Corporation SD Corporation	Joint venture Foreign enterprise	Shenzhen Shenzhen
	Business and commercial association	YY Commercial		Beijing
		ZB Business		Shenzhen
		WS Investment		Shenzhen
Community organization	Urban residents' committee	SY Community	<i>Dayuan</i>	Beijing
		XX Community	Common	Beijing
Religious organization	Three Selfs Church ( <i>sanzi jiaohui</i> )	YC Church	Urban	Henan
		BD Church	Rural	Henan
NGO	Official NGO	FP Foundation		Beijing
	Grassroots NGO	XY Research Institute	Domestic	Beijing
		FZ Journal	Foreign	Beijing
Informal organization	Art, entertainment, and other	RD Painting and Calligraphy	Work unit	Beijing
		SY Music	Work unit	Beijing
		QN Interest	Public park	Beijing
Antagonistic organization	Politically antagonistic organization	Falungong		

Note: NGO = Non-governmental organization.

The Grade II control strategy governs trade unions and community organizations that are established by government directive. In the four trade unions surveyed, two (SG General Trade Union and SG Steel Factory Trade Union) were established by the government at the founding of the People's Republic, and the other two (SK Corporation Trade Union and SD Corporation Trade Union) were established at the demand of the government after the reform and opening up. By the same token, the community organizations were established at the demand of the government. The predecessor of community organizations is the residents' committee (*jumin*

**Table 2**  
**Relationship between Types of Social Organizations and Types of Government Control**

Control Strategies	Type of Social Organization	Control Over Establishment	Attribute of the Administrative Supervising Agency	Type of Government Control				
				Control Over Governance		Control Over Resources		
				Vital Decisions	Appointment of Key Principals	Funding	Personnel	Control Over Routine Activities
I	Politically antagonistic social organization	Prohibited	Full-time appointed agency	Made by the organization independently	Decided by the organization independently	Funding limited by administrative regulations	Decided by the organization independently	Carried out by the organization independently
II	Trade union and community organization	Compulsory establishment from the top	Full-time appointed agency	Made by the supervising agency	Appointed by the supervising agency or by the unit nested under	Funding stipulated by laws and regulations	Decided by the supervising agency or by the unit nested under	Defined by the supervising agency or by the unit nested under
III	Religious organization	Absorbed in the system set by the government	Full-time appointed agency	Proposed by the organization but examined and approved by the supervising agency	Decided after consultation between the organization and the supervising agency	Funding limited by administrative regulations	Decided by the organization independently but reported to the supervising agency	Decided by the organization but examined and approved by the supervising agency in advance



IV	Business association, Commercial association, and Official NGO	Establishment encouraged	Pluralistic agency that is fixed after consultation	Proposed by the organization but approved by the supervising agency	Appointed by the supervising agency, by the unit, or by consultation	Funding by administrative measures or no interference	Decided by the unit nested under	Decided by the organization but reported to the supervising agency
V	Grassroots NGO and Informal interest group	Existence as enterprise or no interference	No administrative supervising agency	Made by the organization independently	Decided by the organization independently	Decided by the organization independently, supported by the unit nested under, or no interference	Decided by the organization independently	Carried out by the organization independently

*weiyuanhui*) established by municipal governments, which is under direct control of the government. For example, XX Community Committee was created by combining two committees, and SY Community Committee was developed from one resident committee that had been created by combining several residents' committees.

Not only does the government monopolize the establishment of such types of social organizations, but also it assigns them to full-time administrative supervising agencies that make and carry out vital decisions top down and appoint the key principals. Surveys show that the routine activities of trade unions are mostly arranged by local trade union federations and that trade union federations above the county level are absorbed into the government system. The Trade Union Law clearly stipulates that retired trade union functionaries at or above the county level shall enjoy the same treatment as retired functionaries of government departments (Article 48). Most routine activities of residents' committees are arranged by the people's government of the subdistrict. The Organic Law of Urban Residents' Committees stipulates that the people's government of a city not divided into districts or of a municipal district or an agency of such a people's government shall provide guidance, support, and help for the residents' committees. The residents' committees shall, for their part, assist the superior people's government or agency in its work (Article 2). That is to say, the government appoints key leaders of trade union federations at various levels, and the government of a city, or its subordinate branches, manages the operations of trade unions and community organizations.

Our survey shows that the key principals of trade unions are all appointed by the Party or administrative departments. For example, in SG General the chairman of the trade union is the deputy secretary of the Party Committee of the SG Corporation, and the principal of every department of the trade union is nominated by the Party Committee, as is the case in lower-level trade unions in SG. In SK Corporation, the chairman of the trade union is the vice secretary of the SK Corporation Party Committee as well as the chairman of the Supervisory Committee and the executive director of the corporation. All the chairmen of subordinate trade unions are nominated by the department managers. As for community organizations, though a voting system has been implemented, selection of leaders is in reality under government control. For example, before the election of XX Community Committee, to ensure control officials of the subdistrict government (*jiedao banshichu*) did much campaigning, including disseminating propaganda and holding informal meetings to increase the visibility of their own, favored candidates.<sup>6</sup> There was also an election in SY Community

Committee, but it was only nominal. In 2003 for example, before the election SY leaders and subdistrict government officials made a number of speeches to voice their support for the incumbent committee members and to mobilize the residents to reelect them. The committee was reelected, just as the officials had expected.

As for funding, the Trade Union Law and the Organic Law of Urban Residents' Committees have different stipulations. For example, the Urban Residents' Committee law stipulates that "the operational funding and the source of funding of the committee and the stipend scheme and source [of funding] for the staff" must be determined and allocated by the government, and the "office space for these committees must be provided by the local government in a unified fashion" (Article 17). The salaries, provision of welfare, and personnel scheme of grassroots trade unions are determined by the enterprises in which they operate.

Most routine activities of trade unions in state-owned enterprises involve the upper-level trade union system. Comparing the activities in 2002 of the SG Trade Union with those of the Beijing Municipal General Trade Union, we found that the activities of the former involved either taking part in activities organized by the municipal general trade union or were dictated by the latter. The operation of trade unions in joint ventures and non-state-owned enterprises is subject to the management of their enterprises.<sup>7</sup> The routine activities of community organizations is controlled by the relevant government bureaucracies. For example, while investigating XX Community Committee, committee members complained to us about too many assignments and too many meetings with the subdistrict government offices (*jiedao banshichu*). During an interview, the staff members of a community committee were busy with jobs assigned by the superior government offices.

Under such tight governmental control, trade unions and community organizations have become quasi-governmental organizations that carry out specific policies of the government. In a word, they are integrated into the government and have little independence.<sup>8</sup>

The Grade III control strategy is applied to religious organizations. The government imposes certain limits on the establishment of religious organizations. For example, a newly established Christian church must be examined and approved by the government and absorbed into the Three Selfs Church (*sanzì jiaohuì*); otherwise, it will be banned. Actually, before the BD Christian Church was reviewed and approved, several government agencies such as the Public Security Bureau, the Civil Affairs Bureau, the United Front Department, and the Bureau of Religious Affairs had cracked down on it many times. Most of the key figures of the BD Church remember being

arrested. In fact, while we were conducting our field work, some staff members of a church in one township were detained by the Public Security Bureau because the church had not yet been approved by the government.

To supervise the activities of religious organizations, the government has set up a specialized Administrative Bureau of Religious Affairs. All important activities of religious organizations must be approved by this agency; otherwise, they will be banned. For example, in summer 2003, the YC Christian Church held a sodality meeting for college students who were either Christians themselves or had Christian parents. The YC District Bureau of Religious Affairs approved this gathering beforehand but did not notify the City Bureau of Religious Affairs. As a result, the gathering was interrupted by the YC City Bureau of Religious Affairs when it was almost over. The city bureau reprimanded the church leaders for “competing for talent” with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Key principals of religious organizations are appointed through consultation with the relevant administrative supervising agency and seek to maintain good relations with the government. Some of them have even been absorbed into the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). For example, the leader of the YC Christian Church was appointed in 1994 and has remained in the CPPCC since then. Though there were several elections after 1994, these elections were only nominal. In addition, he is also a member of the YC District CPPCC and of the Henan Provincial CPPCC.

With respect to fundraising, the government imposes many restrictions, especially on churches’ acceptance of overseas contributions. According to a principal of the Henan Province Christian Three Selves Patriotic Committee (Jidujiao sanzhi aiguo yundong weiyuanhui), the Bureau of Religious Affairs strictly limits the church’s overseas contributions. Contributions below 300,000 yuan have to be approved by the Provincial Bureau of Religious Affairs, and any contribution above that amount has to be approved by the National Bureau of Religious Affairs. Generally speaking, when a religious organization applies for permission to accept a contribution, information on the contributor will be transferred to the Provincial Foreign Affairs Office and then to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a process that always takes two or three years.

With respect to personnel, the engagement of personnel, the level of salaries, and the provision of welfare for full-time staff, all these are decided independently by the church, but they must be recorded with the relevant governmental departments. Routine matters such as the time, place, and form of assembly are carried out independently by the church, but they must be examined and approved by the government.

In contrast to its control strategy with regard to trade unions and community organizations, the government follows a stern control strategy with respect to religious organizations.

The Grade IV control strategy is tailored for business and commercial associations and official NGOs. The government encourages the founding of such organizations. In 1989, to encourage foreign investment, the government promulgated regulations entitled Interim Provisions for the Administration of Foreign Chambers of Commerce in China (*Waiguo shanghui guanli zan-xing guiding*), and in 1999 it circulated a document entitled "Opinions on Stepping Up the Development of Industrial and Commercial Associations (For Trial Implementation)" (*Guanyu jiakuai peiyu he fazhan gongshang lingyu xiehui de ruogan yijian*). The latter document states that "industrial and commercial associations . . . are important components of the socialist market economy. Their development is an important part of the reform of government organization and the deepening of the reform of state-owned enterprises." Obviously, the government encourages the development of such associations. In fact, our investigation testifies to this. For example, the YY Commercial Association is a product of the separation of government functions from enterprise management. The ZB Business Association and the WS Investment Association were jointly initiated and founded by the government and the relevant enterprises. Not only does the government encourage the establishment of business and commercial associations, it also encourages the establishment of official NGOs. For example, the FP Foundation was directly sponsored by the government. It has since worked hand in glove with the government. As an official stated, the CCP Central Committee and the State Council have focused on and strongly supported the development of the FP Foundation.

In terms of administrative supervision of Grade IV organizations, there is no single, full-time agency assigned to this task. Instead there are multiple administrative supervising agencies, created via consultation between the social organization and relevant departments of the government. Such social organizations enjoy different levels of autonomy when it comes to vital decisions and appointment of principals. In the four organizations we surveyed, the ZB Business Association and the WS Investment Association have relatively great autonomy, while the YY Commercial Association is more subject to influence from the work unit of its chairman (*huizhang danwei*) on personnel matters and important decisions. The principals of the FP Foundation are appointed by the government.

There are no restrictions on the acquisition of funding; indeed, the government actively supports such organizations. For example, the FP has enjoyed

many preferences over the years. From 1992 to 1993, with the government's backing it received discounted loans of twenty million yuan from the People's Bank of China, the Agricultural Bank of China, the China Construction Bank, and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China. The FD is free to hire full-time staff and to decide on the salaries and welfare provision of its staff. In its routine activities, it faces little interference from the government, but nonetheless its routine must be reported to the administrative supervising agencies.

Obviously, since these organizations are different from religious organizations, the government's control strategy is not to severely restrict them but to actively encourage and support them.

Finally, the Grade V control strategy is reserved for grassroots NGOs and informal organizations, which do not encounter too much interference from the government.<sup>9</sup> Grassroots NGOs are always registered as enterprises, which are supervised by the Administrative Bureau for Industry and Commerce (Gongshang ju). According to the Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations (*Shehui tuanti dengji guanli tiaoli*), a social organization, with the agreement of its administrative supervising agency, must register with the Bureau of Civil Affairs. That is to say, if a social organization wants to be an associational legal person (*shetuan faren*), it must find an administrative supervising agency. But in reality administrative bureaucracies are not willing to take on the responsibilities this involves, and thus many social organizations cannot find an administrative supervising agency. As a result, these social organizations cannot register as an association (*shetuan faren*). Therefore, to operate as a legal entity, they have no choice but to register as a corporation (business enterprise). For example, before the XX Research Institute registered as an enterprise, it had approached the National Educational Commission, the All-China Women's Federation, the Soong Ching Ling Foundation, the Youth Development Foundation, the Child Development Center, the China Disabled Persons' Federation, the Beijing Disabled Persons' Federation, and so on to find an administrative supervising agency. None of these agencies was interested. Thus, XX was forced to register as an enterprise. Compared with official NGOs, grassroots NGOs are more independent because they do not have any administrative supervising agency.<sup>10</sup>

As for informal organizations, the government neither demands them to register with the Bureau of Civil Affairs nor exercises direct control. Instead, the government's control strategy is one of either indirect control, such as managing organizations through the units and residents' committees they adhere to,<sup>11</sup> or letting things go without control. Obviously, the control of the government over such organizations is weak.

In sum, the government implements different control strategies for different social organizations according to their capability to challenge the government. For example, the strategy for controlling politically antagonistic organizations is to ban them, since they have publicly and explicitly challenged the government. For trade unions and community organizations that have a strong potential challenging capability, the strategy is to turn them into quasi-governmental organs. The strategy for religious organizations is to limit their growth, since they have a strong potential challenging capability. The strategy for business and commercial associations and official NGOs is to encourage and support them, since they have weak potential challenging capability. The strategy for grassroots NGOs and informal organizations is one of no interference. On the premise that social organizations cannot challenge the government's power, the government follows different control strategies according to the public goods they provide. For example, the strategy for business and commercial associations and official NGOs is to encourage and support them, because the public goods they provide are necessary for the government. If the public goods that social organizations provide are not deemed necessary, the control strategy of the government is to control and limit them or to let them operate without restriction.<sup>12</sup> In short, the government implements different control strategies with respect to different social organizations according to their different challenging capabilities and the character of public goods they provide.

### **Graduated Controls as an Ideal Type of State-Society Relationship**

Analysis of our data shows that during the reform period with political liberalization and economic marketization there emerged a myriad of social organizations representing diverse interests and needs. In the face of this change, the old totalitarian mode of control, in which the state absolutely controls society, gradually disintegrated. Civil autonomy has not, however, emerged in its place. Rather, a new mode of state control has taken shape, what we call a "graduated mode of control." The key feature of this new state-society relationship is that the state controls society purposefully, flexibly, and selectively. Its controls are very intensive and strong when it feels such are necessary, and lax or even absent when control is considered unnecessary. In this new system the kind of strategies and the degree of the control vary according to the interest of the government and the challenging capability and social function of the controlled organizations. In fact,

this is a new system through which the government implements overall control of society by quasi-governmental means in a new economic environment.

The system of graduated controls not only describes essential features of the state-society relationship of contemporary China but also establishes an ideal type. We can understand the features of the new type by comparing it to other types of state-society models such as the civil society model, the corporatist model, the civil-society-against-the state model, and the totalitarianism model.

Though there is some controversy over the definition of civil society, in general we can say that civil society is the realm of the social, economic, and moral order that lies outside of state control (Miller, 1992: 126). Civil society emphasizes freedom of association, competition among diverse social organizations, and a social field independent of the state. It is a free democratic regime that can assure these features of civil society in which society dominates the distribution of power between the state and society, while in a system of graduated controls, the right to organize is so limited that each different realm has different rights. In the latter system, social organizations have been established neither fully according to the free will of their members nor fully independent of the state. Different social organizations have different relationships with the government.<sup>13</sup> This new system is an adaptation not to a free democratic regime but an authoritarian or post-totalitarian regime, where the state dominates in the distribution of power between state and society.

In the corporatist model, in contrast to the model of graduated controls, citizens have ample rights of free association and social organizations are relatively autonomous.<sup>14</sup> However, unlike the civil society model, corporatism emphasizes communication and cooperation between state and society instead of a social field independent of the state. In addition, corporatism emphasizes a monopoly of functional organizations instead of free competition among social organizations. Such functional organizations can negotiate with the state for their members' sake on the one hand, and on the other hand, they must make a commitment to enforce public policies among their members (Miller, 1992: 173–76). In a system of graduated controls, there is not always a monopoly social organization for every interest group. Even when a monopoly social organization does exist in a system of graduated controls, it probably does not have the support of its members because, given the restriction on the freedom of association, most likely it is mandated by the government rather than by the free will of its members.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, those monopoly organizations may not serve the interests of their members, but instead tend to serve the interests of the state. In addition, corporatism is more flexible and adaptable than graduated controls and can exist in harmony with democracy, authoritarianism, and even totalitarianism.



The civil-society-against-the-state model characterizes the state-society relationship of Eastern European countries in transition, which corresponds to totalitarianism in collapse. In this relationship, though people's right to organize is limited by law, in fact the limitation is ineffective. Social organizations have a great deal of independence and publicly oppose the state, while state controls over these organizations are weak. In a system of graduated controls, not only are associational rights limited but also state controls over social organizations are efficient. Generally, social organizations do not oppose the state, for they have a clear sense of limits; that is, they dare not publicly challenge the authority of the government.<sup>16</sup> The civil-society-against-the-state model corresponds to totalitarianism in collapse, while a system of graduated controls corresponds to totalitarianism in self-adjustment.

The totalitarianism model describes the state-society relationship in mainland China before the reform. In this model people are deprived of associational rights and independent social organizations are banned. In the distribution of power between the state and society, the state dominates totally and intrudes into every corner of society, including both the public sphere and private lives. To a certain extent China's present system of graduated controls has inherited some features of totalitarianism. For example, the state dominates in the distribution of power between state and society so that it controls all of the public sphere and monopolizes all resources for collective action. But there is an obvious difference between the two models. In a system of graduated controls, the state no longer interferes in every aspect of society and permits limited freedom of association. Many social organizations emerge, and moreover economic and private spheres open up. With regard to providing public goods, the state changes from arranging everything into using social organizations to meet social needs, though these social organizations are supposed to play only a supplementary "odds and ends" role.

A system of graduated controls is thus different from both the old model of totalitarianism before reform, civil-society-against-the-state in Eastern Europe, and corporatism and civil society in the West. It is a new model of the state-society relationship.

After twenty years of reform in China, the market has replaced central planning as the dominant mechanism of resource allocation and authoritarianism has replaced totalitarianism. In the system of graduated controls that appeared in China in the 1990s, the state does not totally control the economy or interfere in personal lives any longer, but it firmly controls the political and public spheres. The state permits citizens limited freedom to organize, but social organizations are permitted neither to exist independently of the

state nor to challenge the power of the state. At the same time, the state fully uses the capabilities of social organizations to provide public goods. As a result, the freedom of the citizens of China has greatly expanded, while authoritarianism ultimately remains unchallenged. In addition, the development of social organizations has not led to democratization in the political arena. Of course, twenty years is so short that we cannot forecast the long-term effects of the system of graduated controls based on what has happened over the past two decades, nor can we forecast what may result from further organizing in Chinese society. By the same token, we cannot judge whether the system of graduated controls is a short-lived phenomenon or will endure. Perhaps only time can give us the answer.

## Notes

1. On the controversy over “neo-authoritarianism” and “democratism,” see Liu and Li (1989).

2. Tony Saich has pointed out that the early literature on contemporary China and civil society focused on the areas of conflict between the state and society. In this literature, almost all types of nonconformity or antiregime behavior were cited as evidence of an emerging civil society (Saich, 2001: 206).

3. On the applicability of the civil society model, see Wakeman, 1993; Huang, 1993; Dean, 1997; Chamberlain, 1998; Saich, 2000: 139; and Howell, 2004: 163–4. On corporatism, see White, Howell, and Shang, 1996: 211–15; Saich, 2001: 209; Foster, 2002: 62–63; and Howell, 2004: 162–63.

4. “Government” is not an abstract concept, for it is made up of real persons; in fact, persons who are rational and pursue the maximization of their own interests. As a result, in all cases government also acts to maximize its interests or those of its agents.

5. An example of a politically antagonistic organization is the Falungong. See Kang Xiaoguang’s survey and research on the Falungong between 1998 and 2000 (Kang, 2000).

6. *Jiedao banshichu* is a subordinate agency of the people’s municipal district government.

7. We surveyed one enterprise established with foreign capital—the CL Group—which has no trade union. Though it lacks a trade union, the CL Group offers all the recreational activities that are offered by the SK Trade Union; moreover, some of these activities are better. Judging from this, we can conclude that whether a trade union exists or not in a joint venture has little effect on the workers. Even if an enterprise has no trade union, it nonetheless may carry out such things as work competitions (*laodong jingsai*) and propaganda, and it may offer recreational activities because its purpose is to stimulate enthusiasm, initiative and a sense of loyalty among its workers. In short, the object is to promote the interests of the enterprise rather than the interests of the workers.

8. Grassroots trade unions and compound (*dayuan*) residents’ committees are attached not only to the government but also to the units under which they are nested. The appointment of principals, funding, and personnel matters are highly dependent on these units. Thus, these organizations can be doubly dependent.

9. This does not mean the government exercises no control over such organizations. In fact, the Public Security Bureau controls every organization and every individual. Once these

organizations and people engage in nonconforming behavior, the Public Security Bureau promptly intervenes. As Jude Howell (2004: 159) notes, such governmental control establishes the limits of what is tolerated: no organization and no individual is permitted to challenge the power of the government or threaten its stability.

10. At present, the government manages grassroots organizations as enterprises instead of social organizations, although these organizations carry out activities and perform the functions of social organizations. That is to say, there is a loophole in the government's management of such organizations.

11. This manifests itself in two ways. One is that informal organizations must register with the units that they belong to, and the other is that the units actively support informal organizations. This is also true of community residents' committees. In XX Community, government "Measures on Strengthening the Management of Community Social Organization" demand that residents' committees gather information about the interest group organizations in the community, including the name, gender, age, address, place of employment, and telephone number of their members. Thus, although there is no direct control over informal organizations, the government implements indirect control over informal interest groups through community organizations and units.

12. If a social organization has a strong potential challenging capability and the public goods it provides are not necessary for the government, the control strategy of the government is to limit its development. A religious organization would be an example of such an organization. If, however, a social organization has a weak potential challenging capability and the public goods it provides are not necessary for the government—which would be the case with, for example, an informal interest group—the control strategy of the government is to let the organization operate without restriction.

13. Because of this, some scholars who advocate civil society adjust the concept when analyzing China and propose such concepts as "semi-civil society" and "state-led civil society" and argue that civil society in China is in a nascent, embryonic, and emerging stage (Dickson, 2003: 18).

14. There are two primary types of corporatism: societal corporatism and state corporatism. In the former, citizens have full rights of association. In the latter, the rights of association are limited. But as a whole, in the corporatist model citizens have greater rights of association than in the model of graduated controls.

15. As Foster (2002: 63) points out, associations are designed neither to represent nor to stifle group interests; instead, they are created to assist government agencies. Although the structural form of corporatism is found in contemporary China, these arrangements are essentially not corporatist.

16. Not all the activities of the organizations we surveyed (politically antagonistic organizations excluded) are seen by the government as challenges to its authority. All the organizations we surveyed have a strong sense of boundary lines and carry out strict self-discipline in their daily operations, which indicates that governmental control is so effective that these organizations avoid challenging the authority of the government.

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