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Governing through *Shequ*/Community: The Shanghai Example

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Abstract

This paper explores the government-led community/*shequ* project in urban Shanghai as a new social institution designed to solve some of the emerging social problems associated with economic reforms. Community-building seeks to move away from a model based on direct government towards a model of structured self-governance. Together with the family and the schools, *shequ* form a bulwark against moral degeneration in the society. More importantly, infusing *shequ* with "moral purpose" also revitalizes the Party's legitimacy at the grassroots. This paper elucidates the ways in which *shequ* governance attempts to make up the spiritual and moral shortfall in society through the example of "civilizing campaigns" (*wenming huodong*). Using the new category of "new Shanghainese", this paper argues that in making the distinction between those fit to govern themselves and those, for various reasons, must be governed by others, new notions of citizenship are being created. However, communities are seen to have a morally uplifting character and a generally positive influence in the formation of citizen-subjects.

Keywords: *community (shequ), governance, citizenship, legitimacy, civilization, quality (suzhi), "new Shanghainese", Shanghai, danwei (work unit), moral*

JEL classification: *J15, O15, Z13, Z18*

1. Introduction

More than three decades of economic reforms have significantly altered the political, economic and social landscape of China. While there is no doubt that economic prosperity has lifted millions out of poverty and made China one of the most powerful countries in the world, the costs of growth including rising income inequality, corruption, and environmental degradation have significantly eroded these gains. As a result, "mass incidents" which is

euphemistic for strikes, street protests, roadblocks and other forms of mass protests have been on the rise. One way for accounting for this is the emergent "rights consciousness" in China (Goldman, 2005). Another plausible reason has been the ineffectiveness of government (usually local government) in addressing genuine complaints from citizens in the first instance resulting in them "snow-balling" into larger protests (Yu, 2009). As a consequence, the issue of "governance" has come into sharp focus for the Party and posed the following questions: How can the Party effectively govern in an increasingly diverse and polarized society undergoing rapid transformation? More importantly, how can the Party maintain political monopoly whilst also trying to control these forces of change?

Re-asserting control in a society currently experiencing some of the most disruptive changes has been an ongoing preoccupation and source of headache for the Party. Thus far, the party-state has averted crisis and continues to steer the country with some measure of skill and dexterity. However, in order to remain in control, the Party needs to continuously reinvent itself by redefining its role *vis-à-vis* the population. Jiang Zemin's "Three Represents" (*san ge daibiao* 三个代表) and Hu Jintao's "people-centredness" (*yi ren wei ben* 以人为本) are pivotal moments in reconceptualizing the task of governing in the wake of greater societal polarization and diversification. The state project of building a "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会) is a culmination of these efforts to close the income and opportunity gap.

This paper will look at the government-led community/*shequ* 社区[1]-building project as a new social institution designed to solve emerging social problems associated with reforms. *Shequ*-building seeks to move away from a model based on direct government intervention towards a model of structured self-governance. Specifically, the paper draws from the data collected from the author's field notes on the civilizing campaigns (*wenming huodong* 文明活动) carried out at the *shequ* level in Shanghai between 2006 and 2007. In China, neighbourhood *communities* are seen as instruments for teaching "civilized behaviour", for the inculcation of moral values and the overall "moral development" of society (Heberer, 2009). Together with the family and the schools, *shequ* form a bulwark against moral degeneration in the society. More importantly, infusing *shequ* with "moral purpose" also revitalizes the Party's legitimacy which has been waning in recent years.

The paper begins with an explanation of the rationale behind *shequ* construction in China. In particular, it focuses on the issues that pose challenges to urban governance as they play out at the *shequ* level such as the breakdown of the urban work unit (*danwei* 单位), the privatization of the housing market and the increase in the rural-to-urban population. This will be followed by a description of the laws, policies and programmes carried out under the *shequ* construction project. In this section, the three "self"

(*zizhi* 自治) functions of the *shequ*, that is, citizen's self-management, self-education, and self-service will be assessed. The paper argues that while steering people to govern themselves invokes neoliberal ideas, this however, must be understood as a means to strengthening "the Party's governing capacity" (*dang de zhizheng nengli* 党的执政能力) and not to be mistaken as "autonomy" as understood in Anglophone discourses. The final section explores the role of *shequ* in the ethical training of migrants in Shanghai based on established models as promoted by "spiritual civilization" campaigns (*jingshen wenming huodong* 精神文明活动). According to Bray (2006: 545), "the implementation of various schemes for moral accounting demonstrates that the community is far from a seamless whole, because it invokes a range of dividing practices that publicly distinguish between the moral and amoral, the fit and the unfit, or, as it is often expressed in China, between those of high 'quality' and those of low 'quality'." These dividing practices enhance rather than undermine the governing capacity of *shequ* because it justifies the necessity for state intervention.

2. The Rationale for *Shequ*/Community Construction

In the era of the planned economy, no *shequ*/communities existed in the real sense of the word. In fact, it was not until the rehabilitation of sociology in the mid-1980s that the term *shequ*/community was taken up with gusto by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA). China's establishment of a market economy and the subsequent dismantling of the *danwei* (work unit) provide the context for China's current *community*-building project. The implications of these changes will help to explain why *shequ*/community-building was so urgently needed in the post-Mao[2] era.

Urban China under Mao was defined by the *danwei* system. This system evolved from being a tool for the effective mobilization of labour to one that sought to oversee and administer every other aspect of urban life in a comprehensive and all-encompassing way (Bray, 2005). *Danwei* provided more than just employment to its members but also welfare benefits and social identity in return for political loyalty. The *danwei* was therefore the basic organization of a "totalitarian society" because "enterprises, educational institutions, hospitals, people's communes and other organizations were nothing but *danwei* subordinate[s] to the government" (Xu Y., 2008: 143). *Danwei* was thus the model *par excellence* of Chinese socialist governance. Put in another way, urban governance was successfully realized at the level of the *danwei*.

In order to "join with the international mainstream" (*yu guoji jiegui* 与国际接轨) and be part of the international supply chain, China's opening up to the outside world meant that its state-owned enterprises (SOEs) had to be

radically overhauled to remain competitive (Wang, 2007). Many if not all SOEs were operating at below capacity and over-burdened by the welfare functions it was asked to fulfil under the Maoist planned economy (Naughton, 1997). As expected, a great number were sent bankrupt resulting in hundreds of thousands losing their jobs and along with this, their entitlements to basic services such as state-subsidized housing, healthcare and pensions (Burkett and Hart-Landsberg, 2004). A few were amalgamated and consolidated under joint-venture agreements and some remain in operation propped up by non-performing loans from state-owned financial institutions (*ibid*.).

The coming apart of the *danwei* has been interpreted as a "hollowing out" of the state and to some extent this is true (Xu F., 2008a). However, a "hollowing out" should not be seen as a weakening of the party-state or that the state is "pauperized" by these changes. If anything, the party-state has made great financial gains from unburdening its social welfare function onto "society". Further, its policy to allow some people to get rich first has brought immense wealth to the state coffers affording it the ability to reconsolidate and invest in priority industries. In fact, as former vice-premier Zhu Rongji once said, the object of SOE reform was to "*zhuada, fangxiao* 抓大, 放小", that is, to let go of the small unproductive and unprofitable industries while taking control and ownership of large and strategically important ones. This strategy has yielded dividends for the SOEs that are now run by children and relatives of high-ranking government and Party officials. According to a recent report compiled by Willy Lam for the *China Brief* (14th January 2011), the combined assets of the 129 central SOEs also known as *yangqi* 央企 in China, was 21 trillion yuan (US$3.17 trillion) accounting for 61.7 per cent of the country's total gross domestic product (GDP) in 2009. This goes to show that income inequality is still a major sticking point after more than thirty years of reforms.

The reforms have also meant that more people than ever are now found outside of the *danwei* system. This meant that the Party-state could no longer exercise control of residents through old-style disciplinary mechanisms and mass mobilization. Privatization of housing, a product of the dismantling process, has resulted in more people living further away from their place of work and that they lived less with co-workers as neighbours. This trend, together with the influx of rural-urban migrants, has produced an urban society that is more fragmented, heterogeneous and divisive therefore providing a recipe for urban unrest.

Another important aspect of China's transformation has been the re-emergence of many social ills which were absent (or driven underground) during the Maoist period. Negative social phenomena such as crime, prostitution, gambling, addiction and epidemics like HIV/AIDS have created new challenges for the party-state. In the urban areas, rising unemployment,

declining living standards and forced relocations due to urban development have led urban residents to open confrontation with the local government (Perry, 2010). Although protests have targeted local actors in the administration, it has nevertheless been seen by the party-state as undermining its legitimacy, which, lacking electoral grounding, is based on serving the "people's" interests, no matter how vaguely defined these may be.

The *shequ*-building project is the government's response to mounting pressures to resolve social tensions. Designed to replace *danwei* and the neighbourhood committees, *shequ* provides citizens with a sense of empowerment through formal political participation. It was hoped that through active participation at the *shequ* level, citizens will learn to cultivate the right kind of behaviour and mode of thinking necessary for the further development of society. In the process, the Party network is being strengthened even as it delegates the task of "governing" to others more up to the task. This suggests that self-government and "governing" has become a more diffuse and inclusive project that, in the context of China, is not separate from state rule but is actually constitutive of it: enhancing, enriching and revitalizing the state in the process of improving, helping and guiding the population to ever higher levels of material wealth and spiritual well-being (Jeffreys and Sigley, 2009).

3. From "*Community* Services" to "*Community*-Building"

The legal framework for the construction of *shequ*/communities in China came in the form of the 1989 *Law on Urban Residents Committee Organization* (Xu F., 2008a). While commonly translated to mean "community" in Chinese, *shequ* actually refers to a territorially defined area. A compound character, *shequ* comprises of "*she* 社" which means "society" and "*qu* 区" which refers to an area or zone (Xu F., 2008b: 634). Accordingly, *community* in China does not mean natural social groupings but refers to a spatially defined, officially administered urban unit. In China therefore, *communities* correlate to already existing grassroots administrative units as demarcated by the government (Bray, 2006). This is not to suggest that communities of the kind that exist in the West are not present in China, but to emphasize that *communities* in China are conceived and practiced for the purposes of enhancing the party-state's ability to govern, hence "governing through community" (Rose, 1999). As China rapidly urbanizes, urban residential *communities* are thus the new frontiers of government in Chinese cities of the twenty-first century.

As Feng Xu (2008a: 26) notes, *shequ*-building which begun in the late 1980s did not become national policy until 1998. This corresponded with the rapid disintegration of the *danwei* system resulting in large numbers of people being laid off and cut off from the social benefits they once enjoyed

by virtue of being affiliated with their *danwei*. Reflecting Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic and cautious approach to reforms which he once described as a process of "crossing the river by feeling the stones", *shequ* construction also began its life as a series of "experiments" in selected cities (Xu F., 2008a). The experiences of these sites were then given full consideration with debates ensuing in academic and policy circles as to the relative merits of each (*ibid*.). Shanghai, being one of the pilot cities to participate in this experiment, underwent *community* construction in 1996 mainly in response to the new situation created by the deepening of SOE reforms and the corresponding need for new social management methods (Xu Y., 2008). Despite variations in practice from city to city, a model of *community*-building generally took shape.

In the beginning, *community* was only narrowly conceived as a means for replacing the *danwei* in terms of social service provision. Gradually, the scope of *community* work began to expand beyond the original idea of "*community* service" (*fuwu* 服务) to that of holistic "*community*-building" (*jianshe* 建设) including culture, health, environment, education, morality, policing, grassroots democracy, and "Party-building" (Bray, 2006). The Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) even set up a Division for Grassroots Authority and Community/*Shequ*-Building (*jiceng zhengquan yu shequ jianshe si* 基层政权与社区建设司) (Xu F., 2008a: 26). For example, in 1993, before *community* construction was officially adopted as policy, the MoCA released a document entitled "Some Suggestions Regarding the Acceleration and Development of Community Services" (*guanyu jiakuai fazhan shequ fuwuye de yijian* 关于加快发展社区服务业的意见) in which *shequ* was solely defined as a functional replacement for *danwei* in terms of its social welfare role. However by 2000, "*community*-building" had replaced "*community* services" as the new paradigm of government. In this document, the MoCA outlined what *community*-building involved:

1) Expanding services to marginalized or vulnerable populations such as the elderly, children, the disabled, less well-off families, and other people in need of social assistance.
2) Improve *community* healthcare through education and service provision. In particular, pay attention to family planning issues, disease prevention and generally promote healthy living.
3) Promote *community* culture. This is to be facilitated by the implementation of national programmes of "socialist spiritual civilization". The spaces and resources of the *community* such as billboards, plaques and columns should be used to propagate a "healthy" and "wholesome" culture. The aim is to create citizens who will realize the goal of constructing a civilized and harmonious *community*.

4) Beautification of the *community* landscape. A clean, green, and sanitized *community* will be better conducive to healthy living. The goal is to increase residents' awareness of the need for environmental protection.
5) Strengthening *community* policing/surveillance. Upholding public order and preventing crime lie at the core of this goal. *Communities* also have a responsibility to rehabilitate and monitor released prisoners. Management of the floating population is also another role of the *community*. In this way, social stability will be guaranteed.

(MoCA 2000)

Clearly, "*community* services", the MoCA's initial response to the break-up of the *danwei*, was inadequate in dealing with the complex urban situation. After a decade of "*community* construction", it would appear that these efforts are yielding positive results. As Xu Yongxiang (2008: 147) observes: "fundamental changes in formerly 'squalid' neighbourhoods, sanitation, landscaping and streets' have been brought about." He further argues that:

> Community services and recreational facilities are gradually being set up for the benefit and convenience of residents, and security conditions and the cultural atmosphere are being improved. Increasingly, [what were once drab] neighbourhoods are [now] becoming communities. (*ibid*.)

However, it remains to be seen whether the former identity of the "*danwei* person" (*danwei ren* 单位人) has been succeeded by the new "*community* person" (*shequ ren* 社区人) even though meaningful conceptions of citizenship and identity are emerging against this backdrop (Herberer, 2009). The primary reason for this, and as I will elaborate below, is the gap between official discourse about *shequ* and the reality as practiced at the grassroots. For example, *community* self-governance is being promoted as the new discourse of *shequ* construction in urban China. This however, does not mean that *communities* are regarded as a "mechanism through which ordinary citizens can (collectively) confront the might of 'faceless' government" (Bray, 2006: 532) but more a "containment strategy". *Shequ*-building should therefore be viewed as an attempt by the party-state to build formal institutions of political participation to ensure that collective actions against the state can be organized in a politically acceptable manner and that they do not spill onto the streets and pose a threat to social stability.

Throughout the literature on *shequ* in Chinese, the idea of "self-governance" (*zizhi*) is promoted as a core goal and strategy of *community*-building in China. What does this mean? The natural inclination is to render *zizhi* "autonomy" in the sense that civil society is regarded as an autonomous sphere of action outside or beyond the reach of the state. However, in my interviews with local officials as well as ordinary citizens in Shanghai, *zizhi*

does not connote action outside the established parameters of state discourse and practice. In fact, when *zizhi* is used, it is seen as being an integral part of state discourse in developing the modern subject whether understood as a collectivity like a *shequ*/community or at the individual level of the citizen/subject (Herberer, 2009). Further, what is intimated in these responses is that China is different in the sense that the origins/context of its *shequ* project proceeds from historically and politically specific set of circumstances. Compared to the Maoist past, Chinese now experience more freedoms than they have ever experienced at any other time in history. *Shequ* then provides the *pingtai* 平台 or platform for experiments in participatory democracy and *shequ* self-governance is an expression of this democratic principle albeit in a Chinese setting. The Communist Party of China (CPC) has made repeated claims to the effect that China is "not ready" for democracy because the "quality" of its population is, on the whole, low (Yu, 2009). The development of *shequ* self-governance is meant to rectify this situation so that one day, in the not too distant future, some form of representative government will eventuate in the People's Republic of China (*ibid*.). The *shequ* should therefore be viewed as a training ground for the creation of citizens who will one day inherit the China of tomorrow and lead it into a bold new future (Goldman, 2005).

Citizenship and the embryonic beginnings of participatory democracy could be potentially germinating at the level of *shequ*. The Chinese state links the promotion of the "full development of the individual" (*ren de quanmian fazhan* 人的全面发展) and the overall national strength (*guojia de zonghe guoli* 国家的综合国力) as part-and-parcel of the same project (Sigley, 2004). Nations are comprised of individuals but not just any individual. To be a modern and well respected nation state in a world of nation states, the Chinese state desires the kinds of individuals who are civilized, modern, consuming, and of a generally "higher" quality. Add to this list "political docility", because upsetting the political *status quo* is tantamount to treachery, so above all else, this "high"-quality individual must respect the political order. This political order suggests *community*-building forms the lowest level of government, namely at the level of the sub-district. Insofar as it is "self-governing", it refers to the fact that *communities* lie outside the formal structures of government. Thus, although *community*-building is a state-sponsored project, communities have limited autonomy in the management of their affairs.

The three "self-functions", namely, self-management, self-education, and self-service of *shequ*/community are a means for the state to offload some of its responsibilities onto social actors and organizations. In terms of self-management, *communities* are expected to mobilize itself to meet policy goals. It is also expected to create and manage its own management structures like

committees and sub-committees as well as organize its own meetings (Bray, 2006). Concerning self-education and self-service, *communities* are expected to be self-reliant (*ibid*.). In tandem with state goals to raise the overall quality of the population, *communities* must substantially rely on their own resources to improve the intellectual, spiritual and moral qualities of its population (*ibid*.). The scope of *shequ* self-governance therefore extends beyond meeting the "economic shortfall" but also the moral and spiritual shortfall resulting from the collapse of communism as a hegemonic discourse in the post-Cold War world. From the MoCA (2000) document, it can be gleaned that "problematic" sections of the population such as migrant labourers, delinquents, the unemployed, and the drug addicts are particular targets of "*community*-building".

The next section explores how *communities* in Shanghai are realizing the goal of building "harmonious *communities*" at the grassroots. In particular, it elucidates the ways in which these *communities* attempt to make up the spiritual and moral shortfall through the example of "civilizing campaigns" (*wenming huodong*). The conceptual link between notions of "moral quality" and "self-governance" will be made and it will be argued that this linkage is imperative for the realization of "harmonious society" as envisioned by the Hu-Wen leadership. In making this link however, it is inevitable that dividing practices be used to identify those who are capable of governing themselves and those who must be subjected to further supervision by their *communities*. However, communities are seen to have a morally uplifting character and a generally positive influence in the formation of citizen-subjects.

4. Divided Communities: Civilizing Campaigns and the "New Shanghainese"

Twenty-first century Shanghai has attracted the attention of academics and observers for many different reasons. Its glittering skyline bedazzles spectators who flock to the bund to admire the architectural feats of Chinese modernization. With the Pudong financial district the central focus of the city's reform efforts, Shanghai's spatial divisions are fast altering the physical landscape and are having a tumultuous impact on the lives of everyday people. In order to comprehend the sheer impact of this change, we look no further than the numbers. Shanghai has experienced an explosion in population size (both formal and informal), so this means that the city is expanding and reclaiming what were once rural farmlands and turning these into habitable new neighbourhoods.[3] Shanghai is also growing vertically which means that more people than ever are living in apartments and high-rises.[4] Shanghai's demographics also indicate that its population is aging and that more migrants, who in the past were expected to "move on", have

now permanently settled in the city. This has had the greatest impact on population dynamics and also problematized the "Shanghai identity". Just who are the "new Shanghainese" (*xin Shanghairen* 新上海人) and how have they changed notions of citizenship in Shanghai? Crucially, how have the "new Shanghainese" been linked to the project of "harmonious community" construction in this fast-changing metropolis?

The label "new Shanghainese" (*xin Shanghairen*) was first coined by the Shanghai Spiritual Civilisation Office in a survey conducted to ascertain the city's new demographic make-up (*China Daily*, 13th January 2007). According to the survey, "new Shanghainese" referred to those who have come from overseas or other provinces. They have either obtained a local *hukou* 户口 (residence permit) or a temporary residence permit and have lived in the city for more than five years. They also have decent jobs and stable incomes and plan to stay in the city in the long term. In other words, "new Shanghainese" refer to this elite group of migrants, who in the past were barred from obtaining Shanghai citizenship but now enjoy the full modicum of rights offered by the city government. Why has this been the case?

Shanghai was not always a "migrant-receiver" city. During the Maoist period, the state launched two major city-to-countryside migration episodes (Li *et al*., 2010). The first occurred in the 1950s in which millions of Shanghai youth had their *hukou* annulled and were sent to the countryside to "build socialism". The second wave occurred in the lead-up to the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in which mostly skilled workers were sent to build military factories in far-flung places. With the rebuilding of Shanghai made a priority in the 1990s, the gates to *hukou* attainment were opened but it did not confer equal citizenship on all new arrivals. This was because the overarching strategy of the Shanghai Municipal Government was to develop the city through science and technology (*kejiao xing shi* 科教兴市) in which the aim was to transform the city into a "platform for talent" (*rencai gaodi* 人才高地). *Hukou* restriction to educated and wealthy migrants was a means to realize this dream.

Li *et al*. (2010) in their in-depth analysis of the *hukou* system in Shanghai found that there were three pathways to obtaining a *hukou*. The first is through what is known as the "talent scheme" (*rencai yinjin* 人才引进), the second is through attainment of college-level qualifications (the higher the better), and finally through inter-region marriages (*liangdi hunyin* 两地婚姻). For migrants without "talent" (i.e. educational attainment) and wealth (because talent is sometimes not enough), the best they can do is to apply for a "transient residence card" (*linshi juzhuzheng* 临时居住证). This is why they are commonly referred to as "second-class" even "third-class" citizens in the literature on migrants in China (Solinger, 1999). Even those with "talent

cards" cannot be guaranteed permanent residency. In fact, "talent" is so broadly defined that in 2007, only 38 per cent of college graduates with talent cards could successfully convert their temporary residency to official Shanghai *hukou* (Li *et al*., 2010: 152). Gradations of talent depend on the ranking of the university one is enrolled with, the degree one is studying for, the marks one gets, the prestige and stability of one's place of employment, and so forth. So stringent and arbitrary are these measures that they have turned the conferment of *hukou* into a complex process and a lucrative business for the Shanghai government (*ibid*.).

City governments act like enterprises and weigh up their fiscal burden with the gains they will have made from the *hukou* system. While on the one hand, attracting people of "high quality" or "talent" is an absolute must to maintain Shanghai's competitiveness, on the other, city administrators do not want to shoulder the financial burden of social welfare provision. Many social commentators have decried the *hukou* system instituted in the 1950s to keep the rural population landlocked in their place of birth. In 2003, the tragic death of a migrant student Sun Zhigang while in police detention because he was found without the relevant residency permits, unleashed a torrent of anger and led to the abolishment of the then controversial detention and repatriation policy (*China Daily*, 10th June 2003). However, at the root of this problem lies the *hukou* system, which far from being relaxed, has undergone substantial transformations that enhance the party-state's capacity to exercise greater control, in particular, in deciding who becomes full-fledged members of the society and who is excluded. The residency permit system thus creates a situation whereby a "regime of discrimination" and "exclusion" is normalized and is based on "technoscientific" reasoning which rewards "talent" and punishes or dehumanizes persons of "low talent" and "low quality" (Sigley, 2009). The fact that they are not counted as part of the official population in the national census shows that migrants are regarded as sub-persons, represented by a transient resident card that only recognizes their capacity for labour and nothing else.

As the second generation of migrants (*nongmingong er'dai* 农民工二代) come of age, a new dilemma now faces the government because unlike their parents who have accepted a fate of rootlessness, this new generation want to make a life for themselves in the cities. For many children of migrants, returning to the countryside is not an option but staying on in the cities is also nearly impossible given the low status and marginalization of migrants due to systemic inequalities arising out of the *hukou* system. The Foxconn suicides in 2010 (Kahney, 2010) highlighted not only the plight of migrant workers in general but the grave situation facing many second-generation migrants living in cities in particular. In response, sociologists in China have made a passionate appeal to the government and enterprises to make a

conscious effort to make these new migrants full-fledged citizens. They put the problem thus:

> Over the last thirty years, China has depended on huge numbers of cheap laborers, mainly from rural areas, who have forged an export-oriented style "world factory", and fueled the rapid growth of China's economy. But at the same time, the basic survival rights of the work force have been overlooked; we have denied migrant workers' dignity, paid them at wage levels below the average for third world countries, made it impossible for them to settle and live in the cities, while leaving them to drift back and forth between cities and the countryside. We have made them live a migrancy life that is rootless and helpless, where families are separated, parents have no one to support them, and children are not taken care of. In short, this is a life without dignity. From the tragedies at Foxconn, we can hear the loud cries for life from the second generation of migrant workers, warning society to reconsider this development model that has sacrificed people's fundamental dignity. (Kahney, 2010)

A poignant article in the *People Daily* (13th January 2007) also points to the bitter irony in the label "new Shanghainese" used to denote only the "high-quality" migrants while completely ignoring the millions of migrants who call Shanghai home. "New Shanghainese" does not only draw on distinctions between the "old Shanghainese" or locals and non-locals but also between different groups of migrants. The article calls on the government to include in the category of "new Shanghainese" all those who have contributed to the prosperity of Shanghai but have been rendered invisible by this label:

> While applauding the contribution made by these "new Shanghainese", we seem to have forgotten about another, much larger, group of people who have probably made more of a contribution to the city's boom over the past decade. They definitely deserve the title of "new Shanghainese" or even Shanghainese.
>
> They are the construction workers who have built the city's futuristic skyline in Lujiazui, and the thousands of high-rises, subways, bridges, tunnels and ring roads, as well as the landmark Shanghai Museum, Pudong International Airport and Shanghai Grand Theater.
>
> They are also the nannies who look after children, cook and keep millions of Shanghai families clean and tidy.
>
> This group of people usually young women also work in the city's many restaurants and entertainment venues that make Shanghai such an agreeable place to live.
>
> They are also the city's many delivery workers, supermarket cashiers, refuse collectors, masseurs, and clothing and food vendors.

Being a city that is built upon the labour of migrants, their plight thus forms the backdrop of *community*-building efforts in Shanghai. The aim of *community*-building with regard to the so-called "temporary" migrant population is to generate a sense of belonging without affording them the full spectrum of rights and protection that would otherwise be conferred to *hukou* holders. The government does not want to be held liable for their welfare even though they are cognisant of their indispensable role in the industrialization of cities. "Socialist spiritual civilization" campaigns carried out at the *community* level are meant to create solidarity, promote societal cohesion, and reduce conflict by advocating self-responsibility. This fits nicely with the discourse of *community* "self-governance" by putting the blame squarely on migrants and their "low quality" for their demise in society.

Civilizing campaigns also move the focus from "welfare provision" to other, less tangible measures of overall well-being such as morality, ethics, culture, safety, and belonging. Since they cannot confer citizenship status to migrants, *communities* help bridge the gap by improving the quality of life for their migrant population through volunteer, educational and philanthropic activities. For example, while in Shanghai, I participated in a programme whereby the social work students of my university volunteer their time as teachers in a migrant *community* school. The focus of our activities was not so much to replicate the curriculum taught at school but to bridge the knowledge gap arising out of disadvantage in background, culture and experiences of the students. Many of my students came from families that did not abide by the one-child policy and much of their time outside class was spent helping their families run small businesses or babysit younger siblings. In effect, many of these students did not have a childhood and as almost all did not have any fond memories or experiences of the countryside, they envision their futures in Shanghai. For this reason, the *community* initiative was to cultivate students' sense of belonging and identification with Shanghai in the hope that one day the *hukou* system will "catch up" with society and that full citizenship will be eventually attained.

Slogans painted throughout *shequ* in Shanghai capture the state's desire for *shequ* self-governance: "*wo zuo, wo canjia, wo xiangshou* 我做, 我参加, 我享受" ("I do, I participate, I benefit"). Further, it must be re-iterated that "self-governance" is an integral part of state rule and does not imply an equality between citizens in terms of the right to govern, but as Nicholas Rose (1999) points out, turns on a division between those "fit" to rule and those fit only to be ruled by others. The majority of migrants are deemed to be at the "infant" stage of self-help which therefore supports the continuing role of government in their improvement and supervision. Migrants can however, improve their "inner urbanization" not only through consumption and participation in the production of cheap and low-end goods but also by

improving their "personal quality" in terms of skills, education and degree of urbanization (*chengshiren* 城市人) (Xu, 2009: 55). Self-help books are replete with guides on how to improve one's demeanour and behaviour and full of admonitions against social taboos like spitting in public, jaywalking and queue-jumping. Reminders to say "please" and "thank you", "hello" and "how are you?" show that restraint and self-control are the hallmarks of civilized personhood. However, improving the social capital of migrants could also be viewed as a conscious effort on the part of the state to move China up in the global supply chain from reliance on low-end, labour-intensive, export-oriented production to high-end, technologically sophisticated work. If migrants have more skills and social capital, it is hoped that they can bargain for higher wages and better living conditions in the labour market. Improving the "quality" of migrant population is therefore linked to the improvement of the social order and the overall economic standing of China.

As China adopts measures of "good governance" in line with recommendations from international institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations, it is beginning to move away from a dependence on coercive methods to a service-oriented, people-oriented approach. This is particularly true with regard to the treatment of migrants and slowly we are witnessing a realization of Hu Jintao's "people-first" (*yi ren wei ben*) strategy. It also means that authorities are seeking new ways to make migrants "legible" through *hukou* selection criteria, ranking systems, and other complex application and bureaucratic methods involved in the registration process. On the economic front, this is also supported by the move away from an emphasis on GDP growth towards growth that addresses issues of inequality and poverty crystallized in efforts to build an "all round, well-off" (*quanmian, xiaokang* 全面, 小康) and "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui*). However, the barriers to full urban membership in the *community* are still considerably high for migrants. Although they can obtain temporary residence permits and their cheap labour is needed to fuel China's continuing development, they are still held in contempt by locals and increasingly by other migrants of "talent" and "higher quality". For example, an excerpt from a pamphlet distributed to volunteers at the migrant *community* I taught at reveals the ambivalent attitude towards migrants by other migrants:

> …However, with the inward flow of these people is the danger that they [migrants], through their "naïve young eyes", will view this [discrimination] as a type of "social inequality". Their lack of understanding of the rational development of this inequality has contributed to this and has already seeped into their everyday lives and to the core of their very existence. It is very likely that a feeling of hatred will arise from this shared sentiment.[5]

In the past, the literature on rural-urban migrants in China has focused on discrimination arising from tensions between locals and non-locals, that is, between Shanghainese *hukou* holders and non-Shanghainese without *hukou* (Solinger, 1999). Nowadays with the introduction of a new residency permit system on top of the already existing *hukou* system, internal differentiation is made between migrants of "higher quality" and those of "lower quality" determined predominantly on the basis of educational and cultural attainment. What new research has shown is that a further distinction needs to be made between the "new Shanghainese" referring to these superior migrant-citizens and their "poorer-quality" country cousins (Li *et al*., 2010). This goes to show just how unreliable and problematic the dichotomous distinction between outsider/insider, migrant/non-migrant can be. Moreover, the more the government divides this group, the more it is able to exert control over them. If migrants cannot coalesce around a common cause, they cannot pose a threat to the party-state. Thus by granting some the exclusive right to *community* urban membership denied to others, the state removes from local identity the need for "place embeddedness" and hence lessens the potential for confrontation between migrants and the party-state. Therefore you can be officially recognized as a Shanghainese citizen if you have "talent" and money even if you have only lived in the city for a short period of time. Conversely, you may be a migrant labourer who has resided with your family for over two decades but you are not counted as part of its official population.

5. Conclusion

In sociological parlance, *communities* are spontaneous sociological facts that can be made up of people in the same geographical location who share similar beliefs and have similar values. In China, the legal definition of "community" is a "fixed" geographical entity regardless of its internal composition. *Communities* formed along the lines of *danwei* were predictable and easily penetrated by the government. People used to work and live together, and the intimacies of their daily routines made known to all where the distinction between private/public was a non-issue. However, with the onset of reforms and the desire to link up to the global economy, *danwei* became the first casualty, shedding hundreds of millions of employees in the process. Simultaneously, population policy was relaxed to supply the growing coastal cities with cheap labour to fuel the industrialization process. No longer attached to the land or *danwei*, many found employment in the private sector that emerged almost overnight. This trend, coupled with the inadequate social infrastructure to cater to the new population demographic, troubled the CPC deeply. The CPC's presence at the grassroots (previously via *danwei*) was disorganized and weak. People no longer looked

to the state for survival, identity or sustenance. Party revitalization was thus desperately needed.

Shequ-building must be viewed in this context: as a response to the demise of post-*danwei* society and a breakdown of the CPC's political infrastructure at the grassroots. The much-touted self-governance of *shequ* exists only on paper and is limited to encouraging residents to help themselves in the realm of public service provision thereby significantly reducing the costs of governance. However, in the realm of political leadership, the "spiritual" guidance of the Party has not yielded to social pressure. "Governing through community", as analyzed by Rose (1999), has become the new strategy in linking government to disparate social elements similar to practices in neoliberal Western countries. However, where communities of interest in the West can converge to put demands on their government, *communities* in China can only tentatively push for gradual change.

In the case of Shanghai, change has occurred in the example of *hukou* reform in which different "residency status" could be obtained conferring access to different levels of benefits or welfare cover. For migrants of little "talent" very few services are available while for others with talent and are regarded as of "higher quality", a full range of rights and protections are offered. The label "new Shanghainese" (*xin Shanghairen*) is an example of how the party-state employs dividing strategies in the governing of this problematic group. "New Shanghainese" refer to a new category of migrants with college degrees, cultural and financial capital and a desire to live in Shanghai in the long term. It ignores the contributions and even the existence of the millions of other migrants who have contributed to the industrialization of Shanghai and the diversity of their *communities* who also call the city home.

The aim of *community*-building arising in the context of the need to better manage this underclass of migrants is to turn migrants into "urbanites" by focusing on ways in which they could improve. Civilizing campaigns at the *shequ*/community level should be understood as attempts to rectify the "deficient" component of China's urbanization process as manifested in the "poor quality" of its vast workforce of rural-urban migrants. "Socialist spiritual civilization" campaigns encourage migrants to adopt the good habits of urban people. By internalizing norms of proper dress, etiquette and polite forms of address, it is hoped that this will stop the social stigmatization associated with migrants and rural China in general. However, even though self-governance is being promoted, migrants are, on the whole, regarded to be at the "infant" stages of self-help which means that while some are trusted to govern themselves (e.g. the "new Shanghainese"), others require continued governmental intervention. Further, it is hoped that in the process of improving the skills and social capital of migrants, China will also be able

to improve its economic standing by moving away from an economic model that relies on keeping the migrant working population marginalized in order to remain competitive.

Notes

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1. Throughout this paper, I will be using *shequ* (the Chinese translation of "community" from English) and "community" interchangeably. However, where "community" is used in the Chinese context, it will be italicized to indicate that *community* does not have the same meanings as in Anglophone discourses.
2. What I want to convey with the use of "post-Mao" is not so much a historical break with the past (although at a certain level a "break" has occurred) but to suggest that with the official endorsement of the "socialist market economy" in the Chinese Constitution in 1991, China is no longer the society it once was under Mao and this needs to be acknowledged in some way. In my case, I have chosen to use "post-Mao" to denote this change. My Chinese supervisors brought to my attention that in Chinese academic writing, "post-Mao" is never used because CPC rule has not ended and that to do so was to convey that it has. What we are witnessing, as I am told, is a transformation of communist rule to meet the challenges arising out of adoption of a "market economy". In other words, the market economy has transformed the Communist Party and not brought about its demise. The use of "post-Mao" therefore conveys both change and continuity. For an appreciation of the Maoism in a secular age, see Timothy Cheek's (2006) *Living with Reform: China since 1989*, pp. 32-74.
3. According to China's National Bureau of Statistics, Shanghai's population stood at approximately 23 million which represented a growth of more than 37 per cent from the 2000 census.
4. According to the 2000 Census, the average living space per inhabitant in Shanghai is 11.8 square metres.
5. This came from a pamphlet written by Shanghai University students who made up the bulk of volunteers for the "Sunflower Project". This project provided, amongst other things, Sunday classes to the children of migrant workers at the Minhang District migrant community where I volunteered as an English teacher. The initiative is part of a larger government project known as the "Community Project". For further information, visit <*http://www.community.org.cn*>. Translation is my own.

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