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NEIGHBORHOOD SPACE IN 1950s
BEIJING: URBAN GOVERNANCE IN
THE EARLY PRC

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Neighborhood Space in 1950s Beijing: Urban Governance in the Early PRC

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<Abstract>

Through an analysis of the early urban administration building process, the formation of neighborhood space, the connotation of “autonomy” (zizhi) of Residents’ Committees (RCs), and problems of governmental leadership in carrying out street works, this article attempts to redefine the state-society relationship in 1950s Beijing at the neighborhood level, appropriating the concept of “governance” instead of the conventional “state control” approaches which are, to a certain extent, based on the totalitarian model. The term “governance,” widely used in academia over the past decade, is essentially defined as state-society cooperation as opposed to the existing state-society dichotomy and its contradictory relationship. This more detailed and thorough investigation into the discrepancies between state intention and the reality of its own conditions, based on new materials preserved in the Beijing Municipal Archives, reveals a different landscape from the state’s strict control system in which governmental organizations seamlessly reached the lowest level of society. The strengthened reach of state power over urban society in the 1950s materialized not by coercive control through the expansion of the organs of state to the basic levels of society, but by governance through which positive societal responses to and cooperation with state policy could be put into place.

Introduction

As the Chinese urban society was experiencing rapid change since reform and open-door policy started in the end of the 1970s, the state-society relation has also been changing substantially. In Chinese cities, a societal realm has been resurging with the rapid increase of transient population, the change of the way for resource distribution due to an increase of diverse employment opportunities, and the growing collapse of “household registration” and “work unit” systems which were symbols for state control. In short, urban people are transforming themselves from “work unit people” (单位人) to “societal people” (社会人). To check the expanding societal realm from transcending the state power’s reach, the Chinese government has pushed for “Community Building” (社区建设) since the end of the 1990s, and placed emphasis on the role of Residents’ Committees (RCs 居民委员会) that remained nominal since the Cultural Revolution.¹ This showed critical change in the state-society relationship in accordance with urban societal transformation since reform and open-

¹ 民政部, “关于在全国推进城市社区建设的意见”, 2000

door policy emergence, as recent studies have analyzed.² This article surveys the state-society relationship in the era prior to Chinese reform and open-door policy, and intends to provide a historical perspective for understanding the role and function of the RCs, focusing especially on the operating method of Chinese urban “governance” in 1950s Beijing neighborhood spaces.

The existing literatures on the state-society relationship in the Mao era – especially on the relationships between the state and mass organizations, including RCs – focus on the control of state power over society through various coercive measures. This conventional “control/coercion frame” holds the assumption that the party-state exercised strong power to force the weak society to subjugate to state domination. In this framework, all of the organizations and technics conceived and deployed by the party-state are considered components of the powerful state control mechanism. Almost all of the literatures assume a seamless and perfect expansion of party-state power to the lowest level of society.³

F. Schurmann surveyed the party-state system during the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s from the perspective of ideology and organization, and analyzed the RCs in systematic organizational structures for “purely control function.”⁴ J. R. Townsend, though focusing on the political participation by mass organizations, also saw the establishment of the RCs as an effort to extend “control of the people” by the CCP.⁵ The research by Martin King Whyte and William L. Parish, the most comprehensive on this subject, also analyzed the RCs from the viewpoints of bureaucratic, social, and political controls.⁶ Referring to the case of the Shanghai neighborhood (*linong*) in the early PRC, Zhang Jishun conceptualizes the state-society relationship as “state-society unification (*yitihua*).”⁷

² For the representative work on urban transformation since the reform, see Deborah S. Davis, Richard Kraus, Barry Naughton, Elizabeth J. Perry, eds., *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995. For the Community Building process, see David Bray, “Building ‘Community’: New Strategies of Governance in Urban China”, *Economy and Society*, Feb 2007; Thomas Heberer and Christian Göbel, *The Politics of Community Building in Urban China*, Routledge, 2011; Benjamin L. Read, *Roots of the State: Neighborhood Organization and Social Networks in Beijing and Taipei*, Stanford University Press, 2012.

³ All of these studies are, to a certain extent, based on a totalitarian model. For the earliest version of this perspective, see Benjamin Schwartz, “Totalitarian Consolidation and the Chinese Model”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 18. 1960.

⁴ Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (new, enlarged edition), University of California Press, 1968, pp.313, 377, 380. For similar perspective, see Ezra F. Vogel, “Preserving Order in the Cities”, in John Wilson Lewis, ed., *The City in Communist China*, Stanford University Press, 1971, p.87

⁵ James R. Townsend, *Political Participation in Communist China* (new edition), University of California Press, 1969, p.159, 165

⁶ Martin K. Whyte and William L. Parish, *Urban Life in Contemporary China*, University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp.22-26, 234-246, 325-327

⁷ 张济顺, “上海里弄: 基层政治动员与国家社会一体化走向(1950-1955)”, *中国社会科学*, 2004年第2期

For other similar view points, see Deborah S. Davis, “Social Class Transformation in Urban China”, *Modern China*, Vol. 26, No. 3, July 2000; Julia Strauss, “Morality, Coercion and State Building by Campaign in the Early PRC: Regime Consolidation and after, 1949-1956”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 188, 2006.

However, more detailed and thorough investigations into the state's intention and its capacity to reach society, based on the newly opened official archival materials available over the past decades, clearly show that governmental policies and programs could be implemented through complicated intercessions and interactions between the communist authorities and the subjects that they governed. According to recent research, the conventional discourses of strict state control over and homogenization of society faced challenges. For example, E. Perry points out the hierarchical socioeconomic cleavages still existing in the labor world in the 1950s.⁸ V. Shue, analyzing the relations between government and villages ("cell of honeycomb"), asserts that the party-state of the Mao era was unable to infiltrate into the villages.⁹ In the same vein, P. Huang gives attention to the importance of the semiformal realm and attempts to understand the Chinese state as a power of "centralized minimalism".¹⁰

All of these works show that the way in which the party-state exercised its power toward the society was not unilateral or coercive through organs and agents of state, but bilateral and responsive, if not negotiating, conditioned by both the governmental capacity and societal realities. In assuring its presence, the party-state should continuously contend with its own capacity and the social conditions.¹¹ I characterize these state-society relationships as a "governance system" instead of a conventional "control system", analyzing the 1950s Beijing neighborhood spaces in which the state encounters the society on a daily basis.

The concept of "governance" instead of state "control," rule, or government provides a better understanding of the state-society relationship in the 1950s. The term "governance" is different from state control or government: as control or government means state infiltration into society with the organizational structure and function of various governmental agencies, the term is entirely state-centric. In contrast, governance can be defined as the process and mechanism of societal management which both state and society are involved and participate in. Though it is clear that the core of political power is state, and that the state plays a leading role, governance is defined as the way in which the state manages the society, not by coercive means but by forming relationships with societal actors who have diverse demands.¹² Such a viewpoint is based on my own observation that the

⁸ Elizabeth J. Perry, "Shanghai's Strike Wave of 1957", *The China Quarterly*, No. 137, 1994

⁹ Vivienne Shue, *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politics*, Stanford University Press, 1988

¹⁰ Philip C.C. Huang, "Centralized Minimalism: Semiformal Governance by Quasi Officials and Dispute Resolution in China", *Modern China*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2008

¹¹ For a similar perspective on *danwei* space, see Duanfang Lu, *Remaking Chinese Urban Form: Modernity, Scarcity and Space, 1949-2005*, Routledge, 2006; David Bray, *Social Space and Governance in Urban China: The Danwei System from Origins to Urban Reform*, Stanford University Press, 2005.

¹² The term "governance" is a confusing terminology with different connotations in different contexts, ranging from policy networks, public management, coordination of sectors of the economy to public-private partnerships and international collective efforts, among others. For this categorization, see Jon Pierre and Guy B. Peters, *Governance, Politics and the State*, St. Martin's Press, 2000, p. 14; Committee of Experts on Public Administration, Economic and Social Council, United Nations, *Definition of Basic Concepts and Terminologies in Governance and Public Administration*, January 2006. In particular, I pay attention to the phrases in Jon Pierre and Guy B. Peters' book, "governance as processes in which the state plays a leading role, making priorities and defining objectives" (p. 12); However, "The actual role which the state plays in governance is the outcome of the tug-of-war between the role the state wants to play and the role which the external environment allows it to play" (p. 26).

party-state power in 1950s China intended to dominate the society through state infiltration and control, but the discrepancy between such state intention and the reality of its own conditions continued to exist, whereby the management of urban society could be realized through mutual “realm overlapping” between state and society.

It is undeniable that existing researches tend to over-emphasize the Soviet style control method, and the coerciveness of party-state rule from the early PRC. This is because the process for intensively strengthening the state power since the end of the 1950s – the Anti-rightist Campaign, Great Leap Forward Movement, Cultural Revolution, and consolidation of the work unit system – influenced the framework for explaining the situation in the preceding period.¹³ However, the RCs as a “mass organization” in the 1950s played not only the role as the “transmission belt” of the will of the state power (government policy), but also played the more complicated roles of transferring wide-range demands and opinions to the state, taking the initiative in sustaining public order, and providing various urban services to the residents voluntarily. The Communist regime depended upon the RCs for conducting basic-level governance of urban society through such voluntary involvement of the society.

In sum, my research gives attention to governance of urban society and shows a new perspective on the state's way for society management and the society's way for involvement in the state policies, thus presenting the possibility to review existing researches on state-society relations during the 1950s and beyond. Currently, the urban Community Building and the role of the RCs are becoming increasingly important, which represents a transformation of urban situations since the 1980s. My research attempts to investigate the origin and function of the RCs, the “production” of neighborhood space, and the RCs' relations with state organizations, such as the Street Office and Police Station within that space. This research will thus propose a historical perspective to understand the state-society relationship in today's urban society.

Background of the Establishment of RCs: Vicissitudes of Urban Administration Building

Though some literature on the communist control system addressed the early urban administration building process in the first half of 1949 Beijing (what was then Beiping) and Tianjin, in which district and street governments were quickly abolished about six months after their establishment in urban basic-level administration,¹⁴ no special explanation about the meaning of such radical change had been given. The quest for the reason for these vicissitudes in urban administration building is a starting point for my present research, as this question is closely related to the future creation of neighborhood spaces and the establishment of RCs within them.

The early frustration of the Communist regime in establishing urban administration originated, above all, from its long experiences of rural revolution. “Taking over” (接管) the biggest cities in North China, such as Beijing and Tianjin, for the first time in its revolutionary history in January 1949, the communists faced a challenging task to create an adequate administration system for urban society. However, a lack of urban administrative

¹³ E.g., 张济顺, op. cit.; Julia Strauss, op. cit.

¹⁴ Franz Schurmann, op. cit.; James R. Townsend, op. cit.; 李国芳, “建国前后中共减少城市行政层级的尝试 – 以石家庄、天津等为线索”, *党的文献*, 2007年第2期

experience throughout the revolutionary process forced them to adopt the same method as their rural system. As is the case in all the small- and middle-sized cities seized by the Communists in North and Northeast China during the civil war with the Nationalists (GMD), the communists established district and street governments (区街政权/政府) in Beijing and Tianjin corresponding to the township and village governments (乡村政权/政府) established in the rural base areas.

During the first six months after taking over Beijing, the Communists began to vigorously and enthusiastically establish district and street governments. Especially for the creation of street governments on approximately the same level as the GMD era's *Bao* (保), the communists mobilized a number of cadres as work teams (工作组) who would be in charge of the head of street governments.¹⁵ The establishment of basic level governments in cities signifies a further expansion of state power to the basic level of society compared to the GMD era. The communist state power intended to penetrate newly taken cities with a seamless hierarchical administrative system.

This process of administration-building in the early stages of taking over the larger cities, however, encountered strong criticism from Liu Shaoqi who at the time was guiding the Party's urban works. After his visits to Beijing and Tianjin in April 1949, a series of rapid administrative reforms were launched, resulting in the complete abolition of district and street governments in all cities in North and Northeast China, including Beijing and Tianjin, from mid-1949 to early 1950. Instead, on the district level, district office (区公所) was established as an outpost of municipal government, and on the street level, the Police Station (派出所) was left as the sole organ of state.¹⁶

Liu Shaoqi's assertion was based both on his own estimation on urban society and on the reality that the new regime faced. Characterizing the urban society as a centralized entity (集中), Liu insists that the cities are essentially composed of "organized masses" working in enterprises, factories, public institutions, schools, and the like, thereby requiring management by municipal government in a centralized and unified manner (集中领导) instead of by territorial administrative divisions. For Liu Shaoqi, the establishment of governments on a basic level may only engender "dispersion and disorder" for urban works, causing a reverse effect in municipal government's "interaction with the masses" (联系群众), or the state's effective reach to the basic level of urban society.¹⁷

¹⁵ 北平市人民政府民政局, "群众对摧毁保甲制度建立街政权的意见" (April 20, 1949), Beijing Municipal Archives(北京市档案馆), archival code (档号) 2-1-40; 黄利新, "北平和平接管时期的城市街道工作组", 当代中国史研究, 2007年第5期

¹⁶ "关于改革北平市区街政权机构改造和加强公安局派出所的决定(草案)" (early June, 1949 assumed), 档号 45-1-11

¹⁷ "刘少奇在中共中央政治局会议上的发言记录" (January 8, 1949), 金冲及主编, 刘少奇传, 中央文献出版社, 1998, p. 620; 刘少奇, "关于北平接管工作中一些问题的报告要点" (April 3, 1949), 北京市重要文献选编, Vol. 1 (December 1948 - 1949), pp. 330-339; 民政局、研究室, "关于改革政权机构问题的意见" (June 1949 assumed), 档号 2-1-15. For the Communists' early conception of urban administration building, see "较近代化城市中各级政府的组织分工问题" (copied on December 30, 1948), 档号 2-1-9; 韩子毅, "对北平市区、街政府组织的意见" (December 29, 1948), 档号 2-1-45.

Behind Liu's narratives on urban society and its administration system, there was a crucial condition by which the reform was imposed. Specifically, this condition was the lack of human resources at the new regime's disposal. An article published in *People's Daily* in early 1950 clearly reveals the reasons for such radical administrative reform to the basic urban level:

“As centralized urban society is dividing into parts like tofu pieces and binding a large number of cadres within the street level, the big enterprises, factories, public institutions, and schools are howling their displeasure for the lack of cadres. By letting the cadres in district and street levels work independently in their own administrative units, the policies of municipal government cannot be implemented systematically as there is frequently occurring disorder. This situation makes the municipal government suspended, engendering difficulties in interactions between government and the masses. People are suffering from overlapped governmental agencies and red-tape formalities.”¹⁸

In this regard, it is clear that the new regime intended to reorganize the disposition of state agents to meet urgent demands for competent cadres. In fact, a report submitted immediately after the administrative reform of the basic level of urban society indicates the decrease of cadres in number in the administration sector, and their increase in public security and labor union sectors. The new regime wanted to line up deficient state agents for the organized population by reducing their presence in the administration of unorganized population in the basic level of urban society.¹⁹

The reform in district and street levels (区街改革), however, turned out to be hasty, triggering serious unexpected problems. A number of official reports from district level assert that after the abolition of basic-level governments, the interactions between the municipal government and urban residents could not effectively be put into place. The origins of the problem consisted first in the societal realities, and second in unprecedented governmental interventionist attitudes.

First, the 1950s in Beijing saw a huge amount of an unorganized population not employed in enterprises, factories, institutions, or schools. While Liu Shaoqi emphasized the importance of interaction between government and the organized population in particular, the reality of urban society in the early PRC did not conform to his estimation. Certainly, the organized workers gradually increase as the socialist collectivization of production progresses and the *danwei* system is gradually established, but the 1950s especially saw a considerable number of “unorganized masses” (无组织群众), which were also at the time described as “scattered laborers and unemployed workers” (零散劳动者, 失业工人). According to demographic statistics, the urban (城区) population of Beijing in 1954 was estimated to be at 2,575,000 among 3,104,000 of the entire Beijing city population, including suburban area (郊区); the total number of street residents under the jurisdiction of the Street Office was at 1,633,906 in September 1954. In this regard, in the report addressed to Mao Zedong in June 1953 by Peng Zhen, mayor of Beijing city, the remark that “in China, there is also a city where the unorganized masses reach more than 60% of the entire urban population” was certainly referring to Beijing.²⁰ The unified leadership by municipal government essentially targeted the workers employed in

¹⁸ “坚决改变城市政权的旧的组织形式与工作方法”，*人民日报*，January 23, 1950

¹⁹ For Tianjin case, see Kenneth Lieberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin, 1949-1952*, Stanford University Press, 1980, pp. 44-45.

²⁰ “各区街道办事处干部编制及人员比例一览表” (September 1, 1954)，北京市地方志编纂委员会，*北京志 政务卷 民政志*，北京出版社，1999，p. 25；北京市统计局编，*北京五十年*，中国统计出版社，1999，p. 49；彭真，

enterprises, factories, institutions, schools, and other establishments, leaving the unorganized masses at the street level without an effective administration system. The new regime was certainly willing to reach the lowest levels of urban society, but the administrative reform measures, which considerably reduced the number of state agents in the basic level of urban administration, turned out to be problematic.

Second, the Beijing municipal government manifested a strong will to reorganize urban life by providing the unorganized residents with various urban services. Especially in the street level, in addition to the basic administrative works such as household registration, taxation, and maintenance of public order, the new regime planned and assigned numerous works related to various urban services (these will be further explained in more detail later in the manuscript). All of those “urban works” (城市工作) required competent state agents, but the cadres working in the street level remain very limited in their number and capacity after the reform. The centralization of governmental authorities to the municipal level did not produce the originally expected effect of close interaction with the masses under unified leadership by the municipal government. The report from the District No. 9 expresses the difficulty following the abolition of basic level governments as follows: “though the works are assigned continuously from municipal government, we have no sufficient manpower, having numerous works to do without lower-level administrative organizations. Suffering from shortage of hands, we cannot enter deeply among the masses to achieve governmental policies.”²¹

The necessity of rebuilding the interactional relationship between government and the unorganized population – the effectiveness of the state’s reach to the remaining street-level masses – demands serious “re-reform” (再改革) of district- and street-level administration. In December 1949, around six months after the initiation of the reform, a research report of municipal government admitted frankly that the municipal government’s unified leadership could not be realized, and on the contrary triggered a weakening of the state’s relationship with the masses.²² The findings of this report suggested on the one hand a strengthening of district office’s authorities or a recovery of district government, and on the other hand an enforcement of staffs in civil affairs in the Police Station or a new creation of a Street Office separate from the Police Station.²³ In March 1950, the Beijing municipal government made a decision to enlarge and strengthen district office’s organizations and authorities, indicating that “as Beijing is a big city in size and in population with a number of scattered industry and commerce, the municipal government cannot take charge of so many works, thereby tending to slack off.”²⁴

The ineffectiveness of unified leadership by municipal government was not limited to Beijing; all Chinese cities that adopted such an administrative system seemed to face the same difficulties. In this regard, the central

“城市应建立街道办事处和居民委员会” (June 8, 1953), 《北京市重要文献选编》(1953), p. 194. Similar to Beijing, in the case of Shanghai, the residents covered by the RCs reached 68% of the entire population in urban areas in 1952; see “上海市人民政府八个月来的工作和当面任务”, 《文汇报》, September 27, 1952. On the other hand, in 1960, the total number of residents in Beijing urban areas was at 2,313,000, among which the residents under the RCs’ jurisdiction was at 1,962,748. See 《北京五十年》, p. 52; 《北京志 政务卷 民政志》, p. 44.

²¹ 第八区人民政府, “关于区政权的组织机构及干部配备的意见” (May 20, 1949), 档号 3-9-14; (六区) “关于改革区街政权组织的意见” (June 29, 1949), 档号 40-1-40; 北京市第九区公所, “一九四九年的工作总结” (late 1949 or early 1950 assumed), 档号 38-1-11

²² 研究室, “本市各区公所对再改革区组织机构的初步意见” (December 14, 1949), 档号 1-9-83

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ “加强区政权和建立区代表会议的决定” (March 1, 1950), 档号 2-2-19

government promulgated in November 1950 a general rule on district governments of big cities, allowing the establishment of district governments but without any mention of street-level administration.²⁵ In the case of Beijing, district governments came to recover officially in August 1951 after experiencing a gradual strengthening of district office's authorities. However, the reestablishment of district government was not a mere return to the past, but through expanding district jurisdiction, reducing district number from the original 12 to 9 within the urban area (城区), resulting in a unified leadership centered not on the municipal level, but on the district level.²⁶

In sum, all of these vicissitudes in early urban administration building, from the establishment of district/street governments to their abolition and again to the reestablishment of district government, were due to a discrepancy between ideals and realities: on the one hand, the CCP state's strong intention to expand its power to the basic level of society through organs of state, and on the other hand, the lack of means to realize the intention. The most significant difficulty was the scarcity of available human resources: the state cadres were considerably limited in number and capacity in the early years of the regime. This is why Liu Shaoqi insisted on the centralization of leadership to the municipal government, abolishing basic-level governments. Placing emphasis on the importance of organized masses rather than on a scattered population, the regime tried to re-dispose the insufficient number of state cadres from the basic level of administration to enterprises, factories, institutions, and schools that were considered the most important components of urban society.

Another reality that the communists have to admit was that the "scattered" and "unorganized masses" left in the street level were considerably numerous in the 1950s as the process of industrialization, socialist collectivization, and the construction of a *danwei* system comprising "organized masses" still demand more time to be realized. The city of Beijing finally decided to reestablish district government with the expectation that district government would play an effective leading role in administering the scattered population at the street level.

In this regard, it is clear that from the beginning of its takeover of urban areas, the Communist regime faced two major difficulties: the lack of cadres at its disposal, and a huge unorganized population to be administered. What was, then, going on at the street level, the lowest administrative unit, in which the state power and the masses it governed encountered each other on a daily basis?

Creation of Neighborhood Space and Establishment of RCs

After the abolition of district/street governments in mid-1949, the street-level administration confronted multiple difficulties as in the street level, there was no organ of state, but instead the Police Station that undertook essentially public security tasks. Many investigation reports addressed to the municipal government from district offices complained of difficulties in implementing state policies through the administrative system at the street level. The major reason for these complaints was none other than the deficiency of state cadres as previously mentioned.

²⁵ 政务院, "大城市区人民政府组织通则" (November 3, 1950), 中央人民政府法制委员会编, *中央人民政府法令汇编 (1949-1950)*, 人民出版社, 1952, p. 134

²⁶ "加强区政权和建立区代表会的决定" (March 1, 1950), 档号 2-2-19

Another relevant factor aggravating the problem was that the government planned a number of works on which to build a new urban society. As generally accepted, the Communist regime could be characterized by its strong interventionist orientation. Though being in a state of considerable resource scarcity, the regime had a strong will to reorganize urban society, intending to provide all sorts of urban services, ranging from providing public services and facilities to mediating civil disputes.²⁷ The majority of these urban services should have been implemented at the street level, but the lack of available resources to fulfill the tasks was evident.

As a means to overcome the discrepancy between the regime's interventionist plan and its own capacity to materialize it, the plan to organize the masses beyond the administration system was conceived. The names of the mass organizations multiplied at the street level from the abolition of street government to the end of 1952, and this clearly shows not only that the government needed to establish these organizations at the street level, but also that the government planned enormous works to provide various urban services. The following mass organizations show clearly the range of such works: the Public Security Committee 治安保卫委员会, Sanitary Committee 卫生委员会, Resist America and Aide North Korea Committee 抗美援朝委员会, Social Relief Committee 社会救济委员会, Women's Representatives' Association 妇女代表会, Sino-Soviet Friendship Association Branch 中苏友协支会, Fire Prevention Brigade, 防火队, Taxation Team 税务组, Maternal and Children Health Care Team 妇幼保健组, Committee for Giving Special Care to Disabled Servicemen and Family Members of Revolutionary Martyrs 优抚委员会, Military Family Representatives 军属代表组, Propaganda Brigade 宣传队, Newspaper Reading Team 读报组, House Repairing Committee 房屋修缮委员会, Public Housing Management Committee 公房管理委员会, Cooperatives Services Committee 合作社业务委员会, Labor Employment Committee 劳动就业委员会, Democratic Water Supply Management Station 自来水民主管理站, Dispute Mediation Team 调解组, and the Book Publishing Station 图书发行站, among others.²⁸

Though all of these street-level mass organizations were created under the governmental leadership, the role of "activists" (积极分子) among the masses was crucial for their operation. Having positive and enthusiastic attitudes toward the new regime and its policies, these activists were at the core of enabling interaction between government and ordinary residents. The regime, facing the lack of state cadres in street administration, was vigorously seeking activists with the intention of implementing various urban works with their support.²⁹ However, the street mass organizations sprung up rapidly in early years, and enacted ad hoc measures rather than meticulous plans, which provoked serious functional defects. The large number of mass organizations remains nominal, and the activists, who are few in number, should undertake the responsibilities in different mass organizations simultaneously.³⁰ The ineffectiveness and disorder in performing the street works were characterized by "mangluan" (忙乱 "working in rush and getting into a muddle") phenomena with "five

²⁷ According to the *Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 36.70A.030 Definitions*, "Public facilities" include streets, roads, highways, sidewalks, street and road lighting systems, traffic signals, domestic water systems, storm and sanitary sewer systems, parks and recreational facilities, and schools; "Public services" include fire protection and suppression, law enforcement, public health, education, recreation, environmental protection, and other governmental services. <http://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=365-196-320>

²⁸ 中共北京市委政策研究室、市政府秘书厅, "关于城区街道组织的情况与改进意见" (October 14, 1952), 档号 1-9-250

²⁹ 中共北京市委第九区委员会, "九区关于街道组织机构的调查研究材料" (September 4, 1951), 档号 41-1-17

³⁰ 中共北京市委政策研究室、市政府秘书厅, "关于城区街道组织的情况与改进意见" (October 14, 1952), 档号 1-9-250

excesses”(五多): excessive organizations (组织多), excessive leaders (领导多), excessive holding of multiple positions (兼职多), excessive meetings (会议多), and excessive survey tables (表报多).³¹ These terms frequently appeared in district offices/governments' work reports to the municipal government. *Mangluan* was the case as well for no more than a few staffs in civil affairs belonging to the Police Station, due to the fact that they had to undertake burdensome leading tasks over the multiple mass organizations and the activists in order to implement governmental policies at the street level.

When viewed from the perspective of those aforementioned processes which led to the creation of mass organizations and resulting disorder in the street works, the early structure of the Communist administration shows somehow different images from the state's strict control system in which governmental organizations seamlessly reached the lowest level of society. The conventional perspective on the state control system over the society seems to be oversimplified to reflect the integrity of the state-society relationship in the early urban PRC. The state was rather weak in its administrative structure as well as in its available human resources compared to its strong intention to reorganize urban society, providing the population with a number of urban services.

Facing disorder in the streets caused by the vicissitudes of administration building and the emergence of ad hoc mass organizations, the Beijing municipal government launched a reorganization of those numerous mass organizations, regrouping them under the unified RCs in the street level. It was a new enterprise to “produce” a neighborhood space³² at the street level, aiming at reorienting the state-society relationship.

The production of neighborhood space began from October 1952, when the municipal government selected four streets to demo the establishment of the RCs to simplify and unify (精简统一) the existing mass organizations. This was a sort of merger and abolition policy. For that purpose, the municipal government experimentally adopted two different methods: to organize a large RC (大型居民委员会) within the boundary of jurisdiction beneath the Police Station, and to establish several small RCs (小型居民委员会) within the same boundary. While the former is a simple merger of existing mass organizations as it unified all the existing organizations within a street level under one RC, the latter was a veritable production of neighborhood space as it triggered a fundamental transformation in the operational mode of mass organizations and their relations with the government.

The structures of the large and small RCs are as follows, respectively:

The large RC: just one RC was established in the entire street under the jurisdiction of a police station, comprising 2,000 to 3,000 households and 10,000 to 13,000 residents; the committee members were 21 persons, and residents' representatives reached 229 persons in the biggest case.

³¹ “宣武区关于检查民政干事工作‘五多’情况的报告”(July 16, 1953), 档号 2-5-73; “东单区人民政府关于街道工作‘五多’情况调查报告”(October 6, 1953), 档号 2-5-73; “北京市东四区人民政府关于‘五多’情况的材料”(December 1953), 档号 2-5-73; “西单区人民政府关于‘五多’情况报告”(October 6, 1953), 档号 2-5-73; “城区街道‘五多’调查材料”(December 1953 assumed), 档号 2-5-73

³² “Indeed each new form of state, each new form of political power, introduces its own particular way of partitioning space, its own particular administrative classification of discourses about space and about things and people in space. Each such form commands space, as it were, to serve its purposes.” Henri Lefebvre (translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith), *The Production of Space*, Blackwell, 1991, p. 281

The small RCs: each RC was organized by one Hutong, or two or three alleys, based on their natural conditions, comprising 200 to 400 households and 1,000 to 2,000 residents; the committee members were composed of 5 to 9 persons, and residents' representatives were around 30 persons.

The composition of the committee: in both cases, the committee members were elected indirectly by the residents' representatives.

The residents' representatives: one representative (renamed later "head of small team" (小组长) in every 10 households was elected directly by the residents themselves.³³

A work report delivered after several months of experimentation points out the demerits of the large RC, as well as the merits of the small RCs:

"(In the case of the large RC), the jurisdiction boundary is too big to exercise effective leadership. It is not easy to convene meetings as there are too many representatives. During the meetings, it is difficult to have sufficient discussion and, furthermore, even after the discussion, each committee member has to convene another meeting for the representatives in his own area of responsibility, thereby engendering another unnecessary layer between the committee members and the residents. As the boundary is too big, the activists have to spend much time to carry out their works, running busily here and there, and consequently the *mangluan* phenomena cannot be overcome."³⁴

The small RCs have the following merits:

1. The boundary of jurisdiction is small enough to make close interaction between the committee and residents, and to exercise deepened leadership.
2. The size of the organization is small enough to easily convene representatives' meetings and the committee members' meetings as well, thereby having sufficient discussions and promoting democratic procedures.
3. As the space of their activities is small, the activists can save time to care for their own professions and household affairs.³⁵

These reports show that the production of neighborhood space centered on the RCs focused on the relationship among the street population. The relationship between the activists taking leading roles as committee members in general and the ordinary residents was especially a crucial point in creating neighborhood space. Another

³³ “关于城市区政权下的组织问题的调查报告” (early 1953 assumed), 档号 2-5-63. As the organization process of the RCs progresses, the residents' representatives are replaced by the residents' small teams, each of which is composed of 15 to 40 households. Each team directly elected one team head who becomes a member of the RC. See also “北京人民政府民政局关于建立居民委员会的几个问题” (May 26, 1954), 档号 14-2-66.

³⁴ “关于城市区政权下的组织问题的调查报告” (early 1953 assumed), 档号 2-5-63

³⁵ Ibid.; “中共北京市委政策研究室关于街道居民组织试点工作总结 (草稿)” (February 19, 1953), 档号 2-5-63

report delivered after the accumulation of experimental experiences reveals the merits of small RCs in terms of the social relationship between the activists and the street residents:

1. A
the space of the activities is small, the activists' works are not so burdensome; the residents' suggestions are easily submitted and the mass mobilization (发动) is easily carried out.
2. I
it is easy for the activists to connect (联系) the masses; as the residents know each other very well, it is convenient to promote the spirit of mutual aids (互济互助精神) and to deal with public welfare (公共福利) issues on time.
3. I
it is convenient for the activists to contact each other, which demands less meeting sessions and less meeting time; the range is not large so that the laborers and their family dependents can participate easily in the neighborhood works.³⁶

After several months of the experimentation of establishing the RCs, the Beijing municipal government extended the method of organizing small RCs to the city-wide level. The street became reshuffled into new neighborhood spaces based on small RCs. The reports cited above clearly show that in this "production of space," what the government attached great importance to was social relations in particular. The small RCs were delimited by alley or Hutong with good natural conditions in which the social relations between the residents were to be easily mobilized for the street works. A report depicts the effect of new production of neighborhood space as follows:

"A number of the RC members (who are the activists) 'are able to recall with their eyes closed how many restrooms there are and what structures are inside the residents' houses.' This was the case as well in the situation of the poor within the neighborhood: Xu Xx, head of the RC in the first household quarter, said with confidence, 'The whole question of who is worse off or who does not need relief is fully grasped by our RC members and residents' representatives (肚子里装着呢)!"³⁷

In sum, with the establishment of the RCs, a communitarian space based on close sociability (熟悉情况)³⁸ and social capital³⁹ was to be produced at the neighborhood level. The neighborhood space created on the basis of the small RCs became a unit of life of the street residents in which the residents could form social ties with each

³⁶ "北京人民政府民政局关于建立居民委员会的几个问题" (May 26, 1954), 档号 14-2-66

³⁷ "北京市东四区人民政府关于在洋管胡同派出所管界建立居民委员会半年以来的工作总结" (May 11, 1953), 档号 2-5-63

³⁸ "市人民政府党组关于街道居民组织典型试验的总结报告" (June 30, 1953), 中共北京市委政策研究室编, *中国共产党北京市委委员会重要文件汇编: 一九五三年*, November 1, 1954, p. 167

³⁹ P. Bourdieu defines social capital as follows: "Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." Pierre Bourdieu, "Le capital social", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, Vol. 31, janvier 1980, p. 2

other through a sense of belonging and mutual solidarity.⁴⁰ Now, on the one hand, the state could implement its policies and laws (政令) in a pertinent institutional dimension within the neighborhood space, but on the other hand, within the same space, the society could connect itself to the state based on its own networks formed among the residents.⁴¹ The streets of Beijing were recreated into neighborhood spaces which were commensurate with the formation of social capital, promotion of social interaction, and execution of governmental policies. In this regard, the neighborhood space was a space for governance in which state and society encountered and interconnected with each other, rather than a mere device designed for the state control over society.

The small-sized RCs also had their own shortcoming, namely de-concentration. A party report points out that “the only weakness of the small-sized RCs is that its constituent units are too many for district government to exercise its leadership to them.”⁴² However, this problem was due to the governmental leadership to the RCs rather than the RCs’ operations. The measure taken to resolve such a governmental leadership problem was to establish another governmental outpost which was the Street Office at the citywide level of Beijing from the summer of 1954.⁴³ Although even after the establishment of the Street Office the governmental leadership problem in the street level continued to exist, the governance system previously mentioned was closely related with the production of neighborhood space centered on small-sized RCs.

Connotation of the RCs “Autonomy” (zizhi)

Article 1 of the organizational regulation on the RCs, promulgated at the end of 1954, stipulates as follows:

“In order to strengthen the organization and work of residents in urban streets and to promote their public welfare, RCs may be established according to residential quarters under the leadership(指导) of the people’s councils of city-administered districts and undistricted cities or their outposts. RCs are the residents’ autonomous mass organizations (群众自治性组织).”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ K. Lieberthal points out in a Tianjin case that although the new regime tried to overcome “traditional personal connections” (guanxi) through various political campaigns (especially the Five Anti movement), the traditional networks remained powerful (Kenneth Lieberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin, 1949-1952*, Stanford University Press, 1980). However, I rather focus on the regime’s attempts to recreate interpersonal networks and relations through the production of neighborhood space and the RCs, thereby nourishing its power.

⁴¹ “北京人民政府民政局关于建立居民委员会的几个问题” (May 26, 1954), 档号 14-2-66

⁴² “市人民政府党组关于街道居民组织典型试验的总结报告” (June 30, 1953), 中共北京市委政策研究室编, *中国共产党北京市委委员会重要文件汇编: 一九五三年*, November 1, 1954, p. 168

⁴³ 吴晗, “关于北京市街道工作情况” (November 18, 1955), *北京市重要文献选编* (1955), p. 779

⁴⁴ “城市居民委员会组织条例 (一九五四年十二月三十一日全国人民代表大会常务委员会第四次会议通过)”, *人民日报*, January 1, 1955

This regulation intends to clearly define the status and nature of the RCs, but the correlation between the governmental leadership and the mass “autonomy” could not be understood adequately through conventional oppositive dichotomy between state and society. When analyzing certain institutions or organizations, the existing literatures largely focus on whether they are organized by the state or by the societal autonomous initiatives. The civil society theory is an extreme example of this state-society dichotomy, but it is no exaggeration to say that other approaches explaining the Mao era and the subsequent change such as totalitarianism, authoritarianism, corporatism, or clientelism still remain within the paradigm of state-society dichotomy as well. As previously explained, although the RCs were created by the state initiatives and operated within the space produced by the state, a mere dichotomy focusing on strong state control over the basic level of society, or on societal compliance on the state’s coercion, is not sufficient for the understanding of their integrity. The function and operational mode of the RCs could be fully understood when we transcend the paradigm of the state-society dichotomy.

A recent work by B. Read and R. Pekkanen is significant to the present discussion as they tried to overcome this dichotomy by focusing on the organizations that have overlapping state-society aspects or state-society duality. Comparing the grassroots communities in East and Southeast Asian countries, the authors examine “straddler organizations” that embedded such a duality and overlapping nature between state and society in an attempt to understand the human associational universe in general, and local associational life in particular.⁴⁵ According to Read, the local community organizations in China and Taiwan today such as respectively Community RCs (社区居民委员会) and *Lilin* (里邻), on the one hand, help the authoritarian regimes maintain their powers and, on the other hand, play important roles to promote public health and social welfare. In that these organizations are run by the state, they have their limitations, but at the same time they can strengthen their status as “locus of popular participation,” solving their local problems through their close interaction with the state.⁴⁶

The street RCs in the 1950s had more or less similar statuses to the Community RCs today as studied by B. Read,⁴⁷ beyond the “transmission belt” perspective. Organized by the state, they were not voluntary or autonomous organizations initiated by society itself. As the state used street RCs for the purpose of implementing laws and policies at the neighborhood level, it is undeniable that they played an auxiliary role for state administration. Their operational mode was, however, not necessarily originated from unilateral command or control by the state. In the neighborhood space produced by the state, the RCs occasionally reacted to the state’s demands, forming their own social networks and interconnections among the residents.⁴⁸ If the CCP state in the 1950s could expand its power to the basic level of urban society, it was not through systemic state

⁴⁵ Benjamin L. Read & Robert Pekkanen, eds., *Local Organizations and Urban Governance in East and Southeast Asia: Straddling State and Society*, Routledge, 2009

⁴⁶ Benjamin L. Read, “The Multiple Uses of Local Networks: State Cultivation of Neighborhood Social Capital in China and Taiwan”, *Ibid.*, p. 150. For more detail, see Read’s book, *Roots of the State: Neighborhood Organization and Social Networks in Beijing and Taipei*, Stanford University Press, 2012.

⁴⁷ However, I am not sure that the “social capital” and “neighborly ties” emphasized by B. Read can be formed in practice in an increasingly mobile and heterogeneous urban society in present-day China. Benjamin L. Read, *ibid.* pp. 269-270

⁴⁸ A variety of work reports indicate the residents’ reactions against cadres’ coercive orders and work assignments. For instance, see “中共北京市委政策研究室关于街道居民组织试点工作总结（草稿）”（February 19, 1953），档号 2-5-63；“北京市人民政府秘书厅关于本市城区重点试建的街道居民委员会目前情况的调查”（November 1953），档号 2-5-63；“北京市人民委员会关于克服街道工作忙乱现象的决定”（May 7, 1956），档号 2-8-9.

organizations' reach to the basic level, but through the RCs' active involvement in the state policy implementation.

In this regard, the RCs' "autonomy" stipulated in the regulation meant a sort of self-resolution of local issues through their positive response to and active participation in state-planned urban works. The new regime in the 1950s intended to provide the residents with a variety of urban services through the "autonomy" of the neighborhood spaces instead of inputting the state's insufficient resources. In effect, the communist state was facing the scarcity of resources, both in terms of reality and its own perception.⁴⁹ "The spirit that everyone does everyone's work on one's own" (大家事大家办的精神)⁵⁰ which was expected of the RCs by the government, shows clearly the connotation of "autonomy." The autonomy (*zizhi*) granted to the RCs signified self-help, self-regulation, and self-resolution in performing a number of urban works.

The "autonomy" at the neighborhood level was to be materialized through not the coercion or control of the state power, but through the cultivation of social cohesion and voluntarism for which the neighborhood space was produced with the establishment of small RCs. By organizing the RCs at the basic level of urban society, the atomized anonymity of urban society was to be transformed into the strengthening of social relations, the formation of social capital, and promotion of communitarian voluntarism.

To present examples, as an existing research points out, it is clear that the Public Security Committee, under the leadership of the RCs, could be characterized by its repressive and surveillant nature vis-à-vis the street residents who were not willing to accept the legitimacy of the new regime.⁵¹ However, this organization did not limit its function to the suppression of dissidents. The Committee played crucial roles for daily life security (治安) of the street residents, thereby receiving residents' positive support in its activities for prevention and addressing of crimes at the neighborhood level.⁵² Similarly, though the Newspaper Reading Team was conceived for indoctrination which had the effect of "brainwashing" on residents, the practices of newspaper reading led by the RCs also served as one of the means for illiterate residents to access new information, which was closely related to "public welfare," thereby triggering the residents' high interest.

Though this sort of "autonomy" was clearly different from independence and self-determination vis-à-vis the state power, it was not mere political rhetoric embellishing state control and coercion. The establishment of the RCs and their activities were state-planned and state-disposed, but they were not imposed in a coercive manner by the state for purposes irrelevant to residents' needs. The state organized the RCs, exercising its leadership (指

⁴⁹ For the historical conditions of scarcity of resources and the regime's sense of lacking which produced particular urban spaces in China, see Duanfang Lu, *op. cit.* For the early situation of scarcity of state cadres, see "坚决改变城市政权的旧的组织形式与工作方法", *人民日报*, January 23, 1950; 安子文, "中华人民共和国三年来得干部工作", *人民日报*, September 30, 1952.

⁵⁰ "北京人民政府民政局关于建立居民委员会的几个问题" (May 26, 1954), 档号 14-2-66

⁵¹ Martin K. Whyte and William L. Parish, *Urban Life in Contemporary China*, University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 284. This book is the most detailed and comprehensive study on the Maoist urban society, but as it focuses largely on the period of the Cultural Revolution and its sources are mainly based on the interviews of the émigrés from mainland China, it does not show the realities of 1950s RCs and contains an inevitable biased perspective.

⁵² "坚定地相信群众, 大走群众路线, 提高破案率", 北京市公安局办公室编印, *北京市四级公安干部会议代表发言稿汇编* (第二卷), December, 1958

导) to them to enhance social cohesion; the RCs could manage neighborhood welfare issues for themselves based on newly formed social capital and interconnection. As the societal cooperation coming from the neighborhood community was indispensable for the implementation of a variety of governmental policies, the RCs' "autonomy" shows how the scheme of "governance" between state and society was conceived and put into place.

The relationship between the RCs and the residents shows the mode of interconnection between neighborhood members. While the neighborhood actors, such as residents' representatives (i.e., heads of small teams), RCs members, and the heads of RCs, who were generally categorized as "activists," formed a vertical relationship with the state agents of the Street Office and the Police Station, they had a horizontal relationship with ordinary residents. Though acting within the guidance dictated by the state – "under the governmental leadership" (指导) – they were directly (as in the case of the heads of small teams) or indirectly (as in the case of RCs members elected by heads of the small teams) elected by the residents themselves so that their relations with the residents could not be ignored.⁵³ According to a document, "The defeated activists in the election were largely those who were isolated from the masses (脱离群众) or whose work style (作风) had serious problems (严重毛病)."⁵⁴ In this regard, the loyalty of the RCs was oriented both toward the state and the neighborhood society, though it was inevitably asymmetric.

State-Society Governance Viewed from Resuscitation of "Mangluan" Phenomena

As was previously pointed out, the "mangluan" phenomena were closely related to the circumstances in which the Beijing municipal government had to implement a number of urban works through the mass organizations established ad hoc at the street level after the abolition of district and street governments in mid-1949. A limited number of street activists spent time typically designated for their profession and housework to street works, occupying several positions simultaneously in over 20 sorts of different mass organizations, "working in rush" (*mang* 忙) but with their works just "getting into a muddle" (*luan* 乱). The production of neighborhood space by establishing RCs as a unified mass organization, and by setting up the Street Office as another governmental outpost separately from the existing Police Station, was all designed to overcome those *mangluan* phenomena at a gradual pace from October 1952 to late 1954. Various governmental work reports submitted during this period of time indicate the positive effects of the RCs organization in carrying out street works at the neighborhood level.⁵⁵ In the newly produced neighborhood space, a "governance" system could operate in the interaction between the "autonomy" of the RCs and the governmental leadership exercised by the Street Office and the Police Station.

⁵³ All of the leadership positions of various street mass organizations prior to the establishment of the RCs were nominated by the Police Station. "北京市东四区人民政府关于在洋管胡同派出所管界建立居民委员会半年以来的工作总结" (May 11, 1953), 档号 2-5-63

⁵⁴ "北京人民政府民政局关于建立居民委员会的几个问题" (May 26, 1954), 档号 14-2-66

⁵⁵ "北京市人民政府秘书厅关于本市城区重点试建的街道居民委员会目前情况的调查" (November 1953), 档号 2-5-63; "北京人民政府民政局关于重点建立居民委员会工作总结报告" (October 12, 1954), *北京市重要文献选编* (1954), pp. 625-62; 吴晗, *op. cit.*

However, it is worth noting that in the newly produced neighborhood space, the *mangluan* phenomena continued to resurge throughout the 1950s and even up to the first half of the 1960s.⁵⁶ To be precise, from the summer of 1955, approximately one year after the establishment of the RCs and the Street Office at the citywide level, the “serious *mangluan* phenomena resuscitated” (又发生了严重的忙乱现象). The similar disorder prior to the establishment of RCs – frequent meetings, activists’ holding of plural positions, multitudinous investigation works, and so forth – appeared again in the neighborhood space. Attributing the origins of this recurrent problem to the inefficiency of leadership methods, the Beijing municipal government issued a “decision” in May 1956 to overcome the problem by unified work arrangements and the establishment of work scopes between different work sectors.⁵⁷

However, the more fundamental origin of the resuscitation of *mangluan* phenomena was due to an incessant increase of the street works planned by the government beyond its inefficient leadership method. As a report submitted in the early experimental stage of establishing the RCs estimated, “any organizational rearrangement could not resolve the *mangluan* phenomena because the municipal and district governments assign too many works to the street levels”.⁵⁸ This remark suggests that even after the new establishment of the RCs in the citywide level, such predicaments could not be overcome easily. Furthermore the municipal government, for its part, had the idea that because, even with supposed reestablishment of street government, small number of governmental cadres could not implement such excessive amount of works, “the street welfare-related works should be carried out by the masses for themselves”.⁵⁹ In this regard, the street works to be accomplished by the RCs had no room for being diminished from the beginning. The *mangluan* phenomena were not limited to the RCs’ activists, but was shared by the Street Office, because the municipal and district governments assigned so many works toward the Office, and the latter had to implement the works, exercising its leadership and guidance to the RCs.

The works to be implemented at the street level were divided into two categories: “day-to-day works” (经常工作) and “core works” (中心工作). The former was related to the daily life of the street residents, while the latter referred to the works driven intensively by the government for a limited period with a generally huge scale of residents’ mobilization. The day-to-day works included all sorts of public services necessary to urban life. Those were frequently named “public welfare works” in official documents, comprising a wide variety of works such as public security, dispute mediation (调解), sanitarian improvement and maintenance, social relief activities, assistance in public route construction, installation and maintenance of public restrooms, repair of damaged houses, well drilling, environmental improvement, running of reading newspaper teams, establishment and management of kindergarten, among others. The core works launched during the period from the citywide establishment of the RCs in 1954 to mid-1957 included a series of consecutive campaigns and mobilizations

⁵⁶ “居民委员会等街道组织的任务及存在问题” (October, 1963), 档号 2-20-1165

⁵⁷ “北京市人民委员会关于克服街道工作忙乱现象的决定” (May 7, 1956), 档号 2-8-9; “前门区人民委员会关于检查街道工作忙乱情况的报告及克服街道工作忙乱现象的意见 (草案)” (June 18, 1956), 档号 39-1-207; “前门区人民委员会街道工作情况” (1957), 档号 39-1-342

⁵⁸ “北京市东四区人民政府关于在洋管胡同派出所管界建立居民委员会半年以来的工作总结” (May 11, 1953), 档号 2-5-63

⁵⁹ “区以下街道居民组织问题座谈会记录要点” (mid-1953 assumed), 档号 2-5-63. The participants in the talk were district representatives, members of district government, staffs in civil affairs and the chiefs of the Police Station, and a district mayor.

such as signature-seeking campaigns against nuclear weapons, ration-allowance works, military-conscription works, sailing of public construction bonds, resettlement works for unemployed workers, and anti-illiteracy campaigns.⁶⁰ It was certain that the difficulties in carrying out all of these street works were engendered because the different governmental sectors tended to assign the works *pro re nata* to the street level, without adequate unified arrangements between them. However, the more fundamental problem was due to the huge amount of work involved in these public welfare works and campaigns.

When the *mangluan* phenomena originated, above all, from the burdensome amount of works beyond the capacity of the street actors, two different but correlated evidences were seen: on the one hand, it is undeniable that the state took initiatives in setting the agenda in street works; on the other hand, the RCs and their voluntary cooperation were indispensable for the accomplishment of these works, beyond leadership roles that were supposed to be exercised by the state agencies and its agents. Despite the aforementioned governmental decision in May 1956, the *mangluan* problem remained unresolved. In July 1957, approximately one year later, the Beijing government convened a round table talk of the persons in charge of street works to gather the opinions of the hands-on street workers. The participants' opinions revealed two characteristics of governmental leadership as follows.⁶¹

First, the governmental leadership to the street works was not exercised systematically. The opinions presented in the talk indicate commonly that at the municipal level, there was no institution that took full charge of the street works in a unified manner. In general, the existing Bureau of Civil Affairs (民政局) and Division of District Administration (区政科) were related to the street works, but none of them took their leadership role as control tower, resulting in disorderly situation where each bureau of the municipal government assigned respectively its own works to the streets. While the Bureau of Civil Affairs could not intervene in work assignments of other bureaus, it was also impossible for district government to rearrange the works assigned from the upper administrative echelon.

Second, the capacity of the state cadres working in the Street Office and the Police Station was considerably limited. The cadres' weak work capacity was directly related to the lack of manpower compared to the heavy workload rather than to their undesirable "service attitude" or "work style." While the initial organizational structure established in 1954 remains unchanged in that the number of the street cadres did not increase, the works to be carried out rapidly multiplied from then on. For instance, in the mid-1957 Chongwen district, one civil policeman had to cover around 300 households. In another instance, one cadre of the Street Office had to administer 1,000 households. Under these conditions, the district government addressed the necessity of enlargement of the Street Office organization and the enforcement of the cadre numbers. On this predicament of the street works, a participant of the talk complained that the government was just concerned with the works (管事) without consideration of the personnel (管人) who should carry out those works.⁶²

The relationship between the Street Office and the Police Station was not harmonious. Two organs of state taking charge of leadership on the street works showed their frequent noncooperation and mutual discord.

⁶⁰ “作好街道工作，为加速社会主义建设而努力！（北京市前门区人民委员会在前门区街道工作者代表会议上的报告”（May 1957），档号 39-1-226；“前门区人民委员会街道工作情况”（1957），档号 39-1-342

⁶¹ 北京市民政局（民陈（57）字第 580 号），“关于街道工作的意见”（July 15, 1957），档号 2-9-41

⁶² Ibid.

According to a report handed in on November 4, 1957, their work performance had four kinds of concrete problems. The first problem was the lack of the unified work relationship between two organs of state at the street level. Though the importance of unified leadership in the street works had been constantly emphasized, the Street Office and the Police Station continued to assign their work to the RCs respectively, thereby provoking the activists' complaints. For example, only 4 cases of 16 Street Offices and Police Stations in Xuanwu district established their own regulations for the co-arrangement of works, while the rest continued to assign works independently, engendering "collision" (冲突) between the different works. On this disorderly situation, an activist expressed his emotion: "We have another mother-in-law. While this side convenes a meeting, that side convenes another meeting simultaneously; we cannot carry out the works under an overall arrangement."⁶³

Second, there existed leadership problems toward the Public Security Committee (PSC), which was considered the most important neighborhood organization under the leadership of the RCs. The problem was that the PSC was under a dual leadership: because the RCs were under the guidance of the Street Office, the PSC was naturally under the leadership of the Street Office, but according to the regulation, the PSC was also under the direct leadership of the Police Station.⁶⁴ This confused leadership disposition was an origin of the discord between two organs of state. While the Street Office frequently arranged the relevant works to the PSC without the approval of or consultation with the Police Station, the latter put an emphasis on the division of the works rather than on the coordination of them. The Police Station preferred the PSC's independent work performance, appointing the Committee members even without informing the RCs.

Third, the negative competition between two organs of state to secure the activists commonly occurred. The Police Station wanted to place competent activists to the PSC, while the Street Office was willing to dispose them to the RCs. This kind of competition led to degradation or slander on both sides, "harming their unity" and engendering a chronicle phenomenon of the activists' holding of multiple positions.

Fourth, there existed mutual buck-passing phenomena. In general, in the case that the dispute mediation between the residents by the RCs was impossible, it should have been transferred to the Street Office. However, while the Street Office cadres were apt to shift their responsibility to the Police Station for the reason that they had no night-shift worker, the civil policemen of the Police Station, for their part, referred even the disputes related to the public order to the Street Office. For example, when two residents in the street were taken to the Police Station for engaging in a physical altercation, the civil policeman kicked them out of the Police Station, saying "as the blood did not run out, go to the Street Office to settle the dispute!" However, immediately after they came out of the Police Station, one of them cracked the head of the other, so that they had to return to the Police Station. Observing this kind of discord and conflict occurring frequently between two street organizations, an activist manifested his complaint, saying "should we mediate even your disputes?"⁶⁵

⁶³ 北京市民政局、北京市公安局, "关于进一步改善街道办事处和公安派出所关系的报告" (November 4, 1957), 档号 2-9-41

⁶⁴ "治安保卫委员会组织条例(一九五二年六月二十七日中央人民政府政务院批准), 人民日报, August 11, 1952. This regulation stipulates that the Public Security Committee is put under the dual leadership (双重领导) by RCs and the Police Station. See also "公安派出所组织条例(一九五四年十二月三十一日全国人民代表大会常务委员会第四次会议通过)", 人民日报, January 1, 1955.

⁶⁵ 北京市民政局、北京市公安局, "关于进一步改善街道办事处和公安派出所关系的报告" (November 4, 1957), 档号 2-9-41

The complaints of the RCs' activists against governmental leadership and work style can be found in a good number of governmental work reports. An activist being elected head of the RC once said, "You elected me! That would harm me!" Other activists expressed their dissatisfactions, saying "Don't we fulfill even military services by term?" and "The cadres can have Sunday to rest, but (having no such day) we feel more tired than them."⁶⁶ The activists knew well that the street work assigned by the government could not be implemented without the cooperation of the RCs and their adjunctive organizations and committees. In some cases, the importance of the RCs was so exaggerated that the RCs' head and members expressed their independent voices. For example, an RC head in Xuanwu district said, "Whether the works are assigned by the district government or the Police Station, all should be addressed through our RC. Otherwise, I will protest against the upper level of administration."⁶⁷

All of these problems and instances of disorder which frequently manifested at the street level demonstrate a considerably different landscape from conventional totalitarian rule in which the state power exercises a perfect and seamless control over the basic level of society. While the municipal government had no organizational structure that could arrange the street works in a centralized way, the Street Office and the Police Station at the street level also had considerable deficiency in exercising their "leadership" toward the RCs' works. With a lack of efficient governmental leadership and disposition, the RCs should not only fulfill a variety of "core works" intensively assigned by different municipal bureaus and district governments, but should also "autonomously" provide almost all of the urban services necessary to urban life through their "day-to-day works."

Conclusion

Analyzing the early urban administration building process, the formation of neighborhood space, the connotation of "autonomy" (自治) of Residents' Committees (RCs), and the problems of governmental leadership to the street works, this article attempted to redefine the state-society relationship in 1950s Beijing at the neighborhood level, appropriating the concept of "governance" instead of the conventional "state control" approaches which are, to a certain extent, based on the totalitarian model. The term of "governance" widely used in academia since the last two decades is essentially defined as state-society cooperation as opposed to the existing state-society dichotomy and its contradictory relationship.

The basis of this article attempted to explain why the new regime restored district government and established RCs at the neighborhood level after having abolished the early intended government building at the district and street level. As analyzed, these vicissitudes in the urban basic level administration originated from the discrepancies between ideals and realities: on the one hand, the CCP state's strong intention to expand its power to the basic level of society and, on the other hand, the lack of means to materialize the intention. The new regime in its early stage suffered from a scarcity of resources, especially a lack of state cadres, at its disposal. Facing such discrepancies, the regime paid its attention to "autonomous" residents' organizations, which led to the establishment of the RCs to the national level since 1954.

⁶⁶ "北京市人民委员会关于克服街道工作忙乱现象的决定" (May 7, 1956), 档号 2-8-9

⁶⁷ "北京市人民政府秘书厅关于本市城区重点试建的街道居民委员会目前情况的调查" (November 1953), 档号 2-5-63

Though it was certain that the RCs could be put into place under state initiative and leadership, thereby adopting the roles of auxiliary administrative functions, the RCs' "autonomy" was also based on social capital newly created by the "production of space" of neighborhoods. Within this space, several small RCs could closely interact with the residents, enhancing communitarian cohesion, sociability, and voluntarism among them. The RCs both placed under the state leadership and based on their own social interactions implemented various "street works" to "autonomously" provide the residents with various urban services. In this regard, the "autonomy" of the RCs had its particular connotations of self-reliance, self-regulation, and self-solution rather than independence of or opposition to the state or a participatory democracy.

The "street works" charged by the RCs were burdensome due to excessive works under a lack of effective governmental leadership. The Communist regime in its early stage in the 1950s had no sufficient resources to expand organs of state to the basic level of urban society, which accordingly requires the RCs as a status of non-governmental organization to not only implement state-planned works, but also carry out neighborhood-level's various welfare works. The term "*mangluan*" (忙乱 "working in rush and getting into a muddle") frequently mentioned in the official reports reflects overfull works undertaken by the RCs. In this regard, the state-society relationship during the 1950s at the neighborhood level could be defined as a sort of *governance* rather than a coercive and surveillant totalitarian rule absorbing the atomized society into a state system. That is, the state-society relationship during this time could be characterized as a *governance* in which the state leads societal "autonomy," and this societal autonomy functions under the state leadership.

If we observe the strengthening of state power reaching urban society in the 1950s, it could be materialized not by coercive control through the expansion of the organs of state to the basic level of urban society, but by *governance* through which positive societal responses to and cooperation with the state policy could be put into place. In this regard, the emphasis by the Chinese government on RCs' roles in the urban community-building process today could be considered not as a mere intention to reimpose state control over mobile society,⁶⁸ but instead as an attempt to recover state-society *governance* to strengthen state legitimacy and stability.

⁶⁸ Though the community-building progresses, "state control is precarious" in present-day urban China. See Thomas Heberer and Christian Göbel, *op. cit.*, p. 154.