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Article *in* Economy and Society · November 2006

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Economy and Society Volume 35 Number 4 November 2006: 487–508

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Gary Sigley

Abstract

This paper examines significant changes (and continuities) in the realm of government in contemporary China through drawing upon the insights of governmentality studies. It summarizes the organizing concerns of governmentality studies, arguing that they have functioned, albeit by default, to preclude a consideration of how governmentality is played out in non-liberal contexts. This argument is developed by outlining shifts in the nature of government in China, in particular the shift from a concept of 'government' to one of 'governance', and subsequently suggesting that the Chinese Party-state is 'regrouping' rather than 'retreating'. The conclusion highlights the significance of the papers contained in this issue of *Economy and Society* in terms of extending the study of governmentality to both non-Western and authoritarian contexts.

Keywords: China; governmentality; government; governance.

Introduction

Since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) embarked on a programme of 'reform and openness' in the late 1970s, Chinese society has undergone a series of dramatic, and some would say traumatic, transformations in almost all realms of social, cultural, economic and political life. When the CCP declared at the Fourteenth Party Congress in 1992 that its mission was to henceforth develop a 'socialist market economy' the shores of Maoist China seemed more distant than ever. Just over a decade later the pace of reform in many areas and

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ISSN 0308-5147 print/1469-5766 online
DOI: 10.1080/03085140600960773

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

the scale of transformation both physically and socially continue to gather momentum.

This metamorphosis from 'Maoist socialism' to 'capitalism with Chinese characteristics', accompanied as it is by the so-called 'rise of China', has attracted the attention and interest of observers worldwide. In response to the demands for China-related analysis, the once narrow Cold War field of Chinese Studies is burgeoning. But just as China the nation-state has been shaken to its foundations, so too the practice of 'China watching' has been significantly destabilized in the wake of this series of unprecedented changes. This seeming dislocation, and I use the spatial connotation purposely, between China and Chinese Studies is important to note, especially as it is not necessarily obvious to those outside 'area studies'. As an object of study China, as with area studies more generally, has been viewed by the Western academy as a field of applied knowledge, that is, as a site on which to deploy the theories and methodologies of knowledge produced in Western societies. The possibility that the study of non-Western societies can offer more than merely empirical fodder for mainstream Western social sciences remains one of the crucial obstacles to overcoming the intellectual division of labour between 'the West and the rest'.

The papers in this issue of *Economy and Society* seek to make sense of social change in contemporary China through engagement with Michel Foucault's notion of 'governmentality' in a transdisciplinary fashion (Foucault (1991 [1978]). In so doing, they seek to avoid reproducing the 'applied knowledge' approach. Instead, through exploring various different dimensions of social life in contemporary China, they address a long-standing, at least until more recently, lacuna within the governmentality studies literature – that is, they are concerned to examine the implications and limitations of drawing upon the insights of governmentality for the analysis of non-Western contexts. This task involves more than simply judging the 'utility' of a particular approach in a setting foreign to its origins. More crucially, if we are to take the task of critical analysis seriously, when 'theory travels' we must accept the possibility that it is not only the perception of the foreign that will be altered but also the original 'theory' itself. If utility is to be located anywhere in this endeavour it is most likely to be at this particular intellectual juncture.

The papers in this issue are unified by a common desire to understand more adequately the governmental and ideological terrain of the socialist market economy, even though they explore such different aspects of social life in contemporary China as: the glocal politics associated with the buying and selling of blood products in rural China (Ann Anagnost), the emergence of a discourse of 'community building' and the structural transformation of urban communities (David Bray), the emergence of concepts of 'choice' and 'autonomy' in relation to governmental interventions concerning the personal attributes and employment potential of college graduates (Lisa Hoffman), and the recent problematization of governmental efforts to guide individual conduct in the form of banning the selling and buying of sex (Elaine Jeffreys).

China's transition from 'plan' to 'market' has been accompanied by significant shifts in how the practice and objects of government are understood, calculated and acted upon. We have witnessed during this process the emergence of a hybrid socialist-neoliberal (or perhaps 'neoleninist') form of political rationality that is at once authoritarian in a familiar political and technocratic sense yet, at the same time, seeks to govern certain subjects, but not all, through their own autonomy. Indeed, all of the papers in this issue are concerned to highlight the complex diversity of the ways in which the practice and objects of government in contemporary China are calculated, acted upon and contested. There is no single hand, invisible or otherwise, projecting its will upon the population, on the contrary, as the governmentality literature knows well, government is a much more decentred, *ad hoc* and contingent affair.

In attempting to understand various processes of 'translation' when 'foreign' models of calculation and government are adapted to Chinese conditions, the papers in this issue place particular importance on comprehending the socialist market economy in terms of Chinese discourse. For example, it is misleading to assume that 'autonomy' in the Chinese instance readily equates to 'autonomy' as it is understood within Western forms of political rationality. The plethora of new governmental terms and concepts that have emerged in Chinese discourse over the last two decades at first glance appear to have direct and obvious links to foreign counterparts, and no doubt many of these have been 'imported' through closer working links with international governing institutions and the domestic resurgence of the social sciences. A closer reading, however, reveals that Chinese notions such as *zizhi* and *zhili*, which are generally rendered as 'autonomy' and 'governance' respectively, must be understood within the complex socio-historical terrain of modern China. This in turn provides another avenue through which to reflect back upon the heuristic benefits of the governmentality approach in the Chinese instance.

In short, the primary objective of this issue of *Economy and Society* is to describe and analyse the significant changes (and continuities) in the realm of government in contemporary China through drawing upon the insights of governmentality studies in ways that not only 'describe' contemporary China, but also highlight some of the challenges and consequences in doing so for both the study of 'governmentality' and of 'China'. What remains of this paper is divided into four sections. Section one examines some of the organizing concerns of governmentality studies, and argues that these concerns have functioned, albeit by default, to preclude a consideration of how governmentality is played out in non-liberal contexts. Section two develops this line of argument by outlining various shifts in the nature of government in China, in particular, the shift from a concept of 'government' to one of 'governance'. Section three focuses on Chinese governmental documents to suggest that shifts in concepts of government demonstrate that the Chinese Party-state is 'regrouping' rather than 'retreating'. The fourth section introduces the other papers contained in this issue and highlights their significance in terms of

extending the study of governmentality to both non-Western and authoritarian contexts.

Positioning governmentality: from Paris to Peking

Michel Foucault (1991 [1978]) developed the concept of 'governmentality' as a means of understanding shifts in relations between knowledge, power and subjectivity in the context of early modern Western societies. Much of the subsequent research that draws upon Foucault's insights continues to take Western nation-states as the primary site of analysis, with a particularly large body of work focusing on the experiences of the United Kingdom and Australia (e.g., Barry *et al.* 1996; Burchell *et al.* 1991). The empirical foundation for these studies is therefore generally characterized as situated within an analysis of 'advanced liberal' societies. However, in more recent years, studies adapting so-called 'governmentality studies' in non-Western contexts have appeared like 'bamboo shoots after a spring rain' and studies of China are no exception. Indeed, in some ways, China has emerged as one of the most productive sites of scholarship in this area (e.g., Bray 2005; Dutton 1992; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005; Jeffreys 2004; Sigley 2004).

However, at first glance Foucault's description of governmentality and its deployment in the various studies focusing on Western societies that have followed does not seem appropriate for the analysis of non-Western contexts such as China. One of the problems inherent in broaching this subject is what Dipesh Chakrabarty (1992) refers to as the 'artifice of history'. To launch into another account that takes as its point of departure how Foucault and others have articulated governmentality in the Western context and then to consider if it is relevant in non-Western instances smacks of 'Eurocentrism'. That is, we can reflect on the non-Western instance only after an obligatory reference to the essential source of modern history. As Chakrabarty writes:

> 'Europe' remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call 'Indian', 'Chinese', 'Kenyan', and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called 'the history of Europe'.
>
> (Chakrabarty 1992: 2)

The task posed for the critical theorist, therefore, is to not only outline how certain political rationalities and practices of government develop in Western contexts and subsequently travel to non-Western destinations, but also to generate a greater acknowledgement that the 'non-West' has been relegated to a series of footnotes in the history of Western political reasoning *per se*. It is important to recognize, for instance, that the mapping out of liberal reasoning was not a discrete activity that took place within the confines of the West and only later to be applied externally. The construction of a liberal image of itself was to a large extent reliant upon the characterization of non-liberal, that is,

non-Western, societies as liberalism's Other (Stokes 1959). In the case of China it is crucial to understand that although Maoist socialism, for example, may seem as far removed from systems of Western liberalism as one can imagine, all 'modern' systems of government are cut from the same cloth.

After all, the period that Foucault (1991 [1978]) attributes to the growth and expansion of governmentality in certain Western societies is largely coextensive with the processes of colonial expansion. A number of the key administrative States undergoing 'governmentalization' were also concomitantly administering or acquiring colonial possessions. It is, therefore, impossible to do justice to the dimensions of this process by which 'the conduct of conduct' becomes preeminent without considering the global dimensions of its coming into being. The government of subjects at home and those abroad are closely intertwined. Without carefully considering these global dimensions it is all too easy to bracket-off the 'non-West' and construe liberal rationalities in ways that take 'the West' as the sole determining referent.

To offer one example of how non-Western governmentalities are excluded by default from governmentality studies, Nikolas Rose (1999: 10) agrees that coercion, constraint, domination and oppression continue to impact on populations within modern societies, but that the 'programmatic and strategic deployment of coercion, whether it be in the name of crime control or the administration of welfare benefits, has been reshaped upon the ground of freedom, so that particular kinds of justification have to be provided for such practices'. The problem here is that what Rose refers to as 'modern societies' is limited to the 'English-speaking world – Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia'. This focus overlooks the possibility of non-liberal forms of governmentality, in this instance a 'socialist arts of government' or 'Chinese governmentality', which governs not through familiar tactics of 'freedom and liberty', but through a distinct planning and administrative rationality, and which is nonetheless a product of the same processes that Foucault partly outlines in the governmentality lecture. We therefore need to nuance Rose's (1999: 10–11) claim that: 'certain values and presuppositions about human beings and how they should live, values and presuppositions given the name of freedom and liberty, have come to provide the grounds upon which government must enact its practices for the conduct of conduct.'

One of the key elements missing from much of the analysis is a developed understanding of the persistent deployment of sovereign and authoritarian measures in 'advanced liberal societies' in ways that challenge and complicate the seeming ascendance of 'freedom and liberty'. Rectifying this omission, Barry Hindess (2001: 94) argues that rather than viewing sovereign and authoritarian measures as an auxiliary measure within liberal rationalities they are actually constitutive of them. He identifies three categories that form the differentiated subjects of liberal political reason. Firstly, the notion that some populations are completely incapable of acquiring the desirable attributes of autonomy and self-government, and should be subject to extermination, enslavement or, we might add, a process of 'softening the pillow'.[1] Secondly,

the notion that a population is capable of realizing the desired capacities, but only after undergoing an extensive period of training and discipline (individuals or communities characterized by 'welfare dependency' or that are the target of colonial administration are examples of this context). Thirdly, the notion that in relatively 'civilized' societies there are those who lack the capacities for autonomous conduct as a result of external factors (such as ill health, poverty, or lack of education) rather than innate characteristics (such as those 'determined' by race or gender) (Hindess 2001: 101). Hindess does not consider the so-called 'liberal government of unfreedom' an anomaly or hypocritical denial of liberal principles, but argues instead that 'freedom' and 'unfreedom' are joined at the hip and there is no possibility of neat surgical separation. Rather than representing a denial of the commitment to liberty, 'the resort to authoritarian rule in certain cases is a necessary consequence of the liberal understanding of that commitment' (ibid.: 94). In short, liberal rationalities not only require certain kinds of subject but also deploy a range of tactics, including sovereign measures, in order to produce and sustain them.

Mitchell Dean (2002) furthers our understanding of the persistent deployment of sovereign and authoritarian measures in 'advanced liberal societies' when he argues that liberal government is comprised of both facilitative and authoritarian dimensions. The facilitative side can be summed up by reference to the tenets of liberal political philosophy itself: that is, that liberal government rests on the notion of 'free individuals pursuing their own interests'. The authoritarian dimension involves acknowledging that liberal government requires the establishment of 'specific norms of individual and collective life', which constitute the desirable forms that freedom and autonomy, take. These 'norms' in turn become obligatory and are enforceable (Dean 2002: 40). On the one hand, there is the explicit political dimension of liberal rationalities that are concerned with guaranteeing individual liberty, and, on the other hand, what Dean refers to as a 'liberal police'. Liberal police are those knowledges and technologies concerned with securing the conditions conducive to liberal government, of providing the foundations of a knowledge of individual and collective norms, and the means of ensuring their realization (ibid.: 41).

Although Hindess (2001) and Dean (2002) significantly extend our understanding of the continued importance of sovereign measures in contemporary contexts, they do so primarily in terms of examining liberal rationalities of government in Western societies. We are still none the wiser as to how governmentality is played out in non-liberal contexts. We are, however, fortunate that elsewhere both Dean and Hindess have attempted to broach this subject.

In a chapter devoted to exploring 'authoritarian governmentality', Dean (1999: 131–48) begins by noting what liberal and non-liberal forms of rule have in common, namely, that both are comprised of elements assembled from biopolitics, pastoral power and sovereignty, and both can also be located on the trajectory of the governmentalization of the State. To this end, Dean

(ibid.: 134) identifies three different forms of non-liberal political rationality: 'those non-liberal forms of thought and practice that are a component of liberal rationalities; those non-liberal forms of thought and practice that gain a certain legitimacy within liberal democracies; and non-liberal forms of rule proper'. Within each of these variations non-liberal interventions are played out differently. The major point of distinction between non-liberal strategies within liberal rationalities and non-liberal rationalities *per se* is that within liberal rationalities there is a clearly articulated connection between governing through freedom and the possibility of improving the target subject. There is always the possibility, however, that the 'good despot' of liberal reasoning can apply sovereign measures in the treatment of certain 'unimprovable' subjects. In contrast, non-liberal rationalities are distinct insofar as 'they do not accept a conception of limited government characterized by the rule of law that would secure the rights of individual citizens' (ibid.: 147). Unfortunately, and as Dean acknowledges, his foray into the authoritarian dimensions of liberal and non-liberal rationalities barely scratches the surface: 'The study of governmentality has yet to open up the extensive discussion of authoritarian and non-liberal governmentality' (ibid.: 145).

Hindess (1996) adopts a slightly different perspective to argue that just as Foucault notes that there is no distinctly socialist governmentality the same can be said of liberalism. Hindess maintains that the autonomous individual within liberal discourse occupies an ambiguous ontological status. On the one hand, the autonomous individual is taken as a natural pregiven entity for which the endeavour of political activity should be to secure that autonomy from harmful State intervention. On the other hand, the autonomous individual is also taken as an artefact of specific social conditions (ibid.: 73). But Hindess notes that this ambiguity is equally represented within other political rationalities and applies to a variety of entities. For instance, notions of the autonomous subject, whether as the individual, a community or the nation, are represented within a number of political rationalities. Consequently, Hindess (ibid.: 77) concludes that 'what these rationalities of government take for granted, and therefore what they have in common, may be more significant than the more obvious doctrinal points on which they differ'.

In sum, to understand how governmentality might play out in the Chinese context we must first acknowledge the limitations associated with the ways in which governmentality is understood to have come into being in the West. Once we begin to move beyond an understanding of 'advanced liberal' forms of government as characterized primarily by government through freedom and begin to consider the ongoing deployment of sovereign and authoritarian measures within those 'liberal' societies, any simple contrast between the deployment of 'freedom' in one context and that of 'unfreedom' in another becomes much more complex. There are, nonetheless, crucial differences between the how the 'conduct of conduct' has been played out in different societies. Accordingly, the next section outlines some of the significant shifts

that have taken place in the terrain of government in China in order to provide a more satisfactory basis for comparing China with foreign contexts.

A socialist arts of government: from 'government' to 'governance'

As the papers in this issue of *Economy and Society* demonstrate, China's 'socialist arts of government' shares a close genealogy with its Western 'liberal' siblings, but Chinese socialist governmentality differs from liberal western variants in its perception of the limits to what one can know about the object to be governed. Liberal reasoning, growing out of a critique of police, maintains a certain scepticism regarding the ability to know the object to be governed in detail and thereby employs an array of more 'indirect' methods of shaping conduct. In contrast, China's socialist governmentality, especially as it developed during the Maoist period (1949–76), argues that through the science of Marxism-Leninism there is nothing it does not know.

The shadow of scientistic hubris is by no means unique to China or the other former, and still existing, socialist party-states. Claims regarding the superiority of social and economic planning, linked as they are to optimistic visions of what modern technology and science can offer, were also a prominent feature of certain Western doctrines during the twentieth-century, and in particular during the 1930s. However, whereas it has become ideologically incorrect to suggest that 'economic planning' or 'social engineering' might be both achievable and desirable in an era of neoliberalism (so much so that if such arguments are raised they are generally couched in other terms), what is unique in the Chinese case is the continued high status of technoscientific and administrative reasoning amongst officials and scholars and an accompanying belief in the strong necessity for the Party-state to remain the primary driving force behind national development.

Since the onset of the reform period, however, the scientistic hubris of China's 'socialist arts of government' has given way somewhat to new calculations and strategies which call for governing through autonomy, whether that be through market mechanisms or the autonomous conduct of individuals. Yet these new strategies have not completely supplanted 'scientific socialism', on the contrary, they have become an integral part of the new technoscientific-administrative Party-state – a mixture of conventional Chinese socialist technologies of government such as the 'mass line',[2] and of more recent, seemingly neoliberal, strategies to govern through the desires of individuals whether as consumers, property-owners, jobseekers, and, perhaps more contentiously, as citizens. As the People's Republic of China began to integrate ever more closely with the global order, beginning in the 1970s with admission into the United Nations, but particularly after 1978, the Party-state began to actively accept and adopt international accounting practices, forms of economic and social measurement, and so on. The social sciences, previously under tight political and ideological control during the Maoist period,

underwent a significant revival in the 1980s as the central government called for the input of expertise into its ambitious plan for 'social engineering' (*shehui gongcheng*) and 'construction of socialist material and spiritual civilization' (*jianshe shehuizhuyi wuzhi yu jingshen wenming*).

The crossover between the practices of the social sciences and government policy in China becomes increasingly obvious as we move further into the reform period. Working with key global governing institutions that have become synonymous with a global neoliberalism, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, the central government has launched its own programmes of economic rationalization and marketization in the fields of health, education and the socialist work-unit, and many more besides. As the paper by David Bray in this issue of *Economy and Society* makes clear, concepts such as 'community' which have gained credence in many societies as an object and method of government have also made significant headway in present-day China, which suggests some connections between the development of domestic governmental reform and broader global trends. Likewise, the paper by Ann Anagnost highlights how the labouring body of the rural inhabitant of the Chinese hinterland is caught up in global circuits of value and the hypermodernity of the global city. As Anagnost notes, we are not ourselves removed from these circuits of value insofar as 'just about everything that we use and wear has probably been made using Chinese migrant labour'.

Yet the impact of the global on the discourse of government in reform-era China is a mere sideline when compared to the overbearing historical weight of China's existing array of governmental strategies. Although we can recognize some of the trappings of neoliberal reasoning, the prevailing discourse on government in China continues to approach the task of government in a distinctly Chinese, and as I am arguing here, 'socialist' manner. It is this combination of market autonomy and techoscientific administrative regulation that characterizes the 'socialist market economy' and epitomises Deng Xiaoping's notion of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'.

As China engages with the global, however, a complex reimagining of local, national and global space is taking place. The term 'socialist market economy', for instance, may seem to be a peculiarly Chinese Marxist notion with only domestic significance (i.e., as a 'market' internal to China). But it is important to note that the 'socialist market economy' functions also as a conceptual device linking China with the rest of the ('capitalist') world in ways inconceivable under the ideological auspices of the 'socialist planned economy'. On the domestic front, the market is seen as a competitive environment that forges superior enterprises and citizens through a process of 'survival of the fittest' (*yousheng liebai*). On the global front, the same form of competition is being played out amongst larger collectivities, notably nation-states but also transnational corporations and institutions. The link, therefore, between individual subjects and their 'quality' (*suzhi*) and the 'overall national strength' (*zonghe guoli*) is a constant source of reflection, concern and policy

intervention in China today (Sigley 2004; see also Lisa Hoffman's discussion of 'patriotic professional' in this issue).

Questions of government, especially the kind that concern governmentality studies, feature very prominently in this reimagining of 'glocal China'. The demise of the socialist work-unit, which formed the foundation of urban life in China from the 1950s until the 1990s (Bray 2005), combined with the enormous influx of rural migrants into China's cities in the reform period (Solinger 1999), has contributed to a changing urban social fabric in a significant manner. Most notably, with the emergence of the 'socialist market economy' there is now a clear and ongoing project devoted to describing the role of government in this new context, a process officially described as 'the changing function of government' (*zhengfu zhineng zhuanbian*).

In terms of the changing function of government, one of the most intriguing features of recent Chinese discussions of government, one that has largely gone unnoticed in Anglophone Chinese Studies, is the shift in vocabulary and conceptualization within Chinese discourse from a notion of 'government' (*zhengfu*) as a task of 'planning' (*jihua*) and 'administration' (*xingzheng*) to one that involves 'management' (*guanli*) and 'governance' (*zhili*). The sudden appearance of the term 'governance' (*zhili*) in 1990s China as a means to describe the paternal and governmental relationship between State and society needs some explanation. Even within contemporary Western political science, the term 'governance', like the term 'civil society', only came into widespread use in Western scholarly and government writings during the late 1980s and early 1990s, particularly through the policy texts of global governing institutions such as the World Bank and within the non-government organization (NGO) sector.

Within Anglophone Chinese Studies, the term 'governance' appears to have gained ground only since 2000, several years after the notion of '*zhili*' had gained ground in China itself. None of the Anglophone studies of 'governance in China' I have thus far examined are adequately cognisant of the historical conditions associated with the emergence of the term. For instance, Kenneth Lieberthal's (2004) oft-quoted tome *Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform*, first published in 1995 and now in a second edition, does not seriously entertain the concept of governance at all. In *Governance and Politics of China*, Tony Saich (2004: xvi) uses the term 'governance' to move analysis beyond what he describes as 'the functioning of government institutions and administrative departments to the broader issues of how individual citizens, groups and communities relate to the State'. But he does not provide any further discussion of why 'governance' should be the favoured term in the first place. In any case, 'governance' does not appear to have been conceptually significant enough for Saich to warrant inclusion in the book's index.

In the one volume on China that does address the historical significance of the term 'governance' to some degree, Jude Howell's edited collection of essays *Governance in China*, we are informed that:

> With the end of the Cold War and the seeming vindication of liberal democracy and free markets, Western governments and international development agencies embarked upon a new agenda of "good governance". Taking the spotlight away from ideology and global political divisions, the good governance agenda focused its attentions on the internal failure of states in the South.
>
> (Howell 2004: 1)

For *Governance in China*, that is about as far as analysis of the emergence of 'good governance' as a normative device goes: we are simply told that it is a programme of improving the accountability and transparency of 'states in the South'. Howell (2004) does not consider that the broader concept of 'governance' not only has been a prominent feature of political and governmental reasoning in developed Western societies as well, but also possibly prior to its deployment in the context of development. The emergence and significance of 'governance' cannot, therefore, be solely reduced to addressing the 'internal failure' of non-Western states. For example, as the paper by Elaine Jeffreys suggests, although the media or 'the free press' is often held up as a guarantor of individual freedoms and 'good government' in neoliberal societies, the Chinese media's new capacity to act as part of a disciplinary apparatus that extends beyond the purview of the Party-state, via its claim to promote freedom of information, has actually resulted in more 'illiberal and authoritarian' sanctions being imposed on the actions of certain individuals.

Studies in governmentality thus prove a valuable resource for attempts to position the emergence of a discourse of 'governance' (*zhili*) both domestically within China and in relation to the global proliferation of concepts of 'governance', and in so doing bring to our attention trends that have hitherto escaped the 'Chinese Studies radar'. In tracing the shift in China from 'plan' to 'market', we must also avoid reading into this a concomitant 'retreat of the State'. As Maria Edin (2003: 4) explains, although the Chinese Party-state is often described as a decaying shell of its former self that is hastening its own demise by allowing market forces to expand, the Party-state is much more innovative than the 'retreat of the State' thesis suggests. We should consider the reform process not so much as a 'retreat' but a 'regrouping'. Until now those who have used the notion of 'retreat of the State' have generally failed to carefully consider what the term literally implies. Both 'retreat' and 'regrouping' refer to strategic manoeuvres. A 'retreat' is a strategic withdrawal either after a defeat or in the face of superior forces. A 'regrouping' is what occurs after a 'retreat' in which forces, plans and people are reorganized to suit new objectives, circumstances or strategies. If during the early years of reform the Party-state did actually 'retreat', then it was only momentary, for the important point to consider here is how the Party-state 'regroups' after the 'retreat'. A close reading of government texts that explain the status of the Chinese Party-state in a socialist market economy enables us to reread the so-called 'retreat' in terms of changes in how the problem of government is

conceived, calculated, and acted upon, in China today, as the following section demonstrates.

Governance and the socialist market economy

The official endorsement of China's programme of 'reform and openness' by the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CCP in December 1978 is rightly regarded as a major historical watershed. The year 1992 is also widely acknowledged as historically significant, but generally for the final downfall of the Soviet Union. The so-called 'end of history' thesis that triumphantly accompanied the collapse of state socialism, however, tended to overshadow two very important events that took place in China in the same year which arguably have had just as far-reaching regional and global implications. First, in January 1992 Deng Xiaoping came out of semi-retirement to embark on a 'southern tour' to the Special Economic Zones of Shenzhen and Zhuhai, which were established in the late 1970s as export processing zones, and to the then somewhat stagnant metropolis of Shanghai. The purpose of Deng's journey was to re-kick-start the reform process following the 'loss of direction' that had accompanied the events of 1989.[3] In the accompanying lectures to his 'southern tour', Deng called for greater boldness from Party and government in implementing reform and opening up, they should not, he instructed, 'act like women with bound feet'. Socialism, Deng said, is not to be judged according to whether it is based on the plan or the market but on whether or not it expands and develops the productive forces and raises the standard of living. In reference to the relationship between reform, opening up to the outside world, and changing practices of management and government, he stated:

> . . . if we want socialism to achieve superiority over capitalism, we should not hesitate to draw on the achievements of all cultures and to learn from other countries, including the developed capitalist countries, all advanced methods of operation and techniques of management that reflect the laws governing modern socialized production.
>
> (Deng Xiaoping 1994: 361–62)

Close on heels of Deng's 'southern tour' came the convening of the Fourteenth Party Congress of the CCP in October 1992. In his report to the Congress, Party General-Secretary Jiang Zemin, capitalizing on the momentum created by Deng, declared that the object of economic reform was henceforth to construct a 'socialist market economy' (*shehuizhuyi shichang jingji*) (see Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.) 1996: 1–47). The use of the term 'socialist market economy' in this instance, the first time used in such a way in any official document, represented a significant conceptual shift for a Party and government that had long upheld the superiority of socialist planning.

The official endorsement of the 'market economy', albeit a 'socialist market economy', unleashed a flurry of intellectual activity across the country as scholars, officials and businesses, not to mention ordinary folk, began to discuss the implications for all manner of activity, including the practice of government. Although governmental reform had been ongoing since the 1980s, the emergence of the model embodied in the market created an unprecedented focus for rethinking the very 'function of government' (*zhengfu zhineng*). As Wu Jinglian (2002: 308), a prominent economist and formative figure in conceiving the 'socialist market economy', notes, one of the reasons reform of the system of government (*zhengfu tizhi gaige*) had previously failed and was limited in scope was due to the lack of consensus as to where China's reforms were leading. Wu Jinglian does not suggest that the 'socialist market economy' made the task of reforming the system of government any easier. He simply implies that it at least facilitated a major reconceptualization of relations between State and society and the role of government in a market society. From about this time, we can begin to note the appearance in official and scholarly texts of a wide-ranging discussion centred on 'the transformation in government function' (*zhengfu zhineng zhuanbian*). Within the corpus of texts, statements and policy announcements we can also begin to discern an emerging interest in the notion of 'governance'.

The emergence of the notion of 'governance' in China was accompanied by a critique of the system of socialist planning and associated forms of government. One of the hallmarks of socialist planning, and the system of government in China in general, was the combination of rewards and punishments, quotas, and reliance on administrative commands. Commencing in the 1980s, critics of the system argued that administrative intervention was overly heavy-handed and had a detrimental effect on 'relations between the Party and the masses' (*dangqun guanxi*). As they argued, the target subject of the planned economy was seen as a passive, dehumanised object of instrumental reasoning. In contrast the market, through the mechanism of competition and individual autonomy and initiative, could produce an environment conducive to forging superior citizens and enterprises. In addition, they argued that the market could be seen as a device that links the nation to the rest of the world insofar as the competition between individuals, communities and enterprises at a national level is played out globally as a struggle between competing nation-states and transnational enterprises. In contrast, the socialist plan was a relatively self-sufficient entity, especially during much of the Maoist period (1949–76) when China was more isolated.

Viewed in this context, the historical shift to a 'socialist market economy' in China was also accompanied by the redeployment of a long held 'realist' or 'social Darwinian' view of the world in terms of competing nation-states. In the aforementioned Fourteenth Party Congress Report, for example, the discussion of the socialist market economy is prefaced by a description of an increasingly competitive world in which the economy and science and

technology are the foundations of 'overall national strength' (*zonghe guoli*), which, in turn, forms the basis of competition between nations (Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (ed.) 1996: 1–47). The Report points out that nations around the globe and especially in China's immediate region are forging ahead. This reference to other countries in the region that are 'forging ahead' meant the 'four little dragons' of Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong and South Korea, which Deng Xiaoping specifically mentioned in his 'southern tour' speeches. The Report also notes the significance of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar world order. Most importantly, the Report conveys a sense of urgency in suggesting that it is not just a matter of having economic growth, but of having a fast pace of economic growth. It warns that those who fall behind will be at the beck and call of other more powerful nations (*shou zhi yu ren*) (ibid.). The upshot is that times are indeed changing, the era of the planned economy, and the form of socialism it embodied, is over. The emerging global order demands that China embraces global capital and develop strategies for producing docile labourers on the one hand, and active and entrepreneurial citizens on the other.

Discussion of the virtues of the 'socialist market economy' also found their way into Chinese Marxist philosophy. As with the general discussions about the shortcomings of government under conditions of the socialist plan, Chinese Marxist philosophers, once they neutralized the problem of any contradiction between 'socialism' and 'markets', generally agreed that the market was conducive to creating superior subjectivities. As Lu Jianjie (1995: 22) writes: 'A socialist enterprise must establish its own subjectivity. Under the planned economy, it is not an independent economic and decision-making subject, but an affiliate of the State ... its subjectivity is very weak.' By contrast, '[the] socialist market economy demands that the subjectivity of the enterprise be re-made and its tremendous potential be released', and that which applies to enterprises is equally applicable for individuals. Indeed, Lu concludes that not only does the market create superior subjects, it is only through autonomy, or 'egoism' (*ziwozhuyi*), that a 'true' subject can come into being:

> 'Egoism' is the focus of the individuality of the market subjects. Ego designates the market subject. It may be the individual's ego, or the ego of the socialist collectively-owned enterprise and socialist State-owned enterprise with independent interest. Egoism means that the market subject seeks its own interests. Under the guidance of egoism, the market economic subject becomes pioneering, innovative, economical, adventurous, and outward-going. Only by acquiring these characteristics can the market economic subject realize its egoist goals and be subject in its true sense.
>
> (Lu Jianjie: 23–4)

In this connection, commentators often read China's declaration of the 'socialist market economy' in 1992 as vindicating their belief that the State is 'retreating', a process which is said to have commenced with the start of 'reform and openness' in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Reading back from

this event, the reform process can be interpreted as the gradual decline of the socialist plan in favour of the market. This view is, however, seriously misinformed. Rather than signifying the death of socialist planning, the 1980s were witness to the reinvigoration of a planning mentality (most spectacularly in the field of population planning) and, sometimes almost verging on 'scientism', a wave of technocratic reasoning drawing upon, *inter alia*, systems theory, futurism, and corporate managerialism. Ever since the 1919 May Fourth Movement there has been a playing out in China of the twin Enlightenment projects of 'democracy' and 'science'.[4] During the 1980s, demands for 'democracy' spontaneously erupted on numerous occasions only finally to be silenced in the crushing of the student and worker movements of 1989. The demand for 'science', however, was officially embraced as the key to achieving modernization and maintaining national sovereignty. Indeed, Deng Xiaoping regarded 'science and technology' as primary elements of the productive forces. Thus the 1980s do not herald the last days of the plan, on the contrary, we see the implementation of the most ambitious programme of population planning in human history and the rise of a technocratic approach to government that is at once a child of socialism (Frederick Engels did, after all, describe socialism as the 'administration of things') and of the re-emergence of the social sciences.

In other words, the 'socialist market economy' neither spells the end of technocratic reasoning nor the plan. Instead, we see the development of a new form of technocratism for the market, one that has many similarities with the notion of 'governance' as it emerges outside of China at the same time. There is definitely a change in the significance of the 'socialist plan' under conditions of the market economy. But even though the scope and authority of the plan decreases significantly, the practice of five-year plans remains in place. Notions such as 'social engineering' (*shehui gongcheng*) and 'social construction' (*shehui jianshe*) are still held in a positive light. Most importantly, the Chinese government has begun to view its role at a more macro level, using economic levers and policy initiatives to 'steer' and 'guide' development. This does not imply a 'retreat of the State', but rather a 'regrouping' (although in the crucial areas of health and education, especially in rural areas, State subsidies have been reduced considerably).

A textbook produced to explain the working of government in the new market era to Party and government officials illustrates some of the ways in which the Chinese Party-state is 'regrouping' rather than retreating. This textbook argues that the planned economy had to be abandoned because it stifled the further development of the productive forces. According to the author, Li Shouchu (1997), the most serious problem with the planned economy was its reliance on administrative commands to allocate resources and set tasks. In doing so, it overlooked the importance of economic levers such as price, monetary and taxation to shape and guide the economy. The planned economy also compartmentalized the economy and society into distinct areas, thus hampering the flows of information and people and stifling competition.

This compartmentalization had the added problem of making it difficult for Chinese enterprises to integrate with the global economy. In addition, the planned economy, based as it was on a misconceived notion of 'egalitarianism' (*pingjunzhuyi*), hampered the development of a spirit of innovation among enterprises and individuals. Subjects were unable to become entrepreneurs of themselves and of their own destinies. The textbook therefore upholds the competitive mechanisms inherent in the market for playing a positive role in weeding out inferior economic practices and creating greater economic efficiency, evoking the notion of 'survival of the fittest' (*you sheng lie tai*) on several occasions (Li Shouchu 1997: 91–6).

However, as the textbook proceeds to explain: 'The establishment of a socialist market economy does not mean that the function of government (*zhengfu zhineng*) is diminished, on the contrary the establishment of the market system requires a powerful (*qiang you li*) government' (ibid.: 96). Under the conditions of a market economy, the textbook admits that the role of government inevitably must shift from relying on administrative commands and high levels of micro-management to using the legal system, macro levers and administrative commands only where absolutely necessary. But this does not imply that as the State retreats from direct intervention that its governmental role is weakened. In the words of another Chinese commentator on reform-era government:

> Any attempt to weaken government power and function is very dangerous. In the process of establishing a socialist market economy the function of government must be strengthened [not weakened]. Of course the kind of strengthening that takes place must accord with and satisfy the demands of the market economy.
>
> (Zhang Kangzhi 1996: 19)

In Chinese discourses on government, therefore, the establishment of the socialist market economy does not demand the 'retreat of the State': it simply requires the State to intervene in different ways, ones that combine neoliberal and socialist strategies.

A similar process of rethinking the role of government is occurring, almost simultaneously elsewhere in advanced liberal societies and global institutions, which is more than a matter of sheer coincidence. The development of these trends within China and those abroad are interrelated. At the very least it would be fair to say that the external development of neoliberal rationalities seems to have had some impact on the Chinese instance for three reasons. First, the rebirth of the social sciences in China has received a sizeable injection from students and researchers that have studied in overseas universities. The fields of economics, demography, sociology, to name but a few, have begun to diversify and, in some areas, strengthen connections with the international academic community. In so doing, they have become conduits for new approaches to government. Second, by 1992, agencies such as the United Nations Development Fund, the World Bank and the Asian

Development Bank, had all been working in China on various development programmes for over a decade or longer. Despite the apparent ideological differences between these institutions and that of the Chinese Party-state, insofar as they shared a common discourse of developmentalism the scope for cooperation and the transfer of technologies of government was considerable. Finally, the NGO sector has been steadily expanding and many of the larger foreign NGOs have no doubt contributed, to some extent and not without limitations, to a changing mindset about questions of government in China.

For example, Yu Keping (2002), Director of the Center for Chinese Government Innovations and one of the key scholars responsible for introducing and translating into Chinese the principle foreign scholarship on governance, specifically cites the World Bank's Annual Report of 1992 – 'Governance and Development' – as a major catalyst for discussions on governance in China. In the mid-1990s, he argues, some Chinese economists began to take an interest in corporate governance, whilst political scientists began to consider the possibilities of the application of good governance in the Chinese context. Yu (ibid.: 194) further notes that notions of 'government' and 'governance' should be distinguished. Government (*zhengfu*) refers to the Party-state apparatus whereas governance (*zhili*) refers to the relationships between the government, corporations and communities. He concludes that the most notable difference between the way 'government' and 'governance' are understood is in the operation of power:

> Power of government operates always from top-down to bottom-up primarily through orders, statutes, bureaucracy and coercion while power of governance operates mutually, interacting both from top-down to bottom-up and from bottom-up to top-down, primarily through collaboration, coordination, negotiation, social networking, neighbourhood, identity or consensus.
>
> (Yu Keping 2002: 195)

As this example suggests, neoliberal strategies based on collaboration, coordination, negotiation, social networking, neighbourhood, and identity or consensus, are viewed as crucial to the operation of government in China, but, as the preceding examples also indicate, this should not be read as implying 'the retreat of the State'.

In fact, the recent conclusion of the Fifth Plenum of the Sixteenth Party Congress of the CCP (2005) was followed by a report that outlines the nature and objectives of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan. The document is significant insofar as when referring to 'the plan' it dropped the Chinese term '*jihua*' in favour of '*guihua*'. *Jihua* has been the term used to describe socialist planning in China since its inauguration in the 1950s. *Guihua* can also be rendered as 'plan', but unlike *jihua*, which implies detailed planning and intervention, *guihua* connotes regularization and overall supervision. The term *guihua* is thus much closer to the way in which government has come to be understood in the socialist market economy but at the same time allows for a continued managerial and guiding role for the Party and government.

The questions of government implied in this transition are also captured in the official perception of the Party as moving from being a 'revolutionary party' (*gemingdang*) to occupying the position of a 'ruling party' (*zhizhengdang*). In a volume dedicated to introducing the concept of 'service orientated government' (*fuwuxing zhengfu*), a concept forwarded at the Sixteenth Party Congress (2002), Wang Jiangyu (2005) argues that the strategies and institutions formed during the course of the revolution and which carried over into the foundation of the People's Republic have long since out-lived their purpose. The Party no longer requires the maintenance of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' through mass mobilization against so-called 'class enemies'. Nor does society need to be on an almost constant war footing through intense policing and State intervention in all aspects of political, social, economic and cultural life. Although the vestiges of the 'revolutionary party' have been gradually dismantled since 1978, Wang Jiangyu argues that there is still a lingering influence in the form of over-reliance on administrative commands and paternalism. Society, by contrast, has become far more plural, fluid, and dynamic, and the way in which it is governed needs to reflect that reality (ibid.). The crucial point to note here is that within all of this discussion the continued importance and role of the CCP is not in question. On the contrary, in order to become *the* 'ruling party', and the one and only possible party to take this mantle, the CCP and its cohort of 60 million cadres must be continuously strengthened, disciplined and trained.

To summarize the preceding remarks, Chinese discussions on the role of government in the socialist market economy are part of the general critique of the Maoist socialist system and a response to the challenges of governing in the contemporary context. At the same time, they are also responding and engaging with a broader discussion about the role of government in an era of globalization and competition between nation-states. The conclusion to be drawn out of discussions of government in China is that the reform process has produced a hybrid socialist-neoliberal form of political rationality that is at once authoritarian in a familiar political and technocratic sense yet, at the same time, seeks to govern certain subjects, but not all, through their own autonomy.

Conclusion

As the papers in this issue of *Economy and Society* variously show, the process of 'reform and opening' has not only generated new challenges for government in present-day China, but also governmental responses that involve a creative blending of neoliberal rationalities and revitalized forms of socialist rationalities. Ann Anagnost in her paper describes the social stratification of contemporary China based on new calculations as to what constitutes value. The 'high quality' (*gao suzhi*) subject of the emerging urban middle-class is the apple of the Party's eye as far as the capacity to self-govern is concerned. By contrast, the 'low quality' (*di suzhi*) of the rural migrant necessarily implies

that the State and other agencies must play a greater role in disciplining and civilizing their conduct; not only that, through the commodification of blood itself the body of the rural inhabitant literally becomes a body 'devoid of life'.

David Bray discusses how China's market reforms have resulted in a dramatic decline of the State-sector and the emergence of a more mobile, heterogeneous and economically independent urban population. In rendering the old 'socialist' system obsolete, these trends have obliged the Chinese government to rethink its strategies of urban government, resulting in the launch of nation-wide campaign in 2000 to 'build communities', with the aim of establishing the residential 'community' as the new basic unit of urban governance. As Bray concludes, although China's new urban 'communities' are premised on neoliberal notions of neighbourhood and autonomous subjects, they are still conceived of as administrative entities governed by professional 'socialist' cadres with some level of political, managerial and technical training.

Likewise, Lisa Hoffman demonstrates that autonomy and choice constitute important new techniques of governing in reform-era China with reference to the attributes and employment potential of college students. China's college students no longer receive direct State job assignments upon graduation, but rather go to job fairs and thereby experience a degree of autonomy from state-planning organs that was not available during the Maoist era. Nevertheless, young professionals' experiences of choice continue to be framed within 'socialist' conceptions of social responsibility and patriotism. Hoffman therefore concludes that neoliberal governmentality and a nationalism steeped in Maoist notions of State strength, achieved today through reform-era economic competitiveness, are intertwined in the emergence of what she calls 'patriotic professionalism'.

Finally, Elaine Jeffreys' examines the recent problematization of governmental efforts to shape 'the conduct of conduct' in the form of banning the selling and buying of sex. Eradicated during the Maoist period as part of an exploitative, feudal-capitalist system, prostitution businesses and practices have proliferated in the reform era and questions concerning the most appropriate governmental response are now hotly debated. With reference to mainstream media controversy surrounding the case of a male academic penalized as a buyer of commercial sexual services in late 2004, Jeffreys argues that the protagonist's highly public 'fall from grace' paradoxically may owe more to the Chinese media's new capacity to act as part of a disciplinary apparatus that extends beyond the purview of the Party-state – via its claim to promote individual freedoms and freedom of information – than the presumed repressive ethos of the Chinese Communist Party.

Viewed as a whole, all of the papers in this issue of *Economy and Society* contribute to a broader understanding of the significant shifts that have taken place in how the practice and objects of government in China are understood, calculated and acted upon. In turn, they contribute to studies outside of 'China' by showing how neoliberal discourses on government and governance, value and consumption practices, community building, graduate attributes,

and prostitution debates, have been raised in 'other' contexts. They also contribute to the emerging studies of governmentality in non-Western and non-liberal settings.

Notes

1 'Softening the pillow' was a phrase used by white Australian officials during the first half of the twentieth-century to refer to what they regarded as the inevitable demise of the indigenous Australian population and their perceived duty to make this demise as humane as possible.

2 During the Maoist era, 'the mass line' defined the relationship between 'the leaders' and 'the led' in terms of 'from the masses to the masses' and was upheld as the organizing principle of socialist government. It combined two basic but far-reaching strategies. On the one hand, local cadres were required to develop a close and responsive relationship with 'the masses', and to use their knowledge of Mao Zedong Thought and Marxism-Leninism to adapt general policy to localized circumstances. On the other hand, 'the mass line' was used to mobilize the population for revolutionary struggle in the form of various campaigns, whilst simultaneously overcoming resource problems and countering any tendency towards bureaucratism and centralism within the vanguard Party. The Great Leap Forward and the Chinese Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution offer two extreme examples of 'the mass line' in action. Although the era of mass mobilization campaigns in China has now ended, 'the mass line' is still evoked in different ways to elicit public support for governmental objectives, for example, in assisting the police to fight crime.

3 Following the violent crushing of student and worker demonstrations in June 1989, the conservative 'leftists' within the CCP reasserted some authority over the affairs of State. Although the reform process did not come to a complete and grinding halt, the combination of domestic disquiet as China experienced the largest 'rectification campaign' since the Cultural Revolution, and the international opprobrium and ostracism that accompanied the crackdown, meant that the overall process was considerably stalled. This was, in turn, accompanied by a largely non-public debate between conservatives and reformists (whilst recognizing that these labels are somewhat arbitrary) over the fundamental differences between 'socialism' and 'capitalism'. Under these conditions it was not possible for reformists to clearly and decisively restart the reform process. Deng Xiaoping's very public and high profile entrance onto the scene in 1992 (the 'southern tour' was a massive State-media event) and his clear insistence that 'reform and openness' must not only continue but deepen and quicken, put an end to what remained as 'leftist' influence.

4 The May Fourth Movement (*wusi yundong*) refers to the patriotic and anti-imperialist student demonstrations that took place at Tiananmen Square, Beijing on 4 May 1919. The students were demonstrating against the transfer of German concessions in China to Japan at the Treaty of Versailles. The demonstrations became a key catalyst in further intensifying and expanding the critique of traditional Chinese cultural and political institutions. The CCP, founded a few years later in 1921, claims the May Fourth Movement as an important source of its own nationalistic and revolutionary legitimacy. The student and worker demonstrations of 1989 also expressed themselves as carrying forward the spirit of May Fourth.

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