From “Danwei” Society To New Community Building:
Opportunities and Challenges for Citizen Participation in Chinese Cities

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Exploring the appropriate role of the public in public administration has been an active and ongoing area of inquiry and experimentation since the birth of the United States (King, Feltey, and Susel, 1998). Especially in last three decades, public administration has struggled to bring the public into the administrative process in the recognition that many programs cannot be effective without the collaboration between citizens and public administrators. As Thomas (1999) concludes, “everyone agrees that contemporary public administrators must be prepared to work with citizens,” and “the new public involvement has transformed the work of public managers.... [P]ublic participation in the managerial process has become a fact of life” (1995, xi).

At the same time, however, there is considerable evidence to suggest that citizen-participation efforts are not effective (Parsons, 1990; Kathleen and Martin, 1991). Public administrators “recognize the need for participation, but they cannot find ways to fit the public into decision-making processes” (King, Feltey, and Susel, 1998, 319). For ordinary citizens, it seems that the more we discuss and attempt to increase their role in public administration, the more their view of government has deteriorated (Nye, Zelikow, and King, 1997).

The real challenge is to transform the current institutions, adjusting the relationships among citizens, interest groups, elected officials, and public administrators. Although Barber’s (1984) stance (authentic participation implies “strong democracy” in place of representative democracy) has been criticized for its lack of feasibility, the attempt to analyze citizen participation as part of democratic institutions has many merits. As King, Feltey, and Susel (1998) argue, authentic public participation “requires rethinking the underlying roles of, and relationships between, administrators and citizens” (317). Or as Checkoway and Til (1978) contend, “[C]itizen participation must take place in the context of a more general evaluation of the health and efficacy of democratic institutions and practices in specific situations. Therefore, citizen participation should be viewed as either an alternative or a complementary means of improving democratic governance” (9).

If institutional context is, indeed, a critical factor in explaining the effectiveness of citizen participation (Langton 1978; DeSario and Langton 1987), it might be informative to investigate how institutional context influences the operation and effectiveness of citizen participation in a country other than the United States. As a step toward this objective, this paper aims to intro-

Abstract: This paper discusses the Chinese government’s current efforts to build modern communities in its major cities. Background information is provided about the evolution of community building in Chinese cities since the Red Revolution. Based on a case study from Beijing, this paper addresses the challenges and opportunities the movement brings to improve citizen participation and democratization in Chinese cities, as well as the future of the movement and some other theoretical concerns.
duce and analyze one of China's current efforts in increasing citizens' roles in the society.

Citizen participation has a special meaning to China's democratization. Although some Chinese officials and scholars argue that China's future democratization should be in a top-down manner, beginning with the internal democratization of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), bottom-up democratization should not be ignored.

The modern history of China has witnessed three revolutions, among which the first one (1921-1949), to establish a new socialist country, was led by Chairman Mao, who adopted the famous strategy of "from villages to cities." The second, economic revolution, initiated by Xiaopin Deng, also started from the rural area and then transferred to the cities. The third is working to reform China's political system in the direction of constitutional democracy. This revolution is very likely to follow the course of the former two, because the rural area, again, already leads the process.

In October 1987, the People's Congress of China enacted the Organizing Law of Village Resident Committees, in which the principle of self-governance by village residents was acknowledged. According to the law, every three years village residents elect their representatives to the village resident committees to take charge of public affairs. Since 1988, about a dozen provinces have organized four times through direct election by village residents, and another 18 provinces have organized three times. Gradually, rural residents have improved their sense of citizenship and civic competence; governments continue to develop, refine, and improve election systems, procedures, and techniques (Wang, 2000).

In contrast, although defined as a self-governing organization for city residents in the Constitution of 1954, the Organizing Law of City Resident Committees of 1954, and The Organizing Law of City Resident Committees of 1990, city resident committees have never achieved this legal status before 1999. Even at present, few cities have taken steps to move toward the goal of self-governance.

In 2000, the Administrative Office of the Central CCP Committee and the Administrative Office of the State Council published The Opinion on Building City Communities Nationwide (the Opinion), which had been formulated by the Ministry of Civic Affairs. In the Opinion, the nature of the new community resident committees in the cities is defined as self-governance, in the direction of law and under the leadership of the CCP. The Opinion also clarifies self-governance as self-management, self-education, self-service, and self-monitoring. Since then, New City Community Building (NCCB) as a movement has been under way. Three reasons for the movement are stated in the Opinion: (1) It reflects an urgent need for reforming and constructing socialism under new circumstances; (2) it is an effective measure to enrich cultural life for the grassroots and to strengthen the construction of socialistic spiritual civilization; (3) it is an important way to maintain city regime and to strengthen the construction of socialistic democratic politics. Ultimately, it is expected that city residents will play a more active role in city affairs.

Research Question

The Opinion requires city CCP committees and governments to assume the responsibility of NCCB, especially demanding that they include NCCB into their annual and five-year strategic plans on economy and social development. It emphasizes that the movement is to "ensure the function of community residents' self-governing organizations and support residents to manage community affairs by themselves under the guidance of law." The language used by the Opinion is similar to the language used in directing the reform of the village election, but it would be naïve to infer that the policy would have the same impact as the one applied to the villages, considering the special history, structure, and institutions of the cities. This paper addresses whether the NCCB movement is offering better opportunities for citizen participation than before, and the challenges and difficulties in the process.

Methods

To understand citizen participation in Chinese cities, one has to know the Chinese city management system and some other background information. In the central
government, the Ministry of Civic Affairs (MCA) is in charge of the NCCB movement, but some other ministries are also involved such as the Central Committee of the Youth League. In the major cities, the city management system could be summarized as “two levels of government, three levels of management” (Figure 1).

The city and the district make up the two levels of government; the three levels of management are city government, district government, and street office. To be clear, the street office is not a level of government, but an authorized body of the government. One important characteristic of the Chinese city-management system is that it functions under the leadership of the CCP’s city committees. The CCP’s subcommittees play a core role in policy formulation in all government agencies and public organizations, from the city level to the community level (Figure 2).

To assess the movement, I first interviewed five scholars in Beijing, six officials from the MCA, and ten officials from the Central Committee of the Youth League. Then, among the nine experimental cities supported by the MCA, I visited Wuhan, Qingdao, Shenyang, and Beijing, and talked to a number of officials and residents. For example, in Beijing, I interviewed two officials from the Beijing City Government and two officials from the Beijing Bureau of Civil Affairs. Among Beijing’s districts, due to the fact that the Chaoyang district is the only one emphasizing self-governance of the community committees, I interviewed five officials from the Chaoyang District Government. Among Chaoyang’s street offices, only the office of Anzhen Street formulated and carried out detailed measures to achieve self-governance of community committees, so I interviewed four officials from the Anzhen Street Office, conducted a focus group with all eight chairs of its community committees, and interviewed 50 residents by phone. For comparison, I also interviewed five officials from the Fengtai District Government, five officials from the street offices, and six chairs of community committees in Fengtai District.

“Danwei” Society and the Lack of Citizen Participation

Concept of Citizen Participation Pertinent to China

Traditional analyses on Chinese citizen participation focus primarily on political participation with the paradigm of mass mobilization (Tao and Chen, 1998; Roth, et al., 1989; Townsend, 1968). This paradigm has been challenged for its uni-dimensional construct of citizen participation (Bahry and Silver, 1990) and its ignorance of participatory activities other than mass mobilization in socialist countries. The paradigm is problematic for our purpose here because of its failure to account for special features and characteristics of Chinese cities relative to the villages. This problem of differentiation is solved by the adoption of a “Danwei” society framework in the following section. Here, we provide a three-dimensional construct of citizen participation in Chinese cities (Figure 3).

Citizen participation is a multi-faceted concept (Rosener, 1978; Cole and Caputo, 1984). It can be either political or social, which differentiates different levels of participation. Political participation means activities of citizens that “attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of government authorities, or the policies
of government (Conway, 1985). It is emblematic of political modernization (Huntington and Nelson, 1976), and it refers specifically to electoral and lobbying activities within a representative democracy. In contrast, citizen participation is often considered a medicine for curing the ill of representative democracy.

In this regard, it is reasonable to separate citizen participation from political involvement in the narrow sense. Although Langton (1978) contends that citizen participation and political participation are synonymous, he nonetheless acknowledges that “what is distinctive about citizen participation is that it stresses the person rather than the state in the participatory relationship” (p. 20). The different focuses are reflected in the four categories of citizen participation he identifies: obligatory participation, electoral participation, citizen involvement, and citizen action.

Currently, citizen participation in empirical studies in the field of public administration (rather than political science) is generally defined as citizen action and citizen involvement from a managerial perspective. As Wang (2001) defines, citizen participation is citizen involvement in making service delivery and management decisions. When using words such as “service” and “management,” the political implications are diminished to some extent. Similarly, the concept of “co-production” is defined as the manner in which public services are produced not by government alone, but by government and citizens jointly (Levine, 1984).

On the other hand, social engagement and civic involvement were not generally considered as part of citizen participation, but they are closely related to citizen participation, and they are preconditions for developing social capital that is necessary for citizen participation (Putnam, 1993, 1995, 2000). For this reason, Crenson (1974) defines “therapeutic participation” as a process by which citizens are brought together to do things for their communities, and therefore overcome the isolation, the alienation, and sense of powerlessness. “Therapeutic participation,” in contrast to “demand-producing participation,” expands the scope of citizen participation.

Treating political participation and social participation as two extreme positions is appropriate for the analysis of the Chinese citizen participation phenomenon. On the one hand, in socialist China, political participation is widespread. For example, city voter

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**Figure 2: The CCP’s Leading Role in City Affairs**

- City gov.  
- District gov.  
- Street office  
- Resident committee  
- City CCP committee  
- District CCP committee  
- Street CCP committee  
- Community CCP committee

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**Figure 3: Three Dimensions of Citizen Participation**
Turnout has always been more than 90 percent. On the other hand, social activities are encouraged by the state as long as they do not violate the CCP’s directive. The real issue is how to involve citizens in the administrative process, an issue in between political participation and social participation.

Citizen participation has different meanings in authoritarian and non-authoritarian countries. In authoritarian China, although city voter turnout is high, the election itself is symbolic and exists only to make the result legitimate. Kuan and Liou (2001) find that in Mainland China, as opposed to Hong Kong and Taiwan, traditional political culture has an active role in individuals’ participation regardless of the force of modernization, which could be explained by Mainland China’s mobilization system (mobilization regime). Chinese mass movement is designed to mobilize the emotional and physical strength of the people to achieve specific goals established by the leadership, representing “a temporary intensification of the pressure to participate and a channeling of citizen’s efforts toward chosen objectives” (Roth, Warwick, and Paul, 1989, p. 194). In other words, “the nature and extent of participation are determined by the party leadership; at times the limits of permissible activity have been expanded, at other times constricted” (185). However, mass participation is not equal to citizen participation in the sense that people participate because they do not have a choice. As Kuan and Liou find, those who are influenced by traditional political culture intend to vote under state mobilization, while those who are less or not influenced intend to vote voluntarily. Authentic citizen participation, regardless of which party (citizen, government, or other organizations) initiates it, should be a voluntary process.

Citizen participation can also be either conventional or unconventional. Conventional activities include election campaign, contacting officials or media, joining and being active in citizen groups, committees, and boards, and many others. Unconventional activities include protests, strikes, and even riots. The choice between conventional and unconventional participation is not determined by whether the state is authoritarian or not; rather, it is determined by the degree of social conflict and contradiction.

**“Danwei” Society**

A “Danwei” framework is useful to illustrate citizen participation in Chinese cities, because within the dual structure of village and city, Chinese cities have been organized into a “Danwei” society.

“Danwei” has three types. One type is JiGuan, or governmental, Danwei. It includes the CCP committees, government agencies, legislature, judicial branches, army, and the People’s Congress. Another type is ShiYe, or public service, Danwei, referring to universities, schools, cultural institutes, research institutes, hospitals, publishers, weather stations and other public services. The third type is enterprise Danwei, meaning the state owned enterprises (SOEs), which do not have independent property and decision authority. All three types of Danwei share four characteristics: they are owned by the state in terms of property; they are administered by the personnel and the labor department of the state; they are supported by a unitary collective welfare and insurance system; and they are controlled by administrative agencies centered around the CCP committees.

The three types of Danwei are indistinguishable in terms of personnel and labor management. Members are classified into cadres and workers. Cadres are managers and technicians, managed by the personnel department of the state, while workers are laborers directly related to production activities, managed by the labor department of the state. Cadres and workers can be considered public employees, since the government supplies their salaries, welfare, and insurance. As a result, cadres and workers are people “inside the system,” differing from the peasants in the villages who are “outside the system.” This differentiation is connected with and strengthened by the Chinese residential system (the Hukou system), which constrains citizens’ movement between villages and cities. According to the system, if a citizen wants to move from one place to another, he or she must get permission from the police bureau in both places.

Danwei is bureaucratic in nature. It incorporates political, economic, and social functions into one single organization. Politically, Danwei is a form for the state to manage people within the public (in terms of ownership) system, which covers almost every corner
of the cities. Economically, Danwei is an important entity for controlling the state’s economy and ensuring culture and material production. Sociologically, Danwei is a social group emblematic of the difference between the rural area and the cities, determining individual’s career, identity, consuming capability, values, personal experiences, behavioral manner, and social status.

Several factors have been identified to explain why Chinese cities have become a Danwei society. First, economically, the Chinese government attempted to destroy market relations and control resource allocation with administrative means from the beginning of the New China. When the government finished this task, it forced the SOEs to assume responsibility for employees’ employment and welfare. This policy resulted in labor’s comprehensive reliance on the employment organizations, and ultimately on the state. Second, managerially, since law was not the major means of rule, the SOEs became the organizational means for the state to achieve direct management over the society.

Third, politically, the CCP dominated the political arena, and its committees were extended to all local organizations. Danwei became the major place for individuals to take part in politics.

Fourth, socially, individuals’ social life was controlled comprehensively and closely by the administrative power of the state. Without Danwei’s acknowledgement and certification, individuals’ social activities, such as marriage, change of employment, and moving to another place, could not be performed. Overall, when all organizations were included in the plan-based economic system, the Danwei society was formed (Lu, 1993).

The framework of Danwei society is more appropriate for our purpose than plan-based economy and Marxism ideology because it acknowledges and includes these two factors while at the same time differentiates the cities from the villages. Some have argued that with the NCCB movement there is a much more realistic hope for democratization in the cities than in the villages (Luo, 2001). This argument overlooks the complicated social-political-cultural structure and institutions of Danwei society and its lagging impact on city management. In Danwei society, authentic citizen participation could not take place because of the lack of at least three factors: the need of citizen participation (public sphere), organization for citizen participation, and competence and willingness of citizens to participate.

The Lack of Public Sphere

The Danwei society leaves no room for the public sphere. Public sphere, according to Habermas, is the sum total of information and communication “spaces” that people use when they exchange views and formulate opinions. It is through these “spaces” that a democratic society is created and maintained. In the Danwei society, Danwei controlled all social resources, making it impossible for communities to develop autonomously.

Danwei is society because Danwei assumes the functions and responsibilities that should be assumed by communities or business, such as housing, welfare, pension, medical insurance, kindergarten, school, and commuting service. As a result, all aspects of an individual’s life were supported and controlled by his or her Danwei, and there was no need for engaging “public” participation on service delivery and decision making. The relationship between individual and the government was remote in the sense that government policies have only indirect impact on individuals who were controlled by his or her Danwei. The community in such a society was nothing more than a living place managed by Danwei. Housing was provided by Danwei, and people from the same Danwei usually lived in the same building or same place.

Inside a Danwei, the relationship between ordinary individuals and decision makers is not the same as the relationship between citizen (owner of government) and trustee, but between ruled and ruler, subordinate and supervisor. Outside a Danwei, social contact and social activities were based on individual’s Danwei identity, and Danwei’s authority, rank, and resource determined its and its members’ social status. In such a system, there is no need for citizen participation, and all that is necessary is to please the decision-makers and to let them take care of everything. Meanwhile, since Danweis are separated from one another, it is actually a closed “private” field in which individuals’
participation was "private" in nature. I label the participation inside a "Danwei" as "private" because it is similar to business employees bargaining with their employers.

The Lack of Civil Organizations

As Checkoway and Til (1978) conclude, organization is a central factor for citizens seeking to participate. In the Danwei society, there are no organizational forms effective for the purpose of citizen participation.

Danwei is ineffective in this regard. As the basic organizing unit, Danwei is nothing but the state's controlling place, in which individuals do what leaders want them to do in order to exchange living resources and better records in their personal files. If the leader of a Danwei is democratic, he or she may have the interest to include employees' opinion into the decision process, but only occasionally. And Danwei is closed to any other individual citizens outside it.

Since resources are completely controlled by the state and the Danwei system, it is impossible to form any kind of civil organizations outside the system. In the mean time, the state's policy on organization formation is very strict; independent organizations or associations cannot be developed unless they are Danweiized, or attached to a Danwei. Whereas in American cities church-related organizations are a major force driving citizen participation, in China these organizations did not exist 20 years ago, and even now their influence is minimal.

The city resident committee is not an effective vehicle either. Although as early as in 1954's Organizing Law of the City Resident Committee, the city resident committee was defined as a self-governing organization, it was bureaucratically bureaucratized and governmentalized in practice. The Law specified five tasks for resident committees: (1) to manage items concerned with the public welfare of residents; (2) to reflect the opinions and demands of residents to the local people's council or its subordinate organization; (3) to mobilize the residents to respond to government appeals and to respect the law; (4) to lead public security and protection work of a mass character; and (5) to reconcile disputes among the residents. The Law also regulated that miscellaneous expenses of the committee and supplementary living allowances for the members should be provided by local governments, and public welfare funds should be raised by "voluntary collections and contributions" from the residents. This article led to the committees' total reliance on local governments for their operation, since very few contributions were actually available from the residents.

From 1954 to 1958, the city resident committees gained some publicity and played an important role in the city management. However, from 1958 to 1961, the CCP's experimentation with urban communes (following rural communes) stopped the development and operation of the city resident committees, although the committees never disappeared. In this period, the committees had two main functions: (1) political education and mobilization: to provide direction and organization for urban residents in order to secure their active support of the CCP's policies and the state's directives; (2) problem-solving: to resolve as many community problems as possible at the street level, thereby reducing the demands on energies and financial resources from the government. In a sense, the resident committee was considered as an informal governmental organization, and "the governmental function of the residents' committee is definitely subordinate to the more general goal of political education and mobilization" (Townsend, 1968).

During the "Culture Revolution," the operation of the resident committees basically stopped. In this period, as in the years before, resident committees were unable to have more impact, which could be explained with the Danwei framework. Since Danwei had their own "family committees" mediating contradictions in and among families, city resident committees (even the street offices) had nothing to do with individuals covered by the Danweis. The city resident committees' role was nothing more than a temporary shelter and control spot for individuals who were not supported by the state, such as former prisoners and unemployed youth. In a word, the committee was a supplement to the mainstream Danwei system.

Since the 1980s, the role of city resident committee has been expanded, paralleling the gradual loosening of the Danwei system, but it has been very dependent on the government, and actually acted as a level of gov-
government. Although the duties of resident committees were strictly defined in The Organizing Law of the City Resident Committee of 1990, practice deviated much from the law. The reality was, and still is, that city government formulates policies and gives orders to district government, district government passes the orders to street office, and street office passes the orders to resident committees. As a result, a resident committee’s main activity was to manage residents on behalf of diverse government agencies (see Figure 4), and the committee lacked direct connections with residents, over-relying on the street office to specific managerial functions. The committees’ function changed from mediating family fights and helping misbehaved young people to carrying out governments’ policies and requirements. Since every government agency can issue orders to a resident committee, the resident committees are usually overloaded, and sometimes face contradictory orders.

According to my focus group data, before 2001’s reform, some resident committees had more than 150 tasks in a year (75 tasks at least), most of which were administrative affairs. All chairmen of the resident committees and all residents I interviewed in Anzhen Street agree that before the reform, the resident committee was nothing more than the “governments’ leg.” In the Opinion, it is recognized that “the operation of the city resident committee is administrative to different extent, and citizens’ participation in community building is still rare... As to the management and service of the resident committee, there are many problems to be resolved such as obligation, right, and interest being contradictory, duties and tasks being ambiguous, jurisdiction being too small, committee members being too old, and working conditions being too poor.”

The Lack of Citizenship

In the Danwei society, individuals are treated not as citizens, but as Danwei persons. Citizenship is the status and role that defines the rights and obligations of individual members of a community. A citizen is one who qualifies for the status of citizenship as prescribed formally, or informally, by a particular community, and is attributed with the rights and encumbered with the obligations assigned to this role by that community. In essence, a citizen has both rights and obligations. However, in the Danwei society, individuals’ rights and self-interests were deprived. The CCP and the State determined individuals’ rights of survival through administrative power, and Danwei does not take law as its operating principle, preventing meaningful citizenship from existing.

In other words, Chinese citizenship is obligation based, not right based. Chinese people have the tradition of waiting for an “ethical ruler” to come, which implies a kind of democracy theory based on competence. It does not allow more people to participate during the process form a democratic system and institution; rather, it emphasizes the importance of good ideas and competent officials. In a word, there is almost no sense of citizenship in traditional Chinese political culture, which has been made more severe by the Danwei society.

Chinese people think of the government as their father, and never see citizen’s rights as a product of a contract between individual and state on an equal basis.

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Figure 4: Resident Committee as the Government’s Leg

![Figure 4: Resident Committee as the Government’s Leg](image-url)
As a result, “it is difficult for people to understand that rights are very important, and it is more difficult to enforce citizens’ rights or human rights by law” (Li and Wu, 1999). It is not a complete citizenship, because “citizenship is, in the first instance, a bundle of rights that a state grants to some people, allowing those persons to influence the policies of the state and the choice of its top decision makers” (Soltan, 1999, p. 2).

Danwei persons may participate simply because Danwei (the state) required them to, being part of the mass mobilization. Besides that, Danwei persons usually show two non-citizenship behaviors when encountering uncomfortable government policies or actions. The first choice is to seek or develop some personal Guanxi (relation) with officials being in charge or officials who have strong influence on those being in charge; as a result, they can bypass the regulation or action. When there is no way for them to use Guanxi, they usually keep silent and “vote with their feet.”

In a word, Danwei society does not allow the existence of public sphere, independent civil organizations, and authentic citizenship. Lack of these three factors means lack of civil society, a result from the state’s complete intrusion into the social life. Under such circumstance, citizen participation has no root.

**New Community Building and Citizen Participation**

During the 1980s, the MCA began to promote the concept of community. In 1987, the Ministry for the first time proposed and defined the concept of community service during a meeting in Wuhan. In 1991, then minister Naifu Cui expanded the concept into “community building,” similar to the western concept of “community development” (Hua, 2000). In 1999, the MCA chose nine districts in eight cities as experimental spots for community building. In 2000, it called for nationwide efforts to carry out community building. This increasing interest in community building reflects the rapid change of population, family structure, and social structure since 1978’s reform (Wei, 2000). More importantly and specifically, it has been put forward as a remedy to the gradual collapse of the Danwei society.

The collapse of the Danwei society was accelerated in the 1990s, resulting from factors both outside and inside the system. Outside the Danwei system, with the transformation from a plan-based country to a market-based one, more and more resources and organizations have fallen out of the control of the traditional system. Private and township companies have been increasing their contribution to China’s economy and their voice in resource allocation. The economic reform also initiated the classic process of modernization and industrialization, in which millions of people from rural areas came to cities to make a living. Most of these people have not been and could not be supported and governed by the traditional Danwei system due to the financial deficiency of the government.

Changes also have taken place within the Danwei system. As the economic mainstay of the system, SOEs have been required to deepen reform measures and update their operating mechanisms. Almost 30 functions formerly assumed by SOEs are being separated and transferred to the society. Similarly, as governmental Danwei reform to redefine their function, many social and service functions they assumed are being passed to the society. Since the 1990s, the reforms on housing, medical care, employment, and pension have jointly distanced individuals further from their Danwei.

The collapse of the Danwei society has left a relative vacuum of social control. Community and community control, as a result, were put onto the government agenda. The loosening control of the state provides an opportunity for the rise of the public sphere, civil organizations, and authentic citizenship. The NCCB movement is one of the major initiatives to exploit the opportunity. It should be pointed out, however, that the movement would not necessarily lead to more citizen participation, unless practitioners really accept the con-
cept of self-governance and devote themselves to cultivating a sense of community and citizenship among the residents. Currently, while the formal goal and one of the guiding principles of the movement is to strengthen the self-governance of city residents, the practice has taken diverse forms, most of which are far from the theoretical claim. In Beijing’s hundreds of traditional and newly established communities, only seven have undergone reforms to achieve the goal of self-governance. The following section discusses the process of the reform, the form and measures that have been taken, and the problems that have arisen. It also explains why other communities do not follow the same course as these seven communities.

The discussion is based primarily on the practice of Anzhen Street, Chaoyang district, city of Beijing. With a population of 60,000, Anzhen Street (3.6 square km) is one of 22 streets in the Chaoyang District.

**Communities: Re-mapping**

The first task of the NCCB movement is to re-map the communities. Traditionally, city resident committees were established and distributed on the basis of the Danwei’s location, without consideration of residents’ sense of belonging. According to the Opinion and the operational plans formulated by the MCA, the Beijing City Government, and the Chaoyang District Government, respectively, the community re-mapping is to make the distribution more facilitative for communities’ management, resource allocation, and self-governance. Meanwhile, population scale and residents’ sense of belonging are required to be taken into account. The intention behind the re-mapping is to audit and reallocate informal administrative resources to maintain the stability of the society and the social control of the state.

After a thorough analysis of the characteristics of the area, officials in the Anzhen Street Office found several factors that should be considered as to the re-mapping. First, there are a large number of high buildings in the area, with very high population intensity. Second, there is a relatively long history of “closing” management of the jurisdiction, so residents basically have the cognition of the community. Third, there are different kinds of well-located service facilities, and residents’ basic living area are the same, with similar living customs. Fourth, previous committee members have relatively high prestige in the area. Fifth, due to the natural divide by some major roads, the area has relatively constant allocation of place and facilities.

According to the guiding principle for re-mapping and the characteristic analysis, Anzhen Street re-mapped its jurisdiction into six communities, including Western Anzhen, Western Anhua, and Yunmin Road, with 46 traditional city resident committees and family committees being consolidated. The average household of the communities is about 5,000, with the highest one of 6,225. The average population for each community is about 10,000.

**Community Resident Committee: Election and Power**

Because the Organizing Law of the City Resident Committee of 1990 is ambiguous about the procedure and methods for the election and operation of the resident committee, city governments have to formulate their own. According to the Beijing City Government’s and Chaoyang District Government’s directives (2001), as well as the Anzhen Street Office’s practice, relevant to residents’ self-governance are the assembly of community residents and the community resident committee.

1. **Assembly of Community Residents.** The assembly of community residents is designed to be the decision-making organ for community building affairs, representing residents’ will through democratic election, democratic decision, democratic management and democratic monitoring. Its mission is claimed to be to achieve residents’ self-management, self-education, self-service, and self-monitoring. Generally, the assembly consists of resident representatives, Danwei representatives, and representatives of the people who live in the community but without the identity of the permanent residency (non-permanent residents).

According to Chaoyang District’s directive, resident representatives are elected by a resident group consisting of between 30 and 50 households, with the principle of “one group, one representative.” Danwei representatives are elected or named by one or more Danwei according to its scale. Representatives of the non-per-
Community Resident Committee is the standing organ of the assembly, and represents residents to perform self-governance and manage public affairs. The committee generally consists of five to 11 members, among which one is chairman and one or two are vice chairmen. The Chairman has the authority to call for and preside over committee meetings, in which the decision principle is majority rule.

The committee’s right of self-governance could be divided into four authorities:

**Authority of decision** — Under the direction of law and government policy, it has the authority to decide independently on everyday public affairs and public business in the community.

**Authority of preliminary examination** — Under the direction of law and government policy, it has the authority to preliminarily examine programs that are relevant to residents’ life. Before such programs are examined and approved by government agencies, they should be sent to the resident committee for examination.

**Authority of collaborative management** — This implies collaborating with government agencies and offices to carry out activities relevant to community building, as well as helping government with certain tasks according to the principle that “obligation, right, and interest are in line” and “fee-collecting power is given to those who do the work.” It also has the right to resist some unreasonable tasks ordered by government agencies and tasks irrelevant to community building.

**Authority of monitoring** — It represents residents to review, criticize, and advise government agencies and offices on their community-building efforts. The Beijing City government and Chaoyang District government require that agencies and offices under their jurisdiction respond to the committee’s questions and advice within 10 days and take effective measures.

The new community resident committee is designed to have a new relationship with street offices and gov-
ernment agencies (see Figure 5). It is hoped that they will become partners and monitors of the government, a role radically different from "governments' leg." According to the interviews and the focus group, the new city management is ready to improve residents' welfare and participation. Several changes have taken place. One is that younger, more educated people are replacing aging committee members. The average age of the six committee chairmen in Anzhen Street has been decreased from 63 to 46. In Fengtai District, I even met two committee chairmen in their twenties, with college educations and business experience. Officials say that they will continue to recruit qualified people from current cadres, on-the-market graduates from colleges, former employees of SOEs, and young unemployed people. Other measures will also be taken to improve committee members' professional ethics and skills, and to enhance their social and economic status.

Another change is that the rigid relationship between committees and governmental agencies has been loosened; therefore, agencies have begun to realize the independence of the committees. For example, previously, the location of public and private service facilities was within the jurisdiction of Beijing Municipal Construction and Management Committee, a city level government agency. Under NCCB, it is now in the control of the local resident committees. When the six committees in Anzhen started to take charge of this matter, they had clashes with the city agency as predicted. But after several rounds of negotiation, the committees eventually won control over the location decision. During the process, the Municipal Construction and Management Committee recognized the status of the new resident committees in the law, and started to rethink their relationship with these committees.

One of the most important changes has been the initiative to establish the CCP’s leadership in local resident committees. Previously, the CCP managed its members based on Danwei. Currently, it is required that the CCP members be managed simultaneously by the CCP’s subcommittees in Danwei and in Community. Although the operation plan of the MCA only touches on the CCP members who are retired, in non-state-owned enterprises, without job affiliation, or living in the community but whose Danwei is not in the community, some street governments including Fengtai and Chaoyang have been looking for ways to include more of the CCP members. The six committee chairmen in Anzhen Street all agree that such a new management system for the CCP is very helpful in the NCCB movement, partly because it is facilitative to solve the resource problem since most of the CCP members have some influence in their Danwei. Such a system will also make more and more of the CCP members interested in and taking part in NCCB.

**Citizenship: Deliberation and Decision**

In the focus group and the follow-up interviews, the six chairmen of the committees in Anzhen Street agree that after the re-mapping and election, as well as propagation, three noticeable changes took place among the residents. First, residents acknowledged the newly established community and its committee, recognizing the fundamental difference between the tradition resident committee in Danwei society and the new community resident committee. Second, they have started to understand that the new community is the organization for their self-governance; third, the cohesion of the community has increased. They tell stories about how residents collectively decide on public affairs related to their lives.

For example, in Western Anhua community, as well as other communities, there are some service outlets that provide services for a fee. Traditionally, Danwei or estate companies determine where such outlets are established. Currently, such decisions are determined by the community resident committees, which listen to the opinions of all residents. Another example is in the Western Anzhen community. Recently two areas of the community planned to do some reengineering work, which involves many residents’ interests. The new community resident committee first invited 20 people to have several meetings to discuss alternative plans, then designed and distributed questionnaires to all households in the area for their opinion. The final decision was based on all the returned questionnaires, and the results of the survey were made public to all residents. One decision is about the color of the buildings in the area. The committee first invited several construction experts to discuss and
came up with several plans including blue, blue plus white, green, and yellow. In the questionnaire, these four plans were introduced and several factors were also provided for residents' consideration, such as the degree of harmony with the environment. Eighty-six percent of the residents chose blue plus white, which was the same choice made by the experts. In old times, such reengineering projects always led to controversies and fights, but it went very well this time.

Challenges for Citizen Participation in Chinese Cities

Communities:

Advocates of the NCCB movement recognize that the new community should be based on the sense of belonging, but in practice it is not the most important factor practitioners take into account. The irony is that the re-mapping is trying to base itself on a feature that does not exist in most cases. The sense of belonging is the sense of community, and it is almost impossible for some communities to have the sense of belonging for it has not been very long since the collapse of the Danwei system. The focus group and resident interviewees agree that it will take a long time to develop a mature sense of community, which is related to the overall economic and political system of reform. In responding to the question “Do you have a special feeling of attachment toward the community you live in?” only 26 percent replied that they did. Fortunately, the officials have recognized and have promised to address this problem.

Anzhen is an old community, with a relatively constant population, so it is easier to carry out NCCB. In some other communities, the implementation would be more complicated. Communities in Fengtai District, for example, are connecting spots between villages and cities, so they have more fluid and diverse populations, with relatively poorer economic conditions. The re-mapping in these communities may be more difficult.

A far more fundamental question is the lack of consensus on what actually a community is. Without an accurate understanding of the concept, the re-mapping seems meaningless and the sense of community may be a false expectation. If we take the city of Beijing as a community, then the hundreds of resident committees are nothing more than neighborhood organizations. The current efforts aim to involve residents into neighborhood activities, with no intention to help residents to take part in affairs at the street, district, and the city level. Some argue that it is not feasible to manage a “community” of more than 5,000 households. This argument testifies that the intention of the movement is to update the control mechanism for the state, rather than to cultivate a sense of community.

Community re-mapping has to be planned more carefully, and it cannot be separated from other institutional changes in the city system. As Etzioni (1993) says, “institutions, from local schools to community policing, from local churches to museums, are important for communities above and beyond the service they provide. Communities congeal around such institutions” (p. 135). For example, “local schools...are more than a place to which parents send their children. The buildings, and the sports teams, are a source of identity for the community...[W]hen bean counters decide that it is more efficient to consolidate the schools of several communities, many communities lose their unifying institution” (135). In Chinese cities, such institutions are not organized around communities and more attention should be paid to adapt them to the new community building efforts.

In contrast to Anzhen Street’s practice, other Beijing streets did not focus on resident committees’ self-governance. Most of them have been investing to construct community centers in which a series of community services are provided. These community centers have the potential to stand for a sense and spirit of community, but unfortunately the leaders in these communities have not recognized the symbolic meaning of the infrastructure and failed to manage the centers from a cultural and symbolism perspective (Yanow, 1993). Differently, Anzhen Street did not invest much on infrastructure construction; hence they lack such a way to symbolize the sense of community and the spirit of self-governance. In the future, the two types of practice should be integrated to build meaningful communities.

Yang/ From “Danwei” Society to New Community Building
The Community Resident Committee

There are several problems with the community resident committee. One is that the election process is not satisfactory. Basically, the street offices have their own candidates, and residents lack willingness to name other candidates. Even when there are several candidates, the election process is not serious and fair. For example, not all residents or households received the election ticket in March. Among our interviewees, only 72 percent said they received the election ticket. Moreover, the election was not held in a public meeting; rather, street officials or people they authorized went to residents’ houses to distribute election tickets and to ask residents to fill them out. A procedure with more detail is needed to ensure the procedural justice in the election.

Another problem, recognized by some officials, is that although the committee has more autonomy from the street office than a traditional committee does, it is still not enough for self-governance. Although street office is defined to “direct” not “lead” the committee, it is also required that the committee should be led by the CCP’s sub-committee at the community level, which is under the leadership of the CCP’s sub-committee at the street level. Meanwhile, the CCP’s sub-committee at the street level also leads the street office. As a result, it is hard to say that the community committee can represent residents’ willingness.

A related problem is that it is all up to the officials in the street office to interpret NCCB. In the Anzhen Street office, the official in charge of community building is very open-minded and believes in residents’ intelligence. During my observation and interview, this official was promoted to the city; as a result, the six committee chairmen expressed their doubts and anxieties about the future leader and his or her standing on NCCB. In contrast, other streets in Chaoyang District and other districts in Beijing do not have such an official, so they hesitate to let residents decide their affairs. Interestingly, although the laws, the Opinion and some other national directives all describe the resident committee as a self-governing organization, they are nevertheless ambiguous and up to the interpretation of city governments and district governments. In some communities, officials don’t want to give up powers to residents and their committee, because they fear that if the committee becomes a decision-making and monitoring organ then there would be no local organizations to carry out some administrative functions. This illustrates that in the minds of many governmental officials, the ideal of “big government” is still playing a dominant role. As long as they want government to micromanage, they will not welcome citizen’s self-governance. In this case, even if a new community resident committee is elected, it will still be an administrative tool of the government, as traditional committees were.

Citizenship

If residents don’t have a sense of community, they certainly would not have the sense of citizenship, the sense of responsibility or obligation to community and government affairs. Although interviewees agree that the new movement is improving residents’ sense of citizenship, they also point out that it is just a start and it needs more careful efforts in the long run. Interviewees also mentioned that residents enthusiastic about community building are still old people, especially retired people. It is obvious that young people and those who have a full time job do not have interest in community building. In my interview with residents, 95 percent of retired people are very interested in community activities, but only 13 percent young people and 15 percent adults are interested.

Although the participation pattern may seem similar to that in Western countries, its implications in citizenship are different. For Western countries, the lack of willingness to participate is related to a rights-based citizenship with “too many rights, too few responsibilities,” and a communitarian movement has been proposed to reestablish the link between rights and responsibilities (Etzioni, 1993). While in China, the lack of participation is related to obligation-based citizenship, any attempts to encourage authentic participation have to begin with true and meaningful attribution of certain rights to citizens.

The NCCB movement does not have a thorough theory on how to improve the sense of citizenship. It fails to design a full range of mechanisms for the dissemination, sharing, and understanding of complex issues and diverse opinions. The resident committee, even
successful, is limited in spreading its resources and energies over so many social problems. It also has neither the intention nor resources to train residents to improve their participation skills.

One area that has been ignored by the NCCB movement is how to cultivate the sense of citizenship among young people through partnerships among local schools, communities, and local governments. Interestingly, the Youth League has taken steps to help its members to understand their legal rights and to introduce them to community building. The Central Committee of the Youth League has launched a nationwide campaign to build "Civilized Community by the Youth," and its impact is significant. However, the officials I interviewed in the MCA and its local bureaus told me that the campaign was nothing and meaningless -- compared with the NCCB movement -- and they did not recognize the importance of the campaign in cultivating citizenship among young people. In the future, attention should be paid to the collaboration among the MCA, the Youth League, the Ministry of Education, and other government agencies.

Conclusions and Further Reflections

It is safe to say that the NCCB movement does have the potential to promote citizen participation in China's major cities, but the progress depends on some other factors. China's endeavor for authentic citizen participation in its cities will be a long process of institutional transformation, but with the NCCB movement China is already on its way. Unfortunately, it seems that Chinese academics and officials have not fully understood the relationship between community building and citizen participation. Although it is expected that institutional change is a process of trial and error, it would be better to develop a new and thorough theoretical ground.

Regarding the political-social dimension of citizen participation, current NCCB efforts focus mainly on communities' services, sanitation, security, and culture, all of which are more social (civic) than political. On the one hand, such kinds of social engagement and civic participation would necessarily improve residents' interpersonal trust and commitment, ingredients of the social capital necessary for citizenship behavior and citizen participation. On the other hand, separated from the substantive governmental policy-making process, such kinds of socialization will not necessarily lead to improved political participation competence such as skills of deliberation, negotiation, and bargaining. One has to understand that a continuum exists between social engagement and political participation, and one has to make efforts to facilitate movement along this spectrum.

In regard to the authoritarian-individualistic dimension of citizen participation, the NCCB movement pays less attention to transforming government agencies than to resident committees and community service. Only after government becomes more democratic and liberal can citizen participation be voluntary and active. However, in highly centralized socialist China dominated by Marxism-Leninism ideology, it is hard to expect that city government could change quickly its governing manner.

In cities, improving political socialization and reforming authoritarian governance need to change the local power structure and stay focused on public policy making. A comparison to U.S. experiences is illustrative on three points. First, attention should be focused on the governmental policy process. According to Seavo (1993), by the early 1990s, over 60 percent of American cities had established a formal participatory regime for community development. Local residents are organized to design long-term neighborhood (city) plans and then devise spending plans to implement their ideas. For example, the Neighborhood Revitalization Program of Minneapolis, Minnesota has four goals: build neighborhood capacity, redesign public services, increase government agency collaboration, and create a sense of community (Filner, 2000). The real challenge of citizen participation is to change the relationship between government and citizens, in which citizen groups play an intermediary role. In this sense, Chinese resident committees should strive to organize residents to take part in city and district government, changing from a service-and-education-centered organization to a deliberative and participative one.

Second, more citizen groups and committees parallel current resident committees should be allowed to
form. In the United States, citizen commissions and citizen committees have diverse forms performing diverse functions (Box, 1998; Rodgers, 1977), while the Chinese resident committee, as an organization unit, includes all functions related to community development and becomes an informal administrative organ with all-in-one functions but limited resources. Some Chinese officials have recognized the necessity to develop more voluntary organizations in communities, but concrete measures have to be taken. Besides, most officials expect more voluntary groups as a supplement to the resident committees, but only when these groups have the same status as the resident committees do could the whole system be stable enough. By allowing and encouraging the formation of more citizen groups, the diversity of interest groups and the interdependence of interests would be enhanced, paving the way from a Convincing type of citizen participation to a Co-evolving type (Innes and Booler, 2000).

Third, promotion of citizen participation cannot be understood without a reference to local power structure (MacNair, et al., 1983; King, et al., 1998; Ebdon, 2000). Box (1998) contends that citizen governance means changing the relationship between elected officials and the general public and between public professionals and both their elected superiors and the public. However, in Chinese cities, representatives of the city People’s Congress, with consideration for special groups such as minorities, women, and the disabled, are elected based on profession and the Danwei system, not on the community system. No officials have inquired about the relationship between the elected representatives and the resident committees. Since the members of the resident committees are elected by all residents according to law, the committee actually has high legitimacy and legal status, at least in theory. What this legal status will mean and how it will change the city governance system remains uncertain at this point, but it is safe to say that more system changes are needed.

In general, China needs to focus on both transformation and development (Li, 1996). In such a historical stage, institutional change always has to solve two problems: insufficient supply of institution (resources) and path dependence (North, 1990). As to the former, it is widely discussed that traditional culture and political systems do not leave the Chinese people a resourceful base from which to achieve rights-based citizenship and authentic citizen participation (Wang, 1981; Qin, 1999; Wei, 2001; Li, 2000). However, Chinese culture is so multifaceted that one can always find resources from it for his/her purpose. The ultimate factor determining how officials interpret culture and institution is political system and dominant ideology. For example, the CCP’s firmly held slogans “from the mass, for the mass” and “serving the mass,” if interpreted properly, can provide legitimacy to broader and stronger citizen participation.

As to the latter, it is obvious that the NCCB movement is initiated and organized by the government, emblematic of another government supplied institutional change. It is acceptable and helpful in such a transitional period, but it is necessary to develop a bottom-up process in the future. This transformation depends on the overall reform policy related to the economic and political systems at the national level. One point is that the government should further redefine its function and reform its operation manner, completely giving up its ambition of “big government.” Another is that the way the CCP leads the country and the people should be reconsidered. At the local level, especially in civil organizations, the CCP’s role should be nothing more than “direction” and “advice.”

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