The Civil Society and Public Sphere Debate: Western Reflections on Chinese Political Culture

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Why have Western historians devoted so much attention recently to the question of civil society and the public sphere in China? A special panel on "Civil Society in People's China" was organized at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in New Orleans during April 1991.[1] Several papers (Kuhn, 1991; Strand, 1991) were devoted to this same topic a month later in Paris at the American-European Symposium on State vs. Society in East Asian Traditions. In November 1991, a forum was held at the Wilson Center in Washington to discuss the question: "Did China Ever Enjoy a Civil Society?"[2] The issue continued to be the subject of intense debate at the Berkeley-Fudan conference on China's efforts at modernization held in Shanghai in May-June 1992.[3] And, finally, in October 1992, there was a symposium in Montreal under the aegis of the Joint European-American Committee on Cooperation in East Asian Studies entirely devoted to the civil society/public sphere question and focused on places of assembly and discussion, media for the circulation of ideas, and the role of intellectuals.

CIVIL SOCIETY VERSUS THE STATE

The most obvious explanation for this Western—and mainly American—interest in asking whether or not we can speak of "civil

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society" or a "public sphere" in China has to do with the political events of 1989, starting with the Beijing Spring and the Tiananmen Massacre and culminating with the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Long before *glasnost* and *perestroika* began in the former Soviet Union, the search had been on for signs of civil society in Eastern Europe, and especially in Poland where Solidarity and the Catholic church appeared to offer institutional forms of association for social movements directed against the state's monopoly of political activity.[4] Charles Taylor recently explained the significance of this use of the term *civil society*.[5]

> In societies suffering under Leninist tyranny, it articulated the hopes of those fighting to open spaces of freedom. Originally, when the chances of doing away with these power structures altogether seemed remote, the notion "civil society" expressed a programme of building independent forms of social life from below, free from state tutelage. This was the thinking current in the Solidarity movement in Poland, for instance, in the early '80s [Taylor, 1990: 95].

According to this view, citizens in Eastern Europe were eventually able to wrest authority from their dictatorial regimes, because they already had created civil society: "an arena of independent associational activity, free from state interference" (Perry and Fuller, 1991: 663). Conversely, the "anticlimactic outcome" of the Chinese democratic movement was attributed to the absence of civil society: no dissident intellectual circles, no Catholic church, no autonomous labor unions, no old democratic parties (Cheek, 1992: 127). "China [was] pictured as devoid of the institutional stage upon which the revolutions of 1989 were played out elsewhere in the communist world" (Perry and Fuller, 1991: 663).

CIVIL SOCIETY IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

This is not to say that Western social scientists failed to find any signs at all of incipient civil society in contemporary China (Perry and Fuller, 1991: 681).[6] As long as they distinguished between civil society

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of this article. Especially helpful were the suggestions made by Kwang-Kuo Hwang, Elizabeth Perry, and Wen-hsin Yeh.

in the Marxist sense of a realm of nongovernmental private economic activities, and civil society in the European liberal sense of "political society," then Western observers could find in the economic reforms of the 1980s signs of the reemergence of civil society as a realm of non-state economic groups (Yang, 1989: 59; Solinger, 1991: 1-5, 26-30).

> Encouraged by the economic reforms to become more prosperous, enterprises in China increasingly are seeking relief from the society-wide functions they serve for the state and from state administrative linkages. As they gain autonomy from the state, relations of exchange between economic corporate groups increasingly tend to take place without the vertical mediation of hierarchical administrative channels. Thus the horizontal integration of civil society is enhanced in the economic sphere and civil society begins to detach itself from the state [Yang, 1989: 59].

One important sign of this supposed reemergence of civil society was the appearance of organizations such as the Institute for the Study of the Development of Agricultural Economy, the Institute for the Study of Reforms in Economic Structure, and even the Beijing Stone Group Corporation, which purported to be autonomous spokesmen for society (Tsou, 1990: 22-24). As Wan Runnan, president of the Stone Group Corporation, recently explained,

> Precisely because of this individual development of the Stone Corporation in China, we could exert tremendous influence upon many aspects of Chinese life. For example, because we developed this private entrepreneurship, many of the work units in China, the *danwei*, came to us for help. They would ask us to sponsor dance troupes, singing concerts, Go tournaments, or even swimming races. We were able to influence a large part of Chinese society. Our influence also extended to the arena of education in China. Many primary and high school teachers would come to us asking for money to renovate their educational facilities. This is very significant for they realized that they did not have to beg for money from the central government. Instead they could come to us and get help. We gave them sponsorship: with it the energy and creativity generated from this private support was enormous. To ordinary Westerners this kind of economic development and relationship between enterprises and civil society is probably looked upon as normal. But in China all these aspects of Chinese life had been controlled by the central communist government before. So private sponsorship was very new to people [Wan, 1992: 2].

In fact, their independent and semiprivate status was ambiguous and partial, because in order to function at all, they had to be registered with the government.[7] But they did nevertheless between 1986 and June 1989 conduct a series of large-scale surveys that were then presented as "public opinion" following the Thirteenth Party Congress of October 1987. General Secretary Zhao Ziyang, in his report to the congress, emphasized the need for public opinion to play a "supervisory role," and the Chinese press increasingly featured the results of these surveys as evidence of the public's response to government policies (Rosen, 1989: 158-159, 163-164).

THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Nonetheless, this form of somewhat queasily tolerated public opinion was a considerable distance from the public sphere idealized by the German social philosopher, Jürgen Habermas.

> By "public sphere" we mean first of all a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open in principle to all citizens. . . . Citizens act as a public when they deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion; thus with the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicize their opinions freely [Habermas, 1991: 398].

As an ideal type, Habermas's public sphere may seem remote from most social reality, but it is still closely linked to the liberal conception of civil society both as a teleology and as a praxis.[8] Philip Huang notes,

> In the context of Western European history, Habermas' study of the rise of the public sphere is tantamount to a study of the roots of democracy (and of its subsequent degeneration or "structural transformation"). He is talking not just about the difference between a public and a private realm, but rather about those two realms in the context of another juxtaposition: the state versus civil society. For him the two pairs of concepts interpenetrate. Indeed, it is his simultaneous use of them that gives his work its analytic power. From the standpoint of the roots of democracy, it was not merely the expansion of the public realm of life that was crucial, but rather its expansion in the context of the assertion of civic power against state power. It is in such a context that we need

> to understand Habermas' references to the "*public sphere of civil society*" [Huang, 1991: 320-321; the reference is to Habermas, 1989].

For Habermas, as for Marx, the emergence of civil society and its attendant public sphere was inextricably connected to the emergence of the bourgeoisie. That linkage alone fixes both ideal types in a particular historical setting; and if we allow ourselves to be hobbled by teleology, then neither concept is going to fit the Chinese case very well. But as terms of social practice, which can be gingerly universalized, civil society and public sphere may afford a better understanding of recent events in China.

When, on April 17, 1989, the students of Beijing did take to the streets, these incipient elements of civil society failed to come together in a sustained and organized way. Even though one eminent political scientist has described the demonstrators as "the advanced elements of a submerged civil society suddenly emerging to the surface," there was a considerable contrast to Poland, where organized labor became a "virtual opposition party" (Tsou, 1990: 44). City dwellers and workers in Beijing during the student rebellion were simply unable to mount a movement of their own.

> Blue- and white-collar workers either participated spontaneously in student-led actions or formed themselves into small bands who left their offices and factories to march under banners naming their place of work. At least one autonomous organization of industrial workers, the "Capital Independent Workers' Union," publicly announced its formation, but we have little evidence to suggest that it was able to build a significant membership or to coordinate work actions in support of the student protests [Walder, 1989: 35].

According to one Western sociologist, "It is tempting, but misleading, to characterize Beijing's popular rebellion as a movement by 'society' against the 'state' " (Walder, 1989: 40).[9] Rather than being like the decadè-long struggle of Solidarity, the events in Beijing in 1989 were more like the rebellion of 1956 in Hungary.

> China's ordinary citizens did not organize to force themselves onto the political stage; they used an opportunity created initially by students, and then opened wider first by the rebellion of intellectuals and later by the defection of key parts of the government apparatus and the media [Walder, 1989: 40].

HISTORICAL SOURCES OF CHINESE CIVIL SOCIETY

Western social scientists who nonetheless still wished to identify elements of civil society in post-Maoist China either had to locate them in movements instead of institutions (Sullivan, 1990: 13),[10] or else argue that there had reappeared, within the interstices of China's market reforms, preexisting elements of civil society present long before the rise of the Leninist state (Tsou, 1990: 7, 13; Strand, 1990a: 25).

> A distinct pre-modern civil society existed in the form of corporate groups and voluntary associations: guilds, native place associations, clans and lineages, surname associations, neighborhood associations, and religious groupings such as temple societies, deity cults, monasteries, and secret societies. Perhaps the most important shared principle of these organizations was that they were formed outside of, or independent of, the state [Yang, 1989: 35-36].

This identification by contemporary Western social scientists of premodern Chinese civil society with the corporate groups and voluntary associations of the late Qing and Republican periods corresponds with, and is corroborated by, the research of a rising generation of social historians who have found "long-term structural process more intellectually interesting that the short-term effects of foreign contact" (Kuhn, 1991: 2). These historians have fundamentally challenged the assertion of Max Weber that China's failure to develop capitalism was owing to the absence of urban political autonomy and to the dominance of particularistic attachments to native-place kith and kin (Rowe, 1984: 4-5).[11]

Although a growing number of Western scholars have contributed to this reevaluation of late imperial and modern Chinese society, I will focus here mainly upon the work of William T. Rowe, whose two superbly researched studies of Hankou in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have been aptly regarded as milestones in the new social history of Chinese cities.

THE CASE FOR HANKOU

Of all the revisionists, Rowe has diverged most emphatically from the Weberian depiction of China, which he called in passing a "myth"

(Rowe, 1984: 10). In his first book, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889* (1984), Rowe especially emphasized the administrative autonomy and municipal identity of the city's guilds.

> Despite its many officials, Hankow was able to escape the heavy-handed bureaucratic domination posited by Weber. Guilds and other voluntary associations (such as benevolent halls) became progressively more powerful, but they did not necessarily do so at the expense of the rest of the urban population. Rather, such groups increasingly sought to identify their interests with those of a broader urban community and to devise methods of broad, extrabureaucratic coordination to achieve communal goals [Rowe, 1984: 10].

The city of Hankou, which is characterized by Rowe as "the highest expression of indigenous urbanism achieved before China's first assimilation of European cultural norms," was classified by the Qing government as an administrative subprefecture (*zhen*) (Rowe, 1984: 17). "This tradition of discrete urban administration seems to have bequeathed to the city a sense of itself as a separate political entity, and thus to have fostered the development of an incipient 'urban autonomy'" (Rowe, 1984: 38). Although Hankou was a city mainly settled by immigrants from other provinces, its residents shared a strong "locational identity" with other fellow urbanites (Rowe, 1984: 338). And although Hankou did not have a formal grant or municipal charter from the government, Rowe claims that its guilds and guild federations eventually functioned as though they did.

> In nineteenth-century Hankow, it seems, there was an unusually wide gap between de jure and de facto systems of political authority. Thus a substantial degree of de facto autonomy had emerged, with real power balanced between officials and the leaders of local society; over the course of the century the balance shifted very much toward the latter [Rowe, 1984: 339].

Not only was there little or no government intervention in Hankou's municipal business, according to Rowe; there were only "a few instances in which prefects actually intervened in the city's affairs; nearly all involved local projects or crises of some magnitude" (Rowe, 1984: 31). Moreover, "a great deal of urban administration at the level below the centrally appointed bureaucrats was in the hands of gentry managers (*shen-tung*) and gentry deputies (*wei-yuan*)" (Rowe, 1984:

36). This was especially true after the Taiping Rebellion when merchant groups took on municipal functions.[12]

The most important group of merchants in pre-Taiping Hankou were the salt merchants. These 200 *yunshang* (transport merchants) from Huizhou (Anhui) and not Hankou itself, held hereditary licenses to particular salt distribution routes under the *gangfa* system. The Hankou salt trade was officially administered by the Hubei provincial salt *daotai*, appointed by the Board of Revenue and to whom the salt firms' "head merchant" reported. According to Rowe, the head merchant was "selected by the transport merchants from among themselves" to arbitrate conflicts and represent the merchants before the imperial authorities. "Although he was ostensibly under the supervision of the salt taotai, the head merchant exercised a tremendous degree of independent power because of the financial resources he controlled" (Rowe, 1984: 99-100).

Those resources included the "coffer funds" (*xiafei*) of a common merchant treasury, financed by a surcharge on each salt transaction, that was ostensibly used for philanthropic contributions, famine relief, militia costs, and that was frequently misused for bribes, embezzlement, entertainment, the formation of a huge patronage network by hiring friends and relatives as salt administration personnel, and so on (Rowe, 1984: 95-96). The Hankou salt trade as a whole, whether official or illicit, "financed in large part the social welfare machinery upon which the urban poor (and at times their rural counterparts) depended for their very survival" (Rowe, 1984: 97).

> In the century or so before the Taiping Rebellion, the salt merchants constituted the financially and culturally dominant stratum in local society. These merchants as a group exercised enormous influence through their collective treasury, disbursements from which were used to provide famine relief, to finance local defense, and increasingly to underwrite regular local philanthropic activities. The implicit political power that this collective wealth gave the salt merchants was augmented considerably around the turn of the nineteenth century, when the White Lotus Rebellion debilitated the central administration, and merchants were forced to assume a larger share of local government and its costs. In retrospect, we can identify in this period of simultaneous merchant prosperity and administrative fiscal distress the beginnings of a new pattern of private (i.e. nonbureaucratic) initiative in the management of urban public affairs. Throughout the pre-Taiping pe-

> riod, the Hankow merchants' formal superiors in the Liang-Huai administration fought a generally losing battle to bring their independent power under control [Rowe, 1984: 119].

In 1849, on the eve of the Taiping Rebellion, Liang-Huai Salt Commissioner Lu Jianying replaced the 200-year-old gangfa system in the Huai-nan salt zone, which incorporated Hankou, with a new *piaofa* or ticket system designed to attract a larger number of small investors. Between 1860 and 1863, when Hankou was again securely in imperial hands, Governor-General Guanwen instituted a "sales management bureau" (*duxiao ju*) in Hankou. In 1863, Zeng Guofan made this Hankou office a "general superintendency" (*duxiao zongju*) to set prices, collect duties, and prevent smuggling; and the *piao* system was reintroduced. The "new tickets" (*xinpiao*) were made available at a more modest price to approximately 600 merchants who could now buy salt in Yangzhou, pay their taxes there in exchange for a certificate that would get them through the customs barriers, and then ship the salt back to Hankou for exclusive sale there. Also, Zeng authorized non-Huai salt imports from Sichuan and Guangdong but at a higher tariff than Liang-Huai salt, which was collected at entry points into the Huai-nan area.

> All reports indicate that the new class of salt shippers that entered the trade in the early Reconstruction years evolved over the course of the next half century into a secure and privileged elite, but they were a more diverse group than their prerebellion counterparts [Rowe, 1984: 119].

Altogether, "both pre- and post-Taiping decades were marked by a dramatic loss of bureaucratic control over the conduct of the trade" (Rowe, 1984: 119). And when control was exercised by the Hubei Provincial Bureau it was benevolent and supportive of commerce, which was regarded by the authorities as a primary source of government revenue (Rowe, 1984: 181). Thanks to a "general trend toward social and economic pluralism," the post-Taiping Hankou world of commerce "had come to look very like the familiar Western conception of preindustrial, urban, commercial capitalist society" (Rowe, 1984: 120-121).

As a municipality, Hankou also seemed to have a lot "in common with early modern European cities," including "the steady develop-

ment of organized, corporate-style civic action and the proliferation of a wide range of philanthropic and public-service institutions, designed to meet the unprecedented and specifically urban social problems faced by cities in the early modern period" (Rowe, 1989: 3, 5). There did remain a basic difference between an "early modern" Chinese city such as Hankou and its European equivalents: namely, a lower level of social protest in the former thanks to "the compelling strength of the Chinese urban community" (Rowe, 1989: 6). This "highly institutionalized sense of urban community" was owing mainly "to the initiative of the local society itself, especially but not exclusively that of the urban elite" (Rowe, 1989: 346).

This is the primary substance of Rowe's assertions in these two important books. Are these claims supported by the evidence he himself introduces to support this picture of an early modern urban landscape complete with public sphere and even an approximate civil society?

TESTING THE HANKOU CASE

Let us start with the simple definition of Hankou as a "city." As Rowe himself tells us, Hankou was never before 1900 classed as a city (*cheng*). It had no city god, no bell tower, no drum tower. It did not even have a city wall until 1860, and that was an ad hoc construction designed for momentary local defense (Rowe, 1984: 30). It was an entrepot: a city of mixed origins inhabited by immigrants and sojourners.

Rowe stresses the way in which merchant guilds "increasingly sought to identify their interests with those of a broader urban community" (Rowe, 1984: 10). The two largest groups of merchants, however, were sojourners. The pre-Taiping salt merchants were from Huizhou, and many of the post-Taiping salt dealers were from other parts of China. The city's tea dealers after 1861 were "non-native merchants: Cantonese and Ningpoese in the overseas trade or Shansi men in the ever-expanding Russian trade" (Rowe, 1984: 133). A number of them were compradores who worked for foreign firms. Some of these nonnative tea dealers moved their homes to Hankou, "but the majority continued to live in Canton or Shanghai during the off-season" (Rowe, 1984: 134). The really big export tea dealers "were

invariably non-natives" and they "set up shop in Hankow only during the few months when foreign buyers were in the city" (Rowe, 1984: 134). Moreover, "both broker and buyer at Hankow were likely to be branch managers of Shanghai-based firms" (Rowe, 1984: 135). The guilds they formed in Hankou after the tea trade opened in 1861 were native-place associations. In the 1860s, there were six tea guilds (*bang*) in Hankou, "each constituted along provincial lines" (Rowe, 1984: 137). When they amalgamated into a single *gongsuo*, that central guild was still referred to formally as the "Six Provincial Guilds" (*Liubang*). Moreover, the new gongsuo was itself a kind of satellite to the headquarters' tea guild established in 1868 in Shanghai. Xu Run, the comprador for Dent and Company, reported,

> In this year [of 1868] the tea guild (*kung-so*) was founded at Shanghai. . . . A tea guild was also set up at Hankow. Sheng Heng-shan, Chang Yin-pin, and others were publicly selected from among the various tea merchants of Hunan, Hupeh, Kiangsi, and Kwangtung to collaborate with the officers of the Shanghai guild in regulating trade [Rowe, 1984: 137-138].

That one of the two major Hankou guilds was actually an organization founded by sojourners under the supervision of Shanghai compradores severely undercuts the assertion that these merchants' local activities epitomized endogenous Chinese urban autonomy and municipal identity. Professor Rowe insists that "it seems unlikely" that the Hankou guild was "manipulated by a downriver parent organization," but the fact remains that the city's most powerful guild ("almost omnipotent," the *North-China Herald* declared in 1886) was run by outsiders who were not even permanent residents of the city (Rowe, 1984: 138).

Similarly, Hankou's Financial Guild (Hankou qianye gongsuo), which was founded in 1871, was a collaboration between Hubei, Zhejiang, Anhui, and Jiangxi banking groups, each of which had their own provincial guild (*bang*).[13] The gongsuo was collectively known as the "four *bang*" down into the Republican period, strongly suggesting that provincial identity was still foremost among these financial sojourners (Rowe, 1984: 171).

In an interesting chapter on "Local Origin in an Immigrant City," Rowe sought to amend the view long held by Weberians that Chinese cities were composed of sojourners whose primary loyalties were to

native places somewhere else. Rowe argued that there was no reason to assume

> that the identification of a Chinese urban dweller with his native place—what may be termed his "native identity"—in any way precluded the development of a conception of himself as a full member of the community to which he had immigrated or in which he sojourned—what I would term his "locational identity" [Rowe, 1984: 250].

By using the neologism, "locational identity," Rowe hoped to show that one's identity as a Cantonese or Ningboese in no way precluded feeling also that one was a "Hankow man" (*Hankou ren*). He even argued in his second book on Hankou's "Community and Conflict" that the multiethnic quality of the city produced an unusually high level of cultural tolerance, although he quickly added that "this in no way, of course, precluded interethnic conflicts. . . . " (Rowe, 1989: 27).

And indeed it did not. Anhui guildsmen and Hunan guildsmen litigated over the use of the latter's pier in 1888, and when the local magistrate found in favor of Anhui, a Hunanese mob smashed his sedan chair to bits. Huizhou guildsmen tried to keep local peddlers away from their guildhall, while the Shanxi-Shaanxi Guildhall leaders burned a fire lane through squatter's huts at their back gate. Fights between individuals frequently escalated into brawls between groups of compatriots. Cantonese fought the notoriously unruly Hubei natives at the annual Dragon Boat races, which had to be banned (Rowe, 1989: 198-204). Rowe argued that such intense and pervasive ethnic conflict was not a sign of weakness or failure of community appeals. Invoking Georg Simmel and Lewis Coser, he maintained that "conflict is the necessary complement to cooperation, providing a safety valve for routine tensions, as well as establishing and maintaining impersonal norms and rules of behavior by system participants" (Rowe, 1989: 216). Yet he went on to describe an urban landscape that was repeatedly riven by murderous interethnic gang fights often devoted to protecting labor rights that were "a routine cause of violence" (Rowe, 1989: 237). The result, for this reader at least, is a certain amount of cognitive dissonance.

The same sort of dissonance, incidentally, is conveyed by David Strand's attempt to depict the street battles between Beijing guildsmen in the 1920s as a form of "state building."

> This contentious process resembled state building in miniature. When one considers that fully developed guilds performed a range of quasi-governmental functions, the resemblance becomes less an analogy than a description of the development of extensive local commitment to the management, control, and representation of city residents. Even when workers and residents resisted incorporation into city-wide bodies and uneven or aborted development resulted, the terms of the struggle forced those involved to be conscious of power as it was constituted beyond the confines of neighborhood and workplace [Strand, 1989: 154].

By way of illustration, Strand presents a colorful *tableau vivant* of the combative factionalism of the capital during the Beiyang Republic. The blind storytellers guild was divided into inner- and outer-city factions that fought among themselves repeatedly. The water trade guild was divided between Shandong, Baoding, and Beijing factions, and the police had to break up the brawls among them for control of the union and of the potable water trade. Grain-milling workers in 1925 were divided between a faction based upon the eastern and southern suburbs and another one representing the northern and western suburbs. They too used violence against each other in conflicts "often centered on leadership struggles among rival factions based on personal followings, territory, and sub-ethnic identity" (Strand, 1989: 151). Can we justifiably liken this "contentious process" to "state building in miniature"?

By the same token, is it possible to accept William Rowe's claim that in late nineteenth-century Hankou a "highly institutionalized sense of community" mitigated community conflict? How do we square his statement that "Hankow was a violent and contentious place" with the simultaneous assertion that the city enjoyed a "comparative social calm" (Rowe, 1989: 280, 346)? On the one hand, we learn that Hankou was a "leadership center" for heterodox organizations; that in 1880, the authorities discovered a training camp and arsenal for a sectarian army within the city; that Buddhist millenarians almost launched an uprising in Hankou in 1883 to overthrow the dynasty and usher in a new social age; that the *Gelao hui* (Society of Elder Brothers) helped lead the widespread Yangzi riots of 1891 there; and, of course, that the Revolution of 1911 initially broke out in Wuchang, Hankou, and Hanyang (Rowe, 1989: 158, 160, 263-267, 276). On the other hand, we are told that most of these activities were

perpetrated by outside agitators and that genuine Hankou residents ("citizens") resisted such outsiders and "violence of a premeditated ideological sort" (Rowe, 1989: 280).

Needless to say, such a strong sense of community would correspond to an equally strong feeling of municipal autonomy. Rowe claimed that Hankou did seem to enjoy an "incipient 'urban autonomy' "; but he quickly went on to qualify this assertion.

> A major factor that prevented this autonomy from being realized, say early in the nineteenth century, was the care taken by the bureaucratic administration to keep Hankow under its control. The city had an unusual number of officials. . . . So long as the Ch'ing bureaucracy chose to monopolize political authority within Hankow, it was probably capable of doing so [Rowe, 1984: 38].

Hankou was, in other words, a highly policed and administered city—a major entrepot completely under the official thumb of the government.

Rowe's introductory remarks notwithstanding, the Hanyang prefect's intervention in the city's affairs was more than for crises. In his own footnote, Rowe cited as examples of prefectural involvement the establishment of harbor lifeboat services, the construction of a city wall, and regulation of the examinations. He also mentioned that after 1862 the prefect served as assistant superintendent of Maritime Customs at Hankou. The jurisdiction of his subprefect (*tongzhi*) was coterminous with the zhen—the subprefect and an assistant subprefect (*tongpan*) being responsible for law enforcement and public security throughout the city. Meanwhile, the Hanyang magistrate consistently involved himself in the "entire spectrum of urban concerns in Hankow," and three of his subordinates, including a deputy submagistrate in charge of maintaining harbor facilities and water control, were stationed in the city (Rowe, 1984: 32, 354).

The "gentry managers" whom they directed were usually "expectant officials" (*houbu*), who constituted a new stratum in the late nineteenth century, given the crush on office because of the massive selling of degrees. Expectant officials were clearly part of the official world, especially after the Taiping Rebellion, when

> a type of functionally specific management unit known as the *chü* (bureau) began to appear in many areas of urban governance in the

> postrebellion decades; it seems to have been a carry-over into the civil sphere of the military staff offices familiar to Hu Lin-i, Kuan-wen, and other Restoration officials from their anti-Taiping campaigns [Rowe, 1984: 35].

In Hankou, this included a Lijin Bureau, an Official Ferry Bureau, a Baojia Bureau, and a Telegraph Bureau.

> Gradually the various bureaus in each locality were merged into a single, multifunctional bureau responsible for all revenue from commercial sources, as well as for the patronage of local trade and local commercial interests. Each local bureau was headed by a "gentry deputy" (*shen-yuan, wei-shen*) and staffed by "upright gentry" (*kung-cheng shih-shen*) drawn from the locality itself. All such personnel, however, were selected and periodically evaluated at the provincial level, and indeed the whole structure was clearly oriented toward provincial, not local, rule [Rowe, 1984: 201].

At the top of the structure was the Hubei Provincial Bureau for Salt, Tea, Brokerage, and Lijin Matters, which had a large staff of holders of brevet and expectant official ranks under a board of directors that included the provincial treasurer, the provincial judge, the provincial grain daotai, the Wuchang daotai, and the Hankou daotai. The bureau's main purposes were to oversee revenue collection and support merchants (Rowe, 1984: 199-203).

The salt market's profits "underwrote the cultural life of the town" (Rowe, 1984: 97). Yet this source of Hankou's revenue was not generated by an independent commerce controlled by autonomous merchants; it was the product of a state monopoly conducted by official state agents or merchants who bought into a tightly controlled government monopoly that momentarily designated them as state brokers. The most important group of merchants in pre-Taiping days, the salt "transport merchants" under the gangfa system, "were virtually accorded the status of government officials."[14]

> The political influence of the Liang-Huai merchants was based . . . on their status as quasi-governmental officials (*i-shang-i-kuan*). Although the merchants purchased their salt outright at Yangchow and resold it for a profit at Hankow, these transactions were formally viewed as little more than internal accounting procedures between agencies of the imperial administration, and until the salt left the Hankow depot in the hands of the *shui-fan* [water trader] it was considered to be government

> property (*kuan-yen*). Similarly, the warehouses and other facilities of the Hankow salt market, which were in fact the collective property of the transport merchants, were officially held to lie in the public domain, as were the funds covering the depot's operating budget [Rowe, 1984: 99].

The head merchant who was supposedly selected by the merchants to represent them and who had "a tremendous degree of independent power" was actually much more like a Tang official merchant broker whose selection was determined by the officials to whom he reported (Fujii, 1954: 87-88, cited in Rowe, 1984: 364-365). And the evidence that Rowe presents to demonstrate the degree of his "independent power" was a case of corruption in which the head merchant traveled to Beijing in order to forestall a censorial indictment by bribing capital officials (Rowe, 1984: 100). Needless to say, Ho Ping-ti long ago, in his classic study of the Yangzhou salt merchants, made perfectly clear how vulnerable these Anhui merchants were to official "squeeze" and extortions (Ho, 1954). Their "licenses," in effect, were personal privileges granted by officials who had constantly to be bribed and cozened. That this translated into "influence" is undeniable, but it was the influence of rent payers vis-à-vis gatekeepers and certainly not the "independent power" of autonomous municipal burghers.

The xiafei (coffer funds), for example, were actually an official entry item used not only for the Hankou salt gabelle but to refer to any miscellaneous item in Qing official budgets (Rowe, 1984: 365). It was not a fund controlled by the salt merchants in general but by the officially appointed head merchant in particular, and in collusion with the salt daotai whose office appointed the "superfluous personnel" supposedly belonging to the patronage network described earlier. Indeed, the Qing government repeatedly took measures in 1764, 1789, 1803, 1831, and 1848 to control the "coffer funds" as a way of checking the private abuses of individual merchants infringing official statutes (Rowe, 1984: 103-105).

The 1849 piaofa reform was meant to increase "control over the entire salt-distribution network by eliminating the independent power of the large *kang* merchants" (Rowe, 1984: 92). Under the 1860-1863 "sales management bureau" system, the two local merchants who were bonded and given the viceroy's personal seal to buy salt in bulk at

Liang-Huai and then turn it over to the provincial administration to be sold for troop rations, were expectant officeholders. They were, de jure and de facto, official purchase agents of the governor-general's office (Rowe, 1984: 93). Under Zeng Guofan's "general superintendency," the salt merchants' activities were even more tightly circumscribed. The government also sought to curb the private smuggling of Huai rice by the licensed merchants by creating "an elaborate registration and reporting procedure for salt boats," stepping up the vigilance of *baojia* functionaries, and establishing "a harbor patrol fleet manned by local salt-administration officials" (Rowe, 1984: 97).[15]

Consider the following evidence for tightened government control. According to Zeng Guofan's new salt regulations, all salt destined for Huguang had to pass through Hankou for official inspection. The salt was conveyed from the Liang-Huai factories by 600 merchants who held the "new tickets" issued after 1863. Although these shares were sometimes traded and the privileges they conferred were leased out, they were not legally transferable except to an approved merchant and with the government's consent; malefactors were punished if caught. Informal commissions were replaced by new provincial salt taxes (*eli*), collected at Hankou and forwarded by the salt daotai, who was regularly appointed by the central government in Beijing, to the Provincial Lijin Bureau to pay military and postrebellion reconstruction costs (Rowe, 1984: 110-112).

As for distribution, local traders (*shuifan*), who were not from Hankou and who "had comparatively little connection . . . with the city generally," had to post a bond with the Liang-Huai salt commissioners in order to purchase their stock, which had been inspected, weighed, and repackaged for them by salt depot officials called *yanhang*, who were "not merchants at all in the ordinary sense, but salt brokers" licensed by the Board of Revenue (Rowe, 1984: 110-111).[16] These brokers had to submit regular reports to the Hubei governor, the Liang-Huai commissioner, and the Board of Revenue. Thus, under Zeng Guofan's administration, "the concept of broker-merchant self-regulation took second place to the desire for greater bureaucratic control" under the new Hankou General Office for Superintendency of Salt Sales, which was charged with keeping detailed records of the brokers' transactions in order to prevent them from

manipulating market prices, demanding illicit payments, or delaying delivery of the duties they collected (Rowe, 1984: 112).[17]

Although Rowe warned his readers about the "danger in overstressing this bureaucratization," the evidence that he himself so carefully gathered on the salt monopoly in post-Taiping Hankou delineates a much more efficiently run government gabelle in which the corps of transport merchants was tripled in number and strenuously reduced in influence (Rowe, 1984: 113). The old broker-merchants had given way to a new system of state-licensed brokers who occupied a semi-public position in a monopoly trade completely dominated by provincial bureaucrats who applied sanctions virtually at will.[18] Does this really look like "the familiar Western conception of preindustrial, urban, commercial capitalist society" (Rowe, 1984: 121)?

And did the guilds that flourished in Hankou after the Taiping Rebellion actually take over municipal functions from the local Qing administration? Was there "the rise of a guild-centered, sub-rosa municipal government apparatus" in the city (Rowe, 1984: 344)? The evidence for that claim is slight. Besides self-nurturance (including maintaining streets, opening fire lanes, and building bridges around their halls), guildsmen maintained private fire-fighting units beginning in 1800, organized a small militia when White Lotus forces captured a county seat thirty miles away, somewhat halfheartedly supported local defense measures against the Taipings (who captured the city twice without encountering much local resistance), and on the eve of the 1911 revolution organized an informal local constabulary of watchmen. Many of these actions were taken as a result of official pressure (Rowe, 1984: 318-321).

Despite a wide-ranging search for evidence of interguild linkages and guild confederations, Rowe was only able to come up with the name of one such organization during the early post-Taiping years. This was a "semiformal" group of guild managers known as the "eight great guilds" (*badahang, badabang*), which met "regularly" at the Shen Family Temple (*Shenjia miao*). The evidence for the conveners of these meetings—of which there are no records—taking on "an ever-greater range of quasi-governmental functions within the city" was merchant sponsorship (sometimes through guilds, sometimes individually) of charitable soup kitchens ("benevolent halls" or *shantang*) that were used during the annual "winter defense" (*dongfang*) in the

1870s to dispense food. In addition to that, there was a certain degree of coordination of the fire-fighting companies, and the development after 1910 of a citywide merchants militia (*shangtuan*). "Eventually," Rowe tells us, "the linkages between guilds became fully formal and officially recognized" (Rowe, 1984: 333-334). How? By the establishment in 1898, during the abortive reform movement, of a Hankou Chamber of Commerce (*Shangwu ju*) at the order of Viceroy Zhang Zhidong in response to an imperial edict. In other words, the "guild-centered sub-rosa municipal government apparatus" consisted of a "commercial bureau" (which is the proper translation of "shangwu ju") set up by the imperial government and administered by two expectant daotais from the top down.[19]

Finally, what of Rowe's claim that the intensification of local security controls over Hankou's population during the "law-and-order campaign" of 1876-1883 may have been formally initiated by local officials, "but in all cases it was the local citizenry itself that took charge of implementation" (Rowe, 1989: 306)? To begin with, of what did the campaign consist? In the autumn of 1878, the Hanyang magistrate, Lin Duanzhi, and Subprefect Zhang Qinjia issued funds for the repair of enclosing gates for the lanes of Hankou and ordered baojia headmen to make sure that there were adequate numbers of watchmen to tend the new gates. If a military patrol discovered that a gate had been left open, then the responsible baojia head and watchman would be tried and severely punished (Rowe, 1989: 308-309).

> In light of the description so far, it might appear that what occurred was an instance of local bureaucratic initiative, or perhaps even administrate repression of the local society. This was very far from the truth. No doubt Magistrates Ts'ai and Lin and Subprefect Chang found enforcement of social order in line with their commissions and probably also congenial to their temperaments, and, if only in an attempt to encourage compliance, all three presented these beefed-up security programs as personal projects of their own. But, as suggested by the uncommon publicity given these programs by the elite organ *Shen-pao*, the officials were responding to a climate of public opinion (at least elite opinion) favoring a stronger public-security presence in the city. Moreover, virtually all of the implementation and most of the financing of these projects came from the local community, especially from the urban neighborhoods [Rowe, 1989: 309].

The "implementation" and "financing" by the "local community" consisted—as Rowe detailed in succeeding paragraphs—of (1) individual shop proprietors paying watchmen who presented their bills at the first of each month, and (2) a single neighborhood levying a surcharge on rents in order to rebuild a small guardpost in the center of its street. The other measures consisted of the magistrate's insistence that traditional local control baojia placards be posted, that militia conduct patrols during the program of "winter defense" modeled after Beijing's public security program, and that the baojia households pay for the watchmen's lanterns or gaslights (Rowe, 1989: 309-310).

Rowe thought to find further evidence of an emerging public sphere in the urban militia "imposed on Hankow" by Subprefect Zhang Oufang during the 1883 crisis. Subprefect Zhang was head of the militia, which was run from a bureau at the Shenjia Temple. Business firms were assessed to provide militiamen, and funds were collected from each side street to pay for gate repairs and the hiring of gatekeepers to prevent rebel elements from infiltrating the city (Rowe, 1989: 335-340). Because this was common practice in the Ming dynasty and in the early Qing, I do not find it persuasive testament to the emergence of an early modern communitarian analogue in late Qing China.

A final word on the public sphere issue in Rowe's work should address the issue of public opinion (Rowe, 1990). Habermas defined the public sphere as "a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed" (Habermas, 1991: 398).

> Access to the public sphere is open in principle to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public. They are then acting neither as business or professional people conducting their private affairs, nor as legal consociates subject to the legal regulations of a state bureaucracy and obligated to obedience. Citizens act as a public when they deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion; thus with the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicize their opinions freely. When the public is large, this kind of communication requires certain means of dissemination and influence: today, newspapers and periodicals, radio and television are the media of the public sphere [Habermas, 1991: 398].

What was the medium of public opinion in late nineteenth-century Hankou?

In 1873, a newspaperlike publication appeared in Hankou. It was called the *Zhaowen xinbao* and carried local news and market quotations along with excerpts from *Jingbao* ("Capital Gazette," which transcribed official memorials and rescripts). The paper lasted less than a year. Foreigners in 1874 and 1880 attempted to launch newspapers, but these failed. The Hankou Tea Guild published *Hanbao* from 1893 until 1900; but there was no widely circulated newspaper available for Hankou's public from the 1870s on other than *Shenbao*, which Rowe associated with the rise of an urban reformist elite that would presumably constitute China's new public sphere (Rowe, 1989: 24-27).

The difficulty of this argument is that *Shenbao*, founded by an Englishman named Ernest Major, was published in Shanghai, not Hankou. Although it carried news about Hankou, "there is no way of establishing what percentage of the Hankow population read the paper on a regular basis. . . . " (Rowe, 1989: 26). Correspondingly, the evidence for a public sphere, in that peculiarly nineteenth-century sense of an informed and critical public opinion, is dubious. This same difficulty afflicts Mary Backus Rankin's claims for the rise of a public sphere in post-Taiping Zhejiang.[20]

ELITE ACTIVISM

I have gone to such lengths to criticize William Rowe's finely textured analysis of nineteenth-century Hankou both because his two books are deservedly regarded as landmarks in the Western historiography on China and because his research is so frequently cited by scholars searching for civil society in the late Qing and early Republican periods (e.g., Strand, 1990a: 5). Another pioneering study about the emergence of a public sphere is Mary Backus Rankin's *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China*. Rankin's thesis is well-known: the Taiping Rebellion marked a major shift in the balance between the Chinese state and local elites, causing the main initiative for local welfare efforts, education, and to a lesser extent public security to shift from the bureaucracy to society. Meanwhile, commer-

cialization encouraged an incomplete fusion of gentry and merchants, who together began to play new managerial roles as activists in a rapidly growing public (*gong*) sphere.

> As I use the term here, "public" retains a considerable communal element but refers more specifically to the institutionalized, extrabureaucratic management of matters considered important by both the community and the state. Public management by elites thus contrasted with official administration (*guan*), and with private (*si*) activities of individuals, families, religions, businesses, and organizations that were not identified with the whole community [Rankin, 1986: 15].

For Rankin, then, "the most important departure" in the post-Taiping period was the rise of activist managers. During the eighteenth century, managers of philanthropies and waterworks projects were usually hired from among the lowest gentry degree-holders. The new gentry activism of the late 1800s supposedly involved a more reputable group, and in her study Rankin argued that "management in this period was a respectable—even a prestigious—occupation." Yet she also acknowledged that "the names of most managers were never recorded" (Rankin, 1986: 107, 109-110).[21]

In reading Rankin's acclamation of the management projects of the late Qing notability, it is sometimes hard to distinguish between traditional habits of gentry philanthropy and whatever the new gentry activism entailed. She noted, for example, that the most famous manager in Zhejiang was Ding Bing, a gentryman from the provincial capital of Hangzhou. Ding Bing's father was a wealthy scholar who had maintained Confucian shrines and Buddhist temples in a way perfectly familiar to students of late Ming and early Qing philanthropy. Inheriting this penchant for charitable works, which was also a well-established local tradition, Ding Bing began in 1838, long before the Taiping Rebellion, to open up soup kitchens and repair temples. Often, he was supervising projects that were underwritten by his father. After Hangzhou was retaken from the Taipings, he continued to act as a local philanthropist by funding a welfare agency, rebuilding academies, repairing bridges and shrines, and so forth. What was the difference between the traditional Buddhist-Confucianist philanthropist who loved to collect books and Rankin's depiction of Ding Bing as a paradigmatic "new activist manager"? In what special way did Ding

Bing, who devoted the last years of his life to gathering rare texts for his personal library, especially epitomize the "energetic, expansive management" of the new "public sphere" era (Rankin, 1986: 108)?

How did the "new managers" finance their activities? During the Taiping Rebellion, Qing officials devised the new *lijin* tax on commercial goods. Lijin was collected through bureaus controlled by the governors and viceroys appointed to defend their provinces and regions. Rankin maintained that the lijin taxes supported "expansive autonomous elite management" (Rankin, 1986: 104). Although the local gentry had to submit requests to officials for lijin funds and although they had very little control over methods of collection and the location of lijin stations, Rankin argues that there were numerous "dramatic examples of how this tax might foster managerial autonomy rather than bureaucratic control" (Rankin, 1986: 102).

If we look closely at the administration of lijin, however, we discover that the new tax was used by the provincial governments to provide funds for merchants to pay for local academy buildings that once would have been enabled by their own private contributions. That is, official revenue agents now provided funds to merchants or gentry who became increasingly tied to the public purse and had increasingly fewer sources of independent income as private endowments were wiped out by the Taiping Rebellion. As a result, in one of Rankin's most cited locales of the new elite activism, the town of Nanxun in Huzhou prefecture, the payments from lijin came to support virtually all elite-run enterprises for at least a decade after the Taiping Rebellion (Rankin, 1986: 104).

Rankin used the Nanxun case to try to show that lijin provided the wherewithal to fund autonomous management. The example she provided was questionable. In 1864, the silk merchants of Nanxun petitioned for the establishment of a silk bureau (*siye gongsuo*) to collect taxes on silk. In Rankin's view, this bureau provided the wherewithal for an autonomous local elite to develop public sphere activities over a long period of time. Yet we learn from her own text that only ten years after its establishment, the prefect closed it down.

> This system, in which members of the managerial elite financed their activities through the silk taxes that they themselves collected, eventually aroused the suspicion of the Huchou prefect. The silk office was

> dissolved in 1874 but the system may have remained intact since no alternative funding is indicated for ongoing institutions [Rankin, 1986: 104].

In other words, the main source for the supposedly autonomous activities of the gentry of Nanxun, one of Rankin's key examples of new elite management, was for ten years a public tax source—which was stanched, in effect, by the local prefect when he suspected peculation by local gentry and merchants.

Rankin's study not only raised serious questions about the provenance of some of these local Zhejiang managers (who seem to have spent most of their time in Shanghai, occasionally sending moneys home to fund local building projects); it also provoked queries about the degree of government involvement in activities such as famine relief, which she presented as examples of "macroregional mobilization" of the local gentry.[22] To my own eyes, the 1878 famine relief drive appears to be an extension of Li Hongzhang's apparatus, via the Chinese Merchants Steam Navigation Company, into Shanghai (and ultimately northern Zhejiang) gentry circles. Rankin, however, was interested only in the "separate" private relief efforts in this national campaign. But when she sought to present the "mobilization of prominent managers and philanthropists at different urban levels and across provincial boundaries," they turned out almost always to be "employed in the bureaucracy" and "supported by an official decree urging contributions" (Rankin, 1986: 145). Time and again, in other words, her depiction of autonomous local management of public sphere activities is to me marred by evidence of top-down, official sponsorship of social welfare.[23]

For Philip A. Kuhn, this sponsorship was evidence of an utter lack of autonomy on the part of these local elites.

> Another point to consider is the dependent position of the gentry and merchant managers of late imperial times. Official patronage of merchant guilds and native place associations was considered a normal and necessary protection of their activities. It was not just decoration. Gentry managers were likewise tied in, through both elite networks and formal franchises, to the regular bureaucracy. The "New Policies" of the 1900s formalized roles that had been customarily informal, making local managers an integral part of the state sector, removing the "para" from "parapolitical" [Kuhn, 1991: 7].

Moreover, Kuhn believes that the overriding nationalistic commitment of these reformist provincial elites to the formation of a strong central state "reduced the prospects for the development of a viable Civil Society (to say nothing of a Public Sphere) to something near zero" (Kuhn, 1991: 8; see also Whyte, 1992: 83).

Nonetheless, there is ample evidence to support the contention that the late Qing saw the expansion of a public sphere in the sense of an "arena of nonstate activity at the local level that contributed to the supply of services and resources to the public good" (Brook, 1990: 43). This is hardly Habermas's public sphere, the application of which to China may carry "unintended teleological and reductionist implications" (Huang, 1991: 320). But variant aspects of *gong* added up to a notion that became closely knitted to the patriotic ideal of "pure talk" (*qingyi*) during the reform period, and that was unsystematically articulated in what might be called "working sources" of the statecraft movement after the Opium War (Rankin, 1986: 15-26; Rankin, 1990: 36). To be sure, individual manifestations of public sphere activity could drift off into private, self-interested engrossment—a kind of political tax-farming—if only because the lines between "official" (guan), "public" (*gong*), and "private" (si) were less than distinct (Strand, 1990a: 4, 10). But principled participation in the various rights recovery movements just before the Revolution of 1911 affirmed the reformist gentry's right to claim patriotic duty above all (Rankin, 1982: 472-473).

MUNICIPAL POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Can we then speak of civil society during the Republican period? David Strand certainly does (Strand, 1990b: 225). But he lays much more stress upon the emergence of a public sphere—not so much as "nonstate activity" as a new arena of political engagement. He enumerates in the preindustrial city the variety of public activities that included marketing, theatergoing, worshipping, and teahouse and restaurant socializing. And he cites for 1920s Beijing the spread of newspapers, the existence of the telephone, the discussions in the city's parks, and the meetings taking place in its brothels, bathhouses, and restaurants (Strand, 1989: 167-169). Tiananmen was not yet a formal architectural square; it was just "the empty space outside Tian'anmen

Gate." But Strand tries his rhetorical best to turn it into a public arena by "filling this space periodically with townspeople (*shimin*) and citizens (*gongmin*) [who] projected an evocative, albeit fleeting, image of municipal and national solidarity" (Strand, 1989: 172).

Although Strand finds analogies to Habermas's public sphere in the guilds, *tongxianghui*, pavilions and temples of Beijing, he is quick to see that there existed a fundamental difference: "The existence of a European public sphere assumed a radical polarization of state and society out of public and private realms" (Strand, 1990a: 9). He also notes that the Western notion of "society" as an association of free persons counterposed to the state is absent from traditional Chinese thought (Strand, 1990a: 3). But he does find in the appearance after 1903 of self-regulating professional associations (*fatuan*), such as chambers of commerce, lawyers' guilds, and bankers' associations, evidence of a combination of state control and local activity that supports the notion of a limited and "soft" public sphere during the Republican period (Strand, 1990a: 6-8).

But how independent, after all, were these figments of civil society? Strand gives us more than a hint in describing their activities.

> Beijing merchants, too, were inclined toward a combination with, even subservience to, official power [Strand, 1989: 100].
>
> Through the mid-teens the Beijing Chamber of Commerce maintained a passive, dependent relationship with political authority [Strand, 1989: 102].
>
> What chambers and other *fatuan* could not do was dictate terms to old or new powerholders [Strand, 1989: 102].

" 'Civil society' did not draw a line in the dirt and dare the state, or some statelike entity to step over," Strand remarks. "That would have been foolhardy. It also would have been, perhaps, a means of giving real substance to ideals of self-government which were all the rage in the 1920s but hard to find on the ground" (Strand, 1989: 13-14; see also Perry, 1992b: 150).

Like Philip Huang, I find "poignant" the effort to apply Habermas's concepts to China because, although there has been a continuing expansion of the public realm since 1900, this has not led to the habituated assertion of civic power against the state (Huang, 1991: 321). Instead, state coercive power has continually grown, and most

Chinese citizens appear to conceive of social existence mainly in terms of obligation and interdependence rather than rights and responsibilities (Wakeman, 1991).

At the same time, I must also acknowledge my own myopia. Daniel Chirot tells us that "sometimes literature written for what seems to be a handful of people is a better measure of the true state of mind of a society than public opinion polls, economic statistics, or overt political behavior" (Chirot, 1992: 234). Chirot reminds us as well that, although few Western observers of Eastern Europe grasped its significance at the time, an alternative civil society—"where people could interact freely and without government interference, where they could turn their backs on the Party-state's corruption"—was being created by intellectuals like Vaclav Havel, Miklos Haraszti, and Adam Michnik well before 1989 (Chirot, 1992: 234). Could the same be true for China today?

NOTES

1. Among the papers given was a remarkably interesting study of contemporary Chinese state-society relations by David Wank (1991).

2. The speaker was myself and the discussant was William Rowe. Audience participants included Mary B. Rankin and David Strand.

3. A different version of this article will appear as a chapter in the forthcoming proceedings of that symposium, which will be a volume entitled *China's Quest for Modernization: A Historical Approach*, Frederic Wakeman, Jr. and Wang Xi, eds., Institute of East Asian Studies, Berkeley, 1993.

4. "The goal is not to take over the state but to unhinge social structure from the state structure and to define a separate public sphere of pluralistic associations hitherto monopolized by the state" (Yang, 1989: 37).

5. See also the fascinating discussion in Pérez-Diaz (1992).

6. Tsou states,

> Civil society has a capacity to survive submerged under state control. Small networks of persons had always existed even during the Cultural Revolution. Now they multiplied, extended in size, and the content of mutual exchange became richer including an increasingly larger share of political information, gossip, and opinion [Tsou, 1990: 20-21].

7. Wan states,

> The Stone Corporation was a private enterprise, which according to Chinese law could not get a permit to import anything. So we could not conduct normal

> international trading. Now because this [other Beijing electronic] factory was state run, it could get an import permit from the government. It did so, and bought all these parts from abroad that the Stone Corporation wanted. The factory sold these to us, made money, and that is how it survived. At the same time, the Stone Corporation received the parts it needed, and so benefitted. This is an excellent networking system in China [Wan, 1992: 4].

8. " 'Public Sphere' for Habermas is like 'Protestant Ethic' for Weber: it is a social philosopher's ideal type, not a social historian's description of reality" (Kuhn, 1991: 5).

9. The willingness of the students to sacrifice themselves for society, for the "greater self" (*da wo*), was striking (Chen, 1989: 356-357). However, this spirit of self-sacrifice could also be interpreted as a manifestation of a form of "mass consciousness" (*gunzhong yishi*), which some reformers in the PRC had viewed as different from "citizens' consciousness" (*gongmin yishi*) (Liu and Wang, 1988: 10).

10. David Strand takes care to emphasize that the Chinese themselves, not Western social scientists, look to movements rather than institutions. "When Chinese seek to revive a democratic tradition, it is a tradition of movements, not institutions, they are drawing upon" (Strand, 1990a: 3). Perry and Fuller also emphasize the Chinese context: "If we are to use the concept of civil society in the Chinese context, we must emphasize its behavioral (rather than its purely organizational) connotation" (Perry and Fuller, 1991: 666). Despite superficial resemblances to Gramsci, the "neoculturalists" who emphasize relatively autonomous social movements, sustained by long-established symbolic repertories of protest, owe more to the tradition-conscious social history of Natalie Davis, Charles Tilly, and Lynn Hunt than to the Sorelian momentism of the "old" New Left. See Esherick and Wasserstrom (1990), and Perry (1992a: 5).

11. The locus classicus is Weber (1958). But see also Weber (1951), translated from his essay "Konfuzianismus und Taoismus," published in Vol. 1 of Weber's *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* in 1922.

12. Managerial gentry appeared in the late Ming and expanded in the Qing when the bureaucracy was increasingly less able to deal with the growing population (Rankin, 1986: 16-17).

13. Shanxi bankers, who eventually had the biggest guildhall in the city, remained apart altogether.

14. According to Qing usage, the Liang-Huai salt merchants were called *yi-shang yi-guan* (both merchants and officials) (Rowe, 1984: 91, 364).

15. Rowe with characteristic scholarly integrity notes that "although the Huai salt merchants of Hankow regained a considerable degree of prosperity in the decades after the Taiping Rebellion, the scope of their activities was continually diminished. . . ." ". . . These later transport merchants never approached the political or even economic power of their predecessors under the *kang* system" (Rowe, 1984: 96, 109).

16. "By this single stroke, the private *p'iao* merchants were brought under the control of a separate class of government appointees whose status and powers were qualitatively superior to their own" (Rowe, 1984: 111-112).

17. Sanctions were stiff. When a banker failed to pay back salt depot deposits after 1865, the magistrate had him beaten to death (Rowe, 1984: 169).

18. The government seems to have had much more direct control over merchants in this case than in the instances of "liturgical governance" described in Mann (1987) as both an extension of state power and a crystallization of social interests. See also Strand (1989: 100, and 1990a: 7).

19. This was a case of "official rule" (*guanzhi*) coopting "self-rule" (*zizhi*) (Schoppa, 1982: 34). For the distinction between "commerce bureau" (shangwu ju) and "chamber of commerce" (*shangwu zonghui*), insofar as the former was a *pouvoir subsidiaire* and the latter a *pouvoir intermédiaire*, see Fewsmith (1983: 634-636).

20. Northern Zhejiang, which is the location of the gentry activism that constitutes "the rise of the public sphere" Rankin describes in chapter 3 of her book, did not have its own newspaper. Because a newspaper-reading public is a crucial component of a modern "public sphere," Rankin has to suppose that the gentry "activists" she studies read the only available newspaper, which was Shanghai's *Shenbao*. "The paper must have been available—at least occasionally—to elite leaders in the five northern prefectures and along the coast." In a footnote to this hopeful utterance, Rankin suggests that the inclusion of an editorial from *Shenbao* in a Zhejiang local gazetteer "indicates that the managerial elite might read the paper." See Rankin (1986: 141, 353).

21. Rankin uses data from Longyou (Quzhou) to demonstrate how many *gongsheng* served as managers. However, her footnotes also show that only 3 out of the 45 managers held higher degrees.

22. Pierre-Étienne Will argues that the instruments and modes of organization of famine relief were entirely dominated by the state, and that the subordination of this primary philanthropy to formal administrative power continued deep into the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century, he states, the "managerial" public sphere was totally eclipsed. And during most of the nineteenth century, the role of local elites in this regard was merely to support the government, and not to supplant it (Will, 1991).

23. For a thoughtful analysis of the distinction between a genuine public sphere and this form of officially managed local "self-government," see Tang Zhenchang (1992: 9).

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