

Civil Society

China's social transformation:

- China transformed from Maoist totalitarianism to a post-Mao soft authoritarian state. There is far more freedom in the present day compared to the Maoist period; there has been the development of a market economy and society. Though the market has introduced many new things, it has also brought in many new negatives into China such as massive wide-spread pollution, a consumer culture and the commodification of gender and culture
 - Chinese society has become more plural and tolerant, but in the recent years they have taken a step back and the grip over the population has been tightened
- The retreat of the state; there has been a de-politicisation of daily life; the partial separation of the state and society
 - In the Maoist period, every aspect of life was permeated with political views. Whereas in the present, there has been a greater scope for autonomous activity; entrepreneurial and social
 - Entrepreneurial activities opened with the market
 - There has also been a greater degree of religious freedom to some extent; practices are allowed but cannot go against the party's ideas
- Though there has been a retreat in the state, it has not been a uniform retreat; the retreat of the party has never been about decreasing the party's power, but only to become stronger
- There has been the emergence of non-state spaces
 - The private life outside of work units and kinship networks as well as associational activity NGOs
- There has also been the emergence of social groups which are largely organised online; they are not officially registered with the state
- The majority of social groups are not politically orientated and simply enjoy the granted freedom
- With the emergence of many pressing issues, the role of the state and society needs to be defined; there has been the growth of philanthropy in China in the very recent years which was unheard of in the Maoist period
- There are official mass organisations in China which are permitted, such as the: All China Women's Federation and the All China Federation of Trade Unions.
 - However there are no independent representative organisations, the Chinese system of politics and federation are not adversarial but only complementary
- There is scope for criticism of the government, but everyone is meant to be supportive of the party
- There are no independent organisations
 - There are also no organisations which represent some groups. For example, there is no organisation to represent farmers; there is a group to represent farmers but the vast majority of farmers have never heard of this group nor do they ever meet the group
- Where are the critical voices in China, if there are no opposing parties in China?

- In China intellectuals play a large more influential role in criticising China; NGOs also play a role in the criticism, but cannot have a directly oppositional role

China's civil society:

- In the west civil society is defined as: an autonomous sphere of associational life committed to the discourse of the public issues and to the defence of its autonomy
 - This definition does not fit Chinese civil society; there are no true autonomous spheres in social life in China at present. They may be relatively autonomous, but the state still has the mechanisms and power to control the groups and societies
- The government does not recognise the role of civil society, it realises it must rely on societies to resolve certain issues. There has been the emergence of social workers and NGOs to support the government at the grass-roots level
- The party also fears civil society as it may be an avenue for civil disobedience and political resistance
 - It is debated whether or not civil society is beginning in China, however if it is emerging it is state led and controlled
 - For civil society to flourish independently there must be revolution

Civil society in modern China:

- There is a legacy of statist reasoning; only a strong centralised state can save China, it is due to this that the state subsumes society. There is little emphasis placed on civil society
- In modern times, however, there has been the re-emergence of civil society under the watch and control of the CPC, social stability needs a strong state

Expansion of rights discourse:

- There is a state led civil society in China, the party is able to contain civil society through active engagement
- State activism encourages rights consciousness; there is a difference between human rights and rights
 - Human rights are typical a western idea and does not much funding in China. Rights on the other hand are a different topic, rights such as consumer, cultural and religious rights are discussed and funded

The government and civil society:

- There is evidence that the government is beginning to value civil society
 - The idea of small government big society does not aim to weaken the party
- NGOs have become more prominent in the last two decades, the government does recognise that the action of NGOs have had a positive effect with social issues.
 - However NGOs are not supposed to oppose the government
- To start an NGO, one must be registered with the ministry of civil affairs, they must be sponsor in government bureaucracy. For example, to set up a NGO in a field, you must have

the support of the ministry of that field; to open a forest protection NGO approval of the forest protection ministry is needed

- The government only wants one NGO in each area
- Government NGOs are commonly known as GONGOs. They are operated by the government department
- NGO strategies register as a commercial enterprise rather than a NGO, this allows them to register with the ministry of commerce and industry so that they do not have to pay tax as they will have no profit