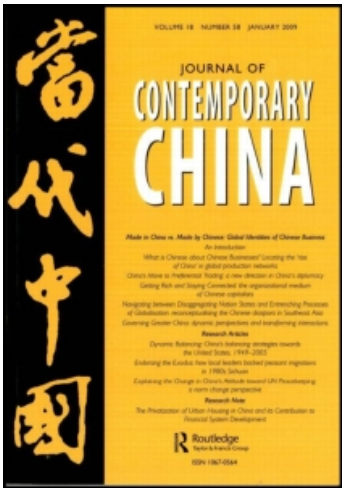
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Evolvement of Citizenship in Urban China or Authoritarian Communitarianism? Neighborhood development, community participation, and autonomy

THOMAS HEBERER*

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Frequently, civil society is identified with an increase of associational life. Yet, in this article it is argued that the emerging of citizens and citizenship is a vital precondition for developing a civil society. Here I will focus on a concept of citizenship grounded in a local context. Accordingly, it focuses on both the public discourse on citizenship and the institutional effects with regard to citizenship generated by the establishment of urban neighborhood communities and the enhancement of participation. The author's hypothesis is that by virtue of newly established neighborhood communities in urban areas, a gradual transition from 'masses' to citizens seems to manifest itself. This transition process will be examined in four central fields: (a) community participation and grassroots elections; (b) self-administration (autonomy) and the attitudes of residents thereto; (c) the growth of individual autonomy; and (d) value engineering by the party state. As the institutional preconditions for a civil society in China are widely lacking, the party-state conceives its role in initiating them. It is precisely the combination of the top-down establishing of neighborhood communities and grassroots elections, mobilized participation and volunteers, which gives evidence of the party-state's intention to generate structures of an (illiberal and controlled) civil society. Citizen status has not yet been fully achieved in China; yet the state-led activation in urban neighborhood communities shows that the political leadership has decided to chart this course. Finally the article classifies the concept of neighborhood communities as a model of 'authoritarian communitarianism'.

Reorganizing urban resident areas: mobilizing residents to become involved in community tasks[1]

From the 1950s onward, the organization of the party-state was extended to urban residential areas. 'Residents Committees' (RCs) as leading administrative bodies

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1. This paper is organized around the results of a major research project on 'Participation, legitimacy, and social stability in urban areas in China'. Three surveys were conducted altogether (in-depth interviews of ordinary residents and local officials): in spring 2003 in two neighborhoods in Shenyang; in summer 2003 in two neighborhoods in Chongqing; and in spring 2004 in two neighborhoods in Shenzhen. Further interviews were carried out in Qingdao (2005) and Beijing (2006). The intention of the research project was to examine the political awareness of urban citizens and officials in terms of participation and citizenship.

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were established across the country. Until the late 1990s, the members of those committees consisted primarily of elderly women (housewives and pensioners) with a low educational level. Their principal function was to ensure social control of, and in, their neighborhoods. Economic reforms, economic and social change, and, strongly interrelated, growing social mobility significantly altered the structure of urban residential areas. Traditional communities such as, for instance, the *danwei*[2] were eroded. Increasingly, homogeneous residential areas resting on an affiliation to a state-owned economic or administrative unit (like an enterprise) have disintegrated.

The structure of urban residential areas has changed through the purchase or sale of living space or by moving out. Businessmen, craftsmen, and entrepreneurs from rural areas have rented or purchased flats. Hence, the neighborhoods now are composed of rather different social strata. Many neighborhoods consist of subdivisions within which members of still existing or former *danweis* are living, but concurrently there are also members of the middle classes who have purchased new condominiums. Simultaneously, local authorities are faced by increasing unemployment, urban poverty, disintegration of family structures and of public security. The traditional RCs with a low reputation were no longer able to meet the new demands of social control and social mobilization. This was the reason why the central leadership at the end of the 1990s initiated a reorganization of urban residential areas. Several neighborhoods under the jurisdiction of RCs were merged into larger 'neighborhood communities' (*shequ*). A *shequ* is to be characterized as a geographically separate urban residential area and comprises a population between 3,000 and 16,000 people. The political leadership intends the residents of a neighborhood to hopefully develop a shared identification resting on common interests and needs. Residents would, hopefully, voluntarily participate in the implementation of community affairs like, for example, taking care of the socially weak, thus creating a co-operative relationship of solidarity between each other.

According to law the *shequ* are self-administered entities. Yet, currently, the RCs are less concerned with self-administration but rather with activities which used to be the tasks of the state, like birth control, paying out pensions, examining preconditions for income support to families with no or low income, mediating conflicts among residents, handling divorce applications, care of sick persons, of handicapped people, drug addicts and persons with a previous conviction, and psychological advice (e.g. after family violence or attempted suicide). More important, one of their crucial tasks is to mobilize residents to become involved in social community affairs like taking care of the socially weak (elderly, disabled or sick persons, etc.).

In this article I will focus on the institutional effects with regard to citizenship generated by the establishment of neighborhood communities and the enhancement of participation. Hence, I will focus on a concept of citizenship grounded in a local context. My hypothesis is that currently in urban space a gradual transition from 'masses' to citizens seems to be manifesting itself. Undoubtedly, the emergence of citizens is a vital precondition for developing a civil society. I will examine this

2. *Danwei*, or 'work unit', is used to designate a public enterprise (factory, government agency, educational institution, etc.) of which one is a member. Until recently, the *danwei* were ascribed an all-encompassing responsibility for the lives of their employees.

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transition process in four central fields: (a) participation and grassroots elections; (b) self-administration (autonomy) and the attitudes of residents thereto; (c) the growth of individual autonomy; and (d) value engineering by the party state. Since in China the institutional preconditions for a civil society are widely lacking, the party-state conceives its role in initiating them. Its intention is to generate the structures of such a society in a top-down manner. It is precisely the combination of the top-down establishing of neighborhood communities and grassroots elections, mobilized participation and volunteers, which gives evidence to the party-state's intention to generate structures of an (illiberal and controlled) civil society. Finally the article characterizes the concept of neighborhood communities as a model of 'authoritarian communitarianism'.

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Urban communities and citizenship

In recent years an academic debate has crystallized in China focusing on the meaning of 'citizen'. It is purported that the term *gongmin* is of foreign descendency. In China, however, traditional distinctions are said to only have been made between *chenmin*, subjects, and *zimin*, literally 'people as sons'. Whereas the last two terms refer generally to the ruled people, citizens are conceived to be politically self-determined subjects in democratic communities.[3] Nevertheless, according to Liu, the development of neighborhood communities or *shequ* also harbors a development of the people into citizens. The 'highest level of the modern *shequ*' is represented by the 'association of free people' and this involves the emergence of citizens.[4] For China at present one may speak first and foremost of urban citizenship, i.e. citizenship primarily related to city inhabitants and here with a stronger basis in the middle class than in marginal groups.[5]

Kevin O'Brien raises the question of whether grassroots elections (as in villages and neighborhoods) cause the people in China to develop into citizens possessing citizenship and thus to become full members of a community.[6] With these thoughts, he picks up on a discussion that was already taking place at the beginning of the twentieth century, in China too, one which had been repeatedly resumed by intellectuals and put up for debate.[7]

3. Ying Kefu, 'Guojia guanli yu gongmin quanli—ziyouzhuyi de jiben yuanze' ['Administration bt the state and rights of citizens—basic principles of liberalism'], *Xuehai* [*Ocean of Learning*] 3, (2004), pp. 42–47. See on this discussion, for instance, Gao Like, 'Lusuo de gongminquan' ['On Rousseau's citizen rights'], *Zhejiang Xuekan* [*Zhejiang Academic Journal*] 4, (2004), pp. 108–115.

4. Liu Bokui, *Zhonghua wenhua yu Zhongguo shequ* [*China's Culture and China's shequ*] (Guangzhou: Jinan daxue chubanshe, 2005), pp. 213–221.

5. Cf. Rachel Murphy and Vanessa L. Fong, 'Introduction: Chinese experiences of citizenship at the margins', in Vanessa L. Fong and Rachel Murphy, eds, *Chinese Citizenship. Views from the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 1–8; Tianshu Pan, 'Civilizing Shanghai: government efforts to cultivate citizenship among impoverished residents', in Fong and Murphy, eds, *Chinese Citizenship*, pp. 96–122.

6. Kevin O'Brien, 'Villagers, elections, and citizenship in contemporary China', *Modern China* 4, (2001), pp. 407–435. On the question of citizenship in China cf. Merle Goldman and Elisabeth J. Perry, eds, *Changing Meanings of Citizenship in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), as well as Dorothy J. Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999).

7. Cf. Joshua Fogel and Peter Zarrow, eds, *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship, 1890–1920* (Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1997); Peter Harris, 'The origins of modern citizenship in China', *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 43(2), (2002), pp. 181–203.

Drawing on Thomas H. Marshall I discern four basic criteria for an emerging citizenship in China: (1) increasing opportunities for people to participate in social and political affairs; (2) the prospect for a rising living standard for the majority of the population; (3) voluntary involvement in public and societal issues (sense of citizenship and civic duty); and (4) civic liberties.[8] The *shequ* are concerned at least with the first three issues in the form of basic social security and social participation in the matters of the neighborhood. In contrast, civic liberties thus far exist only in a limited way. Let me briefly develop these arguments in the following sections.

Participation in neighborhood communities

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Here I define *political* participation to encompass activities which, in an ideal-typical scenario, have to do with community organization, i.e. with activities in the form of electoral acts, representation of resident groups and their interests as well as organizing in parties and associations. *Social* participation varies in that it is not principally related to the *institutional* organization of the community, but to the care of specific resident groups or financial support, improvement and infrastructural design and organization of the neighborhood. Taking care of elderly, disabled and sick people, or involvement in leisure activities belongs to the category of social participation.

Concerning participation, in recent years new opportunities have evolved, for instance by establishing legally binding grassroots elections in urban neighborhoods and by fostering social participation in neighborhood communities. The success of village elections[9] gave rise to the transfer of rural experiences to urban areas. In urban neighborhoods residents are electing the members of the RCs. Two main types of RC elections are currently in existence: predominantly voting by delegates of the residents (indirect voting), and in a minority of *shequ* we already find voting by all the residents.[10] According to the political leadership, in the near future direct voting will have to be implemented throughout the country.[11]

Furthermore, the housing reform during the 1990s led both to a conversion of living spaces into condominiums and, following this, their sale to the residents, and to the construction of new commercial housing sold on the market. Companies responsible for the administration and maintenance of new commercial housing areas (property management companies) were established. Yet, there are frequent tensions between house owners and those companies in terms of payment of fees, repair and maintenance issues. As organizations representing the interests of the new proprietors did not exist, independent interest organizations of the owners emerged in the 1990s. Their boards, the 'Home-Owners Self-Organization Committee' (HOSOC) are elected by all owners and are accountable to them. Albeit that the local authorities

8. O'Brien, 'Villagers, elections, and citizenship in contemporary China', pp. 410–411; Thomas H. Marshall, *Class, Citizenship, and Social Development* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), pp. 71–77.

9. Meanwhile, village leaderships have to be elected by the population in direct and secret ballots.

10. So, for instance, in Yingchou County in Guangxi, see Li Xueping and Chen Weidong, 'Jinnian lai chengshi shequ minzhu jianshe fazhan baogao' ['Report on the development of the build-up of urban *shequ* democracy since this year'], in Li Fan, ed., *Zhongguo jiceng minzhu fazhan baogao 2000–2001* [*Report on the Development of Grassroots Democracy in China 2000–2001*] (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 2002), pp. 325–326.

11. See, for instance, *Renmin Ribao* [*People's Daily*], (31 March 2003).

now and then intervene in the daily activities of those committees, for instance if a board proves to be too radical or conflictual, the residents perceive these organizations as democratically elected and legitimized institutions. They differ from the RCs by being bottom-up organizations and by representing the interests of their constituents. Therefore, property owners were more interested in electing those organizations than in electing the members of the RCs.[12]

Most owners classified the HOSOCs as 'autonomous', as an organ elected by the residents themselves. Elections were to be considered direct and free. In contrast to RC elections, most owners were well informed about the elections of their HOSOCs. Mostly, people with prestige and a certain influence, like Party or trade union chairmen of larger enterprises or lawyers, took over the position of chairmen of HOSOCs.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs, responsible for grassroots elections, argues that elections are to strengthen the degree of the population's participation and the legitimacy of the political system. Although in many respects this may not yet work in a satisfactory way (as shown above in urban neighborhoods elections are primarily by indirect ballots, i.e. only representatives of the inhabitants have a voting right), my own research and surveys in China prove that people increasingly conceive elections as their 'right'. Rational voters emerge who have realized that there exists a correlation between balloting and the responsibility of the elected towards their voters. Many interviewees argued that elected persons had a stronger sense of accountability, because they were elected and wanted to be re-elected and that people who do not show any engagement for the demands or interests of the residents will not be re-elected and that residents increasingly put forward suggestions and voice their opinion. Moreover, even indirect voting (by delegates) requires the elected to take the interests of their constituents into account. And if the constituents are unsatisfied with the behavior of the people elected, the latter might not be re-elected.

As far as elections are concerned, the restricted nature of these elections together with the institutional deficit impedes the emergence of citizenship. Yet, on the other hand, the term is also bound to the ideas of taking action and the voluntary participation and self-help of mature, responsible citizens. On the whole, grassroots elections are a new phenomenon still in progress. Continuous elections will foster a learning process, the internalization and training of voting and participation. On the one hand, this will enhance the citizens' demand for information and participation, on the other hand candidates are increasingly enforced to present themselves in a more substantial way in order to generate trust and to be elected or re-elected. The general introduction of direct elections would therefore be supportive in spawning trust and legitimacy.

Yet, participation comprises more than elections. Therefore, Table 1 attempts a division of participatory activities of those questioned into political and social activities, although overlaps between the two categories exist and the distinctions are partially blurred.

12. On the history and current situation of Home-Owners Self-Organization Committees see Benjamin L. Read, 'Democratizing the neighbourhood? New private housing and home-owner self-organization in urban China', *The China Journal* 49, (January 2003), pp. 31–59.

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Table 1. Forms of participation of the interviewees in the *shequ* studied

Activities	Shenyang	Chongqing	Shenzhen
1. Political participation in SQ			
Electoral representative	33	3	5
Building/block leader	22	10	4
SQ advisory committee	3	1	–
CP membership	21	9	26
Associations (disabled, women)	3	–	–
Home Owners Committee[a]	–	–	5
2. Social participation in SQ			
Care of families in need	8	1	–
Public works (sweeping paths, clean-up, etc.)	7	2	–
Work with children/youth	2	–	–
Work with women	3	–	–
Propagating birth planning	3	–	2
Work with the elderly	2	–	–
Donations for social causes	4	5	–
Involvement in RC activities	11	4	–
Cultural activities/further education	10	3	–

Note: [a] Participation in the elected board of the Home Owners Committee involves the participation in negotiations with state or semi-state organizations (property management companies, RCs, real estate development companies) and is thus to be classified as political.
Source: Author's survey.

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As Table 1 reveals, clear regional differences may be observed. Thus, the highest degree of participation could be found in the neighborhood communities of Shenyang, the lowest in Shenzhen. In Shenyang, the people's thinking was most strongly influenced by 'socialism'. The people were accustomed to collective thought patterns; most of them had been members of large state enterprises which had been influential in their socialization. Neighbors usually knew each other; in some cases they had lived together in a *danwei*. The *shequ* was comprehended as a *danwei* substitute. In relation to new employment opportunities, the people tended to wait for the state to take action. For the respondents in Chongqing, waiting for state action did not play such an important role. The desire for self-employment as tradespersons or merchants was especially prevalent among women aged 35–50. This desire and independence (from the state) was without a doubt a reason for lower rates of participation among the residents in their communities. Moreover, not all residents knew each other, since in recent years a growing number of persons had moved into the communities in the newly built residential buildings. In Shenzhen the general participation rate was the lowest. This can be attributed to the lack of local ties in this city of migrants, which compared to the rest of China displays a high labor intensity and with it a strong working pressure as well as a strong desire for individual independence. Neighbors were seldom acquainted; in many cases such contacts were not desirable.

Especially the more wealthy community members preferred anonymity in the face of the outside world. The existence of two additional organizations alongside the RC, the property management companies, who also appointed block and building caretakers, and the home owners associations diminished the role of the RCs in the

neighborhoods as they handled important tasks (infrastructure and neighborhood beautification; guaranteeing the rights of property owners) without the assistance of the RCs. Problems with the apartments or cleanliness and public security in the neighborhood were incumbent on the property management firms. When problems in these areas occurred, the home owners associations tried to sort them out in negotiations with the property management firms taking legal recourse when necessary. The lower rate of unemployment and income recipients in comparison to Shenyang and Chongqing, coupled with the high percentage of high earners and wealthy community members in the neighborhoods I studied, meant more than a different residential composition. Those neighborhoods were also characterized by the self-confidence and awareness of the new middle class in the face of state or semi-state organizations. Yet, this awareness was not expressed through participation in the activities of the RCs, but rather in autonomous forms such as involvement in home owners associations or collective legal action in cases of alleged violations. The relatively free and open political climate in the special economic zone and the influence of Hong Kong as a neighbor make themselves felt in Shenzhen. One could speak here of the development of a public sphere and a relaxing of institutionalized authoritarian rule owing to migration from the most divergent areas of the country (including Hong Kong). People from the interior obviously feel more independence from collective pressures and freer than in their places of birth.

Interestingly enough, almost all of our respondents took part in RC activities in Shenyang with only a few exceptions. In Chongqing, on the other hand, only 18 out of 48 persons to answer this question responded that they took part in *shequ* activities (37.5%); 30 (62.5%) stated that they did not participate. In Shenzhen, 13 out of 46 people stated that they participated (28.3%) while 33 did not (71.7%). In relation to participation, this sets Shenyang apart from the other two cities. It was also notable there that, in particular, the older women who had gone into early retirement were interested in being involved in RC activities, i.e. wanted to participate. In contrast to Chongqing and Shenzhen, the neighborhoods in Shenyang were more homogeneous in their composition, i.e. the number of migrants from other areas was lower. The larger number of acquaintances in the neighborhoods stemming from this homogeneity, as well as residents' stronger identification with the *shequ*, could constitute further reasons for their greater willingness to participate.

A Chinese study charting participation levels in Shenzhen's neighborhood communities yielded the spectrum as indicated in Table 2.

The highest rate of participation can be seen in more passive activities (donations), as well as patterns of participation for which the residents are mobilized (elections, voluntary activities, the planting of vegetation and environmental activities). Nonetheless, Table 2 points to the broad range of participation possibilities which do exist.

Rising living standards and community involvement

Concerning the second characteristic of citizenship, we can ascertain a rising living standard among the majority of the people, particularly in urban areas. As long as people primarily are concerned with their personal survival they are unwilling to

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Table 2. Patterns of participation in Shenzhen's neighborhood communities

Patterns of participation	Degree of participation (in %)
Mobilization of residents for participation in neighborhood elections	12.9
Involvement in solving problems in the *shequ*	23.3
Attendance at home-owners committee meetings	24.7
Participation in public security activities in the *shequ*	28.0
Participation in sporting events organized by the RC	36.7
Submitted suggestion(s) to the RC	38.5
Called upon by RC to express opinion	39.3
Voiced opinion to RC	40.6
Attendance at RC meeting	40.8
Participation in RC's green landscaping and environmental activities	46.1
Participation in RC's cultural activities	50.2
Participation in 'voluntary' activities	51.2
Participation in RC elections	54.4
Monetary and other donations	77.9

Source: *Shequ* 1(2), (2006), p. 33.

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participate. In more developed areas, better-off people might increasingly engage in social and welfare issues. Nevertheless, the figures available support the assumption that the majority of better-off people are primarily involved in their jobs and lack the time to engage socially.

Regarding the third characteristic, the party-state is strongly encouraging and even asking for involvement in social activities. In view of an increasingly differentiated and sophisticated society in China, it is acknowledged that the state is unable to undertake and operate all societal tasks. As a new social security system is still underdeveloped and market regulation does not produce the outcome sought, the state makes efforts to mobilize people to involve into social activities and to take over certain tasks like taking care of weak social groups in neighborhood communities. 'Volunteers' are requested to look after the socially weak, the old-aged, disabled persons and fringe groups. They shall take care of environment and cultural life in their communities. Though a sense of citizenship or of community in the form of voluntary activities is still relatively underdeveloped, meanwhile such a sense is gradually emerging, with the rise in living standards and associated social philanthropic attitudes, as well as through state mobilization.

Last, but not least, the party-state supports the surfacing of citizenship by a turn in ideology. Instead of talking about 'masses', the dominant term in the former political concept, it is now propagating the notion of 'citizens' which has the connotation of legal and participating rights. The fact that the reorganization of social security systems and social participation in the neighborhood communities demands conscious citizens has indeed been recognized in part by the party-state, as when, for instance, *Shequ*, a journal published by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, noted that China needs conscious citizens electing and monitoring their own administrations and who consciously participate in the public affairs of their neighborhood communities.[13]

13. Chen Weidong, 'Min ping guan: rang jumin chengwei gongmin' ['Citizens assess officials: let inhabitants become citizens'], *Shequ* [*Community*] 2–4, (2004), p. 11.

Here, participation and a public spirit are conceived of as a part of citizenship, a concept relatively close to Western conceptions.

Social volunteers and citizenship

At the same time, we find an additional conceptual breakdown with regard to citizens to be important, namely the distinction between (a) *responsible citizens*, (b) *participant citizens* and (c) *justice-oriented citizens*. The first category of citizens is active in their living and working environment on their own accord, i.e. taking the initiative. They participate voluntarily in social activities such as the improvement of environmental conditions; they abide strictly by the ordinances and regulations and exhort others to do the same. They demonstrate *civic engagement*. The participant citizens are involved in public activities and take part in the social life in their communities. They are informed about the work of their RC as well as of the local government agencies. They are, therefore, more reactive. Justice-oriented citizens struggle against injustice and pursue social equality. Although the amount of political activity and involvement may differ significantly, we can speak of different degrees of political activism. Political scientists have rightly pointed out that participation levels are also related to 'citizen knowledge' and that educational measures can foment participation in this area. As such, the state can make a contribution to the development of citizens, e.g. through the educational system or their integration in participatory processes (learning by doing).[14] After all, participation demands not only a readiness, but also an ability to become involved.

The current state of development regarding citizenship or citizen duty can be seen clearly in the degree of voluntary involvement of *shequ* residents in social or community tasks. The degree of participant citizens, i.e. voluntary participation, is still relatively low. Whereas in Western societies 35–40% of the population is involved in voluntary (honorary) activities,[15] in China this percentage has only been marginal up until this point. Fundamentally, three reasons can be cited as an explanation for this:

1. Historical factors: distinctive from Christian or Buddhist societies, in which the ideas of charity and mercy played a great part, the compassion for persons outside of immediate reference groups (clan, family, village, countrymen, etc.) is relatively low in China. In the 1930s, the philosopher Lin Yutang complained accordingly of the lack of such a social disposition. He noted that a sense of family was central for the Chinese, not a sense of community. The concept of society thus was also very alien to Chinese thought patterns.[16] For this reason, at the beginning of the twentieth century, China's leading thinkers voted for the abolition of the family and correspondingly the sense of family ties (Kang

14. In China it is emphasized as well that the 'citizenship quality' (*gongmin suzhi*) of the population must be elevated, cf. Meng Gu and Bai Zhigang, *Shequ wenhua yu gongmin suzhi* [*Shequ Culture and Citizen Quality*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe, 2006).

15. Statistics for Germany state that approximately 70% of the population volunteer on a regular or sporadic basis, cf. Thomas Gensicke, 'Bürgerschaftliches Engagement in Deutschland', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 12, (2006), p. 11.

16. Yutang Lin, *My Country and My People* (New York: The John Day Company, 1939).

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Youwei), or in other words for a 'moral revolution' (*daode geming*, Liang Qichao).
2. Modernization processes led to the decay of traditional communities and values and with that to an increase in individualistic and egocentric factors and behavioral patterns.
3. So far, institutions that would foster voluntary social involvement have been lacking, including functioning legal institutions, a corruption-resistant system of officials and a system of values in which unpaid commitment for one's fellow citizens is regarded as a valuable resource; this impedes the formation of civilizational competence in the sense of civil duties as well as a sense of citizen duty and public spirit.

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However, since a diversifying society increasingly depends upon the work of voluntary actors involved in various social areas, the Chinese state attempts to mobilize volunteers and initiate voluntary activity top-down in a situation of deficient volunteering among urban residents. In those areas where volunteers are generally lacking, people dependent on the party-state like party members and the socially weak like income support recipients should take up the slack by assuming those tasks and supplementing the working areas of the RCs in the *shequ*. A report on the southeastern province capital of Fuzhou points to this fact, arguing that in early 2005 there were supposedly 182 'volunteer groups' and 764 'volunteer subgroups' consisting of over 10,000 party members in the city's *shequ*.[17] In late 2005, approximately 75,000 volunteer organizations with 16 million members were purported to exist in Chinese *shequ*; only 3% of all urban inhabitants engaged in voluntary activities.[18] A Chinese report reveals that 80% of volunteers in the *shequ* are members of the Party and the Communist Youth League or public servants.[19] In Peking, 300,000 people were registered as official 'volunteers' in 2005, or only about 2% of the total population. Of this group, statistics indicate that 40% were party members and 70% were over 50 years of age.[20] According to a document from the State Council, this figure should be raised to about 8% by 2008.[21]

One of the more advanced examples of top-down mobilization is the voluntary association of Lugu *shequ* in Peking's Shijingshan district. Founded in 2004 based on a suggestion of the district leadership, in March 2006 the association had almost 500 members on record, most of which were party members (51.4%).[22] The majority of members are retired. Yet even though the association was established 'from above' and is constituted predominantly by party members, it carries out important social tasks in

17. *Renmin Ribao*, (7 January 2005). In light of these numbers, *Renmin Ribao* called for the mobilization of party members as volunteers, cf. Wang Yonghong, 'Chuangxin shequ dangjian, jianshe hexie shequ' ['Renew the party construction in *shequ*, establish harmonious communities'], *Renmin Ribao*, (15 July 2005).
18. *Renmin Ribao*, (6 December 2005; 17 July 2006).
19. Cf. *Shequ* 11(2), (2005), p. 15.
20. Research Center for the Important Ideas of the Deng-Xiaoping Theory, the 'Three Represents' of Beijing City and the Publishing House of the Journal 'Front' of the Party Committee of Beijing City, eds, *Goujian hexie. Beijing shi jianshe hexie shequ xin tan* [*Build-up Harmony. New Reflection on the Build-up of Harmonious shequ in Beijing City*] (Beijing: Xuexi chubanshe, 2006), p. 50.
21. *Renmin Ribao*, (17 July 2006). In such plan economy thinking, the state's mobilizing strategy becomes visible once again.
22. Interview, Lugu *shequ*, 4 March 2006.

the areas of social income support, environmental protection, health care, transportation and public security as well as continuing education. Future plans foresee tax advantages to support the work of voluntary associations.[23] Such plans are designed to pave the way for the development of voluntary efforts from 'benevolence' to 'social responsibility' through state mobilization and education.[24] These measures are all part of a state agenda to educate and train volunteers.[25] The example of the incentive system of Lugu neighborhood exemplifies this educational goal: those who participate in over 100 hours of voluntary activities annually, earn the title of star volunteer (*xingji yigong*); furthermore, monetary prizes and special titles are awarded for over 1,000, 3,000 and 5,000 hours achieved by volunteer workers.[26]

Citizens who participate make up a minority in almost all societies. Part of being a citizen is also the decision *against* active participation (we will examine this issue in the section 'Individual autonomy'). Citizens can also decide between migration, voice (going as far as active resistance) and 'political epicurianism' (Franz Neumann), i.e. self-conscious abstinence from politics and concentrating on their private interests, characterized by passiveness and indifference. In the context of *shequ*, migration simply indicates the move to a different living space or location.

Interestingly, state paternalism and the relationships of individuals to primary groups impede the emergence of a sense of citizen duty. The lessons of socialist socialization taught the people that good citizens were those who fell in line, subordinated themselves and were loyal to the party-state—just like a 47-year-old female worker in the northeastern province capital of Shenyang who stated: 'I am a very good citizen; I don't create any difficulties for others'.[27] Or as a 55-year old female retiree put it: 'I go with the party. I do what the leaders order ... when they call me, then I come'.[28] The institutionalized authoritarian authority still continues to dominate the thinking and action of many elderly residents. Power is exerted over the consciousness of the people in that they believe that the arrangements of the states are in their interest. Such perspectives, in which the power of the system makes its weight felt, also prevent involvement on the part of the people, as the state appears to fix everything.

Community self-administration: discourse and reality

Citizenship and participation demand a minimum of self-determination and autonomy in the sense that on the one hand, the members of a community themselves make decisions regarding their community and its scope, and on the other that state power is limited by this autonomy.[29] At the same time, the autonomous will must proceed from the community itself, i.e. as an expression of the collective will of

23. *Goujian hexie*, p. 50.
24. Sun Ying, 'Shequ zhiyuanzhe fuwu neihan de sange kuozhan' ['Three enhancements of the content of voluntary services in *shequ*'], *Shequ* 6(1), (2005), pp. 17–18.
25. Cf. the corresponding document from the State Council [*Renmin Ribao*, (17 July 2006)].
26. Interview, Lugu *shequ*, 10 October 2006.
27. Interview, Shenyang, 11 March 2003.
28. Interview, Shenyang, 13 March 2003.
29. See Henry S. Richardson, *Democratic Autonomy—Public Reasoning about the Ends of Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) on the matter of democratic autonomy.

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a community. Autonomy does not refer in this context to *absolute* autonomy (independence from higher levels), but to *relative* autonomy, i.e. the forms of self-administration which are accorded to the individual units must be locally defined. It is therefore a question of the political awareness of the residents concerning the matter of self-administration as well as the implementation of state-defined measures.

The Organizational Law for RCs from 1989 confirmed that RCs represent a self-administrative level.[30] However, this prescribed autonomy in the urban space continues to be one that only exists on paper, despite the provisions of legal regulations for self-administration of urban neighborhoods. The terms autonomy or self-administration refer to social subsystems which under predetermined legal frameworks are in the position to decide about their basic structures, mechanisms and actions, i.e. about their own affairs. Self-administration is implemented by persons who are not members of the state bureaucracy, but who carry out the duties incumbent upon them as a legally sanctioned corporate body. Autonomy concurrently requires certain resources in order to act independently from bureaucracy, such as financial resources, knowledge and the pursuit of an autonomous will.[31]

However, self-administration involves additional fundamental components: voluntary citizen involvement in the administration, the guarantee of involvement in and influence over important administrative decisions and the accomplishment of public tasks by independent bodies which are elected and controlled by the citizens. All of these factors link autonomy to a high degree of participation.

According to the provisions of the Ministry of Civil Affairs the neighborhood communities are to be autonomous units below the state level (self-administrative level). Autonomy is justified by citing the necessity of 'socialist democracy'. The system of village elections and village autonomy is to be transferred to the urban neighborhoods. It is planned that in the neighborhoods a network of services on a non-state and *non-profit* level shall be constructed through the non-paid work of volunteers. The local state in form of the street offices (sub-districts, the lowest state level in urban areas) is to 'guide' the work in the neighborhoods, rather than leading it.

Another report appearing in the journal *Shequ* assigns the following contents to the concept of self-administration: election of the RC by the residents; financial autonomy (whereas on the one hand the state is to finance the work of the RCs, because they perform state tasks, on the other hand the RC is to charge fees for its services); self-administration of *shequ* property, of training and educational institutions; autonomous administration and monitoring of this functioning on the part of the resident assemblies; autonomously administered services and performance of community tasks (social work, public safety, mediation, environment, birth planning, youth activities, etc.).[32]

30. Printed in Zhou Wenjian and Ning Feng, eds, *Chengshi shequ jianshe gailun* [*Outline of Urban shequ Build-up*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe, 2001), pp. 442ff.

31. On the latter, see Colin Bird, 'The possibility of self-government', *The American Political Science Review* 94(3), (September 2000), p. 563. The relationship between resources, autonomy and governance is also being discussed in the meantime by Chinese scholars, cf. Feng Ling and Li Zhiyuan, 'Zhongguo chengshi shequ zhili jiegou bianqian de guocheng fenxi' ['Analysis of the process of structural change of governance in China's urban *shequ*'], *Renwen Zazhi* [*Journal of Humanities*] 1, (2003), pp. 133–138.

32. Xu Kaiming, 'Shequ zizhi de jiben neirong' ['Basic content of *shequ* autonomy'], *Shequ* [*Community*] 10(20), (2003), p. 22.

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Self-administration taken to mean the administration of residents' own affairs by themselves or their chosen representatives without outside intervention has not existed to this point in China. Instead it becomes all the more apparent that on the one hand the *shequ* fulfill tasks of social control, and moreover political control through the Party organizations; on the other hand they are to relieve the state with voluntary social services and measures of self-help. In this manner, the neighborhoods were designated an important function in combating, for instance, *Falun Gong*, and also in containing the respiratory disease caused by the SARS coronavirus in 2003.

From the side of the government as well as many Chinese social scientists, the aspects of democracy and autonomy are placed at the center of the *shequ* concept. This development is purportedly part of the (socialist) democratization process.[33] The *shequ* is viewed as a 'strategic space of political development', part of China's political democratization, the latter defined as an important element of Chinese modernization. It is further postulated that the significance of neighborhood communities for democratization is based on three elements: (a) the creation of a space for political democratization and of a democratic political culture; (b) the democratic qualification of citizens; and (c) the creation of a necessary space for political participation.[34] In 2003, even the Ministry of Civil Affairs endorsed the expansion of autonomy and participatory possibilities in the neighborhood communities.[35]

According to Chinese social scientists the issues of grassroots democracy and self-administration stand at the core of the neighborhood communities. It is argued that neither of the two has existed to this point: the street office appoints candidates for RC elections, who are then voted for by the residents' representatives. The committees are said to hold an allegiance to the street offices, but not to the residents.[36] Li Rong, vice-governor of Guangdong Province, stated too that the core of autonomy was 'democratic decision-making'.[37] Yet other authors emphasize the restrictions placed on the autonomy of neighborhood communities by the CCP's leadership role.[38] The core of autonomy is seen as the right to autonomous decision-making and management. In the absence of these two elements, self-administration is said to be non-existent.[39] Ultimately, without the residents' participation there is also no autonomy. Moreover, the legal safeguarding of specified rights of autonomy in the

33. Lin Shangli, ed., *Shequ minzhu yu zhili: anli yanjiu* [*On Case Studies of Democratic Governance in shequ*] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2003), p. 36.

34. *Ibid*., pp. 321–325; Wang Jianmin, *Chengshi shequ zhengzhi fazhan* [*Political Development of Urban shequ*] (Beijing: Shehui kexie wenxian chubanshe, 2006), pp. 40–48.

35. *Shequ canyu xingdong 2005 niandu baogao* [*Annual Report 2005 of 'Shequ Participation Action'*] (Beijing: Canyushi Information and Consulting Centre, 2006), p. 2.

36. Chen Yi, 'Chengshi jiceng minzhu de qidian zaiyu xuanju zhidu de gaige' ['Starting point of urban grassroots elections and the reform of the electoral system'], *Shequ* [*Community*] 2(3), (2003), p. 24.

37. Li Rong, 'Quanmian tuijin chengshi shequ jianshe yao licu jumin zizhi, shequ zhuban' ['The full implementation of the build-up of urban *shequ* must be based on the self-administration of the residents and the responsibility of the *shequ*'], *Shequ* 8, (2002), p. 9.

38. See e.g. Liang Qidong, ed., *Shequ fazhan yanjiu baogao* [*Research Report on the Development of shequ*] (Shenyang: Shenyang chubanshe, 2002), p. 149; Lin Shangli, ed., *Shequ minzhu yu zhili*, p. 12.

39. Yang Zhangqiao and Ma Lihua, 'Chengshi shequ zizhi quanwei de minzhu jiangou' ['Democratic build-up of autonomous rights of urban *shequ*'], *Shehuixue* [*Sociology*] 3, (2004), p. 20.

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shequ is necessary. Some scholars even find a 'Chinese Agenda 21 as the foundation of the work in *shequ*' to be indispensable.[40]

In her considerations, Yu Yanyan does not depart from the concept of 'democracy', but instead develops stronger civil society-based criteria for autonomy: a higher participation rate, higher functionality of associations working in a *shequ*, a greater amount of resources to provide and support qualitatively good services for residents and finally a sense of identity and belonging among inhabitants. With these criteria, Yu Yanyan comes relatively close to the concept of 'harmonious' neighborhood communities although her primary interest is the transformation of the role of the state and the strengthening of the functions of the neighborhoods.[41]

Other scholars question the possibility of autonomy at its very foundations. They view the RCs as mere 'appendages' of the street offices. In their arguments, they see RCs as fulfilling administrative functions and being paid by the street offices. The head of the RC is regarded as a representative of the state. Party organizations are no different, as the Party committee secretary is appointed by the street's Party committee. At any rate, one could still speak of a hybrid organization (a mixture of state and society). This is attributed to the fact that the Chinese model of development is a top-down model initiated by the state, in contrast to the Western bottom-up model.[42]

Many Chinese scholars hold the street offices or committees accountable for the lack of autonomy, particularly since regulations for the work and functions of street offices have remained unchanged since 1954.[43] They point out that as long as the RCs must answer to the street offices and the latter exercise a supervisory function, autonomy is not possible. For this reason, some authors have argued for the dissolution of the street offices, and in some cities (like Shanghai) they have already been disbanded to a certain extent.[44] Others suggest setting up a separate authority for the administration of the neighborhoods.[45]

In all the neighborhoods we visited, the street offices exercised a central control function over the *shequ*. They provided the bulk of financial resources and monitored their use. Seen financially, this makes the neighborhood communities dependent upon the state. The RCs' working agendas and the evaluation of their activities are also incumbent upon the respective street offices. At the same time, as mentioned above, the latter exercise their control over the elections. The state disregards the autonomy of the *shequ* through the street offices. It delegates public tasks such as birth planning, pension payments, income support, etc. directly to the neighborhoods. The street office remains the prime political organ of reference for the RC: 'If you don't listen to the street office, then you will have a serious problem', a leading RC

40. Cf. also Zhang Shuchen, 'Shequ zizhi de zuzhi jiagou jiqi dong yunzhuan' ['Organizational structure of *shequ* autonomy and its driving function'], *Shehui* [*Society*] 1, (2005), pp. 50–55.

41. Yu Yanyan, *Shequ zizhi yu zhengfu zhineng zhuanbian* [*Autonomy of shequ and the Transformation of the Role of Government*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe, 2006), p. 87.

42. Xu Xiaojun, 'Chengshi shequ zizhi: quanli maodun ji qi xietiao' ['Autonomy of urban *shequ*: power contradictions and their regulation'], *Shehuixue* 4, (2005), pp. 74–79.

43. Zhao Hongwen, 'Tizhi chuangxin: shequ jianshe de qiangda dongli' ['System innovation: mighty driving force for the build-up of neighbourhood communities'], *Zhongguo Minzheng* [*China's Civil Affairs*] 1, (2003), p. 29.

44. Cf. e.g. the lead article of the journal *Zhongguo Minzheng* 4, (2003) or the journal *Shequ* 8(15), (2002), pp. 32–33.

45. Zhang Shuchen, 'Shequ zizhi de zuzhi jiagou jiqi dong yunzhuan', p. 53.

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member in Shenyang explained.[46] The RC *must* carry out the tasks which are assigned to it by the street office.

Although the street offices are only assigned a 'guiding' (*zhidao*) function, the residents perceive it more as 'exercising leadership' (*lingdao*); they comprehend the RC as a part of the state apparatus. Hence, only a small minority of residents questioned by the author held the opinion that the RC was an autonomous organ (see Table 3).

Over 45% did not regard the RCs and *shequ* as autonomous structures. Nearly one half of respondents were uncertain as to the meaning of autonomy in general. One 60-year-old woman stated:

> What does self-administration mean? I don't know. I have heard the term used before, but I don't understand it. It's like this: whatever the government demands from us is what we do.[47]

The extent to which RCs are associated with the government and thus with the state is shown in Table 4.

Table 5 confirms the residents' perception of the RCs as belonging to the state apparatus and not as independent, non-state organizations.

Even among officials only a minority conceived the RCs as autonomous organs. The majority discerned them as semi-state organizations. Those who affirmed an autonomous status justified the term autonomy by citing the following factors: the RC was elected (two); the residents participate (two); the RC listens to the opinions of the masses (two); the RC takes care of its own affairs (one). Those who refuted the autonomous status stated: autonomy is impossible without independent financial resources (five); it is premature; the RC still requires the guidance of superior organs (five); and autonomy is a gradual process (two).

One crucial factor for making autonomy a reality is—alongside system-based factors—the situation as regards resources. Until the present, most *shequ* do not have their own revenues, which would enable them to expand or improve their capacity for self-administration and their range of services. Though the neighborhood communities are permitted to establish their own operations (principally in the service sector), they lack the necessary means to do so. Early in 2006, the city of Shenzhen even resolved that *shequ* were not allowed to develop their own economic activities.[48]

Most small businesses and operations located with the territory of a *shequ* are managed by the street offices and in 2003 were paid, e.g. in Shenyang only an administrative charge of 60 yuan per month to the RC. In Chang'anjie neighborhood, three halls for bicycle racks whose use required a monthly fee brought a meager income to the RC in the sum of a few hundred yuan. In neighborhoods where larger groups of *danwei* members resided the respective *danwei* supported the RC mostly by financial measures. The RCs also made efforts to acquire donations from city authorities or from private entrepreneurs. Yet all of these measures did not bring a resolution to the neighborhoods' financial problems. Some RCs were still required to

46. Interview, Shenyang, 14 March 2003.
47. Interview, Shenyang, 14 March 2003.
48. *Shequ* 1, (2006), p. 10.

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Table 3. Are residents committees autonomous organs?

	Persons	%
Yes	5	5.8
No, part of the government apparatus	25	29.1
No, requirements are lacking	14	16.3
Don't know	42	48.8
Total	86	100.0

Note: Numbers refer to persons who answered this question.
Source: Author's survey.

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pay rent to the street office for the space which they used. Moreover, even small sources of income (2004: starting from 200 yuan) had to be reported to the street offices. Applications can be filed for the proposed use of these funds, which then must be approved by the street offices. Donations, as some RC members explained, must be ceded to the street office.

Nevertheless, in individual cases, functioning self-administered neighborhoods do exist. One interesting case of local self-administration is the Shangsha neighborhood community in Shenzhen (a special economic zone bordering Hong Kong). The former fishing village with around 1,300 inhabitants, mainly members of the Huang clan, was converted into an urban neighborhood community by the city government in 1992. The soil rights were gradually sold to the city of Shenzhen, which commissioned an urban company to build high-rise buildings with condominiums. While the land was sold initially for cheap prices to the city under the condition that jobs in non-agrarian sectors be provided for the former village inhabitants, the village community quickly improved its strategy. It demanded payments for the land according to prices in line with the market. The payments were not simply distributed among the individual community members. Instead, all revenues of the once poor village community were placed in a joint stock company and all 1,300 inhabitants became stockholders. In addition, investments were made in production and service companies to multiply assets. The shares were distributed among residents and were not permitted to be transferred or sold. Only persons from the former village are entitled to shares. Even the wife of the Party secretary from Sichuan did not receive shares, while their children did. The chairperson makes decisions regarding the payout of dividends, and is required to justify these expenditures to the community at year's end.

Table 4. What type of organizations are the residents committees?

Type	Shenyang	%	Chongqing	%	Shenzhen	%
Organ at lowest governmental level	22	57.9	29	60.4	37	75.5
Division below street office	11	29.0	15	31.3	6	12.3
Autonomous organ	1	2.6	–	–	1	2.0
Don't know	4	10.5	4	8.3	5	10.2
Total	38	100.0	48	100.0	49	100.0

Source: Authors' survey.

Table 5. Are residents committees autonomous organs (officials)?

	Persons	%
Yes	7	26.9
No	15	57.7
Don't know	2	7.7
Other	2	7.7
Total	26	100.0

Source: Authors' survey.

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The 50,000 migrants or temporary residents living in this neighborhood in 2004 were excluded from these measures. Only the native residents were granted the authority of administration of the residential area (the RC is elected by the 1,300 residents in direct and secret elections), as well as of the management of apartments and public security (over 100 security personnel). The community also purchased and rented some apartments.[49]

Although those are merely single cases, their existence discerns that self-administered neighborhoods can emerge even under authoritarian conditions.

Individual autonomy

Citizenship and self-administration require autonomous individuals who are capable of making independent decisions. Chinese scholars also argue to this effect. Each individual, as Yang and Ma write, bears the right to self-administration.[50]

The process of modernization already contributes to this end. It causes the dissolution of traditional structures and ties (through phenomena such as the loosening of familial ties, migratory movements, expansion of market relationships, performance-based principles and competition, erosion of the social security net or unemployment). Social uncertainty increases; the individual is forced to become more self-sufficient, seek means of self-employment and become the sole bearer of the responsibility for increased risk and social unknowns. Traditional values and beliefs are called into question and relativized. The result is what Ulrich Beck coined 'social surge of individualization'.[51] Although we can also identify an individualization impulse in the neighborhood communities, it is nonetheless distinct from the social surge of individualization as characterized by Beck. Instead, it is rather implicative of that which social anthropologist Fei Xiaotong has designated 'selfishness' or 'egocentrism' as a characteristic of social behavior in China. Fei uses these terms to refer to the lack of responsibility for public affairs.[52] Nevertheless, the present process of urban atomization also brings about a

49. Conversation with the residents committee of Shangsha neighborhood community, 25 February 2004. According to *Renmin Ribao*, (30 June 2004), in 2004 Shenzhen was the first Chinese city without villages and a rural population, since all villages had been transformed into *shequ*.

50. Yang Zhangqiao and Ma Lihua, 'Chengshi shequ zizhi quanwei de minzhu jiangou', p. 21.

51. Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society* (London: Sage, 1992).

52. Cf. Xiaotong Fei, *From the Soil. The Foundations of Chinese Society* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992).

transformation from group-based egoism (family, clan, village, *danwei*) to an individualized egoism, which can be interpreted to a large extent as an initial phase of society-based individualism.

Individual (political) autonomy in the sense of the liberties of private citizens in the face of the state apparatus and its subdivisions is accorded mainly to groups of persons who are neither socially nor politically dependent upon the RCs. This group of persons, consisting of those with regular and somewhat higher incomes, is only seldom interested in the affairs of the *shequ* and takes an active stance against being involved in any collective activities. Here we can find a renewed validation of Georg Simmel's hypothesis that money and monetary exchange (or the market), as carriers of impersonal relationships between persons, lead to the factual development of individuality, since personal dependencies or interrelationships are replaced by indifference and personal freedom. The direct consequence becomes the inner autonomy of individuals.[53] Exactly this process is currently taking place in China's urban society. Moreover, individual autonomy is also an expression of the authoritarian system's fatigue, or a 'depleted Leninism' (Charles Taylor), a former, all-encompassing political and social inclusion as well as a de-totalization of politics. 'Freedom from politics', Hannah Arendt once argued, is one of the most important negative liberties.[54] Accordingly, individuals in the *shequ* have the option to decide not to participate, because they do not regard it as necessary, or because they believe that existing structures satisfy their interests. In the end, it is a decision to be able to live and act of one's own accord. This matter could also be interpreted to the effect that the party-state might be interested in the participation of those who depend upon it, but not that of the members of the new middle class. However, this argument does little to convince, since the focus of the party-state is the integration of the neighborhoods and no class-based distinctions are made in its mobilization efforts.

Individualization and autonomy of individuals are not the only results of the modernization process. A threefold process of individualization also occurs, involving the disintegration of traditional authority and social structures and with that the loss of social security and social ties, to the dissolution of traditional values, norms and belief patterns and to new forms of social integration. Modernization causes an increasingly separate development of the public and private spheres, which is also a factor in individualization. A greater amount of individualism in a society requires a greater amount of individual freedom. Individual freedom should not be confused here with the democratic notion of freedom as freedom of participation. As described by Kornai, individual freedom increases in socialist societies: (1) when the right to make certain types of decisions is transferred from the bureaucracy to the individual; and (2) when bureaucratic constraints on the decisions of individuals slacken or are lifted.[55] Such a rise in individual autonomy and the private sphere can be identified without a doubt in present-day China. Yet, autonomy as I have characterized it in the present context involves a decrease in people's dependence on

53. Georg Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994), pp. 395–415.
54. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 284.
55. Janos Kornai, 'Individual freedom and reform of the socialist economy', *European Economic Review* 32, (1988), pp. 236–237.

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bureaucratic structures, greater room for personal decisions in relation to individual life planning and the acceptance of non-participation on the part of the party-state.

Accordingly, it can be concluded that autonomy is already present in the form of individual autonomy in the neighborhood communities. With the exception of the socially dependent (income support recipients) and the politically dependent (CP members), individuals can no longer be obligated to participate politically or socially in their neighborhoods. Instead, configuring and designing biographical plans are individual matters.

The growth of individual autonomy can be interpreted as part of a transformation in the Chinese society from being a closed to an open one. Closed societies can be identified as such by their low degree of social mobility, integration of members in rigidly structured communities, individual dependence on collective constraints or boundaries, while a division between the private and public spheres is absent. This description corresponds with the social and political conditions in China well into the 1980s. Open societies are characterized by social change and various forms of spatial and social mobility. Traditional communities begin to dissolve; processes of individualization lead to an erosion of collective values and norms; individual biographies begin to free themselves from collective pressures. Public and private spaces become increasingly distinct; collective fates (of *danwei*, villages, clans, village communities) are individualized.[56] Precisely this process of *individual autonomization* has begun to take hold above all in the urban space since the 1980s. As such, in the long term the development of society requires the transition from individual autonomy to a sense of citizenship and civic duty based on possibilities for participation, volunteerism, empathy and social solidarity in order to elevate the level of social stability as well as to be able to counter centrifugal tendencies of an over-individualization and other centrifugal trends in the social sphere.

Value and morality engineering by the party-state

In China the creation of a new order of morals and values is appearing as a key element of the intended community building and of creating citizenship. Among other sources alluding to this goal is an 'Action Plan for the Development of Civic Morality' (*gongmin daode jianshe shishi gangyao*), which was instituted by the political leadership in 2001 and is regularly touted by the media.[57] In 2003 the Central Committee Commission for the Development of a Spiritual Civilization published a new document that was to provide concrete measures for the program from 2001. Therein, 20 September was declared as a 'Day for Promoting Morality of Citizens'.[58] From 2004, the party daily *Renmin Ribao* has reported regularly on the participation of citizens in the creation of a new moral order. The means for accomplishing this goal include 'public conventions' (*gongyue*) of residents at the level of the *shequ*, residential blocks and residential buildings in order to comply with certain moral standards in relation to behavior in public, in the neighborhood or

56. See Michael Baurmann, *Der Markt der Tugend. Recht und Moral in der liberalen Gesellschaft. Eine soziologische Untersuchung* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1996), pp. 502–510.

57. Cf. e.g. *Renmin Ribao*, (5 September 2003; 7 July 2004; 20 September 2005).

58. *Renmin Ribao*, (19 September 2003).

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toward one's fellow residents.[59] In November 2004, *Renmin Ribao* even set up a special column for a 'discussion on the development of [new] morality'.

In June 2004, Vice-minister Chen Jichang from the Ministry of Civil Affairs explicitly emphasized that the 'development of ideological morals', especially for the youth, represented a central part of *shequ* development. He continued to state that family, school and *shequ* had to work together in close cooperation to fulfill this task.[60] The neighborhood communities are also understood as an instrument for teaching and internalizing 'civilized behavior', for the 'moral development' of society as well as the elevation of the people's 'moral quality'.[61] Even the media and scholarly publications repeatedly emphasize that the change in values, the creation of public morals and a social awareness of the people are 'central factors' and goals of *shequ* development.[62]

In many *shequ*, a brief code of ethics consisting of 20 characters is posted publicly: love the fatherland and observe all laws; be courteous, honest and sincere; show solidarity and be friendly; be industrious, frugal and progressive; have respect for work and make sacrifices. It is primarily patriotism, the internalization of moral values through propaganda campaigns, social control, and the conscientious compliance with required standards and official instructions, which are supposed to result in the development of 'civic morality'.[63] It is no longer the morality of new 'socialist humans' that is at stake, but a new morality of 'citizens'.

The state acts in this context as a *moral state* that attempts to implement new institutional patterns in the form of moral standards. In an empirical investigation, Kuan and Lau showed that the citizens in the People's Republic hold their government responsible for the moral decay in society.[64] Our surveys confirmed this attitude. If this perspective prevails in the political culture, then it indeed appears that demands are placed on the state to counter this decay by instituting new moral standards. It is the state, and not the people, which is called upon to implement these new standards. New in the current situation is the state's response to the paternalistic attitude which assigns it both the blame for the breakdown of morals and the responsibility in providing a remedy. The state now answers with efforts to integrate the population in the residential areas in this process on a voluntary basis. It is, however, doubtful that this type of propaganda is effective in relation to one of its main target groups: the youth, who in present-day China are seen as a high-risk group (through extreme individualism, gambling, pornography and 'Western' culture as

59. Cf. e.g. *Renmin Ribao*, [9 September 2004 (Dalian); 10 September 2004 (Peking); 11 September 2004 (Shanghai)].

60. *Renmin Ribao*, (17 June 2004).

61. Meng Gu and Bai Zhigang, *Shequ wenhua yu gongmin suzhi*, pp. 3–10; Shi Chang and Zhuo Silian, *Shequ jiaoyu yu xuexixing shequ* [*Shequ education and learning shequ*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe, 2006), pp. 127–135; Tang Zhongxin, *Goujian hexie shequ* [*Build-up of Harmonious shequ*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe, 2006), pp. 175–182.

62. Liu Jitong, 'Guojia huayu yu shequ shijian: Zhongguo chengshi shequ jianshe mubiao jiedu' ['State utterances and *shequ* practice: explaining goals of community construction'], *Shehui Kexue Yanjiu* [*Studies of Social Sciences*] 3, (2003), p. 105; Liu Lina, 'Shequ shi shehui gongde jianshe de zhongyao zaiti' ['*Shequ* are important carriers of the creation of a social public morale'], *Xinan Minzu Xueyuan Xuebao* [*Journal of the Nationalities Institute Southwest*] 9, (2004), pp. 282–285; *Renmin Ribao*, (3 July 2004; 29 July 2004).

63. Similar attempts were also made during the Republic under Chiang Kai-Shek.

64. Hsin-Chi Kuan and Siu-Kai Lau, 'Traditional orientations and political participation in three Chinese societies', *Journal of Contemporary China* 11(31), (2002), p. 304.

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well as drugs, rising criminality and the growth in religious and superstitious influences). Little will be accomplished if the *shequ* are called upon to take greater action against negative influences among the youth and strengthening moral education.[65]

Can a new order of values and morals be quasi-generated in a top-down process by the party-state and—in our case—through the *shequ*? 'The commodity morality', Baurmann writes, cannot be 'given over to circumstance and the uncontrolled interaction of human interests. It must be methodically manufactured and distributed'. It requires 'moral and ideological armament'.[66] But who should guarantee such a methodical approach, if not the state?

High expectations exist within the population with regard to a 'moral renewal of society' spearheaded by the Party. Thus a study among heads of households in Shanghai's *shequ* revealed that 69.8% of those surveyed considered knowledge and education to be the most important overall goals for their children (coming in at a distant second, the next most important goal was having good morals with 19.5%); only 4.2% named achieving material wealth (money). The absolute majority (81.0%) believed that education by the Party (in this case the reference is more likely to be toward the state) was the most important factor. Confucian ethics came in second (21.3%).[67] These responses centering heavily on the party-state could, however, also be related to the fact that no questions were posed as to the role of the family, the schools or the neighborhoods in this educational mandate. From a functional perspective the results could also be interpreted to mean that the state must do more in relation to conveying values. Whether the state is in the position to perform this task is doubtful. Social relationships are already extremely pluralized. Communities as value-conveying actors also demonstrate themselves to be largely ineffective.

Keller *et al.* refer to three developmental phases of morals: (a) in the first phase compliance with moral commitments is oriented on given rules and threats of sanctions; (b) in the second phase actors' own interests and the interests of others play equal parts; and (c) in the third phase empathy and care for one's fellow human beings play an important part in a moral context.[68] Although it would be incorrect to draw a rigid line separating these three phases, as some elements are present in all three of the phases described, our study has shown that caring about others also requires a certain material foundation in order to become a common moral good. For this reason, in the Chinese cities we can primarily find (a), with slight tendencies toward (b).

The *shequ* concept: a model of authoritarian communitarianism

The basic idea of the *shequ* concept is reminiscent of the notion of communitarianism, as outlined, for example, by the sociologist Amitai Etzioni, who calls for a new type of community in the face of increasing individualization in

65. See also: *Renmin Ribao*, (27 April 2004).
66. Baurmann, *Der Markt der Tugend*, p. 31.
67. Zhang Huanhua, 'Chengshi shequ jumin wei "richang guannian"' ['Everyday thinking of residents in urban *shequ*'], *Shehui* 9, (2004), pp. 14–18.
68. Cf. Monika Keller, Wolfgang Edelstein *et al.*, 'Denken über moralische Verpflichtung und interpersonale Verantwortung im Zusammenhang unterschiedlicher Kulturen', in W. Edelstein and Gertrud Nummer-Winkler, eds, *Moral im sozialen Kontext* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 378–379.

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order to create a new sense of responsibility among the people and to strengthen the moral foundations of society. The fundamental concept of communitarianism is comprised of resuscitating community thinking in the context of postmodern service-based societies. The dissolution of ideologies which propose a certain identity for a community (such as Marxism or Socialism) and the breakdown of a 'social model of modernization' (Touraine) lead to the search for new forms of community in order to compensate for social distance, isolation and the deficit in both its former effectiveness and meaning on a new, conscious, self-reliant and autonomous level. Finally, this can be seen as a manifestation of the 'Malaise of Modernity',[69] which has induced a state of moral disorder. The function of communitarianism in creating community would also make a strong case in China. Chinese politicians are also concerned with the issue of how an overarching social value complex can be produced which on the one hand counters the destructive tendencies of a further individualization through new forms of social solidarity and an issue of the renewal of public spaces in the cities.

Yet although a striking correlation can be identified between the objectives of communitarianism and the notion of *shequ*, differences between the two concepts exist not only concerning the point of a strong democracy. While Etzioni appeals directly to the politically mature citizen, the *shequ* project is the offspring of politics and provides for the 'top-down' creation of (controlled) citizens through authority and organizational structures. In regard to Chinese urban development policy, we may thus speak of an *authoritarian communitarianism*. At first glance the Chinese form of communitarianism has little in common with Western communitarianism. Communitarian theorists associate community primarily with a liberal society, with democracy, solid basic rights and mutual respect between social groups, finally as a combination of shared living arrangements and autonomous organization. Communitarianism, Etzioni argues, is closely connected to 'strong democracy'.[70] While such a democracy in Western societies constitutes the point of departure for communitarian approaches, Chinese social scientists believe that 'democracy' might be fostered by building on communitarian concepts. This too is an indicator that their concept is one of an authoritarian communitarianism. Points of potential overlap with Western communitarianism can instead be identified in that which Etzioni terms a 'reconstruction of morality',[71] i.e. the creation of a system of new social virtues and values based on a sense of community, personal responsibility and self-help.

In contrast to the idea of *shequ*, however, communitarianism requires a self-aware civil movement emerging 'from below' and a high degree of self-administration, participation and voluntary work. Nevertheless, the two are similar with regard to their objectives: the creation of a new social, moral and values-based order while preserving individual autonomy, and care for the socially disadvantaged. In relation to their means, differences between the two exist: communitarianism requires individual and organizational autonomy; *shequ* on the other hand attempts to

69. Cf. Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).
70. Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).
71. *Ibid*.

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maintain individual autonomy within bounds; no organizational autonomy exists to this point. However, a development is imaginable in which the degree of individual autonomy might increase, leading to the strengthening of organizational autonomy (*shequ*) and finally to a greater autonomy at the societal level.

The sociologist Amitai Etzioni argued that societies like China, which create a modern economy while at the same time wanting to hold tightly to the socialist system, need a 'thick', i.e. strongly controlled, social order. He underlined the necessity for processes and institutions that possess the ability to mobilize a certain amount of time, activity, energy, and loyalty of community members for service in one or more shared goals.[72] Indeed, the *shequ* appear to take on this role.

Conclusion

Rising living standards, greater individual liberties, increasing participation opportunities and jurification favor the emergence of citizens in the urban space. The state strives to create structures top-down and propagates values that are beneficial to this development. In and through the neighborhood communities, the residents are to be trained for and internalize participatory involvement. Voluntary social activities, the establishment of associations or the transfer of state services to the neighborhoods produce structures which could be beneficial to the development of a sense of community and social commitment. Lacking 'civil' liberties and legal security, however, have a restrictive effect in this context. The degree of individual autonomy has increased significantly. This autonomy, together with elevated individualization, might also be comprehended as an initial stage leading to greater organizational autonomy or self-administration of the *shequ*. After all their negative experiences with a planned economy and social repression, most people are now beginning to strive for a higher living standard and individual independence. Along with other means, the state attempts to steer this development with the aid of the *shequ* in the direction of social commitment and activity. Whether new value-based communities showing solidarity will arise in this process remains doubtful. Hence, 'civilizing' learning processes, participation and social *engineering* on the part of the state create the requirements for citizens and a sense of civic duty. The *shequ* serve as catalysts in the process.

To sum up, some aspects of the necessary prerequisites for 'citizens' in urban China are on the rise. In the meantime, the high degree of self-confidence and potential self-determination of the middle and upper classes; the option to also participate in autonomous or non-state forms (home owner committees, NGOs, associations); a slowly growing legal awareness, which causes a larger number of individuals and groups to attempt to defend their rights by calling on laws (e.g. constitution) or Party and state documents, are all signs of an emerging citizenship. The latter is more pronounced with young academics and professionals, while socially weaker groups are still at the beginning of a learning process in relation to participation. Therefore, the middle classes can be classified as the forerunners on a path leading to citizenship, even though factors related to political culture (such as a

72. *Ibid*.

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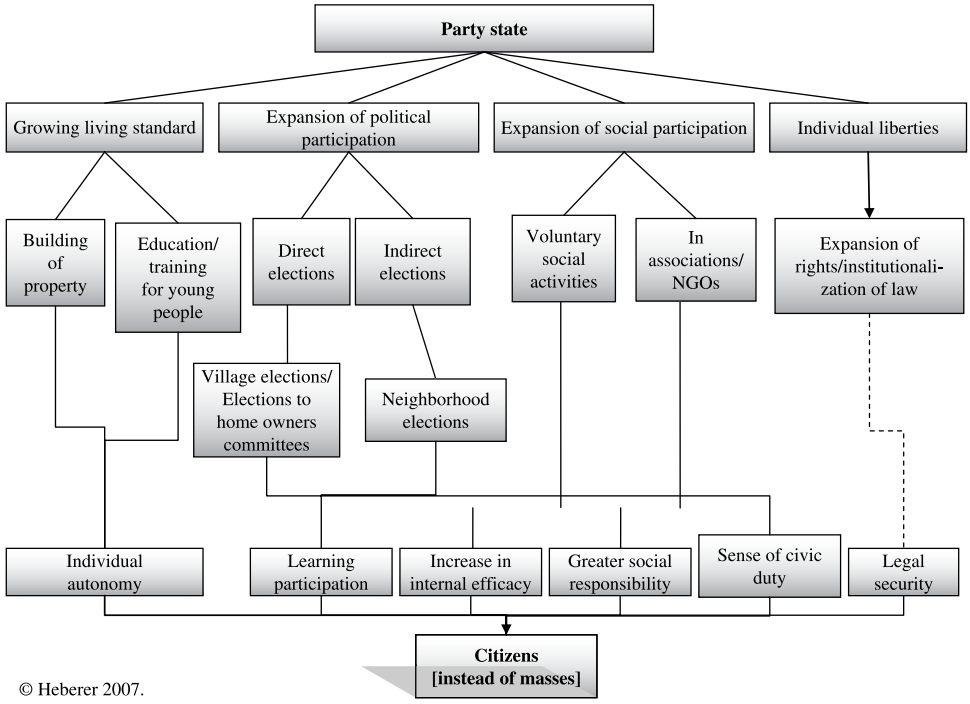


Figure 1. The emergence of citizens—the perspective of the party-state.

weak orientation toward one's society, underdeveloped social and citizen's sense, *guanxi* networks, dormant legal awareness and hierarchical structures) might present hurdles to such a development.

In this article I have argued that the Chinese party-state is in several ways activating citizenship in a top-down manner. The process of an emerging citizenship by means of neighborhood communities is not yet initiated by the residents as a *bottom-up* process, rather the party-state initiates the creation of a framework for the emergence of *citizenship* in a top-down manner. This also ultimately concerns the expansion of participatory instances in the form of mobilized participation. Under conditions of both weakly developed structures of a civil society and of a strong state facing a weak society the state is required to function as an institutional and structural architect. Accordingly, Figure 1 designs a model of this process of creating citizens in a top-down manner. The diagram simulates an ideal type, since this process does not occur in a straightforward or even manner. We comprehend the process instead as a tentative and interactive development of various interwoven social fields.

The diagram delineates the tentative developmental process from masses to citizens through the elevation of urban living standards (as a prerequisite for voluntary social involvement), the expansion of participation and—with that—the gradual increase in a sense of civic duty. Central to these developments are the institutional effects which

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result from the establishment of neighborhood communities: effects of participatory learning, empowerment through the growth of *internal efficacy*[73] and larger social responsibility (as a prerequisite for a sense of civic duty). Finally, learning participation, participatory empowerment and *shequ* elections do not yet equate to democratization; they can, however, contribute to making citizens out of the 'masses' or 'the people', citizens who receive at least partial gains with respect to opportunities for political participation of which they also begin to take advantage. Masses or 'the people' are political concepts; citizen is a legal term. Masses are mobilized and they function; citizens participate, act with critical self-awareness.

Finally, processes of economic and social differentiation and pluralization have relaxed traditional forms of class and community membership. Today, a 'Chinese citizen' is increasingly required who identifies with the nation and actively devotes his or her energies to its causes. The concept of the 'Three Representations' (*sange daibiao*), which states, among other ideas, that the Party represents the interests of all Chinese citizens and is thus no longer a class-based party, but rather has been transformed into a 'people's party', is meant to lead to a stronger identification with the state on the part of the citizens. The latter requires that citizens are furnished with the same rights and duties and (at least locally) are allowed to participate in public affairs. Citizen status has not yet been fully achieved in China; yet the state-led activation in urban neighborhood communities and through the gradual formulation of certain civil rights shows that the political leadership has decided to chart this course.

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73. In social sciences, a distinction is made between internal and external political efficacy. Internal efficacy is predicated upon the belief of individual citizens in their ability to act upon political decision-making processes within the state. External efficacy is related to the individual belief that the institutions and actors in a political system will respond positively to participation and the demands of the citizens that it conveys. As such, internal efficacy refers to people's assessment of their own abilities to influence politics, to their subjective competence for political participation. External efficacy aims to assess the responsiveness of the political system. Therefore, the two components of efficacy represent two different orientations in relation to the role of citizens in political decision-making.