

The Politics of Neighborhood Governance in China

Jianfeng Wang

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Introduction
China's Residents Committee
Linking the State with Ordinary Residents
Chapter One

Prologue

The Dejia Community does not appear to be strikingly different from hundreds and thousands of other urban communities in China. Roughly 4,500 residents live in this warm but clean and comfortable neighborhood, located in the heart of the metropolitan Tianjin City. Most of the adults rush out of the neighborhood for work at dawn, leaving this cluster of six-floored concrete-brick mixing apartment buildings quiet and even a little dreary. On the northwest side of the community sits a line of freestanding one-floored buildings. The organization occupying these buildings is the Dejia Residents Committee, which is for all intents and purposes in control of the community.

We have complained about this issue many times to the city and district leaders as well as the related governmental sections. No results! Therefore, being the representative of all Dejia residents, our committee is formally seeking help from you, the People's Congress of Tianjin City as the highest authority in our city. Please put our accusation into your propositions and discuss it in your coming annual meeting. We earnestly trust that you representatives will bring justice back to our community.

This is an excerpt from a letter sent by the committee to the People's Congress of Tianjin City on December 12, 2003. In the letter, the committee accused its back-fence neighbor, the No.1 Rest House of Tianjin City, of infringing upon the interests of the committee. The No. 1 Rest House is a luxurious villa specially prepared for the most senior national and foreign leaders when they visit Tianjin City. The facility is a military forbidden zone. Local residents call it “the Camp David of Tianjin City.”

The dispute started in 2003 when the Rest House facility installed a huge boiler near the bounding wall that separates it from the Dejia Community. The boiler is located just 14 meters away from the four nearest Dejia residential buildings—numbers 65, 66, 67, and 68. The residents began complaining about the low frequency rumbling and the exhaust pollution emitted from the boiler immediately after it had been finished. They worried about not only the damage to their health, but also the devaluation of their private property as the result of the pollution. Some even called the boiler a “time bomb.” Representing its constituents, the committee attempted several times to negotiate with the facility. However, the facility manager never bothered talking with the committee. Indeed, the facility even prohibited the committee members from entering its compound to check the boiler in the name of security. That was not an uncommon result in China, since no one would question the

facility's authority and legitimacy over a no-ranking and unofficial residential organization.

However, what makes the story interesting is the persistence of the committee in its accusations. First, it asked help from the street office, but the office refused to back the committee. The reasons were simple. First, the administrative rank of the facility is much higher than the rank of the street office in the Chinese administrative hierarchy. More importantly, the facility is a security station, an "independent kingdom" beyond the control of regular administration. The office believed that the fight with the facility was helpless, and tried persuading the committee to back down on this issue. It even warned the committee of the potential consequences for both residents and the committee if the dispute was scaled-up to higher levels of administration. The committee defied the warning, however, and went up to the district and, later, to the city government. After receiving similar rejections, the committee sued the facility but the district court refused to accept the case. Finally, the committee sent the letter to the People's Congress of Tianjin City for help, and then sent a similar letter to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference of Tianjin City two days later.

Eventually the committee's perseverance harvested some results. The Tianjin City Planning and Land Resource Bureau and the Environmental Protection Bureau of Hexi District Government together ruled that the boiler was a non-sanctioned illegal construction, and its emission exceeded the national environmental standard. Leaving aside the detail of how the irresponsible government sector was punished and residents were compensated, the committee's action itself raises some interesting questions about the nature of its organization and its interactions with the state and ordinary residents. What is the Residents Committee? How could it win a concession from a powerful piece of the state? How frequent are such concessions? What can we learn about grassroots state-society relations in contemporary China from the organization?

Residents Committee: A Chinese “Parallel Polis?”

The Dejia Residents Committee is only one of 1,115 Residents Committees in Tianjin City (*Tianjin Statistical Yearbook*, 2003). They together constitute the lowest-tiered but largest social network existing between the state and ordinary residents in the city. Each committee has between three and nine full time members, and they are often middle-aged or elderly women handpicked by local governments. A committee is usually in charge of a variety of issues that affect several thousand urban residents. According to the Chinese Constitution (1982), the committee is the only grassroots organization that is legally recognized within urban communities. It is supposed to be self-governing body that is elected by and is accountable to ordinary residents. The Constitution also guarantees it an independent legal status, protecting its operations from outside infringement by the state or other organizations.

The committee’s director, Ms. Li Lan, told me that she had stood firmly to a principle from the beginning: solving the dispute by appealing only to legal means. She believed that any non-peaceful resistance would do nothing but ruin the legitimacy of the committee’s accusation. When the court refused to accept the case, Ms. Li tried hard persuading a few angry residents not to block the entrance of the facility, protest on the street or in the front of the city government building, and even go to Beijing to appeal. Her decision finally proved appropriate.

The Dejia Residents Committee’s action against the No. 1 Rest House of Tianjin City followed its legal obligation precisely. It played the leading role by representing the best interests of its constituents. Such an activity is reminiscent of success stories from East European countries where disobedient civil societies organized at the grassroots level, competed with, and eventually won over the penetrative states that governed over them.

When this first story about the Dejia Residents Committee is told, many would raise this Eastern European analogy. The analogy is alluring as we live in the age when “history” is supposed to end with the liberal mantra (Fukuyama, 1992). Dictatorship should be torn down according to the sentiment of the mantra, and democracy and liberty must prevail. Any activity like that described above as undertaken by an organization like the Dejia Residents Committee should raise curiosity about the possibility of a bottom-up transformation in China.

This liberal mantra, not surprisingly, has already had a significant ripple effect on the study of the state-society relations in China. Many China observers, inspired by the effective explanatory power of the liberal concept, and perhaps more encouraged by the transition in East Europe, have attempted either to prove or discover the universal value of the mantra and its indicated path in Chinese context.

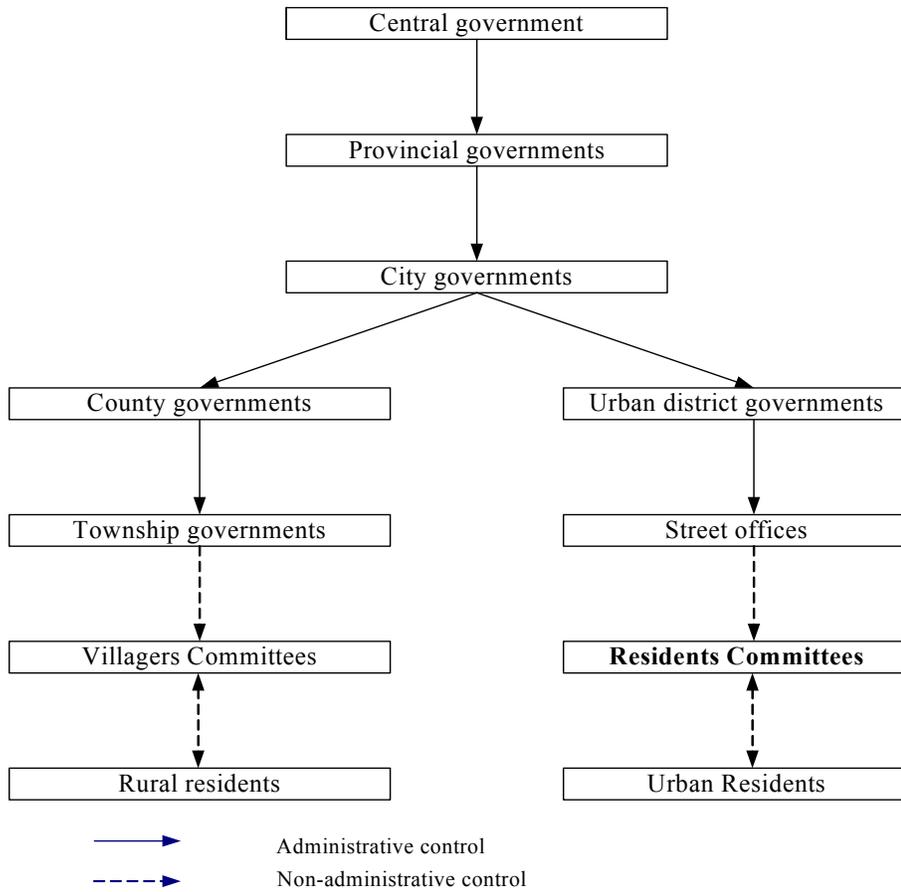
Typical examples of these sorts of effort can be found in studies of the Chinese rural institutional counterpart to the urban Residents Committee, the Villagers Committee. Figure 1-1 shows the great similarities between the two institutions. While the Villagers Committee serves as the link between peasants and the state in rural areas, the Residents Committee has essentially the same legal status

in cities. Both institutions are defined in the Constitution as “grassroots mass self-governing organizations” with similar structures and statutory functions.

The Villagers Committee started attracting the interest of researchers in the late 1980s when the mechanism of direct election was adopted in some villages. Despite some serious reservations about the authenticity of the democratic elections in the Villagers Committees (Kennedy, 2002; O’Brien and Li, 2000), the literature enthusiastically suggests that the organization represents a genuine path to grassroots democracy and the eventual democratization of Chinese politics (Bai, 1997; Carter Center Delegation Report, 1997, 1998; Epstein, 1997; International Republican Institute, 1994, 1997; Oi and Rozelle, 2000; Pastor and Tan, 2000; Shi, 1999; Wang, 2001; Wang, 1997). The practice of the Villagers Committee at the rural grassroots is described as “a definite step forward in the nation’s delicate move toward a more democratic government” (Institute for Rural Development, 1994, p. 1). As Wang (1997, p. 1440) argues, “The active participation of eight hundred million of Chinese peasants at every level of elections will become an irresistible force to reconstitute the state from below.” As a result, he continues, “the Chinese case shows that the democratic wave can flourish first in rural areas” (Wang, 1997, p. 1440).

The studies on the Villagers Committee identify it as an important self-governing entity for rural peasants to “shield themselves against the encroachments of local government and to protect their legal rights and properties” (Wang, 1997, p. 1440). Coordinately, the Deji Residents Committee was engaged in exactly this same sort of activity in the above-relayed story. If the Villagers Committee is the hope of democratization for rural China, what is about the Residents Committee for cities? Given the same legal nature between the two grassroots organizations, would it be possible that the Residents Committee follows its rural cousin in changing the political establishment from the below? Such an analogy is indeed not baseless if the broad context of Chinese economic reform is brought into picture.

Figure 1-1: The Formal Governing Structure in China¹



¹ There are four cities directly under the control of the central government. There are also few provinces that directly control their counties, such as Jiangsu Province.

Urban Crisis: Economic Reform and Governability

Lipset (1959) once empirically tested for a positive correlation between economic development and democracy. Ever since then, this correlation has been treated as a holy ordinance, even though it is sometimes labeled as being economic determinism and linearity (Burkhart and Lewis-Beck, 1994; Przeworski and Limongi, 1997). According to the theory, economic growth increases the desire and capability of people to participate in decision-making processes, which in turn facilitates democratization. This economic theory proposes at least three social and political changes as the result of economic development. First, ordinary people become more interested in influencing governmental decision-making process since economic growth increases state-individual interactions. Second, economic development alters the stratification of the population and creates a dominant middle class. Finally, increases in personal wealth change people's political orientations towards a more open system (Weiner, 1971; Nie and Prewitt, 1969).

This economic-political tandem relationship underlies many contemporary Chinese state-society studies, which suggests that economic reform will facilitate, if not cause, democracy to Chinese society sooner or later (White, 1993a). In fact, nearly all observers who praise the democratic progress in rural China have based their arguments on the fact of China's rapid economic development situation either explicitly or implicitly, regardless of their detail arguments. It is argued that crisis of rural governance, as a result of economic liberalization, has forced the state to accept democratization in rural villages (Shi, 1999). Now, if economic development created a crisis that triggered democratic transition in rural China, as the liberal scholars believe, what is the situation in cities, where deeper crisis occurs as more profound economic reform measures are taken?

The *Danwei* System – The Traditional Urban Control Cornerstone

Cities once were safe boxes in China. The state imposed a Soviet-style planned system to manage the economy after it took power in 1949. The state monopolized all social resources, which made it possible to deeply penetrate urban society through direct control over not only production resources, but also living resources, such as food, employment, housing, social welfare, and education. In this totalitarian system, politics, economy, and social life were very much intertwined and the state became *the* axle that commanded essentially everything in the society. In order to match this centralized economic basis in cities, the state created a tightly controlled network, "the working unit system" [the *danwei* system] (Lu and Perry, 1997). Besides serving as the basic economic unit for the state-owned economy, the *danwei* was also the cornerstone for social and social control in cities. All *danwei* were subordinated to various levels of government, and urban residents were subordinated to various *danwei*. A *danwei* managed nearly all aspects of its employees' lives (including their families) from the cradle to the grave. This was a system where urban society was deeply embedded into the state's political will. If the society was a big "honeycomb," as Shue (1988) characterized, each *danwei* formulated an independent and closed cell. Each individual was slotted into a small

cell. He or she became a “*danwei* person” [*danwei ren*] rather than a “social person” [*shehui ren*], when most of his or her needs depended upon his or her *danwei*. Therefore, the society was sliced into millions of largely isolated *danwei*. Each *danwei* existed under the shadow of the state, and each individual was a *danwei*’s dependent. This system was a highly effective control system, and fit well into the Chinese planned economy. The state had successfully managed cities utilizing it until the Dengist economic reforms were adopted in the late 1970s.

Crisis of Urban Governance

Deng Xiaoping, the principal architect of Chinese economic reform, inherited a massive and sluggish state-owned economy on the brink of collapse in 1978. He then initiated a fundamental reform in economic area: gradually transforming the planned economy into a market economy. Nearly three decades later, very few still question the achievements of the Chinese economy. With nearly the highest growth rate in the world over the period, China has become the third largest economic entity in the world (the second if using purchasing parity value), and it has since been more or less fully integrated into the world economic system.

However, under the aureole of its rapid economic growth, the urban governing structure has been dragged down into an unprecedented crisis. The *danwei* system, upon which the state relied for social control, is rapidly dissolving as the effects of economic reform affect the Chinese social system and politics.

In line with the Dengist reforms, the state has gradually retreated from being involved with direct production activities. It pushes its formerly owned *danwei* to face market competition. Since the market economy is built upon the profit-seeking motive, the *danwei* has had to peel off its non-economic responsibilities like providing housing, medical services, child schooling, and social security to its employees. As a result, the trinity of state-*danwei*-urban residents has been dissolved from both directions (Croll, 1999).

Economic reform has also created new types of working units that have little connection with the state. State-owned employees constituted only less than thirty percent of total urban employment in China in 2002 (Table 1-1).

Table 1-1: China Urban Employment Personnel (1999-2002)

(10,000 persons)

	1999	2000	2001	2002
Urban employed persons (Total)	22412	23151	23940	24780
State-owned units	8572	8102	7640	7163
Urban collective-owned units	1712	1499	1291	1122
Cooperative units	144	155	153	161
Joint ownership units	46	42	45	45
Limited liability corporations	603	687	841	1083
Share-holding corporations Ltd.	420	457	483	538
Private enterprises	1053	1268	1527	1999
Units with funds from Hong Kong, Macro, &	306	310	326	367

Taiwan				
Foreign funded units	306	332	345	391
Self-employed units	2414	2136	2131	2269

Source: *China Statistical Yearbook*, 2003.

That number has particular political significance from an historical perspective: just thirty years ago a vast majority of urban employees worked for state-owned units. More interestingly, the number of people working in private enterprises and so called limited liability corporations doubled in just four years between 1999 and 2002, which reflects the rapid pace of privatization in China.

Table 1-2 shows a more dynamic trend of employment composition in Tianjin City. In 1978, seventy-seven percent of employees worked in the state-owned system. Today, that number has dropped to forty-six percent.² In contrast, the number of employees in “other ownership” and “private and individual” sectors skyrocketed after 1993. Before that, they constituted a negligible part of the total work force in the city.

The national level data and the data in Tianjin City both suggest a simple fact: the majority of urban residents no longer directly rely upon the state for their living resources. Economic independence implies more personal freedom from the state. As the traditional *danwei* becomes no more than a purely economic entity, the state is losing its most powerful means of control over the urban society in the reform era. Even those who still work in state-owned units have much weaker ties with the state, since those remaining state-owned units, like their private competitors, are primarily concerned with making profit. Indeed, people often find that non-state sectors are more attractive, especially for young Chinese. For example, an average state-owned unit worker received only seventy-one percent of income that a foreign funded unit worker did in 2002 (*China Statistical Yearbook*, 2003).

Table 1-2: Tianjin City Urban Employment Personnel (1978-2002)

(10,000 persons)

	Total urban employment	State-Owned Employment	Collective-owned Employment	Other Ownership employment	Private and Individual employment
1978	217.5	168.3	49.1		0.1
1979	230.34	178.2	52.04		0.1
1980	243.59	188.08	54.61		0.9
1981	255	194.02	59.88		1.1
1982	262.02	198.91	61.61		1.5
1983	270.33	201.27	66.96		2.1
1984	276.39	201.29	71.42	0.98	2.7

² The percentage of state-owned employees among total employees in Tianjin City is higher than the national level, because it was one of the selected cities in which the state had heavily invested during the pre-reform era.

1985	281.08	205.26	69.71	1.51	4.6
1986	284.5	209.97	68.47	1.76	4.3
1987	286.63	212.1	66.89	2.54	5.1
1988	286.64	213.99	64.33	3.04	5.28
1989	289.91	217.32	63.45	3.61	5.53
1990	290.01	217.26	62.55	4.5	5.7
1991	300.58	219.34	66.17	6.05	9.02
1992	303.7	212.73	72.39	8.85	9.73
1993	312.7	210.9	75.5	16.3	10
1994	318.6	206.5	71.4	24.4	16.3
1995	319.8	202.1	68.4	29.2	20.1
1996	317.1	199.1	62.8	31	24.2
1997	318.6	196.16	58.19	35.8	28.45
1998	312.65	183.49	53	41.58	34.58
1999	313.89	176.54	47.54	49.8	40.01
2000	296.61	163.84	40.58	55.37	36.82
2001	295.37	153.25	32.13	60.94	49.05
2002	295.71	137.81	26.6	82.54	48.76

Source: *Tianjin City Statistical Yearbook*, 2003.

The dissolution of the *danwei* system has been accompanied by demographic change, which aggravates the crisis in urban governance. Economic growth creates a huge demand for cheap wage labor, which in turn breaks down the traditional segregation between the urban and rural sectors. In order to control urban residents and peasants, peasants were largely prohibited from entering cities without the state's permission before the mid-1980s. However, nearly 110 million peasants have filed into almost every corner of Chinese cities today (*People's Daily*, 2002). A nation wide survey conducted in 1997 shows that an average urban community contains about 115 officially registered temporary peasants. That does not include more unregistered "black" peasants (Liu and Lu, 1997, p. 194).³ Nowadays, more than one in ten urban residents are registered as peasants in the average Chinese city, and the number is even higher in major cities (Solinger, 1995, p. 128).

While this flood of "floating population" has made the Chinese economic take-off possible, it also has posed tremendous challenges to the state's capacity for social control. The Chinese government and ordinary urban residents once referred to the members of this population as "*mangliu*," vagrants who wander aimlessly, begging, stealing, gambling, and working in prostitution (Li and Hu, 1991, p. 22). In many ways, the members of this demographic are the most rebellious population in China since they are young but have almost no stable interest connection with the cities where they live. In Chinese history, the "floating population" has subverted

³ A person living in cities without proper documents and permissions is considered illegal and he/she will be fined and deported by public security organs.

many regimes, including the Nationalist Regime (1911-1949 in mainland China, fled to Taiwan later), and the state is acutely aware of this fact of history. To some extent, controlling the “floating population” along the economic liberalization has become the most urgent problem for urban social stability (Jiang and Lu, 1997).

Besides the dissolution of the *danwei* system and floating population, cities are also paying increasingly higher price for losing social justice and equality. Mounting social problems are swelling in the reform era, such as unemployment (Muo, 2000), enlarging the marginal classes (Khan and Riskin, 1998; Solinger, 1996), crime and moral decay (Bakken, 1999), and environmental deterioration (Economy, 2004). Just a few cases can illustrate the pace and intensity of these problems. For example, urban unemployment in Tianjin City multiplied by 38 times in just seven years from 1996 to 2002 (Table 1-3).

Table 1-3: Official Urban Unemployment Rate of Tianjin City (1996-2002)

Year	Urban unemployment rate (%)
1996	0.37
1997	1.57
1998	4.71
1999	7.02
2000	13.52
2001	14.05
2002	14.30

Source: calculated from Table 2-15 in *Tianjin City Statistical Year Book*, 2003.

The nationwide number of offense cases against public order accepted or investigated by public security organs jumped ninety percent and seventy-five percent respectively from 1995 to 2002 (Table 1-4 and Table1-5).⁴ Perhaps there is no better word than ‘shocking’ to describe the severity of social problems in Chinese cities. These problems threaten not only the confidence of ordinary Chinese on the rightness of economic reform, but also the legitimacy of the state day by day (He, 1993).

Table 1-4: Offense Cases Against Public Order Accepted by Public Security Organs (1995-2002)⁵

<i>Number of Cases Accepted to Be Treated</i>	Unit: Case							
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Total	3289760	3363636	3227669	3232113	3356083	4437417	5713934	6232350
Disturbing Work or Public Order	332120	381035	330886	300201	268747	272113	413042	544363
Gang Fighting or Picking Quarrels and Making Troubles	84588	86626	90233	99050	103178	135930	154016	147307

⁴ One of the most rapid growing and largest type of public order offenses is “Violating Regulations on Management of Residence or Identity.” Those regulations target primarily on floating population. The violations show the scale of floating population.

⁵ The table does not include (1) criminal cases, and (2) the offense cases handled by non-public security organs, such as the Residents Committee.

Acting Indecently Towards Women	63220	63808	53976	41294	34192	32341	33063	27468
Obstructing the Government Workers to Perform Their Duty	45999	48686	45998	45971	47640	50490	56163	51917
Violating Regulations on Management of Firearms	23070	55019	35461	26234	24734	26456	59729	19052
Violating Regulations on Management of Explosives	26883	33475	35114	34912	49304	62819	88614	71606
Beating Other Body	503283	511716	537455	568438	576712	837778	1053191	1135896
Robbing Other People of Their Valuables	729707	620202	515110	528818	517277	732633	915240	1001965
Defrauding, Snatching or Extorting and Racketeering Valuables	93471	89405	78257	86537	90494	117594	141194	150620
Making Stirs and Then Robbing Public or Private Valuables	5821	5525	4970	4859	4529	6048	6888	6007
Intentionally Damaging Public or Private Valuables	48737	50221	49779	53033	54492	82159	107066	117672
Forging and Fraudulently Selling Bills or Certificates	43318	41224	29700	26119	23075	18131	18205	16656
Disturbing Public Order	13061	11011	10945	9000	10134	17539	12826	11275
Prostitution or Going Whoring	186661	210724	210390	189972	216660	225693	242053	224976
Gambling	433831	441929	417784	365221	382272	413846	463218	446654
Violating Regulations on Management of Residence or Identity	197808	218338	217676	268537	306111	561719	759048	899068
Others	458182	494692	563935	583917	646532	844128	1190378	1359848

Sources: *Statistical Yearbook of China*, 1996-2003.

Table 1-5: Offense Cases Against Public Order Investigated and Treated by Public Security Organs (1995-2002)

<i>Number of Cases Investigated and Treated</i>	Unit: Case							
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Total	2968220	3117623	3003799	2994282	3105940	3823011	4851600	5196998
Disturbing Work or Public Order	330462	378452	322084	298650	267119	264865	406813	534504
Gang Fighting or Picking Quarrels and Making Troubles	81581	83769	87341	95560	98808	121290	134246	126225
Acting Indecently Towards Women	62141	62881	53225	40613	33538	30791	30660	25335
Obstructing the Government Workers to Perform Their Duty	45394	48128	45515	45347	46909	48504	53381	49599
Violating Regulations on Management of Firearms	22730	54773	35271	26047	24434	26081	58353	18699
Violating Regulations on Management of Explosives	26213	33305	34857	34473	48832	61410	86410	70496
Beating Other Body	476254	486295	509924	534990	536009	695294	829360	881592
Robbing Other People of Their Valuables	468437	430375	353804	357360	351066	399436	476997	470116
Defrauding, Snatching or Extorting and Racketeering Valuables	86589	83089	72385	78943	79449	87948	93956	84496
Making Stirs and Then Robbing Public or Private Valuables	5554	5296	4794	4715	4254	5320	5542	4582
Intentionally Damaging Public or Private Valuables	46670	48377	48081	50513	51465	66250	78898	84051
Forging and Fraudulently Selling Bills or Certificates	43162	41165	29428	26017	22863	17911	17872	16154
Disturbing Public Order	12982	10937	10890	8910	10001	16765	12245	10688
Prostitution or Going Whoring	185441	209652	209244	189452	215128	222132	239461	221930

Gambling	431453	439928	415991	363737	379039	402588	455727	438295
Violating Regulations on Management of Residence or Identity	197060	217380	216358	267877	305002	557131	749540	889793
Others	446097	483821	554607	571078	632024	799295	1122139	1270443

Sources: *Statistical Yearbook of China*, 1996-2003.

The Lumpy State

Economic reform brings unprecedented challenges to urban China. However, the state is far from ready to cope with them. The old control network, the *danwei* system, is fading quickly. The state has to find new ways to manage more economically and socially liberalized residents, a massive floating population, and other explosive social problems.

The state's first instinctive response is to enhance its local bureaucracy to fill the power vacuums created by economic development. That is why we see a paradoxical fact in Chinese administrative reform. In one way, the state promised to drastically reduce its size by cutting its involvement in direct economic activities. Ironically however, the size of bureaucracy nearly doubled in the reform era (Tang, 2003). Most of the new positions were added at the local government level. For example, the Pudong Street Office, the lowest administrative unit above the earlier-mentioned Deji Residents Committee, saw its official personnel expand from seven employees in the 1970s to roughly two hundred today. This does not include another three hundred temporary employees that also work for the office. A simple calculation illustrates how the expansion in the number of local officials has become a huge burden on the state's fiscal resources.⁶

To make things worse, China has entered a period of rapid urbanization. The Chinese urban population increased from 172 million in 1978 to 481 million in 2001 while the number of urban districts nearly doubled from 467 to 830 (*China Statistical Yearbooks*, various years). It is predicted that the urban population would reach 630 million by 2010, which means more peasants moving into cities, more numbers of cities, and larger size of cities (Qin, 1998, p. 16). All of these changes will further stretch the already tight government budget. Relying on additional bureaucratic expansion to manage cities is just fiscally unsustainable.

In addition, the swelled local governments have become increasingly inefficient in the handling of diverse and complex issues in city management, largely due to the hierarchical nature of the bureaucracy (Xu and Cheng, 2002, p. 18). The excessive expansion of local bureaucracy has become a seedbed for corruption. There is a vast amount of literature describing the power-related corruption in the reform era (Cai, 2003; Gong, 2002; Guo and Hu, 2004). Even the former General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Jiang Zemin, has publicly admitted in the 15th

⁶ Tianjin City has 99 street offices by 2002. If each street office has 200 employees at 2500 *yuan* per month salary level, the payroll only would be nearly 600 million *yuan*, 3.4 percent of total revenue (17.1 billion *yuan* in 2002) of the whole city. If we include the operating costs and the costs of their temporary employees, that percentage would be much higher. Data from *Tianjin City Statistical Yearbook* 2003.

National Congress in 1997 that bureaucratic corruption is rampant and still growing bigger (*People's Daily* [Oversea edition], 1997b). Among all the different manifestations of bureaucratic corruption, local bureaucrats were responsible for most of them. Since these crooked officials are close to ordinary citizens, their bad behavior evokes a lot of social resentment, which is then in turn transferred onto the state itself. In fact, the state had to discipline a large number of its corrupt cadres, of whom more than twenty thousand served at urban district and street office level, over sixteen hundred at the city level, and only seventy-eight at the provincial or ministerial level during the period from October 1992 to June 1997 (*People's Daily* [Oversea edition], 1997a).

Such a wide range of corruption at the local government level confirms Deng Xiaoping's worry about the alienation of bureaucratic power and disconnection from ordinary people. For Deng, the expansion of local governments was not a solution but the ultimate root cause of the problems of bureaucratism and corruption (Deng, 1994).

Residents Committee Called On

Chinese cities are facing a crisis of governability, and it is clear the lumpy bureaucracy in cities is not capable of handling these daunting challenges. If local governments are not the solution, what else can the state do?

Similarly to what it had done in the countryside, the state soon identified the Residents Committee as the key organization that could replace the *danwei* system in cities. Jiang Zemin believed that urban community development (including the Residents Committee) is "a critically important aspect of the overall mission of sustaining the Party's principles, handling the problems of the masses, and solidifying a micro-basis of the governance" (*People's Daily*, 1999). The then Premier Li Peng pointed out that the Residents Committee "is taking on greater and greater roles in social life and community construction. As the reform deepens, the function of the Residents Committee is changed and more and more jobs will fall on its shoulders" (*People's Daily*, 2000b). The current President Hu Jintao also publicly advocated strengthening the Residents Committee once he admitted the ruling basis of the CCP was at risk in cities.

The grassroots is the ground of all our work. We must maintain the control over the grassroots and solidify the basis. ... Over the years, our attention on the grassroots is the countryside and the state-owned enterprises. Now according to the changing situation, besides continuing the above work, we must prioritize the urban community construction. This is a work with not only great social and economic meanings, but also critical political meanings (*People's Daily*, 2000a).

It has been rare for the highest leadership in China to talk about urban organizational problems in such a prominent way, which indicates the fact that there have been important policy changes regarding the Residents Committee. The crisis of governability indicates the necessity of changing state-society relations in cities, and

it seems that the Residents Committee is going to be a key element of any solution. Like reform in rural villages, reform in cities can be characterized as decentralization from the state. Deng Xiaoping once argued that the only solution that can increase the efficiency of governance and curb bureaucratism and corruption is to decentralize power to the hands of ordinary people (Deng, 1994, p. 328). The core of his argument involves reforming the structure of totalitarian control so as to encourage a counterbalance between the grassroots and corruptive and inefficient bureaucrats, although it must be stated that Deng certainly did not see liberal democracy as the objective of reform. However, some western observers believe that loosening control over society has often been believed to be an important step toward the emergence of a dissenting civil society in Eastern European studies (Lewin, 1998; Weigle and Butterfield, 1992). This view is echoed by Chinese state-society scholars when they see the state's retreat from its economic function as an opportunity for civil society to emerge in China (White, 1993b).

In rural areas, it is the crisis of governability that has forced the state to empower the Villagers Committee, which in turn has set grassroots democratization on track (Shi, 1999; Wang, 1997). Nowadays while facing even bigger crises in cities, the state has adopted a similar strategy: decentralizing its power to society, including the Residents Committee. If the Villagers Committee has championed and exemplified the cause of rural democratization in rural China, what will be the role of the Residents Committee in its cities? Will it epitomize a similar transformation as the literature has portrayed the Villagers Committee as doing? The story of the DeJia Residents Committee offers a promising perspective in leading an effort against the abuses of the state. However, that story is only one aspect of the committee's relations with the state and its residential constituents. I found something in its archives that shows a dramatically different picture of how it connects with the state and residents.

Another Facet: The Residents Committee in the Literature

The Spring Festival is coming. We must tighten our neighborhood security in four areas. First, we must pay attention to monitoring, educating, and assisting the sensitive persons inside our neighborhood, especially released convicts. We need man-to-man monitoring: men visiting their homes, talking to them, and reporting on their unstable thought and behavior; second, we need to know fairly well the situation of special groups in our neighborhood; and finally, we must be careful of those outsiders who live in our neighborhood and of other floating populations. They are planning to return home as the Spring Festival comes, and we must be careful to take every precaution and try to monitor their activities.

This quote comes from the dossier of the comprehensive neighborhood security meeting convened by the Deji Residents Committee on January 11, 2002. The Spring Festival for Chinese is like Christmas for Americans. When every Deji resident is geared up for the holiday preparation, the committee also keeps itself busy. Community security is no doubt its priority, although its plan cited in the dossier is not necessarily consistent with the priority of the safety of the residents. The monitoring of residents with criminal records or neighborhood outsiders may make the committee suspicious and somewhat untrustworthy in the eyes of the residents it represents. However, these security measures are certainly cheered on by the state.

Some of these security measures were primarily the initiatives of the street office, but were carried out by the committee. The committee convenes such a security meeting every month, a meeting that includes all of the committee members, neighborhood activists, and sometimes the ward police and a few resident representatives. One major goal in the meeting is to keep all kinds of “unstable elements” under control.

Neighborhood control is hardly a new challenge for many states. Due to either the resource limits or the intricate but often trivial nature of neighborhood affairs, many states rely on neighborhood organizations to mobilize and control the mass population at the grassroots level. However, the purposes and means of social control vary from state to state. Perhaps a few could disagree that the security measures undertaken by the Deji Residents Committee have gone far beyond the utmost a resident could bear in Western societies. It reminds us of a well-recognized neighborhood organization, the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) in Cuba.

Fidel Castro created the CDR in 1960 “as a system to mobilize and reeducate citizens, to publicize official goals and activities, to counter internal and external campaigns of aggression, and to promote and organize cooperatives, civil defense, and first-aid projects” (Bunck, 1994, p. 9). As an element of control, the CDR was primarily a coercive organization aiming at revolutionary transformation, social control, and political mobilization (Dominguez, 1978, p. 208).

The security measures adopted by the Deji Residents Committee could be associated with what the CDR is doing in Cuba: both help the state extend its tentacles into the deepest levels of society through peer pressure and neighborhood surveillance. In looking at the Spring Festival security plan, one can easily see a social control network in the Deji Community organized around the committee. The committee first takes control orders from the street office and then eventually implements them inside the community upon the targeted population. Such a penetrative scenario is consistent not only with the conventional image of China, but also with the available literature on the Residents Committee.

Literature on the Residents Committee

There are a few studies that exist on the Residents Committee, and most of them date back to pre-reform era (Cohen, 1968; Lieberthal, 1980; Salaff, 1971; Schurmann, 1968; Townsend, 1967; Vogel, 1971; White, 1971) and the very early reform period (Benewick, 1991; Clark, 1989; Li and Bachman, 1989; Jankowiak, 1993; Whyte and Parish, 1984; Wu, 2002). Among the available information in the literature, the committee is portrayed mainly as a social control organization, like the Cuban CDR. Although its functions in social relief, neighborhood sanitation, and other non-coercive areas were skimmed through here and there, overall the literature treats the committee as only significant because it is the coercive state's little myrmidon. Whyte and Parish (1984, p. 244) find that the committee plays key roles in trying to supervise things through the leadership of the street office and the street police station. Most of the security measures taken by the Deji Residents Committee today have their historical roots in the pre-reform China.

The Residents Committee officers, and the security officer in particular, devote a great deal of attention to keeping track of various kinds of suspect individuals and families in the neighborhood – individuals under 'mass supervision,' released convicts, people with bad class backgrounds or political histories, or simply those suspected of engaging in illicit activities. At times, some of these 'negative elements' have had to regularly report on their activities and attitudes and even to perform menial labor around the neighborhood. ... Generally during times of disorder or on national holidays or during the visits of important foreign dignitaries, it is common to have residents organized to stand guard and patrol and to order certain suspect individuals in the neighborhoods to stay at home (Whyte and Parish, 1984, pp. 244-245).

Besides specifying how the Residents Committee carried out the social control function, the literature is also very helpful in establishing a historical basis for understanding why it was established.

In the pre-reform era, the state dominated cities through the *danwei* system. However, the *danwei* system had cracks: there were urban residents who could not be absorbed into the controlling purview of any *danwei*, such as the unemployed, housewives, and the disabled. In order to fill in the cracks and to bring the above-