CHAPTER SIX

CIVIL ORGANIZATION-GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIPS: FUNCTIONAL COOPERATION AND POWER DILEMMAS

Jia Xijin

This chapter focuses on the question of functional cooperation and power dilemmas in public work, and explores changes in and characteristics of the relationship between civil organizations and governments in China since the Reform and Opening. It includes an introduction and five parts. The introduction summarizes the origins of the Reform and Opening and factors contributing to China’s social transformations. The first part observes two different paths along which China’s civil organizations have tended to develop. The second part summarizes the basic logic of the relationship between civil organizations and governments as well as unique characteristics in China. The third part discusses cooperation in public services and public finance-based civil organization-government relationships. The fourth part discusses public policy advocacy and civil organization participation in government decision-making. The last part analyzes civil organization-government relationships from the perspective of citizens’ powers.

Introduction

The Chinese society established in 1949 had a “totalistic society” structure.¹ In China in Crisis, Tsou Tang wrote that China’s crisis in the Late Qing period was a “holistic crisis” with urgent demand for social concord and order. Under the conditions, organizational forms with centralized power and control-type order orientations received social acceptance and lent form to the structural framework of the whole of society. Society’s form after the establishment of the PRC in

1949 was one in which the State exercised total control and monopoly over social resources. Civil organizations were later “cleaned-up and reorganized”, leaving two major groups. Legal, governmental organizations, defined as the “Eight Big” democratic party sections that participated directly in governance, and legal, civil organizations, social groups with new political rights. Of these the eight People’s Groups, designed as bridges to help the Party and the government liaise with the masses developed rapidly at all levels nationwide.\(^2\) The People’s groups together with the eight party sections were considered crucial, intermediary parts of the system.\(^3\) They enjoyed total financial support and appointment and removal of their leaders was handled by United Front (统一战线) departments.

Within the State’s holistic framework, civil organizations have developed gradually. By 1965, nationwide-level social groups had expanded from 44 around the time of the founding to almost 100, while local-level social groups had grown to over 6000 in number. The Cultural Revolution disrupted this process. During the Cultural Revolution, most social group activities were ceased while many groups were labeled “counter-revolutionary organizations” and punished. Meanwhile, the activities of “little red soldiers” and “red guards” flourished. The governmental-social relationship embodied by these mass associations with specially-designated political and social background is quite unique and worth analyzing. At the least, we can see that it is different from “free association” in the West: first, without being non-governmental, without having independent and mutually-respectful relationships with the government, these organizations occupy a place in society that falls clearly within the category of government functions. Where any social functions they may have overlap or even conflict with the government, those functions are subordinate. Second,

\(^2\) Of the eight largest People’s groups (人民团体), the China New Democratic Youth League, and the Union were the first to be set up by the Communist Party. From 1949, more were gradually added: the Women’s Federation, Communist Youth League, Confederation of Trade Unions, China Association of Science and Technology (CAST), All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, as well as the All-China Federation of Taiwan Compatriots, set up in 1981. All are based on membership systems except for the Women’s Federation, CAST and Federation of Taiwan Compatriots.

\(^3\) The Interim Measures on Social Group Registration and Administration (社会团体登记管理暂行办法) were drafted based on the Common Program of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (中国人民政治协商会议共同纲领).