

**PRO-FORMA CONSISTENCY: THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHINA'S SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS  
AND THE STATE IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

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A thesis submitted to

The University of Birmingham

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPH

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14 April 2012

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## **Abstract**

The thesis investigates how the Chinese state's control and the autonomy of social organizations co-exist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century China. I argue that both of them get along with each other through Pro-Forma consistency, which is the underlying mechanism. Pro-Forma consistency means that the Chinese state and social organization achieve unfixed conformity at the central state discourse level and the local state level through the articulatory elements of 'bottom line consistency', 'personal connections as intermediary', 'key words policy consistency' and 'matching political achievements'. Under Pro-Forma consistency, there is an ongoing and paradoxical power relationship. On the one hand, the Chinese state is reinforced in its hegemonic position as social organizations must conform, at least formally, to the state discourse. The antagonistic practices of social organizations are inhibited from exposing themselves. On the other, Pro-Forma consistency also has a productive function, as the hegemonic status of the state is not fixed. The suppressed antagonistic practices of social organizations obtain the opportunity to develop unremarkably and peacefully under Pro-Forma consistency with the state discourse. The thesis contributes to the civil society theories and Post-Marxist theories in identifying the liminal stage of Chinese social organizations under Pro-Forma Consistency.

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## INTRODUCTION

After nearly thirty years of reforms, China has experienced dramatic changes, not only in her economic field but also socially and politically (Wang, Rees, and Andreosso-O'callaghan 2004: 203-222), and since its establishment, the PRC has experienced a steady discourse change, from one of 'class struggle as the central task' in Mao Ze Dong's era to 'economic reform and opening up...' during Deng Xiao Peng's time, and more recently on to the 'three representations' and 'building a harmonious socialist society using a scientific outlook on development'. These discourse changes have been introduced in order to confront the particular social dislocations that have taken place during the different phases. The latest state discourse, 'building a harmonious society...' has been constructed in order to deal with the social problems of environmental deterioration, deepening social inequality and antagonism between different social groups, plus the widening disparity between the urban and rural areas of China.

In his book *The Paradox of China's Post-Mao Reform*, Merle Goldman and his contributors perspicaciously characterize China as a 'fragmented and fragmenting society' with the party-state continuously in decline (1999: 17). This statement captures the essential nature of China's social and political fields, and with the institutional retreat of the Chinese state from social and economic areas, Chinese society and its people have developed greater opportunity to organize themselves in a variety of ways. Moreover, during the social dislocations of the twenty-first century,

China has become more and more serious about social issues, and as a result, new social organizations have mushroomed voluntarily, their aim being to resolve the social problems that exist (Howell 2004a: 143-171).

However, in terms of the nature of Chinese society, one unanswered question has always been as to whether China has ever had a civil society. Controversial discussions in this area have focused on the relationship between the Chinese state and society, as the ambiguous relationship between the Chinese state and social organizations has always been a difficult topic to address. One compromise view is that China has a civil society in a sociological sense, meaning 'an intermediate social associational realm' standing between the state and the 'basic building blocks of society' (White 1993: 65-67), within which it is admitted that there are social organizations institutionally separate from the state. However, this description is not satisfactory, since it does not provide a suitably deep understanding of the political nature of Chinese social organizations. Existing studies on the topic have contributed to the classification of the relationship between the Chinese state and social organizations by describing the degrees of autonomy enjoyed by the latter (or the degrees of control employed by the state) (Howell 1996: 185-201, Kang and Han 2008: 36-55). However, such functionalist descriptions are still incapable of answering the political nature of Chinese social organizations and whether they can be collectively viewed as representing 'civil society'. The dynamic interactions between the state and social organizations in everyday practice have been overlooked, and how the retreating Chinese state controls these institutionally independent social

organizations in contemporary China has also been little studied.

Therefore, the research questions that my thesis will help to answer are as follows:

- 1) In what form does state control and the institutional autonomy of social organizations co-exist in China?
- 2) Following on from 1), what are the underlying mechanisms in the ongoing relational constructions between the controlling practices of the Chinese state and the autonomous practices of the social organizations?
- 3) Based on the answers to question 2), what are the political meanings of the mechanisms involved? Can the political meanings in place answer the question of whether China has a civil society?

In this thesis, I will argue that both Chinese state control and the autonomous practices of social organizations work alongside each other through the use of Pro-Forma Consistency, which is the mechanism underlying their co-existence. Pro-Forma Consistency means that the Chinese state and social organizations are able to achieve an unfixed conformity at the central state discourse and local state levels, through the articulatory elements of 'bottom line consistency', 'personal connections as intermediaries', 'key word policy consistency' and 'matching political achievements'. Within Pro-Forma Consistency, there is an ongoing and paradoxical power relationship between the state and social organizations, and on the one hand, the Chinese state formally reinforces its hegemonic position – the one to which social organizations must conform, as related to the state discourse of 'building a harmonious socialist society through a scientific outlook on development'. The state



controls through Pro-Forma Consistency within which the antagonistic practices of the social organizations remain hidden - suppressed under the chains of equivalence formed by the state's discourse. On the other hand, Pro-Forma Consistency also has a productive function, as the hegemonic status of the state is not fixed but is challenged. As a result, the suppressed antagonistic practices of the social organizations have the opportunity to develop unnoticed within the Pro-Forma Consistency framework, and as a part of state discourse.

The possibility of Pro-Forma Consistency lies in the nature of the nodal points within Chinese state discourses. These nodal points, such as 'building a harmonious socialist society', 'constructing new socialist rural areas' and 'caring for migrant workers' are constructed in order to represent a vast range of practices and to hold the entire Chinese social and political arena together. This mythical 'fullness' of representation is then embodied through the nodal points, those that interpolate the social practices into state discourses. However, this embodied fullness is not fixed; it is constantly being constructed. The desire to represent all practices leads to an internal emptiness within the nodal points of state discourse, and it is based on this emptiness that Pro-Forma Consistency between the state and social organizations is able to be constructed. As a result, the suppressed, antagonistic practices of the social organizations have space to develop.

It is still hard to answer whether the space where social organizations operate can be termed 'civil society' or not. A tentative answer may be proffered - that civil society *is* developing in China, due to the fact that Chinese social organizations do hold their

own political values, those which differ from the state. As for the five cases analyzed in this thesis, these being 'raising the class consciousness of migrant workers', 'searching for an anti-capitalist mode of development' and 'developing civic virtues, civil rights and democracy', these are the three political values pursued by the social organizations. However, the time has not yet arrived to judge whether these political values can be developed to such an extent as to openly break through Pro-Forma Consistency and compete directly with state discourse. Moreover, in the meantime, there is no sign that the three political values will ally with each other and construct an internal political frontier within the state discourse of 'building a harmonious socialist society'.

This thesis contributes to civil society and Post-Marxist theories in two ways. First, Pro-Forma Consistency is used to explain the relationship between the Chinese state and social organizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, helping to interpret how the state controls social organizations and how social organizations struggle to maintain their autonomy. This approach captures the key features of the relationship between the Chinese state and social organizations in terms of the dynamic interactions that occur within their everyday practices. The concept of Pro-Forma Consistency transcends the typological interpretations of the relationship between the Chinese state and social organizations, and adds to civil society theories of the existence of a non-liberal, non-Marxist type of nascent civil society model in a post-totalitarian regime. To be more accurate, the nascent civil society model of China is a tentative judgment which requires more empirical studies to be carried out; meanwhile, it is legitimate to say

that there is a liminality or in-limbo status in terms of Chinese civil society. It is at the stage when the antagonistic practices of social organizations are simultaneously suppressed and developed, and the hegemonic status of the state is simultaneously reinforced and challenged under the Pro-Forma Consistency framework. As a result, the right time for the construction of a political frontier, as proposed by Laclau and Mouffe, has not yet arrived. Therefore, the discovery of this liminal stage is the second aspect of the contribution of this thesis.

In this paper, then after the contributions of and the gaps in civil society theories have been identified, a theoretical framework based on the Post-Marxist concepts of discourse, articulation and nodal points will be developed. Theoretical frameworks related to the liberal theories of civil society and the traditional Marxist theories provide the two starting points for this thesis. Both of these theoretical models, though they are different from each other in many crucial respects, agree that with the development of the capitalist mode of production, state, market and society will gradually, institutionally separate from each other. Secondly, both these theories identify the conflicts and struggles that exist between state, market and society actors; the liberal theories believe that these conflicts can be resolved within the balanced, interactive and complimentary actions of the three sectors, while the Marxist theories propose the complete overthrow of capitalism.

However, there are also two gaps in the existing civil society theories. Their analytical capacities are limited, in the sense that their pre-settled ideal-typical models are not sufficient enough to capture the details of the discursive practices that occur in

everyday life. Moreover, while the discursive everyday practices of both the state and social organizations in China reveal themselves as fluid and constant procedures, the existing sectorial models of civil society, both the counter-balancing cooperative model and the confrontational model, are ultimately static models that miss the dynamic points that exist within the real-life, procedural setting.

Therefore, the theoretical framework of this thesis starts by admitting to the institutional separation of the state and society in China, then is alert to the possible conflicts that might exist between the two sectors. However, in order to develop a framework that is able to capture the details of these practices and embrace a procedural perspective, the theoretical framework will focus on the articulatory process related to the interactions between the Chinese state and social organizations. This focus is supported by the methodology used: multi-sited ethnography, which means I will study the interactions and processes that exist by following the people and the plots involved. (Marcus1995: 95-117)

The five social organizations were selected according to their profound illustrative potential; in that they came into being in order to respond to the contemporary social dislocations of the 'three rural problems' in China. Institutionally, the initiation, establishment and even daily operations of the five social organizations, all take place within the realm of Chinese society, plus share a channel to the central state. In this thesis, pseudonyms will be used to refer to the selected organizations and relevant people, in order to maintain their confidentiality.

Accompanied by a multi-sited ethnography, the theoretical framework of this thesis

is focused on the articulatory processes of the interactions between the Chinese state and the social organizations, from four perspectives, these being 'bottom-line consistency', 'personal connections as intermediaries', 'key word policy consistency' and 'matching political achievements'. Bottom-line consistency and key word policy consistency operate at both the discourse and the local state level, and the existence of the former means that the Chinese state and social organizations do not openly oppose each other, while key word consistency refers to the conformity established regarding the nodal points within the discursive practices of both the state and the social organizations. 'Personal connections as intermediaries' and 'matching political achievements' meanwhile, can be observed at the local state level, the former referring to personal connections between the state and social organizations and how these contribute to the establishment of Pro-Forma Consistency, and the latter requiring social organizations to satisfy local government officers by providing them with content for their official reports. These four analytical dimensions will be theorized based upon the empirical findings of my fieldwork – and in studying the people and stories in order to identify the articulatory processes in existence, I will particularly pay attention to the expressions and connections contained within the different practices, and based upon which a contextual picture will always develop.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. In the first chapter, it will present my research questions, which are derived from the debate in the literature as to whether China has ever had a civil society; then a general picture of Chinese social organizations and how the state wants to shape them. In the second chapter, based

on the critical review of civil society theories, post-Marxist theories and ethnographic methods, I will present the theoretical and methodological framework of the study, by looking at the people and the plots - to capture the articulatory practices of the social organizations and the Chinese state from the four dimensions of the articulatory elements. This theoretical and methodological approach is developed to alter the frequently applied research focus from the sectorial models to everyday practices, which means to fill in the gaps of the current civil society theories and research approaches.

The third chapter consists of two parts; one, how Chinese state discourse has changed along with the changing dislocations that have taken place in Chinese society in the twenty-first century, and two, how the five social organizations have achieved Pro-Forma Consistency with the state at the state discourse level using the nodal point of building a harmonious society. In establishing the Pro-Forma Consistency with the state policy discourse, other two-and-a-half discourses have also emerged from the everyday practices of the five social organizations. These two-and-a-half discourses are hiding behind the hegemonic exercises of the state discourse.

In the fourth chapter, I will present the cases of Organizations Grey and Orange at the local state level from four dimensions, during which time the dynamic power relations between the state and the social organizations will be revealed. Three states of Pro-Forma Consistency will also be identified, these being ruptured, excessive and successful consistency. Ruptures can occur at any of the four articulatory elements;

and excessive consistency means a full institutional absorption, while successful Pro-Forma Consistency is constructed by both the 'routine suppression' and the room to develop organizations' own values.

In the fifth chapter, the cases of Organization Colorful, Red and Green will be analyzed to show how they have struggled locally to achieve Pro-forma Consistency through the articulations of the four dimensional points mentioned above, and how the construction of Pro-Forma consistency is an ongoing struggle. Moreover, I will illustrate that the discourses of 'neo-rural reconstruction', 'building migrant workers' class consciousness' and 'popular education' are in construction in the practices of the five social organizations underneath the state discourse. They are both overlapping with and different from each other. Although there is room for them to develop, they are far less unified into a political frontier to confront the state discourse of 'building a harmonious society'.

The last chapter sums up all the information presented and discusses the theoretical construction of Pro-Forma Consistency through the use of the four articulatory elements at both the state discourse and local state levels. Last but not least, though tentatively, I will answer that China do have a civil society, which is developing in its own pace and route.

# CHAPTER 1: THE UNANSWERED QUESTION - HAS CHINA EVER HAD A CIVIL SOCIETY?

## Introduction

“Civil society’ covers by and large ‘all voluntarily constituted social relations, institutions, and organizations that are not reducible to the administrative grasp of the state’...One type of CSO (civil society organization) is the non-governmental development organization’ (Jørgensen, 1996: 37, 38).

This chapter aims to discuss my research questions within the context of a long-standing debate as to whether China has ever had a civil society. This debate raises three important issues – the autonomy of social organizations *vis-à-vis* the Chinese state, the values held and historical conditions experienced by these social organizations, and the normative aspects of promoting a civil society in China.

This thesis will respond to the debate by discussing how ‘state control’ and different levels of ‘autonomy’ among social organizations can co-exist in China, what the underlying mechanisms and values of this co-existence are, and how the meanings of these mechanisms contribute to the theories on civil society.

Before moving on to develop a theoretical and methodological framework, this chapter will provide a general picture of Chinese social organizations in the twenty-first century, a picture which echoes the debate regarding state control and organizational autonomy and which are the key points of this study.



## Crucial and Challenging Points of the Debate

Has China ever had a civil society? This contentious question can only be answered if considering whether Chinese social organizations have ever been independent from the state. Then there are further questions as to whether associations, if agreement is achieved on their autonomy, collectively hold the values of 'economic exchange and association', 'privacy', 'civil rights', 'voluntariness' and 'democracy', and thus are in themselves a 'limited state', as these values are regarded as the core features of a civil society (Ray 2004: 220-223).

Some researchers believe that China *does* have a civil society, though it is not mature enough to hold all the hallmark civil society values (Xiao 1995: 41-51; White 1996: 3; White, Howell, and Shang 1996: 209-210; Howell 1996: 185-201). Some scholars do not agree that China has a civil society, since Chinese traditional values rule out the possibility of the emergence of such a thing (Shi 1991: 105-120; Xia 1995: 23-39; Deng and Jing 2002: 23). Adding to the debate, some Chinese scholars advocate developing a civil society in order to achieve political modernity in China (Yu 1993b: 45-48, He 1994: Deng 2002: 91-96). Civil society thus also contains a normative value within the Chinese context.

Those who agree that China has a civil society usually argue from two perspectives, first, that the legal rights of a market economy that protect liberty, contractual relationships and private ownership, are raised as the core of a civil society (Xiao 1995: 41-43). According to this principle, in the nineteenth century, China at one point had an immature civil society - at 'a stage when some individuals and social interest

groups obtain[ed] autonomous status out of state direct control, but with a low institutional level' (Xiao 1995: 43). However, due to the national crisis caused by the Japanese invasion and later the building of a centralized party-state in the twentieth century, this immature civil society did not have a chance to develop further (Xiao 1995: 44-51). As reforms and opening-up policies have been carried out since the late 1970s, so many scholars believe that the socialist market economy established by the reform policies, that which recognizes private ownership, the de-politicization of individual life and the government withdrawal from enterprise management, has provided the pre-conditions for a civil society to develop in China (Yu 1993b: 45-48; Deng 2002: 91-96).

The second perspective focuses on the autonomy of Chinese social organizations. Depending upon the degree of autonomy from the party-state enjoyed by the various organizations, and the level of voluntariness of their membership, Chinese social organizations can be divided into the following types: (i) mass organizations, (ii) registered organizations - meaning official organizations with two sub-groups: registered popular organizations and registered grassroots support organizations, (iii) in-limbo organizations and (iv) illegal organizations (White 1993: 75-85; White, Howell and Shang 1996: 209-210; Howell 1996: 187-191). This list constitutes a continuum of Chinese social organizations ranging from those 'mass and official organizations' who have intimate relations with the party-state 'in terms of funding, staffing, policy orientation and structural integration' at one end (Howell 1996: 188), to those organized entirely from below at the other. This incorporates '...a wide spectrum from

the caged, through the incorporated and interstitial, to the suppressed sectors' (White, Howell and Shang 1996: 38).

This typological analysis concurs with the 'sociological conception' of 'an intermediate social associational realm' standing between the state and the 'basic building blocks of society', which contain 'all social organizations', 'bourgeois society' and 'mass organizations' (White 1993: 66; White 1996: 3; Buchowski 1996: 80-81).

When it comes to the question as to whether in the political sense, these social organizations bear 'the nature and feasibility of political democratization' (White 1993: 65-67), the answer is that they are conservative. It has been found that Chinese social organizations only partially embody the ideal, typical values of a civil society, such as 'voluntary participation', 'self-regulation', 'autonomy and separation from the state' (White, Howell and Shang 1996: 29, 37-38), because there does not exist a political context in China that allows them to support this full set of values (White, Howell and Shang 1996: 37-38).

Some scholars completely disagree with the proposition that China has a civil society. Shi Yuan Kang, who was educated in Taiwan and Canada and then taught at the Chinese University in Hong Kong, reviewed Hegel's civil society theories in his work the *Twenty-First Century*. He points out that China has always been a traditional, agricultural country, in which civil society's core values, such as privacy, civil rights and contractual market relations, have never occurred (Shi 1991: 113-119). The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has continued the traditional Chinese social-political system by establishing a party-state, one that has unified society under its control (Shi

1991: 118). Therefore, he concludes, China does not have anything that could be called 'civil society' (Shi 1991: 119). Similarly, Deng and Jing worry that China's traditionally centralized political system might prevent the emergence of independent social forces (Deng and Jing 2002: 23), while Shi asserts that China does not genetically have the seeds of a civil society. Xia reviews western history in terms of the emergence of civil society and nation states, and compares the features of western cities with Chinese cities in the middle ages (Xia 1995: 23-40). He echoes the findings of Shi by declaring that if civil society is to be expected to take root in China, China's traditional, agricultural economy will be the biggest impediment. When he wrote his article, he did not think there was a possibility of civil society emerging in China (Xia 1995: 37-38).

Adding to this debate, one group of Chinese scholars views civil society as having a bright future within China's development paradigm. From the 1980s to the 1990s, many Chinese scholars endeavored to reinterpret Marxist theory on 'bourgeois society' and 'civil society'. Within their arguments, great efforts are made to prove that the theories of civil society and the blueprint of building a civil society in China tally with the Chinese ideology of Marxism and socialist development.

The first step in this process is to unravel the concept of 'bourgeois society', which is translated as 'civil society' in Chinese but actually contains several meanings. For example, translating the term *bürgerliches recht* only as the 'bourgeois right' leads to a misunderstanding of Marxist theory (Shen 1986: 30, Yu 1993a: 60), as *bürgerliches recht* in this context is both a 'historical category' and an 'analytical category' (Yu

1993a: 59-65). As a historical category, it narrowly refers to the bourgeois right, referring to the exploitive nature of the bourgeois class; while in its analytical sense it refers to 'townspeople's rights' (Shen 1986: 30-31, Ma 1994: 183). Townspeople, who later in the industrialized capitalist societies were called 'citizens' (*GongMin* or *ShiMin*), enjoy the 'private possession of commodities' in the market (Shen 1986: 30-32), and the private possession of commodities and market exchanges between townspeople does not necessarily represent bourgeois exploitation. Thus, 'civil society' equates to 'bourgeois society' only when the exploitation of surplus value in capitalist production is considered (Shen 1990: 49-50; Yu 1993a: 68-69). By distinguishing the concepts townspeople's/civil rights and civil society, from the bourgeois right and bourgeois society, Chinese scholars have tried to play-down the negative implications of bourgeois exploitation.

The second step is to argue that civil society is suitable for Chinese development. Some still believe that the Marxist theory of civil society is the only 'true, scientific and objective' theory that can be used to develop civil society in China (Yu 1993a: 71-74), while others choose the theories of Locke and Hegel (Deng 2002:91). Huang suggests that only socialism can realize true civil rights (Huang 1988: 55), as socialist state laws, which represent the collective will of the people, are supposed to protect civil rights, and that would be a must in the development of socialist China (*Ibid*). As for civic awareness, Huang argues that this originates from 'working class awareness' and 'enjoys the state-will' and that, in contrast to 'the bourgeois individualistic civic awareness', it is a combination of socialist collectivism and individual free will (Huang

1988: 56).

Similarly, He Zeng Ke reviews the western theories of civil society, from Aristotle, Aquinas and Locke, to Hegel and Marx and then on to Parsons, Gramsci and Habermas. He not only appraises the 'rationalism' theorized by the enlightenment intellectuals, the 'reasonable individualism' suggested by liberalists and the 'universalism' of Hegel, but also regards Marxism as the best framework for researching civil society (He 1994: 67-80). Zhu takes the same position by emphasizing the 'effectiveness and irreplaceable' status of Marxism (Zhu 1995:41).

Deng and Jing apply the theories of Locke and Hegel to propose a blueprint for Chinese civil society (Deng and Jing 2002: 1-16; Deng 2002: 91-96), one which should be 'both a private sphere of social and economic activities where free will, autonomy and contractual principle constitute its base, and a public sphere of political participation' (Deng and Jing 2002: 3). An ideal type of 'benign systematic interactive model of the state and civil society' is thus proposed, one in which the state is supposed to establish a legal system to recognize, protect and regulate civil society, while civil society is supposed to balance the power of the state and help develop a diversified selection of social interest groups (Deng and Jing 2002: 14-16).

This debate shows that, although no consensus has been achieved on whether China has ever had a civil society or not, some basic characteristics of Chinese social organizations have been explored. In the sociological sense proposed by White, China does have 'an intermediate social associational realm', as constructed by all forms of social organizations (White 1993: 66; White 1996: 3). Where disagreement

occurs is as to whether these social organizations that have the incomplete features of civil society can actually be called 'civil society'. A contradiction also occurs among these two camps, as one denies the possibility of developing a civil society in China due to Chinese agricultural traditions, while the other advocates developing a civil society in the belief that a market economy will provide the appropriate conditions.

If the Chinese 'intermediate social associational realm' does not have any features of a civil society, what features does it have - do the features all represent state control? If Chinese social organizations only have the partial features of a civil society, what are their other partial features? Can all the other partial features be explained by state control? If the remaining features are indeed just a part of state control, where does the partial freedom come from? How do Chinese social organizations manage such an embarrassing and difficult situation? Is building Chinese civil society thus only wishful thinking on the part of Chinese scholars? The research questions that support this thesis have been developed from the above debate and questions.

## **The Research Questions**

The debate regarding the very existence of a Chinese civil society has encouraged me to scrutinize contemporary Chinese social organizations. As a result, I will focus on the two crucial features of social organizations in China - state control and their level of autonomy - that have aroused the debate. This thesis aims to answer the questions as to why different levels of state control and autonomy can co-exist among social organizations in China, what the underlying mechanisms and values behind this

co-existence are, and how the meanings behind the mechanisms contribute to the theories on civil society.

The three-level question first recognizes the existence of the voluntary associations that reside between individual/family and the state in the sociological sense. Then it goes further to ask the nature of such intermediate sphere. Which aspects are controlled by the state and why? Then, which aspects can remain autonomous and why? The mechanisms that make the situation of coexistence work are the focus of the three-level research question. Finally, the political implications of the mechanisms are to be found. To put it in another way, the Chinese state fears the political revolt of social organizations, but it also anticipates the social service provided by the social organizations. (Howell and Pearce 2002: 9) Thus it is interesting to explore the political meanings of the paradoxical practices of controlling and self-governing. Instead of judging whether Chinese social organizations embody the existing civil society values, I would rather try to find out the political values held by Chinese social organizations in the current situation of the co-existence of 'state-control' and 'organizational autonomy'.

Before I move on to develop a theoretical and methodological framework for the thesis, one I will use to explore my research questions, I will first provide a general picture of Chinese social organizations in the twenty-first century. From the picture, the co-existence of state control and the restricted autonomy of social organizations can also be found.



## Social Organizations in Twenty-first Century China

In contemporary China, social organizations that are established voluntarily for mutual or public interest within the societal domain are given various labels, and the characteristics of these organizations are diverse. This section provides a general development picture with respect to Chinese social organizations, outlines the different categorizations that may be used for them, their regulations and their alternative names.

According to reports from the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA), the total number of Chinese social organizations climbed rapidly between 1999 and 2008 (MCA 2004, 2007 and 2008). Table 1 shows that by the end of 2008, the total number of social groups and private non-enterprise units had reached 41,200, with the annual growth rate matching China's GDP growth (see table 1)<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1: Growth of Chinese Social Organizations from 1999 to 2008**

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Social Group	13.7	13.1	12.9	13.3	14.2	15.3	17.1	19.2	21.2	23.0
Private Non-Enterprise Unit	0.6	2.3	8.2	11.1	12.4	13.5	14.8	16.1	17.4	18.2
Foundation					954	892	975	1144	1340	1597
Yearly Growth Rate ( % )	-9.0	-4.6	-1.6	3.1	6.8	7.7	11.8	12.3	10.4	7.0

<sup>1</sup> Table 1 has been translated and adapted from *The Statistical Report on the Development of Civil Affairs 2004, 2007 & 2008*, issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, PRC.

There is no consensus yet on the way to categorize social organizations, though there are four main approaches. The first classifies social organizations according to whether the organization is for the public interest or for the membership's mutual interests (Yu 2006: 114). The second categorizes social organizations according to the way they organize themselves; for example, they could be loosely organized, tightly organized, organized in a pyramid structure or organized as a network (*Ibid*). However, these two approaches are not frequently used, and the most popular approach is to categorize organizations according to their service domains in which the categories used are: Arts and Sports, Education Services, Health, Social Services and Aid, Environment and Ecology Protection, Community Services, Consulting Services, Foundations, Volunteer Associations, International Communication and Aid, Religion, Guilds, Clubs, Research Institutes, Poverty Relief, Disaster Relief, Gender Issues and Human Rights Organizations, among others (Yu 2006: 114-115). Some would argue that volunteer associations, consulting services and community services belong to social services and aid, but whether those three are sub-categories of social services and aid or not does not make any fundamental difference, since the underlying principle remains unchanged. This categorization approach is most closely related to the state-society relationship which I outlined in the above section, the aim being to categorize social organizations according to their closeness to the government, or, to put in another way, according to their level of independence.

Three documents have been issued by the Committee of the State Council (CSC) which provide guidelines for the regulation social organizations in China, these being:

*Management Regulations on the Registration of Social Groups, Management Regulations on the Registration of Private Non-Enterprises* and the *Management Regulations of Foundations*. (CSC 1998) Using the Chinese government's official language, social organizations can be classified into three types: foundations (*JiJinHui*), social groups (*SheHui TuanTi*) and private non-enterprise units (*MinBan FeiQiYe DanWei*). These are the three commonly referred to social organizations (*SheHui ZuZhi*), or 'organizations that exist among common people in the unofficial sphere' (*MinJian ZuZhi*).

According to the regulations, 'non-profit making social groups are voluntarily composed of Chinese citizens that perform activities in accordance with the articles of their groups for the realization of the common desires of the membership' (CSC 1998). This type of social organization mainly includes guilds, club associations and volunteer associations, whose organization is based on membership. Private non-enterprise units are 'social organizations established by enterprises, institutions, social groups, or other civil entities and individual citizens using non-state assets that conduct not-for-profit social service activities' (CSC 1998). This type of social organization not only includes community service centers and homes for the elderly, but also hospitals, private schools and intermediary agencies. 'Foundations are not-for-profit legal persons established according to this regulation for achieving public interest by using the assets donated by natural persons, corporations and other social organizations' (CSC 1998).

According to these three sets of regulations, two conditions must be simultaneously

met for the registration of a social organization. First, a social organization is required to be affiliated with a supervisory body (*YeWu ZhuGuan DanWei*), which takes responsibility for scrutinizing the organization before registration, and for supervising and guiding the everyday activities of the organization according to the laws and regulations (Shui 2008: 56-60). Second, a social organization is also required to register with the Division of the Supervision of Social Organizations at the Ministry of Civil Affairs (*DengJi GuanLi JiGuan*) - usually the local Bureau of Civil Affairs (BCA), which has the twin responsibilities of supervising the organizations and carrying out annual inspections (*Ibid*).

In the official documents, Chinese social organizations are portrayed as subordinate to the party-state, such that the leadership statements made by the party-state can never be changed by them. In a speech made by Chen Guang Yao in 2000, the then Deputy Bureau Director of the Non-governmental Organizations Administrative Bureau at the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and now Deputy Director of the Department of Social Affairs, he advocated that Chinese NGOs should facilitate government policies across seventeen areas, most of which are related to economic, industrial and business development issues (Chen 2000). According to him, NGOs are 'communication bridge(s) linking government and society...supporting the government's efforts to establish a market economy system...carrying on traditional virtues of the Chinese people...helping the government solve many social problems', and act as 'important channels for expanding dialogue with the international community' (*Ibid*).

On another occasion, at the National Commendatory Meeting of Advanced Social Organizations held by the MCA in 2010, 595 advanced (*XianJin*) social organizations were selected and appraised. At the meeting, the then Minister of Civil Affairs, Mr. Li Xue Ju, gave a speech on the party-state's requirements in terms of social organizations. Three points of his speech are particularly salient, the first of which corresponds to the speech given by Mr. Chen Guang Yao regarding the functions that social organizations have attained since the reforms – such that social organizations once again are regarded as the 'bridges linking party-government and the people, and [an] indispensable force improving economic development, social development and the overall development of human-beings'. However, he added that the key future task for social organizations is to 'take Deng's theories - the 'three represents' and the 'scientific outlook of development', as the guiding principles, while development and supervision are of equal importance'<sup>2</sup>. Accordingly, social organizations must be absorbed into the overall national economic and social development plan. The second point requires social organizations to make 'serving the country, serving...society and serving the people' their key responsibility. The final point calls for an improvement in particular capacities of social organizations, such as accountability and effective internal governance (MCA 2010).

The term 'non-governmental organization' (NGO) is still somewhat foreign to Chinese people, though this English abbreviation is now directly used in many Chinese academic works, and the social organizations themselves also use the term<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Deng's theories, 'the three represents' and 'scientific outlook of development' are the three key political principles in contemporary China and will be explained in the next chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Easily observed evidence is that the words NGO and NPO are frequently used on the China Development Brief and

(Gough 2004: 12), and when the term is used, it equates to the general term 'social organization'. The term 'not-for-profit organization' (NPO) is frequently used as a substitute for NGO, since the latter may be related to anti-government tendencies (*Ibid*). The acronyms NGO and NPO, and the terms 'organizations of the third sector' and 'social organizations' are often used interchangeably outside the official realm (Yu 2006: 109-111).

A key factor that has stimulated the development of Chinese social organizations is that China hosted the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, and it was from this conference that the party-state came to understand how international agencies address the issue of civil society organizations (Howell 2004a: 148). After the Conference, international aid agencies began to expand their activities and projects in China, which also served as a stimulant for social organizations to develop inside the country (Howell 2004a: 149). Although the term NGO, in its Chinese translation, is not used in the Chinese official language, interestingly, when the party-state needs to communicate with international institutions, it then uses the term. On the official website<sup>4</sup>, under a 'Guide to P.R.C Government Agencies', the term 'management bureau of social/popular organizations' is translated into 'management of non-governmental organizations'.

The 'double registration' regulations, the way that state officers explain the nature of social organizations, and even the avoidance of the term NGO when referring to social organizations in the official documents, show that the state has grasped the

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NGOCN Chinese NGO website portals: <http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com.cn/> <http://www.ngocn.net/>

<sup>4</sup> Examples of the translations of the official websites can be found here: <http://www.prcgov.org/center/center-gov-b-12.html>

concept of social organizations through the use of its own administrative and political techniques. Meanwhile, the interchangeable usage of NGO, NPO and social organizations implies that something different is happening in the social realm. So, how can one analyze and interpret the phenomena of 'state control' and 'organizational autonomy'? The next chapter will provide a theoretical and methodological framework, based upon existing literature regarding the Chinese state-society relationship, post-Marxist theories of discourse and articulation, and the work of everyday politics.

## CHAPTER 2: CIVIL SOCIETY AS A HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL PROCESS – THEORIES AND METHODS

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the controversial issue of whether China has ever had a civil society, the difficulty lying in the need to understand the political nature of Chinese social organizations. In this chapter, I will present the theoretical concept of 'Pro-Forma Consistency' to explain those mechanisms underlying the interactive relations between the Chinese state and social organizations. This concept will be developed through a review of civil society and post-Marxist theories, plus of ethnographic knowledge.

Western civil society theories have provided a series of normative generalizations based on the induction of western experiences. The sectorial mode of analysis uses the basic framework of state, civil society and market, with liberal theorists believing that the three sectors can complement and balance each other out, while Marxist theorists suggest that a violent revolution will destroy the system.

The sectorial model is helpful in terms of identifying the institutional characteristics of the three sectors; however, the either/or explanation of the relationship between the three sectors pre-supposes their internal coherence, and this has the potential to miss the historicity and particularities that might exist within different social and political contexts. Moreover, from a methodological perspective, the sectorial mode of analysis is ineffective at revealing the details contained within everyday practices, and my



thesis is focused on exploring the emergence of new social organizations in China, those which tend to be smaller, less-institutionalized and harder to observe.

Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxist theoretical approach can be applied in tandem with the ethnographic method - with each informing the other, as both focus on the political processes and practices of social agents and take into account contextual elements as well. These two aspects complement the sectorial mode by changing the focus from institutional behaviours to the discursive practices of the social agents.

By 'studying through' the interactive practices of the five study social organizations, each of which has emerged to deal with China's crucial rural underdevelopment issues, plus local state institutions, I have formulated Pro-Forma Consistency as a theoretical concept to interpret the complex relationships that exist between the Chinese state and social organizations. As a form of everyday politics constructed by the four articulatory elements, Pro-Forma Consistency provides both the opportunity to reinforce the hegemonic status of the state, and the space for social organizations to develop alternative values - as a kind of resistance.

### **Civil Society Theories: Contributions and Limitations**

Civil society, in a historical sense, originated from when Western Europe developed from feudalism through the Enlightenment and on to the establishment of modern nation-states and capitalist modes of production (Kaviraj 2001: 289-290; Howell 2001: 20; Edwards 2009: 1-20; Friedmann 2004). The *leitmotiv* of this epoch was the changing political arrangement of private interests in relation to public interests

(Seligman 1992: 1-50).

Based on legally established civil rights and liberty-based rules, civil society emerged separately from the state before the eighteenth century, which overlapped with the development of the market sphere (Seligman 1992: 1-35). As part of this process, the development of civil society was accompanied by the 'ideals of civility, toleration, and peace' (Trentmann 2000: 3). Later, the state, market and civil society became 'separate from and independent of each other...in their own rationalities and particular ways of working' (Edwards 2009: 24). This separation meant that each sector developed its own set of institutions, though the boundaries of the sectors were and still are always fluid.

Civil society is not only an historical entity, but also a contested concept. There are different theoretical explanations as to the nature of the historically existing civil society movements, but what they share in common is their acceptance of the institutional separation of the state, the market and civil society, and that civil society is made up of voluntary and self-governing associations (Salamon and Anheier 1997: 33-34; Dionne Jr. 1998: 3).

To date, civil society theories have peaked twice in the history of western social science. The first peak occurred during the period of Enlightenment, and the next was around the time when eastern and central Europe underwent dramatic changes in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s (Trentmann 2000: 5, Howell and Pearce 2002: 16). Civil society theories have contributed towards the detection of the institutional separation of the state, the market and civil society, and have applied different theoretical insights

in order to explain the nature of civil society in relation to the state and the market. These different theoretical insights can generally be categorized into two types which disagree with each other in terms of explaining how to solve social inequalities, conflicts and various forms of contradiction. One camp believes that these problems can be solved within the capitalist system, through counterbalancing the state, the market and civil society, while the other believes that civil society is a battlefield 'constituted by economic production, class, and their attendant social and political relations' (Alagappa 2004: 28). The capitalist system itself is thus to be questioned or even destroyed.

Guided by these two theoretical approaches and the three-sector analysis, some fruitful research has already been carried out into the relationship between the Chinese state and social organizations, revealing how the state controls and how the autonomy of social organizations functions. 'Patron-client' relationships, 'semi-official and semi-unofficial', 'graduated control', 'non-confrontational' relationships and 'political ambiguity' are the terms used by these studies to describe the subtle and complex relationship between the Chinese state and Chinese social organizations (Chamberlain 1993; White 1993, 1996; Saich 1994, 2000; Howell 1996; Frolic 1997; Brook 1997; Kang and Feng 2004; Tian 2002, 2009; Yu and Wu 2003; Kwong 2004; Zhang and Baum 2004; Yang 2005; Kang and Han 2008).

It is based on these findings that I propose in this thesis to develop theoretical interpretations regarding the co-existence of state control and the autonomy of social organizations in China, since civil society theories and the current studies guided by

these theories are limited in two respects. From the analytical point of view, civil society theories, those developed at particular historical stages, run the risk of losing historicity when they are abstractly applied to the current Chinese social context. For example, the sectorial model presupposes the existence of a market, the state and civil society as the three analytical units, so using this model, the historical features of both the Chinese national context and the local context of the social organizations are likely to be neglected. In addition, the discursive political processes that happen in everyday interactions between the different levels of the state and social organizations are also likely to be overlooked. Second, faced with the social movements in Latin America and East and Central Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, civil society theories developed in response have the tendency to move closer to each other. The new theoretical perspectives of anti-fundamentalism have been developed out of the social movements, which may enlighten further studies on the issue of Chinese civil society.

### ***Two Schools of Civil Society Theories***

The two theoretical camps on civil society are the mainstream western liberal theories and the alternative western-left theories, and these contain different attitudes towards capitalist development (Howell and Pearce 2002: 1-38; Keane 1988: 1-29). They have also been termed the 'Anglo-American' tradition and the 'Marxist' tradition (Seligman 1992: 5).

According to the mainstream western liberal theories, civil society 'represented an

independent source of political power and as such exercised a powerful check against either powerful private interests or tyranny by political majorities'. (Eberly 2000: 26)

On the one hand, civil society is a place where both individual interests and collective purposes of voluntary associations are realized through contract, cooperation, 'undisturbed competition' and compromise, such that its 'rule bound space' is independent of but also protected by the state - the state functions to preserve social order and the freedom of civil society (Giner 1995: 304; Chandhoke 1995: 161), whilst on the other, civil society helps prevent the intrusion of state power into individual rights (Giner 1995: 304; Chandhoke 1995: 161).

The above definition reveals the normative relations between the state, civil society and individuals, for in the modern industrial world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, a sectorial model has been developed in the liberal democratic tradition - as the most popular guideline to regulate relations between the state, the market and civil society.

In explaining the operations of the three sectors, the ideal model follows a functionalist approach, with the legitimacy for the separation coming from national/internal laws, but with the sectors in continuous interaction and coordination. States, as the first sector, are responsible for establishing the legal and regulatory framework needed to protect the market and civil society, and to ensure basic social conditions. The legal and regulatory framework - including the political, legal, bureaucratic and tax frameworks, defines personal and group rights, and maintains civil order. It should be noted that the state is also the only institutional system that

‘retain(s) a monopoly over the means of violence and coercion’ (Edwards 2009: 24-30; Hall 1995: 16; Alagappa 2004: 36-37; Fowler 1996: 19-22). The second sector is the market sector, which, in line with the legal rules set by the state, ‘ensures people have livelihoods as well as [can] create and accumulate wealth’ (Fowler 1996: 20). The civil society sector acts as a counterweight to state power and exerts pressure on the state regarding its accountability (Edwards 2009: 24-30) Alagappa categorizes several models of state-civil society interaction, as follows (2004: 37):

The relationship of civil society to the state can take many forms: co-optation and manipulation of civil society by the state, deep penetration and influence over the state by certain civil society actors, productive tension between the two in a context of overall agreement on the political and economic framework, contestation over certain fundamental issues, alienation and isolation of civil society organizations from the state, or outright rejection of the state by key segments of civil society.

For liberal democratic countries, the relative separation and interdependence of the three sectors is a necessity for democracy to operate, and the sectorial model of interactions between the three sectors is a generalization of the diverse realities of western countries in the northern hemisphere (Fowler 1996: 21).

There is still one issue left; the question of how to deal with the inequalities generated within the capitalist economy. Liberal democratic theorists adhere to the sectorial model, as in their opinion, the functionally separate state, market and civil

society sectors complement each other and achieve a dynamic balance of power. The theorists believe that in this way, inequality can be solved. For example, if the state fails to address inequalities in welfare distribution, civil society organizations can get involved and provide supplementary services to the socially vulnerable. This mode of development is called 'socially responsible capitalism' (Edwards 2009: 60). Since 1945 and to the present day, three phases of development have been experienced throughout the world: the welfare state, market-based solutions after 'state failure' and 'the third way' after 'market failure', with each phase emphasizing the functions of particular sector(s) (Edwards 2009: 11; Howell and Pearce 2002: 65-68). The current development mode, which combines the three sectors, 'is the best way to overcome social and economic problems', and civic associations are standing at the core of this agenda (Edwards 2009: 11).

The liberal solution to the problem of capitalist societies was rejected by the Marxist theorists, who generated an alternative genealogy of civil society theories through a different analysis of capitalist production. Marx refutes Hegel's proposal that only the universal state can fully realize the idea of freedom or 'universal interests' (Baker 2002: 5, Seligman 1992: 47-49). For Marxist theorists such as Marx, Engels and Lenin, the inequalities created in the process of capitalist development are insoluble within the capitalist system itself, because whatever measures are taken, the solutions to the social inequalities only remain as mediation, not an absolute elimination of the unequal system (Chandhoke 1995: 191, Lenin 1919: 16-19). Thus, inequality lies in the formal, equal civil rights, which, for Marx, are the legitimate safeguard of capitalist

exploitation. In the name of equal civil rights, the surplus value of the mass laborers or the proletariat working class is exploited, and since 'the formal discourse of rights and freedom does not distinguish between those who have property in the form of material possessions, and those who have only their labor' (Chandhoke 1995: 189), civil rights allow people to sell their labor power and guarantees that the bourgeoisie obtain the surplus value. As a result, capitalists obtain the legitimacy not only to practice their economic oppression, but also their political coercion (Chandhoke 1995: 161, 189, Marx and Engels 2000: 31-32). 'The form of intercourse determined by the existing productive forces at all previous historical stages, and in its turn determining theses, is civil society' (Marx and Engels 2000: 16). Civil society, under Marx's definition, corresponds to the economic base *vis-à-vis* the state, which is defined as 'the superstructure in the service of the dominant capitalist class' (Alagappa 2004: 28). The state, subordinated to the essential economic and class relations inherent within civil society, is civil society's 'by-product', which means that it is 'the tool of the ruling classes' (Giner 1995: 323, Marx and Engels 2000: 31-32). Therefore, due to the super-structural nature of the state, Marx does not agree with Hegel in attributing all hope to the state - to achieve the ultimate freedom. The state is only 'an artificial unity' that gives civil rights and freedom to 'those who own the means of production' (Howell and Pearce 2002: 33). Marx anticipates a 'forcible overthrow' (Marx and Engels 2010:34), during which the party of the proletariat will take the leading role in thoroughly abolishing the unequal economic relations of capitalism (Seligman 1992: 51). After the Revolution, civil and political societies will be reunified just as political



power and social power are unified within individual human beings. This is what Marx calls emancipation (Seligman 1992: 56).

Gramsci continues Marx's class theory mainly by rejecting the very existence of a 'regulated society' as long as the class-state entity still exists (Gramsci 1971: 257). He reveals the hegemonic function of the seemingly 'ethical states' in various cultural domains such as schools and courts (Gramsci 1971: 258-259), and similar to Marx, shatters the dream that a 'class-state' can have a 'regulated society' in which struggles or upheavals can be avoided (Gramsci 1971: 258). To put it in another way, the counter-balancing and supplementation forces among the three sectors proposed by the liberals, do not satisfy Gramsci either.

However, Gramsci's explanations of the nature and functions of civil society are different from those given by Marx. While Marx views civil society as synonymous with the capitalist economic structural base - that which should be fully overthrown together with the superstructure in the form of the state, Gramsci takes civil society as part of the superstructure, and sometimes equates civil society to the 'ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private'' which is part of the superstructure. The rest of the superstructure is 'political society' or the state (Gramsci 1971: 12). On other occasions, he groups civil society and political society together as the state (Gramsci 1971: 262-263), as for him, civil society contains 'the cultural and ideological relations', with its 'variety of 'cultural' institutions [which] function to reproduce or to transform the dominant bourgeois sense of reality' (Bobbio 1979: 28-29; Keane 1988: 23). This sense of reality, which actually represents the hegemony of the capitalist system, is

supposed to be accepted by 'the exploited classes as natural and legitimate', either through consensus or through coercion (Howell and Pearce 2002: 34, Gramsci 1971: 245-247).

However, civil society not only serves the hegemonic function of the ruling classes, but also acts as an arena for counter-hegemonic struggles. Instead of urging a thorough Revolution, Gramsci urges a continuous 'war of position' to fight against the bourgeoisie in civil society, without triggering physical warfare. The target is to establish dominant positions of the exploited against the ruling classes in cultural and ideological areas (Gramsci 1971: 206-209, 229-239). However, this may include various fighting forms, such as 'creating alternative institutions and alternative intellectual resources' (Cox 1983: 165).

Meanwhile, the liberal democratic type of voluntary association and the Marxist type of voluntary association both exist in the global North and South. As for mainstream voluntary associations, they function to 'complement rather than replace the state' (Howell and Pearce 2002: 67). The alternative voluntary associations, like the mainstream ones, also pay attention to 'the inequalities reaped by the market', but 'differ in mounting a more fundamental challenge to the desirability of capitalism and even of development' (Howell and Pearce 2002: 68). They try to find alternative development approaches and values, which 'prioritize(s) the collective over the individual, the local over the central, fair trade over unfair profit, and cooperation over competition', in order to resist the dominant market and state-led capitalist paradigm (Howell and Pearce 2002: 70).

### *In China's Case: the insufficiency of the sectorial approach*

The question is therefore whether western civil society theories are applicable in terms of interpreting the nature of social organizations in contemporary China. Influenced by these civil society theories, recent research on the relationship between Chinese social organizations and the state has been imprinted with the characteristics of the three-sector framework. Although these guidelines have helped the researchers to make some insightful findings, they have also stopped the researchers from digging deeper. As a result, no studies or conclusions have been made as to whether the values and practices of China's social organizations belong to the mainstream camp or the alternative.

One explanation of the relationship between the Chinese state and social organizations is that the former has an ambivalent attitude towards the later. The opening-up and reform plan has been carried out in a top-down fashion, as arranged by the state. This means that on the one hand, the state has realized that social organizations can share with it a welfare responsibility, whilst on the other the state also fears losing control over these organizations as a result of sharing responsibility (Tian 2002). However, no description or explanation has been forthcoming as to the way that this ambivalent attitude has been managed by the state, or the way that social organizations deal with it either.

Ma has described the relationship as a 'dual registration system' as 'patron-client'. (Ma 2002: 122, 124). So, in order to have legal status, a Chinese social organization must find a government department to be its supervisory body; for example, an

organization that targets educational services is required to ask the local Education Bureau to be its supervisory body, plus has to register with the local Civil Affairs Department or the Ministry of Civil Affairs at the top level (Saich 2000: 126-133). While some people think that the state has control over social organizations through this dual registration system, Ma claims that as long as the social organizations behave themselves, the official supervisory bodies usually leave them alone. A further question may thus be asked as to what 'behave themselves' actually means, particularly in terms of scope and standards.

Kang and Han developed a model of 'graduated controls' to measure the different strategies the government applies to 'regulate different social organizations', saying 'a system of such controls is a basic feature of the state-society relationship in contemporary China' (Kang and Han 2008: 38). These 'graduated controls' are divided into five levels, with the degrees of control of the five levels ranging from 'tight' to 'loose', and from 'establishment', 'supervision', 'governance' and 'resources', to 'routine activities', according to the types of social organization involved (Kang and Han 2008: 42-43). However, this one-sided model of graduated controls ignores the reactions of and resistance coming from social organizations.

These studies belong to the paradigm of typological or sectorial model of analysis, in which the dichotomous opposition between state and society in civil society theories is identified (Huang 1993: 216-240). Huang once tried to avoid such dichotomous thinking by proposing a model entitled 'state-the third realm-society' to analyze the relationship between the Chinese state and society (Huang 1993:

216-240); however, the model has been criticized as it is still based on binary thinking, since the concepts of state and society are uncritically transplanted into his tertiary model. Huang does not go further to reflect why and how the dichotomous model is inappropriate for China (Liang 1996: 44-45).

Huang was not the only one who reflected on methodological issues. When theorizing the 'typological model', White, Howell and Shang were conscious of both its strong and weak points, saying that although the typological model can provide a general and static description of Chinese society, it is not able to 'capture the dynamics of a rapidly changing social universe' (White, Howell and Shang 1996 :209). Perry also realized that state and society are 'too gross to capture the enormous variation that differentiates one Chinese region - or level of government - from another' (Perry 1994: 707); for example, kinship relations in a Chinese village may blur the distinction between party cadres who represent the state, and the local peasants who are just ordinary people (Perry 1994: 706). She thus encouraged researchers of Chinese studies to make good use of the new resources that have been available since the opening-up of the country (Perry 1994: 712). Wank and Madsen suggested applying anthropologist field work in the studies of Chinese society, which would avoid being restricted by a pre-given frame (Wank 1998: 219, Madsen 1993: 189-190).

More recently, detailed inductive case studies on the state's control and social organizations' level of autonomy have emerged. For example, Yu and Wu questioned the validity of the civil society models that prevailed in the 1980s and 1990s, pointing out that they are based on dichotomous thinking ('state-society'), which is too static to

capture the interactive features of the state and society in reality (Yu and Wu 2003: 142-148). Therefore, the 'state-in-society' model, which was originally developed by Migdal, Kohli and Shue, has been adopted to analyze the dynamic relations between the Chinese state and 'organizations that exist among common people in the unofficial sphere' (*MinJian ZuZhi*, or social organizations). (Migdal 1994: 7-36) The state maintains its dominant position by controlling those resources needed by social organizations in their everyday operations, and by supervising their activities. Social organizations interact with the state by borrowing state authority for legitimization, and one way to do this is to formally and informally affiliate themselves with particular government departments, or obtain acceptance from government officials. Another way for social organizations to legitimize themselves is to participate in policy-making procedures (Yu and Wu 2003: 146-147), leading to the conclusion that they bear the 'dual nature of semi-official and semi-popular/unofficial' organizations (*GuanMin LiangChongXing*). Actually, this conclusion is a little disappointing, since it retreats directly to the dichotomous model without paying enough attention to the enlightening implications found in the empirical information gathered. These research studies have not gone further to question why social organizations can borrow the authority of the state for their own justification.

Kwong illustrated how a private school for the children of migrant workers in Beijing survives in the local political context, by tracing the continuous struggles of the school when faced with an unsupportive government (Kwong 2004: 1073-1088). Zhang and Baum presented the way in which a grass-roots development NGO has developed

peacefully alongside the local government, while Yang led us through the interaction between an environmental NGO and other social actors in the development field (Zhang and Baum 2004: 97-107; Yang 2005: 46-66). These studies share similar conclusions regarding the relationship between the state and social organizations, these being that Chinese social organizations only enjoy relative autonomy under the administrative control of the state, as the state either constrains or gives inactive or opaque responses to their activities. If the dominant political position of the state is challenged, the challenging social organization will be cautioned or disbanded, without exception. However, there is still room for social organizations to maneuver with the support of other social agents, such as the media and donors.

These studies distinguish themselves from the earlier literature by focusing on particular social organizations within a given time frame, and by providing vivid and detailed descriptions of each aspect of the cases in question. In so doing, they reveal many interesting elements that are usually unreached or unobserved in other sectorial research, elements that imply insightful theoretical conclusions that deserve further study. For example, it has been discerned that some environmental NGOs use the state regime's 'own words as a weapon of protest, resistance and collective action' (Yang 2005: 52); therefore, social organizations sometimes borrow the state authorities to justify their practices (Yu and Wu 2003: 142-148). 'Non-confrontational methods' prove to be effective for organizations, while 'political ambiguities' always thrive when actions are taken (Yang 2005: 56); however, these empirical research studies represent only the first steps towards achieving a deeper level of

understanding. Unlike the sectorial model of deductive research, these empirical works lack any specific theorizing *vis-à-vis* their fieldwork findings.

### ***Back to the Everyday Practices***

So far, I have reviewed the two western theoretical genealogies of civil society, with the capitalist mode of development being the core contentious topic of the two. Both these theories were developed to accompany the capitalist empirical progress of western countries, with one theoretical genealogy being for, and the other being against such a mode of development. The theories which are part of the first genealogy hold a harmonious view of the state, civil society and market sectors, and as I explained earlier in this chapter, these three sectors are supposed to function in a complementary way. Within the dynamic interaction of the three, political arbitrariness is checked and prevented, both social cohesion and civic virtues are built up, and diverse public opinions are expressed in civil society. In the end, global capitalism can further develop through the systematic interaction of the three, in other words, capitalism itself is self-sufficient, with civil society as its internal organic part. In contrast, the key words in the alternative genealogy are 'conflict' and 'struggle', which stand *vis-à-vis* the harmonious picture of the state, society and market sectors. While the liberal democratic theories and practices try to keep a dynamic balance between the three sectors, the Marxist theories and practices are eager to totally replace the capitalist mode of economic development with alternatives. Although the two camps differ in their analyses of the nature and functions of civil society, and the political



purpose of building civil society; on the practical level both of them take seriously the role of various kinds of civil society associations. They share similar views on the trinity of civil society, the state and the market, but make different interpretations.

Scholars from both China and abroad have realized that the ambiguous boundary between the Chinese state and the newly emerging social organizations has become a contentious, troubling and unavoidable issue to accommodate. In the aforementioned literatures, the outstanding contribution is that a typological model of Chinese social organizations has been established according to the different levels of state involvement in their operations. Although the typological model has contributed to capturing the basic features of Chinese social organizations *vis-à-vis* state control; it can overlook the discursiveness of the everyday practices of Chinese social organizations. The dichotomous thinking of 'state-society' has prevented researchers from capturing and explaining the features of the dynamic interactive mechanisms that exist in the various interactions between state and society in an insightful way. Anthropological fieldwork should thus be encouraged, in terms of carrying out further studies on civil society in China.

Fortunately, recent fieldwork research has been carried out into China's social organizations, and in this research interesting elements have been uncovered with the presentation of detailed processes that support interactions between the state and society, and these interesting elements deserve further study. Compared with the sectorial model, the prominent advantage of this kind of empirical data-oriented inductive research is that only through empirically inductive studies can the informal

practices be detected. These informal practices at the operational level may be unwritten, plural, contingent, changing and even promiscuous and paradoxical (Shue 2008: 141-143, 146-148), so may not fall into neat, systematic theoretical models. However, they are realistic, and it is these informal practices that construct the real relationship between the Chinese state and social organizations. However, it is very difficult to start from a pre-given theoretical model in order to discover and understand these informal practices; for example, the various kinds of techniques used by social organizations may not be found within the 'graduated controls', nor may a general statement regarding the 'dual nature of semi-official and semi-popular/unofficial' entities provide a satisfactory explanation regarding how these maneuvering techniques function. Shue pointed out that 'in China, the *idea* of state authority is then, perhaps, always singular, transcendent, and universal; the *realization* of rule, however, is always plural, rooted, and particular' (Shue 2008: 142). However, the recent empirical data-oriented studies do not provide enough to theorize and generalize regarding their findings.

In consideration of the contributions of and gaps in civil society theories, it is necessary to adopt an empirically-oriented study in order to investigate the ongoing dynamic relations between the state and social organizations in contemporary China, with a focus on the complex, discursive and fluid everyday practices at the operational level. The purpose of this research will be to identify the interactive practices and processes of both the state and the social organizations, and why they interact in particular ways. As was noted in the last chapter, further steps are needed in order to

uncover the mechanisms and underlying rules used in the operational reality, as constructed by the interactive practices of the Chinese state and voluntary associations (Huang 2008: 20; Sun 2008: 108-109). Vague assertions of the existence of 'semi state control and semi organizational autonomy' are no longer sufficient.

Moreover, studies of China's associational phenomena do not touch upon the debate taking place between the mainstream and alternative theories. It seems that claiming China to be a 'socialist country with Chinese characteristics' removes the need to face-up to the existence of capitalism in the country (Saich 2004: 76-68); therefore, questioning whether China's social organizations bear the characteristics of mainstream civil society or alternative characteristics would seem at odds with China's political context. In the previous chapter, the official tone is set in which Chinese social organizations are expected to 'support and help the government' by 'serving the country, the society and the people' (Chen 2000, MCA 2010). In light of this, do the practices of social organizations belong to the liberal sense of social services, those that support the national-state regime by complementing the state and the market, or are they preparing to challenge the current party-state framework? This question corresponds to the latter research questions raised in the previous chapter, and to answer them is to uncover the political meanings behind the mechanisms underlying the interactions between the state and social organizations.

In order to capture the features of the everyday practices carried out, a new theoretical approach needs to be developed, one which avoids the rigid trinity mode of

thinking. The anti-thesis effort does not intend to deny the institutional facts of state and social organizations, but endeavors to highlight the historicity of the construction of the two subjects in their continuous interactions. The social movements that emerged during the 1950s around the world, have contributed to the development of the Marxist theories of civil society, and so critiques of post-Marxist theories then shed light on the way forward. Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxist theory of 'discourse' and 'articulation' provides a theoretical standpoint for this thesis to change the focus from the organizationally concrete unities of the state and social organizations, to the rambling and complex processes found in reality. The theoretical framework of this thesis is based on the post-Marxist standpoint, and the theoretical point of 'articulation' will be developed in the next section to construct an analytical framework. It is through discovering the features of the new social movements that post-Marxist theory can contribute to the development of a third way other than the liberal or the revolutionary, in order to solve conflicts and inequalities. Though bearing some of the same characteristics, the Chinese social organizations studied in this thesis do not entirely fit the new way forward proposed by Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxism.

### **Bringing the Political Processes and Practices Back in: Discourse and Articulation**

The key disagreement between the liberal trend of civil society theories and the Marxist tradition is on how to solve inequalities and conflicts. The former believes that these problems can be solved within the capitalist system, while the latter suggests eliminating inequalities by totally abandoning the system. In Laclau and Mouffe's

post-Marxist theories, this dispute no longer takes place as they propose a 'theory of 'the political'' in the new era since the cold war, one which tends to 'think beyond left and right' (Mouffe 2005a: 6).

### ***The Historical Context of post-Marxism***

Post-Marxist theories originally emerged from the historical context of social movements in the 1960s and 1970s (Miklitsch 1995: 169), which were a response to the crises or dislocations in both the liberal democratic countries of Western Europe, and the system of the Soviet Union. 'The collapse of communism...[was] not a victory for capitalism' (Motchane 1998: 301), and after 1968 and during the 1970s, though the western welfare state had brought 'considerable benefits' to the working classes, an economic impasse was experienced due to the oil crisis (Torfing 1999: 1-2; Hewitt 2000: 296-305). The astonishing environmental cost of capitalism was articulated and criticized in Europe (Torfing 1999: 1-2; Hewitt 2000: 300-306; Woodhouse 2000: 141-142); however, the pre-supposed political unification of the working class was replaced by the protests of different social groups such as feminists, environmentalists, ethnic groups, nationalists, gays, lesbians and peace advocates (Torfing 1999: 1, Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 1). Meanwhile, from 1968 onwards, although dissidents and rebellion movements within the Soviet Union also emerged (Kilmister 2000: 317), Marx's and Gramsci's belief in the leading role of the working class's party organizations failed to take into account the potential danger of the totalitarian, monopolistic party-state (Keane 1988: 24). In 1989, the Soviet Union

collapsed after a long period of civil society struggles, those considered to have been the basis of political resistance against totalitarian hegemony (Baker 2002: 8, and 13-52). As a result, the distinctions between 'us' and the 'enemy' no longer existed; however, as the whole reference system broke down and the limits of both the totalitarian state and the welfare state were identified, uncertainty and confusion over where to go next surfaced everywhere (Mouffe 2005b: 3-4; Ossorio 1998: 308).

In this historical context of the double failure of both the liberal-democratic and the totalitarian myths, many political theorists began to reflect on orthodox Marxism and to reintroduce the theoretical legacy of liberty and democracy. It is based upon these theoretical reflections that Laclau and Mouffe developed post-Marxist theories, their contribution being to emancipate political relations from the omnipresent, ultimate productive relations.

In *A Critique of the German Ideology*, Marx and Engels clearly assert that definite social and political relations are conditioned by definite productive relations accordingly (Marx and Engels 2000: 8-9). As a result, 'the life-process of definite individuals' is real because they 'operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will' (Marx and Engels 2000: 8). Gramsci highlights the fact that economic crises do not directly determine historical crises (Gramsci 1971: 184), and proposes the analysis of situations and relations with regard to certain forces from three levels, these being the material forces of production, the political forces of various classes and military forces, to show that an economic crisis only 'produces the fundamental basis' for

disseminating 'modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving questions' (Gramsci 1971: 180-184). Gramsci insightfully discovered that civil society, as part of the superstructure, is 'resistant to the catastrophic 'incursions' of the immediate economic element' (Gramsci 1971: 235). In other words, an economic crisis would not inevitably lead to the collapse of the European countries, those in which the complex civil societies are 'like the trench-systems of modern warfare' (*Ibid*: 235). In consideration of civil society's function, Gramsci proposes that warfare takes three forms: the war of position, the war of movement and an underground war (Gramsci 1971: 229), with the 'war of position' being in the cultural realm of civil society, after military warfare has reinforced the hegemonic status of the proletariat state (Gramsci 1971: 238-239).

From Marx through to Gramsci, the existence of an ultimate economic determination has been questioned, with dogmatic Marxism criticized from three perspectives. First it has been argued that it reduces social and political relations to economic relations - that its theories of civil society are burdened by 'the tendency to reduce both the social sphere and the workers' movement to the logic and contradictions of a mode of production' (Cohen 1982: 2, 30-36, 81, 109, 194). Second, since economic relations cannot explain everything, the formation of a working class based on the same productive relations is also questioned, such that more historical conditions are needed for the construction of a coherent working class (Laclau 1990: 5-8). Economic relations do not necessarily lead to workers developing a similar class consciousness, for sometimes big differences in class consciousness exist between

skilled workers and non-skilled workers, or between workers with different cultural backgrounds (Perry 1993: 250-253, Laclau 1990: 32). Third, the contradictions within capitalism are not necessarily determined by productive relations alone (Laclau 1990: 7-10).

These newly discovered elements - the disappearance of the working class as a whole, the emergence of new forms of political alliances, the newly recognized capitalist contradictions not caused by productive relations alone, the unsuccessful liberal agenda and the defeated Soviet Union of Marxism with its dislocations and social movements, pushed the development of political theories in two ways. For example, based on observations of and theoretical reflections on the dislocations and social movements, political theorists such as Michael Polanyi, Cohen, Walzer, Laclau and Mouffe developed new political agendas regarding the future of liberty and democracy, but what they share in common is the reintroduction of liberalism and pluralism (Walzer 1998: 26, Polanyi 1998: 244, Cohen 1982: 228).

The blueprint for Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxism is to find ways towards the development of a radical democracy (Laclau and Mouffe 1990: 123-125, Mouffe 2005b: 9-23, Mouffe 1998: 295), within which post-Marxism not only maintains a critical view regarding the problems experienced by capitalist systems, but also draws upon capitalist legacies of liberty and democracy. The either/or choice between the internal adjustments of capitalism and the once-for-all revolution is thus deconstructed from the non-fundamental perspective of post-Marxism. According to this non-fundamental perspective, the hegemonic structure is constantly constructed and



challenged; therefore, the either/or choice is out of the question, since it is argued that the ultimate goal of the two theoretical choices - building a society without any conflicts, is actually a myth (Laclau and Mouffe 1990: 97-132). As a result, the focus is changed from achieving universal success to a political process of dominance and resistance. Accompanying this change in theoretical focus, new analytical tools have been developed to capture the political process of hegemonic construction.

After recognizing the limitations of the sectorial mode, my paper deepens its analysis by focusing on the practices and the interactive processes of the state and social organizations, without denying the organizational separation of the three sectors. The analytical concepts of post-Marxism are developed to capture the political processes involved, and thus are suitable to be applied in order to study the everyday practices of the state and the social organizations with respect to their interactive processes. In this thesis, a theoretical framework of 'articulatory elements' - of Pro-Forma Consistency between the state and social organizations will be developed based on Laclau and Mouffe's theories of 'discourse' and 'articulation', and the theoretical implications of Scott's 'everyday politics' (Scott 1985: XVI, 241-303; Scott 1990: 136-201). Accordingly, an anthropological approach will be adopted as the methodology, to scrutinize the everyday practices and interactive processes of five social organizations as well as local and central state actors.

### ***Discourse, Articulation, Nodal Points and Subjectivity***

The key analytical concepts that I am going to use and develop in this thesis are

‘discourse’ and ‘articulation’ and the relevant theoretical concepts, ‘nodal point’, ‘subject position’, ‘hegemony’, ‘logic of equivalence’, and ‘logic of difference’. In summary, discourse is constructed through the hegemony of a certain nodal point in the process of the articulations of various discursive elements, which obtain their subject positions in the construction of chains of equivalence in the discourse.

In this thesis, instead of using the concept of ‘ideology’, I use ‘discourse’. Basically, discourse has been identified by Laclau and Mouffe as a developed concept transcending ideology, which refers to ‘the idea that human individuals participate in forms of understanding, comprehension or consciousness of the relations and activities in which they are involved ...especially how relations of domination or subordination are reproduced with only minimal resort to direct coercion’ (Purvis and Hunt 1993: 474). Discourse not only refers to the ideas but also the practices of ‘the constitution of any object’ by establishing ‘a system of relations between raw materials’ (Laclau 1990: 185). While ideology is still limited to the system of ‘base and superstructure’, discourse does not have this pre-supposition of the binary opposition of superstructures and economic relations.

Discourse is the synonym of ‘structure’ in the non-essentialist sense, and also another way to describe social myths/imaginary space, such that ‘Social identity, whether economic, political or ideological, is constituted in and by discourse’ (Torfing 1999: 32). Discourse, as a result of articulatory practices at different locations, is a structural totality which is never fully achieved (Andersen 2003: vi; Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 113), an ensemble of signifying sequences whose meanings are constantly

negotiated and constructed. Discourse includes both physical objects and social practices, meaning that discourse is not reducible to linguistic aspects, though it has been insisted upon that discourse contains 'the interweaving of the semantic aspects of language with the pragmatic aspects of actions, movements and objects' (Laclau 1990: 100, Torfing 1999: 40, 85, 94).

It seems that discourse is something that includes everything; however, this is not the case. What, then, are the limits and boundaries of discourse? How can we identify a discourse when it is defined as an open and de-centred structure? The difference between discourse and 'the discursive' is that discourse is more fixed than the discursive. The partial fixation of a discourse indicates that there must be some elements governing or unifying its whole system, without ever becoming its centre. These key elements, or 'the centers that never quite become centers', are nodal points (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 51; Andersen 2003: vi).

Nodal points are privileged discursive points that experience 'a certain emptying of their contents', in other words, they are key signifiers rather than the signified; they serve to partially unify the discursive elements into a 'paradigmatic chain of equivalence' (Torfing 1999: 98, 99). In making discursive elements a chain of equivalence, the nodal points contingently prevent the differences that exist among the discursive elements from fully constituting; however, this can never be completely achieved. Once the dislocation of the discourse is changed or is extended to such a degree that social myths are broken, then the discursive elements will be articulated according to other hegemonic rules. As a result, the once equivalent chain will be

dissolved and new differential and equivalent logics will function at the political frontier (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 127-133).

The concepts of equivalent logic and differential logic are an antagonistic couple, but the establishment of a discourse requires both of them. First, the differential logic produces a constitutive outside of the discourse, that is, a discursive exteriority, a 'radical otherness' that is excluded from the discourse. However, this constitutive outside not only establishes itself as something outside of this discourse by threatening its meaning, but also helps to constitute the discourse by negating it (Torfing 1999: 124). Second, challenges to the temporarily constructed wholeness of a discourse not only come from the discursive differences that exist outside, but also from internal differences. Actually, the distinction between the inside and the outside depends on to what extent the nodal point can command the wholeness. Since the chain of equivalence of a discourse is constructed by suppressing the differences between the various floating elements, whenever the specific differences overcome their marginalized status and become prominent, it means that new dislocation occurs within the discourse. There is thus the potential for the newly raised differences among the floating signifiers to construct a new political frontier and discourse (Laclau 2007: 70-74; Laclau 1996: 36-40).

A discourse cannot be constructed without the existence of hegemony, for 'Hegemony is, quite simply, a political type of relation, a form, if one so wishes, of politics; but not a determinable location within [the] topography of the social' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 139). Hegemonic articulation always occurs in the dislocation of

discourses, where power and resistance, force and repression take place, for, as Torfing says 'Hegemony and discourse are mutually conditioned' (Torfing 1999: 43). This is because, on the one hand, hegemonic articulation is only possible 'when a discourse lacks final fixation', and on the other, it is hegemonic articulation that shapes and reshapes discourse (Andersen 2003: 55).

The partially fixed structural totality of a discourse is the hegemonic result of articulatory practices which impose connections on the different discursive elements in 'a certain way of relating each other' into a whole (Andersen 2003: 56). Articulation refers to 'any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 105), and this means that, in hegemonizing the discourse, the nodal point extends its signifying function by articulatory practices to represent all the connotations of the discursive elements. This hegemonic result indicates that the articulatory process involves concrete struggles among the elements. The establishment of particular social meanings of a nodal point unavoidably entails the suppression of other meanings, which constitute the antagonistic exterior of the meanings positively established. Therefore, hegemonic articulations 'bring us from the undecidable level of non-totalizable openness to a decidable level of discourse' (Torfing 1999: 102). In this process, hegemony is invested into the construction of the fullness of a discourse; however, this fullness is a myth or social imagination because the contingent fixedness of a discourse relies on the subordination of all the differences and particularities of the discursive elements to the mythical universe (Laclau 2007:

106-107, 116; Laclau 1996: 40-45).

A social agent in this thesis means an 'intentionally acting subject' who is in the continuous process of subjectivation. Two things are important with regard to this definition, first, that the consciousness and rationality of the acting subject as well as his or her degree of control over the action are not of concern here – 'What matters is only that the subjects' actions have a direction' (Torfing 1999: 137). Second, the subject and identity of the agent is only partially fixed; social agents acquire incomplete subject positions, but never fully secure their identities.

According to Laclau and Mouffe, both structure and agency are understood as unfixed and contingent, with a 'constitutive outside' that serves both as a threat to their fullness and as a condition on their completeness (Laclau 1990: 3-59). In other words, 'every identity is dislocated insofar as it depends on an outside which both denies that identity and provides its condition of possibility at the same time' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 39; Torfing 1999: 149). Therefore, for Laclau and Mouffe, since agents' identities are not fixed in advance, the right question to ask about agents is not 'who the social agents are', but 'the extent to which they manage to constitute themselves'. Similarly, the right question to ask about collective identity is 'to what extent are social agents formed as classes by the collective struggles forging the unity of their positions as subjects?' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 36-37) Such enquiries, putting aside the pre-given conceptions, focus on revealing the historicity of subjectivation and structuration.

In comparison, the actor-oriented perspective proposed by Norman Long, one that

develops Giddens' dualist view of structure and agency, does not question the stability of agents' subject identities; in particular, structures are created, reproduced and transformed through the ways in which actors' projects and practices are interlocked (Long 2001: 63). The focus of analysis here is on the complex interactions of agents - their relationships and network formulations at the point of 'social interface' (Long 2001: 65-92). However, from the post-Marxist perspective, the process of agents acquiring subject positions and the process of structures obtaining temporary completeness are the same process, with the focus being on the construction of the discourse and the constitution of subjectivity, because the 'subject is merely the distance between the undecidable structure and the decision' (Laclau 1990: 50, 39). On the one hand, agents can have a failed structural identity, since structures 'do not constitute a closed system, but are riven with antagonisms...and merely have weak or relative form[s] of integration' Laclau 1990: 44, 210, 223). On the other hand, 'structures can never acquire the fullness of a closed system *because* the subject is essentially lack[ing]' (Laclau 1990: 211).

In terms of a description of the processes of discourse construction and subjectivation, dislocations make the reconstruction of these discourses both impossible and possible. Impossibility refers to the fact that discourse can never achieve a completed system, and as for possibility, dislocations open the way for re-articulation of the dislocated elements. The whole process of hegemonic articulation strives to obtain a new social order by partially fixing the discursive elements, subjectivating social agents and constructing social myths. The elements

re-articulated come to form an agent's subject identity; however, given that there are multiple contingent articulatory possibilities, a hegemonic decision is crucial. Any decision-making entails hegemonic articulations out of the concrete struggles of social agents, and so when decisions are taken, social agents obtain new subject positions in the reconstructed structure. 'Any subject is a mythical subject', which implies that the 'mythical subject' is a metaphor for an absent structural fullness. On the one hand, it functions by 'sutur[ing] the dislocated space through the constitution of a new space of representation', whilst on the other, myth serves as 'a surface on which dislocations and social demands can be inscribed' (Laclau 1990: 61, 63). When 'the moment of representation of the very form of fullness dominates to such an extent that it becomes the unlimited horizon of inscription of *any* social demand and *any* possible dislocation', 'myth is transformed into an imaginary' (Laclau 1990: 64). When the representational function of the nodal point is transferred to a social myth, particular social orders are hegemonically generated. The reconstructed structure and regained subject positions are never complete due to their inherent uneven nature, so that when the form of fullness cannot accommodate the suppressed differences of each element, the social imaginary space will then decline and a new round of hegemonic reconstruction will begin.

### ***The Theoretical Implications for the Research Framework***

With reference to the theoretical explanations of 'discourse' and 'articulation', and the findings of sectorial analysis, a research framework can be developed in which the



organizational division of social organizations and the state institutions is included, plus observations are focused on their everyday practices and interactive processes. The subject positions of the organizational bodies are not viewed as fixed and unchanged; they are open to reconstruction within the practices and processes carried out. Thus, in order to answer the research question, the following aspects of articulation must be observed and/or identified:

- 1) As articulation means both expression and connection, the content, connections and methods of expression of social organizations through their daily practices and in relation to state institutions
- 2) The methods and content with which state institutions express themselves *vis-à-vis* social organizations
- 3) Elements such as language and actions used by the state to control social organizations, plus the language and actions used by social organizations to deal with state control
- 4) Elements such as language and actions used by social organizations to implement their own values and events, plus the actions used by the state to deal with independent actions
- 5) Commonalities and connections shared by the two parties and the political implications of such commonalities and connections, and
- 6) The differences and disconnected elements between the two parties.

However, this framework is not complete, for in addition, methodological aspects must be clarified and added.

## **‘Studying Through’: the Anthropological Approach**

A good ethnography must have ‘theoretical candour, the portrayal of the ethnographer’s path in conducting fieldwork, and field notes evidence’ (Sanjek 1991: 621). My thesis is based on fieldwork carried out in July 2005, between June and November 2007, and finally between March and April and during December 2009. In this section, I will explain my case selections, my constructive methodological standpoint, fieldwork methods of ‘Studying Through’ and the fieldwork process; I will also reflect on the levels of accessibility I experienced, my personal identity as a researcher, and the participatory observations I carried out over multiple sites.

### ***Case Selection***

The five social organizations selected for my research study work on the so-called ‘three rural problems’ (*SanNong WenTi*), a concise phrase first coined in the late 1990s which refers to the systematic and complex problems present in agriculture and rural areas, and among peasants, and which have economic, social and institutional aspects. Briefly speaking, agricultural issues refer to the weaknesses inherent in agriculture as its surplus has been used to support China’s industrial development, plus the decrease in plowable land. Rural area issues refer to the inappropriate and unsuitable household registration system, the incomplete social welfare system in rural areas, insufficient public expenditure, underdeveloped rural education and other social problems concerning the development of rural areas. Peasant issues include the predicament of rural livelihoods, the alleviation of peasants’ burden and the

problem of internal migrant workers (Chen 2009: 133-135). These three rural problems as a whole have become a big and important dislocation for China in the twenty-first century, and as a result, discursive practices have appeared in response.

According to my descriptions in the last chapter, the five study social organizations cross-over into several categories; for example, they might be understood as social service organizations, educational organizations and community service organizations. As for their official registration status, not all of them abide by the registration regulations - some of them are even commercially registered. As for how the five selected organizations refer to themselves, it is interesting to note that their ideas differ from the official terms, as for them it is not important whether are identified as NGOs, NPOs or social organizations for two reasons. The first reason is that although they use particular names for their institutions during their everyday activities, when it comes to situations such as conferences involving other organizations or when they meet with officials, they are flexible and refer to themselves in accordance with the situation. The second reason is that how other people perceive them is beyond their direct control; for example, some people believe they are commercial enterprises. However, the key thing for them is that they focus on their own values and how to realize those values, for as long as they can put these values into practice, they believe that people will notice and eventually understand them.

The five social organizations were set up to tackle one or more of the three rural problems, but before the 1990s there were only a small number of social organizations of this kind in existence (Howell 2004a: 146). The emergence of this

kind of social organization marks a '...new phase in the development of civil society', because these social organizations have emerged out of a changing social reality - at a time when the dislocation of the three rural problems has occurred in China (*Ibid.* 146). This is the first reason for me choosing these five social organizations from the three rural problems area (Note - a detailed explanation of the dislocations in China will be presented in the next chapter).

Second, small and less institutionalized than others, the five study social organizations were all initiated voluntarily by ordinary people who do not work for state institutions, their purpose being to contribute to finding solutions to the three rural problems. Therefore, from a sectorial perspective, these social organizations have all emerged from the social realm, plus all share a common but non-institutionalized linkage with the state at the macro-policy level. A well-known intellectual in the area of the three rural problems, Mr. Sunny, who is a member of a policy think-tank formed by the central state, contributes his ideas, personal resources and symbolic capital to the operation of the five social organizations, and also writes research papers containing policy recommendations to central state officers, though these papers are not entirely based on the practices of the five organizations. Through him, the five social organizations not only have a channel through which to connect to macro-state policy discourse, but can also link to each other in one way or another. Nevertheless, both the practices of the five organizations in the local context and their practices at the macro-policy level are not yet institutionalized. 'Bottom-up or socially established' and 'connecting to macro state policies' are the two key characteristics of the five

organizations, characteristics which are not simultaneously shared by social organizations working in other areas.

Third, I chose these five social organizations after following the people involved and the plots until my theoretical interpretation was full formed (Bryman 2001: 303). At the beginning, my key informant, Mr. Query, was introduced to me by my university colleague. He had resigned from his job at a state-owned company in 1996, and started his own social organization full-time focused on the three rural problems. It was him who contacted Mr. Sunny to ask for his support (Participant interview Mr. Query 200707). Since 2002, he has developed into an experienced and senior activist in the NGO field regarding the three rural problems; therefore, my first task was to follow him, and in this way I came to know about the organizations 'Grey', 'Colorful' and 'Orange', initiated by him. The other organizations, 'Green' and 'Red' were founded in the same plots as Grey and Colorful, and similar or shared events, people, narratives and norms link the five organizations together. They are respectively located in the northern and southern parts of eastern China, and detailed contextual information about them will be given in the following chapters.

The five social organizations were not selected according to a random sampling strategy, but according to their illustrative potential, and there are plenty of other social organizations in this field. This thesis aims to offer a relatively confined but meaningful interpretation of how China's voluntary associations in a specific sector interact and relate with the state using particular mechanisms. Therefore, any generalizing of the findings of this thesis must be carried out with caution; however,

further empirical research may be undertaken on the basis of the findings.

In this thesis, pseudonyms are used to refer to the selected organizations and relevant people, in order to maintain their confidentiality. The five social organizations have been trying to realize their own values in the processes of tackling the three rural problems. Although I believe that their values are not anti-government at all, they are still potentially political sensitive to the Chinese government. As I will show in the following chapters, this potential political risk can be triggered when Pro-Forma Consistency is broken. Revealing the identities of the social organizations could help breaking the Pro-Forma Consistency, which is harmful to the social organizations. Therefore, pseudonyms are used to keep the ethics<sup>5</sup>.

### ***Studying Through and the Constructivist Position***

In light of the lack of investigation and theorization regarding the discursive and dynamic practices in terms of interactions between Chinese social organizations and the state, my thesis adopts the anthropological approach of ‘studying through’. The key advantage of this method is that it allows one to trace ‘...ways in which power creates webs and relations between actors, institutions, and discourses across time and space’ (Reinhold 1994: 477-9, cited in Shore and Wright 1997: 14). This process involves ‘detaching and repositioning oneself sufficiently far enough from the norms and categories of thought that give security and meaning to the moral universe of one’s society in order to interrogate the supposed natural or axiomatic ‘order of things’

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<sup>5</sup> The research obeys University of Birmingham’s *Code of Practice for Research*:  
<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/supervision-monitoring-postgrad-researchers>

(Shore and Wright 1997: 17). 'Studying through' is also situated within a deconstructive perspective, such that the 'natural or axiomatic order of things' is not taken for granted, though underlying power relations are to be discerned. In this sense, 'studying through' corresponds to the research framework of this thesis, as it is by 'interrogating' the existing 'norms and categories of thought' regarding state and society relations, and investigating how the 'natural or axiomatic 'order of things'' is constructed by the everyday discursive practices in the interactions between state and voluntary associations, that the anthropologist approach is able to be congruent with my research questions.

In this thesis, 'studying through' means to follow the plots and people, and find articulations in the everyday practices related to the interactions between Chinese social organizations and the state, as a specific approach to carry out a multi-sited and contextualized ethnography.(Marcus 1995: 95-117).

Ethnography means 'a description of peoples or cultures', and '...involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions—in fact, collating whatever data are [*sic*] available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research' (Denscombe 2003: 84, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 1).

The first definition clarifies the subject matter and the final production of ethnography; whereas, the second elaborates in detail on the process of carrying out ethnography.

The purpose of this type of research is to grasp the subject's point of view about his

or her world, and its validity lies in the 'experimental authority' of the claim 'I was there' (Denscombe 2003: 85, Clifford 1988: 23-32). Ethnography advocates a holistic and contextual approach in order to understand different aspects of culture; however, the holistic view is questionable - is it a realist holistic picture of the research target or a holistic picture constructed by the researcher according to his or her interpretation of the subject's point of view? If it is 'yes' to the first question, then it is a realist's point of view of ethnography, but if there is agreement in answer to the second question, then the research is viewed from the constructivist standpoint. Realism refers to 'realist' aspirations - to provide full and detailed descriptions of events or cultures as they naturally exist. A constructivist or relativist view is aware of the reflexive nature of social knowledge and the inevitable influence of the researcher's 'self' on the whole research endeavor (Denscombe 2003: 93).

'Realistic aspirations' reflect a naturalistic stance, which asserts that researchers can learn about the social world as constructed in natural settings. This perspective treats social phenomenon as objects existing independently of the researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 6-9). An awareness of reflexivity relates to a 'philosophical hermeneutics' view, which says that the accounts produced in social research inevitably reflect the socio-historical position of the researcher; therefore, the naturalistic stance fails to 'take into account...the fact that social researchers are part of the social world they study' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 13, 16).

One way for ethnographers to deal with this internal tension within their field is to take an eclectic standpoint. 'While ethnographers may adopt a variety of roles, the



usual aim throughout is to maintain a more or less marginal position, thereby providing access to participant perspectives but at the same time minimizing the dangers of over-rapport' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 12).

In contrast, the post-structuralist and post-modernist critiques of the epistemological foundation of ethnographic truth are radical in terms of handling this problem; for example, Foucault 'stresses the fact that social research is a socio-historical phenomenon, one which functions as part of the process of surveillance and control...'; thus, researchers are also part of the political process (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 14). It seems that these problems can never be totally resolved; however, reflecting on the researcher's own standpoint may ease the tension, if not fully resolve it, because reflecting on the researcher's own identity or identities should contribute to the internal validity of the research. The presupposition of reflecting the researcher's position is an acceptance of the constructivist statement.

In this thesis, I take the constructivist point of view, because a researcher can never stay in a fully objective position in the social field, and he or she definitely has an identity whenever entering a social context. The identity of the scholar or researcher means he or she is never totally immune to the subject positions, as behind the social identity are his or her social class, social network and social capital. Local people will not accept a researcher as an object alone; the researcher's own social identities and interactions with different people in the field will surely influence his or her work. In other words, the researcher participates in the construction of the field itself. In addition, the researcher is not able to be omnipresent in every social event, even

when in the field; for example, if two events happen in one night, a researcher inevitably has to choose between one and the other.

My experience in the field has taught me that the key point of field work should be to establish a relationship between the researcher and the research participants. For my field research project, I acted as both a volunteer and a research student, and during the first phase of the research, I made it clear that my intention was to gather information for my thesis; however, in order to be fair to organization Grey, I also became a volunteer within the organization, doing work such as inputting information on to a computer, cleaning, visiting villagers and harvesting water melons. However, it is true that in many circumstances 'the overt/covert' distinction was only a matter of degree (Bryman 2001: 294). Not all the people who appeared during my participant observation work knew who I was, and sometimes they regarded me purely as a volunteer. This did not happen on purpose, but to explain my work every time I met with someone in the village would have been both time consuming and redundant, plus not all people were that interested in whom I *really* was. My own subject position was also being constructed during my participant observation and volunteer work.

The twin roles of volunteer and research student stayed with me throughout the fieldwork process. At first, I was not happy with my double identity because I was afraid of influencing the practices and values of the organizations, but later I realized that it was a necessity for me to conduct my work in the same manner as the other participants. Becoming a volunteer was not simply my own idea or a strategy used to get closer to them - it was also a welcome way of participating in the organizations'

work, which they encouraged. Doing this research involved taking something from the other participants; and they did not have a duty to cooperate. However, carrying out volunteer work such as translating brochures into English, sharing my overseas experience with the participants, sorting out books and documents, and commenting on their English activities, was not only a way for me to show my empathy towards their activities, but also a way for me to show respect for and appreciate their support. This was not a relationship built on an indifferent contract, but one built on mutual respect and trust.

A traditional anthropological critique always focuses on the unequal power relations that exist between Western researchers - who are seen as powerful, and their non-western participants - who are seen as powerless or 'the other'. 'Anthropology has a politics and has always had a politics, one aim of which is to help Western society recognize itself as but one community among many human communities' (Wolf 1992: 136). However, this era has already passed (Chawla 2006: 14). With the withering of the dichotomous oppositions of 'the west and the east', 'the colonists and the colonized', the tensions within field research and how written works represent research results have not been eliminated but in fact have become even more complicated. The issues of hybrid subjectivity constructed during fieldwork and the accuracy of field reports are of critical concern, and the two issues are also linked to each other.

The identity issue is worth discussing for two reasons. Accessing a social site requires having a certain social identity, but actually I used different identities to

access different sites. For Organizations Grey and Orange I entered as both a volunteer and a student who wanted to gather information for a thesis, while for Organization Colorful, I entered as a friend of Mr. Query - a volunteer and a student searching for data. When staying with organizations Red and Green, I gave up on my intention to say I was a student studying abroad and instead used an identity as a volunteer for Organization Colorful. The use of multiple identities raises several issues, these being the issues of outsider versus insider, the social class of the researcher, power relations and the perspective of observing at different sites.

During my fieldwork, I gradually realized that my practical knowledge allowed me to present myself slightly differently to different people in different situations. The principle for me was to show respect and empathy towards the participants, as a result of which I would hopefully be accepted by them. I subconsciously tried to explore the shared similarities and experiences I had with people at the sites, and also wished them to know that I shared some of their values, goals and experiences. The distinction between 'insider' and 'outsider' is, after all, relative. As Chawla says '...Whether native or other, we are all 'another's' in the field, because there will always be facets of ourselves that connect us with the people we study and other facets that emphasize our differences' (Chawla 2006: 14). My personal experiences and background meant I knew very little about migrant workers or peasants when I entered the research field, and though I am Chinese, this still made me an outsider to them. However, as time went on, my volunteer's identity gradually made me think from the perspective of the staff members, migrant workers and peasants I was

working with; I even ran the risk of 'going native'. However, I found that there was no such thing as a 'proper distance', and as a human being myself, I could not fully remove or hide my particular identities. In fact, it was through these identities that I was able to carry out my activities with the people at the research sites, data collection included. Besides, there is actually no such social identity as a 'pure observer' or researcher, one who can freely adjust his or her degree of participation according to the requirements of the research. Thanks to my identity and practices as a volunteer; however, I was able to gain the trust of people at my sites.

As for the issues of 'social class' and 'power relations', my personal social status as a student from an urban middle class family meant I was granted different treatment at different sites. In Organization Colorful, Grey and Orange, I was respected due to my social background, but here local peasants regarded me as someone 'who has knowledge', and the migrant workers envied my chance to study and taste a life abroad. The way that they respected me and regarded me as someone who knew better than they did made me feel uneasy; this uneasiness coming from my self-reflections on my own shortcomings in comparison to how the workers and peasants viewed me. I dealt with this unease by telling the peasants and migrant workers that I did not know everything; I know very little about agricultural planting technologies, neither am I experienced enough to know how to survive in a factory. By so doing, I intended to balance our relationship - by revealing the fact that we just knew about different things, and that I am just an ordinary person also.

However, in Organization Red and Green, the situation was reversed. Some of the

staff members there have a negative attitude towards those who live in the cities, and according to their binary oppositions of urban people and migrant workers, I belong to the former category. As a result, I did not dare to announce that I was studying abroad and had returned to do my field work. Also, one of the staff members, Ms. Flower, became very emotional when introducing her project, one which serves the children of migrant workers, and at one point criticized people in the cities who sponsor their own children to study abroad. She said that she thinks the distribution of welfare resources, such as for education, is unfair. Added to this, many staff members had an offhand attitude towards intellectuals and researchers, questioning the point of writing essays and of intellectuals' advocating policy changes.

Having realized that Organizations Red and Green took the issue of class differentiation very seriously, I became nervous when talking with the people there, telling them only that I was a volunteer at Organization Colorful, which was half true. I only dared tell some of the visitors who had a similar social background to myself that I had research interests whilst there. In organizations Red and Green; therefore, I was somewhat marginalized – a totally opposite experience to the ones in Grey, Colorful and Orange.

Fabian argues that ethnographers must be conscious about their 'oppressors' position, and argues that consciousness-raising is only possible when there is true subversion in the power-relations (Fabian 1991: 220); however, a researcher's position is not always a hegemonic one. As Facebook, Twitter, personal web pages, and other means of expressing ideas have developed, so power relations regarding

knowledge are no longer as fixed as they once were. A researcher can thus step down from his or her powerful position, into an interpretive one. Even if it is still in the traditional scenario of a field research site, a researcher may also face unfamiliarity, as well as friendly or non-friendly reactions from participants. In the field, it is natural that a researcher might adopt several subjective identities in different situations, within which different power relations will also be constructed.

Margery Wolf, a feminist anthropologist, carried out her ethnography (with her husband) in Peihotien village in Taiwan, to study if a village woman was mentally ill or a shaman. In her work, she offers and compares three methods of representation. In the first section, she develops the story as a fiction, and in this fiction she is really an outsider who is watching things as they happen, though she hopes to be totally involved. She comments herself that she does not narrate in another voice because she feels she cannot think like a Chinese person. The second section is recorded as field notes, and in that section she raises the question as to whose voice the notes belong to (Wolf 1992: 89). At the same time, she also reflects on the relationship between the informants and the ethnographer, and finds that although an informant called Wu Chieh tried to do something to make her and her husband interested, her husband did not feel that at all. Therefore, that some issues entered the vision of the ethnographer at all, was really the result of Wu Chieh's efforts. The last ethnographic text is based on her 'understanding of where those voices were coming from in relation to their status' (Wolf 1992: 89), and in that section, she finds the answer; that the woman was not a shaman but was ill, by comparing a session held with an

experienced shaman and the behaviour of the lady in question – in a typically comparative, anthropologist way (Wolf 1992: 96-126).

Wolf admits to the existence of power-relations, saying: 'I see no way to avoid this exercise of power and at least some of the stylistic requirements used to legitimate that text if the practice of ethnography is to continue' (Wolf 1992:11); however, what she means by power-relations is not simply her own hegemonic status *vis-à-vis* the participants. When anthropologists go into the field, they do hold power as somebody rich and powerful, but as they try to get used to the complex way of life in the field, local people will soon come to know consciously or unconsciously that they themselves are also powerful, since the ethnographer's life is dependent on them. Power-relations thus are not a one-way flow, just like the relationship between Wolf and her informants.

Finally, the social identities that I used to access different sites also helped construct the perspectives developed from my observations. As long as particular social identities exist, there is no way to observe a site from all the possible angles, as the social identity that exists at the moment one accesses a site also shapes the perspectives developed. Within such a social identity, some aspects may not even be accessible for further investigation. For example, the unanswered question in this thesis is: why and how do local state officers make decisions on when or when not to carry out coercive practices against the social organizations? This aspect could not be observed in the field, since my social identities as a volunteer, student or friend of an NGO member, were not able to help me get close enough to government officers to



ask this question. As a result, I did not have a chance in the field to observe the state officers' own opinions being expressed.

Sperber says that ethnography deals in the representation of other cultures and categorizes the discipline into two: descriptive and non-descriptive ethnography. The former can only be developed in the form of utterances - which is similar to dialogic ethnography. The latter; however, can be further divided into reproduction and interpretation. Different from Geertz's interpretative ethnography, which is 'from notebook to monograph', Sperber's interpretative ethnography is not concerned with one's own construction of other people's lives, but aims to 'unpick the stitches that hold it all together.' 'He [the researcher] wants to ask—indeed his overall project requires him to ask—whose construction of what?' (1985, cited in Spencer 1989: 150)

The fieldwork for this thesis had as its purpose to reveal 'whose construction of what?' The Pro-Forma Consistency constructed through the four articulatory elements represents an interpretation of the relationship between the Chinese state and the five study social organizations. The legitimacy of this interpretation lies in the process of transforming the everyday 'practical knowledge' into sociological knowledge (Hamel 1998: 1-19). 'This representativeness is not grounded...but through the intermediary of a 'theory' of which the methodological qualities conferred on the case show clearly that it is indeed 'well constructed'" (Hamel 1998: 17). The fact that Wolf was experiencing complex power relations in the field does not serve to cancel-out her interpretations on whether the lady in question was mad or not. 'Ethnography is actively situated between powerful systems of meaning. It poses its questions at the

boundaries of civilizations, cultures, classes, races, and genders' (Clifford 1986: 2, 9), so based on this insight, 'ethnographic truths are thus inherently partial—committed and incomplete' (Clifford 1986: 7). Further studies should be carried out to test to what extent Pro-Forma Consistency can hold up to this explanation, as '...this 'theory' holds until proof to the contrary [is provided] as long as it is set out in sufficient detail to be open to validation' (Hamel 1998: 17).

### *Specific Fieldwork Methods*

The method of 'studying through' used, and my research framework - based on the theory of articulation, all belong to the post-structuralist, constructive perspective. Not only the norms and thoughts, but also the subject positions of social agents are problematized, and are seen open to construction and reconstruction (Smith 1992: 498).

As for specific ethnographic techniques, according to Marcus, 'plots' refer to the stories told by people in modern times, which should be tested against the reality of ethnographic work (Marcus 1995: 109). Here, in this thesis, 'plots' will refer not only to narratives and norms but also to everyday events observable in ethnography. 'Following the people' and 'following the plots' are the same process because plots are impossible to generate without people. Besides narratives and norms, plots include two kinds of event, each of which contains various practices. Some events are pre-designed, with a clear purpose to start with; are carried out intentionally by the people in the ethnographic field. However, purposefully set plots sometimes do not

evolve according to their original purpose; they may function to alter the subject positions of the social agents. The other set of events may occur contingently, which also contributes to the construction of the subject positions and thus the discourse. Writing these events into a coherent thesis like this also touches upon the issue of representation (Smith 1992: 498). The plots or events presented here are taken from the information gained through participant observation and non-structured interviews. Moreover, the various plots become a whole only through hegemonic articulation, in other words, it may be observed that some plots can be sutured together, while others just pass-on.

The practical knowledge of 'plots' in ethnographic field work informs the research framework, and for this thesis, a multi-sited ethnography was carried out in five local Chinese social organization, each of which was chosen and its interactions with the state investigated according to the principles of 'following the plots' and 'following the people'. In the field, my information gathering process did not occur in a straightforward manner, as the everyday practices I witnessed were discursive and entangled together; thus, it was not easy to identify those practices relevant to the interactions between state institutions and social organizations and those which were not. In the process of following the plots and people; however, the seemingly disordered and unsystematic information gradually unfolded itself, so it was not necessary to make a distinction between practices, or only to pay attention to the assumingly relevant information (O'Brien 2007: 8). The diverse practices in action brought me a sense of the ongoing construction of a certain whole, one which

corresponded to the theoretical assumption of discourse construction. The practical knowledge of ethnography raises the importance of the contextual sense of an ongoing construction, something missing from the research framework presented in the last section.

Ethnographic work empirically informs the theoretical position of post-Marxism by bringing the abstract theories into a practical context. Grand theory can thus be checked using empirical details, and can also be extended through the further theorization of particular elements discovered in the field. 'Whether the investigator is aware of it or not, theory is always driving field inquiry...' (Wacquant 2009: 149). It is true that no one is totally blank when entering a field situation, as theoretical pre-suppositions function unconsciously; however, it is also true that theory and empirical evidence have a dialectic relationship; each informs, develops, alters, modifies and even breaks the other (O'Brien 2007: 9). During my fieldwork studies of the interactions between the five social organizations and state institutions, I developed the theoretical concept of 'articulation'. Before moving on to the theorization of articulation, I will first clarify my case selection and fieldwork strategies.

### ***Fieldwork Strategy and Process***

The fieldwork for this thesis was divided into three phases. The first phase was carried out over a month in July 2005, the second between 19<sup>th</sup> June and 10<sup>th</sup> November 2007, and the final phase, from 12<sup>th</sup> March to 30<sup>th</sup> April 2009 and during December of the same year. Follow-up questions - for clarification, checking and

confirmation, were asked using e-mails and phone calls.

The first phase of my research study was implemented in 2005 at organization Grey, which was then trying to develop an integrated development plan for a village in the northern part of China. I carried out participatory observation and interviews with volunteers, peasants and staff, the aim of this one-month research phase being to probe about the research topic, establish a good research relationship and obtain basic information regarding the organization - including its value-orientation, activities and its social network. I then developed a future research plan based on this first-round of fieldwork. During this first research phase I discovered organization Red, since Red participates a lot in the work of Grey, though more in the area of serving internal migrant workers, another aspect of the three rural problems.

By the time my second round of fieldwork was carried out in 2007, Mr. Query had left organization Grey to create a new space for action, so I followed and observed him setting up another organization called 'Colorful', in a city located in southern China. I then spent a month-and-a-half with Mr. Query, living near him and following him every day - visiting the people and local organizations he is linked to. I then spent another month-and-a-half with organization Grey, during a transitional period. My final month during this phase was spent undertaking participant observation at organization Red, and the rest of my time was spent travelling, participating in NGO seminars and contacting people from other organizations introduced to me by Mr. Query. I managed to talk to two contacts in this way, but failed to obtain permission to

carry out participant research<sup>6</sup>.

In the third phase of my research, in 2009, I spent another one-and-a-half months with organizations Colorful and Orange, the latter having been established by Mr. Query in 2006. Both organization Red and organization Green were frequently identified in the everyday practices of organization Colorful, so in December of that year, I visited organization Green through an introduction by Colorful.

I mainly used participant observation during my fieldwork, with informal interviews and face-to-face discussions carried out as a way to obtain clearer and more precise explanations. I also used the organizational brochures, documents and research reports of each of the organizations as a source of information. The texts generated are part of everyday practices as well. Laclau and Mouffe view the semantic language system as a constituent part of a discourse. (Laclau 1990: 100, Torfing 1999: 40, 85, 94) These materials are used in two ways. The brochures and research reports made by some social organizations are used for the general information of the local contexts, while brochures and documents are used as complementary resources to check and to reassure the information gained in the field observation and interviews. Since the second phase of my research I have been in regular contact with the people I visited, especially Mr. Query, through e-mails and phone calls; therefore, have been able to obtain further, follow-up information.

During the second and third phases of my research, I made the purpose of my research and my identity as a research student clear to Mr. Query and the staff at the

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<sup>6</sup> The reasons provided were that they were making some adjustments to the organizations. I did not visit at a good time. Later, I heard rumors of poor accountability in terms of finance, but never had the chance to clarify this.

organizations For the organizations Colorful, Grey and Orange; however, when it came to engaging in social events, that is, meeting people and organizations related to Mr. Query, I did not introduce myself as a research student to everyone in all circumstances. For example, the local government officers whom the staff and I visited regarded me as a volunteer working with the staff. In organizations Red and Green, I was introduced by Mr. Query and Ms. Hey (the successor to Mr. Query in leading organization Colorful) as a volunteer for organization Colorful.

During the course of my fieldwork, a theoretical framework that explains the mechanisms underlying the co-existence of state control and organizational autonomy gradually took shape, and my empirical findings show that articulation plays an important role in this interactive relationship.

### **Theorizing 'Pro-Forma Consistency' and the Articulatory Elements**

In this thesis, I would like to raise and discuss the concept of 'Pro-Forma Consistency'. The co-existence of state control and organizational autonomy depends on the mechanism of Pro-Forma Consistency, which means that the social organizations and the state conform in some respects to accept each other. As the Chinese state is in the hegemonic position, this conformity usually takes the form of the state appreciating the subversive performances of the social organizations as demonstrating their legitimacy.

The possibility of Pro-Forma Consistency depends on the emptiness of the nodal points of state policy discourse, which brings about the chance of multiple

interpretations being made of the ambiguous connotations of the discourses. According to Gramsci, when hegemony is exercised, the interests of the subordinate groups must also be taken into consideration, such that the hegemonic groups should compromise with the subordinate groups by sacrificing some economic interests (Gramsci 1971: 161). While Gramsci still holds that the ultimate function is the economy in any 'ethical-political' hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe bring the political aspects back by asserting that discourse is part of a constant political construction. In *Weapons of the Weak*, Scott says that 'a hegemonic ideology requires, by definition, that what are in fact particular interests be reformulated and presented as general interests' (1985: 337). In order to maintain their hegemonic position, hegemonic groups must stick to the propaganda of the dominant ideology, which is dressed up to represent the general interests of the universe (nation state). Therefore, as long as the dominant ideology includes the narratives of the subordinate interests, the universality represented by the dominant ideology can be used by the subordinate groups as weapons to justify their appeals and resistances (Scott 1985: 338). Such ironic phenomena also occur in the 'rightful resistance' described by O'Brien, in which Chinese peasants use central state policies to fight local cadres who do not carry out state policies (O'Brien and Li 2006: 1-15). Laclau and Mouffe further highlight the reasons for an expanded representation of the dominant ideology, saying that the possibility for the particularity of a nodal point to hegemonically represent the universe lies in the emptiness of the nodal points. Therefore, such an emptiness of the Chinese state policy discourse opens the door for social organizations to connect and



formulate a Pro-Forma Consistency.

Pro-Forma Consistency is formulated through four articulatory elements, these being: 'Personal connections as intermediaries', 'bottom-line consistency', 'key words/policy consistency', and 'matching political achievements'. Through these four articulatory elements, social organizations and the state do not achieve complete conformity in terms of narratives and practices; for example, consistency with the state may occur in a 'stereotyped' and 'ritualistic' way due to the repeated emergence of nodal points in an oral or practical sense, without the exact meaning of these points being fixed (Scott 1990: 3). This is how Pro-Forma Consistency remains 'pro-forma'. Under this framework, spaces and differences are always set aside to allow the autonomous actions of the organizations involved to proceed.

The state exerts its control at both the local organizational level and the policy discourse level. On the first level, the Chinese state is embodied in the various local and departmental state institution entities, those which are constituted by 'multiple sets of practices' (Migdal 2001: 20), and on the second level, the Chinese state itself represents the abstract and general representations of all Chinese people (Migdal 2001: 17-18). The separate and diverse practices that take place may either reinforce the 'mythical abstraction' of the state, or break the abstraction (Migdal 2001: 19). The discretion afforded to organizations in executing their work may vary from one state institution to another (Lipsky 2010: 13-16), as working in the local context, officers are faced with complicated and human-related situations rather than programmatic formats (Lipsky 2010: 15), and this is one reason why discretion is exercised. The

other reason is that the local officers have to interpret the macro and abstract state policies themselves, and so local practices are to an extent determined by local officers' interpretations of the policy signifiers. Sometimes, their own interests also have to be considered during the decision-making processes - when the 'matching [of] political achievement' enters the equation. These issues bring added complexity for social organizations when trying to develop Pro-Forma Consistency with the state, as the articulatory elements of 'personal connections as intermediary' and 'matching political achievements' are more related to local behavior. 'Key words/policy consistency' and 'bottom-line consistency' belong to both the local state organizational behavior and state policy discourse levels.

Duara (2008: 152-164) and Shue once elaborated upon the 'cultural nexus of power', saying:

...the nexus is not a place but a framework of institutions, practices, and beliefs circulating [and] within which elements of state and society are mingled, each gaining scope and power from their mutual association, one with the other; a framework within which authority, acquired through association with other persons of influence, power, and prestige who operate in diverse spheres of human affairs, can thereby be generated or reconfirmed and where the efficacy of state and society can be both symbolically and actually joined. (Shue 2008: 148)

The four articulatory elements are like the nexus described above. Though the state is in the hegemonic position - maintaining the interpretative and coercive power,

social organizations also gain 'scope and power' from their association with the state through the articulatory elements (Shue 2008: 148). The autonomy of the social organizations lies in their partial alignment with the state, in which social organizations' differences of opinion with regard to state policy narratives and practices are suppressed underneath Pro-Forma Consistency. Social organizations are able to develop their own values and practices outside of this alignment; however, the autonomy of the social organizations in terms of developing their own values and practices will be lost if the Pro-Forma Consistency is broken or overly constructed. When the Pro-Forma Consistency is broken, the differences the social organizations have with the state will be brought to centre stage in the struggle. On the other hand, when the consistency is overly constructed, the autonomy of the social organizations will be eliminated. The breaking point can happen at each end of the articulatory scale; for example, excessive consistency may be constructed when the state organizationally controls the social organizations, in other words, social organizations are absorbed into the state system such that no institutional separation can be identified.

Kerkvliet categorizes politics into three types: official politics, advocacy politics and everyday politics (2005: 20-25). Everyday politics occurs in people's everyday lives and work, a situation in which people quietly, mundanely or subtly embrace, adjust to, or contest norms and rules 'regarding authority over, production of, or allocation of resources' (Kerkvliet 2005: 22). The practices of Chinese social organizations represent a form of everyday politics; however, it is not certain whether the everyday

politics of Chinese social organizations can influence or even alter advocacy politics and official politics, which are more overt, confrontational and institutionalized. When everyday politics is elevated into the realms of advocacy or official politics, it means that Pro-Forma Consistency is no longer applicable in such situation, as conformity between the state and the social organizations has already been broken.

In the next chapter, I will briefly present the changing state policy discourse in China from Mao's era up to the current one, in order to reveal how the dislocations occur in the changing discourses, and how the value orientations of the social organizations are settled to face with these dislocations in accordance with the state policy discourse.

## CHAPTER 3 : CHINESE POLITICAL DISCOURSES, DISLOCATIONS AND PRO-FORMA CONSISTENCY AT THE STATE LEVEL

### Introduction

Since implementation of 'the reform and opening up' policy in 1992, China has gradually changed from a totalitarian state into one with 'managed or limited pluralism'. As part of this, on the one hand, economic development and decentralization have brought not only economic progress, but also created social spaces for people to carry out activities, whilst on the other, social dislocations have been generated alongside the economic growth, and have become prominent features of 21<sup>st</sup> century China. While economic development has given people confidence, the gap between the groups benefiting and the subordinate groups has widened, and this has rung alarm bells across the country, and in government. Nevertheless, the dislocated discourse that has developed in China has produced the historical pre-conditions for, as well as placed limitations on, the rapid emergence of social organizations in China.

Many of the Chinese social organizations that have emerged since the late 1990s have been focused on social problems, providing services to vulnerable and marginalized groups (Howell 2004a: 147-149). The five social organizations selected for my study were all set-up to tackle agricultural, rural and peasant problems in China. The Chinese state's current discourse has a dual emphasis on 'maintaining social stability (through state's coercive power)' and 'building a socialist harmonious society through a scientific outlook on development'. These two elements are articulatory practices that have been developed in response to the various dislocations that have

appeared in China during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. 'Building a socialist, harmonious society through scientific outlook on development' has not only been prescribed in order to solve the problems brought about by the dislocations that have developed, but also to describe China's bright future. 'Maintaining social stability' (through the state's coercive power) is the flip side of the same coin, this being the antagonistic feelings expressed due to the social ruptures in China. Because social instability has become a problem, class antagonisms have deepened and the state is now being challenged by the potential danger of severe resistance, so that maintaining social stability is being established just in time. Both of these two elements represent the Chinese state's efforts to suture the dislocations that have developed in the country. The 'building a socialist, harmonious society' policy articulates the proposition of developing a hegemonic approach to reconstruct the dislocations present in society, while the 'maintaining social stability' approach expresses an anti-rupture position in light of the antagonistic social resistance practices taking place. Though these two elements are expressed in separate forms, they usually join to form a conspiracy when 'maintaining social stability' is practiced without any prior announcement from the state's 'repressive...apparatus' (Althusser 2008: 16).

In support of the connection between the above two nodal points, 'constructing new socialist rural areas' (*JianShe SheHui ZhuYi Xin NongCun*), and 'caring for migrant (peasant) workers' (*GuanHuai NongMin Gong*) are the two articulatory policy elements that have been specifically developed by the central state in response to the dislocation caused by the 'three rural problems' - in accordance with the general

prescriptions of building a socialist harmonious society and maintaining social stability. This approach has contributed to the temporary fixedness of the political discourse and on the one hand has functioned to partially explain what a harmonious society actually means and contains, and on the other, that the nodal points themselves actually experience an internal emptiness and serve as two general representations of both official and non-official practices, those articulated as 'constructing new socialist rural areas' or 'caring for migrant workers'. During the construction of these Chinese state discourses, the five social organizations in my study have tended to connect to them using Pro-Forma Consistency

In this chapter, I will explore how these discourses have emerged from the dislocations taking place in China. During this process, China has moved from a totalitarian regime towards becoming a post-totalitarian country, within which dislocations have provided both challenges and opportunities for the state and for social organizations. I will also discuss the approaches taken by the social organizations in order to settle the dislocations caused by the three rural problems. Pro-Forma Consistency occurs at the discourse level, and this has granted social organizations the space to develop their own approaches.

### **From Totalitarian State towards Building a Harmonious, Socialist Society**

While China's pre-reform era is usually described as having been totalitarian, authoritarian or Leninist in nature, the reform era initiated by Deng Xiao Ping is usually understood as having been post-totalitarian/authoritarian/Leninist (Goldstein 1995:

1106, Wank 1998: 210-212, Burns 1999: 580-582). In this thesis, the words totalitarian and post-totalitarian will be used to emphasize China's changing relational characteristics in terms of the state and society. China's pre-reform totalitarian era of Leninist-Maoist discourse was characterized by its 'atomized society', with the 'state...amassing total power, demanding total societal submission', and with all social transformation under the monopoly power, leadership and management of the state; thus, it represented the opposite of a pluralistic democratic state regime (Wank 1998: 210-212, Lai 2006: 56).

Since reform and opening-up policy was implemented, China has been characterized by its 'managed or limited pluralism', which means that economic, cultural and political diversity has been both encouraged and restrained (Balzer 2005: 237-238). Some aspects of people's social lives, especially economic activities, are now relatively open, while others are restricted. Economic development and decentralization have been the key achievements of this policy, and this has raised the curtain on managed or limited pluralism. Social stratification, regrouping and inequality are the dislocations which the achievements have failed to address, so that building a harmonious, socialist society and maintaining social stability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be seen as re-articulations of these dislocated, social elements.

### ***Economic Development and Decentralization***

The thirty years or so since 1978 can be divided into two, with one phase characterized by economic development and the gradual retreat of the state from



various social fields - bringing the country prosperity and diversity especially in the economic field, and the other phase featuring emerging social stratification and social problems.

Chinese communist discourse in the totalitarian era was a hegemonic system composed of left-wing radical revolutionary theory based on a 'class struggle', and Mao Ze Dong's charismatic power. By persuading people that China was a 'people's democratic dictatorship', the state successfully captured the hearts of the subordinate class, that is, the peasants and workers. The term 'people's democratic dictatorship' was first used by Mao Ze Dong in 1949, in his article *On People's Democratic Dictatorship* (*Lun Renmin Minzhu Zhuanzheng*), and later was written into the *Constitution of the People's Republic of China*. (National People's Congress 2004) According to this fundamental principle of China's polity, there were two camps in China: one, the people, under the leadership of the working class and based on an alliance of the working and peasant classes, and the other - the enemies, who were represented mainly by the capitalist class (Christiansen and Rai 1996: 17). Democracy was supposed to be used by the people, while dictatorship was exerted by people against the enemy.

The Chinese people's rule over the capitalist class was first imposed in the first eight years of the existence of the People's Republic of China (PRC). By confiscating the means of production and the arable land of the capitalist classes and landowners, and by transforming the private economy into a state-owned economy, the state had achieved the objective of 'socialist transformation' by 1956 (Saich 2004: 22-56).

However, the class struggle did not come to an end there, and Mao Ze Dong, who was undoubtedly in the lead position in terms of determining policy direction in China, continued to stress that, although the capitalist class had lost its economic power, its ideological and political influence was still strong (Schwartz 1965: 3). As a result, under the 'righteous teaching' of 'our great leader Chairman Mao', the class struggle at the ideological and political level continued in the form of a mass movement, which reached its peak during the Cultural Revolution (Christiansen and Rai 1996: 132-133).

After Mao Ze Dong's death, the nationwide class struggle came to an end, so on the one hand, China was faced with the task of restoring and reviving every aspect of social life after the 'ten bad years of great disaster' (*ShiNian HaoJie*) (Pye 1986: 587), and on the other, the country also faced going through a discourse transition, accompanied by a power succession crisis in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Schram 1984: 417-461).

Also, after 1977, the radical class struggle discourse used during the Mao Ze Dong period was gradually replaced by a new one initiated by Deng Xiao Ping and other party leaders. This new discourse contained two related parts, the first stating that 'practice is the sole criterion for testing the truth' and the second being 'economic construction is the central task in the primary stage of socialism' (Schram 1984: 417-419). This new discourse maintained the authority of Mao Ze Dong's political position by inheriting his epistemological legacy of 'seeking truth from practice', while at the same time removing the 'radical class struggle' element. By insisting on a 'socialist direction' and 'proletariat democratic dictatorship', and both emphasizing the

pre-eminence of the CCP's leadership, and 'Marxism-Leninism and Mao Ze Dong Thought', it also avoided an abrupt and potentially harmful change from the past, one which might unsettle the social and political stability of China. By claiming that China was in the primary stages of socialism but lacked sufficient economic accumulation, China's leaders successfully transferred the central task from that of a 'political mass movement of class struggle', to one of economic development. In developing Gramscian theory, Mouffe has pointed that the changing of a discourse<sup>7</sup> is not achieved by rejecting the whole system, but by breaking the old one into different elements to see if some of them can still be maintained and modified to represent new connotations. Thus some old ideological elements represent new contents, while gradually the discourse is changed (Mouffe 1979: 192-193).

Therefore, after Mao's death China moved into a post-totalitarian regime, within which economic reforms became the central focus. This new regime has since been described as 'socialist with Chinese characteristics', with the question as to whether the reforms introduced have been capitalist or socialist left to one side. The economic reforms that have been introduced have transformed China's economic structure in two ways, one by decreasing the role of the state-owned economic sector, and two by increasing the role of the private economy. For example, the proportion of industrial output produced by state-owned enterprises shrank from 77.6% in 1978 to 28.2% in 1999 (Wang and Wang 2004: 60-63); furthermore, the market has substituted for the government at all levels – becoming the main resource allocation and distribution

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<sup>7</sup> Here I use the word 'discourse' to make the text more compatible with the beginning of the thesis. Readers may notice that by the year 1979, when Mouffe edited the book *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, the ultimate determinism of the economy had not yet been abandoned in terms of the development described in Mouffe and Laclau's theory.

mechanism. The principle 'Economics in command' has released people from the economic monopoly of the state, plus Chinese people have obtained some freedoms in economic and cultural areas.

The retreat of the state from many social fields, the establishment of market levers, the containment of social forces and economic growth, including an improvement in people's livelihoods, have all occurred simultaneously.

In rural areas, communes (*RenMin GongShe*) were once the basic units that undertook three functions - serving as agricultural production organizations under the planned economy, as egalitarian collective distribution systems for rural social welfare and most importantly, as the administrative function tasked with organizing the peasants (Kueh 1985: 122). After the late 1970s, the household responsibility system replaced the commune system; therefore, peasants did not need to work within the control of communes, but were able to rent land from the state. Since then the state and collectives have withdrawn from taking direct control over resources and production management tasks, such that peasants in every household are allowed to manage their own farms and simultaneously, to take on the risks. Peasants are; however, required to deliver certain quantities of crops according to contracts with government purchasing stations under the procurement quota system, with any surplus over this quota belonging to the individual households. The household responsibility system encourages peasants to work, since there is an opportunity to 'earn additional income' (Crook 1985: 291-303). Due to the liberation of productive forces and the means of production, '...personal income and consumption

expenditure of the Chinese peasants increased, in real terms, by about two and a half fold from 1978 to 1986' (Kueh 1988: 668). Compared with China's totalitarian era, peasants' livelihoods have dramatically improved.

In urban areas, the work unit (*DanWei*) system that was prevalent in China's totalitarian past has also collapsed in the same way as the rural commune has done so. In the totalitarian era, work units functioned as both working and manufacturing locations, and as the basic institutions for controlling people. It was through the work units that social welfare was allocated to people, and the state was responsible for allocating graduates to different work units after graduating (Shue 1994: 69). Individuals were not allowed to choose their jobs according to personal will, so 'Cadres of work units were both managers of the organizations and the state's officers. Workers were both the cadres' employees and the state's citizens'. (White 1987: 366; Sun 2004: 219) After the reforms, the work unit system was gradually abandoned, and state control over the non-administrative work units, such as enterprises and factories, gradually weakened. The management authority in terms of decision-making, planning and implementation was handed over to managers, and workers could no longer rely on the 'iron rice bowl' of life-long 'virtue and job tenure', as labor contracts and a labor market were introduced into the process of labor allocation (Field 1984: 758, White 1987: 366). State-owned enterprises and factories, those that used to be part of the work unit system, have since become more and more independent, with private enterprises, joint-ventures and other types of organization developing rapidly (Field 1984: 758).

China's economic reforms have liberated people, and economic growth has been accompanied by a loosening of ideological control over cultural activities (Sun 2004: 144-147). On the one hand, the state still insists on a socialist direction by sticking to the principle of 'socialist, spiritual civilization' (*SheHui ZhuYi JingShen WenMing*), a principle formulated at the 6<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1980, whilst on the other, the state has altered its role from directly controlling all cultural activities, to supervising those activities. Individuals are thus allowed to carry out diverse cultural activities as long as they do not violate socialist principles. Literature and voluntary art groups, popular beliefs, international cultural communication, evening entertainment and even market-oriented media, all of which were once not permitted, are now blossoming (Sun 2004: 144-147, Gries and Rosen 2004: 6).

### ***The Dislocations: Social Stratification, Regrouping and Inequality***

While China's reforms have achieved great success in terms of overall economic growth and people's liberation from the control of the totalitarian state, social problems have also developed.

As the economic reforms have deepened, scholars have noticed that the liberated Chinese people are gradually revealing new and different social strata. The whole discourse of 'class analysis' has gradually disappeared from the public media and policy documents since Deng Xiao Ping halted the debate on 'whether the reform is socialist or capitalist in nature' (Xu 2009: 45); the term 'class' was replaced at this time by 'social stratum', which has less political implications in its Chinese translation.

Chinese society is divided into ten social strata according to people's occupations, plus their organizational, economic and cultural resources. The ten social strata are: national and social governors, managers, private enterprise owners, technicians, clerks, people who own small private businesses, people who work in service trades, industrial workers, peasants, and the unemployed and semi-unemployed (Lu 2004: 1-41). However, some scholars do not agree with this categorization and so have tried to find fundamental distinctions between the social strata. As a result, Chinese society can also be categorized into four strata according to the quantum of benefits that people have been able to glean from the economic reforms, with those who have benefited most being the special beneficiary group, that is, the 'new rich', after which comes the group of ordinary beneficiaries, most of whom are intellectuals, workers and clerks etc., then the relatively exploited and the extremely exploited groups (Sun 2004: 42-43). The social problems termed as 'pitfalls of the reform' or 'systemic pressures' have arisen from the distinction between these four social groups (Howell 2004a: 148).

The special beneficiary group includes owners of enterprises, the social elite, recently rich officials, managers of foreign companies, pop and media stars and so on, some of whom are either officials themselves or cooperate with officials for personal gain (Goldman and Macfarquhar 1999: 17). During the economic reforms process, local governments have gained concrete autonomy in terms of deciding budgets, allocating resources and making investment decisions, and their identity as independent interest pursuers is now clear (Xiao 2008: 191, Howell 2004b: 230).

Therefore, the confederacy of the political elites - who are local and departmental officials, plus the economic elites - who are business experts, has been formulated (Xiao 2008: 240-243). This confederacy of political and economic elites has led to departmentalism and localism, and has actually weakened the power of the central government in Beijing (Howell 2004b: 230).

On the other side of the social strata, the relatively exploited and the extremely exploited groups mainly include the urban unemployed, poor peasants - especially in the central and western parts of China, and internal migrant workers (Sun 2004: 105-107). With the deepening of economic reforms in the 1990s, state-owned enterprises and factories obtained more and more autonomy in terms of their management. The establishment of a labor market marked the end of the life-long tenure regime for workers, called the 'iron rice ball'. The freedom to choose and be chosen for jobs not only liberalized the urban productive forces, but also led to the lay-off of millions of workers who were not able to find other, formal work (Whyte 1999: 193-194; Walder 1992: 112; Solinger 2004: 50-51, 56-57). These workers were mostly born in the 1950s and so missed out on educational opportunities due to the Cultural Revolution, thus becoming disadvantaged in terms of the competition brought about by the later economic reforms (Solinger 2004: 59).

According to some reports and estimates, by mid-1999, the number of laid-off workers was about 100 million (Solinger 2004: 50) in China. The National Bureau of Statistics released the numbers on this for the years 2002 to 2006, and in 2002 there were 554.5 million laid-off workers who had received a subsistence allowance (*DiBao*)



in urban areas – a historical peak. After that, the numbers gradually decreased and by 2006, the number had dropped to 350 million people; however, attention must be paid to the fact that these numbers only included the workers who were receiving a subsistence allowance (National Bureau of Statistics 2008a).

In China, as elsewhere, it is difficult for laid-off workers to be formally re-employed, and only a small number have been able to find regular work, while the majority have either become self-employed or work on a temporary basis (Solinger 2004: 51, 57). Financial difficulty is another major predicament faced by unemployed workers (Solinger 2004: 51), for by the time workers lost their jobs as a result of the increased competition between enterprises in the 1990s, a new social welfare system had not yet been established to take over from the welfare distribution system under the old work units. Medical and social insurance schemes, unemployment insurance, pension insurance and other kinds of insurance schemes were only designed and implemented after the late 1990s (Croll 1999: 684-699).

Peasants also belong to the 'exploited' social stratum. With the implementation of the household responsibility system, peasants' income indeed increased in the 1980s, as mentioned in the above section, though in 1978, the income ratio between urban and rural residents was 2.4:1. By 1983, the gap had reduced to 1.7:1 (Sun 2004: 105; Davis 1989: 577); however, by 1997, the gap had again widened again to 2.5:1 (Sun 2004: 105). By 2007, the average rural income was 4140 RMB per capita, while the average urban income was 13,786 RMB per capita, representing an income ratio between urban and rural areas of 3.33:1 (National Bureau of Statistics 2008b). While

peasants' incomes were still lower at this time, the rural social welfare system and public goods they were entitled to lagged far behind. 'In many inner China rural areas, local governments could not afford to pay the local primary and middle school teachers. About 50% to 60% of counties in China could not make ends meet' (Lin 2007: 31). Low local incomes could not provide peasants with a sufficient supply of public goods.

From the mid 1980s onwards, rural industrial and commercial enterprises began to grow rapidly, especially in coastal areas (Bernstein 1999: 207-208), and local or rural governments found that it was better in a financial sense to invest in rural industrial and commercial enterprises than to invest in agriculture (Bernstein 1999: 208-210). The state procurement agencies did not pay cash to peasants; the procurement funds, together with the rural subsidies provided by the central government to enhance agriculture, were instead used to invest in local industrial and commercial enterprises, since they were potentially more profitable than agricultural production (Bernstein 1999: 207-219). During the late 1980s and early 1990s, peasants only received IOUs from local governments, so became heavily burdened.

The state tried to reduce peasants' burden by establishing the PRC Agricultural Law in 1993 and enacting an edict entitled the *Decision on Sincerely Carrying out the Work of Reducing Peasants' Burden* in 1997 (Su Xiang Dong 2008), after which illegal charges and IOUs were strictly punished. Moreover, from 2000 onwards, the state gradually reduced agricultural taxes to further alleviate the financial burden on peasants (Selden and Perry 2010: 26-27). Since the beginning of 2006, these

agricultural taxes have been completely abolished (The Central People's Government of PRC 2006), while at the same time, the state has continued to provide agricultural subsidies to peasants; however, the positive effects of the agricultural subsidies have been offset by the increased costs of agricultural raw materials on the market; thus, it is the trading companies selling agricultural commodities that have made the profits, not the peasants (Lin 2007: 28).

Rural land disputes have also been a source of peasants' troubles, due to the ambiguity of China's land ownership framework (Ho 2001: 394-421). While rural land in China belongs to the state and the collective, the use rights for land belong to the peasants through the land lease system; and these use rights can be sold and transferred on the land market (Ho 2001: 401-402, 417). However, it is always difficult to distinguish between collective ownership, state ownership and peasants' use rights. The state maintains 'deliberate institutional ambiguity' regarding land rights, in order to allow political leeway (Ho 2001: 403-417), which is convenient for the state when making policy adjustments; however, with accelerated industrialization and urbanization, a large amount of rural land has been 'procured' for industrial and commercial purposes. Local governments and merchants, who have grouped together as part of the special beneficiary group, have thus made significant profits, while peasants have become marginalized in terms of benefits sharing (Luo and Fu 2009: 435, Ho 2001: 421).

The third subordinate social stratum consists of the internal migrant workers, as since China began its market reforms in the late 1970s, millions of peasants have

moved from the countryside to urban areas; the number was already 50 million by the end of 1988 (Solinger 1999: 1-15), and has continued to grow since. According to the *Communiqué on Major Data of the Second National Agricultural Census of China (No.5)*, by 2008 the number of rural migrant workers was 131,810,000 people, 66% of which were aged between 21 and 40 (National Bureau of Statistics 2008c). However, these migrating peasants, who are referred to as internal migrant workers, often find themselves in a vulnerable position in their new locations. First, as 70% of them only have a middle school education, they cannot find 'steady employment or a secure source of income'. Second, without a local household registration document, they cannot fully assimilate into city life; therefore, are hardly able to enjoy urban welfare services (Solinger 1999: 1-15, Zhao and Kipnis 2000: 101-110, Saich 2004: 290). Their overall standard of living thus lags far behind the average for native urban residents with regard to access to education resources, medical services and housing facilities (Xu 2009: 39). Third, migrant workers only recently and in part got rid of the 'coercive administrative measures' which have brutally controlled them over the years. Before 2003, migrant workers who failed to present their identity cards, temporary residence cards or employment cards to the police were in most cases detained and repatriated (Xu 2009: 48), but in 2003, the Detention and Repatriation Measures for Urban Vagrants and Beggars legislation was abolished, after a national debate took place about a detained university graduate, Mr. Sun Zhi Gang, who was found dead in a detention centre in Shen Zhen. Since then, although migrant workers have still been portrayed as a group who need help from others, to respect them as equal citizens

has become a political right.

The PRC has adopted a dualistic development structure since its establishment in 1949, a structure which separates rural areas from urban areas and categorizes people into agricultural and non-agricultural sectors of society. The essential purpose of this structure is to grant cities the priority to develop; with the surplus production of agriculture used to support urban industrialization (Zhou 1997: 13-19; Mallee 1995: 19; Cheng and Selden 1994: 644). This absolute separation of the agricultural and industrial sectors has already weakened with the development of the market economy of China, and one of the most prominent phenomena to have occurred has been the *de facto* reduction in immobility in terms of moving to other areas within the country.

Push and pull factors between the countryside and urban areas are frequently mentioned as reasons for the internal migration of peasant-workers (Solinger 1992: 9), push factors arising from the situation of an increasing surplus rural labor force and a decrease in arable land available per capita. The essential pull factors are the attractions of industrialization and of being able to experience an urban lifestyle.

All in all, social stratification of the key beneficiary and social subordinate groups reveals the fact that social inequality has become more and more obvious, and serious, and that this social reality has accompanied the overall growth of GDP in China.

### ***Maintaining Social Stability and Building a Harmonious Socialist Society***

As was revealed in the last section, social problems and inequality have brought

with them big issues for China, with two out of the three subaltern groups experiencing 'the three rural problems' first-hand, and as a result, resolving these problems has become a critical issue - in order to maintain social stability. As a result, policies related to building a harmonious society and maintaining social stability have had to cooperate with each other in order to reconnect these dislocations.

The stability of China's state discourse has been constructed through the use of two practices. The first has been to ensure a smooth hand-over of leadership at the central state level from generation to generation, leading to little political reform being required over the last few decades. Accompanied by this smooth handover of leadership at the state level, the state's political discourse has also been transformed peacefully and unobtrusively, moving from a 'class struggle' discourse to an 'economic development' discourse. While the class struggle discourse was meant to repair the severe dislocations brought by invasions and national wars, plus the underdevelopment of China in the pre-PRC era, by empowering the workers and peasants, 'the discourse of economic development, without talking about ideological issues', was constructed in order to respond to those dislocations caused by the egregious class struggles of the Cultural Revolution. When it comes to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the nodal point of economic development has not been held together coherently by the state's discourse, and as a result, social disparity is the new dislocation (Selden and Perry 2010: 19-21).

The construction of a 'people-centered' development discourse aimed at building a harmonious socialist society, as carried out by current Chairman Hu Jin Tao's

leadership team, represents the solution to growing social dislocations, those briefly listed in the previous section. Although local and departmental government institutions have different interests from the central state, the policy direction and ideological emphasis put in place by the central state remains unchallenged in terms of authority – so that no local or departmental government institution has dared to openly oppose the decisions made by the central state (Yu 2009).

As for the leadership handover and the changing focus of the nodal points, attention must be paid to newly established concepts introduced since the Deng Xiao Ping era. Under the leadership of Jiang Ze Min, the state's discourse developed a new focus; such that while economic development was still regarded as the central task, de-politicization was also further enhanced.

At the celebration of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CCP in 2001, and at graduation ceremonies held for the 'training courses for leaders at the provincial and ministerial level' at the Party School of the CCP Central Committee in 2002, Jiang Ze Min launched the policy entitled the 'three representations' (*SanGe DaiBiao*), which later became an important nodal point for state discourse, being written into the Party Constitution at the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2002, and into the Constitution of the PRC at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Plenary Session of the 10<sup>th</sup> National Congress in 2003. (Jiang Ze Min 2001, National People's Congress 2004) The 'Three Representations' policy thereafter played a leading role in Chinese national political and social life. The official definition of the 'three representations' is that 'the party must always represent the demands for the development of China's advanced social productive forces, the direction of the

development of China's advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the greatest majority of the people'. The leaders of the 'third generation' could still claim continuity in terms of party-state legacies as developed by previous leaders; for example, Jiang's speech in 2002 was titled '*Hold high the banner of Deng Xiao Ping's theory and carry out the important thoughts of the 'three representations''*'. As a result, the 'three representations' was seen to be a development made under the lineage of Deng Xiao Ping's doctrines, and a continuation of Mao Ze Dong and Marxism-Leninist thought, but with an emphasis on economic development. However, the fresh innovation of this policy extended the reach of the CCP. While during Deng Xiao Ping's period, class struggle was subsumed within economic commands, since its introduction the 'three representations' policy has made class struggle even more irrelevant. By embracing 'social productive forces', 'advanced culture' and 'the greatest majority of the people', the CCP, which previously only represented the working and peasant classes, is now open to other social strata. Within this approach, 'The great majority of people' is a concept that has made class analysis insignificant, as it is a category that includes people such as the economic elites, managers and entrepreneurs. This is an articulation that eliminates the distinction and gaps between different social groups, and hence aims to achieve universal representation among the great majority of the people. In so doing, the central state also has to show that the universalized interests also include the interests of the subaltern social groups.

The PRC is now in its 'fourth generation' of leadership, and since coming to power, Hu Jin Tao and his team have adopted new articulatory elements for the further



alteration of state discourse. At first, on 'Army Day' in 2003, Hu proposed political ideas based on Jiang's 'three representations', by declaring that 'building the Party for the public and exercising state power for the people' (*LiDang WeiGong ZhiZheng WeiMin*), was the fundamental objective of the 'three representations'. Later, the previous ideas related to 'building a harmonious society' (*JianShe SheHui ZhuYi HeXie SheHu*) and a 'scientific outlook on development' (*KeXue FaZhan Guan*) were proposed as leading concepts for Hu's team. A 'harmonious socialist society' is one built on 'democracy and the rule of law, justice and equality; trust and truthfulness, amity and vitality, order and stability, and a harmonious relationship with nature'. (Xin Hua News Agency 2007, Holbig 2006). This was formally announced as an order, designed to enhance CCP's 'ruling capacity', at the 4<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the Party Congress in 2004, and then reinforced at the 6<sup>th</sup> plenary session in 2006. Step by step, the 'building a harmonious socialist society' policy has become the key task, not only of the CCP but also the whole populace, in order to achieve the aims of the CCP's leadership, since it reflects the 'common interests' of the 'greatest majority of people'. A 'scientific outlook on development' policy was officially proposed at the 3<sup>rd</sup> plenary session of the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2003, then later at the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2007, and just like the 'three representations', was also written into the Party Constitution. The primary focus of this approach is 'development' (*FaZhan*), the core value is a 'people centred' approach (*YiRen WeiBen*) and the basic aim is 'overall coordinated sustainability'. The fundamental tool used to carry out this scientific development is to 'plan comprehensively and pay attention to particularly important

things' (*TongChou JianGu*). By giving prominence to development and people centredness, Hu Jin Tao and his team have inherited the legacy of Jiang's 'representing the interests of the great majority of people' and Deng's economic development policies. By emphasizing 'sustainability', they have merged Chinese state policy with the international discourse on 'sustainable development' (Holbig 2006); thus, 'building a socialist harmonious society' and a 'scientific outlook on development' work together. The former is the 'target' of the latter, while the latter is the fundamental theory behind the former.

Since the Deng Xiao Ping time, the state has followed similar steps and methods in changing its discourse. The first principle used has been to always inherit the ideological legacy of previous leaders, allowing the party-state to maintain a coherent and smooth lineage, a strategy which is seen to avoid radical political and social disorder. The second principle has been to popularize newly added ideological elements through the Party and National Congresses and even to write them into the Party Constitution and Constitution of the PRC. The third principle used has been to make slight changes in the emphases used, according to the changing national and international environment.

The emphasis on different articulatory elements has led to the formulation of different nodal points. In the Deng Xiao Ping period, the emphasis was on economic growth; which liberated people from the planned economy and paved the way for economic pluralism. In the Jiang Ze Min period, faced with the fact that the 'white collar' workers, the rich, the entrepreneurs and other social strata were being elevated

by economic development, and that the gap between the rich and the poor had widened since the 1980s, the party-state re-directed its emphasis towards expanding membership of the CCP. This was a strategy introduced to unite the populace, without having to pay attention to any particular social strata. In order to maintain economic growth and social stability, the nodal point of the 'three representations' policy matched the interests of the different social strata as it was meant to be in the common interest' of the people, as represented by the CCP (Dickson 2004: 141-156). In the Hu Jin Tao era, social inequality has become even more conspicuous, and the requirements of particular social strata such as the peasants, the urban unemployed and the internal migrant workers, have exerted serious pressure on the state's apparatus. As a result, the party-state has drawn people's attention towards the ideal of a 'harmonious society', which it is claimed can be achieved by following the 'scientific outlook on development' theory. In developing this approach, Hu and his team have taken note of the widening gap in people's livelihoods and wealth, and also the focus on sustainability that has developed within the international community. The emphasis on harmonious, people-centered and sustainable development is an articulation designed to bridge the gap caused by social dislocations.

The violent practices used to reinforce social stability have been the continuous and effective coercive power of the state. In addition to the smooth handover of political power and the construction of new nodal point representing the focus on people's livelihoods and the development of a coherent society, the state has also maintained an effective capacity to use its coercive power when coping with political dissention,

riots, protests and other events labeled as illegal. Using its coercive power to maintain political stability has continued to represent an effective strategy, as proved by the results of the Tian'an Men square movement. 'Maintaining social stability' was highlighted by Deng Xiao Ping in 1987, then in 1989 and 1990 after the Tian'an Men square disaster happened. Maintaining social stability is thus a top priority, and based upon which economic development can proceed (Deng 1993: 103, 112, 106) - it is now a byword for the state's coercive or violent practices.

Research work has identified a range of social events which might be referred to as 'zone[s] of social activities (such as folk religious practices and peaceful religious activities in sanctioned religious sites)', 'low-profile political activities (such as talks among friends in public)', 'low-political activities (such as peaceful and brief local protests against pollution and even brief and unorganized protests by laid-off workers)', and 'political no-go zones' (Lai 2006: 71-72), within which only the activities of the 'political no-go zones' fall for certain under the coercive power of the state. Similarly, some would argue that the party-state exerts different levels of government control over different social organizations, according to their political sensitivity (Kang and Han 2008: 36-55); however, in reality, the 'political no-go zone' is hard to define. The bottom-line regarding the principles of using state violence, is thus also hard to identify.

The social stability and hegemony required to 'build a harmonious, socialist society' work together; they are two sides of the same coin – their purpose being to maintain the 'territorial centralization' of China (Mann 1986: 126). The former functions by

penetrating Chinese society through the media, local officers, official documents, the arts and other political and social practices. In this process, the dominant position of the state discourse is constructed if positive subordinate subject positions are established in the practices (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 153-154); for example, if every state and social institution such as the army, government at all levels, schools, the media and local communities are all practicing this policy, it means that their positive, subordinate subject positions are constituted. Whenever such hegemony is challenged or broken by different practices/an antagonistic position, the coercive practices of the state start to function.

### **Responses of the Five Social Organizations at the Discourse Level**

The dislocations that have occurred in China in recent years have not only prompted the state to adjust its policies, but also have aroused the interest of social organizations in terms of responding to the problems. Although my five study social organizations are involved in the construction of another two and a half discourses<sup>8</sup>, they have still tried to connect to the subordinate chains of equivalence involved in 'constructing new socialist rural areas' and 'caring for migrant workers'. Here, Pro-Forma Consistency is able to capture the emptiness of the nodal points for both state policy discourses and the discourses of the social organizations, and based on this emptiness, the key words 'policy consistency' and 'bottom line consistency' can be achieved in order to formulate this consistency.

In addition, on the one hand, the discourses of the state and the social

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<sup>8</sup> The half discourse is the 'popular education' discourse, which is not completely constructed.

organizations can be distinguished from each other because they have different nodal points which are used to command different discursive formations, but on the other, although the social organizations have developed their own discourses, they have not constructed internal political frontiers that explicitly differentiate them from or breach the state discourses. This is a 'rite of passage' represented by Pro-Forma Consistency to describe an in-between situation in which some of the discursive practices can neither be fully accommodated within the equivalent chain of state discourses because of the inherent differences involved, nor are they ready to be constructed into a completely antagonistic whole (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 154, Laclau 2007: 86). In line with Pro-Forma Consistency, challenges to state discourses have been generally avoided and thus the state's coercive practices have also been avoided. The subordinate positions of the two-and-a-half discourses in relation to the state discourses under Pro-Forma Consistency have paradoxically and successfully given them the opportunity to develop. These two-and-a-half discourses; however, also run the risk of being absorbed into state discourses when the differences between them disappear, though overall, at the discourse level, absorption may be a positive result for the social organizations. Although the particularities of each of the social organizations may be lost if they have the same representation as the nodal points of the state's discourses, absorption might bring them added security, though their different practices may be suppressed.

The five social organizations in my study overlap with each other in terms of their discourse constructions. The first discourse constructed by the work of the social

organizations is 'neo-rural reconstruction'<sup>9</sup> (*Xin NongCun JianShe*), which acts as a nodal point, one which embraces a variety of practices, practices loosely connected with a big chain of equivalence under which the differences between the practices and organizations are put aside temporarily. The five social organizations are all closely or remotely involved in this neo-rural reconstruction discourse.

The name 'neo-rural reconstruction' was publicly proposed by Mr. Sunny and initially practiced by Mr. Query in organization Grey in around 2003, in order to solve the 'three rural problems'. In 2005, a research centre was established which was affiliated to Mr. Sunny's university, with Mr. Sunny's secretary acting as the head of the centre, one providing a framework to accommodate all the connected social organizations. Nevertheless, the relationship between Mr. Sunny, the research centre and the connected social organizations has not been institutionalized; there is no administrative or bureaucratic relationship between them. Basically, the social organizations are voluntary, and cooperation exists either in the name of the university involved or in the personal name of Mr. Sunny, and takes the form of advice, council membership and research interventions. Second, these five social organizations have relied on the reputation of Mr. Sunny and the social resources drawn-in by him, and third, the social organizations involved all generally identify with the values of 'neo-rural reconstruction'. Organizations Grey, Orange, Colorful and Red are all branch organizations, while Organization Green works more with

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<sup>9</sup> The prefix 'neo' is added to represent a resurgence of the 'Rural Reconstruction Movement' that took place in China during the 1920s and 1930s. During that period, famous social activists, educators and thinkers, such as Y.C. James Yen, TAO Xing Zhi and Liang Shu Ming, tried different rural development methods to resolve the problems of illiteracy, disorder and disease - to name but a few, in more than 1000 locations in China, and with the participation of over 700 non-governmental associations.

Organization Red in constructing an additional discourse.

As an established intellectual in the central government think-tank, Mr. Sunny himself act as a link between the practices of the social organizations and the central state's discourses. Pro-Forma Consistency has been obtained in two ways. With regards to 'bottom-line consistency', the 'neo-rural reconstruction' approach emphasizes the importance of the dominance of the CCP, and the organizations' eagerness to be heard and be supported by the state is often expressed openly (Grey Document 2005: 3-4; Field notes 200507). As well as believing the leadership of the CCP, the core ideas and practices related to 'believing in people' and 'working for the people' with the neo-rural reconstruction discourse usually articulated as corresponding to the state's 'three representations' discourse as developed by Jiang Ze Min. However, more specifically, the field practices of 'neo-rural reconstruction' require practitioners to become peasants first (Grey Document 2005: 3, Field notes 200507). Claiming to support the CCP's leadership and conforming with the 'three representations' helps construct the 'bottom-line consistency' required between the neo-rural reconstruction approach and state discourse, and means that the reconstruction discourse avoids the risk of being labeled as dangerous to the state and of being suppressed by the state's subsequent show of coercive power. Moreover, the neo-rural reconstruction discourse also achieves the policy consistency required in an unexpected way. At the end of 2005, the state announced a policy aimed at 'constructing new socialist rural areas' (Central Committee of the CCP 2005). As a result of this, it became neither necessary nor possible to ask central state officers if



they had inserted the expression 'neo-rural reconstruction' into state policies. The function of the hegemonic 'decisive moment...establishing...unity' was clear and the neo-rural reconstruction discourse was thus absorbed into the state discourse of 'constructing new socialist rural areas' (Laclau 2007: 99). Pro-Forma Consistency was thus constructed at the nodal points of the two discourses.

The discursive practices of the two discourses are not entirely the same however. The neo-rural reconstruction discourse has been constructed through the practice of internships, in rural areas, of university students, organic farming, peasant cooperatives, rural-urban cooperation in marketing organic food, caring for migrant workers, and community supported agriculture (Field notes 200507 & 200708, Grey Document 2011). Compared with neo-rural reconstruction, the state-initiated policy of 'constructing new socialist rural areas' includes more diversified nationwide practices; it includes issues related to the social welfare system in rural areas, rural land problems, the rural financial system and rural infrastructure construction activities, the healthcare system and even specific agricultural planting methods (Central Committee of the CCP and the State Council 2006). According to state policies, the discourse related to 'constructing new socialist rural areas' is part of the ultimate task, which is to build a harmonious socialist society (Central Committee of the CCP and the State Council 2006). Although the practices are different, these differences have not developed to such an extent as to construct a political frontier between the neo-rural reconstruction and constructing new socialist new rural area approaches. In the next chapter, I will further analyze in detail the discursive practices taking place at

the local level.

The second discourse is 'new workers' arts', which is positively interlinked with the neo-rural reconstruction discourse and has been participated in by organizations Red, Colorful and Green. The key words 'policy consistency' and 'bottom line consistency' have been constructed in two respects.

First, the key policy approaches of respecting and caring for migrant workers, and solving their problem of insufficient cultural activities have been aligned by the new workers' arts discourse and the state discourse of caring for migrant workers and building a harmonious society. In the state policy documents 'Propositions on Solving the Difficulties of Peasant-migrant Workers issued by the State Council', and 'the Society must Care and Protect Migrant Workers', resolving the problems experienced by migrant workers and caring for migrant workers are seen as a must in order to enhance the constructing new socialist rural areas discourse, one which should be carried out in accordance with the requirement of building a harmonious society (The State Council 2006, People's Daily 2006). Migrant workers are recognized and praised as those who have contributed greatly to urban and rural development as well as the modernization of China. The positive value of migrant workers has thus been politically endorsed; however, due to the problems or difficulties faced by migrant workers, such as wage arrears, insufficient training opportunities, limited access to public school education for children, insufficient public health services, poor quality dwellings and cultural poverty, the new workers' arts policy captures the cultural problem. Cultural activities such as singing, dancing, drama, free parties, performing

for workers in their homes, encouraging each other by sharing personal stories, outdoor sports, chatting on popular social and cultural issues, and establishing migrant workers' museums, have been carried out under the nodal point of the 'new workers' arts' project (Field notes 200707, 200710, 200904 and 200912). Within the discursive structure, this project is agreeable to the state-led policy of caring for migrant workers, as it helps resolve the problem of cultural poverty. Moreover, under the project's approach, the positive image created of migrant workers - as people who wish to lead a better life through hard work, self-confidence and self-respect, has been established, which corresponds to the policy of migrant workers being praised by the state.

Second, the leader of the new workers' arts project, Mr. Insist, once said 'obtaining...honors from the government is also something that can be seen as support from the state' (Field notes 200710), and he was awarded six honors by the state between 2004 to 2007 for his outstanding work serving migrant workers at both the local and national levels. These honors act as proof that the development of the new workers' arts project is in line with state policy discourses.

However, underneath the Pro-Forma Consistency approach, there is a tendency to arouse the class consciousness of the subordinate position of migrant workers in the discursive formation of the new workers' arts project, through the seemingly non-political singing, dancing and other forms of cultural activities. These cultural activities provide the opportunity for migrant workers to think about and value their own lives; they can place their own interpretations of their lives, dissatisfactions,

hopes and appeals into the cultural activities. Gramsci's 'war of position' seems to have occurred in the cultural sphere of new workers' arts project, and various practices at the local level have led to varied results. Some of them have caused the breakdown of the Pro-Forma Consistency approach and have thus been coerced by the state. However, at the discourse level, the new workers' arts project has never been questioned or closed down by the state, as long as it has continued to care for migrant workers and helped 'build a harmonious socialist society', its political righteousness has been maintained. Similar to the neo-rural reconstruction discourse, the neo-workers' arts project has also successfully maintained Pro-Forma Consistency with state discourses, and as a result, space for the development of class consciousness among the migrant workers has more or less been protected. The practice of developing class consciousness has therefore not constructed a political barrier against or an antagonistic position with regard to state discourses.

Another problem faced by the migrant workers is insufficient training opportunities, an issue taken seriously by Organization Colorful. Organization Colorful has not only joined the discourse regarding neo-rural reconstruction and the new workers' arts project, but also wants to contribute to the discourse 'popular/civic education' (*PingMin/GongMin JiaoYu*). This policy not only aims to furnish migrant workers with life skills and civic awareness, but also wishes to bridge over the chasm between migrant workers and urban residents by introducing and promoting the values of equality, civil rights and democracy. The practices have successfully connected with the state discourse related to building a harmonious socialist society, as I will

elaborate upon in the following chapters; however, the discourse related to civic education has been far less constructed, and Organization Colorful is the only practitioner organization among the five in this area.

### **Brief Summary**

China has achieved great success in terms of the economic development, with GDP growth having been maintained at a high level, around 8% each year, for the last two decades (Howell 2006: 282). The state used to have economic development at the core of its discourse and as the basis of the country's stability (Schoenhals 1999: 599). However, in 21<sup>st</sup> century China, social inequality has become more and more serious as an issue, with vulnerable groups having emerged within the social stratification that has taken place, and this has challenged the state's discourse. As a result, a new state discourse related to building a harmonious society has been generated in order to maintain the stability of the whole regime, with its focus being on the development of people's livelihoods, and through the effective use of its coercive power.

The five social organizations which are the focus of my study have practiced their own methods to resolve the 'three rural problems' issue, during which time the nodal points of neo-rural reconstruction, new-workers' arts and civic education have been developed. However, the practices represented by these three nodal points are still subordinate to the state discourses of 'building a harmonious socialist society using a scientific outlook on development', constructing new socialist rural areas and caring

for migrant workers. The subordinate subject position has been constructed in two ways. First, the social organizations' practices have been articulated in such a way as to be positively connected with the state's policy discourses. This successful connection has been made based upon the practices of the social organizations and the recognition of these practices by the state, such as through the praising of their work. Second, the practices of the social organizations, which are different from the state policy discourses, have been suppressed so as not to be explicitly revealed.

It is interesting to note that due to the emptiness of the nodal points created by state discourses, such suppression is not fixed, and this lack of stability has opened space for different practices to develop; however, these different practices have not developed to the extent that they have led to a break with state discourses. In the next two chapters, I will analyze how Pro-Forma Consistency has been formed at the local level, as it is through 'everyday politics' that both the oppressive and the constructive forces of Pro-Forma Consistency are formulated.

## CHAPTER 4: 'NEO-RURAL RECONSTRUCTION' AND 'CONSTRUCTING NEW SOCIALIST RURAL AREAS'

### Introduction: From Discourse to Practice

In the previous chapter, I presented how the social organizations have achieved Pro-Forma Consistency with the Chinese state at the discourse level. Chinese state discourses have changed in accordance with the emergence of different social problems, and in the twenty-first century, social inequality has become the new dislocation issue within the country. As a result, the state has launched a new development paradigm which is focused on the construction of a harmonious socialist society using a scientific and sustainable approach to development. My five study social organizations, also contribute to resolve these social problems in their own way, attaching themselves to the macro-state discourses using a Pro-Forma Consistency approach, and linking with the nodal points found within the state discourses of 'constructing new socialist rural areas', 'caring for migrant workers' and 'building a harmonious socialist society'. On the one hand, Pro-Forma Consistency has been achieved at the cost of developing practices that deviate somewhat from the five social organizations' ideals, which they have suppressed somewhat in order not to come to the attention of the state too much. On the other hand, it is through their Pro-Forma Consistency, or to be more specific through their partial suppression of policies to match state discourses, that the practices of the five social organizations have been able to develop peacefully. Their politically sensitive deviant practices,

which might be understood as antagonistic towards state control, could easily lead to conflict; therefore, Pro-Forma Consistency actually protects their practices and gives them some space to develop. At the discourse level, this Pro-Forma consistency has been developed in-between the state's various policies, and as a result has not yet been challenged as an approach, even though 'violent' practices are carried out at the local level on its behalf.

In this and the next chapters, I will analyze Pro-Forma Consistency at the local state level, taking the four articulatory elements already discussed that function within everyday practices, as these are the points upon which the practices of the social organizations and the local state institutions agree with each other. This chapter also aims to interpret the practices of 'neo-rural reconstruction' and 'constructing new socialist rural areas', for although Pro-Forma Consistency is constructed at the state discourse level between these practices, complex and contradictory practices occur at the local state level. The theoretical implications of excessive and broken Pro-Forma Consistency, as well as its re-articulation will be explained, with reference to Organization Grey and Organization Orange. Before my analysis begins; however, I will present the relations that exists between my five study social organizations.

### **An Uninstitutionalized Network**

Mr. Sunny is the key person involved in the construction of the network for the five social organizations in my study. Although the network is far less institutionalized and the people involved do not have the intention to institutionalize the network due to the



potential political sensitivity, Mr. Sunny still contributes his symbolic capital to the development of the network organizations (follow-up email query 201010).

Mr. Query was not the only one who worked with Mr. Sunny on the editorial board of the magazine 'Try' in 2002; other colleagues who had launched other types of social organizations concerned with the three rural problems also did. As a result, Mr. Sunny was invited to be a council member, team leader and adviser of these organizations. With the participation of Mr. Sunny, the department of the university he works in was also invited to be a partner. During the work of Organization Grey, several peasant cooperative committees and ecological bases were set up, with the help of Organization Grey and Mr. Sunny, in different areas of China, and they all had cooperative relations of varying degrees with Mr. Sunny and the department he leads.

In order to manage these various cooperative relations, in 2005 a research centre was established affiliated to Mr. Sunny's university, in order to bring all the cooperative relationships under one framework.

Organizations Grey, Orange, Red and Colorful were the social organizations directly included in the research centre. As a matter of fact, all the social organizations set up directly by Mr. Query are now grouped together as 'third level' organizations, and Mr. Query has himself commercially registered as an umbrella education organization in order to cover Organizations Colorful and Orange. The office at Mr. Sunny's research centre is shared with Mr. Query's education organization, where only four volunteers help out with the daily administrative tasks. The main tasks of the education organization are to raise funds through negotiation with other foundations,

for those organizations set up by Mr. Query to look for training opportunities for their staff, to hold annual seminars, as well as edit newsletters and documents published by the organizations. Although it is under Mr. Sunny's research centre framework, Mr. Query's education organization officially works at a level below the research centre; however, in the documentation for Organizations Orange and Colorful set up by Mr. Query, the wording states that 'Organization Orange (or Colorful) is co-initiated by the Mr. Sunny's research centre and Mr. Query's educational organization', meaning that Mr. Query's educational organization and Mr. Sunny's research centre are at an equal level. As a result, the unclear structure of the set of organizations under the Mr. Sunny's research centre shows that the institutional arrangements are very informal.

Mr. Sunny is respected as an adviser to Organizations Colorful, Red and Orange, and he is also the President of Organization Grey. His research centre, together with Mr. Query's educational organization, supports Organizations Colorful, Red and Orange; however, staff members at Organization Colorful told me that they do not see any direct association between Organization Colorful and Mr. Sunny and his university, though during the day-to-day work of Organization Colorful, connections do occur in four ways. First, Mr. Sunny's students come to Organization Colorful, either for short visits or long internships, second, Mr. Sunny visits Organization Colorful to give talks, third, staff members occasionally have the opportunity to visit Mr. Sunny and ask his advice, and fourth, Organization Colorful's plan is to involve Mr. Sunny and his resources more within their organizational work in the future - inviting Mr. Sunny and other famous scholars who are in his circle to support the independent and

collective authentication of the education programmes provided by Organization Colorful. Mr. Sunny and his department are also connected with Organizations Grey, Red and Orange in a similar four ways. Although it seems that Mr. Sunny and his department constitute the research body for the organizations, this is not exactly the case, as the connections are more contingent and less institutionalized. Organization Green is not directly involved under Mr. Sunny's research centre but has a close relationship with Organizations Red and Colorful.

### **Organization Grey: Excessive, Broken and Re-articulated Pro-Forma Consistency**

Registered with the local Education Bureau, organization Grey aims to make the local village an experimental area for testing an integrative rural development approach. Its missions are fivefold: to promote sustainable development of the village in the areas of economics, culture, public health, the environment, and the political and institutional framework; to offer peasants free education services regarding the economy, agricultural technology and other relevant areas; to develop sustainable farming technologies and ecological construction technologies; to create a public participant network by cooperating with individuals and organizations on rural reconstruction programs, and to study rural development theories and publish research findings. The organization was initially situated in a small town called Yan in the northern part of China, when it had 2500-square-meter office and accommodation space, plus land used to carry out agricultural experiments regarding sustainable farming. In 2007; however, Grey was closed down by the local Educational Bureau

and moved to a city near to Yan, in order to re-establish itself with slightly altered aims. It now has a working space of 154,100-square-meters which is used to carry out organic farming experiments.

Organization Grey has been through a process of initially obtaining Pro-Forma Consistency, through to having excessive Pro-Forma Consistency, to this breaking apart, then on to the re-articulation of this consistency at another location. This process reveals how the discursive practices of Organization Grey have attempted to connect with the state discourses at the local level. These local practices are highly complex if all stakeholders are taken into account, and in this process, although the Grey's practices have been suppressed and molded, they have tried to maintain their differences.

### *The Construction of Pro-Forma Consistency*

The support of Mr. Sunny and Mr. Mike were key to the successful establishment of Grey, and before its establishment during the 1990s, Mr. Query had tried to find ways to facilitate rural development (participant interview Mr. Query 200707), and as both a university graduate and a young man born into a rural family, he had a strong desire to realize this dream. By chance, he read the books of James Yen on popular education, a Chinese educator in the 1930s, and, having been deeply influenced by the thoughts and practices contained in James Yen's work, he decided to try and do something himself. However, since he did not have enough resources at the start, he had to think of a strategy. The strategy he chose was to find colleagues with a similar

dream, then work together with them, and in 2002, after years of trying, he worked with several colleagues on the editorial board of a magazine called Try<sup>10</sup>, and it was while doing this job that he met and got to know Mr. Sunny.

Mr. Sunny is a well-known scholar in China, having worked on the ‘three rural problems’ issue during the late 1990s and early 2000s. He once worked on an important think-tank<sup>11</sup> in the 1980s, and as a research fellow carried out plenty of first-hand research within rural areas. In the late 1980s, he was officially sent on a short-term program at the World Bank, and in 2002, he became editor of the magazine Try. Since 2004, he has been a leading professor at the rural development department of a Chinese university.

Since Mr. Query always had a dream to put into practice the ideas of James Yen, when he discovered Village First in the northern part of China, he decided to use this location to carry out his experiments. At the same time, the village secretary, Mr. Mike, was also looking for ways to develop the village economically, so Mr. Query and Mr. Mike agreed to work together. Mr. Query then tried to persuade Mr. Sunny to join him, as Mr. Query thought that Mr. Sunny’s participation would bring greater resources and improve the reputation of the village, if he could persuade him to be the head of the fledgling organization - Grey. At first, Mr. Sunny resisted due to the potential political risks involved, but after several attempts at persuasion by Mr. Query, Mr. Sunny decided to give it a try.

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Try’ is the pseudonym of the magazine. They worked for the ‘rural section’ of the magazine and the magazine was led by the State Commission of China’s Economic Reform (*ZhongGuo GuoJia JingJi TiZhi GaiGe WeiYuanHui*). In 1998, the name of this Commission was changed to become the State Commission of China’s Development and Reform (*ZhongGuo GuoJia FaZhan He GaiGe WeiYuanHui*).

<sup>11</sup> The name of the think-tank has also been concealed. Five important national rural reform policies in the 1980s were designed by this think-tank.

In 2003, Grey was thus established in Village First in the name of 'neo-rural reconstruction', to both take forward the historical legacy left by James Yen and meet the contemporary need to solve the 'three rural problems'. The first investments into Grey were from Mr. Sunny's own savings, and for office space they used a disused middle school space offered without charge by the village committee. The village spent around 400,000 RMB purchasing the school, and several young people, including Mr. Query, worked there with different dreams related to rural development. Grey also became an experimental base for Mr. Sunny's university, and from that on, the connection between Mr. Sunny and Grey led to them representing each other externally. As a result, the identities of the two were constructed as a reciprocal representation (Laclau 2007: 158-162), and Mr. Sunny thus became the symbol of both Grey and 'neo-rural reconstruction' in the area.

Organization Grey's main tasks initially included experimenting with ecological and sustainable agricultural development, promoting peasant cooperative associations and developing rural culture, plus training peasants from all over the country on these three areas and documenting the material produced by James Yen and other contemporary researchers.

However, with more participation from other foundations and social organizations, internal disagreements regarding Grey's core mission and its future development emerged. While Mr. Query insisted on developing education services for local people, other members persisted with organic farming, ecological construction work, development of cooperatives, or in trying to make Grey a training centre for peasants

throughout the country.

Gradually, the local villagers also started to feel confused about the purpose of Grey. The villagers and Mr. Mike hoped that Grey would bring greater economic benefits to the village; however, Grey did not intend to do that – the work mentioned above was not intended to bring immediate economic benefits to the village. In addition, the villagers did not fully accept the organic farming methods, as, for the peasants, it was not good to see a lot of worms and grass among the crops; it signified that the peasants who plowed the land were lazy. A lot of pesticides were used by the villagers, and it was difficult for Grey to persuade them to stop using these chemicals.

Though there were various internal opinions and external doubts, Grey carried out all the key types of work mentioned above. After the work of Grey had commenced and public attention had gradually developed, a variety of practices labeled under the term ‘neo-rural reconstruction’ emerged nationwide. For Grey, these practices could be articulated in line with state discourses as follows.

First, legally registered with the local Education Bureau, positively connected with the state in terms of following the leadership of CCP in its ‘three representations’ discourse and admitted by the local authority of the village, organization Grey successfully obtained ‘bottom-line consistency’. ‘Believe our people, believe our CCP’ was thus set as the principle for the institution. Grey thus intended to align itself with the leadership of the CCP and refused to work with any anti-CCP parties (Grey Document 200507), making a clear distinction between those social organizations following the CCP line and those not. Through its approach, Grey put itself firmly in

with the first group; attempting to legitimate its existence and practices by standing side-by-side with the CCP. In addition, whether the institution performed real and effective services for peasants was taken as the only standard upon which its accountability relied. Instead of defining this approach as original to the institution, Grey attributed it to the teachings of 'the three representations', as proclaimed by the CCP. By linking its accountability with the 'three representations', Grey's practices were known to be in accordance with state principles. Moreover, the local village committee was also a council member of Organization Grey, which meant that the local authority also admitted its legitimate status, and legitimacy is vital of Chinese social organizations are to survive.

Second, the values, ideas (*LiNian*) and practices of Grey were articulated as conforming to the key words expounded by state policies. In the early 2000s, the prevalent policy principles of the state followed the 'three representations' theory, the 'scientific outlook on development' and the building of a 'harmonious, socialist society' (Bo 2004: 27-45). In 2004, policies on the three rural problems were for the first time written into the Government Work Report of the State Council. (The Central Committee of CCP and the State Council 2004) At this time, there were abundant policy resources for Grey to use; so from 2000 to 2005, policies in support of and benefiting agriculture, rural areas and peasants were issued repeatedly. (The Central Committee of CCP and the State Council 2005a) During the Fifth Plenary Session of the Fifteenth Central Committee of the CCP in 2000, the term 'use every means to increase peasants' income' was written into the official documents, then during the



CCP's Central Rural Work Conference in 2003, decisions were made to carry out a policy of 'granting more for, taking less from and setting free agriculture.' The policy on the 'three rural problems' was given primary importance among the different priorities, and at the Third Plenary Session of the Sixteenth Central Committee of the CCP, it was noted that China's industrial and urban accumulation must continue to support rural development.

Central state policies could always be found relevant to the activities of Grey, as its practices included implementation of central state policies. The practice conforming most with state policies was the effort to establish a peasant cooperative in Village First. Advocating this form of cooperative was important for Grey, since it was believed that peasant cooperatives benefited peasants in three ways: the collective purchasing of raw materials and developing the means of agricultural production through cooperatives could cut production costs, collectively selling products could reduce market risk, and the development of peasant cooperative associations was supposed to develop mutual aid. Grey advocated the benefits of peasant cooperatives by presenting cases which included calculations showing how much money local peasants could save, so finally a peasant cooperative was established. In 2005, two male and two female peasants took a lead role in the cooperative, and organized the collective purchasing of coal and the wholesale of chemicals. The collective purchasing of coal was less expensive than on the retail market, while the 3000 RMB net income received from chemical sales increased the income of the peasants within the cooperative slightly (Grey Document 200507, Field notes 200507). In addition,

cultural activities such as educational programs for the children, a peasants' study group and a folk singing and dancing group (*Wen Yi Dui*) were also formed alongside the cooperative. While Grey was developing cooperatives with the local villagers, the Central Committee of the CCP and State Council was issuing policies encouraging the development of peasant cooperative associations with respect to the development of advanced agricultural technology and the marketing of agricultural products. (Yang Li Jie & Gu Yue 2006) When interviewed on China Central Television programs, Mr. Sunny stated that the practices carried out by Grey and Village First represented the first implementation phase of such central state policies<sup>12</sup>.

However, free-riding alongside state policy discourse did not represent the entire picture in terms of Grey's practices. 'Neo-rural reconstruction' under the umbrella of state policies was constructed through various specific practices that might be termed as experiments in 'alternative development'.

The concept of 'alternative development' was borrowed from the development experiences of other countries and international organizations, those inclined to escape the western capitalist developmental paradigm. Among a number of alternative development ideas, the Karala People's Science Movement (KSSP), the Mexico sustainable living experience, Zapata's National Liberation Movement (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional or EZLN), the Swadeshi Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi, and the book *Small is Beautiful* written by E. F. Schumacher, were all introduced to staff, volunteers, trainees and visitors at Grey,

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<sup>12</sup> This interview was carried out during two programmes, called 'Lectures of Economy' (*Jing Ji Da Jiang Tang*) and 'Face to Face' (*Mian Dui Mian*). In order to protect Grey, the specific dates of the programmes have been kept confidential.

during training workshops and forums. In development theory, the concept of alternative development signifies a particular development approach that challenges and criticizes the mainstream development models (Pieterse 2001: 74-80). Grey's interpretation of the term followed on from this core element. Alternative development was regarded as standing opposite to mainstream development, while globalization of the capitalist way of production, consumerism, urbanization, industrialization, modernization, and other dominant narratives and practices, were placed into a basket containing mainstream development; sustainable development, the 'peasant-centered' approach, local practices, knowledge and history, participatory development and cultural critiques, which were conceived as alternative forms of development (Grey Document 200507). Vulnerable people explore not universal, but particular ways and spaces for their own development, out of the limitations imposed by the dominant development trends. This was how 'alternative development' was defined at Grey.

Instead of publicly announcing this approach in the media, Grey preferred to base its views on actual practice. In order to develop an ecologically sustainable farming model, Grey's staff brought several villagers together to build a methane-generating pond near their crops. Ecological technologies were also applied for the crops grown by the institution; for example, the use of pesticides was banned and the grasses growing among the crops were left to grow. Ecological construction experts were invited to build an assembly hall alongside local villagers, with publicly recruited volunteers. The local, cultural atmosphere was revived through regular activities

carried out by the dancing team, plus free computer classes were held and a local newspaper produced - all initiated by the institution. In summary, Grey focused on the real actions generated by the above experiments, holding training courses and/or forums for peasants and NGO workers nationwide, through which the values and ideas of alternative development would be spread to other local, rural areas. Open announcements of the group's alternative development practices were avoided.

During this period, Pro-Forma Consistency was established through personal connections, bottom-line consistency and the use of key words consistent with policies, as Mr. Sunny and Mr. Mike played the role of intermediary between Organization Grey and the villagers. The cultural capital Mr. Sunny has as a well-known intellectual transferred into social capital, as persuasive trust, which was accepted by the village committee led by Mr. Mike (Bourdieu and Terry 1992: 111-121). Although the economic interests held by Mr. Mike and the villagers were different from the overall purpose of Grey, the cultural activities and the peasants' cooperative still satisfied them (Field notes 200507), key words and bottom-line consistency were also obtained through the suppression of 'alternative development' practices, and by connecting with the three rural problems issue under the leadership of the CCP. In the local village area, there was not much chance to have face-to-face interactions with local officers, except for Mr. Mike; however, it was known to every member of staff at Grey that the local National Security Bureau could come to visit in the name of the Education Bureau - to inspect on progress and check everything was

going well<sup>13</sup>. Organization Grey was registered with the local Education Bureau, which is authorized to carry out daily inspections according to the regulations outlined in Chapter One. Therefore, a political audit of Organization Grey was carried out in a normal and legal way, with the National Security Bureau concerned that many peasants and foreigners were coming to Village First. As a result, they carried out inspections in 2005.

In a word, as a nodal point, neo-rural reconstruction partly unifies the discursive practices into its 'chain of equivalence'. The differences between the practices of ecological farming and migrant workers' rights protection are prevented from being fully constituted under the control of neo-rural reconstruction, and as a result, the nodal point for neo-rural reconstruction has retained a certain degree of space in terms of its content, and this serves to facilitate a variety of practices in a conformable way.

During the dismantling of the Vietnamese collective farming system, Vietnamese peasants eroded the collective system through seemingly unremarkable practices, such as borrowing collective land for temporary private use, colluding with local leaders to deviate from national policy, and brigade leaders giving grain to members without recording their actions (Kerkvliet 2005: 124-127). The case of Grey provides a different scenario, as in the case of Vietnam, the collective farming policy was at least clear in its connotations; the policies identified what were encouraged and what was not allowed. However, in the case of Grey's attempt to carry out neo-rural

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<sup>13</sup> I myself was even asked by an officer about my background and my purpose for being at Grey. I asked him who he was, and he claimed he was from the local Education Bureau. At the end of the talk, he praised me for my kind concern regarding the 'three rural problems' issue. Later, the staff of Grey told me that he was actually from the National Security Bureau.

reconstruction, Chinese state policies regarding rural problems were not that specific, and when 2006 and 2007 came around, the all-inclusiveness of the state policy discourse related to ‘constructing new socialist rural areas’ simply added to the emptiness experienced.

### ***Excessive Pro-Forma Consistency with ‘Constructing New Socialist Rural Areas’***

In 2006 and 2007, ‘neo-rural reconstruction’ (*Xin NongCun JianShe*) first entered the central state policy-making framework from below (Yang Li Jie & Gu Yue 2006, The Central Committee of CCP and the State Council 2005b), and was replaced by the term ‘constructing new socialist rural areas’ (*JianShe SheHui ZhuYi Xin NongCun*). ‘Neo-rural reconstruction’ by this point had been transformed into official state discourse (*GuanFang HuaYu*) through addition of the adjective ‘socialist’ and altering the word order into an imperative sentence. This event has since been heralded as a ‘significant historical task in the modernization process of our country’ (The Central Committee of CCP and the State Council 2005a), and as the ‘embodiment of constructing a harmonious socialist society’. ‘We must make all effort to promote the ‘construction of new socialist rural areas’ under the direction of Deng’s theory, and the ‘three representations’ theory; according to the requirements of the ‘scientific outlook of development’ and the ‘balanced rural and urban development’ principle (*ChengXiang TongChou*); taking the fundamental interests of the peasants as the start point and the anchor point.’ (Yang Li Jie & Gu Yue 2006)

There were two paradoxical consequences of this. First, ‘neo-rural construction’

was no longer the privilege of only social organization led discourse, but had been absorbed into state discourse. The official articulations of ‘constructing new socialist rural areas’ were constituted a hegemonic status - as *the* genuine discourse on new rural construction. The origins of this term can be traced back to state policies in the early 1950s. (Yang Li Jie & Gu Yue 2006) The policy reservoir and practices launched by local CCP branches all over the country since 2006 have thus produced a chain of equivalence within new rural area construction projects. In contrast, Organization Grey’s practices became gradually marginalized, in that they lost their specialty and their particular voice was drowned-out by hegemonic state discourse. Some of Organization Grey’s practices were assimilated into the equivalential chain of the state, so that it became difficult for Organization Grey to develop and spread its ideas - as representing ‘alternative development’.

Second, the term ‘constructing new socialist rural areas’ thus became an even more empty signifier into which various kinds of practices could be squeezed<sup>14</sup>, as the state discourse on ‘constructing new socialist rural areas’ is an all-inclusive plan that contains nearly every aspect of rural life, including: ‘enhancing peasants-friendly policies, increasing the input into agriculture, promoting the construction of a modern agriculture, enhancing rural public service, deepening the integrative rural reform, ensuring stable development of the prices of agricultural products and persistent income increasing, making rural areas more harmonious...’ (The Central Committee of CCP and the State Council 2007) The contents of the discourse are so vast that

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<sup>14</sup> Xin Hua News Net has a special issue of ‘constructing new socialist rural areas’, which includes various issues, ranging from constructing new house buildings for peasants, the improvement of agricultural technology, to regional economic development. However, differences or even contradictions exist between these orientations, but are not revealed. The cases can be found here: <http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/jsshzyxnc/>

Organization Grey could still carry out its 'alternative development', since it was difficult to judge which practices conformed to state policies and which did not. Not only the practices of Organization Grey, but also other social practices took advantage of the vagueness of state policies. The state began by providing peasant cooperatives with many privileges; however, it also found that many enterprises took advantage of its cooperative policy by changing their registration status from 'enterprises' to 'peasants' cooperatives'. This left the real peasant cooperatives with little or no competitive advantage over these enterprises. Not only that, but some peasants began to question the effectiveness of the cooperative method of marketing.

Therefore, its absorption into state policy discourse has opened-up opportunities and presented difficulties for the neo-rural reconstruction approach. On the one hand, difficulties lie in the loss of distinctness that has occurred since being unified into the state's chain of equivalence – as part of state policy. It is also possible for Mr. Sunny and the branch social organizations to take advantage of their new found legitimacy to carry out their own particular practices.

### ***The Breaking of Pro-Forma Consistency***

From late 2005, Mr. Query did not spend much of his time at Organization Grey - he often went elsewhere to see if it was possible to set up more organizations working on the 'three rural problems'. On the one hand, he aimed to promote the development of social organizations on popular education, whilst on the other, due to an internal disagreement on the future development direction of Organization Grey, Mr. Query



left to establish Organization Orange in a southern part of China, though when I met him, he did not want to talk about the internal disagreement that took place at that time. After he left Organization Grey, Mr. Query still used the reputation of Mr. Sunny and the university he worked in as a symbolic resource - to set up new organizations. This point will be elaborated upon in the next section.

Before Mr. Query and his colleagues had much time to communicate further on their disagreement, Organization Grey shut-down suddenly in April 2007, without prior warning (Field notes 200709, 200710).

On a spring evening in 2007 a group of peasant trainees were watching a video which was part of their training program, when suddenly the electricity went off. At first, they did not think it abnormal, as electricity shortages are normal in rural areas. However, on this occasion the electricity was cut by government officers. Seventeen cars stopped in front of the gate of Organization Grey, and dozens of people got out of the cars, claiming they were officers from the local Education Bureau. However, after the event, the staff of Organization Grey realized that the local Education Bureau had only a few officers, and that, even including its cleaners, it would not have been able to muster as many people as were there that night. The officers asked Organization Grey to close, since they said it was illegal. The staff countered this, saying that Organization Grey was registered legally with the Education Bureau and that they had the documents to prove it; however the officers insisted on closing down it and stayed overnight in their cars. The next morning, the trainees left Organization Grey, and within three weeks, all staff members had left. The staff asked local villagers to take

care of the property left behind, paying a trustees fee on a monthly basis.

All staff members moved to a temporary location in nearby 'City Second', with the help of friends from other NGOs. They tried to find out why Organization Grey had been closed down and sought ways to rescue it. The charges given by the local Education Bureau and the Intermediate People's Court were that 'Organization Grey illegally used the agricultural land for ecological constructions, and illegally enrolled peasant trainees outside Village First into training programs, which exceeded the registered scope of business.' However, these two charges were not convincing enough for the staff; they guessed that there were more serious reasons, but no one was clear about what these real reasons might be - even Mr. Sunny could not figure it out. Given that the members of Organization Grey, and especially Mr. Sunny - who had had the most opportunity to speak in public, had always ensured their practices were in accordance with state policies, it was hard to find reasons for the sudden intervention of the local officers, most of whom were obviously not officers of the Education Bureau. (Field notes 200709, 200710)

After a few months' reflection, Mr. Sunny had an idea. A foreign foundation had funded research on river pollution in the southern parts of China, and its report had not pleased the central government. What was worse was that the research had had no prior consent from the government; therefore, all projects funded by this foreign foundation were being checked and closed down, and Organization Grey was one such organization. As a result, Organization Grey was destined to close. There was also another potential reason. Since Organization Grey was a model site for 'neo-rural

reconstruction', foreigners often came to visit, something that always aroused the interest of the local and national security bureaux. Furthermore, the fact that peasants from all over the country came to study at Organization Grey had the potential to create unification among the peasants. However, the large-scale and country-wide unification of people and organizations is not permitted in China, and according to the *Management Regulations on the Registration of Social Organizations*, the *Management Regulations on the Registration of Private Non-Enterprises*, and the *Management Regulations of Foundations* discussed in Chapter One, then except for a few government-led social organizations, social organizations are not permitted to set-up branches across the country. In addition, the suppression of the mass movement in Tian An Men Square in June 1989 proved to the authorities that the mass unification of people can be regarded as a political threat to the government. However, these were all just guesses - the 'real' reasons were not known then and possibly never will be.

Whatever the cause, 'bottom-line consistency' between the practices of Organization Grey and the local state institutions was broken, and violence exercised to stop it.

### ***The Re-Articulation of Pro Forma Consistency***

After being closed down, the staff members at Organization Grey decided to continue in a nearby city, City Second, where Mr. Sunny's university is located. This time, they decided not to follow the social organization model; they started to run a

social enterprise. Organization 'post-Grey', thus rented a piece of land in the suburbs of City Second to carry out ecologically sound farming, the products of which were to be sold to urban residents. On the basis of producing agricultural products, family days, camps and open markets were held to spread the idea of food safety, sustainable development and organic farming. They change the focus of their practices from both organic farming and peasants' cooperation, to developing organic farming technologies and spreading the idea and technologies of sustainable development. The routine activities thus changed from 'peasant-centred to 'technology and urban residents-centred'. Urban residents were encouraged to rent small pieces of land to try organic farming themselves. In this way, they would understand the hardships faced by peasants and the importance of ecological development. Moreover, training courses of organic farming technologies began to be held annually (post-Grey Document 201001).

Another two crucial points have since been added based on the lessons learned from the shutdown of Organization Grey. First, the training of peasants across the country on the issue of cooperation and association has been stopped, and second, staff members now try to cooperate with the local Agricultural and Forestry Committee of the district government. Although through the work of Mr. Sunny this cooperation has been achieved successfully, staff members are still worried that the district government may stop supporting them in the near future (Field notes 200904).

Organization post-Grey was also set up on a cooperative basis with the recognition of the Agricultural and Forestry Committee of the district government, establishing an

experimental base of 'production, studying and research' for both the district government in City Second, and Mr. Sunny's department. The symbolic resources of Mr. Sunny have again provided an effective link with the local state.

*'Routine Repression', Pro-Forma Consistency and the Influence of Official Politics*

Organization Grey has experienced a process moving from establishing Pro-Forma Consistency, to experiencing excessive consistency with state discourse, then on to Pro-Forma Consistency breaking down, to a re-articulation of that consistency. While the Pro-Forma Consistency associated with the state's discourse related to constructing new socialist rural areas was not broken at the discourse level itself, consistency was ruptured at the local level between Organization Grey and the local state institutions. However, as I have shown, this rupture was a temporary one, because the shut-down of the organization has not meant the end of its activities; discourses are still being constructed based upon people following certain practices. The violent practices of the Education Bureau do not belong to the area of 'large-scale brutality and morbid fear', but belong more to the category 'routine repression' that is 'the steady pressure of everyday repression backed by occasional arrests, warnings, diligent police work, legal restrictions, and an Internal Security Act that allows for indefinite preventive detention and proscribes much political activity' (Scott 1985: 274). This daily repression does not function to break the Pro-Forma Consistency framework at the discourse level, and any ruptures caused by daily repression at the local level can be re-articulated again through the use of bottom-line consistency,

personal connections, key-words consistency and the matching of political achievements. In the case of Organization Grey, this bottom-line consistency has been regained in another locale with another local state institution involved, and by modifying the practices of Organization Grey. Mr. Sunny now successfully plays the intermediary role, and the cooperation seen between Organization Grey and the local state institution of 'City Second' has set an experimental base for 'production, study and research' which satisfies the interests of the local state in terms of demonstrating political achievements and helping to construct new socialist rural areas.

Organization Grey has unintentionally influenced 'official politics' (Kerkvliet 2005: 23-24), and the Vietnamese case reveals how the everyday practices of peasants deviated from state policies on collective farming, and the disappointing outcomes reported to the Vietnamese state then influenced national action in terms of giving up collective farming (Kerkvliet 2005: 235). In contrast, in the case of Organization Grey, it was not the deviant practices that influenced state policy but the over-conforming practices. Their conforming practices, such as following the leadership of the CCP, and contributing to resolve the three rural problems through neo-rural reconstruction activities were the ones accepted by the state.

Organization Orange, set up by Mr. Query in 2006, provides another story of excessive Pro-Forma Consistency.

### **Organization Orange: Excessive Pro-Forma Consistency**

In 2005, a policy analysis officer, Mr. Come, working in City Third's municipal

government in the southern part of China, found that he liked Mr. Sunny's 'neo-rural reconstruction' experiments, and so invited Mr. Sunny to establish an experimental base for rural development in City Third. At that time, Mr. Query was faced with an internal disagreement about the core missions of Organization Grey, which later made him leave Organization Grey. Mr. Sunny asked Mr. Query to communicate with Mr. Come, and as a result, Mr. Come agreed to cooperate with Mr. Sunny's Research Centre. Therefore, in 2006, a community college, that is, Organization Orange, was established in Village Third of City Third, with its mission being to establish a peasant cooperative organization, a cultural activity group and other innovative ways to enhance integrative development in the village. The funding for Organization Orange was to come from the municipal government's annual budget, and the heads of staff at that time were Mr. Kun and Mr. Query. Mr. Kun, the head of Organization Orange, was sent by the municipal government, and its staff members included ten volunteers – with each volunteer offered 750 RMB as a subsidy per month. However, by the spring of 2009, only five volunteers remained (Field notes 200903).

As for Mr. Query and Mr. Sunny, the core neo-rural reconstruction mission of Organization Orange should have meant the establishment of a peasant cooperative. Raw rubber is the main commercial crop in City Third, and at first Mr. Query and the volunteers printed leaflets providing basic knowledge on peasant cooperation; distributing them and introducing the benefits of collective work to the local villagers, to help them manage market risks. In the introduction, they showed the peasants that selling collectively would cost them less than selling the raw rubber individually, plus

that peasant cooperation could help reduce the number of intermediate procedures and link peasants directly to the market. In the introduction, they also provided a 'who's who' for the village. In order to help develop a good relationship with the local village committee, Mr. Query gave the opportunity for three people from Village Third to participate in the peasant cooperative training courses provided by Organization Grey, of which two were the village secretary and the village master, who had both expressed an interest in organizing peasant cooperation in Village Third. The third person to be included was Mr. Happy, who was seen as a warm-hearted and kind man in the village. Mr. Query came to know of him based on information provided by the villagers. When it came to the day of departure, only Mr. Happy went to the training; the village officers expressed no interest in attending any more. Later, with the help of Mr. Happy, local peasant cooperative was established and in 2009, 180 households from Village Third participated in this cooperative effort. Due to the global financial crisis; however, the cooperative lost around 100,000 RMB in 2008, though in the years before 2008, it had generated good profits (Participant interview Mr. Happy 200903).

Mr. Happy told me about one problem faced by the cooperative, saying no formal receipts were used when signing orders directly with the factories, and that without formal receipts, the factories were able to pay less than the market price. Mr. Happy did not know who to speak to for help and advice, so Mr. Query asked him to write a formal report about the problem and to hand it to the local government. He also gave the report to well-known scholars participating in policy-making regarding peasant



cooperative regulations.

Mr. Query was not satisfied with the work of Organization Orange at all, and was faced with three seemingly unsolvable problems. One was that since the funding was controlled by the municipal government, it was hard for staff members to use the money. Whenever a project plan was developed, staff members had to ask the municipal government for money; however, the municipal government was generally reluctant to send the money. Second, since the Organization Orange had been established under the leadership of the municipal government, the government officers used the opportunity to arrange volunteer positions for their relatives, so that among the five volunteers in 2009, two of them turned out to be relatives of government officers, and they did very little except take the 750 RMB subsidies each month. Due to the political sensitivity of the matter; however, Mr. Query was unable to force them to implement projects. Third, the dorms and classrooms for Organization Orange were meant to be used to carry out official training, but were actually used by the staff to relax and have fun. The government carried out such 'face-saving' projects to highlight its political achievements; but in actual fact no one really cared about the content of the training<sup>15</sup>.

However, Mr. Kun, a local officer, does not think in the same way, as for him, the work of Organization Orange has continued to be a success, based on his understanding of neo-rural reconstruction. For him, neo-rural reconstruction first

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<sup>15</sup> On one of the days I stayed at Organization Orange, an official visit was made by the leaders of the province. I was worried at first, since nothing was going on in the organization - it was a vacant school, stagnating. I thought, 'what kind of stuff can be really visited?' However, the results proved that I should not have worried so much. A staff member just introduced the history of the establishment, the functions of the library and classrooms (where nobody was actually learning or reading), the success of the peasant cooperative, and all the official training that was once held there. The whole visit finished within thirty minutes; the provincial leaders expressed their satisfaction and praised the work of Organization Orange - all in front of an empty, non-operating organization.

means developing raw rubber production activities in order to make a profit and encourage young people to migrate. Second, it means building new houses in the village with the earnings from the rubber economy, with the extra money left-over being sent home by the migrant workers. Third, he claims that the local education level has improved - no child has dropped out of school; however, this does not fit with what the villagers say – they say that girls are still discriminated against in the rural areas of the province. Fourth, neo-rural reconstruction to him also means that each household has been able to install a television, and finally, that Organization Orange has allowed people to build a harmonious society, one in which villagers are kind to each other and help each other out. All of these views correspond to the state policy discourse. Finally, ecological development is also part of the neo-rural reconstruction project, and Mr. Kun told me that there is a local saying which says a ‘healthy body and good natural environment are equal to winning the first prize in a lottery’, adding that all of these things must be done under the leadership of the CCP.

Mr. Kun and Mr. Query thus do not have a shared understanding of rural development. Apart from encouraging a peasant cooperative (in the name of building a harmonious society), ecological development activities and developing a rubber business, the rest of Mr Kun’s policies, such as building houses, do not correspond with the ideas of both Mr. Query and Mr. Sunny at all. However, Mr. Query has still tried to link-up with Mr. Kun and the other officers, and as a result, these three seemingly unsolvable issues have been tolerated in order to aid the development of the rubber cooperative.

In the case of Organization Orange, an excessive Pro-Forma Consistency has been established, which is different from the situation at Organization Grey, where excessive Pro-Forma Consistency only occurred at the discourse level - where the nodal point of neo-rural reconstruction was assimilated by the state discourse related to 'constructing new socialist rural areas'. In the case of Organization Orange, excessive Pro-Forma Consistency has occurred within the institutional arrangements, as the head of the Organization is the local officer and the single financial resource is provided by the municipal government. Organization Orange has therefore lost its institutional autonomy altogether. Although Pro-Forma Consistency has been created through Mr. Sunny's reputation, by following the same policies as the state, there has been no room left for Organization Orange to develop its own approach; any deviating practices have been totally suppressed. Without any such practices, the local state organization City Third controls Organization Orange very tightly; however, this is also not the end of the story, as since 2010 new practices have been arranged to resolve the stagnation of Organization Orange - by establishing another organization near City Third which is open for further research. Therefore, as can be seen, struggles and reconstructions are in the constant process of being created.

### **A Brief Discussion and Summary**

In this chapter, the interactions between both Organizations Grey and Orange and the state have been analyzed. Pro-Forma Consistency can be over-achieved, broken or re-articulated, and 'routine repression' exerted by the state's coercive powers might

not be as harmful as excessive consistency, with the social organizations yielding their autonomy to the state.

The two organizations are in the discourses of both 'neo-rural reconstruction' and 'constructing new socialist rural areas'. One is situated in Village First in the North part of China while the other is located in Village Third in the South part of China. Both of them belong to the east half of China, near the coastline. The two villages are different in their ways of living and natural resources. Village First has vast of flat lands for farming based on its continental climate while Village Third has a tropical climate. However, based on my field research, these differences do not contribute to the variations of the outcomes of the two organizations. What really matters is not the villages' characteristics or locations, but the social variables.

As for the two cases, they behave the same way in connecting 'neo-rural reconstruction' with 'constructing new socialist rural areas', and thus they successfully find out how to satisfy the political achievements of the local state institutions. Although Organization Grey once violated the 'bottom-line consistency' in holding up nation-wide peasants' training programs, as it was guessed by the staff members, both of the organizations have tried hard to obey the rules. Even when the bottom line was broken, Organization Grey did not resort to violence. They also have the same intermediate person, Mr. Sunny, who transferred his cultural capital into the credits of the organizations.

However, there is one social aspect that matters. As for the two cases, the ways how the local state institutions are involved are different from each other. As for

Organization Grey, it established Pro-Forma Consistency on both the state discourse level and the local village level. Unfortunately, its rupture of consistency occurred at the local municipal level. It was the municipal officers who came and closed down Organization Grey. No personal intermediary or the other three articulatory elements could fill in the gap at the municipal level. Organization Orange is totally different. From the very beginning, both the key persons Mr. Come and Mr. Kun were involved in the communication of cooperation. Therefore, Pro-Forma consistency at the local village level is not sufficient. It has been proven meaningful when Organization Grey moved to City Second to re-articulate its practices, since the organization started its articulatory efforts with the municipal state institutions. Therefore, more information would be gathered from both the local village and the municipal officers to inform everyday practices, and to avoid the failure of consistency.

In the next chapter, the cases of Organizations Colorful, Red and Green will be presented, with more theoretical implications related to ruptured and re-articulated Pro-Forma Consistency and the development of suppressed practices elaborated upon. On top of that, more general discussions are made regarding to the nature of Pro-Forma Consistency at the discourse level.

## CHAPTER 5: 'CARING FOR MIGRANT WORKERS', 'POPULAR EDUCATION' AND THE 'NEW WORKERS' ARTS' PROJECT'

### Introduction: From Practice to Discourse

In this chapter, firstly, the cases of Organizations Colorful, Red and Green are discussed, in order to reveal the practical features of the establishment of Pro-Forma Consistency in a long struggling process after several twists and turns in the cases of Colorful and Red, and to show how only partial Pro-Forma consistency is constructed in the case of Green.

If I draw a line on the map of China between Shi Jia Zhuang of He Bei Province, and Nan Ning of Guang Xi Province, then all the five cases drop on the right side of the map. All of them are located on the East part of China. In the previous chapter, I have clarified that the differences of locations and natural characteristics of the two villages do not affect the analysis of the articulatory practices. As for the cases of migrant workers' NGOs, according to my field observation, the differences of locations and city sizes do not affect the analytical results, either. The affective aspects are something else, which will be discussed in the next few paragraphs.

Organization Colorful is located in a medium sized city in the South part of China, and Organization Red is in a big city in the North, and Organization Green is also in a big city but in the South. Although they are different regarding to the external features, they share the same social-spatial pattern. All of them are situated in the suburbs or the villages 'enclosed by an urban area', because they want to be close to the place

where migrant workers live. Therefore, no matter they are in big or relatively small cities, all of them are in the same structural situation. Together with the migrant workers, they are excluded from the centre of the cities. The marginal status is not limited to the physical position; it also means the subaltern position in social, cultural and political aspects.

The variation that really matters is the initiators' understandings of the problems of migrant workers and how they settle the missions and values of the organizations with their colleagues. The three organizations are all possibly influenced by the ideas of their financial supporter, Oxfam Hong Kong, who points out the fact of exploitation and advocates class consciousness. (Field notes 200709, 200710, and 200904) However, each organization takes a different approach to tackle the problems of migrant workers. The leader of Organization Colorful, Ms. Hey, is from a middle income background. She and her other colleagues, who were once migrant workers, pursue the value of civic participation and civil rights. Organization Red is led by a group of organic intellectual of migrant workers, who are very aware of the need to unite into a class, but they only carry it out in the form of art events. Organization Orange was initiated by both the experts from Hong Kong and the local migrant workers. Their value orientation is the same with that of Organization Red, but they practice it in a more direct way of fighting for rights by appealing to the court. It is these differences that exert different levels of pressures on the four articulatory elements, which will be summarized in the final chapter.

Secondly, the chapter will also bring practice back to discourse by concluding that

the two-and-a-half discourses constructed through the everyday practices of the five cases formulate a frontier but non-political.

## **Organization Colorful: Popular Education and 'Building a Harmonious Socialist Community'**

### ***The Founding of Organization Colorful***

Organization Colorful is located in the coastal 'City Fourth', in the southern part of China. In July 2007, Organization Colorful was located in the inner district of the city, surrounded by industrial plants making plastic products. A small, local and newly registered foundation called 'Heart' agreed to support the organization for three months in terms of wages and office rent; however, this arrangement lasted for only around half a year due to a lack of office space, the lack of an activity area and few long-term staff being available. As a result, in November 2007 a new site was chosen for Organization Colorful, in a migrant workers' residential area in another industrial park near City Fourth's airport. At first, the office in the inner district of the city was fine; however, after a while, Mr. Query had to accept the fact that the office in the inner district could not be kept open anymore, and he experienced difficulties in finding financial support for the office near the airport. After visiting several foundations, he finally obtained financial support from Oxfam in Hong Kong.

At its inception, Organization Colorful was commercially registered as a 'small-scale individual enterprise', but changed to become a 'private non-enterprise unit' in June



2010.

### ***Geographic Features of the Residential Area 'So-so'***

In the residential area I will call 'So-so', there are around 1000 households made up of people with local household registration documents and another 30,000 migrant workers (Colorful Document 200907). Before the establishment of Organization Colorful, Mr. Query and his colleagues carried out an investigation into the local conditions. 'So-so' belongs administratively to a local neighborhood committee, and the chosen office is only fifteen minutes walk. The residential area and its surroundings used to be a suburb of City Fourth; however, with the industrial development that occurred during the reform era after the 1980s, the suburban land was gradually used to help build factories. The local villagers in this area do not farm anymore, and dorm buildings have been built for migrant workers to rent; thus, rental income has become the main income source of income for the local villagers. The former agricultural land now consists of electrical and mechanics factories. Most of the migrant workers at these factories are required to work on production lines, with few skills needed, most of them are from various areas of inner and western China, and the majority of them were born in the 1980s and early 1990s (Colorful Document 200907). Only a small number of the migrant workers are aged above 30 and have settled down in City Fourth with other family members. The workers' dorms are over-crowded and densely packed, with only basic living amenities, and if the window of a room is open, a person in the opposite dorm building will easily be able to reach

his or her hand out and take items from next door, with the average dwelling area being around only five square meters. In reality, two workers share a ten to fifteen square-meter dorm, with a squat toilet and a wash basin included. The 'Whole' residential area in 'So-so' is zigzagged with small lanes and passages, but the lanes are narrow and only allow only one car to pass at a time. Hundreds of small shops selling low-quality clothes, mobile phones and food are squeezed along the lanes, with pop music blaring out day and night to attract young workers. In contrast to this active picture, with busy living conditions and work days, there was no public library or neighborhood centre for the local residents to use until the coming of Organization Colorful.

### ***The Values, Mission, Team and Activities at Organization Colorful***

The core value of Organization Colorful is called *PingMin JiaoYu*, which can be translated as 'popular', 'people's' or 'mass' education. The historical legacy of Y.C. James Yen's<sup>16</sup> ideas on *PingMin JiaoYu* is advocated by Organization Colorful, and includes many facets<sup>17</sup>. (Li and Li 1990: 514-525; Douglas 1947: 36-37; Organization Colorful Document: Wang 2009, 186)

The principle of 'popular education' is that it is a people-centred perspective.

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<sup>16</sup> Yang Chu James Yen (1893-1990) was an educator with a profound international influence – he who dedicated himself to the education of 'common people' (*PingMin*) and to rural reconstruction over a long period during the modern history of Chinese education. He also launched the American-Chinese Committee for Mass Education Movement and the Philippines Rural Reconstruction Movement.

<sup>17</sup> This includes: equal and life-long educational opportunities for people, learning the ideas, methods and living styles of sustainable development and social transformation; the education of freedom based on an improvement of every aspect of the human body and soul, through Which responsibility and rights, wisdom, justice and peace can all be realized; life education that combines teaching and study together within nature and society; vocational education that provides basic living skills and cultivates a labour force for the country; civic education focusing on social responsibility, the ability to cooperate, democracy building and democratic participation; culture education concerning the study of indigenous knowledge, enhancing the national spirit, the development of personal spirit, and settling down both spiritually and materially.

Organization Colorful believes that the fundamental way to contribute to 'neo-rural construction' is to provide education, since education represents the 'construction of a human being' (Colorful Document 200912). 'Popular education' therefore targets the Whole area's populace, especially the vulnerable in society.

Although the scope of popular education is wide, Organization Colorful's mission at this stage is simply to 'develop migrant workers' community education and advocate equal education opportunities' (Colorful Document 200904). The institution wishes to build a community college or learning centre so that local people and migrant workers can receive life-long and vocational education. It focuses on the living conditions of migrant workers, on their educational opportunities, cultural lives and the migrant children's education conditions. In spite of stressing the importance of knowledge and skills, its ultimate goal is capacity building among young people - migrant workers included. Drawing on the multiple strands of Organization Colorful's popular education framework and the actual courses run, capacity building activities include improving the ability to study, civic consciousness and civic behavior, as well as promoting the equal and democratic participation of local people in public affairs.

In order that it can be found easily by exhausted workers after a hard-day's work, Organization Colorful is situated in the heart of the above described residential area, and rents an area of around 150 square meters on the second floor of a dorm building; with three small rooms and an open and larger area. The three small rooms have been transformed into an office, a small library and a small classroom respectively, while the larger area has been divided into four parts: a reception area where books

can be returned and newcomers receive orientation training, a refreshments and living room with comfortable sofas, a computer learning area with several desktop computers - containing bookshelves, and a multi-functional area of about 25 square meters where civic group seminars are held, movies watched, public lectures conducted and table-tennis games can be played - even balls have been held here. In addition, latest information in terms of vocational lectures, notices and reports of activities, plus any pictures taken and other related information, are posted on the walls.

Organization Colorful's core work team consists of around five to six people, one or two of whom are usually internship staff, and all of the staff live in similar dorm buildings as the migrant workers. Organization Colorful has formed civic co-operative groups, including a public information group, a literature and arts group and a volunteer group, and these groups aim to foster democratic habits through public engagement. It also runs short-term vocational classes and interest classes, including oral English, basic computer skills, and dancing and history classes. The Organization also conducts projects for local children, plus other public activities such as community party fairs to celebrate national festivals. Its main opening times are from four p.m. to eleven p.m.; though it opens in the morning for people to return books and to use the computers. The reason the Organization opens during these hours is because migrant workers only have time to visit after working during the day. Monday morning is set aside for weekly team meetings.

Organization Colorful has a Council which sits above the work team, and this is

supposed to develop the Organization's work plan and its annual work report; however, at first it did not really function. The Council was established in 2007 to ensure that Organization Colorful would receive the support of several well-known scholars and successful, local entrepreneurs who are on the Council members' list. However, Council members at first rarely participated in any substantive activities. Mr. Sunny is also quoted as a Council member for Organization Colorful, though he is really an advisor. It was only after Organization Colorful's registration as a 'private non-enterprise' with the local Bureau of Civil Affairs at the district level that Council members began to get involved – offering their opinions on the future development of the Organization. Mr. Sunny is now on the advisory board; however, the institutional arrangements are still not complete. Organization Colorful also has a Workers and Fellows Development Committee (*GongYou WeiYuanHui*), the members of which are migrant workers who actively participate in organizational activities. This Committee was first established in April 2009, though members were not selected through a democratic election among all migrant workers, but based on the decisions of a 'volunteer group'. It was hoped that at a later date, members of the Workers and Fellows Development Committee would be elected according to a wider voting procedure. The duty of the Workers and Fellows Development Committee is to propose ideas and plans regarding the work and development of Organization Colorful, and these are decided upon through a vote among all members of staff and the Committee. The responsibility of the members of the Committee is to work with the full-time staff at Organization Colorful in their spare time; however, at first, soon after

implementation, this institutional arrangement did not work well, and had stopped functioning by the end of 2009. In 2010, Organization Colorful planned to re-initiate the Workers and Fellows Development Committee. As well as the Council, the work team and the Workers and Fellows Development Committee, there is also a group of volunteers, new and old, who support the work of Organization Colorful. These volunteers come from many areas, such as local universities, nearby companies and other, nearby residential areas.

### ***Pro-Forma Consistency during the Registration Process***

The main thread of this story is how Organization Colorful has tried hard to obtain standard registration from the local Bureau of Civil Affairs, to become a 'private non-enterprise' and replace its commercial registration identity as a 'computer technology training center'. This section focuses on how Organization Colorful has connected with local state institutions using the four articulatory elements of 'bottom line consistency', 'key word policy consistency', 'personal connections' and 'matching political achievements'. Pro-Forma Consistency has been constructed in order to help build a harmonious community within the state discourse of 'building a harmonious, socialist society'. The Organization's popular education activities are thus carried out under this 'harmonious community' framework.

After the establishment of Organization Colorful, Mr. Query and his colleagues registered it as a commercial organization in order to save time. As introduced in Chapter One, it is very difficult for social organizations to register with the Bureau of

Civil Affairs; the pre-conditions being that they find a supervisory body. However, in reality, it is normal for social organizations to fail to persuade any government or public institutions to act as their supervisory body, because government institutions are alert to the potential political risks that they might face if they are seen to be connected with them (Deng 2004: 96). Faced with such a reality, many grassroots social organizations do not register at all (Howell 2004: 150-151; He and Wang 2008: 160-163).

For its commercial registration, Organization Colorful began its activities in the 'so-so' residential area; however, gradually the inconvenience of such an identity was unveiled. Ms. Hey, who took charge of Organization Colorful after Mr. Query left in 2008 to set up organizations in other areas, was told by her colleagues that taxes could be a serious threat to the operations of the Organization in the future. Being registered commercially, Organization Colorful is responsible for paying taxes to the local Tax Bureau. Although Organization Colorful is non-profit, it does charge deliberately low fees for workers on some courses, in order that they may value the study opportunity. Charges paid by those who do not regularly show up at the courses are collected at the end of each course and the money is used to buy gifts for those who study hard and work well. Any fees remaining are returned to the students. This arrangement is made clear to the workers at the beginning of each course, though Organization Colorful does not have a formal accounting department - only one staff member is responsible for daily cash management. At the middle and end of the financial year (from November to October), Organization Colorful has to report to

Oxfam in Hong Kong, and also to report its financial affairs to the volunteers, workers and Council members at the end of the financial year in its 'end-of-year' meetings. The informal accounting institution and non-payment of commercial taxes, though Organization Colorful makes no profit, may arouse the attention of the Tax Bureau, and may cause Organization Colorful to close or pay a big fee. The second risk is that the organization's commercial scope, as registered, is computer training, while the actual activities carried out far exceed this scope. According to the lessons to be learned from the experiences of Organization Grey, if this were to be detected by the local Industrial and Commercial Bureau, the problems caused could also lead to a penalty or closure. Third, having a registration that does not match its actual nature, it is difficult for Organization Colorful to carry out activities that involve widespread participation; when Organization Colorful invites the Neighborhood Committee to participate, the Committee ends up questioning its identity. Changing the registration status has thus become a must for Organization Colorful.

Bottom-line consistency means that Organization Colorful and local state institutions both have their bases for registration, and as in the case of Organization Grey I outlined in the previous chapter, these bottom-lines are not static but in constant negotiation. This is also true in the case of Organization Colorful, though it has managed to maintain consistency with the Neighborhood Committee in terms of successful registration. However, this situation in itself does not form the entire length of the equivalential chain related to 'building harmonious communities through social work under the direction of government institutions', as the four articulatory elements



together are required for this.

According to the 'Management Regulations on the Registration of Social Groups' (*SheHui TuanTi DengJi GuanLi TiaoLi*), and the Management Regulations on the Registration of Private Non-Enterprises' (*MinBan FeiQiYe DanWei DengJi GuanLi TiaoLi*) – as issued by the State Council, a new organization is required to become affiliated with a supervisory body (*YeWu ZhuGuan DanWei*) which then takes responsibility for scrutinizing, supervising and guiding the organization (Shui 2008: 56-60). Therefore, the key aim for Colorful when it was forming was to find a local government organization to be its supervisory body.

In March 2009, Colorful was organizing a party - to be held within the residential area for the coming International Labor Day on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Wood, a staff member at Organization Colorful, decided to use it as a chance to communicate with the local community authority - the Neighborhood Committee, to see if Colorful could gain its support. He also considered it a starting point in terms of persuading the Committee to be the Organization's supervisory body. The Organization's team had long been thinking about visiting the Neighborhood Committee, but had not put this into practice until then, as staff members had always been busy doing other work. It seems that the decision to visit was made contingently; however, as the long period of consideration did not mean they were fully prepared.

However, Mr. Lucky, a key officer at the Committee, refused to communicate with Colorful, since he told Mr. Wood that it was an illegal organization, its intention being to make money out of the education business. Reminded of the old men in Mr.

Lucky's office, Mr. Wood understood that Mr. Lucky was expecting a bribe from Colorful; however, bribing would violate Colorful's bottom-line in terms of ethics.

On that day, several local university students came to Organization Colorful, intending to conduct social research on the local residential area, which needed permission from the local authority. At the same time, Organization Colorful was preparing a community party for the coming International Labor Day, to which Organization Colorful not only intended to invite officers from the local Neighborhood Committee, but also wanted to gain permission from the Committee to use an outdoor stage for the party. Mr. Wood thought it was a good time to bring the students to the Committee, since they were around, the intention being that the two issues of the research and the party could be discussed with the Committee at the same time.

The neighborhood committee (*JuMin WeiYuanHui*, or literally translated as 'Residents' Committee') is the lowest-level of government institution in China (Bray 2009: 100); however, this would, most likely, be denied by the Chinese Government, because, according to the *Organization Law of Urban Residents' Committee of the P.R.C.*, a 'neighborhood committee is a self-governed, self-educated, self-served and self-organized grass-root mass organization' (The Standing Committee of Chinese National Congress 1989). In reality; however, it seldom is. It is paradoxical that while the neighborhood committees claim to be self-governed, they are tightly controlled from above. The lowest administrative level is officially the sub-district office, which belongs to the district government institution but works outside the district governments, as their agency in grassroots areas (Bray 2009: 100).

The neighborhood committee is below the level of the sub-district office and has three functions. First, it represents the interests of the Party and state by communicating and implementing policies issued by superior government authorities, such as carrying out national census activities and assisting government institutions at the higher level. Second, it undertakes administrative tasks, such as maintaining public security, mediating between conflicting residents and educating young people – all within its territorial space, and third, it provides basic social services according to the residents' interests. Since 1990, the Ministry of Civil Affairs has run an experiment, constructing communities (*SheQu*) based on the neighborhood committee and sub-district office system. The core direction of this policy is to enhance the autonomy of the neighborhood committees and direct their functions to become more 'service-oriented'; however, the effectiveness of such reforms is questionable (Bray 2009: 88-103).

In terms of Organization Colorful's visit to the Neighborhood Committee, I accompanied them as a volunteer. The Neighborhood Committee office was larger than I expected, and at the entrance stood a beautiful Chinese traditional screen. A reception desk was located in the middle of the hall, with offices surrounding the area. It was very noisy when we entered, and upon entering, reception took us to an office, informing us that Mr. Lucky was in charge of cultural activities in the neighborhood area.

Mr. Wood began to introduce Organization Colorful to Mr. Lucky, who seemed to be in his late twenties or early thirties; however, he was interrupted by Mr. Lucky even

before he had had the chance to say anything, except to present the name of the organization. Mr. Lucky's response to the name Organization Colorful was clear and precise, telling Mr. Wood that Organization Colorful was an illegal organization, and that he would no longer listen to Mr. Wood. Mr. Wood tried to explain about the work of Organization Colorful and raised the fact that it had received positive reports from the local media, but, unfortunately, Mr. Lucky refused to listen, insisting that Organization Colorful was an illegal organization. He then said that he could not figure out why the local Education Bureau had not closed down it, but since the local Education Bureau had not taken any action, he would just let Organization Colorful continue. He said that he believed Organization Colorful intended to make large profits, which is common nowadays in China; however, he said he did not believe that Colorful was trustworthy. Mr. Wood explained that Organization Colorful was registered - though commercially, but Mr. Lucky did not accept such an explanation.

In the office, there was a table in the corner beside Mr. Lucky's office desk, with four chairs around it. Four elderly local men were drinking tea at the table, laughing and chatting loudly. As we entered the office, the four old men changed their language, speaking mandarin with a strong local accent. While Mr. Lucky and Mr. Wood were arguing, the old men also cut into the conversation, saying 'if you want to do an education business, then you must find the right person.' They said that Mr. Lucky plays an important role in the educational and cultural affairs of the local area, adding 'he is the right guy', repeatedly.

The conversation ended up with no agreement from Mr. Lucky, and then Mr. Wood

expressed his wish that Mr. Lucky understand more about Organization Colorful by coming to see its operations. After we left the office, Mr. Wood asked me if I had noticed the words of the old men, Mr. Wood believing that it was a hint for us to bribe Mr. Lucky. The underlying meaning of the phrase 'you have got the right guy', was 'how come you have not given anything yet to him?'

After Ms. Hey had learnt the whole story of the visit, she developed two plans. Plan one was to approach Mr. Lucky through other channels, and plan two was to totally bypass him if Organization Colorful could gain support from other government officers. The two plans were then carried out simultaneously.

In order to find other channels to approach to Mr. Lucky, as a local person who speaks in a 'dialect with an upper class accent' herself, Ms. Hey began to contact the village elders, first contacting the leader of the Neighborhood Committee, Mr. Soon; however, Mr. Soon's attitude was vague; he neither expressed a wish to support nor did he oppose the move. He did however stress that he could not handle anything at that time since he was very busy. Ms. Hey remembered that there was an old ancestral temple within the residential area, as it had been a natural village before urbanization took place. The ancestral temple is named after a former powerful clan in the village, and after urbanization, it was turned into a leisure area for the old people in the area to play poker, chess and mahjong. The old people who use this facility also know a lot about who is important in the area.

In consideration of this, Ms. Hey went to the ancestral temple, where she was warmly greeted by an old lady who was watching the others play games. Ms. Hey

inquired after the health of the old lady and introduced her to a series of self-massage methods. After a while, an old man in charge of the daily activities at the temple also joined the conversation, and after breaking the ice with the elders, Ms. Hey came to the question of who is important in the area. The old lady and old man told her that there are three key people in the residential area, and that behind these three key people, there are three influential clans. Mr. Soon, the leader of the Committee, is still the most important person, as he is the one who makes the final decisions. Mr. Lucky, who had already been visited by Mr. Wood, is the son of the previous village master, while Mr. Noon is the third important person, belonging to a big clan who named the ancestral temple. All of them represent the traditional authority in the village, and they also work together as part of the new authority regime in the residential area, that is, they work on the Neighborhood Committee.

Since no positive feedback from Mr. Soon and Mr. Lucky was received, Ms. Hey decided to call Mr. Noon to seek potential help. Ms. Hey raised two issues upon calling Mr. Noon, one was that Organization Colorful planned to invite the 'waist drum dance team' from the local residential area so as to perform at the coming party for Labor Day, and the second was to ask for support from the Neighborhood Committee in providing an outdoor stage for the party. Mr. Noon said that he himself did not have any problem, but asked Ms. Hey to add the name of the Neighborhood Committee onto the banner for the party, to show that the Committee was also one of the sponsors of the event. Mr. Noon added that since the event came under the scope of Mr. Lucky's work, obtaining Mr. Lucky's agreement was a must. As a result, it all came

back to the same, key person, Mr. Lucky, which might prove a serious difficulty. Ms. Hey called Mr. Lucky again to see if it was possible to change his attitude by saying something acceptable; however, Mr. Lucky instead said, 'you cheaters, do what you like. I don't agree you use the name of the Committee.' Ms. Hey called Mr. Soon again to explain the problem, and Mr. Soon suggested that Ms. Hey try to privately persuade the 'waist drum dance team' to get access to an outdoor stage. He would then send a public security member of the Committee to the party to ensure the safety of those attending.

The party was finally carried out without the permission of Mr. Lucky. As a result, communication with Mr. Lucky ceased for a while, as no urgent affairs required his involvement; however, the communications picked up again quite suddenly.

This happened on a normal occasion; when Ms. Hey visited the headmaster of a well-known private primary school to negotiate her son's entrance to the school. Ms. Hey was surprised to overhear that a man also waiting to talk with the headmaster was called Mr. Lucky, and then found out that he was the same man from the neighborhood office. Mr. Lucky was also trying to settle schooling for his child, so Ms. Hey took advantage of this opportunity to talk with him about Organization Colorful. Ms. Hey mentioned on purpose to Mr. Lucky that the headmaster of the school is also a volunteer at an environmental NGO, and on this occasion, Mr. Lucky was willing to talk, though he did not express any particular trust in Organization Colorful. After this encounter, Ms. Hey and Mr. Lucky met several times at the primary school; however, they did not discuss anything related to their work.

Later on, when Ms. Young, another staff member of Organization Colorful, was planning a project about after-school tutorials initiated by local university internship students for migrant children, she and Ms. Hey decided to discuss this project with Mr. Lucky. The conversation was carried out in a way that Ms. Young introduced herself not as a staff member of Colorful, but as a graduate from a local university, who wanted to help her freshmen schoolmates to do something good. However, Mr. Lucky told Ms. Young that he knew she was from Organization Colorful, before she had even said anything, after which Mr. Lucky warned Ms. Young not to believe in Organization Colorful, as, according to him, it was not a social organization working for public good, but a business enterprise simply pretending to be a social organization - designed to make a profit. Ms. Young did not respond to this and left. Thereafter, Ms. Hey suggested they should not argue over the issue of whether Organization Colorful is an enterprise or not, as no regulation or law disallows enterprises from carrying out activities for the public good. In the conversation, Ms. Young did not express any disagreement to challenge Mr. Lucky.

After that, Ms. Young approached Mr. Lucky once again, and this time Ms. Young again expressed her hope to implement the education project for the children in the residential area. Mr. Lucky replied that if the university students had passion for the project, they should go to the poorest parts of China. Mr. Lucky thought Organization Colorful was cheating the university students. He believed that nowadays everyone wants money and only money - even disabled people do not accept second-hand clothes. Mr. Lucky believed that there is no point in studying; it is better for children to



work now and earn money – he did not know even that social work is a major at university, believing there is no point in studying hard. Nowadays in China, university graduates cannot even find jobs, he said. Ms. Young also mentioned that she was thinking about providing literacy education for elderly illiterate people in the residential area So-so, to which Mr. Lucky replied that there is no use teaching old people, since they will soon die. Also, he added that literacy education is just a way for certain government agencies to bolster their political achievements; it is not a task for others. Mr. Lucky added that if the students wanted to hold an event, they should ask the local schools themselves, and that if it was the university who planned to do so, then the university teachers should talk to him direct, if it was Organization Colorful who wanted to carry out the project, it would never receive his permission. This time, Mr. Lucky neither agreed nor disagreed with the project, though he did say that education is useless.

The stalemate relationship between Mr. Lucky and Colorful did not change until Colorful was registered through another channel. As a registered NGO at the District level, Colorful was even one level administratively higher than the Neighborhood Committee. When Mr. Lucky received the notification of Organization Colorful's registration from the District Bureau of Civil Affairs, he was not happy. Ms. Hey thus asked another member of the Neighborhood Committee Mr. Noon to go with her to visit Mr. Lucky. While Mr. Noon said sweet words about Organization Colorful to Mr. Lucky, Ms. Hey also expressed her respect to him. The embarrassment was eased, but the relationship between Mr. Lucky and Organization Colorful was a

'non-interfering' one. Mr. Lucky did not express fully positive attitudes towards Colorful. He just let it go.

During this phase, 'bottom-line consistency' was achieved. On the one hand, Organization Colorful had its own bottom line against bribing, whilst on the other, Mr. Lucky insisted on Organization Colorful's 'illegality' and its 'purpose of making money'. 'Bottom line consistency' was thus achieved not through face-to-face antagonistic quarrels with Mr. Lucky. Respect and acceptable ways such as introducing oneself as a university graduate instead of as staff member were applied. Though the effect was not so immediate, violent conflict was avoided. Bottom-line consistency was finally achieved when formal registration was obtained and respect being given to Mr. Lucky continued. Mr. Lucky lost his argument with respect to Organization Colorful's registration, which means that his own bottom-line was removed. As a result, power relations changed in terms of the articulations between Mr. Lucky and Organization Colorful.

As has been touched upon in the above explanations, personal relations were applied to approach Mr. Lucky. Information gathering from local old people and requesting other committee officers, who were sympathetic of Organization Colorful to make introductions, were only a part of the use of personal connections used in the registration process. Here, it has been found that personal connections serve as an intermediary or bridge. Such intermediaries helped Colorful to invite officers to know more about Organization Colorful, and vice-versa. Personal connections as intermediaries are not a must but have helped to create mutual trust between

Organization Colorful and the local state institutions. Intermediaries have thus functioned as a short-cut, helping to link Organization Colorful with the chain of equivalence created by the state discourse of 'building a harmonious, socialist society'.

Organization Colorful encountered a big problem when the evening party on Labor Day was about to start. Everything was prepared but when the party was about to start, the electricity was cut-off by several policemen who suddenly showed up. Mr. Wood was angry, and shouted a few words to the crowd, saying 'if they do not let us hold the party, we will persist to the end!' At the same time, one of the policemen telephoned Mr. Query, since he was the one shown as the head of Organization Colorful in the report handed in by Ms. Hey to the police station; however, Mr. Query was not in town that night, but the police nevertheless asked him to call off the party. After a period of chaos, they decided to change the event into an indoor party instead, so information about the changed venue was sent to the contacts they had at hand through all possible channels, such as using mobile phone text and instant messaging. The staff members then tried their best to decorate the office so as to give it a party atmosphere and the party was eventually held, though having been disturbed at the beginning.

After the event, Ms. Hey asked a friend of hers, who is also a policeman, about the event, and he told her that in future she should not report to the police at all. The policeman was the first personal contact of Organization Colorful. From the police officer, Ms. Hey understood why the evening party was prevented from happening by

the local policemen even though she had reported to them of the party according to the safety requirements. Although it is true that whenever a public event is about to be carried out, the organizer should report to the police for safety reasons, which means the police can organize a patrol, this does not happen in reality. This is because if one reports to the police, then the police know of the event and have a responsibility to ensure public order. Nobody in the police wants to do that, because if anything bad happens at the event, the police have to take responsibility, plus, they do not receive any extra benefits, so as a result, the police tend to stop these events happening in order to remove the risk. This 'game theory' played by the police could never be learned through official channels. As far as Organization Colorful is concerned therefore, the best thing to do is not to report such events to the police at all, which means that the police will have no responsibilities. In this way, one can carry out an event as you like and if anything happens, the police can say they had no responsibility - it was all the responsibility of the organizer. With no risks attached, the police will simply turn a blind eye - they will not come to stop it.

A few months later, when it came to the anniversary of Organization Colorful, another public party was held, and this time Ms. Hey did not inform the police. The party went ahead smoothly and was a great success. At the beginning of this party, Ms. Hey saw two policemen in uniform at the party site, and at first, she was surprised, and worried that they might come and cut off the electricity again. However, she noticed that the two policemen were actually greatly attracted by the performances on the stage, and had smiles on their faces. Seeing this, Ms. Hey went straight over to

the policemen and invited them to sit in the front row of the audience – she did this on purpose so that the two policemen would appear as important guests of the organization to the public. In fact, the two policemen had simply come across the party by chance. After the anniversary party, these two policemen were then delighted to participate in further activities personally.

The second personal connection was with another police officer, who was a relative of Ms. Hey's former classmate. Ms. Hey communicated with him in order to understand the government's viewpoint. The police officer's advice made Ms. Hey realize that registration was urgent. Without an official identification from the government, there was the risk of severe misunderstanding occurring. The police office was surprised to learn from Ms. Hey's introduction of Colorful that these people were doing something for a good cause, since his previous understanding of NGOs as a whole had been that at least one out of ten of them were anti-government. He doubted Colorful at the beginning and strongly suggested registration at the end of the communication. The officer's understanding reminded Ms. Hey of a common expectation from the government side – to always offer obedience to state authority.

Ms. Hey thus realized that registration with the Bureau of Civil Affairs was urgent, as a registration would guarantee the government's backing for Organization Colorful. However, this time, Ms. Hey decided not to pin all her hopes on Mr. Lucky, but to contact government organizations higher than the sub-district office through her personal social network.

The third intermediary was another friend of Ms. Hey, who introduced Ms. Hey to an

officer of the Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs. Ms. Hey was told that at the end of the year, a National Experience Sharing Conference of Constructing Urban Social Workers' Teams was going to be held in the city. The officer of the Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs asked Colorful to hand in reports on their achievements in community social work, so that the municipal officers would have more to say at the conference. The conference was held to respond to the central state requirements of 'completing an urban social governance and service system, solving social problems in urban areas, building harmonious urban communities, enhancing the construction of urban modern civilization, and strengthening the governing roots of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in urban areas'<sup>18</sup>. When the orders of the Central State were passed on to the local people, reports of relevant work and achievements became crucial - to show that the policies were being effectively implemented at the local level. Social work, building a harmonious society and enhancing the CCP's governing capability were key points in this.

While Ms. Hey was negotiating with the municipal officers, another chance came unexpectedly. The fourth connection was introduced by an associate professor of a local university, a person who was volunteering for Organization Colorful. The associate professor was a consultant to the District Bureau of Civil Affairs, whose administrative level is higher than Sub-District Office but lower than the Municipal. He knew by chance that Ms. Hey was trying hard to register Organization Colorful as a 'private non-enterprise' organization, so he praised Organization Colorful in front of an officer of the District Bureau of Civil Affairs, saying Colorful had carried out good social

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<sup>18</sup> I do not give the source of this Conference because it will expose the real identity of 'Colorful'.

work. He then offered to introduce the Chief Director of the Bureau to its staff members, and Ms. Hey appreciated his voluntary help.

The first time the Chief Director came to Organization Colorful with the associate professor; he found it difficult to drive into the residential area; so he left his car by the entrance and called the staff. Two members of staff went out to pick him up, as it is about a ten-minute walk from the entrance to the residential area to the office. However, the Chief Director found the distance too far, so he asked several times on the way to Organization Colorful if they had arrived yet, since he felt tired. The Chief Director only stayed for a while, then left, since Ms. Hey, the head of Organization Colorful, did not show up as she was busy with other tasks. The second time he visited, in order to show respect, Ms. Hey found a place for him to park inside the residential area and let the Chief Director bring his car near to the office.

The last personal connection was an unexpected 'bonus' built upon the previous link. While Ms. Hey continuously kept in touch with the officers from both the municipal and district Bureau of Civil Affairs by frequently visiting their office, she also had a chance to communicate with another officer of the District Bureau of Civil Affairs. After several of her visits, an officer asked Organization Colorful to write a report for him as well. Ms. Hey learned that actually the District Bureau of Civil Affairs had been under pressure to report on the number of social organizations in the District - to the Municipal level, in accordance with the municipal and national policies related to building harmonious communities, and in preparation for the coming National Conference on social work.

The officer whom Ms. Hey came across by chance in the District Bureau of Civil Affairs even took the initiative to ask Organization Colorful to register. Finally, Colorful completed the 'private non-enterprise' registration in June 2010, with the District Bureau of Civil Affairs taking on two roles, acting both as the supervisory body and the registration body.

Personal connection might not be able to directly persuade officers to agree to do things, but it here it provided an opportunity for Colorful to approach these government officers through a channel formed by acquaintances. Sometimes these types of connection do not work however; for example, after Mr. Wood's visit, Mr. Lucky refused to talk with Colorful even if his colleague offered to be the intermediary. For the rest of the time; however, it worked, while it was not always required. It worked in a way in which the intermediaries' acquaintances with both the officers and Ms. Hey served as 'something in common' – to be shared by them. This common point helped put Ms. Hey and the officers together within the same 'line of equivalence'. In addition, the intermediaries opened-up the opportunity for Ms. Hey to develop a greater knowledge of state policy discourses, and for the officers to understand Colorful in more detail as well.

Bottom-line consistency was thus obtained through Organization Colorful and the state institutions achieving agreement on the most crucial points, without which the equivalential chain that involves both of them would be broken. Personal connections are useful bridges that can be accepted by state institutions, and in the interactions between Colorful and the state institutions, acceptability is a crucial point, not only in



terms of communication channels but also in terms of the practices and language used in the interactions. Matching the key policy words such as 'building harmonious communities', and giving local expression to the state's aim of 'building a harmonious, socialist society' is a third articulatory element, and means there is no need to match these policies with total accuracy.

The fourth articulatory element is being able to argue in accordance with the needs of local state organizations to express political achievements. Local state institutions deal with the requirements passed on from the central state in order to show that central state policies have been implemented well at the local level. At the district level, all three state institutions, the Sub-District Office, the District Bureau of Civil Affairs and the Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs asked Colorful to provide reports of its achievements in line with the policy of 'building social harmonious communities', as these government institutions are required to submit reports related to 'building a harmonious society' to the central government, in order to show they have successfully implemented its policies.

During its registration process, Organization Colorful was faced with a set of prohibited actions. The first one was never to act against the government; the second was never to lead the discussion on social problems- over the government. The third was never to take on 'western' values and the fourth was never to argue with officers. A fifth principal was that being able to demonstrate actions in line with 'building harmonious communities through social work' would be welcomed by state institutions, from the Sub-district office level, through the District Bureau of Civil Affairs and on to

the Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs.

By 2009, the discourse on ‘building a harmonious socialist society’ had already been officially in place for about two years, and City Fourth also issued its own policies in accordance with this edict; *A Number of Regulations on the Urban Community Construction of City Fourth* and *The 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan of Building Harmonious Community of City Fourth*, which was published in 2006<sup>19</sup>. (The Municipal Government of City Fourth 2006) Five items in the two documents relate to Colorful. First, in order to build harmonious communities, local community centers, that is, the neighborhood committees and sub-district offices are required to improve service capacity and quality in order to undertake social service tasks as stipulated by the government. (The Municipal Government of City Fourth 2006, chapter 1) Second, the development of regulations is also considered an urgent task - to facilitate the building of harmonious communities. (The Municipal Government of City Fourth 2006, chapters 1 and 2) Third, the policy encourages the development of social organizations at the community level - registration restrictions should be eased for those organizations that provide services for the public good. (The Municipal Government of City Fourth 2006, chapters 3 and 6) Fourth, community education and cultural services are emphasized – there is a request for education services, rights protection, poverty relief and consultation services to be improved in community centers. (*Ibid*) Finally, harmonious community development also includes building morals and a civilized and scientific way of life (*WenMing KeXue de ShengHuo FangShi*). (The Municipal Government of City Fourth 2006, chapters 2 and 3) Deng’s

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<sup>19</sup> The entire set of documents can be accessed online; however, giving URL references will break confidentiality.

theory and 'three representations' are the guiding principles behind this strategy, and there are eight dos and don'ts<sup>20</sup>, as proposed by Hu Jin Tao in 2006, to accompany scientific development and a harmonious society - the core content of advocacy moves, these being: patriotism, an innovative spirit, public morals, professional ethics, family virtues, politeness and science, which are all introduced to help realize the process of building harmonious communities. (The Municipal Government of City Fourth 2006, chapters 2 and 3)

When Ms. Hey could not get an agreement from Mr. Lucky, she went to the Sub-district Office in search of support. Organization Colorful decided to use the theme 'building a harmonious community', to match itself with the national and municipal policies, and in accordance with this, the aims of the Labor Day party were given as: (i) to build a harmonious community in 'So-so', (ii) to serve the community and migrant workers, (iii) to promote community integration, (iv) to strengthen communication between local people and migrant workers, (v) to enrich cultural activities in the community, and (vi) to establish popular education and develop this in harmony with the community (Colorful Document 200905).

Therefore, Ms. Hey decided to focus on this purpose of the Labor Day party when she visited the sub-district office. She first called directory enquiries in order to get the number of the office, then called the office. When she phoned, Ms. Hey said on the phone:

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<sup>20</sup> The eight do's and eight don'ts are: (i) Love - do not harm the motherland (ii) Serve - do not dissuade the people, (iii) Uphold science - do not be ignorant and unenlightened, (iv) Work hard - do not be lazy and hate work, (v) Be united and help each other - do not gain benefits at the expense of others, (vi) Be honest and trustworthy, not profit-mongering at the expense of your values, (vii) Be disciplined and law-abiding instead of chaotic and lawless, and (viii) Know plain living and hard struggles - do not wallow in luxuries and pleasure.

See Xin Hua News Agency: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2006-04/27/content\\_4482754.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2006-04/27/content_4482754.htm)

‘We are commercially registered...We wish to communicate with the departments who will understand what we do...Many officers at the grassroots level do not understand us. We have been driven out of our office, but have hardly said anything wrong. Bad qualities have been shown by the man<sup>21</sup> (*SuZhi*)...what do you mean by ‘legal’? If we started by getting a civil registration, we would not have time to do meaningful work....Can you please tell me know who I can speak to - who is responsible for the work in this field?’

After speaking on the phone, Ms. Hey told me that the person who answered was an office clerk, who talked with her politely in mandarin but with a strong local accent. Ms. Hey made a small complaint about Mr. Lucky’s visit without pointing out his name, in order to exert pressure on the clerk. As a result, Ms. Hey got the phone number of a key person: Director Wise, at the sub-district office, after which she called Mr. Wise to make an appointment. On the phone, she described Organization Colorful as an organization serving migrant workers and community residents, as supported by local university student volunteers. Director Mr. Wise politely agreed to meet two days later.

I followed Ms. Hey to the sub-district office two days later. Director Wise, a middle-aged man, introduced us to his younger colleague Ms. Lucy, who is responsible for education and cultural activities of the sub-district. Ms Lucy acknowledged the introduction to Organization Colorful made by Ms. Hey, and was very interested in the party that was going to happen, even interrupting Ms. Hey to suggest she distribute family planning leaflets on the same day, which is actually the job of the Neighborhood Committee. Actually, Ms. Hey did not spend too much time

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<sup>21</sup> Quality (*SuZhi*) means the personality or substance that one has. It refers to the measurement of human value.

explaining the work of Organization Colorful, as they quickly moved on to the details regarding the party. Ms. Hey asked if one of the officers or leaders of the sub-district office could come to the party and make a speech. Ms. Lucy replied that it was very difficult to invite a leader, as the leader might not be interested, might have another social event which was more important, or simply feel it was too much trouble to ask a clerk to prepare a speech. Ms. Hey asked whether, as it would be difficult to invite a leader, whether it would be possible for Ms. Lucy to give a speech on behalf of the sub-district committee, as an encouragement to migrant workers. Ms. Lucy said it was not appropriate for her to represent the office, but she appreciated the invitation, saying she said she would attend the party privately. Ms. Hey also asked if the office could support the party by providing some gifts for the actors and actresses, to which Ms. Lucy said she would ask the 'family planning office' of the sub-district committee to provide some small gifts. She said the office had some gifts left over from last event they were involved in.

Ms. Lucy also suggested a number of other things, such as to add 'sub-district office' as a title on the Labor Day banner, to show that the office was the co-host, or at least an important host, and to report to the local police station before the party was carried out. Another thing Ms. Lucy asked Organization Colorful to do was to produce a report of the activities of the organization in a newsletter, and send this to her. She said she would then hand it to the leaders of the office, so the leaders would then know that Organization Colorful organizes a lot of activities in terms of helping people. Ms. Lucy also suggested that when the sub-district office held any activities later on,

Organization Colorful would be welcome to recommend any interesting performances, and if she thought the events and activities were good enough, she would report this to the district. Ms. Hey was happy with all these suggestions, since she thus understood what the Sub-district Office wanted from Organization Colorful. However, the last thing Ms. Lucy mentioned worried her again. Ms. Lucy said that Organization Colorful should obtain support from Mr. Lucky of the Neighborhood Committee, as Mr. Lucky is in charge of education and cultural issues in the residential area. So, it all came back to the same key person – Mr. Lucky. Ms. Hey did not mention the problem she had had with Mr. Lucky; she simply thanked her for her help and went back.

Several days later, Ms. Hey received a call from Ms. Lucy, saying that the sub-district office had changed its plan - the office no longer wanted to put its name on the banner at the Labor Day party, plus the small gifts from the family planning office she had promised would no longer be provided. The reason for this is because Ms. Lucy had called Mr. Lucky and received negative feedback concerning the activities of Organization Colorful. Ms. Hey original intention had been that Ms. Lucy might help her to give a positive view of Organization Colorful to Mr. Lucky; however, it had turned out the other way around. Ms. Lucy was reminded by Mr. Lucky not to believe Organization Colorful so quickly. Ms. Lucy was sorry, so Ms. Hey still invited Ms. Lucy to come to the party, on a private basis.

Although the connection with the Sub-district Office was unsuccessful, it was learned that state institutions welcome community activities being written into official reports, as evidence of a given officer's achievements.

In all interactions with the other officers, the five principles outlined above proved to be true. The associate professor, Mr. Wei, a friend of Ms. Hey, who introduced Ms. Hey to this Chief Director of the District Bureau, explained to the Chief Director that, from his point of view, Organization Colorful was a perfect model of social work. The staff members also explained to the Chief Director the level of vulnerability of the workers and children in the residential area; they do not enjoy equal education opportunities or other basic social welfare services, such as health care, and that Organization Colorful would like to help the workers integrate into urban life. However, the Chief Director said that he thought these issues should come under the responsibility of the state. He also said he knew that the population of the residential area 'So-so' was nearly 100,000, while the infrastructure could only support half of this number; the problems faced by these vulnerable people are thus the inevitable result of this lack of development. He said he believed that if investment were put into the infrastructure and education services in the area, it would be a waste, as, from his perspective, the migrant workers and their children move continuously from one city to another. Therefore, if they moved to another location, the investment would have been wasted. The Chief Director believed that the model of Organization Colorful was rooted in the ideas and experiences of western countries, and that such a model is not suited to the situation in China. The associate professor emphasized the reality of the unequal distribution of social welfare in China, to which the Chief Director made no response. When the conversation came to an end, the Chief Director praised Organization Colorful for its hard work.

When Ms. Hey continued to visit the Chief Director of the District Bureau of Civil Affairs and other officers, and found that even officers from the same office can have totally different attitudes towards social organizations, as was the case with the Neighborhood Committee. She also found out that the Bureau required successful examples of social organizations, as it is required to report the number of social organizations in the district to the higher government authorities. This requirement was developed in accordance with the municipal and national policies aimed at building harmonious communities and in support of an up-and-coming national conference on the exchange of good practice in terms of social work. She decided that in addition to the continuing emphasis on arguments in support of 'people's livelihoods', including the poor living standards of migrant workers and equal education opportunities, she would link the livelihood argument with the political achievements (*Zhengji*) of the officers.

Ms. Hey said that she did not speak a lot when meeting with the officers; she felt that the officers naturally regard themselves as leaders or governors in front of ordinary people such as her, Ms. Hey was therefore meant to behave as though obeying the instructions of leaders, so she simply listened to the officers at first, and adopted a humble manner. However, she also tried gradually to make the officers understand that the work of Organization Colorful could add to the merit of their political achievements, and as they themselves lacked a substantial social work record, they were in need of greater achievements - to highlight their successes within the administrative domain. Matching their own key interests was a way to earn a



relatively equal status in negotiations.

Organization Colorful finally completed the 'private non-enterprise' registration process in June 2010, under which the District Bureau of Civil affairs takes on two roles and responsibilities, acting both as the supervisory body and the registration body. Ms. Hey shared another detail with me regarding the final steps in the registration process – the need to obtain donation receipts from the Finance Bureau. Donation receipts are special receipts used by registered social organizations; that they give to commercial donors as proof of their donation. The receipt can be used to claim a discount on the tax that a donor has to pay. Before going to claim the receipts, Ms. Hey was angry at the prospect of being caught up in another time-consuming negotiating procedure, in order to get the receipts, as had happened with the District Bureau of Civil Affairs. However, she was surprised to find that the relevant work was completed in just one visit. Afterwards, she learned from the officers that they had received a notification document from the district government, proving the organization's registration; therefore, Ms. Hey did not need to explain everything to the Finance Bureau from the very beginning. She also learned that even the Sub-district Office and the neighborhood office had received the same notification. Having registered, Organization Colorful is entitled and also obliged to participate in the official meetings of the District Bureau of Civil Affairs, meaning that Organization Colorful now enjoys equal administrative status with the sub-district office. This has also brought a slight change to the relationship with Mr. Lucky.

Since registration, the District Bureau of Civil Affairs has become more proactive in

terms of inviting Organization Colorful to cooperate with the district government. Ms. Hey was informed that the district government was planning a service project bid, but that the officers there found it embarrassing that only two social organizations, including Organization Colorful, were the only legally registered organizations to participate in the bid. The District Bureau of Civil affairs hoped to sign the service contract with Organization Colorful; however, Ms. Hey was not hasty in terms of cooperating, and she never actively called the Bureau of Civil Affairs, she simply waited for the calls from the officers there. This was because she was worried that Organization Colorful might be absorbed into the government institutional system, meaning it would lose its independence and autonomy as Organization Orange had done. She said she needed time to learn more about the state process<sup>22</sup>.

Though Organization Colorful had once been warned by an officer when he heard about its aim of empowering migrant workers through education, it still managed to avoid mentioning this value orientation in later occasions, and succeeded in conforming to the state policy of 'building a harmonious society', as this policy was underway nationally, providing an argument for Organization Colorful to use to match its own with the government's policy direction. The practices of civic education, capacity building, raising the consciousness of civic rights, and enhancing public participation have not been publicly announced by Organization Colorful, they hide behind the government's nodal point of 'building harmonious communities', a point which then absorbs Organization Colorful into its equivalential chain with regard to local state institutions.

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<sup>22</sup> The negotiation is still ongoing as this thesis is being written.

### *The Articulatory Elements in Practice*

One of the principles set by Organization Colorful is never to bribe government officers; therefore, even though Mr. Lucky hinted at this during their negotiations, staff members at Organization Colorful did not take-up the offer. However, members of staff did have a heated discussion as to whether or not to have dinner with the officers, or to go for a drink with them. As a result, the principle of never offering bribes may not work on certain occasions. The bottom-line for the government organizations is that social organizations should be set up legally, and this includes two aspects. The first refers to the legal registration status, which is actually controversial, as the commercial and civil registration processes do not have an equal articulatory function. The second refers to not doing anything that is anti-state or anti-public security/stability. This can also be contentious. Holding a public evening party; for example, might be interpreted as either threatening public security or conversely, enhancing community integration. The variability of this 'bottom line' opens up possibilities for hegemonic practices, negotiations and struggles to develop, and makes the boundaries and linkages between Organization Colorful and the state institutions blurred and fragile. As a result, struggles have occurred at the frontiers of 'no bribery' with Mr. Lucky and 'no anti-government practices/social stability' regarding the evening party.

Second, introductions from such people as school colleagues, friends and relatives of friends have helped bring Organization Colorful and state institutions closer together. The third and fourth articulatory elements are the most critical. The third one

is to provide argumentative practices that match the state policy discourse at the local state level, though such a match does not need to be perfect. The city's local policies in terms of community and social work development have been developed in accordance with the requirements of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, which in turn enacts these policies according to the state policy of 'building a harmonious society'. Organization Colorful's work is focused on providing civic education services to migrant workers and their children. The core practices of Organization Colorful are thus capacity building, consciousness raising and increased participation in public affairs, and it is through this methodology that Organization Colorful has helped transform the inequality experienced by vulnerable migrant workers and their children; however, in practice, Organization Colorful does not have to emphasize these specific concerns, as doing this does not necessarily bring about effective cohesion with local state institutions - in contrast, it may actually produce negative effects. Some officers regard Organization Colorful's work as 'western' in style, as 'not suitable for China', and 'not the responsibility of social organizations'. Thus, the most effective method used has been to emphasize community building and general social work, both of which correspond to local policy requirements such that no additional factors need to be made clear. 'Building harmonious communities' and 'enhancing social work in community centers' have therefore become the nodal points used to strengthen linkages between Organization Colorful and the local state institutions, especially the Bureau of Civil Affairs and the sub-district office. As long as the work of Organization Colorful can be seen to match either one or both of these two requirements, it will be

successful in linking a chain which includes the requirements of being a 'legal social organization', being 'led by government' and 'doing what the government encourages'.

The fourth articulatory element is being able to argue in accordance with the interests of local state institutions. There are two types of interests here; one is administrative or political achievement, which comes from and is judged by superior government authorities, and the other is personal interests. Mr. Lucky stuck to his personal interests, allowing them to marginalize his need for political achievement. Thus political achievement is another critical articulatory element that functions under the aim of 'building harmonious communities' and 'enhancing social work in community centers'. These articulatory elements have provided Organization Colorful with the opportunity to bargain and struggle, as long as their practices fall within the nodal points of the state discourses and remain above the bottom line.

The relationship between Organization Colorful and local state institutions is thus clear; it is not a static or objective relationship, but an interactive one in its constant (re-)construction. Articulatory elements are needed to maintain the relationship in a positive manner, and within these elements two interrelated nodal points sustain the entire relationship framework, as well as the practices within which the process of relation construction takes place. Another set of articulatory elements frame the boundary of the relationship, which is also in constant contention. The rest of the articulatory elements, that is the 'private/personal relations/level of intimacy' (*GuanXi*) and the 'meeting of interests' help construct positive relations, and are the elements

within which the hegemonic status can change through negotiation, bargaining, resistance and struggle.

### **Organization Red: Pro-Forma Consistency and the Hidden Appeal**

Organization Red is also one of the second-level social organizations in the loose network of Mr. Sunny's research centre, and has a close relationship with Organizations Colorful and Green, since it also focuses on the livelihoods of migrant workers. However, similarities and differences exist among the three organizations. In this section, I will analyze how part of the 'new workers' arts' project has been positively linked with the state discourse of 'caring for migrant workers' and turned into a form of Pro-Forma Consistency, under which the other part of the practices such as 'raising class consciousness' have been silenced.

Similar to Organization Colorful, Organization Red is situated in a 'village enclosed by an urban area' (*ChengZhongCun*), that is, a suburban area in City Second in the northern part of China. The institution was established by a group of migrant workers, its aim being to build a utopian-like community that contains schools, hospitals, shops and living areas for migrant workers. Therefore, while Organization Colorful chose to move into this residential area as an outsider, Organization Red, together with the migrant workers, feel that they are being passively isolated more and more from the city centre, as part of the ongoing urbanization process taking place in City Second. Organization Red's current location contains around 1000 local residents and 10,000 migrants (Field notes 200711). The members of Organization Red are all migrant

workers. In 2002, they formed an Art Troupe by writing and performing the songs that express their stories and feelings in the city, including their joy, bitterness, dreams, love, homesickness, friendships and even the hardship of earning a salary. Besides the Art Troupe, in 2005 Organization Red also set up a school for migrant children, those excluded from the urban public education system. Since then, Organization Red has gradually expanded its practices by opening a second-hand shop - where migrant workers can exchange daily commodities at low prices, conducting regular vocational training courses, establishing a museum for migrant workers and setting up an aid centre.

The main financial resources for Organization Red come from project funding provided by international foundations, and naturally, Organization Red is required to meet the targets and standards set by the funding providers, some of whom do have strong reasons for supporting local NGOs, such as wishing to further their agendas inside the country, as the laws and regulations in China do not allow international NGOs to directly undertake projects (Gao and Yuan 2008: 373-399). The international NGOs cannot carry out advocacy on civil rights and class consciousness in the same way as their colleagues in other international or transnational settings; however, they have tried to link with the local social organizations such as Organization Red, in order to disseminate their ideas within China in a different way. Supporting and training Organization Red are thus a way for them to spread their ideas, as they wish to awaken in the migrant workers a sense of class consciousness. However, they have also found that migrant workers often identify with each other, and group together

along home town or kinship lines. Migrant workers also point out that the prevalent descriptions of them in academic research and policy documents neglect their fundamental characteristics. The international NGOs believe that it is only based on a consciousness of their class status and strengths, and the self-confirmation of their value, that the migrant workers can obtain the self-consciousness and confidence necessary to ask for and protect their rights. The international NGOs have thus introduced the ideas of civic rights, empowerment and participatory approaches, leadership-fostering (*PeiYang GuGan*) and the concept of hegemony to Organization Red and the migrant workers who participate in the activities of the organization, during training workshops and other regular activities.

The dream of Organization Red is to build a community of migrant workers, where 'schools, hospitals, shops, and residential areas are built for and of their own, people are equal and sincere to each other and care about each other' (Field notes 200711). For Organization Red, it does not matter too much whether they use the title 'NGO' or not; they use the term to refer to their institution simply because international NGOs, that is, their funding bodies, like this term. The term 'NGO' thus reflects the language and practices that are identified with the discourse used by the international NGOs, and Organization Red stays alert to the intentions and requirements of its funding bodies, plus would be prepared to cut this connection if these other entities' intentions and requirements were to harm its autonomy.



### ***New Workers' Arts and Working Class Consciousness***

Similar to Organization Grey, Organization Red actively uses state policies, state symbolic resources and the public media to justify its own values and ideas. The aims of Organization Red are to raise awareness among migrant workers of their rights and class identity - against capitalism, to enhance their ability to protect their rights and dignity, to attract public attention to caring for migrant workers, and to help migrant workers improve their living conditions.

As for the state, protecting the rights of migrant workers has become politically correct. In the document, *Propositions on Solving the Difficulties of Peasant-migrant Workers*, as issued by the State Council (2006), migrant workers are praised for their significant contribution to the modernization of China; therefore, protecting the rights of migrant workers, caring for them and solving their problems, corresponds to the 'constructing new socialist rural areas' policy, and is necessary for maintaining the overall development, reform and stability situation, plus corresponds to industrialization, urbanization and modernization. The importance of protecting the rights of migrant workers can be seen through the articulation of policies which connect this issue with national economic and social development.

Protecting the rights of and caring for migrant workers are covered by state policies, in order to guarantee social stability and the ongoing development model of industrialization, modernization and urbanization. In contrast, although Organization Red has as its aim to protect the rights of and care for migrant workers, its underlying purpose is to fight capitalism. According to Organization Red's understanding, migrant

workers could become the new working class in the future. In order to become a class for, of and by themselves, three conditions must be satisfied: (i). that they are working people in terms of productive relations, (ii) that there is enlightened class consciousness among the people, and (iii) that there are proper methods in place for organizing the people. Currently, working people in productive relations have already emerged in China; for example, the tasks of Organization Red are to create the other two conditions. The unspoken purpose of the practices of Organization Red, such as protecting rights through art performances and building migrant workers' own communities, is to unite Chinese migrant workers into a new working class and fight against capitalism (follow-up email query 201105).

Organization Red has tried to achieve this by carrying out cultural activities as a starting point; for example, one popular way has been to have workers write songs of their own and perform them in front of a large number of migrant workers at festivals or parties. In the lyrics book of Organization Red, the words and phrases 'hometown', 'we/us', 'brother and sister', 'tiring and dirty work', 'low and small rooms', 'unification' (*TuanJie*), 'glorious', 'vitality' and 'self-esteem', are often connected together to refer to migrant workers, while the words 'cities', 'they', 'beautiful clothes', 'lack of understanding', 'tall buildings and magnificent bridges' are joined together to describe the people and 'mainstream' lifestyles in the cities. Accordingly, the words 'Honda and Jetta cars' and 'big campus' represent urban children, while 'vending cycles' and 'small and dark classrooms' symbolize migrant children. Through such expressions, groups of migrant workers, as a coherent set of people who share similar experiences

and interests, can be established. City residents and their urban life experiences are conceived as 'the other' outside of migrant workers' experiences; however, the distinction between these two camps is transformable. It is stated in the organization's lyrics that it is actually the migrant workers who build the tall buildings, produce the beautiful clothes and construct the spacious streets in the cities; therefore, a hope for respect and a reorganization of their values is expressed.

In addition to the performances of its Art Troupe, Organization Red also organizes vocational classes and group activities. The key point of organizing vocational classes is not to help migrant workers to get diplomas, but to give them the chance to develop a level of knowledge about Organization Red and become conscious of their own class status.

In studying class relations in a Malay village, Scott sensitively identifies three reasons for the cultural practice of undercutting the dominant culture by subordinate groups. (1990: 157-160) His three reasons shed light on the three ways in which Organization Red has created a culture around migrant workers from 2002 onwards, and the construction of this workers' culture is still going on. 'The distinctiveness of subordinate group[s]' cultural expression is created in large part by the fact that in this realm at least, the process of cultural selection is relatively democratic' (Scott 1990: 157). Hard work, perseverance, an eagerness for freedom and equality, and migrant workers' dreams etc., are chosen to be key elements of the songs, which not only express the grievances, but also benign hope. In this way, the unequal reality faced by the migrant workers is balanced.

Second, a hegemonic culture usually causes subordinate groups to 'worship a standard that is impossible for them to achieve' (Scott 1990: 158), and as a method of resistance, the practice of singing songs in Organization Red contributes to the construction of a positive collective culture that is the migrant workers' own, as those who create the prosperities of modern China but live an unequal life in contrast with the urban people in the capitalist system.

Third, the 'polyvalent symbolism and metaphor' of cultural expression has provided the space for the new workers' arts project to constitute its Pro-Forma Consistency with the state discourse of 'caring for migrant workers' (*Ibid.* 158). The cultural activities of Organization Red thus differ from the direct practices of protesting on rights, as the latter usually causes exertion of the state's coercive power, while the former can be hidden. The direct practices of protesting on rights are carried out by Organization Green, which will be explained in the next section. As for Organization Red, thanks to the polyvalent characteristic of cultural expressions, the emphasis on cultural activities can be explained by the fact that migrant workers all try their best to live a better life.

In 2004 and 2005, some cities and provinces hosted ceremonies to select and praise outstanding migrant workers, those revealing a positive spirit. The leader of Organization Red, Mr. Insist, who was once a migrant worker himself, was given six awards, and this state recognition has since granted Organization Red a legitimate base upon which to carry out its further activities. Moreover, the Art Troupe it formed

has been interviewed on a number of occasions by the public media<sup>23</sup>. The leader of Organization Red once expressed his views by saying that ‘Government support is very important in China’s context. It would be difficult to carry out something without the support of the government. Compared with financial support, the honor offered by the government is more valuable since it is a way of affirmation and permission (*KenDing*)’. (Field notes 200711)

While ‘building a harmonious society’, ‘solving the problems of migrant workers’ and ‘caring for migrant workers’ are set as the nodal points among state discourses, the local neighborhood committee area in which Organization Red is located does not have any concrete work to do. The emptiness of the state discourse regarding migrant workers rests in the fact that local state institutions do not know what to do when they are faced with state policies that have a large range. Similar to Organization Colorful, Organization Red also cooperates with its local neighborhood committee office, which would like to have some say over its activities, and is eager to receive praise from upper-state institutions. In return, through this cooperation Organization Red obtains permission to carry out its activities, some of which are even official tasks such as ‘family planning’ – from the local neighborhood committee. Further to this, Organization Red does not reveal too much about its ultimate purpose - building a community of its own based on the unification of migrant workers - to the local officers.

Pro-Forma Consistency has been constructed between Organization Red and the state plus local state institutions. Although the connotations of the state’s ‘protecting

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<sup>23</sup> The media here includes CCTV, Hong Kong Phoenix TV, Beijing Satellite TV, He Bei Satellite TV, He Nan Satellite TV and People’s Daily.

migrant workers' rights and caring for migrant workers' policy and the new workers' arts project are not the same, due to the immense representative extension of the nodal point of 'caring for migrant workers', the new workers' arts project has been easily articulated in line with the policy key words which are supportive of state discourse. At the local state level, the interests of the neighborhood committee have also been satisfied by attributing all the achievements of the Organization's cultural activities to the committee.

### **Organization Green: 'Routine Repression' and Partial Pro-Forma Consistency**

Organization Green is located in City Fifth, in the Pearl Delta of China, where industrial relations are worse than in City Second and City Fourth (Field notes 200912). Although it does not belong to the hierarchy of social organizations under Mr. Sunny's research centre, Green has a close relationship with Organization Colorful, and the staff members of both organizations have got to know each other through the training courses held by Organization Red. Ms. Hey of Organization Colorful has even supported migrant workers from Organization Colorful, those who want to move to City Fifth, by allowing them to work at Organization Green.

Ms. Hey visited Organization Green after a conference on 'Education: NGOs Experience Sharing' in City Fifth. Organization Green is only commercially registered; it is not able to register with the Bureau of Civil Affairs, because its core work is highly sensitive in terms of Chinese politics. Organization Green does not do anything else except help migrant workers whose rights have been infringed through the legal

arbitration or lawsuit processes. The purpose of Organization Green is not only to protect the legal rights of migrant workers, but also to help them study the law in terms of the arbitration and lawsuit process. Organization Green is also situated in a suburban area where industrial plants are grouped together.

Similar to Organization Red, Organization Green's members are all previous migrant workers who once got into legal trouble of some sort. The difference is that Organization Green has a legal expert at hand who was sent by its sponsor organization in Hong Kong; and this legal adviser regularly attends the weekly meetings held by Organization Green. While Organization Red's strategy is to carry out cultural activities, Organization Green's focus is on legal rights protection. Normally, migrant workers who need legal aid will either call the staff members of Organization Green or come to Organization Green directly. The staff members thus explain the points of the cases to the workers and assist them in the legal process, such as going to Labor Supervision Bureau and the courts. The ultimate purpose of Organization Green is to empower migrant workers so that they are capable of dealing with lawsuits by themselves at the end of the legal aid process.

Organization Green is in a constant and overt struggle with the local police and the local branch of the National Security Bureau, though, interestingly, it has not been closed down yet. The local police station always sends policemen to keep an eye on the events and activities taking place at Organization Green. Organization Green keeps several copies of its legal documentation, since the information held in the office computer is frequently deleted by the local authorities.

Organization Green has several tips for dealing with policemen and officers of the National Security Bureau, whom Organization Green calls ‘good friends’. One is that whenever a ‘good friend’ comes to challenge staff members at the Organization’s office or asks them to go with them for questioning<sup>24</sup>, staff members simply repeat the routine information about the organization that is openly available on their leaflets. If the official continues to push them, the staff may say that he or she is not clear enough. Full-time staff members are specially trained to deal with the visits of these ‘good friends’. Second, it is better to make copies of all the documentation, all the time, and third, staff members must be wary or cautious of questions regarding other social organizations, and may simply answer ‘I don’t know’, as the officers frequently try to ask one organization about the activities of another. Fourth, the staff members have already found a way to identify those ‘good friends’ who are in disguise, as they often disguise themselves as workers participating in the activities held by Organization Green. However, they are not very difficult to identify, as they are generally plump, do not make eye contact, pay close attention to their surroundings, and ask strange questions unlikely to be asked by real migrant workers. If a member of staff identifies one of them and hints that he or she has been identified, then they will stop the investigation; because they fear being openly identified, as it means that they have made a big mistake while on duty and will certainly be punished.

The relationship between Organization Green and the state organizations is totally different from the other organizations discussed so far. Interventions, and sometimes

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<sup>24</sup> Chinese people use the phrase ‘tea talk’ or ‘tea time’ (*Qing Hecha*) to describe a situation in which someone is taken away to a police office or an office of the National Security Bureau.



violent interventions, from the police and National Security Bureau take place regularly; however, Organization Green still exists. No actual positive link has been made between them and the local state organizations, and there is always an articulatory gap between them.

The local government authorities have not found a fatal defect in Organization Green yet, yet different from Organization Red, Green participates directly in rights protection for migrant workers by fighting specific law cases, sometimes challenging the illegal behavior of local companies. However, local state institutions do feel under pressure, and they would like to prevent Organization Green from leading a revolt of collective actions against right violation in City Fifth, as for them, social stability outweighs everything. This is the 'political no-go zone' for the Chinese state; social contradictions, social appeals and oppositional ideas must not be expressed in the form of social collective action, as this might not only arouse intense public scrutiny, but also potentially lead to social riot. Social stability in this situation means avoiding the occurrence of these events through the use of daily repression.

Although Organizations Green and Red are different in their main tasks, Organization Green has been influenced by Organization Red's idea to raise the class consciousness of migrant workers through cultural activities. As well as rights protection, Organization Green also runs cultural activities as advocated by Organization Red. Organization Green has two offices, of which one is for legal consultations and the other is used for cultural activities. Songs written at Organization Red are copied on to big posters which are stuck on the wall; with lyrics

changed slightly to match local conditions. Whenever the original words are about City Second - where Organization Red is located, they are changed to match the position in City Fifth. One young staff member at Organization Green, who is also a migrant worker, refers to people there as a collective, as 'our entire group (*WoMen ZhengGe QunTi*). Similar to Organization Red, the phrase 'working class' is not publicly used by Organization Green; however, the idea of a collective group such as this exists.

In the case of Organization Green, Pro-Forma Consistency has not been completely achieved at the local state level. Routine repression happens all the time in the form of the state disturbing the daily work activities of the Organization, carrying out disguised inspections, destroying documents and making oral threats. In response, daily confrontational resistance also happens. Unlike Organization Grey, Organization Green has not been completely shut-down by the violent behavior of the local state agents, though Organization Green cannot copy Organization Grey and re-articulate itself with local state institutions, since the deviant practices of Organization Green cannot be hidden. However, the violence wrought by the routine repression is not as terrible as might be imagined, so it is hard to say whether Pro-Forma Consistency has been totally broken at the discourse level in this case. A fatal attack on Organization Green has not been carried out yet; the Organization carries on its daily tasks of rights protection, which actually conform to state policy discourse related to protecting migrant workers' rights, and in this sense, the rights protection practices carried out by Organization Green enjoy a partial conformity with the state at the discourse level.

## A Brief Discussion at Discourse Level: a non-Political Frontier

### *The Two-and-a-half Discourses: neo-rural reconstruction, building migrant workers' class consciousness and popular education*

As mentioned in Chapter two, although the five cases I have used in this thesis were not selected according to a representative sampling strategy, they *were* selected according to their illustrative potential. On the one hand, all of them except Organization Orange were set up without any official backing or resources, though even Orange originally developed its own plan. On the other hand, these organizations are non-institutionally connected to each other through their everyday practices. As a whole, they share at different levels a symbolic resource – the well-known intellectual Mr. Sunny, who acts as a channel linking these organizations with the state's discourse.

However, the five social organizations covered here have not constructed their different practices into a unified political frontier *vis-à-vis* the state, but have preferred to develop their practices and values under a Pro-Forma Consistency framework, as covered by the nodal points contained within state policies. In this way, conflicts can be avoided. The five organizations have also developed their values and practices into two-and-a-half discourses, and by making them agreeable with the discourses of the central state, they have succeeded in developing room to create their own.

First, a 'neo-rural reconstruction' discourse has been developed underneath the state policy related to the construction of new socialist rural areas, such that the term

'neo-rural reconstruction' has become a nodal point embracing a variety of practices, practices loosely connected but forming a big 'chain of equivalence' under which the differences between the practices and the organizations are put aside temporarily. In the early 2000s, 'neo-rural reconstruction' was a concept proposed by Mr. Sunny and was practiced by Grey and some other social organizations, including Organization Orange and Red. Ecological farming, peasant cooperative associations and popular education formed the core of this discourse. Its value orientation is to search for an alternative development approach in rural areas, one other than the mainstream development approach of transgenic agriculture, modernization, industrialization of agricultural production, and globalization of capitalism (Field notes 200507). The practices of Colorful, Red and Orange are considered a part of this neo-rural reconstruction approach, and merging work related to caring for migrant workers into this 'neo-rural reconstruction' discourse has allowed an extension of the organizations' work.

As well as the 'neo-rural reconstruction' discourse, the discourse 'constructing a new working class' is in development. Though Organization Red belongs to Mr. Sunny's research office framework, it is also in the lead in terms of 'constructing the new working class discourse' through the promotion of its new workers' art project. Organizations Colorful and Green are two organizations among many migrant worker social organizations that have joined with Red's plan, while they also have their own ways of working.

The interactive relationship among Organizations Red, Colorful and Green contains

two particular channels. The First channel of interaction is inviting the Organization Red's Art Troupe to perform in City Fourth and City Fifth, where Organizations Colorful and Green are located.

The second channel is the training seminars held by Organization Red, which are designed to meet the needs of different groups. One of the seminars is held in order for full-time NGO workers to enhance their capabilities in terms of carrying out projects and activities, and the second is held for full-time NGO workers, migrant worker volunteers and active participants. This latter seminar focuses on training the methods used to organize popular drama activities (*MinZhong XiJu*), as they believe that popular drama helps migrant workers to reflect on their lives and their social environment, allowing them to express their daily thoughts and feelings in an organizational way, an exercise which will ultimately contribute towards raising class consciousness. The third type of training is a half-year course held for migrant workers, one which targets their basic community social work methods. The purpose of this training is to help migrant workers take care of their own community.

By holding these training courses, Organization Red is trying to raise the consciousness of migrant workers regarding their rights, and uniting them as one 'family' through cultural activities. However, the training activities are practiced behind the stage, out of sight. The information given out during these two activities is never put on the internet - to recruit members, neither is it open to the public. The core purpose of raising class consciousness is explained and practiced during the training courses. This does not mean that it is not intended for the public to achieve this goal,

just that the goal is not overtly expressed.

The new workers' art project takes the practical form of a variety of cultural activities and is the nodal point that unifies different practices. Actually, the practices carried out by Colorful are quite different from those performed by Red and Green<sup>25</sup>, as it believes that it is only through education that migrant workers can be prepared to seek a better life, either in the cities or in rural areas, when they are too old to work on the production lines or building sites. The short-term courses provided by Organization Colorful emphasize the values of civic virtue, such as cooperation and equality, democratic participation, self-reflection and study capacity. As a result, the practices carried out and values held by Colorful do not have a strong sense of class, glory or workers' confidence; however, these differences are suppressed in the sense that Colorful can still be part of the chain of equivalence during the construction of new workers' art. By connecting with the state policy of caring for migrant workers, the new workers' art project promotes a positive image of migrant workers - as people who are energetic, live a better life through hard work, have self-confidence and have self-respect. Underneath state policies, the practice of raising class awareness among migrant workers is carried out implicitly. Besides arts activities, Organization Green also directly participates in the law suits to help migrant workers fight for their

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<sup>25</sup> During the training sessions held at Organization Red, some of Organization Colorful's staff members sometimes feel uneasy, since the atmosphere in the training center is usually full of passion; fighting in support of rights. As a result, the dignity and glory of migrant workers are praised highly. In such an atmosphere, the identity of a migrant worker is the mainstream position while other social identities such as being an intellectual, an officer or an urban dweller, are marginalized. Mr. Wood, who was also born in a rural area in the southern part of China, was educated to the postgraduate level. He felt that he was disrespected at one training course held by Organization Red, when he was called 'Mr. Query's shadow' (*XiaoDi*). Another member of staff, Ms. Yan, who was once a migrant worker herself, also felt uneasy in a training course at Organization Red, when she was questioned about the utility of popular education carried out in Organization Colorful - whether migrant workers are even able to protect their basic rights, such as receiving a proper salary and working legal hours according to the Labor Law. She felt that the value of Organization Colorful's work had not been properly assessed by the trainers and by members of Organization Red.

rights.

Organizations Red, Colorful and Green are all social organizations that serve migrant workers. This similarity bring them together to a certain degree in terms of cooperation and interaction; nevertheless, they still maintain a difference, one which is based on the specific value orientations of each, yet this does not prevent them from being part of the state's 'caring for migrant workers' discourse.

Actually, although Organizations Colorful, Red and Green are different in terms of their value orientation, Organization Colorful has learned a lot from the latter two. The activities that Organization Colorful has studied are very diverse and include karaoke, dancing, mountain climbing, outdoor sports, Valentine's Day parties, Labor Law roundtable discussions, and popular dramas. All these activities are carried out by the migrant workers themselves, though not all activities are implemented with the intention of raising class consciousness or to criticize the reality of the migrant workers' situation. However, although the activities carried out by Organization Colorful, Red and Green are not all the same, some of their common activities do create the opportunity for migrant workers to reflect on their lives and unite together.

During the parties held by Organization Red; for example, the songs written by the Art Troupe members express the migrant workers' identities, using phrases such as 'glorious migrant workers', 'we are one family', 'our dream will come true' and the 'sad story of a brother', and these songs are performed frequently. However, some of these popular songs are avoided by Organization Red. During Organization Red and Green's cultural activities, there is a preference or prohibition placed upon cultural

activities; whereas in Organization Colorful, popular songs, popular dancing and migrant workers' songs are all welcome<sup>26</sup>.

The differences between Organization Colorful, Red and Green highlight the difficulties to be found in their alliance – given that they hold different values and carry out different practices.

A discourse still under development is the discourse of 'popular education' held by Organization Colorful. However, this discourse is less near to being completed than the above two: 'neo-rural reconstruction' and 'constructing a new working class'; and the idea of popular education has not yet managed to become a nodal point - embracing various practices under a certain scope.

### *A non-Political Frontier*

Three theoretical implications can be drawn from the above analysis. First, although both the left leaning and liberal civil society theories have not been used as analytical frameworks due to limitations in their analytical capacity, some of the practices carried out by the five social organizations reflect values held by the left leaning and the liberal civil society models. The legacies of Marxism and liberal democracy are thus still influential; nevertheless, the ways in which these values are implemented, especially in terms of interactions with the state, are neither Marxist nor liberal democratic in nature, but rather post-Marxist. While Organization Colorful holds liberal democratic values, Organizations Red and Green typically hold interpretations of

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<sup>26</sup> During the popular drama activities held by Organization Colorful, workers perform dramas to reflect the most memorable events in their lives; for example, once a worker showed how he had tried to save money by working hard for a month to buy a multi-functional mobile phone, and when this was performed, no one questioned if it was right for workers to have to work so hard, while white-collar workers might be able to buy a mobile phone much more easily.



Marxist class analysis. Organization Colorful has intentionally placed the values of democracy, civic virtue and equality into its group activities; those participated-in by both the migrant workers and local residents. At the same time, Organization Colourful does not agree to reinforce the 'apartheid' between the local residents and the migrant workers by labeling them respectively.

In contrast, in Organizations Red and Green, Chinese migrant workers are seen as the new working class – those who must unite together to fight for their rights against the industrial capitalists in China. However, migrant workers do not automatically formulate into a coherent class according to their economic relationship with capitalism, so that the construction of a working class consciousness has followed a Gramscian methodology. Organizations Red and Green, through their educational project, thus attach the logic behind the capitalist mode of production to the cultural practices implemented.

The neo-rural reconstruction discourse also holds an anti-capitalism viewpoint; however, the organizations refuse to be labeled as leftists, and in fact refuse to become involved in an ideological debate (Field notes 200709). Therefore, instead of using 'Marxist' or 'leftist' when referring to them, I use 'anti-capitalism', as this is a more acceptable name to use. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, alternative methods of development are searched for and experimented with by the people involved, and there are generally two ways in which anti-capitalism manifests itself here; through advocating organic farming and an ecological way of living, and by helping peasants to form cooperatives so that they can bargain with large brokers in

the market place, and to establish mutual help relations in rural communities. The first approach targets the problem of capitalism from a non-production relations basis, while the second aims to change the current relationship of production, within which peasants are exploited, as agricultural production, exchange and consumption are already capitalized. These elements of Marxism and liberal democratic values are not acceptable to the Chinese state, and so differences from state discourses are prevented from being fully expressed.

The second theoretical point is that, under the Pro-Forma consistency model between the social organizations and the state, the discourses of the social organizations and the state are entwined, and this has three aspects. First, the state policy discourses of building up a new socialist rural area and caring for migrant workers, plus the social organizations' discourses of neo-rural reconstruction, the new workers' art project and popular education, are mixed together in such a way that they end up belonging to the same bundle of ideas and values. This is exactly how the nodal points within the state's policies work. Under the unifying hegemony of these nodal points, internal discursive elements end up being in concordance with one another.

Third, this entanglement does not mean that the discursive elements are permanently in an unchanging congruent relation. In the construction of the entangled discourses, the central state, as a coherent entity, obtains its hegemonic status. At the discourse level, state policies are never overtly opposed, disputed or challenged, yet at the daily practice level, power struggles occur all the time. The concrete, daily

practices of social organizations contribute simultaneously to reinforce the state's discourse and to challenge the emptiness of its policy nodal points as well. When differences between the actual practices reify themselves to the extent that the nodal points are no longer able to control them, the discourse will be broken. In terms of daily confrontations, these break-ups usually occur at the failed articulatory points; however, at the discourse level, there have so far been no serious break-ups within the state discourse of 'building a harmonious socialist society', including the sub-aspects of constructing new socialist rural areas and caring for migrant workers.

The discourses developed by the social organizations have their own political elements, not all of which are addressed by the state's discourses; however, they do not come together to form a unified political frontier. On the one hand, it is safe for the social organizations to develop their discourses under the Pro-Forma Consistency framework with the state, but on the other, current there is no reason for the two-and-a-half discourses created by the social organizations to unify into one approach.

## CONCLUSION: PRO-FORMA CONSISTENCY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

### Summary of the Findings: three phases of Pro-Forma Consistency

In this thesis, the interactive practices between the Chinese state and the five social organizations were studied, in order to develop a confined but meaningful interpretation of how the state control and autonomy of social organizations operate at the same time. Key people in these interactions, such as Mr. Query, Mr. Insist, Mr. Sunny and Ms. Hey were described, as were the interesting stories behind how the five social organizations articulate their relationships with the Chinese state in relation the dislocations linked to the 'three rural problems'.

The missions of Organizations Grey and Orange are to experiment with alternative rural development strategies, such as the establishment of peasant cooperatives and the carrying-out of organic farming. The distinctive stories behind Organization Grey include its successful articulation with state discourse with respect to constructing new, socialist rural areas, as a way to create a harmonious, socialist society, the breaking of the articulated Pro-Forma Consistency model, and the re-construction of this articulation. The story of Organization Orange is related to its institutional absorption into the state system, which has led to excessive Pro-Forma Consistency and which has lefts no room available for its autonomy. Organizations Colorful, Red and Green work with migrant workers, and so how Organization Colorful has maneuvered its way through the registration process and connected itself with the state in terms of 'building harmonious communities' is of particular interest. As for Organization Red, its practices linking the 'new workers' arts' project and the need to care for migrant

workers will also be outlined. The particular stories behind Organization Green are its constant resistance against the routine repressions exerted by the local state institutions. The findings of the thesis can be summarized in the following table:

**Table 2: Pro-Forma Consistency – Based on the Five Study Social Organizations**

Pro-Forma Consistency (Non-Political Frontier)	Locally Broken	Re-articulated:  1) In another place: Organization Grey  2) Through another channels: Organization Colorful
		'Routine repression' of coercive practices: Organizations Green and Grey
	Excessively Constructed	At the state discourse level - 'double-edged sword': Organization Grey
		At the local state level - institutionally absorbed and with autonomy temporarily lost: Organization Orange
	Temporarily Constructed	1. Personal connections as intermediaries
		2. Bottom-line consistency  3. Key word policy consistency  4. Matching political achievements

Within the five social organizations, power struggles take place, but the state is in a dominant position, as its national policies represent the legitimating resource which social organizations must be seen to follow. Overt challenges to the state are not likely to happen; however, the dominant status of the state is not static, so within their daily struggles, social organizations find ways to develop their own values underneath the pro-forma compliance with state authorities. In order to maintain their existence and develop their own social and political values, social organizations must be congruent with the state at both the local and state discourse level. Through the four articulatory elements mentioned previously, the state and the social organizations are integrated as if a coherent whole, under the state's three aims of 'building a harmonious socialist society...', 'building new socialist new rural areas', and 'caring for migrant workers'. On the one hand, the hegemonic position of the state is reproduced through the partially obedient practices of the social organizations, while on the other, such Pro-Forma Consistency between the Chinese state and the social organizations provides legitimacy and room for the latter to develop their own values and practices, those which do not completely coincide with the state's intentions.

There are three phases to the development of Pro-Forma consistency, the first being when successful Pro-Forma Consistency is first formed, during which time the articulatory elements mentioned above are satisfied. However, Pro-Forma Consistency may change, as long as the practices of the state and the social organizations are still carried out as part of a discursive construction, since their

interactions are internally continuous procedures.

Organization Red is a successful case in the sense that it has established a smooth relationship with local state institutions, but as for 'bottom line consistency', Red is only commercially registered but has a business scope which includes cultural performances such as singing and dancing; their band even carries out commercial performances. As a result, policy consistency and the matching of political achievements have been accomplished successfully. Similarly to Organization Colorful, Red has matched itself with state policies at both the national and local levels. For example, through media reports, Red states that its cultural performances correspond to the state policy of caring for migrant workers. In reflection of this, the honor of 'outstanding migrant worker' was won by the leader of Red, helping it be accepted at the municipal level. Also, Red has taken on tasks from the neighbourhood committee, such as advocating a 'family plan' policy and helping to build a harmonious community, and these political achievements have been attributed to the neighbourhood committee itself.

The second phase occurs when Pro-Forma Consistency is broken locally, as has happened to Organizations Grey, Colorful and Green in relation to their 'bottom-line consistency' and 'matching of political achievements' at the local state level. There have been two results of this rupture; one being the need to re-articulate the practices of both the state and the social organizations into a new form of Pro-Forma Consistency, and the second being to work with the openly repressive and resistance practices exercised during everyday life.

Organization Grey at one point had to shut-down due to an only partially successful articulation. Although no policy consistency was needed at the village and county levels, at the national level it was, and Grey thought it could borrow state policies to justify its practices. However, Grey's struggle was its 'illegal status' on which the official charges were very clear and specific: 'Grey illegally used agricultural land for ecological constructions; and illegally enrolled peasant trainees outside the village into training programs, which exceeded the registered scope of the business' (Participant interview Mr. Sunny 200710). These charges reveal that the local municipal government viewed the practices of Organization Grey as illegal. Thus, training courses run for peasants across the country were seen as helping to bring them together, and this was interpreted as a challenge to social stability. (Participant interview Mr. Sunny 200710)

In the case of Organization Grey, when the local state believed that it was not obeying the official, registered scope of the business, the organization changed its bottom-line and matched the political achievement requirements of the local state in order to maintain social stability as a priority. Later, Organization Grey successfully re-articulated its relationship with the local state in another location, such that the articulatory failure in the previous location did not have a negative impact on its continuous articulations elsewhere. Organization Grey shows that broken Pro-Forma Consistency is limited geographically, thus can be re-established in a new location where the context is different. As a result, articulatory consistencies can be established all over again.



Organization Green is in a continuous struggle with local state organizations, and similar to Grey, fractures have occurred in the official bottom line. Violent conflicts such as 'destroying organizational computers', 'face-to-face quarrels between the police and the staff members' and 'invitations for tea at the local Security Bureau' have become common events (Participant group interview 200912), meaning that policy consistency and 'matching political achievements' have lost their articulatory effectiveness in this case. It openly expresses its intention to fight for workers' rights, and so cannot avoid confrontation. Compared to rights protection, the issue of social stability has a heavier meaning; therefore, Pro-Forma Consistency is unlikely to be sewed; and so daily inspections and interruptions occur frequently.

As for Organization Colorful, its bottom-line regarding the different attitudes towards bribes was broken at the beginning between it and the local neighborhood committee. With the help of personal connections, later it successfully achieved key-word policy consistency and thus built a harmonious community by enhancing community social work. However, it did provide the local district Bureau of Civil Affairs with useful reports which were used as proof of the political achievements of the Bureau.

Nevertheless, in these three cases, Pro-Forma Consistency has not been broken at the state discourse level, so all three organizations still have the opportunity to develop themselves.

The third phase in Pro-Forma Consistency refers to the excessive consistency formulated at either the state discourse or local state level, as has happened to Organizations Grey and Orange. Organization Grey achieved excessive Pro-Forma

Consistency with state discourse at the discourse level in relation to the nodal point of 'constructing new socialist rural areas', and the impacts of this excessive consistency were double-edged. The specialty of the deviant practices carried out by Organization Grey has since been further repressed by the dominant representation of the nodal point of state discourse, while it has also provided a stronger argument for Organization Grey to justify its practices.

Organization Orange represents a case of excessive consistency. The excessive consistency occurred at the local institutional level, and as a result the autonomy of the Organization was totally lost initially, and state control took over, as the institutional structure of Organization Orange was subsumed into the local state system. Bottom line and policy consistency, personal connections, and a matching of political achievements were unproblematic issues when Orange was established, but since then the organization has 'over-accomplished'. As presented in Chapters four and five, Orange intended to do something other than 'welcoming...visiting officers', and hosting a 'reception of the official conferences' (Participant interview Ms. Ling 200903); however, as the head of Orange is a local officer and the organizations' plans are approved by high level officers, so the local government has full hegemonic status - Orange has no autonomy at all. In this case, there has been no room for Orange to develop its own and different practices underneath the consistency with the state. This form of consistency does not represent Pro-Forma Consistency, it is full absorption.

As long as Pro-Forma Consistency at the discourse level is not broken, there are

still opportunities for social organizations to re-construct their consistency with local state institutions; however, if excessive consistency is constructed at the local, institutional level, then the autonomy of social organizations is likely to disappear.

### **The Relationship between the Four Articulatory Elements**

‘Personal connections as intermediaries’, ‘bottom-line consistency’, ‘key-word policy consistency’ and ‘matching political achievements’ are the four articulatory elements that form the basis of Pro-Forma Consistency. In some situations, they must work together for it to be achieved, while in some other situations, only some of them are required. Excessive alignment may create a break in the consistency framework, for any articulatory practices of the elements.

#### ***Personal Connections as Intermediaries***

Personal connections do not constitute Pro-Forma Consistency alone, but function to create mutual trust among the social organizations and the state officers. This is one step towards endorsing the congruence related to ‘we are identical’. Such personal connections are not the same as the concept of *GuanXi* - in its instrumental meaning related to Chinese capitalism (Yang 2002: 463-464, 474-475). Since Pro-Forma Consistency cannot be achieved through personal connections alone, the reciprocal exchange of a full *GuanXi* network is not formed. The personal connections discussed in this thesis do not contribute to the construction of a moral community, one with obligations and sentiment (Yan 1996: 1-25), but help to bring strangers into

contact with each other through third persons known or identified by both state officers and the staff of social organizations. On the basis of personal connections, bottom lines, key words and the requirement to attain political achievements can be achieved through daily communications between state officers and the staff of social organizations.

For example, Organization Colorful successfully applies personal connections, such that a policeman, a police officer and an officer of the Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs are consulted during its activities. Organization Colorful thus understands the reason for not telling the local policemen about all their public activities, the importance of registering as a private non-enterprise unit to avoid misunderstandings with local state officials, the ineffectiveness of arguing about the vulnerability of internal migrants in terms of civic education, and the importance of emphasizing the political achievements of local state officers.

In contrast, Organizations Grey, Red and Green lack this intermediary element. Organization Grey; for example, did not have any personal connections with whom to inquire as to why a local Education Bureau was closed down. In the case of Red, it does not need to rely on personal connections, while in the case of Green, it faces violent conflicts every day, such that broken consistency cannot be rearticulated by personal connections. In the case of Orange, its personal connections, together with other articulatory elements led to an excessive consistency forming, such that a local state officer who supported Orange assigned another officer to be its head, and as a result, Orange became excessively subject to state institutions.

### *Bottom Line Consistency, Key Words Policy Consistency and Matching Political Achievements*

These three articulatory elements are inter-connected with each other, such that the successful construction of consistency with state discourse not only depends on the sensitivity of the social organizations' practices to these elements, but also lays with the level of ambition within the state discourse in terms of 'building a harmonious socialist society'. Therefore, the three articulatory elements can be observed to be in a constantly fluid state.

Bottom line consistency first means that social organizations and different levels of state institutions both have their own 'bottom lines'. Since the state is in the hegemonic position, usually, it is the social organization that caters to the bottom line of the state. Only Organization Colorful refused to bribe. Second, the matching of these bottom lines is not a once-and-for-all practice, but is an on-going process. According to the cases of Organizations Grey, Colorful and Green, the bottom line must be met both legally and politically. By 'legally', it means that social organizations must obey the written rules and regulations of China. By 'politically', it means that social organizations must also carry out self-censorship to avoid the possibilities of violating social stability. As it has been explained in chapter three, maintaining social stability is a crucial political task faced by all levels of Chinese governments. The legal and political aspects together form the bottom-line for social organizations to keep.

Matching the key words - the nodal points of state policy discourse, means that social organizations need to be positively connected with the general state policy of

‘building a harmonious socialist society’ and other relevant expressions, such as ‘caring for migrant workers’ and ‘constructing new socialist rural areas’. However, it does not mean that there is any need to match the policies with absolute accuracy.

Now there is something tricky between ‘bottom-line consistency’ and ‘key word policy consistency’. The paradox comes from the fact that ‘building a harmonious socialist society’ and ‘maintaining social stability’ with violent and coercive state power are the two sides of the same coin.

In some literature, the emptiness of state discourse is understood to be ‘political ambiguity’, which is difficult for social organizations to understand and grasp (Yang 2005: 56; Kwong 2004: 1073-1088; Zhang and Baum 2004: 97-107). This explanation is meaningful but not deep enough because it fails to reveal why the politics is ambiguous. In Chapter three, it has been investigated that the state discourse of ‘building a harmonious socialist society’, and the emphasis on harmonious, people-centered and sustainable development is the policy response of the current Chinese party-state towards the social problem of a widening gap in people’s incomes and livelihoods, and the pressure exerted by sustainable development policies coming from the international community (Dickson 2004: 141-156; Lai 2006: 71-72). Nevertheless, in order to make sure that the ‘mythical fullness’ of a harmonious society (Laclau 2005: 115) is not challenged or broken, the Chinese state also maintains a conformity and an effective capacity to use its coercive power to cope with political dissidents, riots, protests and other events labeled as illegal and as acting against social stability. Illegal events are explicitly not consistent with the goal

of building a harmonious society; thus, it becomes a matter of interpretation as to whether the dissensions, protests and other forms of resistance are for or against a harmonious society, and this interpretational legitimacy is only in the hands of the state authorities. The vagueness of the terms 'building a harmonious socialist society' and 'protecting social stability' sometimes means the two conspire to justify the legitimacy of coercive activities applied by the state when the chain of equivalence connecting it and the social organizations is broken. In such cases, the coercive actions of the state towards the social organizations are justified in terms of protecting social stability and guaranteeing the existence of a harmonious society.

Due to the emptiness of the discourse on 'building a harmonious socialist society' and the changing interpretations of the state, sometimes social organizations bear great pressure to balance 'bottom-line consistency' and 'key word policy consistency'. On the one hand, it is enough for social organizations to just use key words to constitute consistency with the state policy discourse. By doing so, though under the suppression of the state discourse, social organizations have the space to develop their own values in everyday practices, which might be different or even against the state discourse. However, on the other hand, since the policy consistency is made only on key words, social organizations have to be cautious of not breaking the bottom line consistency of 'maintaining social stability', when practicing their own values.

As a result, in the different contexts of the five case study organizations, the three articulatory elements work differently. When the existing 'key word consistency' loses

its articulatory function due to changes in terms of political interpretations, and the social organizations fail to respond by changing their positions accordingly, the 'bottom line consistency' may also be challenged.

The fourth articulatory element is to work in accordance with the needs of the political achievements of state institutions. As a consequence of the paradoxical relationship between 'bottom line consistency' and 'key word policy consistency', the required political achievements of each local state bureaucratic unit, also need to change to agree with the new political interpretations.

'Bottom line consistency', 'personal connections', 'key-word consistency' and 'matching political achievements' are the four articulatory elements that connect social organizations and the state together; allowing them to construct them an equivalent whole. As social organizations are articulated in connection with state organizations through Pro-Forma Consistency, so a sense of 'we are on the same side' is created. The vagueness that does exist refers to the existence of differential points between the social and the state organizations, such that differences are neither eliminated nor exposed, which would lead to the social organizations entering into an antagonistic relationship with the state. Excessive consistency and the break-up of Pro-Forma Consistency are the two extreme situations. When you have excessive consistency, the autonomy of the social organizations is totally lost, but when Pro-Forma consistency is lost, so the state's coercive power will be exercised.



## Pro-Forma Consistency

The aim of this thesis is to understand how state control and the autonomy of social organizations paradoxically function together - through observation of the daily interactions between Chinese social organizations and the state, and the five organization cases presented in this thesis illustrate that Pro-Forma Consistency is the mechanism underlying the daily interactions between these two entities.

Pro-Forma Consistency has two aspects. On the one hand, it helps maintain a concordant relationship between the social organizations and the local government institutions, by aligning them both with the state policies' aims to build a harmonious society, construct new socialist rural areas and care for migrant workers, and during this process, the social organizations are seemingly controlled by the state. On the other, it also makes it possible for the social organizations to practice activities based on their own values, those which are created in different ways within the Pro-Forma Consistency framework. Enhancing civic awareness and implementing empowerment through education, alternative or anti-capitalist rural development strategies, plus by making migrant workers a new working class; these are the differences that normally stay hidden within the equivalential chains.

As was explained in Chapter two, the equivalential chain means a series of terms or elements that share an 'identical something' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 51), under which the differences that make the terms and elements distinctive objects are lost. Under this framework the terms or elements are grouped together as a homogeneous whole, with differences suppressed behind under the hegemonic presentational

power of the nodal points within the equivalential chain. Here, the hegemony of the Chinese state is exercised through these nodal points, these being 'building a harmonious society', 'constructing new socialist rural areas', and 'caring for migrant workers'. However, these three nodal points are so empty in their connotation, that the hegemonic aim of controlling all that the social organizations do is only partially achieved. Due to the unfulfilled nature of state hegemony, the different practices carried out by the social organizations thus have space to develop, as long as these practices do not break the equivalential chain.

In other words, Pro-Forma Consistency needs to be successfully constructed; otherwise either excessive consistency or violent contradictions will occur between the state and the social organizations. The balanced tension of maintaining consistency with the state and maintaining the differences of social organizations guarantees the balanced co-existence of state control and the autonomous practices of the social organizations. Whenever one side outweighs the other, the balance is lost. For example, if the social organizations fail to generate different practices, a situation of excessive consistency will occur, meaning that full hegemony of the state will be achieved contingently, and the autonomy of the social organizations lost. Further, if the differences displayed by the social organizations break the Pro-Forma Consistency framework, violent conflicts between the state and these organizations may emerge. In these cases of violent conflict - when the state and the social organizations challenge each other, both state control and the autonomous practices of the social organizations will be at stake.

Pro-Forma Consistency is similar to what Scott has called 'false compliance', in the sense that both of them conceal their differences and the resistances of the powerless. In Scott's *Weapons of the Weak*, 'false compliance' paves the way for the symbolic resistance of the powerless Sedaka peasants (1985: XVI, 29). In the case of Pro-Forma Consistency, the compliance of the social organizations is not false, but a kind of formality, as they not only want to avoid the 'penalties' incurred by disobedience (Scott 1985: 25), but also want to use the nodal points within state policy discourse to highlight their own, different practices. It is through this method that peaceful development of the different practices is ensured. Moreover, just as resistant practices such as 'foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on' (Scott 1985: 29) are methods used to destroy the 'onstage' public life conduct of the local elite (Scott 1985: 27), so the different practices of the Chinese social organizations contribute to the construction of different values.

Pro-Forma Consistency is also similar to the concept of 'rightful resistance', as described by O'Brien, who describes how Chinese peasants use central state policies to fight against local cadres in order to claim their rights, those promised to them by the central state (O'Brien and Li, 2006: 1-15). However, as with Pro-Forma Consistency, confrontational politics are avoided. Here, 'rightful resistance' can be applied to describe the conflictive situations that exist when differences no longer subject to the equivalential chain of state policies.

Another relevant concept is 'non-coordinative constraint' (*Fei XieTiaoXing YueShu*),

as theorized by Tian (2004: 64-75). This is a new institutionalist perspective that explains why Chinese social organizations behave differently in terms of their organizational operation and form. The organizational operation of a certain social organization always deviates from the way it openly and officially claims to be (*Ibid.* 69), and it has been found that 'non-coordinative constraint' causes the conspiracy of the claims and the real operations. 'Non-coordinative constraint' is believed to derive from a contradiction between the demands to development of the social organizations and the state's constraints. In a word, Non-coordinative constraint refers to the state control, which cannot be tackled by social organizations; therefore, social organizations have to behave in one way and claim in another way.

Pro-Forma Consistency does not agree that the external constraints from the state control are non-coordinative; in contrast, it is believed that constraints can be disentangled by the social organizations through following the nodal points of state policies. If these constraints were non-coordinative at all, it would be hard to explain why it is still possible for Chinese social organizations to keep functioning differently at the operational level. Moreover, Pro-Forma Consistency reveals why the claims and behaviors of social organizations, which could be completely different from each other, can exist and work together.

To sum up, Pro-Forma Consistency seems to reveal a seemingly contradictory relationship. On the one hand, its use consolidates the hegemonic status of state discourse, which functions as the source of legitimacy for the social organizations, who all try to show that they follow state policies and the requirements of local

government institutions. On the other hand, Pro-Forma Consistency also creates the opportunity for social organizations to develop their own values - those which are different from, normally unacceptable to, or sometimes even opposing the state's discourse. Pro-Forma Consistency is constructed through four articulatory elements in the case of the five Chinese social organizations covered in this study, and in the next section, these four articulatory elements will be theorized.

### **Theoretical Contributions of the Thesis**

In this thesis, five Chinese social organizations have been investigated through the use of a multi-sited, ethnographical study (Marcus 1995: 95-117), with the focus being on the organizations' daily interactions with state institutions. The aim has been to answer why state control and different levels of autonomy among social organizations co-exist in China; what the underlying mechanisms and values behind this co-existence are and how the meanings behind these mechanisms contribute to the theories on civil society.

Existing literature guided by the sectorial model of civil society shows that the subtle and complex relationship between the Chinese state and social organizations can be termed as a 'patron-client' relationship, as 'semi-official and semi-unofficial', as representing a form of 'graduated control' and 'non-confrontational' relationship, as well as revealing a level of 'political ambiguity' (Chamberlain 1993; White 1993, 1996; Saich 1994, 2000; Howell 1996; Frolic 1997; Brook 1997; Kang and Feng 2004; Tian 2002, 2009; Yu and Wu 2003; Kwong 2004; Zhang and Baum 2004; Yang 2005; Kang

and Han 2008).

The analytical capacity of the civil society sectorial model has already reached a bottleneck with regard to making deeper investigations and theorizations of the underlying mechanisms of concepts such as those identified above. This thesis has adopted a post-Marxist approach, as explored by Laclau and Mouffe. The post-Marxist approach is good at capturing the key features of everyday practices at the operational level. These everyday practices might be unwritten, plural, contingent, changing, and even promiscuous and paradoxical (Shue 2008: 141-143, 146-148); they may not fall into neat, systematic theoretical models, but may well be realistic. The concepts of 'articulation' and 'discourse' within Laclau and Mouffe's theory are useful both for study everyday practices and the abstract level of structures. These two concepts do not pre-suppose that a systematic totality or a self-contained subject pre-exists in reality, but instead, the theory follows the very process of the construction and reconstruction of discourses through the making and unmaking of equivalential chains in the practices of articulation. The hegemony of the discourse is obtained when the partial content, acting as a nodal point, comes to represent the whole (Laclau 2005: 65-157, Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 47-149). Laclau and Mouffe's theory thus has the potential to reveal the internal, complex power relations that exist between the Chinese state and Chinese social organizations.

This thesis contributes to post-Marxist theory in two ways. First, it explores and theorizes upon the underlying mechanism behind the co-existence of state control and the autonomous practices of social organizations in China. This mechanism, it

turns out, is Pro-Forma Consistency, which is achieved through four articulatory elements, these being personal connections, bottom line consistency, key-word policy consistency and the matching of political achievements.

From the perspective of everyday practices, Pro-Forma Consistency connects the state and social organizations into a coherent whole under the state discourse of 'building a harmonious socialist society'. This Pro-Forma Consistency provides legitimacy and room for the social organizations to develop their own values and practices, those which do not necessarily coincide with the state's intentions. Both excessive consistency with and a departure from Pro-Forma Consistency will lead to the failure of the social organizations in terms of articulating their own values and practices.

From the perspective of discourse making, Pro-Forma Consistency also functions in the same way as it does in everyday practice, the only difference lying in the effect excessive consistency has on the discourses. The absorption of the discourses used by the social organizations into state discourses does not definitely lead to their failure, as the empty spaces within the state's nodal points still leave room for maneuver.

Second, I have uncovered a paradoxical relationship between hegemony and resistance. Laclau anticipates the construction of a radical internal political frontier, which indicates the development of a struggle. With the extension of the horizon of unsatisfied demands within a discourse, a dichotomous chasm is able to occur between the old discourse - commanded by the old nodal point, and a new set of unified social demands with its own nodal points (Laclau 1990: 160, 165; 2005: 73-74).

However, I have not found this to be the case here. Refusing to expose their different practices outside of the equivalential chains of state discourse, my study social organizations have not tended to adopt a unified discourse that is antagonistic towards the state. As a result, state hegemony is reinforced and the development of political differences is also guaranteed, due to the use of a peaceful Pro-Forma Consistency model. So, to what extent is Pro-Forma Consistency able to ensure both state hegemony and support resistance among social organizations? Which one will happen in the future; excessive consistency or a rupture of the Pro-Forma Consistency framework? The two questions remain for future observation and investigation.

Therefore, is it appropriate to say that civil society is emerging in China? Taking the mainstream understanding of civil society into consideration, the five study social organizations are not all completely separate from the institutional state system; however, they have reconciled public and private interests in order to meet their problem solving needs. Instead of asking whether they fit into the mainstream definition or the alternative definition of 'civil society', it is maybe better to conclude that each social organization has its own values which it follows. While some wish to develop a mainstream civil society, in which civic virtues, equality and democracy can be developed; some are actually already practicing the alternative definition of civil society, that is, they are fighting for political status among their members as a unified class in the cultural field, a field in which state coercive power is challenged.

Though impacted by the relatively small scope of my five cases, I would like to give



a tentative answer to the question as to whether contemporary China has a civil society, which is 'possibly yes'. First of all, there are already quite a few social organizations which are institutionally independent of the state; the five social organizations presented in this paper have their own political values and appeals which are different from those of the state, and although interactions between these five organizations and the Chinese state can certainly not be placed into either the liberal democratic camp of the 'counter-balance model', or the overtly dissident form of Poland's *Solidarity* movement; they do contribute to civil society theories in terms of providing a new form of social existence.

It could be seen that the hidden struggles of the social organizations in developing their own value orientations within Pro-Forma Consistency with the state, will go on for a period of time, as there has not yet been any political, confrontational frontier constructed at the state discourse level. It is hard to predict the results of the struggles of these organizations when they are still at the 'rite of passage' stage; nevertheless, interactive practices are certainly going on, and China's state and society relations are likely to become more and more complex. As a result, the continuous inter-penetrations and struggles going on could eventually lead to a new form of civil society developing in the future.

## APPENDIX FIELD WORK RESOURCES

Participant interview Mr. Query 200707;  
Participant interview Mr. Happy 200903  
Participant interview Mr. Sunny 200710  
Participant group interview 200912  
Organization Grey Document 2005;  
Organization Grey Document 2011;  
Field notes 200507;  
Field notes 200708;  
Field notes 200709  
Field notes 200710;  
Field notes 200711;  
Field notes 200903  
Field notes 200904;  
Field notes 200912;  
Colorful Document 200904  
Colorful Document 200907  
Colorful Document 200912  
Colorful Document: Wang (2009). *The Compiled Reading Materials for the Forum of Popular Education in the New Era (XinShiQi PingMin JiaoYu LunTan YueDu CaiLiao)*: p. 186 - for internal reference only.  
Follow-up email query 201010  
Follow-up email query 201105  
The Municipal Government of City Fourth (2006) *The 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan of Building Harmonious Community of City Fourth* (anonymous)

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