As pointed out by many scholars, China has adopted a socialist market economy. A thorough reform of the governmental system and governmental organs has not yet been established to meet the demands of this new economy. Therefore, some problems exist:

1) No formal separation of functions between government and enterprises exists. This makes regulation difficult at the macro-level.

2) The transformation of governmental functions is lagging behind reforms in other sectors. The reform of state-owned enterprises is progressing even more slowly.

3) Regional protectionism prevails, lowering efficiency and compromising the quality of construction.

4) Government organizations are overstaffed. Enterprises and peasants are therefore overburdened by unnecessary taxation.

5) The functions of intermediary bodies are distorted; their functions operate bureaucratically and enterprisingly.

6) Corruption is still a grave problem (Diao and Fu, 1999, p. 36).

Therefore, government reform in China must be part of any economic reform. There have been four instances of government organization reforms on a large scale. The reforms took place in 1982, 1988, 1993, and 1998. Of them, the most important reform commenced in 1998 and "was the most determined, the most dynamic and on the largest scale in the government organization reforms since 1949" (Liu, 1998, p. 1). During this government organization reform, the central government took the lead and got the initial results. At the beginning of 2000, local government reform followed.

Generally speaking, there is a four-layer structure in the system of local government in China: province, large city, county, and town. In this system, there are many administrative levels, and areas with large populations are under the jurisdiction of the local governments. Therefore, as China assumes the task of government reform, some of the most difficult, but also the

Abstract: Reforming local government organizations is of decisive significance. Reform at the local level is not only affected by the exemplary role of the central government organization reform, but also has its own special background and contents. Reforming local governments is a greater challenge than reforming the central government as there usually are few posts offered by local governments at lower levels or few private companies in the small cities and towns of China with the capacity to absorb the downsized government employees. Beijing, Zhejiang, Liaoning, Sichuan, Guangdong, and others have made valuable explorations into the formidable task of reform, and each city has accumulated a wealth of experiences.
most significant work, will be at the local level.

This paper discusses the special background of local government reforms, its content and characteristics, major problems associated with the reforms and measures required to solve them. Reform involves people’s interests: politically, economically, and socially, and governments must stick to the principles of justice, fairness, and openness, which is essential for the success of the reforms.

**To establish and perfect the socialist market economy, the government must reasonably define its functions.**

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**The Special Background of the Local Government Organization Reforms**

To establish and perfect the socialist market economy, the government must reasonably define its functions. It is necessary, through organization reforms, to adjust the structure of government departments, reduce the number of departments and re-allocate the powers of various departments in order “to realize the legalization of government organizations, their functions, their authorized size of the government body and the working procedure” (Jiang, 1997). While the reform of local government shares some common aspects with the reform of the central government, the former is carried out against a very special background.

**The Exemplary Role and Influence of the Central Government Organization Reform**

The central government organization reform had been carried out from top to bottom. By October 2000, it was basically completed. Central government reform was guided by a basic principle: “Decide the number of personnel in each government agency; decide the number of positions in each government agency; and decide who is in what position.”

The basic model is formed, including re-organizing or eliminating some departments that are directly in charge of economic management, reinforcing departments responsible for macroeconomic control, increasing social service departments and developing social intermediary bodies. Thus, the administrative reform of the central government provides the organization reforms of local governments with some standards, such as in the proportions by which government organs are reduced, the pace of the reform, and the government policies for the staff repositioned (e.g., enjoying their original material benefits, providing job-oriented training, replenishing enterprises, optimizing the structure).

These provide the local governments with models for their reforms. Moreover, the success of central government reform has exerted a strong influence and political pressure on local governments, forcing them to complete their own organizational reform as soon as possible.

One difficulty is when a local government reformer applies the existing model too closely, neglecting his or her own actual economic and social conditions. The more they imitate the reform of the central government, the more their reforms are likely to be superficial and to become political slogans.

**The Current Situation That Local Governments Must Face**

The odd phenomenon in the personnel system:
Since adoption of the civil service system in 1993, governments at various levels have set up a series of rules and regulations for personnel matters. For example, if someone wants to have a job in a government institution, he or she must take various examinations and must earn better grades than anyone else. However, the post-classification system has not yet been clearly and definitively established, and major obstacles to reform result from a personnel system where officials are always promoted (very rarely reduced to a lower rank), and the “iron rice bowl” (a secure job) is commonplace. Such practices hinder new ideas from flowering.

The difference between the developed areas and undeveloped areas: On the whole, the actual conditions in more than 30 provinces of China vary considerably. For example, there are great differences
between the developed areas along the coast in the eastern part and the undeveloped areas in the mid-western part. Obviously, the reform cannot follow any fixed model due to these profound differences.

The current situation of the local government system: According to statistics, there are 5,480,000 staff members of the local administrative system at various levels. Overstaffing cannot fully and reasonably allocate the manpower resources, but it does increase financial pressures. People call it “eating the finances” (i.e. the finance can merely support the people to live).

The financial situation: By analysis of the financial expenditure structures during the 20 years before 1998, it is shown that “most parts of financial expenditure were spent on capitation payment. According to the current standard, i.e., 10,000 yuan (RMB)/person/year, during 1996, 36,730,000 public servants needed 360 billion yuan from the government’s financial expenditures, which occupied nearly half of 800 billion of the national financial resources” (Xing, 1998, p. 10).

So, as far as the financial expenditures are concerned, “eating finance” occupies a large proportion in the gross financial expenditure, which makes local governments often feel “unable to perform their duties in supplying public goods and service.” For example, the government of Yunnan Province offered financial support to the population of 380,000 in 1987, and up to 1,150,000 in 1997. The net increase is three times as many as the number of 1987. The augmented speed is five times higher than the rate of the natural increase of population in the province during the same period (Yang, 2000, p. 34).

There are enormous complex and interwoven problems inherent in local government reform. We must clarify which one is most important, which one is urgent to solve. There are enormous complex and interwoven problems inherent in local government reform. We must clarify which one is most important, which one is urgent to solve. Some argue that in the reform, we should act according to the following principles: 1) transformation of perceptions should be the highest priority, compared with the discipline; 2) setting up a relatively perfect social welfare system should be the highest priority, rather than dismissing and repositioning redundant staff; 3) transformation of governmental functions should be the highest priority, rather than streamlining government agencies; and 4) strengthening financial budgets should be the highest priority, rather than reducing the size of government agencies (Shi, S-g, 2001, pp. 22-23).

Facing so many problems, nevertheless, we think the key aim of the reform is altering governmental functions.

The Contents and Characteristics of the Organization Reform at Local Levels

According to the central government’s plan, the organization reforms of local governments are carried out initially in the developed areas, and the reform plans of various provinces must be submitted to the State Council for approval. Judging from the reform plans from Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, Guangxi, Hubei, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Fujian, Heilongjiang, Liaoning, and Jilin, there are considerable similarities in the organization reforms of local governments which are less extensive than those at the provincial level, such as in their reform aims and major reform methods. Except for Hubei and Shandong, which would have basically completed the reforms at the provincial level, municipal level, county level, and town level by 2000, most provinces made three-year plans. For example, in three years, they would surmount the element of greatest resistance to reform. In other words, they would resolve how to reposition redundant staff.

The Key Aim: Altering Governmental Functions

Long ago, in China, “the executive behavior of executive branches of governments mixed with non-execu-
tive behavior, and the governments had to deal with something they should not deal with, or they could not very well deal with, or they needed not deal with at all” (Ren and Liang, 1999, p. 275).

The transformation of governmental functions “is crucial, focal, and faces difficult challenges” (Zhao, 1998, p. 84), not only in the reform of the central government but also in that of local governments. Over a long period, there are considerable similarities in the establishment of organizations and the classification of functions among the government organs at various levels. For example, there are some similarities in the classification and allocation of an organ’s functions among various provinces, and the similarities in the structure of government organization between the central government and the governments of various provinces.

In the reform, two measures were adopted to alter the functions of governments: a) re-constructing governmental organization; b) defining clearly which functions should be transferred, which functions should be moved to the lower level, which functions should be reinforced, and which functions should be canceled. For example, in Fujian Province, after the government organization reform, 326 functions were transferred, 112 were put into a lower level, 46 were reinforced, and 42 were canceled (Zhongxin, 2000).

The Key Measures

Reducing the Number of Local Governmental Organs

To the best of our knowledge, after the reform of local governmental organizations, the government organs have been reduced from 53 or so to 40. In the less developed provinces with smaller populations, only 30 organs are left. The governmental organs in municipalities directly under the central government are reduced from 61 or so to 45. After the reform, the governmental executive branches of big cities will be reduced to 40 or so, the number of branches of middle cities will be reduced to 30 or so, and to about 22 for the small cities. For those cities with less population in the under-developed regions, the number of government organs should be even less. For the regions of national autonomy, the governmental branches should be reduced to 25 from 35. The number of government organs at the county level should be reduced to 22 for big counties, 18 for middle-sized ones, and 14 for the small ones. The government organs of poor counties or with less population should be less in number but more capable (Song, 2001, pp. 387-397). This is almost the final aim and unique standard for the reforms of various provinces. The table below shows the amount of local governmental organs before and after the reform.

From the table, we notice that the number of governmental organs in most provinces is above 40 after the reform. This shows that most provinces basically observed the standard of the central government. On the other hand, it also shows that few local governments automatically limit the number of organs to less

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provinces and Districts</th>
<th>Number of Original Organs</th>
<th>Number of Organs after the Reform</th>
<th>Number of Organs Reduced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shandong</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaoning</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heilongjiang</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiangsu</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jilin</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henan</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinjiang</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
than 40. This kind of "taking the same action without prior consultation" of local governments reflects to a certain extent how difficult it is to reform local government organizations.

In order to carry out the reform of local governmental organization from higher levels to lower ones successfully, most provinces and districts have worked out detailed plans. Taking Anhui Province as an example, the numbers of the governmental organs at the provincial level and serving large cities are reduced to 40 or so, the number for medium-sized cities to about 30, and the number for small cities to about 22. The number of governmental organs of larger counties is reduced to about 22, the number for medium-sized counties to about 18, and for small counties to about 14. The number of staff in the government at the provincial level is cut down by half, following the reduction proportion established by the State Council (Shi, 2000).

Thus, it can be seen that the reconstruction of local governmental organization in this reform is characterized in the following ways:

a) There are considerable similarities in the number of organs, the function of organs and even the names of the organs in various provinces.
b) The reconstruction model of local governmental organs basically is the same as that of the central government.
c) The basic principle of local government organization reconstruction is to reduce those organs which are directly in charge of economic management, and to reinforce the departments of comprehensive management.

Repositioning Redundant Staff

According to the central government requirements, in principle, 45 to 50 percent of the staff in the provincial government should be repositioned while 30 percent or so of the staff in the municipal government should be repositioned. Basically, the reform of local governmental organization should conform with that of the central government. After nearly half of the staff in the central government was reduced, local governments followed by also reducing government staff by 50 percent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provinces and districts</th>
<th>Number reduced (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiangsu</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hubei</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jilin</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fujian</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinjiang</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anhui</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiangxi</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhejiang</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangxi</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangdong</td>
<td>49.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shandong</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaoning</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yunnan</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of posts for middle-managers in Guangdong Province was cut by 15 percent, and the number of posts for the staff at lower medium-level was cut by 25 percent. In Sichuan Province, the number of administrative staff was reduced from 5,276 to 2,744. In Liaoning, the number was reduced from 4,955 to 2,577. In Jiangxi, the number was reduced from 4,287 to 2,230. The Liaoning provincial government suggests that the staff who have been dismissed can be resettled in six ways:

a) Some people can be repositioned in enterprises and/or non-government organizations;
b) Those who have professional knowledge and management experience can be recommended to the large and medium sized state-owned enterprises;
c) Some of these people can be persuaded and encouraged to find jobs in social intermediary bodies;
d) Some of these people can be encouraged to set up enterprises and public welfare bodies or to find jobs in privately owned businesses;
e) Young people should be encouraged to pursue more advanced education, such as undergraduate study, graduate study, or some job-oriented training;
f) Some people should be persuaded to retire before the normal age of retirement.
Re-allocating the Powers of Local Governmental Organs

Reforming the organization of local government will result in reconstructing or weakening the powers of some governmental organs. From the reform plans of various provinces, we notice that some readjustments have been made in the way the power operates, among which reforming the examination and approval system was one of the most important changes.

The municipal government of Beijing put forward that "the concrete items of examination and approval should be reduced as much as possible. A system of making affairs public has been put into effect; the basis, standard, procedure, and deadline of the examination and approval should be revealed to the public. All this should be under the people's supervision" (Liu, 2000).

Various organs should categorize the items of administrative examination and approval, and cancel some items that should be controlled by the enterprises themselves, or the market regulation, besides the items which are illegal, or have no sound basis according to laws and regulations. The repetition of examinations and approvals should be avoided. Some items should be delivered to the governments at a lower level, letting the decisions be made more locally.

In order to establish a system of examination and approval which is scientific, just, fair and powerfully supervised, the process of examination and approval should be improved; a set of standards for the procedure of the examination and approval should be established; the procedure of the examination and approval should be simplified; the deadline for examining and approving should be fixed; and the supervision of the examination and approval should be strengthened.

In Zhejiang Province, 751 items of examination and approval have been cancelled, transferred, or handed down to the government in the lower levels, making up 54.7 percent of the total. The government of Tianjing is going to reduce by 40 percent 937 items of examination and approval (Huang, 2000, p. 4).

Three Major Problems and the Methods to Solve Them

There are considerable difficulties in the reform of local government organization. The most perplexing problem is repositioning of redundant staff. According to previous reforms of government organization, there are five ways to reposition staff:

1) Transform administrative organs into enterprises or non-governmental organizations that would participate in market competition;
2) Separate the staff in rear-service organs from the main bodies of government institutions;
3) Persuade those close to the age of retirement to retire early;
4) Encourage staff to find jobs in private industry;
5) Give staff the chance to be trained while keeping the posts in the government organs for them.

However, these suggested measures could not solve all the problems; usually they created additional, unanticipated concerns. Meanwhile, in doing so, local governments could not be relieved of their heavy financial burden. On the contrary, very likely the burden increased. It was reported in People's Daily on March 16, 1998 that by the end of 1996, the number of people who were supported financially by the government reached 36,730,000, an increase of 82 percent since 1978, while the entire population increased only 27.1 percent during the same period.

Among the staff who got financial support from the government, the number of the cadres of the Party and government reached 11,000,000, which doubled the pre-reform number. The financial expenditure of administrative cost reached 104.08 billion yuan (RMB) in 1996, increasing 15.5 times by 1980 (6.679 billion yuan), whereas the gross financial expenditure only increased by 5.46 times during the same period. The national financial revenue increased 100 billion yuan (RMB) per year from 1993 to 1997, but the growing population supported by the national finance was more
than 1,000,000 per year. The rising financial expenditure for salaries and wages per year made up over 60 percent of the increasing national financial capacity. In many places, 80 percent of the growing financial revenues were used as staff payments. During the sixth five-year plan of economic construction, administrative fees made up 6.8 percent of financial expenditures and during the seventh five-year plan, the number was 8.8 percent, while during the eighth five-year plan, the number was 11.9 percent, and the number was up to 13.1 percent in 1996 (Li, 1999). Therefore, these strategies of dealing with redundant staff were less than ideal.

There is no denying the fact that the intensity and difficulties of this reform are greater than that of any previous reforms. The process of reconstructing government and of deciding upon the official size of the government agencies is perhaps easier because this work can be completed by the government’s administrative offices. To a certain extent, in China, government reform is largely an administrative problem, but repositioning redundant staff is a social problem.

No doubt, simplifying the governmental administrative structure and repositioning staff imply that those civil servants affected by the job cuts will no longer be able to work at the job they originally chose. Although the workers have a variety of jobs, most of them share some psychological concerns. In general, for the agencies which can be reserved or strengthened during the reform of government organization, most employees maintain an unruffled mood because of the comparatively simple task in simplifying government organization and repositioning redundant staff. But for the organs with heavy workloads, some of those agencies may be merged into one another or canceled, and there is a growing feeling of insecurity for the employees. Many people put themselves in a passive position, and take a perfunctory attitude towards their work. Even worse this mental state slows workers down in their day-to-day work performance.

After 1998, employment pressure grew. The reform of state-owned enterprises caused millions upon millions of workers to lose their posts. The situation makes it much more difficult to solve the problem of repositioning staff in the reform of local government organization. In addition, repositioning redundant staff is particularly difficult for the following reasons:

a) As far as the issue of stable employment is concerned, many people took a job in a government agency as an “iron rice bowl” to be envied by everyone, especially by the civil servants of the county governmental organs in the undeveloped areas.

b) As far as the employment channel is concerned, the employment capacities of enterprises and non-government organizations are very limited. As for different levels, the nearer to the lower level, the problem of re-employment becomes more conspicuous. As for different areas, obviously the ability to re-employ in the central and western parts of China is more limited.

c) Though it is possible for laid-off government workers to find jobs in the private sector, absorbing government workers does not necessarily benefit the private company that hires them as the skills of the worker may not serve the needs of the company where the worker gets hired.

Because local governments face a myriad of challenges while serving their constituents, including complicated relationships and conflicts, the process of reforming the administrative structure at local levels is quite difficult. On the one hand, local governments have to convey the voice of the masses to the higher level governments, and on the other hand the policies issued by the higher authorities must be implemented locally. Thus, the responsibility taken by the government at county and town levels may be too heavy in workload, too trivial in range and too difficult in degree. Comparing this with organization reform of ministries and commissions at the state level, the organization reforms at local levels have obvious peculiarities. For example, people who lost their jobs at the state level can be repositioned at a lower level, but at local levels it is difficult to settle...
people from the county level to lower-levels, not to mention in the town and zhen (smaller township) levels. For one thing, there is less opportunity for people who have been dismissed to find new jobs; for another, the lower the governmental level, the more serious the problems of inefficiency and deficiency are for the administrative organs.

In addition, in the repositioning of redundant staff, there are four problems which will potentially exert a negative impact upon the reform, and they should be discussed here in detail.

Not reducing strategically: When reformers only pay attention to reducing the size of the government workforce by eliminating unnecessary staff members, they often ignore how to best reposition these laid-off workers in a productive capacity. In fact, how to resettle the staff becomes a crucial problem. The leaders seldom think about how to reposition the staff, and at times there are not as many job openings as expected in which to absorb the government workers.

Appointing people by favoritism: The original aim for the reform of administrative structure in local levels is to implement a just, fair, diligent, practical and efficient government. But the reality of human relationships and the desire by some to enjoy privileges in the new administration causes a small number of people to seek the opportunity to obtain power and push out dissenters.

Only dismissing ordinary personnel, but not the higher level employees: To avoid offending the interests of the leading class, some leaders who are not qualified for their positions will not be dismissed, though they should be. No doubt, this kind of reform can only lead to one result, that is the imbalance of seniority; in other words, there may be more policy makers but fewer people who do practical and specific work.

“No one comes in and no one goes out:” Because of a redundancy in governmental agencies, many agencies could not assign young personnel to suitable work for many years. Reform strives to perfect and merge the personnel in the current system. Therefore, it is not unusual for older, unqualified personnel to supplant talented persons who are badly needed by the governmental organization (Yi, 2000, p. 18).

Obviously, the essence of this problem affects the interests of the people. That is the difficult aspect of this problem. If the government cannot stick to the principle of justice, openness and impartiality, the costs for the reform of local governmental institutions will increase.

In order to reposition the redundant staff successfully, every government agency must work out a set of plans institutionally and organizationally, and put forward a series of favorable measures to support the plans. For example, the government of Zhejiang Province has made a unified arrangement for the repositioned staff in remuneration and welfare benefits, the title of a technical or professional post, housing, and medical treatment. For those staff who are laid off and will be eligible for training, the provincial government will incur the cost. During the training time, those people who are put in the previous working place’s charge will enjoy the same salaries and benefits as those who are still at their posts. One year after graduation, they, tentatively, can continue to have the official status and treatment. Those civil servants whose resignations are approved can get a subsidy for the resignation (Chai, et al. 2000). These measures help staff to reposition free from psychological pressure. But at this time it is a crucial point in the successful reform of local government organizations whether these measures can break through the professional (or trade) barrier and establish a unified market for the qualified manpower; thereby, as a whole, the developing strategy of the qualified manpower resources can be fulfilled.

It should be emphasized that the reform of local government organizations does not only involve the civil servants’ interests, but also the government agencies’ interests themselves. Before reform, the Chinese government system was characterized by centralization, and local governments had neither independence nor
initiative in the creation of a new system. After reform, the central government rendered many powers to local governments in several ways, such as empowering local governments with more independent rights of economic activities in the special economic districts and enlarging the limits of local government jurisdiction (Guo, 2000, pp. 71-72).

At the same time, because local governments must re-organize or cancel some agencies which are directly in charge of economic management, those agencies will lose some powers. No doubt, local government agencies are not willing to weaken their positions. On the contrary, they would keep increasing some agencies and enhancing the grade of those agencies. Thus, those agencies that are more authoritative and powerful and can gain more benefits for their staff will attract more people, and in turn these agencies must open new and wide financial channels to support those staff.

This happened quite often and incurred a vicious cycle of “reducing-expanding-reducing-expanding” local government agencies in previous reforms. It is well known that “essentially interests are the motivation of government agencies, and maintaining and strengthening the power of government agencies will be unavoidable as long as there is a wish to seek after interest(s)” (Peng, 2000, pp. 45-46).

Therefore, it is obvious that at the transitional period, local government agencies act not only as a “moral actor,” but also as “economic actor” and “political actor” (Shi and Xu, 2001, pp. 24-38) and they will make use of the reform policy resources at full length to serve their own interests. In order to implement the reform successfully, reformers must keep in mind that the goal of the reform is not merely to reduce a number of staff and streamline some government agencies, but also to change the structure of people’s interests and impact on current powers and benefits of local government agencies. It is hoped that this will “create an authoritative government with high efficiency, honest in performing its duties [and] develop a team of public servants who are honest, diligent and on intimate terms with people, and have a sense of responsibility and professional morality” (Liu, 1998, p. 84).

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