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Changing Government in China through Philanthropy: On Socialist Spiritual Civilization, Civilized Cities and Good Communists

DENG Guosheng

Tsinghua University

dgs@tsinghua.edu.cn

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1684-8095>

Elaine Jeffreys

University of Technology Sydney

Elaine.jeffreys@uts.edu.au

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8269-7080>

Corresponding author

Abstract

This paper shows how government programs unified under the rubric of ‘building socialist spiritual civilization’ are institutionalizing philanthropy and transforming government practice in China. Spiritual civilization refers to a program of simultaneously advancing China’s market economy and socialist culture. Using a governmentality approach, the paper explains how this strategy has been translated into practice through the government-directed establishment of a not-for-profit sector and ‘national civilized city’ competition aiming to produce modern cities populated by civic-minded citizens. It reveals how civil servants are incentivized to become community-focused social actors by examining new conditions of Communist Party membership and the growth of volunteering in Shenzhen. It concludes that China’s governmental authorities are creating, and being shaped by, what liberal political thought describes as the non-governmental arena.

Keywords: China, city, government, philanthropy, socialist, volunteering.

Introduction

This paper shows how government programs unified under the rubric of ‘building socialist spiritual civilization’ (*shehuizhuyi jingshen wenming jianshe*) are institutionalizing philanthropy and overseeing significant changes in government practice in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Philanthropy is defined here as ‘the planned and structured giving of money, time, information, goods and services, voice and influence to improve the wellbeing of humanity and the community’ (What is philanthropy, n.d.). It is operationalized through diverse organizational forms associated with the contemporary not-for-profit sector, including volunteering.

Spiritual civilization is an umbrella term for multiple programs of government implemented by the Central Commission for Guiding the Building of Socialist Spiritual Civilization, founded in 1997, under the supervision of the Politburo Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). These programs aim simultaneously to develop China’s market economy *and* a dynamic socialist culture and citizenry, that is, to ensure a mutually reinforcing circularity between what is described in Marxist theory as the material ‘base’ of society (the forces and relations of production) and its non-material (or spiritual) ‘superstructure’ (the cultural, political and legal dimensions). As a practical instantiation of that goal, the Commission launched a ‘national civilized city’ competition in the early 2000s. The competition aims to produce modern cities populated by civic-minded citizens by promoting urban economies, standardized municipal governance, public civility and philanthropy (Cartier, 2016). Alongside these initiatives, revised training systems to improve the capabilities of prospective CCP members are making community-focused volunteering a part of Party membership, and by extension, civil service employment (Shanghai jiceng dangjian, 2016).

Government efforts to develop an indigenous philanthropic sector in China merit attention for practical and conceptual reasons. The CCP is the largest political party in the world with around 92 million members; it governs the world’s second largest economy and nearly one-fifth of the human population through a one-party ruling system (Statistica, 2020). Attempts to foster philanthropic enterprise via the machinery of the Party and government are therefore of global as well as local significance. Indeed, the United Nations (UN) has urged the PRC

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government to ‘unleash’ the potential of philanthropy to help realize the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, by combatting poverty, inequality and climate change, in particular (UNDP, 2015).

These efforts are of additional interest from the perspective of governmentality studies, which are concerned with the question of how government is rationalized and operationalized, especially through efforts to guide the conduct of government and citizens in optimal ways (Foucault 2007a). On the one hand, scholars often associate the contemporary not-for-profit sector with liberal political ideas about the important role played by civil society, private enterprise and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in practicing autonomous citizenship and curbing ‘excessive’ government (Feng, 2017). Civil society, and hence the not-for-profit sector, is presented as a natural counterbalance to the state, rather than being recognized as a historically constructed space or dimension of government (Foucault, 2007b, p. 297). On the other hand, leftist critics maintain that celebrity-branded international NGO networks are elitist and promote vested government-corporate interests and citizen ‘slacktivism’ (Kapoor, 2013). These critics assume that governments should resolve socio-economic inequality through welfare provision, but also assume that citizen activism is required to spur such action. Both approaches implicitly turn the PRC’s government-directed not-for-profit sector into a problematic sign of failed democratization or failed socialism, either for being insufficiently non-governmental or demonstrating the recession of the ideal of a welfare state.

Viewed from a governmentality perspective, these normative critiques of the contemporary non-profit sector are analytically misdirected. In North American and European contexts, for example, the post-1970s withdrawal of national governments from social service provision, and the 1990s rise of the non-governmental sector, might be more accurately described in terms of transformed government practice – that is, attempting to achieve similar welfare objectives through different means. These developments reveal an underlying shift towards governing through ‘entrepreneurship’, ‘community’ and ‘active citizens’, rather than a shift towards less (welfare-orientated) government (Kutay, 2014; Osborne & Rose, 1999). The example of China renders the shift in government practice explicit and brings into sharper relief changes that are perhaps obscured by the more subtle architecture of government in western societies.

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To develop this argument, the paper first traces the emergence of philanthropy as an object of national economic and social planning in the PRC, and explains how the program of building socialist spiritual civilization has been translated into practice through the creation of an institutionalized not-for-profit sector. Second, it details the evolution of the civilized city assessment system, from the implementation of pilot projects in the 1990s to the launch in 2005 of an ongoing national competition that promotes standardized governance and civic-minded trends. Third, the paper demonstrates how revised conditions of CCP membership are transforming the nature of bureaucrat ethical authority by socializing ‘good communists’ to be community-focused donors and volunteers. Finally, it provides an interview-based case study of the growth of volunteering in the Chinese mega-city of Shenzhen, a serial winner of the difficult-to-obtain title of a national civilized city.

We conclude that efforts to build spiritual civilization are transforming the terrain and practice of government in China. PRC government authorities are creating, and being shaped by, what liberal political thought typically but incorrectly upholds as the self-governing, non-governmental arena. Concomitantly, the revolutionary socialist-era linchpin of Party legitimacy – the mass-line governmentality that the Party is rooted in the people and serves the people – is being reframed in terms of concerns with community-orientated approaches to urban governance and civic-minded self-governance.

Philanthropy + spiritual civilization

This section explains how governmental initiatives to institutionalize philanthropy under the rubric of ‘spiritual civilization’ were formed. After the PRC’s founding under CCP leadership in 1949, the concept and practice of charity fell into disuse. Most existing charities were connected to elite groups that became targets of revolutionary hostility – landowners, entrepreneurs and religious leaders (Jeffreys, 2017, pp. 319–320). The objectives of such charities – to support selected public-interest causes in local communities – also became incongruous with the introduction of a new centralized model of governance and welfare provision in accordance with the principles of Marxism-Leninism. A program of rapid industrialization, nationalization of industry and centralized economic planning proceeded with the goal of providing worker-citizens with the needs of living through a state-organized system of urban work-units and rural agricultural collectives (Bray, 2005). The resource-poor

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state compensated workers for their skills and labour by providing food rations, housing, education and healthcare, while maintaining low wages. This system of welfare provision became unviable and had to be remodeled following the adoption of market-based economic reforms in December 1978 (Carrillo, Hood & Kadetz, 2017). The reforms, which aimed to overcome the failures of Mao-era development and boost economic growth, have since lifted more than 850 million people out of poverty, creating modern consumers with disposable incomes and income inequality (World Bank, n.d.).

The *People's Daily* – the official print media voice of the CCP – first used the term ‘*cishan*’, which translates into English as ‘charity’ and ‘philanthropy’, in 1994, when discussing the founding of a government-organized charity federation to assist impoverished and vulnerable people without family and the means to support themselves (Jeffreys, 2017, pp. 320–321). This governmental endorsement of philanthropy reflects the reorganization of society required by a labour market, not a retreat from the ideal of social welfare provision. Growing demands for mobile labour, and the corollary dismantling of urban work-units and rural collectives, which had operated on the basis of a geographically-fixed population, meant that the Party-state could no longer supply the range of social services to employees and retirees that had previously been the norm. The PRC government had to create modern, standardized welfare services such as affordable housing, disability services, education, health and aged care, and unemployment and retirement benefits. Philanthropy became a policy issue in this context.

Philanthropy became an escalating focus of national planning in China starting in the 2000s, culminating in plans to develop an institutionalized and professionalized not-for-profit sector. The Tenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development (2001–2005) recommended developing philanthropic organizations to strengthen the country’s social security system, especially given ageing population trends (Jeffreys, 2017, pp. 321–322). The Eleventh Plan (2006–2010) advocated expanding philanthropic organization focused on education and vagrant minors. The Twelfth Plan (2011–2015) more ambitiously proposed using tax incentives to create a comprehensive system of registered private, industry, professional and community organizations that would complement the social service functions of government by developing the economy and acting as public charities. The

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Thirteenth Plan (2016–2020) advocated supporting *professional* social work and not-for-profit organizations to aid aged, disabled, young and impoverished people.

The newfound political importance of domestic philanthropy is outlined in a 2014 State Council document, *On Promoting the Healthy Development of Philanthropy*, which urged local governments to use tax and other incentives to develop a legally registered not-for-profit sector that would complement government social services by 2020 (State Council, 2014). This goal dovetailed with the Thirteenth Five-year Plan's aim of eradicating extreme poverty by the same year, just before the centenary anniversary of the CCP's founding in 1921. That timing highlights the provision of universal (modest) prosperity as a continued feature of the CCP's claim to political legitimacy, although the early regime aimed to eliminate poverty through state distribution of resources, rather than through a hybrid of government, quasi-government, private and mixed social services.

The PRC government has since introduced laws to rapidly develop an indigenous not-for-profit sector, while restricting the role of certain categories of international organizations and donors. The PRC's first Charity Law came into effect in late 2016, followed by the Law on the Management of Foreign Non-Governmental Organizations' Activities within Mainland China in early 2017 (National People's Congress, 2016a, 2016b). Both laws seek to use tax incentives to create a legally registered, transparent and professional not-for-profit sector that will support public policy objectives – for example, eliminating poverty and improving the environment – while constraining support for politically sensitive activities. Specifically, the foreign NGO law enables international NGOs with a two-or-more year-long legal record of substantive and 'appropriate' not-for-profit activities outside mainland China to operate legally in the PRC; that is, international NGOs must not engage in for-profit, political or religious activities. By the end of 2020, there were more than 550 registered international NGOs and nearly 900,000 domestic social organizations, including 8,370 foundations.

Unsurprisingly, critics tend to condemn the PRC's emerging not-for-profit sector for being too state-connected or insufficiently non-governmental and counter-government (Feng, 2017; Simon, 2013, pp. xxvii–xliii.). Based on the liberal political ethos that 'less government is better government', state-directed philanthropy is presented as inferior or distorted because an idealized philanthropic sector is associated with a thriving civil society and a high-order of

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(democratic) governance. Leftist critics tend to replicate such criticisms because of their distaste for authoritarian government, although they maintain that good governments should be responsible for comprehensive welfare provision (Carrillo, Hood & Kadetz, 2017). Some scholars have extended these critiques to argue that the authoritarian Party-state is co-opting or starting to work through the ‘better’ governance practices associated with the UN and international NGOs, in order to guarantee the CCP’s durability rather than its imminent demise (Teets, 2014).

Palmer and Winiger (2019) offer a more sophisticated account, arguing that a ‘neo-socialist governmentality’ has emerged in the PRC (and Cuba and Vietnam) that parallels but indigenizes western neo-liberal governmentality by encouraging yet managing citizen autonomy and organization. Palmer and Winiger highlight the importance of the Chinese discourse of socialist spiritual civilization in opening a more pluralistic space for public debate, popular cultural forms and social action. However, they ultimately present China’s neo-socialist governmentality as an overarching state-coordinated attempt to revitalize and extend Mao-era state socialism by exercising social control through non-coercive (liberal) means. This conclusion conflates the techniques of government, which may be agnostic with respect to the ‘liberality’ of the political system, with the political system itself, a pitfall that prompted Foucault (2007b, pp. 92–93) to resist crowding the conceptual framework with multiple gradations of governmentality (uniquely ‘liberal’, ‘socialist’ or ‘fascist’, etc.). Applying the labels of ‘liberalism’ and ‘socialism’ in this fashion makes them meaningless except as moral and aesthetic markers of a preferred political system (decentralized, *contingent* democratic governance) compared to an undesired ‘illiberal’ system (centralized *social engineering* exercised by the CCP over subjects who are allegedly largely indifferent to or unable to counter ‘Party-speak’). As a result, Palmer and Winiger (2019) replicate the basic parameters of the afore-mentioned critiques using a different nomenclature.

The popularity of normative critiques has resulted in a scholarly failure to consider how the PRC government has been actually able to create a contemporary not-for-profit sector in the name of building spiritual civilization, rather than simply ‘managing’ a pre-existing civil society. Deng Xiaoping (1979) – the architect of China’s economic reforms – first articulated the concept of spiritual civilization in 1979. It referred to the goal of simultaneously advancing the market economy and socialist culture. That culture was ambiguously defined

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as reflecting neither western-capitalist systems nor the ‘ultra-leftist’, class-struggle politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution period (1966–1976). It was further defined as about developing patriotic education on the early CCP’s revolutionary achievements and ‘scientific’ ways of thinking to modernize China. The concept has since been used as an umbrella term in relation to multiple programs of government.

The Central Committee of the CCP issued major decrees on building socialist spiritual civilization in 1986 and 1996, with the latter leading to the establishment of a Central Commission for Guiding the Building of Spiritual Civilization (hereafter the Central Commission), in April 1997. The 1986 Resolution defined that task in terms of adhering to Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, and promoting scientific education to improve the human capital of PRC citizens (*Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu shehuizhuyi jingshen wenming jianshe zhidao fangzhen de jueyi*, 1986). It described China as a nation of people united in the primary stage of socialism – a society where the goals of revolutionary class struggle have been realized, and the main task is for people to unite and advance the productive forces (the economy, businesses and entrepreneurs), rather than Mao-era concepts of class struggle and egalitarianism. It urged citizens to love China, the Chinese people, labour, science and socialism, and respect public property, protect the environment, fulfill their civic duties, abide by the law, and demonstrate civility and care for each other. It further urged Party and government officials to ensure the CCP’s survival by serving the people, being exemplary social role models, and combatting feudal customs, corruption and crime. Thus building spiritual civilization initially was linked to overt social control via the 1980s policy of launching annual police-led mass mobilization campaigns against the emerging problem of crime in China’s burgeoning cities (Deng, 1983).

The 1996 Resolution enshrined Deng Xiaoping Theory as a blueprint for modernizing China by developing a socialist market economy (that would be open to global trade) *and* socialist spiritual civilization (*Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu jiaqiang shehuizhuyi jingshen wenming jianshe*, 1996). A document subsequently released during the CCP’s Fourteenth Congress outlined how that latter task might practically be achieved, and in relation to the Ninth Five-Year Plan for 1996–2000 and the longer-term objectives for 2010 (Central Committee Resolution, 1996). It displayed a new concern with managing the city-citizen matrix via the creation of ‘civilized’ (*wenming*) households, businesses and cities. It recommended creating

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a national system of model civilized households, businesses, communities, towns and cities by 2010, and promoting them through municipal awards, large-scale public activities, and tax and investment incentives. Such models were to be developed through: Party discipline and cadre education; non-corrupt, frugal government; historical-patriotic education; legal education; professional ethics; civility; community; environmental protection; appropriate art, literature and media practices; socialist ethics; family virtues; and healthy youth culture. It further stipulated that a Commission should be established to steer this process and build a network of Spiritual Civilization Offices to liaise between the central and regional governments.

The Central Commission for Guiding the Building of Spiritual Civilization, rebranded in English as the Central Commission for Guiding Cultural and Ethical Progress in 2012, is responsible for advancing socialist culture, now understood in terms of fostering national values and a civic-philanthropic culture. These objectives are highlighted in a 2001 CCP document titled Outline for Building Civic Ethics, and reiterated in a 2019 document titled Outline for Building Civic Ethics in the New Era, that is, the post-2012 era of Xi Jinping's presidency (see below) (Gongmin daode jianshe shishi gangyao, 2001; Zhonggong zhongyang guowuyuan yinfa, 2019). Among numerous directives (especially expanding education that promotes patriotism and professional, legal and civic ethics), the 2001 document incorporates the development of philanthropic organizations and a philanthropic citizenry into the remit of building spiritual civilization. Although the document uses the collectivist expression 'public welfare activities' (*gongyi huodong*) rather than the term '*cishan*' (philanthropy), it describes government-organized charities such as Project Hope, which provides education to impoverished youth, as initiatives that demonstrate socialist virtues such as caring for others. Government-organized charities and volunteering are also represented as epitomizing socialist and 'Chinese' family values, societal and professional ethics, and the civilized nature of Chinese cities, towns and businesses.

As the next section explains, China's civilized city program offers a practical instantiation of the Central Commission's mission. The program aims to promote urban economies and standardized municipal governance, while fostering government-endorsed national values through practices such as public civility and philanthropy.

Civilizing cities

This section traces the evolution of the PRC's civilized city program and analyses its institutional architecture to highlight the emergence of a new approach to governing the city-citizen matrix in China, which includes creating civic-philanthropic-minded citizens (see also Cartier, 2016). In modern, economically-developed societies, domestic governance is urban, being focused on regulating urban spaces and improving the city-citizen matrix, and especially by encouraging autonomous but responsible competitive action on the part of businesses, organizations and individuals (Foucault cited in Rabinow, 1984, p. 241; Osborne & Rose, 1999). This increasingly involves forms of political control and public management that operate 'at a distance' rather than in a direct fashion. Examples include efforts to improve local economies, urban environments and businesses by developing niche markets, municipal rivalry, financial investment and citizen pride. Other examples include efforts to encourage citizens to self-govern their entrepreneurship, health, risks and associational networks, through career and lifestyle management.

The PRC's post-1978 economic growth demanded the development of new ways of governing the city-citizen matrix, not least because it helped drive rapid urbanization and massive labour mobility. After 1949 and up until the early 1990s, urban China was governed through the workplace via centralized economic planning. Urban life was organized around state-run production enterprises that provided worker-citizens with the necessities of everyday life (food, housing, employment, education, healthcare, security and entertainment) (Bray, 2005). This system resulted in a geographically-fixed population that was permanently open to surveillance because the Party-state needed to know who its workers were and where they were. Individuals and their families subsequently lived, worked and retired within the closed space of urban work-units or rural agricultural collectives. Population mobility was constrained not only by the absence of a labour market and consumer services, but also by a household registration system that required individuals to have permission from their workplace to move to another workplace, which was difficult to obtain. Only '329,000 rural residents were ever permitted to change to a hierarchically superior household registration before 1979' (Goodman, 2014, p. 36).

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In 1950, only 30 per cent of China's population lived in urban centres; in 2012, the PRC's urban population surpassed that of rural areas for the first time. Since the mid-1980s, more than 270 million people have moved from rural to urban areas to work in the booming construction, manufacturing, transport and service industries (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2015). Estimates indicate that the urban population will comprise nearly 70 per cent of China's population (around 1 billion people) by 2030 – more than the current combined populations of North America and Europe (China Human Development Report 2013, 2013).

Founded in 1997, the Central Commission was tasked in part with managing rapid urbanization by creating a national system of civilized cities that would exemplify international best practice regarding urban development, while advancing Chinese-socialist culture. This process actually started earlier. Zhangjiagang, a county-level city in Jiangsu Province, which is now part of the Shanghai-Suzhou-Wuxi-Changzhou metroplex, was selected as a model county-level civilized city at a Party-led spiritual civilization symposium in 1995. The city's selection was based on its successful involvement in 1994 in the National Create Healthy-hygienic Cities program, and other efforts to improve the city's environment, services, security and human capital (Nei qing suzhi, wai su xingxiang, 1999). Highlighting the links between the then nascent civilized city program and international urban development goals, Zhangjiagang won a UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour Award in 2008 for being a trend-setting clean, safe city and model of integrated urban-rural development (UNHabitat, n.d.).

The Central Commission promoted various 'model advanced cities' in the late 1990s prior to the launch of a national civilized city competition; it issued interim and revised competition assessment systems in 2003– 2004 and named the first candidates in 2005 (Central Commission, 2005). Civilized city titles were subsequently awarded in 2009, 2011, 2015, 2017 and 2020. The evaluation criteria for each round are revised to reflect changing policy objectives (Quanguo wenming chengshi, 2020).

Daqing's receipt of a civilized city title in 2009, after being included in the original group of advanced cities (and hence years of preparation), illustrates the transformed nature of models for urban development and citizenship in China. Daqing was renowned during the Mao era for its oil wells and the 'iron men' who drilled them. In the late 1950s, the first well of the

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PRC's largest oil field was drilled in Daqing by Wang Jinxi and his team, who worked in subzero temperatures without cranes and piped water, and manually carried 60 tons of equipment from a railway to the field (Jeffreys, 2012, p. 11). In the 1960s, Wang became the focus of a national campaign to Learn from the Iron Man; Daqing was promoted as a model of industry, and Wang was upheld as a national labour model.

In the mid-1990s, the Daqing Municipal Government initiated various projects to rebrand the city as 'green and beautiful', rather than as a part of the country's industrial rustbelt, and rebranded its citizens as 'proud Daqingers' using the slogan 'Focus on civilization-civility, foster new trends' (*jiang wenming, shu xinfeng*) (Guanyu daqingshi chuangjian wenmingshi de sikao, 1997). Residents were given educational pamphlets on how to become a civilized cadre, business, household and citizen (of Daqing). A system of municipal awards and penalties was also introduced for businesses that conformed or failed to comply with urban development directives.

Recent civilized city evaluation criteria reveal the newfound importance of national values and philanthropy for building spiritual civilization when detailing the ideal nature of urban development and citizenship. The first section of the 2015 assessment system for cities above prefecture-level stipulates that civilized cities must have a 'solid foundation in terms of political thinking and ethics' (Central Commission, 2015). This reiterates the concern of the 1996 Resolution with Party discipline and cadre education. However, having a firm ethico-political basis now means ensuring that Party and government officials are familiar with the contents of President Xi Jinping's speeches and actively use broadcast and social media to publicize what are described as 'Chinese' and 'core socialist' values, and the Party's historical achievements and current policy goals. Chinese values refer to revamped conceptions of Confucian guidelines for ethical behaviour such as displaying benevolence, virtue, courtesy, honesty and filial piety. The core socialist values, which comprise a set of principles defined at the CCP's Eighteenth National Congress in 2012, are prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship.

Civilized cities with a firm ethico-political basis embody national values through extensive public service advertising, outstanding examples and institutionalized volunteering. They

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advertise such values, hold frequent educational campaigns and activities focused on civilized families, businesses and tourism, and have charity and other awards to recognize people who are good social role models. They also have a strong culture of community volunteering, with more than 10 per cent of permanent residents engaging in over 25 hours of registered volunteering annually, as mandated in a document on building community volunteering issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (2013).

The second section of the 2015 national civilized city assessment system states that civilized cities have a ‘good (governance) environment for economic and social development’ (Central Commission, 2015). This requires an honest, frugal, transparent and responsive municipal government staffed by trained officials that promote economic growth and provide comprehensive social services. Civilized cities also have active measures to combat crime; improve food safety; raise environmental awareness and reduce pollution; increase the number of free libraries, museums, and sports and culture venues; promote public education and fitness; discourage smoking and uncivil public behaviours; and recognize civilized businesses and individuals. Finally, civilized cities have a large system of community-based organizations that are affiliated to local Party branches, and focus on social welfare initiatives including poverty alleviation and blood and organ donation.

The final section stipulates that civilized cities have ‘long-term, normalized and sustainable systems’ for governing and building spiritual civilization that are supported by more than 90 per cent of the resident population. Apart from the aforementioned tasks, this involves raising the standard of services in rural areas to that in cities and conducting regular large-scale surveys of the extent of public satisfaction with government and service provision, and achieving satisfaction ratings of at least 75 per cent. It also means recognizing outstanding government officials and promoting civilized units in government, commercial, community, educational, tourism and residential settings across China.

The civilized city program thus ties local governance to the national task of building of spiritual civilization in multiple ways. It uses competitive mechanisms to improve municipal governance, urban planning and business practices, with city leaders vying for the cities and city-districts under their jurisdiction to be evaluated for national awards in order to demonstrate their leadership capacity, and augment their city’s branding (Cartier, 2016). At

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the same time, it seeks to socialize the behaviours of Party members, civil servants and everyday citizens by encouraging them to adopt civic-minded practices, including volunteering.

As the next section indicates, efforts to develop a socialist-philanthropic culture will remain linked to efforts to improve local governance, regional economies, urban environments and citizen behaviours for the foreseeable future. This is guaranteed by policy directives associated with President Xi Jinping's doctrine of 'advancing socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era', as well as changing conditions of Communist Party membership and government employment.

Socializing the Party

This section documents philanthropy-related shifts in government practice through the lens of internal CCP doctrines, policies and training/assessment systems. President Xi Jinping's doctrine of 'advancing socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era' includes a call to institutionalize volunteering (Xi, 2017), a mission started by the Central Commission in 2010 when it established the Community Volunteer Service National Liaison Station and an associated website (www.cncv.org.cn/). The PRC now has more than 192 million registered volunteers, contributing more than 2.7 billion working hours and involving around 795,000 registered volunteering organizations (www.chinavolunteer.cn/). These figures flow in part from the 2015 national civilized city assessment system, which urged municipal governments to institutionalize volunteering, as recommended in a 2014 document issued by the Central Commission titled *Opinions on Advancing the Institutionalization of Volunteer Services* (Guanyu tuijin zhiyuan fuwu zhidu hua de yijian, 2014). A 2017 version of the assessment system instructs competing cities to demonstrate their fostering of civilized ethics by expanding institutionalized volunteering, including community-based and Party member volunteering (Quanguo wenming chengshi ceping tixi, 2017).

The newfound political importance of volunteering is underscored by a 2016 policy document titled *Opinions on Supporting and Developing Volunteer Service Organizations*. The document was issued by the Publicity Department; Central Commission; Ministries of Civil Affairs, Education and Finance; All-China Federation of Trade Unions; Communist

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Youth League and All-China Women's Federation (Guanyu zhichi he fazhan zhiyuan fuwu zuzhi de yijian, 2016). It describes volunteering as a symbol of civilizational progress that helps build socialist values, social governance innovation and societal harmony, and hence urges local governments to support registered organizations through tax incentives.

The document states that the central government supports the growth of registered not-for-profit volunteering organizations to meet growing public demand for social services. In keeping with national plans, it urges registered organizations to provide professional services to assist: poverty alleviation, disaster relief and care for vulnerable people; social workers working in local communities; and work in museums and other educational-cultural institutions. It further urges organizations to award outstanding volunteers, innovate advertising and fundraising methods, ensure that any cooperation with foreign persons and organizations is lawful (i.e., that international NGOs are registered), and form Party committees. As the latter recommendation suggests, the growth of the not-for-profit sector is intended to enhance the role of the Party-state, not to replace it.

The document does call for more autonomous and professional not-for-profits, but adds that Party members and civil servants should guide such organizations by volunteering in their spare time. It also describes community-based volunteering as carrying forward the spirit of Lei Feng – a Mao-era soldier and political role model. Lei Feng died in an accident in 1962; he became famous in 1963 when his life-story, encapsulated in a diary that celebrates Mao Zedong Thought and the 'socialist' values of altruism and working hard for public goals, was promoted as a model of socialist citizenship through a national mobilization campaign (Jeffreys & Su, 2016). Subsequent Lei Feng Days, rebadged in 2000 as China Youth Volunteer Service Day, have ensured public familiarity with the Lei Feng 'spirit' of selfless public service. The document's gesture to historical continuity thus presents volunteering as an established socialist tradition, rather than as referring to new forms of governance and social organization and action.

The government promotion of volunteering is transforming the question of what it means to be a good Party member and government official, not just expectations of everyday citizenship. Liu Shaoqi's classic 1939 text, *How to be a Good Communist*, was grounded in the ethos of revolutionary class struggle, advising Chinese communists to study Marxism-

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Leninism consistently to overcome bourgeois-capitalist ideologies, realize the emancipation of the proletariat and establish communism (Liu, 1939). After 1949, this meant studying Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and devoting one's life to the task of socialist industrial and cultural modernization.

In a speech titled Train and Select Good Officials, President Xi Jinping (2014) answers the question of what currently constitutes a good government official in terms of political dedication, moral integrity, professional competence and public trust, rather than class struggle. Good officials believe in Marxism, the CCP, economic reform and realizing communism. They are honest and diligent employees who selflessly serve the people and make difficult decisions when necessary. Good officials become even better officials by actively communicating with the people living in their area of jurisdiction, regularly attending Party training sessions, studying Marxism and CCP theories and policies, and being morally upright. The right official for the right job is a good official with the requisite professional competencies. President Xi closed the speech by saying that the CCP should develop a more transparent assessment and responsibility system to ensure that good officials are first trained by the Party and then appointed to the right jobs, and to abolish employment practices based on 'networks' and 'hidden rules'.

Shortly after this speech, the General Office of the Central Committee of the CCP released a document titled Opinions on Strengthening the Recruitment and Management of Party Members in Contemporary Circumstances, followed by another document titled Working Rules for Developing Members of the Chinese Communist Party (General Office, 2013, 2014). Both documents stress the need to ensure the Party's vitality by including new constituencies, for example, young professionals and domestic migrant workers. The documents also stress that members should understand Party theory and policies, and practice the core socialist values. Hence the second document recommends standardizing training for Party applicants and members, and revoking the membership of individuals who have not demonstrated active involvement in approved activities (Zhonggong zhongyang bangongting, 2014).

An examination of recent, local training systems suggests that philanthropy is becoming an accepted way for applicants to increase their chances of becoming a Party member by

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demonstrating community service. People who want to join the CCP must submit an application letter to the secretary of their closest Party branch that demonstrates, via documentation and references, their suitability for consideration of membership, and also explains why they are applying for membership, why they believe in the Communist Party, and outlines areas for personal improvement (Zhejiang University, n.d.). Once the letter is filed, they become ‘active applicants for CCP membership’. Following various training and screening procedures, the local branch meets to decide whether an applicant is a suitable member, or whether to extend or terminate their probation. Successful applicants become official members after taking a ceremonial oath in front of the national flag, a ceremony which the civilized city program actively promotes (Quanguo wenming chengshi (diji yishang), 2018).

The People’s Government of Beijing’s Yongshou Township evaluates applicants annually based on the points acquired for targets centred on four categories, two of which relate to philanthropy. The categories are: (1) learning (involvement in centralized Party training and independent learning); (2) responsibility (completion of work tasks); (3) dedication (volunteering); and (4) advancement (being an exemplary person) (Shishi ‘jifen zhi’ jiaqiang rudang jijifenzi duiwu peiyang, 2014). While the third category explicitly mentions community volunteering, the fourth category can involve large donations to and involvement with government-endorsed charities, and being the recipient of municipal charity and other awards.

The applicant training system even makes philanthropic endeavour a normalized expectation of CCP membership in some areas. A document issued by the Hongwei Village Party branch of Cao County, in Shanghai, indicates that the branch has four membership categories: A-entrepreneurs; B-ordinary members; C-elderly members; and D-those with special circumstances (who are excluded from performance evaluations) (Shanghai jiceng dangjian, 2016). Members in categories A–C are expected to earn annual performance points by variously donating, volunteering and improving the local environment. Members with an outstanding performance record are recognized at Party functions. Conversely, members with low performance rankings have their efforts discussed at branch meetings with the aim of encouraging (or shaming) them to do better, or else their membership will be revoked. The Party branch further ensures that members are visible and accountable participants in local

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affairs by placing identifying plaques on their homes. Some branches only consider applications for Party membership after applicants have demonstrated their willingness to strengthen government-community relations by completing a set number of volunteering hours (Chen, 2018).

Similarly, although Party member volunteering is encouraged rather than mandated in the prefecture-level civilized city assessment system, state-owned enterprises or institutions that want the title of a ‘civilized work-unit’ are now required to have more than 50 per cent of their employees, and greater than 90 per cent of their Party members, involved in Lei Feng volunteering teams (Central Commission, 2017). These teams serve to enhance community welfare and services while commemorating an imagined tradition of Party-inspired philanthropy spanning the PRC’s past and present.

Taken as a whole, these developments reframe the revolutionary-era linchpin of Party legitimacy – the mass-line governmentality that the Party is rooted in the people and serves the people – in terms of concerns with city-based and community-based approaches to governance. Party activists are being trained to connect with members of local communities through philanthropy. They derive ethical authority from being diligent, non-corrupt representatives of the state, and active philanthropists, rather than being revolutionary-thought leaders. Indeed, some jurisdictions have described experiments with ‘people-orientated’ social service provision that combine Party member activism, citizen volunteering, business funding, and the purchasing of services from NGOs, as an innovative and dynamic means of socializing the current goals of Party building by affirming the Party’s basic function and leadership role (Community Centre, Lucheng District, Wenzhou, 2016).

Volunteering is becoming a requirement of government employment in this context, as demonstrated below through a case study of Shenzhen. China’s civil servants are usually CCP members or applicants because membership is a prerequisite for some government positions and promotions. In cities that aspire to be a national model of excellence, large-scale civil servant volunteering has become a common practice for certain periods of time.

Shenzhen – city of volunteers

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This section shows how government practice is being reconfigured on the ground, tying together the emerging strands of governmental reasoning documented in the previous two sections, using an interview-based case study of the volunteering sector in a Chinese megacity. Shenzhen, a city close to Hong Kong, is among the PRC's first 'special economic zones' (SEZs), the longstanding holder of a national civilized city title and home to nearly 1.9 million registered volunteers (SZ boasts 1.86m registered volunteers, 2020). In 1979, the then rural backwater was designated an SEZ and opened to foreign direct investment and private investment. Shenzhen now has a permanent resident population of around 8.5 million people and an estimated total population of 12.5 million people (Huang & Liang, 2019).

Shenzhen has a long history (for a PRC city) of large-scale volunteering, which is connected to the Municipal Government's ongoing involvement in the civilized city program. The PRC's first official volunteering organization – the Shenzhen Volunteer Association (SVA) – was registered with the Shenzhen Civil Affairs Bureau in 1990, under the supervision of the Shenzhen Communist Youth League Committee. Shenzhen's volunteering sector developed thereafter on the basis of two different approaches. The first is a top-down approach wherein municipal Party organizations and government departments request civil servants, university students (as future leaders) and local residents to volunteer to meet national policy objectives. The second is a bottom-up approach, wherein residents register volunteering organizations of their own volition. The sector initially developed slowly because of limited government and public experience. However, by 2004, Shenzhen had around 60,000 volunteers.

The city's volunteering sector developed rapidly after the Central Commission issued provisional assessment criteria for the first national civilized city competition in 2003, with Shenzhen being included on the inaugural list of successful candidates in September 2005 (Zhao, 2011, p. 17). The evaluation criteria stipulated that a civilized city would have a major volunteering organization with extensive citizen participation, demonstrated by 8 per cent of the resident population being registered volunteers (Quanguo wenming chengshi ceping tixi 2005, n.d.). In early 2005, the Shenzhen Municipal People's Congress approved the PRC's first local regulations to promote and normalize volunteering – the Regulations on Volunteer Services in Shenzhen (2005). The Regulations stipulated that all volunteers and volunteering organizations in Shenzhen should register with and report their activities to the SVA, although organizations could recruit volunteers independently. To incentivize volunteering,

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the Regulations instructed news media to publicize volunteering stories, and told Shenzhen-based employers and universities to give preferential treatment to strong candidates with a history of registered volunteering when making hiring and admissions decisions.

Building on these initiatives, in 2011, the Shenzhen Party Committee and Municipal Government proposed that the city should brand itself nationally as a ‘city of volunteers’ (Chen & Yan, 2015), and hosted China’s first national Charity Fair in 2012. The city continues to host that event, which attracts representatives from thousands of domestic not-for-profit organizations to showcase their achievements, share sector expertise and seek project funding.

To boost the ongoing work of ‘civilizing’ Shenzhen, the Shenzhen Spiritual Civilization Office liaises with local Party organs and government departments, encouraging the city’s districts, businesses and residents to meet the evaluation criteria for the civilized city competition. The Office formulates an action plan based on the criteria, and allocates tasks and targets to different government departments. It also engages third-party consultants to conduct monthly and quarterly investigations to evaluate each department’s progress in meeting the set targets and indicators for each round of the competition. According to the Deputy Director of a District-level Spiritual Civilization Office in Shenzhen, ‘every department attaches great importance to this work because the reports are linked to their annual [government performance management] evaluations’ (Interview, 29 March 2020).

The Office also liaises with the Communist Youth League Committee and SVA to meet the evolving volunteering requirements of the civilized city program. These targets increased from 8 per cent of the city’s permanent resident population in 2005 to over 13 per cent in 2018, and are tied to specific policy documents. The 2018 operation manual for evaluating a civilized city at prefecture-level and above states that a civilized city will institutionalize volunteer services, develop a volunteering culture, meet the 13 per cent target, and implement the State Council’s 2017 Volunteer Service Regulations (State Council, 2017). Consistent with these directives, Shenzhen had 1.54 million registered volunteers in 2017 (13 per of the resident population) and 1.86 million registered volunteers in 2020 (nearly 14 per cent) (SZ boasts 1.86m registered volunteers, 2020).

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Unsurprisingly, given this top-down approach, surveys show that Party members and civil servants comprise the largest proportion of registered volunteers in Shenzhen (34 per cent). The second largest group is corporate employees at 28 per cent, followed by students at 14 per cent (Chen & Yan, 2015). In other words, Shenzhen's huge number of volunteers is largely a function of demand from government-initiated projects.

Party members are mobilized through government departments and related workplaces to volunteer for designated activities, such as local traffic control, environmental improvements and staffing U stations (information stands in residential communities, recreational venues and tourist sites) (Interview, employee, District-level Party Personnel Department, Shenzhen, 9 April 2020). Shenzhen's U stations were introduced in 2011 to support and brand the city's hosting of the 26th Universiade, an international multi-sport event involving university athletes. Party members and civil servants staffed the stations initially with the aim of attracting broader public participation for an ongoing service (Interview, cadre, Work Committee for Municipal Organization of the CCP Shenzhen Municipal Committee, 12 April 2020). Applicants for Party membership from Shenzhen University are motivated to participate in such activities because they must complete 40 hours of volunteering as part of their application process (Interview, Professor, Shenzhen University, 6 April 2020).

The Work Committee for Municipal Organization of the CCP Shenzhen Municipal Committee coordinates and recognizes civil servant volunteering. In 2011, the Committee designated December 15 as the first of an annual Civil Servant Volunteering Day. Among other activities, civil servants wear identifying 'blue vests' as they direct traffic and pedestrian crossing at major road intersections, bus stations and subway stations. The Committee records the names of volunteers and grades their involvement based on the amount of time an individual volunteers, and sometimes using residents' feedback. Volunteers who distinguish themselves receive certificates at the end of each year (Interview, cadre, 12 April 2020).

Street-level government administration offices and residents' committees also help meet targets by mobilizing local residents to participate in community volunteering (Interview, Deputy Director, District-level Spiritual Civilization Office, Shenzhen, 29 March 2020). Residents' committees are ostensibly self-governing grassroots organizations that have been

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revitalized since the 2000s via a policy of building neighbourhood communities. They act as a conduit between local residential communities, Party branches and government offices. Community volunteering activities typically support disadvantaged and vulnerable people, for example, rural-to-urban migrant workers, the elderly and people living with disabilities.

Shenzhen's top-down approach to developing volunteer services has advantages and disadvantages. It legitimizes the not-for-profit sector by creating a legal framework for the sector to operate within, albeit in largely government-defined ways. To cite the Head of one Shenzhen-based volunteering organization:

In the early days, many volunteering organizations in Shenzhen were not officially registered and had no legal status. Now, the city pays more attention to this issue and organizations can register directly with the Department of Civil Affairs. In recent years, most volunteering organizations have obtained legal status. (Interview, 28 March 2020)

It also raises local government and public awareness of volunteering and community needs. Notably, it offers civil servants and Party members an established channel to participate, alongside other volunteers, in community-based charitable activities and to provide social services for local residents. This generates some positive reputational effects for Party organs and government departments flowing from enhanced individual experience and personal satisfaction. As one civil servant explained:

When I first started working in Shenzhen, I didn't know anything about volunteering. It was only when the Party Committee started to organize activities that I began to understand this concept. Now, in my spare time, I often join a volunteering organization to donate books to children living in poverty. This is purely self-motivated to help people in need. I feel very happy doing it. (Interview, 2 April 2020)

As a self-employed worker also explained:

Shenzhen is the most fanatical city for volunteering in China. My wife is a registered volunteer with the District Volunteer Service Team under the Shenzhen Volunteer Association. I volunteer for activities organized by the school that our child attends. I think volunteering not only benefits society, but also helps with my social life and sense of self-fulfillment. (Interview, 6 April 2020)

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But Shenzhen's volunteering sector faces sustainability challenges. Citizen-created organizations in particular often lack access to a secure source of finances and volunteers. In China, only public foundations are permitted to fundraise from public donations. Most organizations depend on irregular financing from government tenders, corporate donations or foundation grants. As the Head of one such organization in Shenzhen explained:

The volunteering organization was founded by people who are concerned with environmental protection. My husband's company is the main source of funding, which means that the organization's survival is tied to the success of the business. We are trying to diversify funding by applying to provide government-purchased services, but it is not easy. (Interview, 28 March 2020).

Limited access to funds means that many citizen-organized volunteering organizations lack professional management staff and face high turnover in volunteers. High turnover rates typically imply limited personal resources or unsatisfactory experiences. In the words of one self-employed volunteer:

With family and children, sometimes it is difficult to find the time to do volunteering work. People volunteer more when they don't need to worry about money and have a lot of time. (Interview, Shenzhen, 6 April 2020)

These problems perpetuate a weaker culture of self-organized volunteering when compared to government-organized volunteering, although the latter approach faces similar challenges. Reflecting Shenzhen's history of top-down volunteering, many registered volunteers do not engage in regular volunteering, and volunteer only when mobilized by Party/government organs. To cite a civil servant:

Our department regularly organizes Party members to carry out volunteering activities. Usually everyone participates, although there is no punishment for not participating. But there are always some people who participate in a perfunctory way. (Interview, 2 April 2020)

As a Shenzhen-based academic concluded:

Initiatives such as making Shenzhen a civilized and volunteering city have meant that Party members and government departments are heavily involved in the city's volunteer services. At the same time, although the overall number of volunteers in Shenzhen is increasing, the number of middle-aged and elderly volunteers is

increasing relative to the number of younger volunteers because of the city's aging population of permanent residents. This situation is contributing to the declining vitality of volunteer services. (Interview, Shenzhen Academy of Social Sciences, 12 April 2020)

The solution proposed by people with responsibility for organizing Party member and civil servant volunteering is to professionalize and improve Party-led and government-led volunteering, not to curtail it. According to a cadre with the Work Committee for Municipal Organization of the CCP Shenzhen Municipal Committee:

We recognize the limitations of current civil servant volunteering activities. In the future, we will no longer require civil servants only to perform physical activities such as cleaning [local areas] and maintaining traffic order. We will use their expertise to develop more diverse and professional volunteer services. (Interview, 12 April 2020).

To cite a member of a Shenzhen District-level Party Personnel Department:

We know that organizing Party members to participate in a uniform fashion in volunteer services in streets and communities can have comparatively superficial results. In the future, we plan to encourage distinguished volunteers to join the Party, get motivated members to participate voluntarily in activities that interest them and strengthen Party leadership within volunteering organizations. (Interview, 9 April 2020)

In short, there is an expectation that sufficient numbers of Party members and civil servants will develop the motivation, experience and skills required to manage institutionalized volunteer services that meet public needs in a sustainable and dynamic fashion. This expectation is likely to result in further changes to conditions of Party membership and government employment, in order to better manage the city-citizen matrix and socialize governing officials in desired ways.

Concluding remarks

This paper documents a significant change in government practice in the PRC, using multiple sources of documentary and empirical evidence about the rise of the not-for-profit sector, including government policies, Communist Party training/assessment systems, and an

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interview-based case study of the volunteering sector in a Chinese mega-city. Since the 2000s, the Chinese Communist Party has reframed the idea of building spiritual civilization in terms of promoting national values and a civic culture, and fused the development of that culture with philanthropy. This has resulted in new legislation to rapidly expand the indigenous not-for-profit sector to support national and global development goals such as eradicating poverty and protecting the environment. The national civilized city competition dovetails with these goals by creating modern cities populated by civic-minded citizens, and encouraging volunteering and extensive public service advertising about vaunted Chinese-socialist values.

The promotion of institutionalized volunteering by the Central Commission, which is enshrined in President Xi Jinping's doctrine of 'advancing socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era', also requires Communist Party members and civil servants to play a vanguard role in expanding registered community-based volunteering. Such volunteering has enabled national and local government experiments aimed at improving social service provision. It also aims to secure the Communist Party's continued vitality by putting the Party back in touch with 'the people' at the community level, and by helping the PRC government meet its objectives of improving the natural environment, creating civic minded citizens, achieving universal modest prosperity and societal harmony.

Philanthropy may appear a strange means to energize the Communist Party and social governance at first glance, especially because it is equated with the non-governmental sector in liberal political thought. But, viewed from a governmentality perspective, the rise of the PRC's not-for-profit sector demonstrates a radical transformation in the arts and architecture of government in China. It reflects a large-scale shift towards governing through economic entrepreneurship, civilized cities and civic-minded citizens, rather than a shift towards less government. Hence future research could examine how the ethical ideal of modest universal prosperity is being translated in practice in China through diverse government interventions aiming to create a mutually reinforcing circularity between economic and social development, rather than using western conceptions of civil society and the welfare state as yardsticks for analysis. Such research could also explore how government and other reflections on the limitations of such interventions are creating, rather than necessarily constraining, new governing practices, forms of social organization and citizenship capacities.

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Author(s) biography

DENG Guosheng is Professor and Vice Dean at the School of Public Policy and Management, Tsinghua University, China. His research interests include NGO management, philanthropy and social innovation. For a recent example, see **Deng, G-S. & Jeffreys, E.** (2019). Celebrity philanthropy in China: Reconfiguring government and non-government roles in national development. *China Quarterly*, 237, 217–240.

Elaine Jeffreys is Professor in International Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Technology Sydney. Recent books include: *Governing HIV in China* (2018, Routledge); *New Mentalities of Government in China* (2016, Routledge); *Sex in China* (2015, Polity); and *Celebrity Philanthropy* (2015, Intellect).