

# Dancing with Diversity? The Evolving Party-Society Nexus in Urban China

CHUNRONG LIU AND YANWEN TANG

## Abstract

Rapid market transition in post-reform China has created various socioeconomic spaces that fall beyond the Leninist mode of control by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and thus constitutes a formidable challenge to its ruling capacity. This article examines the evolving adaptations of the CCP and the rise of a new form of Party-society nexus in urban China. We found that Party organisers have been fostering a spatial strategy in the context of 'disorganised urban socialism'. By spanning institutional and sectoral gaps, engaging so-called 'floating party members', and developing community-based service networks, the Party has deliberately combined a specific social mechanism with the Leninist logic of organising. We conclude with a broader discussion of the possible scenario and political implication of CCP's organisational consolidation from below.

*Keywords:* Chinese Communist Party (CCP); Primary Party Organisations (PPO); community governance; Leninist Institutional Framework

## Introduction

The year 2021 marks the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).<sup>1</sup> There is no denying that CCP is the decisive organisational driver of China's profound political, economic and social transformations in the modern context. Over time, CCP has advanced through a series of existential crises and arrived at a new critical juncture. Despite a host of domestic challenges and international pressure, the Party has not failed in the waves of the collapse of communism. Instead, in recent years, it has witnessed a centralised leadership and has accumulated social support with historic achievements, such as the eradication of absolute poverty and the building of a moderately well-off society.<sup>2</sup> Its membership has been increasing steadily, expanding from about 4.5 million in 1949 to more than 91 million in 2019.<sup>3</sup> The composition of the Party's cadre corps has changed significantly,

---

This article can be accessed at <https://doi.org/10.22439/cjas.v39i2.6400>.

indicating a development from a mass to an elite party (Brødsgaard 2018). In addition, the Party continues to extend its organisational presence in various private and social sectors (Thornton 2013). At the micro-level, the Party membership has been found to be a substantial facilitator of life changes during the market transition (Walder, Li and Triemen 2000).

This puzzling vigour has generated enormous scholarly interest. The thesis of 'authoritarian resilience' suggests a plethora of factors to explain the Party's remarkable durability: the institutionalisation of orderly succession processes, introduction of meritocratic promotions and the promotion of bureaucratic differentiation, social empowerment, as well as the performance-based legitimacy (Dickson 2016; Gore 2010; Laliberté and Lanteigne 2008; Nathan 2003; Shambaugh 2008; Zhao 2009). Furthermore, as some scholars have noted, the CCP is an entirely different breed of political party from those in the West. Its governing capacity is deeply rooted in the traditional Chinese culture of retaining 'Mandate of Heaven' (Zheng 2010; Zhao 2009: 421). Perry and Heilmann (2011) added that creative adaptation of key elements of China's revolutionary heritage should be viewed as a fundamental source of the CCP's resilience. The Party's robustness is further reinforced by the practices of 'cultural governance', namely, the skilful deployment of symbolic resources and the manufacturing of a positive public sentiment (Perry 2013).

A much-neglected aspect in the debate is the CCP's ability to elaborate its Leninist organising power in a market-based and cosmopolitan society. Embedded in a modern state which yearns to take the impenetrable complexity of social ecologies and render it legible (Scott 1998), a Leninist party knows no borders in its host society. The Leninist party in power must be able to constantly engage its members and prevent the alienation from the masses, which entails a highly cohesive, effective and pervasive grassroots infrastructure of Primary Party Organisations (PPOs). As such, the CCP's evolving modes of grassroots organising is a key to understanding the dynamics of political resilience in contemporary China.

This article sets out to delineate CCP's adaptation in a rapidly changing social context in urban China. The next section analyses the characteristics of the Party's Leninist organising power. Then we will proceed with 'disorganised urban socialism', which features various socioeconomic spaces that fall beyond the traditional mode of control. This is followed by a closer look at the Party's ideological and

organisational reformation, especially the community-based Party building in Shanghai. We conclude with a broader discussion of the possible scenarios and political implications of CCP's organisational consolidation from below.

## **The Leninist Mode of Organising**

Modern political parties seek to articulate and aggregate social interests. In a functioning constitutional system, parties that are effective at gathering social support tend to be more successful in the electoral competition. For example, the stunning political success of Japan's LDP, which can boast of being the most enduring political party operating in a democracy since the mid-twentieth century, has not been possible without its locality-based clientelist network of *kôenkai* (Krauss and Pekkanen 2010). It is through the Party's pipeline of community networks that the funds and social support are conveyed to legislators, who in turn bring favours to their constituents in local districts.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, Leninist parties are originally designed to amass power and bring about large-scale changes, such as revolution (Mandel 1970). They seek the comprehensive transformation and management of host societies. They struggle for survival and legitimacy of 'eternal leadership' by exploring the potential capacity and 'latent interest' of each societal segment (Selznick 1960). Although historical memory, economic development and ideological engineering are all important for the Leninist Party's sustained control of political power, they are far from being sufficient. Its power has to be rooted in social fabrics and ordered through the network of PPOs.

According to the Constitution of the CCP and the 'Regulations on the Work of the CCP Leading Party Member Group', PPOs are to be fostered in basic units of society, including enterprises, rural areas, government organs, schools, research institutes, communities, social organisations and others, where there are at least three full Party members.<sup>5</sup> A Party General Branch is formed where there are 50-100 party members or where a higher-level Party organisation has approved its establishment. Various PPOs are positioned as 'militant bastions of the Party in the basic units of society, where all the Party's work proceeds, and they serve as the foundation of its fighting capacity'.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, these omnipresent PPOs constitute a critical interface where the Party mobilises its social and political supports, encap-

ulates mass organisations and aggregates societal interests into the political system.

The nexus between CCP and society is organised according to the principle of ‘mass line’ – a method of leadership by means of which the Party cadres are intimately embedded in and stay relevant to the society (Selden 1971). Through grassroots penetration and persuasion, the Party’s vanguard remoulds the masses and recruits progressive members of the masses into the Party, who will then reach out to the masses. After the masses in the host society are educated and gradually acquire political consciousness, they become an organic component of the Party, making it a powerful accelerator or multiplier of forces. ‘Pooling the wisdom of the masses’ and promoting the Party’s political agenda through PPOs are essential features of China’s political process. As depicted by Neil Harding, a Leninist Party’s cell ‘becomes a small but disciplined group, working according to a common plan, possessing a clear command structure and a well-established division of labour’ and it can demonstrate ‘a disproportionate, even decisive, effect upon the politics of a country’ (Harding 1996: 181). Power mechanisms at this basic level show elective affinity with the stability of the overarching Party-state (Lee and Zhang 2013).

In China’s post-revolutionary context, PPOs were systematically established within the formal governmental bodies and socialist institutions. In connection with the class-label system and household registration system, the work unit (*danwei*) system was developed in the 1950s as an all-encompassing mechanism to secure a socialist-planned economy and urban social control. The absence of a labour market and the guarantee of permanent employment led to workers’ social, political and economic dependence on the state enterprises. Walder (1986) has used the term ‘*organisational dependence*’ to chart the pattern of power and socialist dominance in Mao’s era: workers were subjected to state control through a work unit or collective, both economically and politically. They were individually dependent on the Communist cadres for their subsistence and living allowance.

In addition to this occupation-based control, CCP’s organising power was also forged at the urban grassroots together with the Residents Committee (RC) system in the early 1950s. Party-led neighbourhood institutions were rolled out to replace the traditional *baojia* system, native place associations and lineage organisations.<sup>7</sup> By cultivating grassroots activist networks for policy implementation and political campaigns, neighbourhood PPOs have overcome the

gap between the Party cadres and the masses, and helped maintain a high degree of political consciousness among the people (Read 2012; Townsend 1967).

## **Disorganised Urban Socialism**

Since the opening and reforms in 1978, China has undergone a controlled political decompression, in which new social, economic and cultural norms were pragmatically introduced into a previously closed governing system. On the one hand, the precept of Party Supremacy, socialist mentality and power structure of the Party-state have been vigorously extended; on the other hand, a range of neo-liberal economic discourses and values, such as material incentives, efficiency and profit orientation has been crystallised in a post-socialist context. As the leadership increasingly emphasised economic development instead of class struggle and communist ideologies, there has been a profound decline of the socialist social contract in urban China in the 1990s.

The trajectory of market reforms is largely evidenced by the restructuring of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) or the so-called *dedanweilization* phenomenon, which dismantles critical work unit functions and therefore weakens the command power of the formal authority in urban life (You 1998: 23-28). As a result of restructuring and privatisation of the loss-making SOEs between 1994 and 1999, the number of laid-off workers increased from about 3 million to 11.7 million, constituting a major source of social instability (Cao et al. 1999). As many Party members have left their previous *danwei* and sought more lucrative job opportunities elsewhere, PPOs in the SOEs have faced unprecedented challenges to serve the interests of those laid-off workers and re-engage the 'floating Party members' (*liudong dangyuan*) in urban society.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, urban social mobility has increased remarkably due to the weakening of the household registration system, booming housing market as well as massive urban gentrification. An estimated 240,000 households in Shanghai were physically separated from their place of registration in early 2000 (Ma 2008: 4). Traditional mechanisms of organisational control have gradually lost ground in these processes.

The rise of new economic and social spaces has added a new layer of complexity. The number of registered private enterprises expanded from 443,000 in 1996, which accounted for less than a fifth

of all firms, to 5,918,000 in 2012, when they accounted for more than seven-tenths of all enterprises. Registered private sector employment soared accordingly, exceeding 94 million by 2010. The share of industrial outputs by private firms rose from 4.4 per cent to 30.5 per cent during the period of 1999-2010 (cited in Lardy 2014: 66). In parallel with a thriving private economic sector, professional associations, religious groups and various self-organising mass organisations, such as choral societies, reading clubs and exercises groups, have emerged and hailed by some scholars as an 'associational revolution' in China (Wang and He 2004).<sup>9</sup>

As spontaneous activities have continued to grow in these domains, the Party's PPOs often found themselves irrelevant and invisible. PPO's presence in the private sector of the economy appeared to be especially weak. Despite the fact that the 1993 Company Law addressed the operation of PPOs, urging them 'to be referred to the CCP Constitution', there were few actual driving forces to build up Party branches in private sectors. A Shanghai-based research report in 1999 alerted that among the surveyed 2,592 foreign companies, only 435 of them have set up PPOs, and less than one per cent of the studied private enterprises housed some form of PPOs (Zhou 2002: 3). A nationwide survey in 2000 recorded that only 1.9 per cent of the party members worked in the private sector (cited in Shambaugh 2008: 136). Economic liberalisation has thus posed a tremendous challenge to the credibility of the Leninist mode of organising.

These disorganising trends – essentially caused by the release out of power relations from socialist collective consumption and encompassing social categories – are further entangled with the emerging individualised, middle class society and the flourishing of life politics.<sup>10</sup> Middle class is an evolving social category in China, which is made up of diverse social actors ranging from self-employed private sector entrepreneurs to salaried government officials and professionals. While China's middle class in general maintains relatively strong ties with the Party-state, there is a shared feeling of insecurity and increasing pressure to maintain their wellbeing, given the underdeveloped welfare system and the rising cost of healthcare, education and housing. It remains a challenge to the CCP to realise an individual's political aspirations and, at the same time, increase its own popularity, relevance and appeal in the middle-class society.

Taken together, market reforms in urban China have reduced popular dependence on the Party-state, breeding a disorganised,

fragmented and diversified social context that would undermine the established mode of Leninist organising power. Party members, according to some field observations, 'are no longer interested in the PPO's activities, others become cynical about current policies and still others begin to feel uncomfortable about their party membership; those who are tempted by market opportunities even become mercenary and corrupt' (Chen and Gong 1997: 157). Many PPOs still retain its organisational control to some extent, but often find it difficult to recruit new members, especially within the younger generation. Indeed, as 'blank areas' and 'blind spots' kept emerging in social and economic life, myriads of PPOs became 'empty shells'. The emergence of *falungong* in the late 1990s, which was mobilised from within many residential communities and supported by many laid-off workers, greatly struck the authority and motivated it to reclaim its legitimacy from below.

## **Dancing with Diversity**

To what extent can urban PPOs adapt to these transitional conditions? Recent studies have documented some notable organisational tactics at the grassroots level, including sending down a group of 'party building instructors', rewarding private business elites with appointments to party positions and reorienting the work of local party organs to better serve the needs of the private sector, etc. (Yan and Huang 2017: 56). Meanwhile, many PPOs are adopting a service-oriented approach to accommodate the diverse demands in the business world. CCP is 'breathing new life into its grassroots organisations in precisely those areas in which the forces of commercialisation and marketisation have developed most rapidly' (Thornton 2012: 75; see also Zhang 2015).

The Party's local experiments of power consolidation appear as a bottom-up initiative, but they are also framed and justified by ideological guidelines. In this section, we analyse the emerging community-oriented Party building practices in correspondence with its ideological adaptations.

### ***Ideological Adaptation***

Managing Party-society relations is a central piece of the 'Three Represents' (*sange daibiao*) theory, which was initially formulated by the leadership of Jiang Zemin in 2000, and later enshrined in the Party

Constitution in 2002. In this ideological innovation, CCP claims to stand for three development trends of 'advanced productive forces' (i.e., entrepreneurs, high tech specialists, professionals and other new urban elites), 'advanced culture' and 'the fundamental interests of the majority of the Chinese people' (Jiang 2002). The Three Represents campaign has been advanced to elaborate the Party's legitimacy by absorbing capitalists into its pre-existing Party line and redefining its role from a revolutionary party to a durable governing party. According to Jiang, the fundamental challenge is how to 'maintain and strengthen the Party's steadfast unity and high level of unity of action at a time when society's economic composition, organisational form, material interests and the mode of employment are in an accelerated trend of diversification' (Jiang 2002: 8). In order to consolidate popular support and to prevent the situation in which 'a weak foundation rocks the earth and shakes the mountains', 'the work to step up the building of the Party's grass-roots organisations has to be pursued, and should never be slackened even for a single moment' (Jiang 2002: 19).

Since 2002, CCP embraced new efforts for Party-building under Hu Jintao's leadership. Hu's legitimation strategy extended the ideas of 'Three Represents' to meet the challenge of the Party's governing capacity-building. In his work report to the CCP's 17th Congress, the catchphrases were: 'build a well-off society in an all-round way' and 'adhere to the scientific development concept'. He made references to the deficiencies in political reforms: 'The Party's ability to govern has not been fully competent to deal with the new situation and tasks...' and '...the democratic legal building is still unable to completely adapt to the requirements of expanding people's democracy and of economic and social development...'.<sup>11</sup> The concept of 'Party-led social management' was proposed and elaborated in the 16th and 17th CCP Congresses in 2002 and 2007. It became a focal point at the Fifth Plenary Session of the 17th Central Committee in 2010, with its resolution stating that the general principle of social management is 'party leadership, government responsibility, social coordination and public participation'.<sup>12</sup> In general, while there was a strong drive to make 'comprehensive covering' (*quan fugai*) by PPOs, Hu's leadership has called for modest democratisation reforms, such as allowing greater public participation in nominating Party leaders at grassroots levels and promoting direct elections for lower-level leaders.

Strategic planning for Party building has entered a new era under Secretary-General Xi Jinping's centralised and core leadership since

2012. CCP's ideological work has been framed as the pursuit of national rejuvenation as well as 'the Chinese dream'. A crucial political imperative to embody the Chinese dream is the 'Four Comprehensives' (*sige quanmian*), namely, building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, deepening reforms across-the-board, advancing law-based governance in a well-rounded manner and tightening party discipline at every nook and cranny. Seen from the Party, China's reform has entered a deep-water zone. This would entail a holistic thinking and a 'top-level design' under a stronger CCP leadership, which is to be entrenched as the 'defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics' (Xi 2017).

In order to make a stronger leadership and statecraft, CCP has commanded the strengthening of intra-Party discipline through anti-corruption and the 'mass-line education and practice' campaigns. While the Party continues to embrace 'advanced forces' such as entrepreneurs and professionals, new rules in member recruitment have been emphasised, aiming for 'stringent discipline' and quality improvement (Xi 2017). In addition, Xi's leadership has called for a greater courage to carry out 'self-reform' to accommodate the growing diversified social demands. As the Party addresses various issues related to 'reform, development and stability', it will gain a strong motivation to reform itself (He 2017: 47-48). At the local level, tremendous effort has been made to deliver good community services for the people, to improve conduct and enforce Party discipline and eliminate the practice of formalities for formalities sake and bureaucratism. Against this backdrop, PPOs in various fields are expected to function as a 'strong fighting fortress' under the Party leadership, and they must become a place where the Party members exhibit their 'exemplary and vanguard roles'.<sup>13</sup>

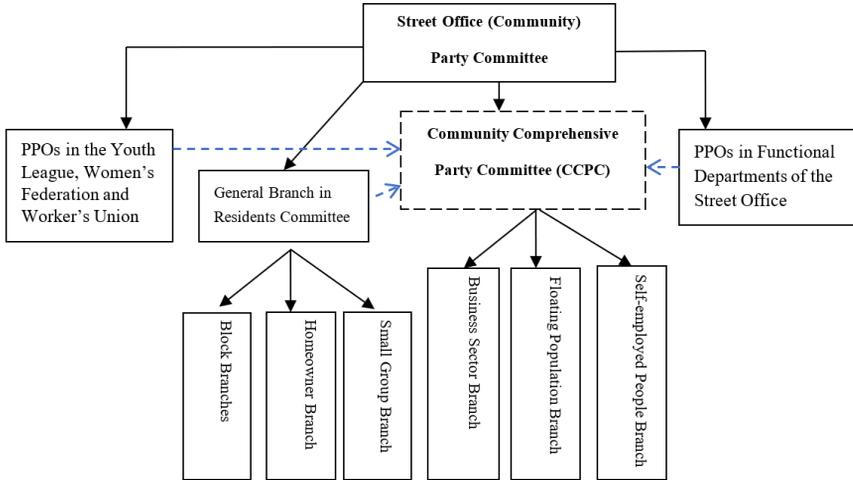
### ***Community-Based Party Building***

These evolving ideological narratives have offered new cognitive frameworks for the CCP to react, thrive and survive on the ground. In an increasingly diverse urban society, the Party has been reinventing its organising power, particularly through the community-based Party building.<sup>14</sup> The concept of 'community' (*shequ*), viewed as a spatial realm for establishing affiliation and a network of collective action, has a long history in China's intellectual discourse. Community-based social control, however, appeared relatively marginal in the shadow of

the dominant *danwei* system in the pre-reform context. The discourse of urban community building only gained currency when the Chinese government promoted the 'Community Service Program' in the early 1990s. Its rationale was to shift social functions and responsibilities for occupational welfare from *danwei* to the local community (Ding 2008).

Forms and scales of community building vary in local experiments (Heberer and Göbel 2011). In Shanghai, the municipal policy planning meeting in 1996 decided to develop a decentralised, community-based governing framework called 'two levels of government, three levels of administration' (Liu 2006). In this framework, the municipal government and district government were the two formal layers of government to be bolstered with a community-based governance network at the Street Office level. The administrative unit of the Street Office was defined as the 'community' or 'the cell of a city'. It was portrayed as 'the base of consolidating the Party construction, strengthening spiritual civilisation and maintaining social stability'.<sup>15</sup>

Community governance reform in Shanghai offers a spatial infrastructure for the reach of CCP as a ruling party (Lin 2000; Liu 2018). Figure 1 describes the organisational field of the development crafted as the 'Community Comprehensive Party Committee' (CCPC) in the Dapu Bridge Community of Shanghai in the late 1990s. CCPC was positioned as an umbrella organisation under the leadership of the Street Office Party Committee. The solid lines in the Figure suggest a Leninist power relationship based on hierarchy and compliance. For instance, the Party's General Branch in the Residents Committee commands its grassroots organs within residential blocks, homeowner associations and small groups which involve residents in various recreational and leisure activities. The dotted lines in the figure indicate a new set of power relations that is primarily based on information-sharing and social coordination. As a platform, CCPC aims to incubate new PPOs in the private sector, floating populations and self-employed persons within the jurisdiction of the Street Office. In addition, it functions as a regular meeting point for other PPOs, including Party cells in the administrative organs of the Street Office and mass organisations which were not previously linked to each other. Ms. Xu, the chief of Dapu CCPC put it succinctly in her comment that, 'community Party building is the new centre piece of urban governance. You may say it works like an aircraft carrier – all the PPOs in our locality can share resources so that we can sail together and better serve the party member and the people'.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 1: Framework of Community-based Party Building.<sup>17</sup>**

In the Meiyuan Street Office of Shanghai's Pudong New District, where a large number of 'floating party members' work in the Lujiazui international financial and trade zone, a community Party service centre called 'Community Sunshine Station' (*yangguang yizhan*, CSS) was initiated in 2003.<sup>18</sup> Like Dapu's CCPC, the CSS in Meiyuan attempts to spearhead links among PPOs within the community and incubate new PPOs in the office and commercial buildings in the financial city zone, which is called 'Block-based Party Building' (*louyu dangjian*). It serves as a hub for the Party members' socialisation as well as a civic space for the general public. One of the most popular CSS programs is the 'Sunshine Forum'. Government officials, experts and community stakeholders are invited to the forum to offer policy updates and their expertise. In addition, CSS operates a 'gold-collar friendship club' featuring various social gatherings, career talks and leisure services for young professionals. From the perspective of Mr. Song, the Party Chief at Meiyuan Street Office and founder of the CSS, it is a social experiment to make a 'fenceless Party branch', where floating Party members are 'lost and found', and they can spread positive energy in their professional fields as vanguards. In his words, the CSS should demonstrate four vital roles: 'a community for floating party members', 'an incubator of new party branches', 'a resource pool for Party volunteers' and 'a service desk for party members and ordinary citizens' (Jin 2005: 61).

By deliberately incorporating locality-based coordination and service-oriented networking into the grassroots Party life, these organising efforts arguably contribute to an emerging 'soft Leninist model'.

It has not only connected PPOs within the localities but also bridged the Party and the new urban social strata. Therefore, it facilitated the presence of CCP in the dynamic socioeconomic realms. When CSS was established in 2003, it was only affiliated with two PPOs and less than 100 floating Party members; the number of affiliated cell organisations increased to 53, with over 1,200 Party members in 2014. As a shining role model of community-based Party building, CSS in Meiyuan has received 2,917 political study tours with approximately 100,000 visitors by 2013.<sup>19</sup> It came as no surprise that the project has received nationwide media attention and praised as 'CCP's red flag fluttering in the sky of China's most internationalised financial and trade landscape'.<sup>20</sup>

## Concluding Remarks

The fundamental challenge for the sustained rule of the CCP can be generally summarised as whether or not the Party can adapt itself and respond to the changing socioeconomic conditions, and it is likely to collapse if it fails in this endeavour. In explaining this transition, regime theories tend to assume an incompatibility of the CCP's orthodox communist ideology with the market economy. It follows that marketisation and the rise of a diversified society have put the CCP-led political system in a track of 'dissolution from within' or 'organisational erosion from below' (Walder 1995; Chen and Gong 2007).

Nevertheless, Leninist institutions are not naturally immune to change and adaptation. The destiny of the CCP is arguably not predetermined by its Leninist institutional framework, but instead depends on whether and how the model can be reconstructed and remain adaptive. As Perry and Heilmann (2011) have aptly demonstrated, China's Soviet-inspired formal institutions are combined with distinctive governance methods shaped by the CCP's revolutionary and post-revolutionary experiences and, in the post-Mao era, complemented by intuitional learning from 'advanced' foreign regulatory practices. Furthermore, during the market transition, the Party can embrace neo-liberal mentality and the game of social management, which serve to 'support, centralise, modernise and strengthen the Party's Leninist leading role in Chinese society' (Pieke 2012: 150). In other words, CCP has learned to combine the logic of the market and the logic of organisational survival in a manner that is 'both productive and socially efficient' (Shevchenko 2004: 180). From a comparative perspective, market

institutions and the market approach of economic accumulation can be legitimised and incorporated through Leninist political institutions and ideology, contributing to the variety of market socialism and market-Leninist regimes (London 2017).

This article examines the reach of CCP in the market-oriented urban society and the emerging form of the Party-society nexus. We found that Party organisers have been asserting a spatial strategy of response when facing a 'disorganised urban socialism'. By spanning jurisdictional and sectoral gaps, and actively engaging floating party members and developing community-based service networks, the PPOs have fused a social dimension within the established Leninist mode of organising. These community-based, service-oriented organising practices have far-reaching political implications. They exhibit a pattern of marginal innovation within the Party-state (Liu 2018), and echoes Bruce Dickson's proposition that 'the CCP is pursuing a variety of political reforms that are intended to enhance the capacity of the state to govern effectively, if not democratically' (Dickson 2008: 68, see also Dickson 2016).

Organisational revitalisation from below is not entirely without limits and dilemmas. As already observed by some scholars, it seems that the community-based Party network is becoming overly dependent on professional staff and manifesting a trend of bureaucratisation, which will undermine its capacity of engaging the mass publics (Li 2007). While a community strategy has paved the way for a more governable grassroots society, the Party-state may expect unintended consequences that can threaten regime stability (Howell 2016). Furthermore, as Party cell organisations absorb elite groups and 'advanced productive forces' in segments of urban society, and the new life of the PPOs has become 'a highly commercialised affair', its organising power and connection to the original social bases maybe weakened, thus undermining its moral credibility (Thornton 2012: 74).

The CCP's centennial history is full of contradictions, struggles and adaptations. As Liu Shaoqi, one of the founders of the CCP, famously stated: 'The organisational form and method of work must exhibit a degree of flexibility. They should be determined by the internal and external environment facing the Party, as well as the political task of the Party' (Liu 1981: 316). As the Party claims itself to be a historically-formed emancipatory force and aspires towards the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and given the increasing complexity of its governing environment, its social adaptation is likely to demonstrate

multiple alternatives. Whether and how it will lead to a 'creative destruction' deserves further considerations. Nevertheless, Liu Shaoqi's message remains as a pertinent advice to the CCP's organisers in the twenty-first century.

---

*CHUNRONG LIU is Associate Professor of political science at Fudan University and managing director of Fudan-European Centre for China Studies at University of Oslo. He is also a research associate at the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS). His research interests are in the areas of political sociology and comparative politics, with a focus on state-society relations in post-reform China and China's domestic-foreign policy nexus. Email: crliu@fudan.edu.cn.*

*YANWEN TANG is Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology at Shanghai University, where she also serves as a research fellow at the Shanghai Centre for Political Party Studies. Her research interests include organisational sociology and social organisations in China. Email: t\_yanwen@hotmail.com.*

## NOTES

1. The authors are grateful to Dr. Vera Skvirskaja and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and careful editorial assistance on the earlier drafts of this article.
2. A recent survey report at Harvard's Ash Center shows a near-universal increase in Chinese citizens' average satisfaction toward the CCP-led government, see Cunningham, Saich and Turiel (2020). For a broader assessment of CCP's popular support, see also Tang (2016).
3. *People's Daily* (3 June 2020): <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0630/c1001-31765280.html> (Accessed on 21 May 2021).
4. Clientalism-based voter mobilisation can be widely observed in the democratisation experiences in East Asia. In the case of Taiwan, the nationalist party KMT can also be viewed as a skilful community organiser which manipulates factions to move the voters and absorb political inputs and supports from local society, see Rigger (1999).
5. The Regulations were made in 2015 and a revised version was adopted in April 2019. See, Xinhua, *Regulations on the work of the CCP Leading Party Member Group Issued by the CCP Central Committee* (15 April 2019). [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-04/15/content\\_5383062.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-04/15/content_5383062.htm) (Accessed on 6 October 2021). The updated regulations demand strict implementation of the regulations to make sure that leading Party members groups uphold the authority of the CPC Central Committee and its centralised and unified leadership.
6. See also, *The Party in Power*. <http://www.china.org.cn/english/Political/26151.htm>. (Accessed on 18 May 2020).
7. The household-based *Baojia* system is a mutual responsibility policing system inherited from the Nationalist and Japanese occupation regime. CCP brought

- its rural revolution-inspired mass mobilisation techniques and reconstituted social control system soon after it took over urban China through the *hukou* (household registration) system.
8. In rural areas, there has been a visible withering of PPOs with the disintegration of the People's commune system and the introduction of grassroots democracy. Because of the de-collectivisation reform, rural PPOs can no longer monopolise resources and dominate the political process in the village (Nee 1989; Oi and Rozelle 2000). Conflicts over the collection of agricultural taxes and fees between elected village head and party branch secretary have become a new normal in village life. Rural PPOs face new challenges associated with urbanisation in which the Party members of 'rural floating populations' cannot maintain routine organisational life and even seldom pay the Party dues (Yu and Tang 2018).
  9. As an illustration, there was an estimated 18,000 'mass groups' with over 450,000 participants in Shanghai in 2009. The number of registered mass groups reached 20,281 in 2016 (quoted in Tang and Liu 2019: 110). Despite enhanced regulations on social organizations in recent years, grassroots non-state space has continued to evolve in everyday life. In local governance, NGOs that can constructively practice co-governance and deliver social services are often advocated, provided that they do not endanger 'national security' and 'social morality'.
  10. According to Giddens (1991), life politics concerns individual and social negotiations about life course, life chances, relationships, self-realisation and well-being. The increasing moral attachment to individual responsibility, or 'individualisation', reflects the essence of a market-based society, as well as the lack of a comprehensive state system of social security, see Yan (2010).
  11. Hu, Jintao: *zai dang de shiqida shang de baogao* (Report at the 17th CCP Congress), 15 October 2007. [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hqzg/2007-10/25/content\\_6205616.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hqzg/2007-10/25/content_6205616.htm) (Accessed on 8 December 2020).
  12. For analysis of Party-led social management, see Yu (2011).
  13. Xinhua: *Xi Stresses Strong Primary-level Party Organizations* (8 June 2021). <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202106/08/WS60bee01da31024ad0bac4538.html>. (Accessed on 12 August 2021). See also, Xinhua: *Xi Jinping Inspects Shanghai* (7 November 2018). [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2018-11/07/c\\_1123679389.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2018-11/07/c_1123679389.htm). (Accessed on 10 October 2020).
  14. Party builders in the community have explored a new organisational presence in industrial, shopping streets and business zones, including the commercial building branch and business park branches, etc. (Zhang 2015). For the process of Party building in the private sector and migrant enclaves during urbanisation, see Yan and Huang (2017) and Jeong, Jong-Ho and Taehee Yoon (2020).
  15. In 1997, the 'Code of Street Office in Shanghai' was promulgated by the People's Congress of Shanghai. The Street Office was assigned a larger responsibility in delivering community governance. In many small and medium-sized cities, residential communities and neighbourhoods are treated as the basic unit of urban governance.
  16. Interview in Shanghai, 19 July 2008.
  17. The Figure is adapted from '*shequ dangjian xin moshi de tansuo*' (exploration of a new model of community party building), policy brief at Dapu Bridge Street Office, 1999.
  18. As a result of administrative division adjustment in Pudong, the name of the Meiyuan Street Office was changed to the Lujiazui Street Office in 2006.
  19. In 2014, after eleven years' of experimentation, the CSS was transformed into a registered social organisation. The rationale was to promote a deeper social en-

agement of the CSS. More specifically, this reform called for the adoption of social work professionalism and cultivating the spirit of volunteerism, aspiring to be a vigorous hub organisation that can enhance interactions and manage multiple ties between PPOs and other social organisations. The Street Office has also established a new funding mechanism for party building through CSS, aiming to make it more sustainable. For an account of this transformation, see Qiu et al. (2016).

20. Xinhua: *Sange daibiao zai jiceng: dangqi piaohong lujiazui* ('Three Represents' at the Grassroots: The Red Party Flag Shines in Lujiazui), 9 October 2003. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/3gdb\\_2003/zjc.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/3gdb_2003/zjc.htm). (Accessed on 26 September 2008).

## REFERENCES

- Brødsgaard, Kjeld Erik 2018. 'China's Communist Party: From Mass to Elite Party'. *China Report* 54 (4): 385-402. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0009445518806076>.
- Cao, Yuanzheng, et al. 1999. 'From Federalism, Chinese style to Privatization, Chinese Style'. *Economics of Transition* 7: 103-131. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0351.00006>.
- Chen, Feng, and Gong Ting 2007. 'Party versus Market in Post-Mao China: The Erosion of the Leninist Organization from Below'. *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 13 (3): 148-166. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523279708415356>.
- Cunningham, Edwards, Tony Saich and Jesse Turiel 2020. *Understanding CCP Resilience: Surveying Chinese Public Opinion Through Time*. [https://ash.harvard.edu/files/ash/files/final\\_policy\\_brief\\_7.6.2020.pdf](https://ash.harvard.edu/files/ash/files/final_policy_brief_7.6.2020.pdf). (Accessed on 20 May 2021).
- Dickson, Bruce 2008. *Wealth into Power: The Communist Party's Embrace of China's Private Sector*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511790706>.
- Dickson, Bruce 2016. *The Dictator's Dilemma: The Chinese Communist Party's Strategy for Survival*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Ding, Yuanzhu 2008. 'Community Building in China: Issues and Directions'. *Social Sciences in China* XXIX (1): 152-159.
- Giddens, Anthony 1991. *Modernity and Self-identity*. London: Polity Press.
- Gore, Lance 2010. *The Chinese Communist Party and China's Capitalist Revolution: The Political Impact of Market*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Harding, Neil 1996. *Leninism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- He, Yiting 2017. 'Iun zhongguo gongchandang de ziwo gage' (On Self-reform of the CPC). *Qiushi: CPC Central Committee Quarterly* 9 (4): 47-48.

- Heberer, Thomas and Christian Göbel 2011. *The Politics of Community Building in Urban China*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Howell, Jude 2016. 'Adaptation under Scrutiny: Peering through the Lens of Community Governance in China'. *Journal of Social Policy* 45 (3): 487-506. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047279415000884>.
- Jeong, Jong-Ho and Taehee Yoon 2020. 'From Gray to Red: Party Building and the Transformation of Beijing's Zhejiangcun'. *Journal of Contemporary China* 29 (126): 934-949. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2020.1744391>.
- Jiang, Zemin 2002. *On the 'Three Represents'*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press.
- Jin, Meng 2005. 'Yangguang yizhan: shequ dangjian xinmoshi' (Sunshine Station: New Model of Community Party Building). *Renmin Luntan* (People's Forum) 1: 60-61.
- Jowitt, Kenneth 1975. 'Inclusion and Mobilization in European Leninist Regimes'. *World Politics* 28 (1): 69-96. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010030>.
- Krauss, Ellis S. and Robert J. Pekkanen 2010. *The Rise and Fall of Japan's LDP: Political Party Organizations as Historical Institutions*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1468109912000102>.
- Laliberté, André and Marc Lanteigne 2008. *The Chinese Party-State in the 21st Century: Adaptation and the Reinvention of Legitimacy*. London and New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s030574100800132x>.
- Lardy, Nicholas 2014. *Markets over Mao: The Rise of Private Business in China*. Washington DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics.
- Lee, Ching Kwan and Zhang Yonghong 2013. 'The Power of Instability: Unraveling the Microfoundations of Bargained Authoritarianism in China'. *American Journal of Sociology* 118 (6): 1475-1508. <https://doi.org/10.1086/670802>.
- Li, Youmei (ed.) 2007. *Yangguang yizhan: Lujiazhui shequ dangjian de shizhengyanjiu* (Sunshine Station: An Empirical Research on Lujiazhui Street Office Party Community Building). Shanghai: Shanghai Daxue chubanshe (Shanghai University Press).
- Lin, Shangli 2000. *Shequ dangjian yu qunzhongluxian* (Community Party Building and Mass Line). Shanghai: Shanghai daxue chubanshe (Shanghai University Press).
- Liu, Chunrong 2006. 'Social Changes and Neighborhood Policy in Shanghai'. *Policy and Society* 25 (1): 133-155. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1449-4035\(06\)70130-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1449-4035(06)70130-8).

- Liu, Chunrong 2018. *Shequ zhili yu zhongguo zhengzhi de bianjigexin* (Community Governance and Marginal Innovation in Chinese Politics). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe (Shanghai People's Press).
- Liu, Shaoqi 1981. 'Lun dang' (On Party). In *Liu Shaoqi xuanji* (Liu Shaoqi Selections). Beijing: Renmin chubanshe (People's Press), pp. 314-370.
- London, Jonathan 2017. 'Varieties of States, Varieties of Political Economy: China, Vietnam, and the Making of Market Leninism'. In Carroll, T. and Jarvis, D.S. (eds.). *Asia after the Developmental State: Disembedding Autonomy*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 388-428. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316480502.016>.
- Ma, Yili (ed.) 2008. *Shanghai minzheng, 1978-2008* (Civil Affairs in Shanghai, 1978-2008), Beijing: zhongguo shehui chubanshe (China Society Press).
- Mandel, Ernest 1970. 'Leninist Theory of Organization: Its Relevance for Today'. *International Socialist Review* 31 (9), December. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/mandel/196x/leninism/index.htm> (Accessed on 25 August 2020).
- Nathan, Andrew J. 2003. 'Authoritarian Resilience'. *Journal of Democracy* 14 (1): 6-17.
- Nee, Victor 1989. 'A Theory of Market Transition: From Redistribution to Markets in State Socialism'. *American Sociological Review* 54 (5): 663-681. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2117747>.
- Oi, Jean. C., and Scott Rozelle 2000. 'Elections and Power: The Locus of Decision-Making in Chinese Villages'. *The China Quarterly* 162: 513-39. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0305741000008237>.
- Perry, Elizabeth J. 2013. 'Cultural Governance in Contemporary China: Re-orienting Party Propaganda'. *Harvard-Yenching Institute Working Papers*. <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:11386987> (Accessed on 3 April 2021).
- Perry, Elizabeth J., and Sebastian Heilmann 2011. *Mao's Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1sq5tc6>.
- Pieke, Frank N. 2012. 'The Communist Party and Social Management in China'. *China Information* 26 (2): 149-165. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203x12442864>.
- Qiu, Suqin, Wang Yunzhi, and Shi Jing 2016. 'Shanghai Pudong Lujiazui jiedao yangguang yizhan de shehuhua zhuanxing.' (Social Transformation of Sunshine Station of Lujiazhui Street Office in

- Pudong). *Shanghai dangshi yu dangjian* (Shanghai Party History and Party Building) 10: 43-46.
- Read, Benjamin L. 2012. *Roots of the State: Neighborhood Organization and Social Networks in Beijing and Taipei*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0305741012001348>.
- Rigger, Shelley 1999. *Politics in Taiwan: Voting for Democracy*. London: Routledge.
- Scott, James 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. <https://doi.org/10.30541/v39i1pp.76-78>.
- Selden, Mark 1971. *The Yanan Way in Revolutionary China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000944557300900206>.
- Selznick, Philip 1960. *The Organizational Weapon: A Study of Bolshevik Strategy and Tactics*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Shambaugh, David 2008. *Chinese Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Shevchenko, Alexei 2004. 'Bringing the Party Back In: The CCP and the Trajectory of Market Transition in China'. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 37 (2): 161-185. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2004.03.002>.
- Tang, Wenfang 2016. *Populist Authoritarianism: Chinese Political Culture and Regime Sustainability*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592717000822>.
- Tang, Yanwen and Liu Chunrong 2019. *Zhaohui caogen: shanghai juweihui zizhijiyuan yanjiu* (Bring the Grassroots Back In: A Study of Residents Committee Self-Governance in Shanghai). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe (Shanghai People's Press).
- Thornton, Patricia M. 2012. 'The New Life of the Party: Party Building and Social Engineering in Greater Shanghai'. *China Journal* 68: 58-78. <https://doi.org/10.1086/666580>.
- Thornton, Patricia M. 2013. 'The Advance of the Party Transformation or Takeover of Urban Grassroots Society'. *The China Quarterly* 213: 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0305741013000039>.
- Townsend, James R. 1967. *Political Participation in Communist China*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Walder, Andrew G., Bobai Li, and Donald J. Treiman 2000. 'Politics and Life Chances in a State Socialist Regime: Dual Career Paths into the Urban Chinese Elite, 1949 to 1996'. *American Sociological Review* 65 (2): 191-209. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2657437>.

- Walder, Andrew 1986. *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/68.2.672>.
- Walder, Adrew (ed.) 1995. *The Waning of the Communist State: Economic Origins of Political Decline in China and Hungary*. Berkeley: University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002190969803300407>.
- Wang, Shaoguang and He Jianyu 2004. 'Associational Revolution in China: Mapping the Landscape'. *Korea Observer* 35 (3): 485-532.
- Xi, Jinping 2017. *The Governance of China II*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press.
- Yan, Xiaojun, and Jie Huang 2017. 'Navigating Unknown Waters: The Chinese Communist Party's New Presence in the Private Sector'. *China Review* 17 (2): 37-63.
- Yan, Yunxiang 2010. 'The Chinese Path to Individualization'. *British Journal of Sociology* 61 (3): 489-512. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2010.01323.x>.
- You, Ji 1998. *China's Enterprise Reform: Changing State-Society Relations after Mao*. London: Routledge.
- Yu, Ang and Chengzuo Tang 2018. 'Mobilized to Take a Vanguard Role: Communist Party Members' Participation in the Community Building Campaign'. *SocArXiv*. 7 October. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/6khja>.
- Yu, Keping 2011. 'A shift towards Social Governance in China'. *East Asia Forum Quarterly: Governing China* 3(2). <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2011/09/09/a-shift-towards-social-governance-in-china/> (Accessed on 12 August 2018).
- Zhang, Han 2015. 'Party Building in Urban Business Districts: Organizational Adaptation of the Chinese Communist Party'. *Journal of Contemporary China* 24 (94): 644-664. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2014.975957>
- Zhao, Dingxin 2009. 'The Mandate of Heaven and Performance Legitimation in Historical and Contemporary China'. *American Behavioral Scientist* 53: 416-433. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764209338800>.
- Zheng, Yongnian 2010. *The Chinese Communist Party as Organizational Emperor: Culture, Reproduction and Transformation*. London and New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-012-9210-6>.
- Zhou, Heling 2002. *Jiedu kunhuo: Shanghai dangjiuan de shencengci tiaozhan* (Interpreting Puzzles: The Deep Challenges of Party Building in Shanghai). Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaotong daxue chubanshe (Shanghai Jiaotong University Press).