"Public Sphere "/"Civil Society" in China?: The Third Realm between State and Society

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The Third Realm between State and Society

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The concepts of "bourgeois public sphere" and "civil society" as they have been applied to China presuppose a dichotomous opposition between state and society. If we adhere to such a presupposition, we run the risk of reducing the debate here to little more than an argument over whose influence was greater in the phenomena under discussion, society's or the state's. I suggest here that Habermas himself in fact proposed a more sophisticated alternative construct that can be developed into a resolution of the issues at hand. The binary opposition between state and society, I argue, is an ideal abstracted from early modern and modern Western experience that is inappropriate for China. We need to employ instead a trinary conception, with a third space in between state and society, in which both participated. This third realm, moreover, took on characteristics and institutional forms over time that need to be understood on their own terms. I discuss briefly some examples of this third realm in imperial, Republican, and contemporary China. The ideas and empirical information come from my two current projects, on civil justice and on the changing rural community, as well as from my past work on rural North China (Huang, 1985) and the Yangzi delta (Huang, 1990).

HABERMAS ON THE PUBLIC SPHERE

TWO MEANINGS

Habermas uses the term *public sphere* in two different ways, one very specific, the other more general. He uses the term, first of all, as

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a shorthand reference for the bourgeois public sphere. By that he is referring specifically to phenomena beginning in late seventeenth-century England and eighteenth-century France. Those phenomena, he is careful to point out, accompanied the rise of a market economy, capitalism, and a bourgeoisie. As he puts it in his preface,

> We conceive bourgeois public sphere as a category that is typical of an epoch. It cannot be abstracted from the unique developmental history of that "civil society" originating in the European High Middle Ages; nor can it be transferred, idealtypically generalized, to any number of historical situations that represent formally similar constellations. Just as we try to show, for instance, that one can properly speak of public opinion in a precise sense only with regard to late-seventeenth-century Great Britain and eighteenth-century France, we treat public sphere in general as a historical category [Habermas, 1989: xvii-xviii].

But Habermas also uses the term in a more general sense to refer to phenomena of which the bourgeois public sphere forms just one variant type. Thus he speaks of the distinctions between "the liberal model" of the bourgeois public sphere as opposed to another model, "the plebeian public sphere." To him, those two make up "two variants of the public sphere of bourgeois society." The two variants, in turn, "must be strictly distinguished" from another, "the plebiscitary-acclamatory form of regimented public sphere characterizing dictatorships in highly developed industrial societies" (p. xviii). In these usages of the term public sphere, he seems to be referring to a generalized phenomenon of an expanding public realm of life in modern society, which can take on different forms and involve different power relationships between state and society. He is hinting at a typology of public spheres, of which "the bourgeois" is but one variety.

It is the bourgeois public sphere to which he devotes most of his attention, spelling out the specific historical circumstances associated with it. In addition to its connection with capitalism, the bourgeois public sphere also had its origins in "the (bourgeois) private sphere." For Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere grew in its first instance out of the clear delineation between the private and public spheres. That distinction did not exist under medieval manorialism, and came into being only with the rise of commodity exchange and the bourgeois family (pp. 14-26). It was the grouping together of "privatized" bourgeois individuals in rational and critical public discussions that

formed the basis for a "public opinion," which, in checking absolutist power, became the essence of the bourgeois public sphere. Hence,

> The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people coming together as a public: they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor [p. 27].

Even more than analyzing the rise of the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas is concerned with its subsequent degeneration beginning in the late nineteenth century, hence the title of the book: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. The liberal bourgeois public sphere formed in opposition to the state and remained a part of the private realm. With the coming of the welfare state and of mass society and advertising, however, that public sphere underwent a structural transformation. State and society interpenetrated, blurring the lines between the private and public spheres. Hence,

> The bourgeois public sphere evolved in the tension-charged field between the state and society. But it did so in such a way that it remained itself a part of the private realm. . . . [S]tate intervention in the sphere of society found its counterpart in the transfer of public functions to private corporate bodies. Likewise, the opposite process of a substitution of state authority by the power of society was connected to the extension of public authority over sectors of the private realm. Only this dialectic of a progressive "societalization" of the state simultaneously with an increasing "state-ification" of society gradually destroyed the basis of the bourgeois public sphere—the separation of state and society. Between the two and out of the two, as it were, a repoliticized social sphere emerged to which the distinction between "public" and "private" could not be usefully applied [p. 142].

The public sphere, in other words, was eroded by the simultaneous processes of "state-ification" and "societalization."

TWO PURPOSES

The dual meanings of Habermas's public sphere carry dual purposes. There is, first, Habermas the sociologist-historian seeking to

typologize actual historical experiences into models. That purpose clearly lies behind his conception of multiple varieties of public spheres, of which the bourgeois public sphere was but one variant. It also lies behind his concrete discussion of early-modern England and France, from which the abstracted model of the bourgeois public sphere is derived.

But there is also Habermas the moral-political philosopher, whose main purpose is a critique of contemporary politics. From this perspective, his bourgeois public sphere is an abstract standard against which contemporary society is to be judged. For him, contemporary democracy has lost much of the rationality and moral force of his abstracted ideal of early-modern England and France. Advertising and interest group maneuverings have replaced the rational public opinion of earlier times. In writing about democracy's "structural transformation," he is speaking out for what ought to be against what is.

TWO SPATIAL CONCEPTIONS

Habermas's public sphere occupies two different spaces conceptually. In his construct of multiple kinds of public spheres, he places the public sphere squarely in "the tension-charged field between the state and society." This intermediate space is where state and society interacted to result in different kinds of public spheres, whether the "liberal" or the "plebeian" varieties of bourgeois society, or the "regimented" variety under "dictatorships in highly developed industrial societies." When he extends the notion of an in-between space to his analysis of the structurally transformed public sphere, he speaks of the erosion of that space under the twin processes of state intervention in society (state-ification) and societal assumption of state authority (societalization).

At the same time, however, his bourgeois public sphere is a sphere that evolved in opposition to the state. In that construct, "private people . . . came together as a public" to take over "the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves." Here the trinary conception of state, society, and the public sphere collapses once more into a binary conception that juxtaposes just society and state. The public sphere becomes merely an extension of (civil) society in its democratic development against the absolutist state.

TWO DYNAMICS

The two different spatial conceptions involve two different dynamics of change. With the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas focuses mainly on societal change, the coming together of private individuals to form a "public" of rational opinion. We might call this process modern liberal-democratic societal integration. He has little to say about the kinds of changes that might have occurred in the state.

With the "structural transformation" of the public sphere, on the other hand, Habermas speaks of both societal change and state change. The collection of private individuals coming together in rational discussion gave way to interest groups of "mass society," while the "liberal constitutional state" gave way to the welfare state. The former underlay the " 'societalization' of the state," and the latter the " 'statification' of society." The twin processes resulted in the destruction of "the separation of state and society," which had been "the basis of the bourgeois public sphere."

DIFFERENT USES BY THE CONTRIBUTORS

The above seem to me the essential core of Habermas's complex of ideas. How might those of us studying China best use his ideas?

Frederic Wakeman's article, which leads off this symposium, criticizes the mechanical application of Habermas's model of the bourgeois public sphere to Chinese historical experience. Such efforts, he shows, can lead to teleological suggestions, even if unintended, and to one-sided interpretations of two-sided evidence. Wakeman emphasizes especially the persistent and prominent role of the state in those developments that William Rowe in his two books (1984, 1989) presents as evidence of an emergent "early-modern" "public sphere" independent of the state. Mary Rankin (1986) and David Strand (1989), where they are not careful to qualify their interpretations, are guilty of the same kind of one-sided emphasis.

In Rowe's defense, we might recall the context within which he framed his argument. The presumption of a uniquely unchanging "traditional" China, which so dominated scholarship of the 1950s and

1960s, was still a powerful influence in the field. Rowe's choice of Max Weber as his foil was conditioned by that context. His contribution consisted in part in calling to our attention Qing phenomena that were similar to those of the early-modern West. In so doing, he helped to break down the earlier presumption of an unchanging China. In this respect, his contributions paralleled those of the Chinese scholars of "incipient capitalism," who, in demonstrating vigorous commercialization during the Ming and Qing, undermined the earlier views in Chinese scholarship of an unchanging "feudal China." I have written about these trends of scholarship at some length (Huang, 1991) and will not repeat them here.

In Rowe's article for this symposium, we can see the beginnings of a new orientation. There is no longer the simple search for similarities between the Qing and the early-modern West. Instead, there is also a concern with differences. The direction seems clear enough: what had once served as a guiding model might now become the conceptual foil.

One advantage of turning Habermas's bourgeois public sphere from guide to foil is to bring into focus not only questions of surface similarities and differences, but also the deeper levels of Habermas's analysis. Just as Rowe addressed in his books not only Weber's descriptive characterization of Chinese cities as administrative centers but also Weber's analytical presumption that Chinese cities lacked the developmental dynamics of a market economy and a merchant class, so we should address now how Habermas's presumption of a bourgeois public sphere based on the rise of capitalism and of a bourgeoisie is not fully applicable to the Qing.

In Mary Rankin's contribution, we see similar movement from a rather mechanical borrowing of Habermas's model of a bourgeois public sphere to an effort to adopt Habermas's second, broader usage of the term to refer to multiple varieties of public spheres. Rankin attempts to delineate a Chinese variety of public sphere. At the same time, we see the effort to move from a simple binary opposition between the public sphere and the state to the adoption of Habermas's trinary conception of a public sphere intermediate between state and society. These are directions I myself had called for in the earlier version of this article.

The problem with such an effort, however, is that Habermas's original notions are either too specific or too general to be truly useful for China. The notion of the bourgeois public sphere is much too historically specific to be a guide for analyzing China; indeed, it is more useful as a foil than as a guide. The notion of multiple varieties of public spheres, on the other hand, is too general to be of much value. When we substitute segmented and largely rural local communities for Habermas's integrated and urban public sphere, as Rankin tries to do, just what is left of the concept of public sphere to warrant retention of the term?

In addition, Habermas gives most of his attention to the bourgeois public sphere and little to the more complex notion of a public sphere occupying a space in between state and society and changing as those two changed. His bourgeois public sphere returns in the end to a simplified binary opposition between state and society. In the same way, Rankin's analysis returns finally to a characterization of the public sphere as societal development outside of or in opposition to the state. She does not tell us much about how state and society worked together in the intermediate space, or about how changes in the state might have joined with changes in society to redefine the public sphere.

Alone among our contributors, Richard Madsen is completely explicit about identifying himself with the moral-philosophical Habermas, engaged in advocating a democracy as it ought to be, rather than the historical-sociological Habermas, concerned with typologizing actual experiences. For Madsen, Habermas's moral-cultural ideal is a universal standard against which both the contemporary West and contemporary China fall short. He advocates research that would evaluate contemporary Chinese developments from the perspective of the Habermasian ideal.

The strength of Madsen's approach is its complete honesty about its moral purpose. He makes no attempt to hide his moral advocacy behind ostensibly "value-neutral" theory. With Madsen, the reader knows exactly what (s)he is getting.

The problem with Madsen's type of approach, however, is that wishful thinking can all too easily be substituted for an accurate grasp of what was and is. To be sure, scholars can never be entirely free from the influence of the values they treasure. That is why it is much better

to be conscious of our own values than not. But such awareness, it seems to me, should be used to help guard against misconstruing historical evidence; it should not be placed in command of our research, no matter how explicitly done. Although I agree very much with Madsen's belief in a moral and rational democracy, I do not agree that that is the correct prescription for all times and all places. Still less do I agree that our research agenda should be guided entirely by such a moral vision. Such advocatory intent can easily blind us to other important changes and developments, simply because they seem irrelevant to our given concerns. When that happens, even the best intended moral visions can become rigid ideological dictates that distort historical reality.

Finally, Heath Chamberlain's article, although it focuses on the concept of civil society rather than of the public sphere, seems to me to raise the same issues as Madsen's. Chamberlain defines civil society in a way that makes it roughly equivalent to what might be called incipient democracy. Like Madsen, Chamberlain is explicit about his advocatory purpose, and concentrates his attention on Chinese phenomena consistent with the wished-for civil society.

Chamberlain argues in addition for a reconsideration of the spatial position that civil society occupies. He rejects the way the term is currently being used (modeled on recent developments in Eastern Europe) to mean any societal organizations or activities independent of the state. That involves a simple opposition of civil society and the state and conflates civil society with society. Rather, Chamberlain calls for returning the concept to its earlier eighteenth- and nineteenth-century usage, which placed civil society in the space intermediate between state and society, born of the interaction between a state and a society in modernizing change. That makes civil society akin to Habermas's second spatial conception of the public sphere.

THE CONCEPT OF THE THIRD REALM BETWEEN STATE AND SOCIETY

The purpose of this symposium, and of my own contribution, is first of all to point out the very complex baggage that comes with the term

public sphere: a moral-philosophical intent in addition to a sociological-historical one, a highly specific construct in addition to a highly generalized one, and a binary opposition between state and society in addition to a trinary conception that interposes a sphere intermediate between state and society. Habermas's own different meanings, as well as our contributors' different interpretations of Habermas, underscore the value-laden nature and multiple meanings of the concept. Small wonder, then, that there should be so much confusion over its usage. For this reason alone, we might want to reject further use of the term to characterize Chinese phenomena.

That does not mean, however, that we do not have a great deal to learn from Habermas's ideas. There can certainly be no question about the value of the central problematic his multiple ideas are intended to address: changing state-society relations in times of fundamental reorientations in both. His hint that those changes need to be understood in terms of both changes in the state and in society, not just one or the other (even though his own bourgeois public sphere focuses only on changes in society), seems to me a good one. And his suggestion that those changes need to be seen in a space in between state and society seems an important notion that can be developed further.

Let us go back for illustration to the Wakeman-Rowe debate. Wakeman is surely right when he points out that the new merchant organizations of nineteenth-century Hankou were very closely tied to the state. They were not as autonomous as Rowe suggests in his books. But just what are we to conclude from this point? If those phenomena cannot be understood simply in terms of societal development, are we then to understand them strictly in terms of state actions? Must we choose just between one or the other, as the assumption of a binary opposition between state and society pushes us to do?

I believe it would be better to take up Habermas's suggestion and think in terms of a space intermediate between state and society in which both participated. The merchant organizations of which Rowe wrote clearly reflected both merchant power and state control. They cannot be comprehended in terms of either just societal organization or just state agency.

To capture this intermediate space clearly, without all the misapplications and confusion that accompany the use of Habermas's public sphere, I would propose the term "third realm." A value-neutral category, it would free us of the value-laden teleology of Habermas's bourgeois public sphere. It would also define more unequivocally than Habermas's public sphere a third space conceptually distinct from state and society.

Such a conception would also prevent any tendency to reduce the third space to the realm of either the state or society. We would begin by acknowledging the simultaneous influence of both in a third space. In so doing, we can talk about the influence of either, or both, on the third space without suggesting that that space can be collapsed into either or both. We would see it as something with distinct characteristics and a logic of its own over and above the influences of state and society.

We might draw an analogy here with the influence of two parents on a child. If we speak of a child only in terms of the influences of its parents, we can easily be drawn into a simplistic argument over which parent's influence was greater. In so doing, we fail to observe what is truly important: growth and changes within the child itself.

Applied to the Wakeman-Rowe exchange, such a formulation would enable us to retain Rowe's contributions even as we reject his argument for a societal public sphere autonomous from the state. Rowe (as well as Rankin and Strand) is surely correct to point to some new kind of long-term trend, even if it cannot be equated with Habermas's public sphere. The concept of a third realm enables us to talk about those changes in terms of the expansion and institutionalization of a third space, without being drawn into a simplistic dichotomization between state and society. We can even speak of the state-ification or societalization of portions of that space (to take up the hints from Habermas's analysis of the structural transformation of the public sphere), without collapsing it into either state or society.

If we look across the Qing, the Republic, and contemporary China, it should be clear that there has always been a third realm in Chinese sociopolitical life. That realm was more ad hoc and semiformal during the Qing, but became increasingly institutionalized in the twentieth

century. The scope of its public functions, moreover, expanded steadily over time. I turn below to some illustrations of this third realm and its changes from the Qing to the present.

THE THIRD REALM IN LATE IMPERIAL CHINA

THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

The idea of the third realm came first from my current research in Chinese law. I am urging in my study a trinary conception of the Qing justice system: the formal legal system, with its codified laws and official courts, the informal justice system, with its well-established customary practices for dispute resolution by kin/community mediation, and the third realm in between. The first two are relatively well-known. The third has been largely overlooked.

I show elsewhere (Huang, 1993) that, out of a sample of 628 civil cases from three counties (Baodi in Zhili, Baxian in Sichuan, and Danshui-Xinzhu in Taiwan) from the 1760s to the end of the Qing, only 221 made it all the way to a formal court session and adjudication by the magistrate. The remainder almost all ended somewhere in the middle stages of a lawsuit, after the filing of a plaint but before a formal court session. The majority were resolved during those middle stages through the interaction between the formal and informal justice systems.

The mechanism for those settlements was a semi-institutionalized dialogue between magisterial opinion and community/kin mediation. The filing of a plaint generally galvanized further efforts at community/kin mediation. At the same time, magistrates routinely commented on each plaint, counterplaint, and petition submitted by the litigants. Those comments were posted, read, or otherwise made known to the litigants. They therefore figured prominently in the ongoing negotiations toward a settlement. Such settlements, in turn, were generally accepted by the magistrate in preference to formal court adjudication.

Settlements produced in this manner should not be conflated either with formal court adjudication or informal community/kin mediation. They involved both the formal and informal justice systems in a kind

of negotiatory relationship. While magisterial opinion was generally guided by the statutory law in the written code, informal mediators were mainly concerned with peacemaking and compromise. Their interaction, semi-institutionalized even in the Qing, made up a major part of the third realm of the justice system.[1]

SUBCOUNTY ADMINISTRATION

The same pattern obtained in local administration. Formal administration of the Qing state reached only to the county yamen. For public actions below that level, the state typically resorted to unsalaried semiofficials. Subcounty administrative posts, whether the township level *xiangbao*[2] or the village level *paizhang*, were to be filled by community nomination and state confirmation. It was taken for granted that those positions stood in between state and society, subject to the influence of both.

It was those quasi-offices of the third realm that helped to extend the reach of the formal state apparatus down into the basic levels of society. Their regular functions included tax collection, judicial administration, and public security. On an ad hoc basis, they also coordinated public service activities like water control, famine relief, and local defense. They helped to join state and society.

In modern society, we are accustomed to a state of immense infrastructural reach. Direct contact with salaried officials of the state apparatus, we assume, is a normal fact of life. But that was not true of the Qing. The state had limited infrastructural scope. For the majority of the local people, contact with the state occurred mainly in the third realm.

GENTRY PUBLIC FUNCTIONS

Local public services like water control, famine relief, or defense were typically undertaken in the third realm with the participation of both state and society. From the state's point of view, it did not have the necessary infrastructure to undertake such activities on its own; the county yamen therefore usually turned to community leaders for assistance. From the gentry's point of view, on the other hand, they

did not have civil organizations capable of undertaking large-scale public activities; the state's leadership and involvement were essential.

In times of dynastic decline, when natural disasters and social disorder increased, the need for such activities expanded. Sometimes, the state would be too weakened to be able to provide leadership, and the gentry may take over completely. More often, the decline of state power was mainly a decline of central power vis-à-vis local power, and local government and local society together took on the expanded public activities. It would be a mistake to project onto all instances of expanded gentry public functions some secular trend of increased societal autonomy from the state, as the public sphere and civil society models would have us do.

IN BETWEEN STATE AND SOCIETY

To make the spatial concept used here more explicit still, it might be useful to picture the sociopolitical system of late imperial China as a stack of three blocks of different sizes. The small one at the top would be the formal apparatus of the state and the large one at the bottom society. In between was the medium-sized third block, where the third realm of Qing justice operated, where subcounty administrative posts like the township xiangbao and the village paizhang were situated, and where state officials and gentry leaders worked together in public service projects. We need to explore other dimensions of this third realm, and its power relations, operational modes, and organizational forms.

THE THIRD REALM AND NEW CHANGES

The third realm outlined above underwent substantial changes in the late Qing and Republic. Some of the phenomena discussed by Rowe and Rankin as making up a new public sphere were in fact nothing new. They were just a part of the old cyclical expansion in the public functions of the third realm during times of dynastic decline. What was new was that those merged with new phenomena distinctive to the late Qing and the twentieth century.

MODERN SOCIETAL INTEGRATION, STATEMAKING, AND THE THIRD REALM

New trends in societal integration were clearly evident in the Qing. New cities and towns rose in China's most commercialized areas. Those came with new social groupings, especially merchant associations, and a higher level of social integration than was possible in the countryside of dispersed villages. In those settings, merchant associations often worked with the state in public activities such as the provision of services, the maintenance of relief organizations, the mediation of disputes, and the like. It was a trend that would climax in the new chambers of commerce in the last decade of the dynasty. Moreover, under the shocks of both dynastic decline and foreign imperialism, as Rankin emphasizes, late Qing and Republican Chinese elites mobilized for public activities and national concerns to unprecedented degrees. New institutions like local assemblies and self-government associations emerged along with the above trends of societal integration.

By the late Qing, there was also the beginning of a long-term trend of "modern statemaking." Earlier, the state concerned itself mainly with matters of tax, security, and law, and the formal bureaucratic apparatus stopped at the level of the county yamen. During the post-Taiping reconstruction, the state began to establish regular offices for ad hoc third-realm public activities, such as land reclamation and water control (Bernhardt, 1992: 122-125). With the "New Policies" in the last decade of the Qing, it further began to take on a host of modern activities: the establishment of a modern police force, modern schools, modern courts, and even agencies for agricultural improvement, commercial expansion, modern transport, and industrial development. At the same time, the salaried bureaucracy began to extend downward past the county seat to encompass the wards (*qu*) in the Republican period.

The twin processes of modern societal integration and modern statemaking in late Qing and Republican China, limited though they might have been in contrast to the West, led to greater interpenetration of the two and expanded third-realm activities. There were the public activities of old in water control, road maintenance, philanthropy, academies, dispute mediation, and so on. There were also the new

activities of gentry and merchant elites, especially the reform-minded among them.

With these changes the third realm became more institutionalized. The activities of gentry and merchant elites found expression in new institutions that ranged from the semiofficial public works "bureaus" (*ju*) to the "self-government" bureaus. Some of those institutions, to be sure, represented steps toward full bureaucratization (or state-ification). That was a part of the process of modern statemaking. Others represented steps toward complete societalization (or "privatization," to use Rowe's word). That was a part of the process of modern societal integration. Most, however, represented the continued working together of state and society in the third space between the two.

The new chambers of commerce illustrate well the simultaneous involvement of state and society in the new institutions of the third realm. These organizations were composed of merchants, but they were called for by state policy (in 1904) and operated under state guidelines. Their emergence told of the formal acknowledgment by the state of long-evolving changes in its attitude toward commerce. Their emergence told also of the increase in size and strength of the merchant groups, especially in the big commercial cities. Working closely with local government agencies, these new organizations wielded institutionalized authority over a wide range of governmental, semigovernmental, and nongovernmental functions, including the maintenance of urban services, the establishment of public security forces, the mediation of disputes, and the organized representation of merchant interests. They cannot be understood simply in terms of the state or of society.[3]

THE LOCALIZED THIRD REALM

In the context of the late Qing and early Republic, the third realm of gentry and merchant public activity operated mainly at the local and rural rather than the national and urban level, just as Rankin suggests. That clearly distinguishes China from Habermas's bourgeois public sphere with its spotlight on national and urban phenomena. Instead of continuing to insist on equating China and Europe under the term public sphere, we need to try to explain the difference between the two.

Democracy in early-modern and modern Europe, it seems to me, was born of a high degree of both modern societal integration and modern statemaking (although Habermas really discusses only the former in his model of the bourgeois public sphere). It emerged out of the twin processes of the integration of society into a national public and the expansion of the state through a modern bureaucratic apparatus. In that context, state power and societal power interpenetrated not only locally, but also nationally. It was the relative balance between the two, or even the superior power of societal development over statemaking, that set the essential background for the development of democracy.

In late Qing and early Republican China, however, national societal integration and modern statemaking did not advance nearly as far. There was the involutionary persistence of a peasant economy and natural-village society rather than a full-blown transformation to modern urban industrial society. Advances in social integration occurred more at the local county, rural township, and village levels than at the national level. And there was the decline of the central government and the emergence of warlordism, rather than the rise of modern absolutism and the nation-state. In that context, state power and societal power overlapped and collaborated mainly at the local and rural levels.

There was sufficient modernization, however, for the local and rural third realm of twentieth-century China to become substantially different from that of earlier periods. Expanded and modernized public activity was the order of the day in advanced areas like the Yangzi delta. It was generally undertaken by a combination of official and elite action, often in newly institutionalized forms. The result was both the expansion and institutionalization of state-society collaboration in the third realm.

To be sure, new institutional forms like the chambers of commerce or self-government associations opened up possibilities of new power relations between state and society. Increasing autonomy from the state on the part of merchant groups in the local chambers of commerce, or of the gentry in the self-government associations, was certainly one of those possibilities. But so was greatly expanded state control, which of course was what was to happen on a massive scale

with the communist revolution. As for what actually transpired during the Republican period, the continued collaboration of the two in a third space seems to me more striking than either growing societal autonomy or increasing bureaucratic control.

THE THIRD REALM OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA

If the projection onto China of an idealized opposition between societal autonomy and state power is misleading for the Qing and the Republic, it is all the more so for contemporary China, where state power has been more pervasive and intrusive than ever before. In terms of the parallel processes of societal integration and statemaking, the communist revolution brought greatly accelerated and expanded statemaking, resulting in an even more lopsided relationship between the two. Although the scope of societal organizations shrank dramatically, the formal state apparatus grew geometrically. The result was what might be called, to borrow Habermas's word, the state-ification of large parts of the old third realm.

Beyond the boundaries of the expanded formal state apparatus, moreover, the party-state sought to extend its influence further by completely institutionalizing much of the remaining third realm. Instead of relying on ad hoc collaboration between state and society, the party-state created institutional frameworks within which such collaboration was to take place. The purpose was to ensure the state's influence even in those spaces it acknowledged to be intermediate between state and society.

The civil justice system, once again, is a good illustration. The scope of the formal courts expanded greatly in the postrevolutionary period, as they took on not only the adjudication but also the mediation of disputes. Qing courts rarely resorted to mediation. When magistrates convened formal court sessions, they almost always ruled in favor of one or the other party in accordance with the law (Huang, forthcoming). Mediation took place not in the formal system but in the informal and third realms of Qing justice. The Republican courts, however, began to take on mediation, creating special mediation offices alongside the adjudicatory chambers. The postrevolutionary

courts enlarged that trend by making mediation a major part of their routine work.

In addition, the postrevolutionary state sought to extend its influence further by institutionalizing community/kin mediation. In place of the ad hoc mediators of old, the government placed mediation under the charge of designated administrators working alongside semiformal mediation committees made up of community cadres. This rural mediation apparatus made up a new kind of third realm of Chinese justice, institutionalized but neither completely of the formal state nor completely of informal society. It is structured to involve the simultaneous influence of both.

THE COLLECTIVE ERA

The same pattern of state extension into the third realm and of institutionalization of that realm occurred in rural administration and organization. The state extended its formal bureaucratic apparatus below the Republican ward down to the commune (township, *xiang*) level, and, through the party organization, farther down to the brigade (administrative village, *cun*) level. At the same time, it created a new type of third-realm institution in the form of the rural collectives.

Economically, these collective (*jiti*) entities were to be distinct from state (*guojia*) units. They were in theory owned by the community (*jiti suoyou*), not by the state (termed "the whole people," *quanmin*). And their net output, after state taxes and compulsory purchase, was to be shared by the members of the community. The income of the members was thus tied directly to the individual collectivity and not to some national wage scale, as was the case with workers in state units.

Politically, these units were seen as neither part of the bureaucratic state nor part of civil society (*minjian*), but as something in between. Their administrations were distinct from state agencies. At the commune level, they were administered by a combination of state cadres (*guojia ganbu*), who were usually appointed from outside, and community cadres (*jiti ganbu*), selected from within. At the brigade level, they were entirely administered by community cadres, albeit under the direction of a party secretary and party branch committee. At the most basic level of the production team, finally, they were administered by community cadres who were usually not even party members.

In practice, to be sure, the relationship between state and society in these community administrations was anything but equal. At one extreme, the community cadres often could do little more than carry out orders transmitted from above by state cadres. At the other extreme, the community cadres who staffed the middle and lower rungs of the commune administration, and all of the brigade and team administrations, were able to bend and manipulate state cadres to their entrenched interests and their way of doing things. Reality generally fell between the two extremes.

The operative relationship between state and community was never the simple push-button one of the totalitarianism model, nor the simple state-versus-village one of the "moral economy" model (Scott 1976).[4] It is better understood as a process that entailed the co-involvement of state and community within the new institutions of the postrevolutionary third realm.

THE REFORM ERA

If the collective era saw mainly state-ification of the third realm, the reform era beginning in the late 1970s has seen much societalization (to borrow Habermas's useful words again) and "de-state-ification" of that realm. The institutional apparatus of the third realm now stops for all intents and purposes at the level of the production brigade. The production team further down has become just a shadow of its earlier self. At the same time, as "guidance planning" (*zhidaoxing jihua*) replaces the old "command planning" (*zhilingxing jihua*), township (commune) and village (brigade) administrations have gained a good deal more autonomy from their immediate superiors. Within the township administrations themselves, furthermore, the community cadres at the middle and lower rungs have gained more negotiatory room vis-à-vis the state-appointed top-level officials. Most important of all, perhaps, are the newly powerful managers of community enterprises. The majority work on a "responsibility" basis, answering to the township and village administrations for a certain quota of output and revenue, but otherwise enjoying full managerial powers. In general, the heads of the larger community enterprises wield considerable negotiatory power in their relations with the township or village administrations.

To be sure, the new phenomena do not add up to anything that might be called "community democracy." Elections remain largely pro forma and elected bodies largely hollow. The supposed divisions of power between administration and enterprise (*zheng qi fenkai*), similarly, carry little substance.[5] Nevertheless, there should be no mistaking the fact that the administrative authorities of these entities cannot be understood simply as part of the state bureaucracy. At this level, there is built-in interaction between state cadres appointed from outside and community cadres subject to the influence of tightly knit networks of local connections. They are best seen as neither completely of the state nor of society, but as a product of both, in the third realm between the two.

In the economic sphere, as in the sociopolitical, the township and village communities cannot be understood simply in terms of the planned state economy or the unplanned market economy. They represent an amalgamation of the two, shaped at once by guidance planning from the state and semiautonomous profit-seeking on the market. They belong neither to the "first economy" of the state sector, nor the "second economy" (or "informal economy") of the private sector, but to a third economy distinct from both. Their enterprises are subject at once to state-imposed controls (on wage differentials between managers and workers and on obligatory contributions to community welfare, for example), and to market stimuli.

PRIVATE SOCIETY VERSUS THE THIRD REALM

The reform era has of course also witnessed a tremendous expansion in the realm of private society and economy. Liberalization of state control has brought greater freedoms for individual citizens. Marketization of the economy has brought the rise of privately owned businesses, from small household concerns up to larger enterprises. Liberalization and marketization, moreover, created the space necessary for the 1980s democracy movement based on college students, intellectuals, and other urban citizens. Together, that complex of phenomena understandably has called to mind the group of associations made in the public sphere/civil society models—hence the great influence of those models in recent Western scholarship on China.

Moreover, there is the possibility that what occurred in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe might happen in China. A collapse of the communist party-state apparatus from within could release a dramatic expansion of the private realm. And such a development might give rise to democratic tendencies that might result eventually in something resembling the Western experience. Those possibilities reinforced the apparent relevance of the public sphere/civil society models and their appeal for scholars.

If we turn from what might happen to what has actually happened, however, the private realm greatly pales in comparison with the third realm. At the end of the first decade of reforms, in 1989, the private sector of the economy still accounted for just 4.80% of total industrial output in China, whereas the collective third sector accounted for fully 35.69% (Guojia tongji ju, 1990: 416; cf. 413, 481).[6] And civil organizations outside state control remained very modest in numbers and influence, especially under the severe crackdown after June 1989. The third realm, by contrast, has grown tremendously, in part because the state does not see townships and villages, collective units that they are, as representing any kind of a basic threat to socialism and party control.

The loosening of vertical controls in the party-state has created much greater room for negotiatory relations between state officials and community entrepreneurs and cadres within the collective units. This has happened at the same time as the dramatic expansion in their resource base through rural industrialization. A measure of horizontal integration among these units has also emerged, as township and village administrations and community enterprises in different localities enter into contractual relations with one another on the market.

Similar changes have occurred to some extent in urban work units. Those share with the rural collectivities some basic characteristics: tightly knit community ties, a relatively stable work force (even if not usually one that also lives together, as in the rural communities), and even common "property." Their administrations also generally include both state cadres appointed from outside and leaders of the units themselves. They too contain a kind of institutionalized interaction between state and society. With the liberalization of state control, they too have seen expansions in the negotiatory space between state cadres

and unit leaders. They too, finally, have entered increasingly into new contractual relations with other units.

If the Chinese government stays on its reform course, third-realm changes such as those outlined above seem to me possibly more important than anything resembling assertions of private societal autonomy against the state. We have been drawn by our binary conceptions to pay much more attention to that latter possibility. But, in a society that has for so long been so thoroughly dominated by the party-state, it is unrealistic, short of a sudden collapse from within of the party-state apparatus itself, to look for the overnight development of societal organizations genuinely separate and independent from the state, in the manner idealized by the public sphere and civil society models. Even in the "Beijing spring" of 1989, the demonstrators were organized more by work units than any civil organizations of the private realm. We may need to look to the third realm more than the still severely restricted private realm for future political change.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZED THIRD REALM

The rural collectives and urban work units of contemporary China, it should be clear, were born of processes of sociopolitical change very different from those underlying the Habermasian model. Instead of growing integration toward a national public, there was state-imposed organization of society into segmented communes/brigades and work units. But that same process gave those entities a strong material basis and highly developed administrative apparatuses. The policies of population registration in the countryside (enforced since 1958) and of virtual permanent employment in the urban work units also gave those units extraordinarily stable memberships. The result was entities that were tightly knit within themselves but largely segmented from one another.

Given such a sociopolitical organization, the administrations of these entities have become a crucial zone in the third realm between state and society. They are where the state joins with society for public activities beyond the capacity of the formal bureaucratic apparatus. They are where new kinds of state-society relations get worked out.

They are the source of new kinds of power relations, more negotiatory than commandist. They are potentially also the source of new kinds of political organizations and activities.

By the early 1990s, those administrations had an institutionalized history of almost four decades. They command material bases, physical and organizational structures, and evolving power relations and operational logics of their own that are distinct both from those of state agencies and private associations. To understand these entities and their historical background, we need to break out of the old conceptual habits of postulating a simple binary opposition between state and society. Contrary to the vision of the public sphere/civil society models, actual sociopolitical change in China has really never come from any lasting assertion of societal autonomy against the state, but rather from the workings out of state-society relations in the third realm. The content and logic of that realm, more than an ideal projected from Western experience, is what urgently demands our creative attention and research.

NOTES

1. These ideas, and the supporting evidence for them, are presented in detail in my forthcoming article (Huang, 1993).

2. The *xiangbao* was known by different names in different places: the *xiangyue* in eighteenth-century Baxian (Sichuan) (Huang, 1993), the *xiangyue dibao* (or xiangbao for short) in nineteenth-century Baodi (Huang, 1985: 225-232), and *zongli* in nineteenth-century Danshui-Xinzhu in Taiwan (Allee, 1987; Huang, 1993). Xiangbao was the encompassing term used by the Qing code. In nineteenth-century Baodi, they oversaw an average of about twenty villages, approximately the size of the contemporary *xiang*.

3. Two recent publications of archival materials on the Tianjin and Suzhou chambers of commerce have provided us with a clearer picture of these organizations: Tianjinshi dang'anguan et al., eds. (1989), and Zhang Kaiyuan et al., eds. (1991).

4. These collective units have been thoroughly transformed by twentieth-century statemaking and community integration. It will not do to picture some preexisting "traditional village" that seeks to reestablish itself against state intrusion, in the manner of Scott's "moral economy" model. The villages and townships of today bear little resemblance to the prerevolutionary village and township. They comprise both state and community, agriculture and industry, and peasant cultivators and industrial workers, and they command highly elaborated and institutionalized administrative apparatuses (Huang, 1990).

5. The theory was that township administrations would be something like a board of directors (*dongshi hui*), and the heads of township "companies" (*gongsi*) would be the managers. Rural

cadres admit readily that the "manager" (*jingli*) of the "industry company" (*gongye gongsi*) (or "sideline company," *fuye gongsi*, or "agriculture company," *nongye gongsi*) functions in fact just like an assistant (*zhuli*) to the township head (*xiangzhang*).

6. The "private" sector's share would be 8.25% if joint Sino-foreign, joint state-private, and collective-private enterprises were added. And the state sector's share was 56.06%. The collective sector, consisting mainly of community enterprises working under some kind of "responsibility" arrangement with community administrations, saw an explosive five-fold growth in the decade, at a rate of more than 20% per year. That was the sector, more than any other, that accounted for the impressive 9.5% growth per annum in the economy as a whole during the decade (Guojia tongji ju, 1990: 51, 415).

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