
Serving the People, Building the Party: Social Organizations and Party Work in China's Urban Villages

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ABSTRACT

The reform era has been associated with the waning authority of the Chinese Communist Party in urban society. While existing studies have investigated the Party's self-reinvention through the incorporation into its ranks of professional groups and the new socioeconomic elite, much less attention has been given to how the Party has rebuilt its presence in neighborhoods among urban residents and migrant communities. Drawing on a case study in Kunming, this article argues that the Party has sought to deepen its territorial reach and regain political relevance by emphasizing welfare provision and service delivery at the grassroots. The rise of service-centered Party-building has seen increased co-optation of previously independent social organizations as "partners" and "collaborators" in service provision. Enrolling NGOs enables the Party to both revamp its image as a paternalistic redistributor and regain its ability to mobilize the masses through appropriating the vocabulary of participation and volunteerism that social organizations espouse. If in co-opting the professional and business elite the Party has successfully fused Party authority with market power, at the urban grassroots it has appropriated social forces to reestablish its presence and bolster its legitimacy, with important implications for the autonomy and professionalism of NGOs.

Adaptive institutional change is viewed as a crucial factor for regime resilience and survival. In his comparative study of why some communist regimes endured while others collapsed, Martin Dimitrov argues that continuous adaptation makes durability more likely, while failure to reform heightens the probability of

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collapse.¹ In his thesis on authoritarian resilience, Andrew Nathan similarly highlights the centrality of institutional innovation for regime survival, through the creation of institutions that absorb popular grievances and bolster political efficacy.² By successfully engaging in market reform, reinventing their ideology and making institutional adjustments that strengthen inclusion and accountability, regimes such as China, Vietnam, and Laos were able to thrive despite the collapse of Communism elsewhere in the 1980s and 1990s.

In China, the Communist Party has been particularly successful in deploying a repertoire of strategies to regain political relevance and organizational control in society. While the presence of the Party was ubiquitous during the Mao era, market reform has presented the once hegemonic Party institutions with the prospect of atrophy.³ The extant literature on Party-building has mainly analyzed the CCP's efforts to revamp the Party's outreach to new non-public-sector organizations.⁴ This pragmatic shift legitimized the recruitment of more educated, high-skilled members and "advanced forces" such as private entrepreneurs and professionals, which has contributed to the "technocratic reorganization" of the CCP.⁵ The Party has furthermore extended its influence through Party-building work among new social and economic organizations, known as the "two new" organizations (*liangxin zuzhi* 两新组织). As Patricia Thornton observes, the CCP has countered predictions of obsolescence by "breathing new life into its grassroots organizations in precisely those areas in which the forces of commercialization and marketization have developed most rapidly."⁶ The revamp of Party cells (*jiceng dang zuzhi* 基层党组织) in private enterprises has helped consolidate the Party's reach into the business community.⁷

Less attention in the literature has been given to the way the Party has sought to rebuild its presence at the neighborhood level, which has been no less significant.

1. Martin Dimitrov, "Understanding Regime Collapse and Resilience," in *Why Communism Did Not Collapse: Understanding Authoritarian Regime Resilience in Asia and Europe*, ed. Martin Dimitrov (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3–40.

2. Andrew J. Nathan, "Authoritarian Resilience," *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 1 (January 2003): 6–17.

3. David Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson, 2008).

4. Gang Guo, "Party Recruitment of College Students in China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 14, no. 43 (May 2005): 371–93; Andrew G. Walder, "The Party Elite and Trajectory of Change," in *The Chinese Communist Party in Reform*, ed. Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard and Yongnian Zheng (London: Routledge, 2006), 15–32.

5. Hiroshi Sato and Keiya Eto, "The Changing Structure of Communist Party Membership in Urban China, 1988–2002," *Journal of Contemporary China* 17, no. 57 (November 2008): 653–72.

6. Patricia M. Thornton, "The New Life of the Party: Party-Building and Social Engineering in Greater Shanghai," *China Journal* 68, no. 1 (July 2012): 75.

7. Zhang Han, "Party Building in Urban Business Districts: Organizational Adaptation of the Chinese Communist Party," *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 94 (July 2015): 644–64; Bruce J. Dickson, *Red Capitalists in China: The Party, Private Entrepreneurs, and Prospect for Political Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Yongnian Zheng, "Interest Representation and the Transformation of the Chinese Communist Party," *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 16 (October 2002): 57–85.

At the administrative levels of the street (*jiedao* 街道) and *shequ* (社区),⁸ the CCP has reinforced its presence in recent years by creating more Party cells, increasing the number of Party members in grassroots governance, establishing Party-affiliated community service centers, and enlisting neighborhood-based social organizations to participate in the Party's work. The centrality of grassroots Party-building (*jiceng dangjian* 基层党建) was spotlighted in a document issued by the General Office of the CCP in 2019, which observes that as urbanization continues apace, the quality of Party work in urban areas must be improved in order to “consolidate the basis of Party rule in cities.”⁹ Party organizations at the urban grassroots are to take up key roles as “strong fortresses” (*jianqiang zhandou baolei* 坚强战斗堡垒), tasked with promoting the Party's position, implementing the Party's decisions, taking the lead in grassroots governance, and uniting and mobilizing the masses.¹⁰ In 2018, the CCP Organization Department designated 214 cities as pilot sites in which to promote grassroots Party-building.¹¹ Over two thousand training sessions on urban grassroots Party work were organized nationwide that year to provide training for some 205,000 cadres.¹² Street and *shequ* Party organizations have been encouraged to recruit Party committee members of *danweis* and private enterprises to serve in an ex officio capacity,¹³ and professional groups are being co-opted into Party-building efforts through activities such as community education and voluntary work.¹⁴

This article draws on fieldwork interviews and documentary research to examine how the CCP has sought to bolster its relevance and control through the provision of welfare and the enhancement of service delivery in a bid to regain its presence in the daily lives of urban residents. This has translated into a strategy of recruiting and co-opting social organizations to do Party work. We will show how this process of co-optation has unfolded on the ground through the case of the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Community Link.¹⁵ Registered in 2005 as a civil

8. The street is an administrative level with jurisdiction over about 20,000 to 100,000 residents. The *shequ*, usually translated as “community” or “neighborhood,” is the lowest level of urban administration and covers hundreds to several thousand households. For an earlier account of grassroots Party work, see Aiko Takahara and Robert Benewick, “Party Work in the Urban Communities,” in *The Chinese Communist Party in Reform*, ed. Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard and Yongnian Zheng (London: Routledge, 2006), 157–72.

9. General Office of the Chinese Communist Party, “Guanyu jiaqiang he gaijin chengshi jiceng dang de jianshe gongzuo de yijian” [Opinions on strengthening and improving Party-building work at the urban grassroots], accessed September 30, 2019, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-05/08/content_5389836.htm.

10. Ibid.

11. Hui Lin, “Hangshi zhizheng genji youhua chengshi zhili zengjin qunzhong fuzhi—quanguo chengshi jiceng dangjian zhanxian xin mianmao huanfa xin qixiang” [Consolidate foundation of rule, enhance city governance, improve public welfare: The new life of urban grassroots Party-building], Xinhua, May 7, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-05/07/c_1124461872.htm.

12. Ibid.

13. General Office of the Chinese Communist Party, “Guanyu jiaqiang he gaijin.”

14. Ibid.

15. Pseudonyms are used for the names of the district, *shequ*, and social organization to protect confidentiality.

nonenterprise (*minban fei qiye* 民办非企业)—an institution established with non-state funds that engages in nonprofit social services—Community Link works with residents of Bridgetown *shequ* in Kunming City, Yunnan Province. Beginning in the mid-2010s, social workers in the organization were increasingly required to incorporate a Party-building agenda in their services, while the community initiatives they organized also became appropriated as part of Party work. Because the social workers in Community Link had already established relations of trust with residents during their decade-long presence in the neighborhood, the Party was able to harness and build on borrowed social capital as it inserted itself as a partner of the NGO in service provision.

Co-opting Community Link by financing its operations, the local Party has created relations of fiscal dependence and political pressure which have compelled the NGO to subscribe to the Party-building drive. While readily admitting to the need to embrace this initiative, the social workers we interviewed displayed a strong sense of efficacy because they viewed their own participation as bottom-up input that benefits residents. Rather than being manifested as the overt suppression of grassroots society, the Party's intervention in this instance came across as a seemingly benign process where permeation is achieved through the normalization of the Party's presence in the daily lives of residents. As Community Link's services became increasingly appropriated as Party work, however, the organization's autonomy has been undermined as it was drawn more deeply into the local CCP governing apparatus.

PARTY-BUILDING AT THE URBAN GRASSROOTS

The transition from state socialism created profound challenges for the Party at the grassroots. During the socialist era, the CCP had exercised overarching organizational control over society in both rural and urban areas. In the countryside, the Party's penetration of rural communities hinged on a dense network of village and production-team cadres, who were given complete control over rural means of production under agricultural collectivization.¹⁶ The system sustained highly clientelistic relations where rural residents were materially dependent on cadres for their basic livelihood.¹⁷ In urban areas, the *danwei* (workplace) system under Mao played a similar role in ensuring compliance.¹⁸ *Danwei* organizations provided healthcare, housing, pensions, and welfare measures when needed, and the interaction between *danwei* leaders and employees entailed a patron-client relationship

16. Johnathan Unger, *The Transformation of Rural China* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2002).

17. Jean C. Oi, *State and Peasant in Contemporary China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

18. Han, "Party Building in Urban Business Districts."

wherein the latter deferred to their leaders in exchange for access to public goods and protection.¹⁹

Alongside the rise of private enterprises and the massive layoffs that came with the restructuring of the state-owned sector in the 1990s, the advent of market reform has been associated with a substantial decrease in the number and range of *danweis* and the welfare provisions on offer.²⁰ Neighborhood-based organizations established under Mao to incorporate and mobilize those segments of the population who fell outside of the reach of privileged workplaces were also becoming “sclerotic, overly authoritarian, underfunded and isolated from the communities.”²¹ The loosening of migration restrictions has contributed to a large-scale movement of rural job-seekers into urban centers since the mid-1980s, and the sheer scale of this work migration further challenged the Party. As of 2018, an estimated 288 million rural migrant workers resided in urban areas,²² and their influx created new “blank spots” (*kongbai dian* 空白点) in the Party’s organizational coverage.

Under the Hu Jintao administration, a campaign of “community building” (*shequ jianshe* 社区建设) was pushed forward in the early 2000s to revitalize the *shequ* as the local unit for urban governance.²³ The reform transferred welfare responsibilities and governance functions to grassroots organizations, including residents’ committees (*jumin weiyuanhui* 居民委员会) and other neighborhood-based organizations.²⁴ But developments under Xi Jinping, particularly since the Nineteenth Party Congress in 2017, marked a shift toward a more Party-centered approach, with clear efforts to reconstitute the CCP as the locus of neighborhood governance. The Party enlarged its presence in grassroots organs, and services were increasingly appropriated by the CCP and relabeled as Party efforts. This reassertion of Party control at the community level reflects an overarching priority of the Xi administration.²⁵ It also points to the fact that the CCP has increasingly viewed a

19. Andrew G. Walder, *Communist Neo-traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Wooyeal Paik, “Local Village Workers, Foreign Factories and Village Politics in Coastal China: A Clientelist Approach,” *China Quarterly*, no. 220 (December 2014): 955–67.

20. Benjamin L. Read, “Revitalizing the State’s Urban ‘Nerve Tips,’” *China Quarterly*, no. 163 (September 2000): 806–20.

21. *Ibid.*, 811.

22. “2018 nian nongmin gong jiance diaocha baogao” [2018 Report on Migrant workers], National Bureau of Statistics, April 29, 2019, http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201904/t20190429_1662268.html

23. On community building, see David Bray, *Social Space and Urban Governance in China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Benjamin L. Read, *Roots of the State: Neighborhood Organization and Social Networks in Beijing and Taipei* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Thomas Heberer and Christian Göbel, *The Politics of Community Building in Urban China* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

24. Jude Howell, “Adaptation under Scrutiny: Peering Through the Lens of Community Governance in China,” *Journal of Social Policy* 45, no. 3 (2016): 487–506.

25. See also Nis Grünberg and Katja Drinhausen, “The Party Leads on Everything: China’s Changing Governance in Xi Jinping’s New Era,” *China Monitor*, September 24, 2019.

territorial approach to Party-building as crucial for dealing with the fluidity and mobility among the population that urbanization creates, in contrast to the earlier focus on specific functional constituencies like the *danwei*.

The consolidation of Party dominance in neighborhood governance can be observed in several aspects. To begin with, street-level Party committees (*jiedao dangwei* 街道党委) and *shequ* Party branches (*shequ dang zhibu* 社区党支部) have been given more powers and resources to facilitate their “dragonhead” (*longtou* 龙头) role in steering and coordinating grassroots Party work. The 2019 policy document on Party-building stipulates that higher-level urban authorities should release street-level units from the responsibility of attracting business and investment as well as assisting in tax collection, so that they can shift from being the “bottom ends of administration” (*xingzheng moduan* 行政末端) to a new role as a “nexus of governance” (*zhili shuniu* 治理枢纽). Following the principle of “devolution, empowerment and effectiveness enhancement” (*xiachen, fuquan, zengxiao* 下沉、赋权、增效), the document called for extending the powers of street Party committees to include the appointment and appraisal of personnel assigned to the street; and in urban planning, to take charge of development plans involving the street’s territory.²⁶

At the *shequ* neighborhood level, the primacy and guiding role of the Party branch is being consolidated. In regulations issued by the CCP in 2018, the *shequ* Party branch is charged with “comprehensively leading all organizations and tasks under the neighborhood’s jurisdiction and engaging in work that buttresses the ruling basis of the Party in the city.”²⁷ The regulations called on higher-level Party authorities to secure funding for the operation of Party branches, support the construction of venues for grassroots Party organizations, and regularize the salary packages of Party branch secretaries.²⁸

Eschewing the earlier approach of granting greater autonomy, the Party-building drive has sought to strengthen Party control over the four institutions of neighborhood self-governance, namely, the residents’ committee, residential affairs supervision committee (*juwu jiandu weiyuanhui* 居务监督委员会), homeowners’ association (*yezhu weiyuanhui* 业主委员会), and property services enterprise (*wuye fuwu qiye* 物业服务企业). Grassroots Party cadres are to reinforce their gatekeeping role “to prevent people who do not meet standard requirements from being elected to committees.”²⁹ *Shequ* Party secretaries should strive to take on the role of residents’

26. General Office of the CCP, “Guanyu jiaqiang he gaijin.” See also “Dangjian yinling jiceng zhili de lilun luoji” [The logic of Party-building-led governance], *Guangming ribao* [Guangming Daily], December 7, 2018, http://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2018-12/07/nw.D110000gmrb_20181207_1-06.htm.

27. Article no. 10, “Zhongguo gongchandang zhibu gongzuo tiaoli (shixing)” [Trial Regulations on Chinese Communist Party branch work], Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 2018.

28. Article no. 33, Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 2018.

29. General Office of the CCP, “Guanyu jiaqiang he gaijin.”

committee chair and should get Party committee members to hold concurrent positions in residents' committees. Efforts are also to be made to elect Party members, especially from among the nonlocal migrant population (*liudong dangyuan* 流动党员), to residents' committees and residential affairs supervision committees. To extend Party networks, Party cells are being established inside homeowners' associations, while property management services have been instructed to "actively recruit Party members as staff" (*jiji zhaopin dangyuan yuangong* 积极招聘党员员工).³⁰ The effect is to achieve greater integration between grassroots administration and CCP organs to better serve the Party's agenda.

THE RISE OF SERVICE-CENTERED PARTY-BUILDING

Embedding the Party into the organs of neighbourhood governance has transformed the way welfare and services are provided at the community level. Two recent developments encapsulate this: the proliferation of Party Mass Service Centers and the enrollment of social-work organizations into grassroots Party work.

Building Party Mass Service Centers

Described as a "stronghold of Party-led urban governance," Party Mass Service Centers (*dangqun fuwu zhongxin* 党群服务中心) have been built inside neighborhoods to bring a range of local public services and activities under one roof and to provide ease of access in the delivery of services to residents in need. Some centers even offer assistance to local residents in petitioning.³¹ Concurrently, the Party Mass Service Centers function as venues for Party administration and channels for the diffusion of Party teachings and political values. The centers assist in the work of Party membership registration, maintain profiles and registries of Party members in the neighborhood, and organize Party-building activities. They also serve as venues for the assessment and examination of Party members.³² In migrant neighborhoods, the Party Mass Service Centers provide a platform for the local Party to reach out to and organize Party members among the migrant population.

The number of Party Mass Service Centers has dramatically increased across major cities in recent years. Over two hundred centers had been built in Beijing's city center as of 2018.³³ In Shenzhen, the government employed a "1 + 10 + N"

30. General Office of the CCP, "Guanyu jiaqiang he gaijin."

31. "Shenme shi dangqun fuwu zhongxin, dangqun fuwu zhongxin gongneng zhize" [What are Party Mass Service Centers? Functions and responsibilities of Party Mass Service Centers], Lanhe gongzhuang sheji [Lanhe industrial design], accessed 12 October 2019, <http://www.lanhesheji.com/lanhexinwen/2741-1.html>.

32. General Office of the CCP, "Guanyu jiaqiang he gaijin."

33. Shaogang Lu, "Shenzhen jiancheng 1050 ge dangqun fuwu zhongxin" [Shenzhen has built 1050 Party Mass Service Centers], *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], December 21, 2018, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2018-12/21/nw.D110000renmrb_20181221_1-06.htm.

model to build one service center at the municipal level and 10 at the district level, in addition to one center per *jiedao*, with N denoting the number of street governments a district has under its jurisdiction. As of the end of 2018, over one thousand Party Mass Service Centers had been built in Shenzhen.³⁴ In Guangzhou, each street administration was instructed to build a Party Mass Service Center of 1,000–2,000 square meters, while each *shequ* neighborhood was to have a service center of at least 500 square meters.³⁵ A noteworthy development is the co-construction of Party Mass Service Centers with enterprises. A state-owned finance holding company in Chengdu took on the project of building a Party Mass Service Center,³⁶ while in Shanghai the municipality collaborated with L'Oréal to establish a Party Mass Service Center attached to the foreign corporation.³⁷

At our fieldwork site in Kunming, the Party Mass Service Center was set up separately from the street office, using new funding provided by the local CCP Organization Department. At the request of local authorities, the NGO that we studied moved part of its operations into the Party Mass Service Center, which then served as an additional venue in which the NGO could organize activities for the local population. Services that were previously provided by the NGO now include the Party's presence and participation.

Enrolling Social Organizations in Party Work

Aligning the local Party-state with social organizations in service provision and neighborhood governance is nothing new. Studies on social services in China have discussed how a trend of contracting out social services in neighborhoods has affected relations between the state and NGOs. Concomitant with the proliferation of private social-service organizations in reform China, the government has progressively withdrawn from welfare provision,³⁸ especially since the Government Procurement Law was passed in 2002. This often entails outsourcing the services to social-work agencies that recruit social workers on a contract basis.³⁹ As a

34. Ibid.

35. "Guangzhou dangqun fuwu zhongxin qunzhong dafen 'jiben manyi'" [Public scoring for Party Mass Service Centers in Guangzhou], *Nanfeng dushi bao* [Southern Metropolis Daily], August 13, 2019, <http://toutiao.3g.oeeee.com/mp/toutiao/BAAFRD000020190813193289.html>

36. "Chengdu shi shouge jinrong shuang chuang qiye dangqun fuwu zhongxin 'jiaozhi yizhan' zhengshi qiyong" [The opening of the first financial enterprise Party Mass Service Center, Jiaozhi Station, in Chengdu], *People.cn*, September 20, 2018, <http://sc.people.com.cn/n2/2018/0920/c379469-32081531.html>.

37. "Shanghai shouge waiqi dangqu fuwu zhan zhengshi jiepai chengli" [The establishment of the first foreign enterprise Party Mass Service Center in Shanghai], *People.cn*, June 15, 2017, <http://sh.people.com.cn/n2/2017/0615/c138654-30334205.html>.

38. Jennifer Hsu and Reza Hasmath, "The Local Corporatist State and NGO Relations in China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, no. 87 (May 2014): 516–34.

39. Mun Young Cho, "Unveiling Neoliberal Dynamics: Government Purchase (*goumai*) of Social Work Services in Shenzhen's Urban Periphery," *China Quarterly*, no. 230 (June 2017): 269–88; Beibei Tang, "Neighborhood Aged Care and Local Governance in Urban China," *China Journal*, no. 79 (2018): 84–99.

result, the agencies maintain close ties with officials.⁴⁰ This outsourcing is seen to reflect a new neoliberal logic in welfare provision, in which the role of the state changes from a key provider to a purchaser of services.⁴¹ To alleviate the social tensions that have emerged from market reform, this type of co-optation has been deployed by the state even with labor NGOs that reach out to disgruntled workers.⁴²

The strategy of enrolling social organizations is now being utilized to draw previously autonomous agencies into the Party's orbit and recruit them in service-centered Party work. The 2019 policy document on grassroots Party-building lists five strategies to secure the leadership and guiding role of the Party over social organizations (*dang jian dai qun jian* 党建带群建). These include a requirement that social organizations include Party-building in their statutes of association, as well as allow personnel recommended by Party organizations to take on leadership positions in their organizations.⁴³ Social organizations with a welfare- or service-oriented nature are to be nurtured, and there should be functional integration between Party organizations and such organizations. Rather than being the "solo act" (*dujiaoxi* 独角戏) of street and *shequ* Party cadres, Party work should resemble a "choral ensemble" (*dahechang* 大合唱) and involve grassroots organizations from different realms of society.⁴⁴

Via the Party's Organization Department at various levels, the CCP has moved to exercise organizational and fiscal controls over the constellation of neighborhood-based organizations through task assignments, personnel management, and funding allocations. Investigating how this plays out in a given locality sheds light not only on the institutional adaptations and innovations of the Party to counter its waning influence but also on the transformation of state-Party-society relations in the reform era.

PARTY-BUILDING IN AN URBAN VILLAGE IN KUNMING CITY

Under the jurisdiction of H district, Bridgetown is a migrant neighborhood located 35 kilometers from Kunming's city center. The former village has been transformed into a *shequ* unit that falls under urban administration. It is a typical "urban village" (*chengzhongcun* 城中村), whose residents, as Kunming City expanded, converted their village homes into ramshackle apartment buildings to house migrant

40. Cho, "Unveiling Neoliberal Dynamics."

41. Hsu and Hasmath, "Local Corporatist State"; Chak Kwan Chan and Jie Lei, "Contracting Social Services in China: The Case of the Integrated Family Services Centres in Guangzhou," *International Social Work* 60, no. 6 (November 2017): 1343–57; Cho, "Unveiling Neoliberal Dynamics."

42. Jude Howell, "Shall We Dance? Welfarist Incorporation and the Politics of State-Labour NGO relations," *China Quarterly*, no. 225 (March 2015): 702–23.

43. General Office of the CCP, "Guangyu jiaqianghe gajjin."

44. Lin, "Hangshi zhizheng genji."

workers.⁴⁵ Urban villages such as Bridgetown have become prevalent in contemporary Chinese cities. In Kunming alone there were some 382 urban villages as of 2017, of which 67 can be found in H district. In official discourses, urban villages are often viewed as “informal settlements,” that is, problematic sites that fall beyond formal regulations and planning controls.⁴⁶

Urban villages provide a good venue in which to study the Party’s attempt to reach out to a populace, as the highly mobile population of migrant workers has been outside of the Party’s organizational control. While the members of high-skilled professions can be brought into the Party’s orbit through the CCP’s relatively established presence in the professional sector, low-skilled migrant workers from rural areas are often engaged in informal, short-term employment. The urban villages where they live provide one of the few venues in which the Party can effectively engage with them on a regular basis. Like most urban villages, Bridgetown accommodates a very large population of migrant workers: in addition to 5,700 local residents, 20,000 migrants, who originate mainly from rural areas of Yunnan, Sichuan, and Guizhou provinces, crowd into rented rooms. Many of them are from the Yi, Miao, and Buyi ethnicities.

Community Link, the nonprofit organization that we studied, has been providing social services to this migrant constituency for the past decade and a half. Registered in 2005, it is one of the earliest social-work organizations to receive recognition from the provincial Department of Civil Affairs. The organization has been branded a “demonstration point” (*shifan dian* 示范点) for its involvement in a largely migrant community. One of the organization’s major initiatives involved migrant workers who engage in informal employment (*feizhenggui jiuye* 非正规就业). Every day, these workers gather at a public square at Bridgetown and wait for hirers to come in and offer them work. Many of these jobs involve short-term labor-intensive work at nearby plants, construction sites, and processing facilities. Based on a survey of 362 migrant workers at Bridgetown, 76 percent of these workers are male, while over 88 percent have received only primary or junior secondary education.⁴⁷ Many of them work in unsafe environments without formal contracts or protection and are paid very low wages. It is not infrequent for workers’ salaries to be withheld, and because of the unstable nature of their work, many oscillate between informal work and unemployment. In 2011, Community Link established a union (*gonghui* 工会) for migrant workers and, in 2012, set up a resource

45. Karita Kan, “The Transformation of the Village Collective in Urbanizing China: A Historical Institutional Analysis,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 47 (2016): 588–600.

46. Karita Kan and Rebecca Wong, “Gated Villages: Community Governance and Social Order in Peri-urban China,” in *Handbook on Urban Development in China*, ed. Ray Yep, Jun Wang, and Thomas Johnson (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2019), 248–61; Fulong Wu, Fangzhu Zhang, and Chris Webster, “Informality and the Development and Demolition of Urban Villages in the Chinese Peri-urban Area,” *Urban Studies* 50, no. 10 (August 2013): 1919–34.

47. Work report by Community Link social workers, October 2019.

center where training and support in labor rights issues (*weiquanzhan* 维权站) were offered.

Community Link has since expanded its services to cover not just migrant workers but also children, the elderly, women, and victims of domestic abuse. Rather than oppose its activities, the authorities have taken heed of its successes, and its staff has been recruited to help incubate and develop similar nonprofit organizations in Yunnan. As of 2019, Community Link had a team of 23 regular staff members and an expert consultant committee comprising 14 experienced social workers and professors, in addition to a team of part-time volunteers, including locals as well as nonresidents such as students.

Unlike “Party-organized” NGOs,⁴⁸ which are heavily dependent on the support of local Party committees in their registration and operations from the outset, Community Link did not have an internal Party cell when it was first established and was supported by both local and overseas sources of funding. Research on how this autonomous organization became imbricated in Party work was carried out between 2017 and 2019 through interviews and participant observation. During field visits to Bridgetown, we collected information from Party members, social workers, and Community Link’s consultants. We shadowed the social workers in some of the activities they organized in Bridgetown to gain firsthand insight into the dynamics of interaction with residents. In addition, we consulted various written sources, including work reports published by Community Link and policy documents issued by the government and Party committees at various levels.

HOW A SOCIAL ORGANIZATION WAS CO-OPTED INTO PARTY WORK

Starting in 2016, Yunnan province implemented a three-year plan to “promote” (*tuijin* 推进), “upgrade” (*tisheng* 提升) and “consolidate” (*gonggu* 巩固) Party-building to facilitate the territorial penetration of Party work down to residential blocks.⁴⁹ According to a system of “grid-style management” (*wanggehua guanli* 网格化管理), different areas of the city are divided into a number of zones or grids. Each grid is subject to a five-tier supervision structure of district, street, *shequ*, residents’ group (*jumin xiaozu* 居民小组), and apartment block (*loudong* 楼栋). One Party-building supervisor is assigned to each grid to ensure the efficient delivery of services and to design policies for cadre management. Suitable candidates for the instructor positions are screened at the municipal level through a recently

48. See Patricia M. Thornton, “The Advance of the Party: Transformation or Takeover of Urban Grassroots Society?,” *China Quarterly*, no. 213 (March 2013): 1–18.

49. “Opinions on comprehensively strengthening Party-building work at the urban grassroots” (*guanyu quanmian jiaqiang chengshi jiceng dangjian gongzuo de yijian* 关于全面加强城市基层党建工作的意见), Kunming Municipal Party Committee, 2018.

revamped examination and assessment system to equip them with professional knowledge of Party work.⁵⁰

In H district, where Bridgetown is located, 59 *shequ* Party committees have been established in recent years.⁵¹ Through these, under the slogan of “Party-building + public welfare,” the district injected over 10 million yuan between 2018 and 2019 to support the construction of Party Mass Service Centers and centers for the incubation and development of social organizations (*shehui zuzhi peiyu fazhan zhongxin* 社会组织培育发展中心). As of June 2019, 24 Party Mass Service Centers had been built and 16 more were scheduled to be completed by the end of 2019.⁵² A Community Link staff member remarked that “Party-building has now become ubiquitous [*putian gaidi* 铺天盖地]. Party Mass Service Centers are being built everywhere.”⁵³

Community Link’s enrolment in Party work began in 2016, when it was given a venue by the street, residents’ committee, and community police station (*paichusuo* 派出所), to develop a Party Mass Service Center for the migrant population (*liudong renyuan dangqun fuwu zhongxin* 流动人口党群服务中心). Funded by the local Organization Department of the Party, the NGO was asked to move part of its operation to the new center, which became a platform for engaging and mobilizing Bridgetown’s migrant workers, particularly those who are Party members, to participate in serving the community. Staff members believed that NGOs like Community Link were enrolled in Party-building social-service efforts because street and *shequ* officials often did not know what activities or services they could organize for residents. “When the [Party-building] initiative was first announced,” one staff member remarked, “the officials did not have many good ideas about what could be done. Every street and *shequ* needs to demonstrate innovation in Party-building. The street authorities saw that Community Link had formed a union for migrant workers, and they liked the idea as an innovative Party-building concept. But they had little concrete idea of the actual work involved, so they wanted us to do it.”⁵⁴

A year after Community Link began its involvement in the Party Mass Service Center, it was further incorporated into a Party-building alliance (*dangjian lianmeng* 党建联盟) formed between four *shequs* under the jurisdiction of H district to coordinate and share resources for community service provision. Social workers at Community Link saw the formation of the alliance in 2017 as a turning point,

50. “Yunnan Kunming Shi: Dangjian lianmeng ningju weimin fuwu Kunming ‘xin’ liliang” [Yunnan Kunming: Party-building alliance consolidates people-centered service with heart], CPC News, October 18, 2018, <http://dangjian.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2018/1018/c420318-30349575.html>.

51. “Daronghe daliandong dafazhan: Jianshe chengshi dangjian xingejie” [Great integration, great linkage, great development: Developing a new pattern of Party-building in H district], *Kunming Daily*, June 14, 2019.

52. Ibid.

53. Conversation with a Community Link social worker, October 2019.

54. Meeting with Community Link staff, October 2019.

after which their participation in Party work in collaboration with other residents' committees intensified. The Party-building alliance is an example of what is known as a "tripartite mobilization model" (*sanshe liandong* 三社联动), a framework for community governance that involves three parties: the neighborhood government (*shequ* 社区), the social organizations (*shehui zuzhi* 社会组织), and social workers (*shegong* 社工). The model originated from practices of self-governance in Jiangsu province, which was implemented nationally following recognition and approval by the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Party's Publicity Department. The model originally emphasized the involvement of nonprofit organizations and professional social workers in community self-governance, but in this context it was retrofitted to advance a Party-building agenda.

Through the Party-building alliance, the local CCP apparatus channeled new resources to the neighborhood to finance service provision. In 2017, the Party's Organization Department at the municipal level provided a sum of 30,000 yuan to each of the four participating *shequs*. Combining their resources, the alliance had a total budget of 120,000 yuan that year for extra staffing and activity costs.⁵⁵ Funding from the Organization Department increased to 50,000 yuan per *shequ* in 2018.⁵⁶ This fiscal commitment proved vital for Community Link, which had previously relied on sponsorship from a nonlocal charitable organization. Following the passage of the Charity Law in 2016, funding from foreign nonprofit groups has been subject to tighter monitoring, and this has increased Chinese social organizations' fiscal dependence on local sources. Funding support from the local Party apparatus allowed Community Link to further expand its services in Bridgetown, such as the development of a "tea break cafe" that serves rural migrant workers.

SERVING THE PEOPLE, MOBILIZING THE MASSES

The tension between Party control and grassroots autonomy in community governance is a common dilemma identified by scholars. A conventional observation is that as the role of the Party-state grows, the autonomy of societal actors is compromised and undermined. In our field study, we share the observation that Party work imposes constraints on social organizations. Nonetheless, we also observe a peculiar symbiosis between the work of social organizations and the requirements of Party-building.

In Bridgetown, Party work is divided into internal and external aspects. First, within Party organizations, Party members must abide by the requirement of having an "organizational life" (*zuzhi shenghuo* 组织生活). This involves attending regular meetings to learn about Party principles and the latest Party documents,

55. Meeting with Community Link staff, June 2017.

56. Meeting with Community Link staff, December 2018.

having annual self-evaluation and appraisal meetings, and holding “heart-to-heart” conversation sessions among Party members. In Bridgetown’s Party-building alliance, the street and four *shequs* take turns in organizing meetings where members are to learn about the Party’s latest initiatives and teachings. According to the director of Community Link, who is also a member of the Party committee of social organizations under Yunnan’s provincial Department of Civil Affairs, Party members are exhorted at these meetings to “demonstrate and lead in serving the people, organizing the people, and mobilizing residents to serve their community.”⁵⁷ The alliance is also tasked with maintaining an updated database of Party members among the urban village’s migrant population.

In Bridgetown, the Party’s efforts to promote itself focuses above all on the alliance’s daily work on social outreach and service delivery. For the social workers at Community Link, this essentially means “business as usual.” As one consultant for the organization remarked, “Because one of the key Party-building tasks is to serve the community, everything that Community Link has been doing at Bridgetown becomes Party work.”⁵⁸ Despite the issuance of many policies and regulations on the need to push forward Party-building at the grassroots, the content of what Party-building work actually entails is phrased in vague terms. This ambiguity opens up space for social workers to design the actual content of Party work. Many social organizations like Community Link use the funding they are allocated for Party-building to expand services and projects that they have already been carrying out in the neighborhood. The main difference, according to social workers, is that they now need to discursively demonstrate their alignment (*peihe* 配合) with Party-building rhetoric. The Party needs to be seen as a joint provider of the services, and Party slogans are now incorporated in their activities. “You need to use the Party’s language,” said one Community Link staff member who has worked at Bridgetown since 2012. “Other than that, we social workers still are leading and organizing the activities.”⁵⁹

Aside from rendering services to social groups in need, another dimension of Party work is to mobilize participation among the migrant population in activities organized by the Party. This mobilizational aspect of grassroots Party-building is an important but understudied topic, especially as the Party’s declining capability to mobilize the masses has been seen as one sign of the CCP’s waning authority.⁶⁰ In following Community Link’s work on the ground, we observe an interesting parallel and mutuality between the social organization’s discourse of volunteerism and participation and the Party’s goal of mobilizing the masses. The language of

57. Meeting with Community Link staff, October 2019.

58. Meeting with Community Link staff, December 2018.

59. Meeting with Community Link staff, October 2019.

60. Minxin Pei, *China’s Trapped Transition: The Limits of Developmental Autocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

participation (*canyu* 参与), self-service (*ziwo fuwu* 自我服务), and self-management (*ziwo guanli* 自我管理) are frequently used to encourage residents' involvement in community activities. Since its establishment, Community Link has mobilized an ever-growing team of volunteers, some of them residents who are encouraged to contribute to the welfare of their own community. To “bolster the ability and confidence” of volunteers, the organization has been offering training sessions to promote “self-enhancement [*ziwo tisheng* 自我提升] and self-participation [*ziwo canyu* 自我参与].”⁶¹

Community Link's projects with women, ethnic minorities, and rural migrant workers all emphasize the identification and training of “core” or “backbone” members (*gugan* 骨干). *Gugan* usually refers to residents who take an active part in community activities and are seen as possessing leadership qualities. In organizational charts, *gugan* are usually represented as the inner core around which other concentric circles—representing other layers of membership—are mapped. In the migrant workers union, for example, Community Link identified eight *gugan* as constituting the inner core of the union, surrounded by an outer circle of fifty active and “knowledgeable” members, a further 150 members who regularly participate in activities, and a further 264 members who have formally registered for membership.⁶² The backbone members are given special training (*gugan peixun* 骨干培训) as leaders who could organize and mobilize migrants in the place of Party members and social workers. “Eventually we do not need to be present. They should do the work of teaching and organizing on their own,” said one Community Link staff member.⁶³ This is seen as one way to reduce the workload of social workers.

To encourage volunteerism, Community Link developed a neighborhood vegetable farm aimed at encouraging mutual help among community residents. Because many of the rural migrant workers have farming experience, they were encouraged to share their skills and knowledge with low-income groups living in Bridgetown, many of them ethnic-minority families who may not have sufficient income to purchase all their food. The vegetable farm provides these low-income families with a basic safety net, and it also transforms rural migrant workers from passive “recipients of welfare” to active “providers of services to the masses.”⁶⁴

By borrowing the language of participation and recruiting social organizations in Party-building work, the Party has artfully appropriated both the discourse and actual effort of social organizations in reviving the Party's mobilizational capacity. Unlike the top-down campaign style of Mao-era mass mobilization, the relationship between the Party and society is now one of co-optation, tempered

61. Work report by Community Link social workers, October 2019.

62. Work report by Community Link social workers, March 2017.

63. Work report by Community Link social workers, October 2019.

64. Work report by Community Link social workers, October 2019.

by descriptions such as “collaborative governance” (*xietong zhili* 协同治理), “partnership” (*huoban hezuo* 伙伴合作) and “co-construction” (*gongjian* 共建). Ironically, social workers’ perceived need to incorporate Party terminology in their work in order to demonstrate alignment with Party-building requirements has led to the two-way borrowing and merging of discourses: Party-building is service provision, community participation, self-governance, and volunteerism. It could be argued that the ultimate effectiveness of Party work in enrolling social organizations has been to normalize the language and presence of the Party in everyday community life.

THE IMPACT ON, AND EXPERIENCE OF, SOCIAL WORKERS

How has their involvement in Party work affected social workers on the ground? Despite the rhetoric of collaboration and partnership, social workers do experience top-down pressure that compels compliance and participation. As one staff member at Community Link remarked, “Party-building is not a ‘hard’ requirement [*yingxing yaoqiu* 硬性要求]. However, it’s very hard to resist it once street-level authorities propose it.”⁶⁵ The necessity of compliance is reflected in the perception of social workers that “if you don’t cooperate and participate in Party-building work, they will make things difficult for you” (*rangni nanshou* 让你难受) and that “it will be very difficult to survive” (*bu peihe hennan shengcun* 不配合很难生存),⁶⁶ while cooperation ensures that authorities “will not make trouble for us” (*buhui zhao women mafan* 不会找我们麻烦).⁶⁷

Despite the perceived mandatory nature of Party work, social workers at Community Link demonstrated a high sense of efficacy and agency. The flexibility in what constitutes Party-building work gives them a degree of autonomy and initiative in designing its actual content. The staff at Community Link saw this as a process of bottom-up input (*congxia ershang* 从下而上) and themselves as the actual implementers (*luoshi zhe* 落实者) of policies on the ground; in their view, authorities lacked the local knowledge and professional expertise to rigorously enforce policy directions disseminated from the top down. This gave the social organizations, being embedded in local communities, opportunities to add actual content to abstract policy directives. The service initiatives of Community Link are often appropriated by street and district authorities and introduced into wider contexts. “When they see the benefits our work brings [*kandao haochu* 看到好处], they adopt our practice and apply it more broadly,” said one social worker.⁶⁸ The efficacy Community Link demonstrated is inseparable from its established status

65. Meeting with Community Link staff, April 2019.

66. Meeting with Community Link staff, December 2018.

67. Meeting with Community Link staff, December 2018.

68. Meeting with Community Link staff, October 2019.

as a relatively autonomous social organization. As a consultant stated, “Social organizations like Community Link must first possess agency [*zizhuxing* 自主性] before they work with street and *shequ* authorities.”⁶⁹ Otherwise they could be “ordered around” and entirely subject to upper-level demands.

The mutually interdependent relationship between the social organizations and street Party committees enables social workers to take the initiative and bargain (*taojia huanjia* 讨价还价) with street authorities. Street-level Party organizations need to submit regular work reports (*gongzuo baogao* 工作报告) on their Party-building work to upper levels of leadership, and they rely on the social organizations to provide details about their work in order to complete the reports. In return for presenting achievements that can be listed in these reports, the social workers receive continued or increased funding.⁷⁰ Social workers at Community Link cited this as the reason for their success when they requested a new venue to provide services to Bridgetown’s migrant workers: “Because the authorities see that we’re doing good work for them, they gave us what we asked for.”⁷¹ Street-level officials also “actively watch over” (*zhudong guanzhao* 主动关照) them, offering both protection and advice for their work.

One unexpected finding is that the Party-building drive has turned social organizations like Community Link into the subject of competition between different bureaus and territorial authorities. This is an unintended outcome of the competitive dynamics between different levels and arms of the Party-state. In the Chinese governance structure, the *tiao-kuai* (条块) power matrix divides power between vertically organized functional bureaucracies and horizontal, territorial authorities. Party cells under both the *tiao* and *kuai* systems had to compete with each other in demonstrating Party-building achievements. Because service-oriented Party work is emphasized and on the ground service delivery is carried out by social organizations, there is strong competition for the chance to partner with social organizations in order to “claim” their work as collaborative projects. In recent years, Community Link has received numerous requests from different bureaus to carry out joint service programs. “They’re all holding onto us [*lazhe women* 拉着我们]; we’ve become a ‘name card’ [*mingpian* 名片]. Every interested party wants to add a name board, secure an achievement [*guage paizi nage chengji* 挂个牌子 拿个成绩],” expressed one social worker.⁷²

The choice of who to work with can be a politically tricky issue to tackle. As a consultant for Community Link observed, “Because many government departments want to work with social organizations to do Party-building, this kind of competition sometimes turns social workers into scapegoats: a bureau will ask

69. Meeting with Community Link staff, October 2019.

70. Meeting with Community Link staff, October 2019.

71. Meeting with Community Link staff, December 2018.

72. Meeting with Community Link staff, October 2019.

why social workers aren't willing to work with it. Social workers need to be very careful in balancing the power struggles between different bureaus; they cannot risk getting on the wrong side [*dezui* 得罪] of any."⁷³ Even within the Party-building alliance, staff at Community Link have to mediate between street authorities and the four residents' committees. When the street office decided to join the alliance in 2018, tensions began to emerge because the committees felt that street-office cadres were taking all the credit for the work they had done. As relations between the street and residents' committees deteriorated, Community Link had to act as a go-between and appease both sides when joint projects were carried out. Social workers refer to their mediation of this as "public relations work" (*zuo gongguan* 做公关) and stated that such work takes up a lot of their time and energy.

While the dependence of upper-level authorities on social organizations to provide social services gives the latter a degree of leverage and some room for strategic maneuvering, the requirement to submit regular work reports to the authorities increases their administrative workload, and the need to demonstrate progress in Party work means that they need to constantly frame and brand their service as "achievements." Because reports are submitted on a frequent basis, "upper-level authorities are always looking for 'highlights' [*liangdian* 亮点]."⁷⁴ The pressure to showcase something innovative in every report has translated into constantly shifting priorities for social organizations on the ground. At Community Link, social workers complained that upper-level authorities changed their emphases from year to year: "One year they wanted to emphasize relations between community residents; but the next year they felt that community relations is no longer eye-catching and wanted us to shift to services for migrant workers."⁷⁵ For the social workers, the need to always align their service provision and community activities with both the prerogatives of the Party and the changing demands of upper-level authorities results in unwanted adjustments, frustration, and additional workload. The shifting priorities also affect the financial resources available to social organizations. Since the announcement of the National Strategic Plan for Rural Revitalization in 2018, the Party-state has begun emphasizing rural rejuvenation (*xiangcun zhenxing* 乡村振兴) and rural construction (*xiangcun jianshe* 乡村建设) in Party work. As a result, funding from the municipality for Party-building is being diverted to nearby rural areas. In the 2019 fiscal year, the annual amount of support for Party work at Bridgetown was reduced to 25,000 yuan per *shequ*, half the amount allocated the year before.⁷⁶

How their involvement in Party work affects social organizations' relations with residents will have important implications going forward. Thus far, social workers at Community Link felt the effect has been light, because they had established

73. Interview with consultant of Community Link, December 2018.

74. Meeting with Community Link staff, April 2019.

75. Meeting with Community Link staff, April 2019.

76. Conversation with Community Link financial controller (*chuna* 出纳), October 2019.

strong and long-standing relations of trust with residents prior to the NGO's recent co-optation into the local governing apparatus. Nonetheless, the tension between their professional position as social workers and their assigned duties for the Party-state was evident when the community police station requested that social workers accompany police officers on their neighborhood patrol because of the social workers' close relations with the tenants.⁷⁷ "Residents were uneasy when we patrolled with the community police," remarked one social worker.⁷⁸ Assignments such as these weaken the bonds they had formed with Bridgetown's residents. The incorporation of social workers into the local surveillance apparatus blurs the boundaries between the Party-state and the social-work groups and, through a gradual rather than ostentatious process, undermines the autonomy of the social organizations.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Following the demise of the *danwei* system, the CCP is widely seen to have lost its overarching control over urban grassroots society. This article has examined how the Party has emphasized a geographical approach to Party-building that focuses on bringing the Party into residential *shequs* and migrant neighborhoods by providing social services and welfare programs to residents in need. Through our case study in Kunming we observed how the CCP has achieved this by co-opting social-work organizations and appropriating their work, as it sought to reconfigure state-Party-society relations and reconstitute itself as the center of community governance.

In the scholarly literature analyzing relations between the Chinese state and the nonprofit sector, much emphasis has been placed on the dilemma between embeddedness and autonomy. On the one hand, close relations with the state give social organizations recognition and political legitimacy and enable them to enhance their funding and upgrade their service capabilities.⁷⁹ Collaboration with local authorities also offers institutional channels in which social organization members can contribute to the policy-making process by sharing their professional experiences.⁸⁰ On the other hand, embeddedness is seen as an impediment to

77. On the recruitment of residents to participate in neighborhood patrols, see Feng Chen and Yi Kang, "Disorganized Popular Contention and Local Institutional Building in China: A Case Study in Guangdong," *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 100 (July 2016): 596–612.

78. Conversation with Community Link social worker, June 2017.

79. Hsu and Hasmath, "Local Corporatist State"; Yijia Jing, "Dual Identity and Social Organizations' Participation in Contracting in Shanghai," *Journal of Contemporary China* 27, no. 110 (March 2018): 180–92; Carolyn Hsu, "Beyond Civil Society: An Organizational Perspective on State-NGO Relations in the People's Republic of China," *Journal of Civil Society* 6, no. 3 (December 2010): 259–77.

80. Samson Yuen, "Negotiating Service Activism in China: The Impact of NGOs' Institutional Embeddedness in the Local State," *Journal of Contemporary China* 27, no. 111 (May 2018): 406–22.

autonomous governance and operations.⁸¹ The state often adopts top-down and repressive regulations, and social organizations are frequently treated as subordinate administrative units rather than the government's working partner.⁸²

Community Link's experience may at first glance appear to be a case of "mutual empowerment," where the Party-state's capacity and control in grassroots governance are enhanced, while social organizations are given a greater role to play.⁸³ In this scenario, rather than being a zero-sum game in which the advance of the Party precipitates the retreat and disempowerment of social organizations, both sides are seemingly empowered by their collaboration. However, such a characterization conceals as much as it reveals. Despite their perceived efficacy and initiative, social organizations such as Community Link remain subject to the diktat of Party prerogatives and feel compelled to comply with Party directions. The term "mutual empowerment" fails to capture the dynamic underlying the apparent devolution of more power and resources to social organizations—that is, the Party's strategy is to reconsolidate itself at the urban grassroots via the co-optation of social organizations and the appropriation of their work and discourse. This has enabled the Party to achieve two of its organizational goals: to engage in benevolent welfare provision and to mobilize the masses.

First, the political legitimacy of the CCP has long relied in part on its image as a paternalistic redistributor. Under state socialism, the Chinese political economy was organized as redistributive through administrative allocations from the top down. In the reform era, the literature on authoritarian adaptation has examined how the refashioned social contract ties people's political quiescence to the Party-state's capacity to deliver welfare-oriented policies.⁸⁴ As Vivienne Shue points out, the Chinese state's "claim to be governing legitimately rests, in part, on its demonstrable 'benevolence'—on its ability convincingly to manifest its magnanimity and constant care for vulnerable people."⁸⁵ Equating service provision with Party work fits the narrative of a paternalistic Party. By recruiting social organizations into Party-building efforts and by publicizing the Party's leadership and partnership in these charitable endeavors, the CCP is effectively drawing on the work and social capital of social organizations to burnish its image and authority at the urban grassroots.

81. Tony Saich, "Negotiating the State: The Development of Social Organizations in China," *China Quarterly*, no. 161 (March 2000): 124–41.

82. Chan and Lei, "Contracting Social Services in China."

83. For a discussion and critique of "mutual empowerment," see Vivienne Shue, "The Political Economy of Compassion: China's 'Charity Supermarket' Saga," *Journal of Contemporary China* 20, no. 72 (November 2011): 751–72.

84. Dimitrov, "Understanding Regime Collapse"; Cheng Xiaonong, "Breaking the Social Contract," in *Dilemmas of Reform in Jiang Zemin's China*, ed. Andrew J. Nathan, Zhao Huihong, and Steven Smith (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999), 107–25.

85. Shue, "Political Economy of Compassion," 771.

Furthermore, the Party's prerogative of mobilizing the masses has found a parallel in the social organizations' goal of encouraging grassroots participation and community self-service. The CCP has deftly borrowed and incorporated into its own vocabulary the language of participatory governance and volunteerism that is frequently employed by social organizations in promoting residents' involvement in community initiatives. Indeed, practices of volunteerism and charity could be viewed as the updated means by which "mass mobilization" is achieved.⁸⁶ Rather than retaining the top-down approach of Maoist campaigns, the Party's present enrollment of social organizations in mobilizing grassroots participation is couched in the terminology of "partnership" and "collaborative governance."

In addressing the challenges brought by market reform, scholars have noted how the CCP has incorporated the "logic of the market" and achieved a "symbiotic relationship with the market economy."⁸⁷ By bringing the new socioeconomic and professional elites into its ranks, the CCP has artfully fused Party authority and market power. Similarly, what can be observed in this article is the appropriation of social forces to reconsolidate the legitimacy and dominance of the Party at the urban grassroots.

What this implies for the development of civil society in China is a question that directly relates to this article. The experience of Community Link does not suggest that the impact of Party-building presages the immediate takeover or elimination of civil society. It should be noted, though, that our case study is not representative of the full spectrum of relations between social organizations and the Party-state, and there are ample examples of other types of social organizations being suppressed or marginalized. Community Link is but one example of the types of NGOs, charities, and community organizations that the Party finds useful to its purposes at the grassroots. And for these, rather than overt suppression, the Party's return to neighborhood life unfolds as a creeping process that gradually draws social organizations into the Party's orbit through collaborative assignments and fiscal control.

86. On voluntary associations and the Party-state, see also Outi Luova, "Community Volunteers' Associations in Contemporary Tianjin: Multipurpose Partners of the Party-state," *Journal of Contemporary China* 20, no. 72 (November 2011): 773–94. On the reinvention of Maoist mobilization, see also Elizabeth J. Perry, "From Mass Campaigns to Managed Campaigns: Constructing a 'New Socialist Countryside,'" in *Mao's Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China*, ed. Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J. Perry (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center), 30–61.

87. Alexei Shevchenko, "Bringing the Party Back In: The CCP and the Trajectory of Market Transition in China," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 37 (2004): 179–80; Frank N. Pieke, with Duan Eryu, "The Production of Rulers: Communist Party Schools and the Transition to Neo-socialism in Contemporary China," *Social Anthropology* 17, no. 1 (2009): 25.