

# Associational Revolution in China: Mapping the Landscapes

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## Abstract

In recent years, we have observed a striking upsurge of organized voluntary activity and the creation of private, nonprofit or non-governmental organizations around the world. This study explores to what extent China is part of the global associational revolution. It aims at charting the size, scope, and structure of the associational world in China, in a way that not only yields solid and objective information about China, but also makes it possible to undertake cross-society comparisons later.

**Key Words:** Association, China, Civil Society, Social Capital

## I. Introduction

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In recent years, political and scholarly interest in associational life has increased noticeably, because “a striking upsurge is under way around the global in organized voluntary activity and the creation of private, nonprofit or non-governmental organizations” (Salamon, 1994). However, little is known about associational life in China, the world’s most populous country with an estimated population of 1.25 billion. If we are indeed in the midst of a “global associational revolution” as Salamon (1994) proclaims, it is quite important and timely to ask whether China is part of the revolution.

Some outside commentators often assume that associational life is repressed and therefore insignificant under the communist rule (Mathews, 1997). In fact, the situation in China does not appear to be very different from the above-mentioned worldwide trend. After 30 years of omnipresent government control, the Chinese state began in the late 1970s to step back from its effort to program totally all of social life. As the economy and society become more pluralistic and as the people enjoy more freedom than ever before, it is only natural for Chinese to pursue a more active associational life. Now a significant number and wide range of associations are in operation in the country. The problem is that, except few aggregated numbers, we know very little about this aspect of modern Chinese society. For this reason, improving the base of knowledge about Chinese associational life in a systematic fashion is a matter of great academic interest. The purpose of this study is to do just that -- contributing to our understanding of associational landscapes in China.

## **II. Rationale**

Since the early 1990s, the expanding social space between the individual and the state has attracted growing interest from China specialists. The focus of the field has been on so-called “civic associations.” Some studies examine specific types of membership organizations, such as trade unions (Chan, 1993; Perry, 1994), business and professional associations (Pearson, 1994; Unger and Chan, 1995; Unger, 1996), student associations (Wasserstrom and Liu, 1994), leisure groups (Wang, 1994; Chen, 1994), or foundations (Zhang, 1995b). Others focus on associations located in certain towns and cities (White, 1993; Wang, Sun, and Zhe, 1993; Shue, 1994; White, Howell, and

Shang, 1996; Chan, 1999). Still others deal with civil associations in general (Whiting, 1991; Zhang, 1992; Whyte, 1992; National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, 1994; Howell, 1994; Zhang, 1995a; Frolic, 1997; Pei, 1998; Chan and Qiu, 1998). Those studies are often informative and insightful. Together, they provide a broad yet diverse picture about associational life in contemporary China.

Rich as it is, however, with few recent exceptions (Ding, 1999; Wang, 2000; Young, 2000), the literature suffers from three drawbacks.

- (1) Approach: The central theoretical concern of the literature has been whether the growth of civic associations is indicative of the emergence of “civil society” in China. Some specialists conclude that elements of civil society are already present in such associations, and that civil society may emerge more fully in the future (Whyte, 1992; White, 1993). Others disagree. In their view, those associations can best be explained as examples of corporatism (Chan, 1993; Pearson, 1994; Unger and Chan, 1995; Unger, 1996). Still others point out that there may be “a possible continuum” of associational experiences stretching from those completely dominated by the state at one extreme to those relatively autonomous at the other (Shue, 1994). The civil society approach focuses its attention almost exclusively on trying to ascertain whether associations represent the emergence of a civil society that can challenge the party-state. While it is important to study the extent to which associations are autonomous from the party-state, approaching China with a strictly “civil society” lens may run the risk of treating the reality in a Procrustean manner. No wonder that many studies end up with a disappointing conclusion that there is little resemblance between Chinese and Western experiences. Perry (1994) is right that a simple state-society dichotomy is of little help in explaining associational life in China. To study the space lying between the state and the market, we should not force the world to fit our concepts. Rather, we should adjust our concepts to fit the real world.
- (2) Coverage: Perhaps due to the influence of the civil society approach, much of the research has focused on civic associations, especially on what have come to be known as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), not on associations in general. The concept of NGO, while

quite useful for some purposes, embraces a very limited range of associations. It excludes most associations that exist in today's China. Moreover, NGO often functions as an ideological screen used to differentiate "good" associations from "bad" ones along lines that are often not entirely clear (Salamon and Anheier, 1997a). Thus, studies on NGOs may at best supplement, but certainly cannot substitute, studies on associations.

- (3) Data: Most studies are case studies in nature, covering either certain types of associations or associations in certain local communities. As Pei (1998) comments, they may have enabled us to examine individual "trees," but overlooked the "forest." Moreover, most of the previous researches have been either published before the mid-1990s (Whiting, 1991; Whyte, 1992; Zhang, 1992; Chan, 1993; Howell, 1994; National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, 1994; Wang, Sun, and Zhe, 1993; White, 1993; Chen, 1994; Pearson, 1994; Perry, 1994; Shue, 1994; Wang, 1994; Wasserstrom and Liu, 1994; Unger and Chan, 1995; Zhang, 1995a, 1995b) or based upon data collected before the mid-1990s (Unger, 1996; White, Howell, and Shang, 1996; Frolic, 1997; Pei, 1998). As snapshots of particular times and places, they are of course valuable. But China is a country where "the situation changes so fast that updates are needed almost before the ink is dry" (Young, 2000: 5). It is necessary to provide up-to-date information on the rapidly changing associational landscapes in China.

This paper intends to provide a quantitative assessment of the density and diversity of associational life in China. Informed by another prevailing concept in social sciences in the last decade or so -- "social capital," the key question here is not whether associations are autonomous from state control, but to what extent people are associated with one another in some structured forms. The concept of "social capital" refers to "resources embedded in social networks accessed and used by actors for action" (Lin, 2001: 25). Associational activity is a cornerstone of the theory of social capital. Various associations, formal or informal, constitute durable networks of interpersonal relationships that provide their members with such capital. For this reason, the degree of associational life can be used as a surrogate measure of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986: 248; Coleman, 1990: 302-304; Putnam, 1993: 173-176).

Social capital is not only individual goods but also collective goods (Lin, 2001: 26). In addition to enabling individuals to gain access to information, favors, status, wealth, power, reputation, and the like, it may also contribute to the creation and maintenance of democracy, albeit indirectly. Through fostering the exchange of information, the norms of reciprocity, and interpersonal trust, for instance, social capital may help facilitate spontaneous cooperation, thus “overcoming dilemmas of collective action and the self-defeating opportunism that they spawn” (Putnam, 1993: 167). Thus, a society with a relatively high level of social capital stock does not have to rely as heavily on the use of force by the state to induce cooperation as those with lower levels of social capital stock (*Ibid.*, 163-185). Perhaps equally important, as a particular form of social capital, membership in associations may instill habits of compromise and tolerance, and cultivate organizational and communications skills, which in turn may increase people’s motivation and capacity to take part in politics and sense of political efficacy and competence (Verba et al., 1995). Because associations may breed a democratic ethic among their members, they are often viewed as the school for democratic citizenship.

Whereas the civil society approach emphasizes associations’ “external” effects on the wide polity (e.g. providing a counterweight to the state), the social capital approach focuses on their “internal” effects on individual members’ ways of thinking and behaviors (Putnam, 1993: 89-90). Both types of effects may be necessary for the emergence, consolidation, effectiveness, and stability of democratic government, but the conditions for them to occur are quite different. External effects are unlikely to happen unless associations are somewhat political and relatively autonomous from state control. However, internal effects do not require that manifest purpose of the association be political. That is why Tocqueville praises various kinds of associations, “religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute” as virtuous organizations (De Tocqueville, 1969: 513-514). In fact, as Tocqueville insists, civil associations are more crucial than political associations to a democratic society. “If the inhabitants of democratic countries had neither the right nor the taste for uniting for political objects, their independence would run great risks, but they could keep both their wealth and their knowledge for a long time,” Tocqueville argues. “But if they did not learn some habits of acting together in the affairs of daily life, civilization it-

self would be in peril" (*Ibid.*, 514). Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995: 3) echo, "Both the motivation and the capacity to take part in politics have their roots in the fundamental non-political institutions." Putnam (1993: 90) put it more vividly, "Taking part in a choral society or a bird-watching club can teach self-discipline and an appreciation for the joys of successful collaboration." There are many more studies demonstrating that participation in non-political organizations can stimulate political involvement and interest (Erickson and Nosanchuck, 1990; Olsen, 1972; Rogers, Barb, and Bultena, 1975).

Similarly, it can be argued that, for associations to generate social capital or some of the above-mentioned "internal" effects, they do not have to be formal, voluntary, or fully autonomous from state control. According to Bourdieu (1986: 248), social capital is rooted in "a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition -- or in other words, to membership in a group." As long as an association forms such a network, the ensuing dense interpersonal relationships would constitute a valuable asset that may benefit its own members as well as the society at large, whether the association is formal voluntary nongovernmental organization or not. Studies in the United States and the United Kingdom, for instance, have found that social networks, both formal and informal, reduced crime (Putnam and Goss, 2002: 6). Offe and Fuchs (2002: 242) observe among informal groups in Germany, "This informality does not preclude a strong preparedness on the part of those attached to provide help and to share resources with other (recognized) members." Likewise, a study of involuntary organizations in England questions the current emphasis on voluntary organizations when examining social capital. The formal institutions active within England's smaller communities in the 14<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> centuries were found to have generated considerable social capital (including both internal and external returns), regardless of whether participation in them was obligatory or voluntary. The emphasis upon the voluntary nature of organizations by political scientists in their study of social capital therefore is deemed unnecessary (McIntosh, 2001). For similar reasons, it may also be premature to exclude the possibility that associations incorporated or co-opted by the state can produce useful social returns just as effectively as can groups that are independent from the state. Foster (2001: 94) is right when he points out, "Associations do not invariably seek autonomy from the state. Viewing associations as fundamentally "civic" in nature, embodying a

societal interest in freedom from state domination, obscures the more basic fact that associations are organizations created to accomplish particular goals.”

In sum, the analytic framework that undergirds the civil society approach is unduly restrictive. Consequently, many interesting and important parts of the associational universe are dismissed as unworthy of attention. In contrast, the social capital approach is more inclusive, allowing the fullest possible array of associations to be included in our study of China’s associational universe. The article attempts to map out the whole picture of associational life in China, top-down or bottom-up, voluntary or involuntary, and formal or informal. Association here is broadly defined as social space in which individuals are tied to each other through formal and informal group membership.

Measuring the density and diversity of associational life may appear to be a modest objective, but in fact, it is a Herculean task. The study of associations in China has long been handicapped by absence of a central source of information on the subject. As in most other countries, the Chinese government rarely gathers statistical data on associations, and even if some of its agencies do, they often collect information only in their respective jurisdictions. Thus, even at the most basic level of quantification, information is abysmally inadequate and fragmented. Since no single information source on associations is available, we have made great efforts in assembling data from a large assortment of sources. The picture emerged from the data presented below make unambiguously evident that a veritable associational revolution is indeed underway in China, which may well prove to be as momentous a feature of the contemporary China as the rise of a market economy.

For the sake of convenience, we build a simple typology of associative forms of social life based upon the combination of two dimensions: Nature can be voluntary or involuntary, and makeup can be formal or informal (Figure 1).

Figure 1. A Typology of Associations

		Nature	
		Voluntary	Involuntary
Makeup	Formal	Organizations under the Jurisdiction of the Ministry of Civil Affairs	Quasi-governmental Organizations
	Informal	Grassroots Groups Virtual Groups	[Traditional Kinship]

### III. The Benchmark

In order to demonstrate that the above-mentioned “associational revolution” is real, not illusory, we need to place the recent development in a historical perspective. A brief history of associations in China therefore is presented here.

In traditional China, primary associations of family and kinship were abundant, membership in most of which were non-voluntary. Qiangxue Society, a reformist group founded by Kang Youwei in Beijing in September 1895, was thought to be the first modern secondary or civic association in the country. This group existed for barely five months before the Qing government outlawed it in January 1896. Ironically, the ban of Qiangxue Society spurred even greater interest in starting reform-oriented learned societies among the literati. The following two years witnessed the first wave of association formation in the modern history of China, with 63 such groups established in the period (Y. Zhang, 1971a: 126-130).

In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, voluntary groups began to proliferate. A study identifies 733 membership associations that came into being between 1899 and 1909, including 85 reformist groups, 65 revolutionary, 265 commercial, 103 educational, 65 academic, 50 diplomatic, 17 cultural, and 83 others (Y. Zhang, 1971b: 90-148). Of course, the number of associations at any particular moment during these years were much smaller than 733, because early groups tended to be fragile or short-lived.



In 1911, the Qing dynasty was overthrown and replaced by the Republic of China, the first republic in Asia. The political change catalyzed another wave of associational development. Within a year or so, nearly 700 political organizations emerged across the country (Y. Zhang, 1975: 33; Wang, 1984: 541). Soon after, business associations began to burgeon. While only 57 chambers of commerce were identified in 1912 (Zhu, 1991: 55), the number jumped to 1,242 in 1915 (EB, 1975: 117). After the death of Yuan Shikai in 1916, the subsequent political chaos and tangled warfare between regional warlords temporarily hampered associational activity. However, following the May Fourth Movement of 1919, China saw the beginning of yet another upsurge of associational building. Hundreds of youth groups, learned societies, literary clubs, mutual aid co-ops, and so on sprang up in major cities, especially among university students and professors, between 1920 and 1923 (Wang and Li, 1994: 358, 372).

In order to mobilize political support against their common enemies -- warlords and local bullies, both Nationalist Party (KMT) and newly established Communist Party made painstaking effort to set up trade unions and peasants' associations in the mid-1920s. Around the time when the two parties split in 1927, there were about 700 trade unions with over 2 million members (Liu, 1998: 343) and 22,000 peasants' associations with 9,153,093 members (DIPPKU, 1985: 170). Afterward, the two parties separately controlled their own workers' and peasants' organizations. There is no record on the communist side, but the Nanjing government claimed to have 33,000 grassroots peasants' associations with 34,681,000 members in 1938 (TSHDHC, 1994: 86, 497).

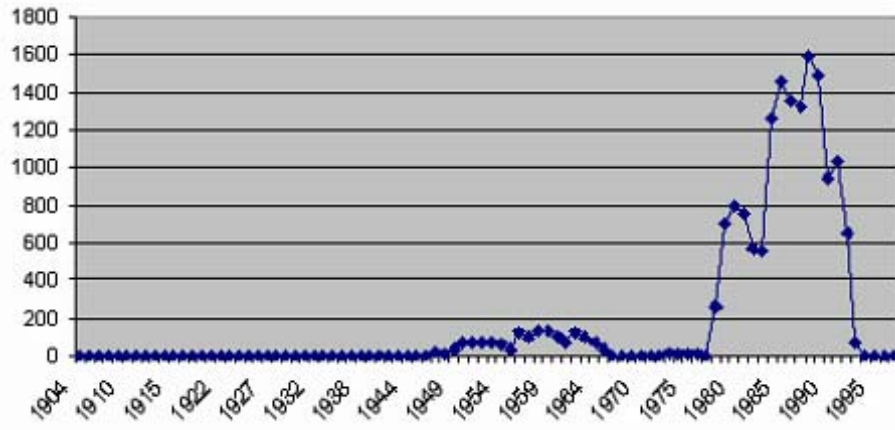
From 1937 to 1945, China was at war with Japan. Large parts of China' territory fell under Japanese occupation. The KMT government then moved its capital to an inland city, Chongqing. In 1942, it stipulated "Organic Law of People's Groups during the War Time," which required associations to register with the government. A total 17,250 organizations did in the same year. Two years later in 1944, the number reached 26,126. Of course, organizations existing in areas under Japanese control were excluded (Liu, 1998: 423-424). No one knew the real number for the whole country. Japanese surrendered in 1945, but soon after China fell into a 3.5-year long civil war, during which the government lost track of the number of operating associations. The war ended in 1949 with a victory of the Communist forces. The KMT forces fled to



1935							1142	
1936								15
1937		2403						
1941		2988						
1942		2225						
1943							97	
1944		3273	1572	1416			212	
1945			2087					
1946	4536	4385	2479	4090	388			
1947			2740					27
1948		5143				1320	492	379
1949			2794			1336	350	278
1951				504	485			1116
1952		9231				904	377	
1953	1210							
1954								1474
1956						590		
1981						633		
1985						2256		
1987				7000				
1988						4299		
1989					10000	4290		80
1990	8172	13200	11403				4803	

\* Sources: *Jiangxi Minzheng Zhi* [Records of Jiangxi Civil Affairs] (Huangshan Publishing House, 1993); *Fujian Shengzhi-Minzheng Zhi* [Fujian Records-Civil Affairs] (Beijing: Fangzhi Publishing House, 1997); *Gansu Shengzhi-Minzheng Zhi* [Gansu Records-Civil Affairs] (Lanzhou: Gansu Peoples' Publishing House, 1994); *Guangdong Shengzhi-Minzheng Zhi* [Guangdong Records-Civil Affairs] (Guangzhou: Guangdong Peoples' Publishing House, 1993); *Liaoning Sheng Minzheng Zhi* [Records of Liaoning Civil Affairs] (Liaoning Peoples' Publishing House, 1996); *Shanghai Minzheng Zhi* [Records of Shanghai Civil Affairs] (Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Science Publishing House, 2000); Ma and Liu (1993); *Tianjin Tongzhi-Minzheng Zhi* [All Records of Tianjin-Civil Affairs] (Tianjin Academy of Social Science Publishing House, 2001); *Nanjing Minzheng Zhi* [Records of Nanjing Civil Affairs] (Shenzhen: Haitian Publishing House; 1994); *Jiangsu Shengzhi-Minzheng Zhi* [Jiangsu Records-Civil Affairs] (Beijing: Fangzhi Publishing House, 2002); *Shaoxing Minzheng Zhi* [Records of Shaoxing Civil Affairs] (Beijing: Fangzhi Publishing House, 1998).

Figure 2. Founding Year of Associations



\* Source: Our databank.

#### IV. Organizations under the Jurisdiction of MCA

Registered groups refer to those that have registered with the Minister of Civil Affairs (MCA) and its subsidiaries throughout the country. Those fall into two broad categories: “social organizations” and “private non-enterprise units.”

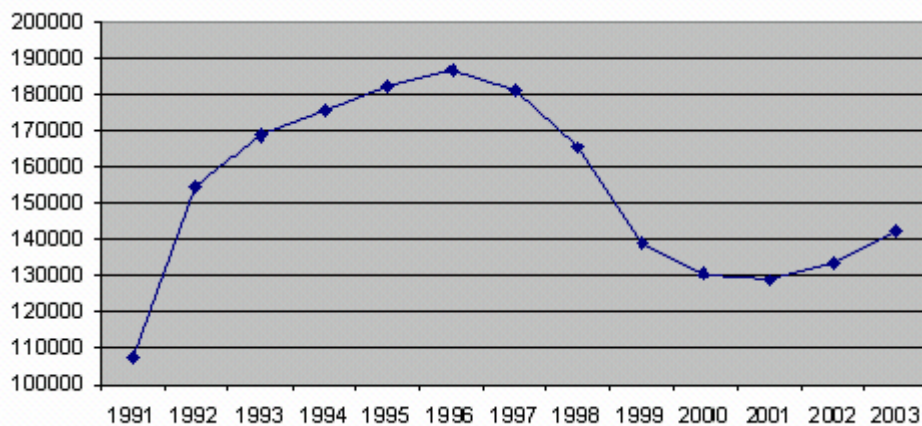
##### A. Social Organizations

In 1989, the State Council promulgated the Regulation on the Registration and Administration of Associations, which entrusted the MCA as the sole authority of registration. With some exceptions, all civic associations were required to register with the MCA and its local bureaus. To do so, an association had to find a party/state agency that was willing to be its official sponsor first. Otherwise, it would have to dissolve itself. The system of dual regulations was designed for the party-state to control the development of the registered associations. In the highly electric political environment after the Tiananmen, thousands of associations failed to obtain appropriate sponsorship. Consequently, the total number of registered associations dropped from around 200,000 in 1989 to barely 110,000 in 1991.

As Figure 3 shows, associational activism quickly resumed in the first

half of 1990s. By 1996, the number of registered associations reached 186,666, a level only slightly lower than the peak of 1989. However, the rapid growth of associations was seen by the government as a serious challenge to its ability to manage associational affairs. In particular, the emergence of such semi-religious organizations as Falun Gong greatly worried the government. With hierarchical structure and top-to-bottom control, such organizations could pose a threat to the regime. In 1999, such concern turned into a reality when more than 10,000 Falun Gong practitioners surrounded Zhongnanhai, the compound in central Beijing housing the core government and CCP leaders and their families. To remove potential time bombs, the government became stricter in conducting annual inspections over associations. Those failing the inspections were forced to shut down. In 1998, the State Council amended the Regulation on the Registration and Administration of Associations, which increased the threshold of the initial funds and required sponsoring agencies to take full responsibility for the conducts of related associations. Those measures resulted in another slump of the number of registered associations between 1996 and 2001. Afterward, the falling trend was reversed. By the end of 2003, China had 142,000 registered associations.

Figure 3. Registered Associations: 1991-2003



\* Source: Ministry of Civil Affairs, *Zhongguo Minzheng Tongji Nianjian* [Statistical Yearbook of Civil Affairs] (Beijing: China Statistical Press, various years).<sup>1</sup>

What kinds of associations were most vulnerable to the above-mentioned

1. 2003's data is from the official website of Bureau of NPO Administration [<http://www.chinanpo.gov.cn>].



1987	—	146	2885	—	1718780	2396037	—
1988	—	146	2828	—	2012312	—	—
1989	—	151	3013	—	2238956	—	—
1990	—	155	3257	—	2305991	3384177	—
1991	—	159	3198	—	2943469	3655743	—
1992	—	163	3107	—	3235631	3592950	—
1993	—	160	3160	—	—	—	—
1994	—	164	3124	—	—	—	—
1995	—	165	3538	—	2734589	2858868	—
1996	13369	165	3055	10149	4157297	4071087	4859651
1997	13092	165	3006	9921	4174262	4219741	4703818
1998	—	165	2950	—	—	—	—
1999	—	163	3535	—	—	—	—
2000	12111	168	3470	8473	4570400	4551200	—
2001	12023	167	3648	8208	4490000	3710000	—
2002	—	167	3609	—	3940000	3960000	—

\* Source: Ministry of Science & Technology, *Zhongguo Keji Tongji Nianjian* [Statistical Yearbook of Science & Technology] (Beijing: China Statistical Press, various years).

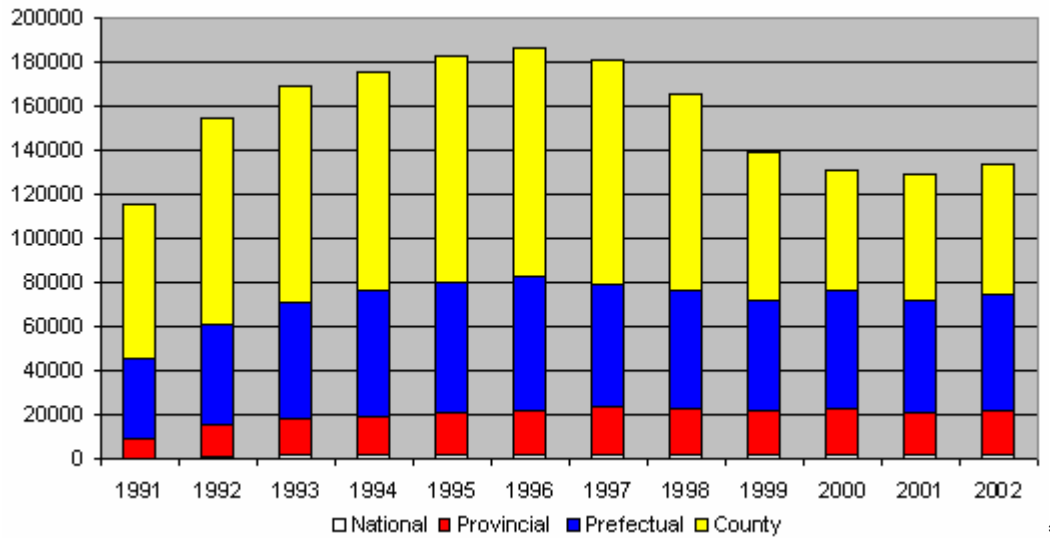
Trade association is a product of marketization and denationalization. The pre-reform system of planned economy left no space for trade associations to function. As government agencies increasingly withdrew from micromanagement of state-owned enterprises and more and more non-state enterprises came into being, the state realized that trade associations could play such important roles as facilitating information exchange and conducting self-regulation among their member firms. For this reason, the government has gone out of its way to promote the development of trade associations in the recent years. In 2000, for instance, nearly 40 percent of the newly registered associations were trade associations. The ratio increased to 45 percent in the following year. In this sense, the current distributional pattern of registered associations reveals the preference order of the state with regards to different types of associations.

Moreover, Figure 5 suggests that the administrative level matters: the lower the level, the more vulnerable. After 1994, the numbers of nation-level and province-level, and prefecture-level associations have fluctuated but within narrow ranges. County-level associations, however, were more likely

to suffer from restrictive policy environment.



Figure 5. Social Organizations by Administrative Levels

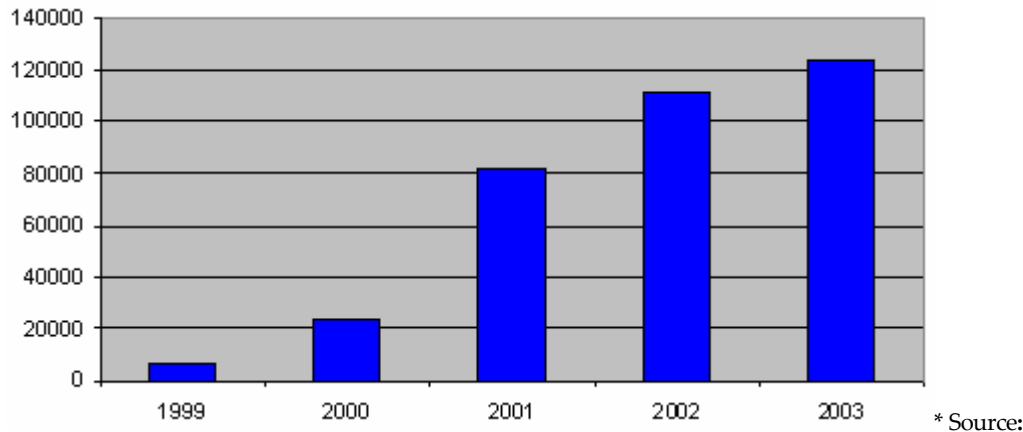


Source: *Zhongguo Minzheng Tongji Nianjian* (various years).

### B. Private Non-enterprise Units

Private non-enterprise units are providers of social services whose purposes are not to maximize profits. Examples include private schools, day care centers, facilities for the physically and mentally challenged, retirement homes, and so on. Most of such entities used to be owned by the state or collectives. Now they became privatized in one way or another. In addition, an increasing number of such entities were recently established to meet new demands resulted from China's rapid socioeconomic transition. They tended to be private-owned from the outset. Whatever their origins were, those organizations did not begin their registration with MCA until 1999. In the last five years, the number of registered organizations increased by more than 20 folds. By the end of 2003, there were altogether 124,000 "private non-enterprise units" (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Private Non-Enterprise Units



*Zhongguo Minzheng Tongji Nianjian* (various years).<sup>2</sup>

### C. What are Excluded?

Studies on China's civil society often focus on "social organizations" and "private non-enterprise units," assuming that they cover the entire associational landscapes in China (Young and Woo, 2000). In fact, organizations registered with MCA only occupy a small corner of the vast landscapes. Most associations in China are actually not registered with MAC. First of all, there are organizations that should register with the Ministry of Civil Affairs but fail to do so. Figure 5 shows that more than 40,000 county-level social organizations vanished on MCA's record between 1996 and 2000. That they were no longer registered with MCA did not mean that they no longer existed. Some of them might have disbanded themselves or merged into other organizations, but most might have chosen either to register as commercial entities instead or simply continue their operation without registration at all. As a matter of fact, many of high-profile environment groups in China have never registered with MCA. Because the thresholds for registration are quite high, many newly formed organizations might also not be able to register even if they are willing to do so.<sup>3</sup> We have reasons to estimate that the number of social organizations that operate without official registration could be

2. 2003's data is from the official website of Bureau of NPO Administration [<http://www.chinanpo.gov.cn>].

3. A former official from Shanghai municipal bureau of civil affairs told us that, after retirement, she worked for a non-governmental organization, but her organization was forced to operate without registration, because the requirement of initial funds for social organizations was set too high.

as many as 30,000-50,000 in the nation.

As for private non-enterprise units, MAC itself estimated that there might in fact be 200,000-300,000 of them currently operating in the country but failing to register (Zhao, 2003).

In addition to the registered and unregistered social organizations and private non-enterprise units, there is huge number of associations that are not required to register with MCA by law. Those include local chapters of the eight categories of “mass organizations” that are the membership of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Congress and of 25 “social organizations” that are exempt from registrations with MCA by the State Council (e.g. the China Writers Association or the All-China Journalism Association). Moreover, grassroots associations below the county level, especially those operating within enterprises, government agencies, schools, urban neighborhoods, rural townships and villages, etc. do not have to register with MCA either. The next two sections turn to examining these vast areas of China’s associational landscapes.

## **V. Quasi-Governmental Organizations**

Established by the Communist Party before or after 1949 and covering the party’s key constituencies (workers, youth, women, scientists and engineers, businesspersons, overseas Chinese, literary and art circles, and so on), mass organizations have been important institutional pillars of China’s political system. They are designed as two-way transmission belts between the party/state and the masses of people. They are expected to carry out the directives of the party/state and pass them down to the masses on the one hand, and collect the will, opinion and interests of the masses and carry them back to the policy-making of the party/state on the other. Even before the reform era, “there has been variation over time in the degree of political integration demanded of mass organizations. During periods of political mobilization, mass organizations were highly politicized. During periods of consolidations, they became relatively independent of political demands and more responsive to the expressed needs and interests of their members” (Fisher, 1974: 11-12). Reforms in the last quarter of century have further weakened their political roles and strengthened their functional roles.

All mass organizations are umbrella organizations, each of which has thousands of branches and subsidiaries and millions of members throughout the country. Table 3 presents breakdown information about eight mass organizations. Space limit does not allow us to elaborate how we arrive at those numbers. What follows is the discussion of a couple of cases, which is meant to illustrate how we assemble data from a myriad of sources for such exercises.

Table 3. Mass Organizations and Their Grassroots Groups

Eight Mass Organizations	Grassroots Groups
Trade Unions	1,713,000
Youth League Branches	2,720,000
Women's Associations	684,000
Science & Technology Associations	50,000
Rural Special Associations	115,658
AST	10,674
WST <sup>†</sup>	25,611
Returned Overseas Chinese	11,000
Federation of Industry & Commerce	18,481
Self-Employed Association <sup>††</sup>	30,000
Taiwanese Associations	-
Youth Federation	-
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>5,378,424</b>

\* Notes: <sup>†</sup>WSTs are sponsored by trade unions. For convenience, they are included under the category of science and technology.

<sup>††</sup>The Administrative Bureau of Industry and Commerce sponsor associations of self-employed and private businesspersons. However, their functions are similar to Federation of Industry & Commerce.

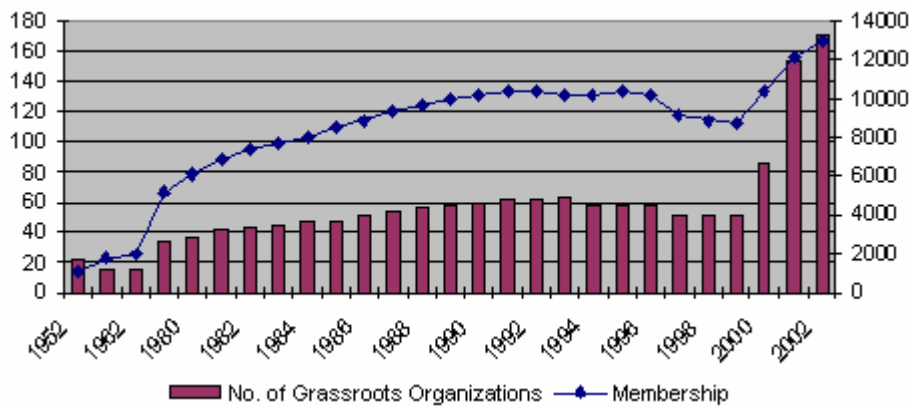
#### A. All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU)<sup>4</sup>

Trade unions are supposed to protect the rights and interests of workers, but at the same time, they are used by the party/state to pacify workers or mobilize workers for achieving certain political goals. The dual nature has often led unions to conflict with the party-state.<sup>5</sup> Due to the massive denationalization of the Chinese economy in recent years, unions are in a process of searching for their new identities. While it is uncertain about whether they will eventually become true representatives of workers' interests, no one can deny their potentiality of serving as a powerful counter force against management. Recent restructuring of trade unions seems to hint that such change is highly probable.

Figure 7. Trade Unions in China: 1952-2002

4. All China Federation of Trade Unions' website [<http://www.acftu.org>].

5. For the detailed description of the conflicts between All-China Federation of Trade Unions and the party-state, see Harper (1969) and Zhang (2003).



\* Sources: ACFTU, *Zhongguo Gonghui Tongji Nianjian* [The Statistical Yearbook of Trade Unions in China] (Beijing: China Statistical Press, various years) and *Zhongguo Gonghui Nianjian* [Yearbook of Trade Unions in China] (Beijing: ACFTU Press, various years).

As Figure 7 reveals, the numbers of grassroots trade unions and their membership reached their peaks in the early 1990s. Afterward, both began to fall. This was so because at that time trade unions operated mainly in the state-owned sector, which was experiencing a painful decline in much of the 1990s. The year of 1999 appeared to be a turning point. In the subsequent three years, the number of grassroots unions more than tripled and their membership increased by 50 percent. Both changes were the results of the expansion of unions into the private sector. Interestingly, although the number of grassroots trade unions expanded rapidly after 1999, the number of the full-time staff working for them was still shrinking, an indication that the party/state's control over unions was relaxing. At the end of 2002, there were all together 1,712,528 grassroots trade unions in China with a total membership of 133,977,709.

### B. Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL)<sup>6</sup>

Chinese Communist Youth League is defined as the vanguard of the youth. To serve as an "assistant and reserve" for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the main function of CCYL is to recruit and educate outstanding young men and women. In the 1990s, the CCYL became less attractive to the young people. After the middle 1990s, though the membership was still

6. Chinese Communist Youth League's website [<http://www.ccyll.org.cn>].

growing, the number of grassroots branches declined (see Table 4), a change that might also be related to the shrinkage of the state sector of the economy. In the new century, the CCYL began to establish branches in the private sector, which helped to increase its grassroots branches, but only slightly. At the end of 2002, there are 2.57 millions of branches with a total membership nearly 70 millions.

Table 4. Development of Youth League

Year	Membership(million)	# of Staff	# of Branches(million)
1978	48.54	150200	212.7
1979	/	161600	/
1980	47.74	168034	227.3
1981	46.95	184716	226.5
1982	46.60	200820	227.8
1985	51.82	220511	239.5
1986	56.37	229692	247.7
1987	60.07	225308	249
1988	56.00	208027	256.9
1989	/	209188	/
1990	55.35	220571	260.8
1991	56.48	235235	258.1
1992	56.80	227546	/
1993	58.00	210593	263.9
1994	61.80	215612	264.8
1995	63.76	213891	274.7
1996	65.56	214960	271.2
1997	68.54	213695	276.6
1998	68.71	208876	264.2
1999	68.03	186971	254.9
2000	/	/	/
2001	/	/	/
2002	69.86	183000	272

\* Source: [<http://80years.cycl.org.cn/80year/tajs/index.htm>].

### C. China Association for Science and Technology (CAST)<sup>7</sup>

China Association for Science and Technology is an umbrella mass organization of scientists and engineers. In addition to directly managing near 200 nation-level scientific societies, CAST has around 2,600 local branches at provincial, municipal, and county levels, which in turn oversee 42,000 scientific societies at the corresponding levels. More important, below the county

7. China Association for Science and Technology's website [<http://www.cflac.org.cn>].



level, there exist three vast networks of grassroots associations for science and technology, namely, rural special technique associations (RSTA), associations for science and technology in enterprises (AST), and the workers' technical associations (WTA).

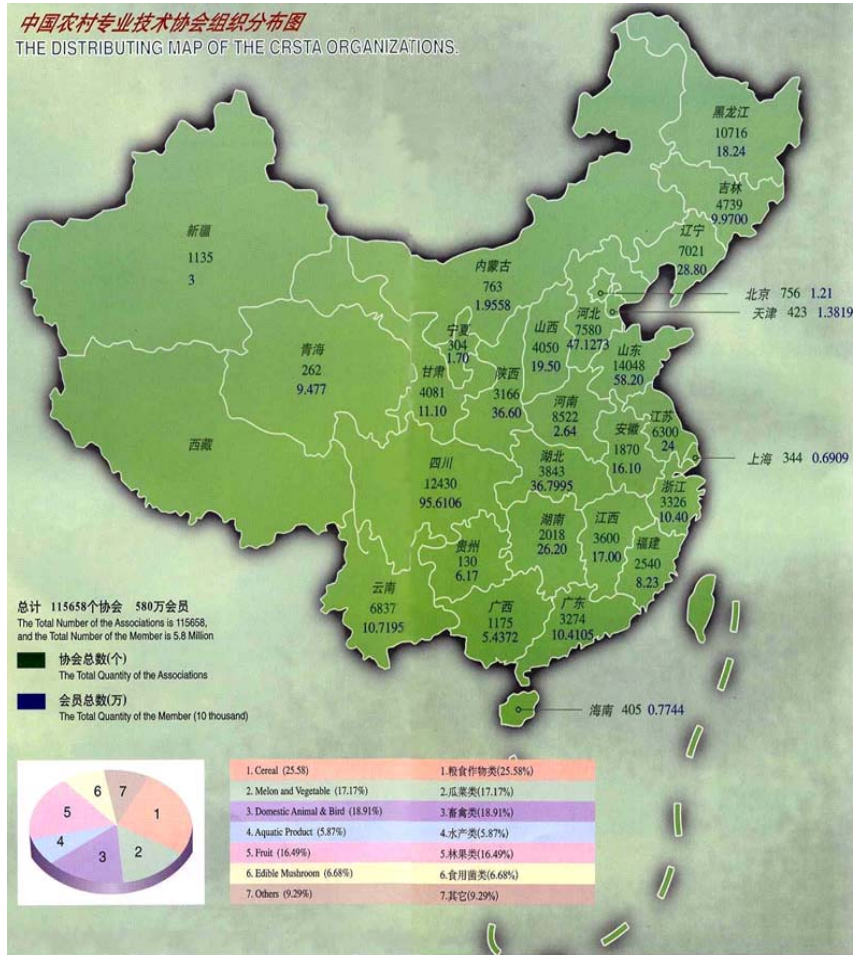
RSTAs emerged after the introduction of household responsibility system in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They were technical and economic cooperative organizations of the farmers who happened to plant the same crops or engage in similar activities. RSTAs have expanded quickly, especially after CAST set up a subsidiary -- China Rural Special Technique Association (CRSTA) to direct RSTAs in 1995. It is reported that 5.8 millions of farmers joined 115,658 RSTAs by the end of 2001 (Figure 8).

Also at the end of 2001, there were 10,674 ASTs operating in enterprises. While ASTs are composed of engineers and technicians, WTAs are organizations of workers. WTA was first founded by some model workers in Shenyang in 1961.<sup>8</sup> From then on, the government has made efforts to promote their development, aiming at increasing the participation of workers in technical innovation, cooperation, competition, and transfer. Table 5 presents statistics on WTAs for the last decade or so. Apparently, WTAs have contracted since the mid-1990s, which no doubt is a consequence of the denationalization of the Chinese economy. Private enterprises do not seem to have much interest in WTAs at all.

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8. For administrative purpose, WTAs are under the jurisdiction of the All China Federation of Trade Unions.

Figure 8. Rural Special Technique Associations



\* Source: [http://www.china-njx.com/xiehuiifenbutu.htm].

Table 5. Grassroots Workers' Technical Associations

	Grassroots WTA #	Membership	Full-time Staff
1991	59750	3642203	39049
1992	60154	4008042	48099
1993	61298	4339543	56426
1994	70000 <sup>†</sup>	4340000	-
1996	47091	3278354	118203
1997	33940	3258082	65627
1998	38000 <sup>†</sup>	3260000	-
2002	25611	2288960	-

\* Source: *Zhongguo Gonghui Tongji Nianjian and Zhongguo Gonghui Nianjian* (various years).

\*\* Note: <sup>†</sup>Those figures include the WTAs at the levels of province and prefecture.

#### D. All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce

Established in 1953, the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce (ACFIC) was an organization representing the interests of industrial and commercial business. Approved by the State Council, now the ACFIC is also known as the China General Chamber of Commerce (CGCC). The adoption of a “new face” is a sign that the organization intends to downplay its “united front” role and shift its emphasis more toward economic and non-state activities. By the end of 2002, the ACFIC system had a membership of about 1.64 million, comprising enterprises, institutions, and individuals. Members were predominantly small and medium-size enterprises as well as individually owned ventures (*getihu*). The system has an extensive network of local chambers of commerce throughout the country, including 3,059 local chapters at the county level and above, of which 358 local chapters are located in major cities throughout the country, covering 95% of the nation’s administrative regions. Below the county level, there are some 18,481 chapters at the township and community level, 461 of which were founded during 2001. The relationships among the chambers at various levels are informal and quite loose. The national ACFIC may provide guidance to the provincial and local chambers and the provincial chambers may also provide guidance to their respective local chambers, but the national and provincial chambers do not have formal authority to issue orders to the local chambers (ADB,

2003: 44).

In addition to the ACFIC, private businesspersons may also join either local *getihu* associations or private enterprise associations. Supervised by the State Administration for Industry and Commerce (SAIC) and its local branches, the two organizations have their own networks throughout the country at every administrative level, which are separated from, and compete in supplying certain services to members with, the ACFIC system. Although both appear to have top-down structure, each local association is actually independent and is administered by its respective local government. There is also considerable variation in the name, structure, size, and activities of different associations depending upon the local conditions and the attitudes of local governments. Since two organizations generally overlap the ACFIC system, it is conservative to estimate that they together have at least 30,000 groups below the county level (ADB, 2003: 46).

#### *E. Other Quasi-Governmental Organizations*

On top of the eight major mass organizations, there are other government-sponsored organizations, each of which has its own nation-wide network. Examples include China Family Planning Association (CFPA)<sup>9</sup> and the consumers' associations.<sup>10</sup> Established in 1980, CFPA has since penetrated nearly all provinces, municipalities, and counties, and a large portion of urban neighborhoods and rural communities. Those organizations have served as an effective instrument for the government to carry out its birth control policy, especially in the countryside. Besides, they have also been active in the fields of health education and community development. CFPA reportedly has about 1.02 million local branches and 83 million members.

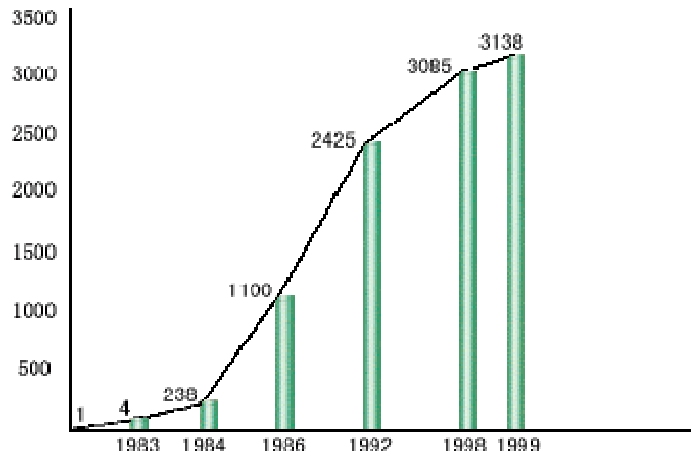
The mission of China Consumers' Association is to protect the consumer rights and to probe and intermediate the consumers' complains according to the Law on Consumer Rights Protection. After its foundation in the early 1980s, the organization has expanded rapidly. Its local branches now penetrate all corners of the country. As Figure 9 shows, by 1999, there were already 3,138 chapters at the county level and above. It is reported that consumers' associations at lower levels amounted to 156,000.

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9. China Family Planning Association's website [<http://www.chinafpa.org.cn>].

10. China Consumers' Association's website [<http://www.cca.org.cn>].

Figure 9. Consumers' Associations at the County Level and Above



\* Source: [<http://www.cca.org.cn/aboutus/6-gzsj1.htm>].

Table 6. Other Quasi-Government Associations and Its Grassroots Groups

Other Quasi-Government Associations	Grassroots Groups
Family Planning Associations	1,020,000
Consumers' Associations	156,000
Associations of Disabled	40,000
Volunteers' Associations	24,000
Associations of Literature & Arts	45,000
Sports Associations	53,220
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>1,338,220</b>

Table 6 sums up the number of grassroots groups affiliated with six quasi-governmental associations. Together, the fourteen organizations included in Tables 5 and 6 encompass some 6.7 million grassroots organizations. The main function of those organizations is to involve people from specific segments of the society in activities in specific areas and make sure that such activities would not spin out of state control. Due to their close connections with the government, they may be more susceptible to state interference than other organizations and the membership within some (not all) of them may not even be entirely voluntary. Nevertheless, as they play important roles in the economic, social, political, and cultural lives for millions of Chi-

nese, any study of associational life in China would be incomplete if they were to be excluded.

## **VI. Grassroots and Virtual Organizations**

According to China's "Regulation on the Registration and Administration of Associations," groups operating within government agencies, institutions, enterprises, schools, urban neighborhoods, and rural communities are considered "internal" organizations and not required to register with MCA. MCA and its local bureaus do not even bother to collect information about associations below the county level. For this reason, grassroots associations have largely been ignored by the literature on China's civil society, although they have played an active and increasingly more important role in Chinese associational life. Examples include book discussion clubs, choral societies, hiking clubs, amateur sports clubs, literary circles, religious groups, hobby groups, elderly associations, friendship groups, students' associations, disease support groups, and the like. A report on grassroots associations in Shanghai, for instance, found that there were 4,658 reading groups in 92 work units surveyed in the August 1999, including 1,061 groups on social science, 1,600 on science and technology, 648 on economics and management, 644 on culture and arts, and 705 on hobbies (Yin, 2001: 244). Most of grassroots associations are locally based, significantly autonomous, and volunteer-run. They provide their members with information, stimulation, opportunities for self-expression, social support, fellowship, and mutual aid, and thus have many kinds of significant "internal impact" on their members. In each work units or community, the number of such grassroots groups may be small, but cumulatively, their total number must be gigantic. It is impossible to ascertain the exact number without a nation-wide survey. Table 7 presents our conservative estimates about the numbers of 11 types of grassroots groups. Three types are discussed below.

Table 7. Grassroots Groups

Grassroots Groups	Number
College Student Groups	20,700
High School Student Groups	95,000
Community-based Recreational Groups	50,000
Philately	41,000
Other Hobby Groups	130,000
Senior Citizens' Schools	17,000
The Elderly Associations	70,000
Home-owners' Associations	15,000
Religious Groups	170,000
Friendship Groups	50,000
BBS and Virtual Associations	100,000
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>758,700</b>

*A. Students' Associations at College Campuses*

There are 1,472 universities and colleges in China by the end of 2003. We randomly selected 108 for our investigation. After sampling, we browsed the websites of these schools to look for information on students' associations in each of them. All of these schools provide their lists of students' groups active on their campuses and some offer detailed information on each of them. These lists may or may not be exhaustive. In any event, we identify altogether 1,519 students' groups among the 108 universities. In other words, each university on average has 14.06.<sup>11</sup> Some universities seem to have more vibrant associational life than others do. The number of students' groups on each campus ranges from 100 at Harbin Polytechnic University to just one at Xinjiang University. Table 8 shows that the distribution of different types of students association in our sample. Apparently, literary and arts groups are most attractive to college students. Using the average derived from our sample, we estimate that there are at least 20,700 ( $14.06 \times 1,472$ ) students' associations on university campuses in China. The same method is also used to estimate the number of students' groups at high schools.

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11. A survey conducted in Shanghai largely confirms this estimate. There were 712 associations in 56 universities in Shanghai in 2000. The average was about 12. The distribution of those associations was also similar with our online survey with 57 percent of groups active in the areas of literary & arts and sports (SDSYL, 2001).

Table 8. Types of Students' Associations at 108 Universities

Types	Number	Percentage
Literary & Arts	647	42.6
Sports & Health	253	16.6
Science & Technology	183	12
Social Science	157	10.3
Voluntary Service	146	9.6
Study Groups	100	6.6
Others	33	2.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1519</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Source: Our own databank.

### B. Community-based Groups

China has 5,576 urban residential communities and 20,601 townships (State Statistical Bureau, 2003: 3). How many community-based recreational groups are there? No one knows. Nevertheless, any tourist to Chinese cities would immediately spot signs of lively recreational activities in group form. Of course, more group activities are not observable to outsiders. Take Ruijin Community in Shanghai as an example. An area of 1.98 square kilometers with the population of 93,000, the community had 465 grassroots associations of 41 types, which involved the participation of more than 6,000 residents (see Table 9). All these groups were founded after 1990. Retirees were among the most active participants. Most of group leaders were either the members of the Residential Committee (46%) or retirees (46%). Moreover, most of the groups were initiated by the Residential Committee, and only a handful of sports clubs were started by individual residents (Yin, 2001).

This case is by no means representative of the overall situation in China. Most of the country's urban and rural communities may not be as vivacious as the Ruijin Community is. Nevertheless, even if we assume that each urban community has five groups and each rural community has only one, the number of community-based groups in the country would reach around 50,000.



Table 9. Grassroots Associations in the Ruijin Community, Shanghai

Types	No.	Name (including Activities)	Group No	Membership
Self-Service	1	Volunteers' Associations and Groups	12	128
	2	Voluntary Patrol Groups	30	5295
	3	Legal Consulting Service Groups	12	65
	4	Health Consulting Groups (Consist of Retired Doctors)	5	30
	5	Sanitation Monitoring Groups	9	133
	6	Medical Service Groups (Including Human Milk Feeding Supporting Groups)	5	77
	7	Psychological Counseling Groups	3	17
	8	Voluntary Groups for Helping Families with Subsistence Difficulties	6	30
	9	Groups for Scientific Baby-fostering	2	11
Learning and Propganda	10	Senior Citizens' Schools	4	51
	11	Newspaper Reading Groups for the Elders	3	37
	12	Current Affairs Discussion Groups	2	29
	13	Citizenship Schools	2	45
	14	Propaganda Groups	2	31
	15	Young Pioneers Radio Groups	5	52
	16	Young People's Propaganda Groups	3	35
	17	Popular Science Groups	12	164
Caring and Mutual Help	18	Comprehensive Caring Groups for the Weakens	4	27
	19	Army Man's Family-caring Groups	4	29
	20	Elders-caring Groups	4	29
	21	Women and Children-caring Groups	2	15
	22	Youth-caring Groups	4	29
	23	Associations for Floating Women Workers	2	31
	24	Neighboring Mutual Helping Groups	3	28
	25	Other Mutual Helping Groups	2	17
Sports and Health Improving	26	Chinese Gongfu Excising Groups	13	220
	27	Eighteenth Qigong Groups	11	196
	28	Health Improving Groups	5	105

	29	Long-life Qigong Groups	6	78
	30	Waist-drum Groups	2	25
	31	Ruyi Qigong Groups	3	58
	32	Other Sports Groups	4	60
Arts and Hobbies	33	Singing Groups	17	244
	34	Dancing Groups	5	67
	35	Painting and Calligraphy Groups	8	65
	36	Foreign Language Corner	2	26
	37	Braid and Weaving Groups	7	76
	38	Traditional and Beijing Opera Groups	5	55
	39	Cooking Groups	5	60
	40	Miniascape and Ikebana Groups	5	41
	41	Other Arts Groups	4	48

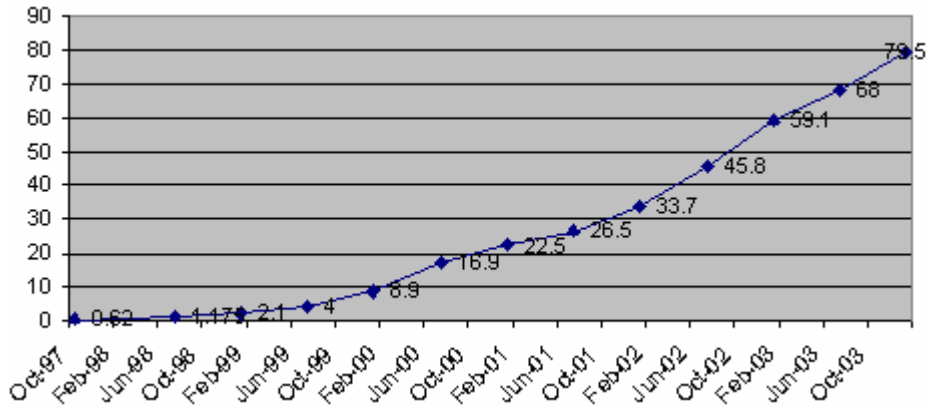
\* Source: Yin (2001: 246-247).

### *C. Associations in Cyberspace*

What we have discussed heretofore are all associations in real space. Since the mid-1990s, personal computers have penetrated workplaces and homes in urban China. Meanwhile, the growth of internet has been equally astounding, with the number of internet users doubling every 12 months or so (see Figure 10). According to the "Thirteenth Semiannual Survey Reports on the Internet in China" released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC, <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/html/Dir/2004/02/03/2114.htm>), the number of Internet users reached 79.5 million by January 2004.

The Internet provides a platform for individuals -- through email, chat rooms, news groups, and clubs -- to form formal and informal groups "for the purpose of exchanges, including resource transactions and relations reinforcement" (Lin, 2001: 212) regardless of their physical location. How does the Internet affect Chinese associational life? Does it promote the growth of "virtual" associations? This subsection tries to answer these questions by focusing on one particular form of virtual community -- the Bulletin Board System.

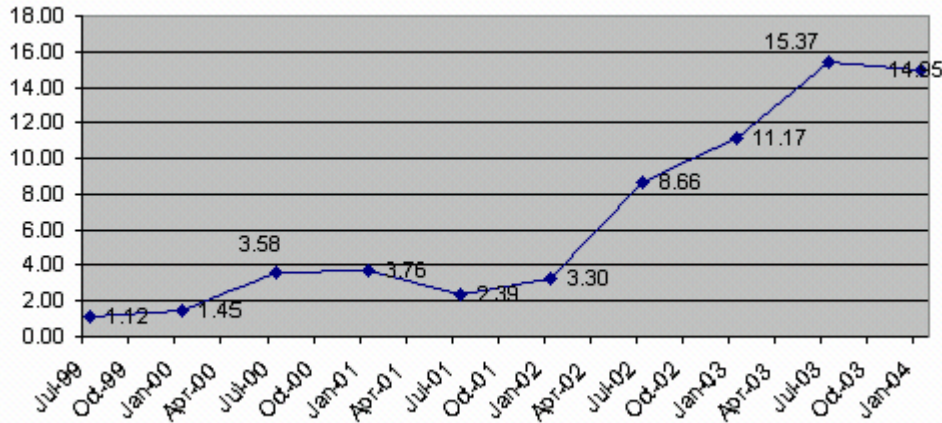
Figure 10. Internet Users in China: 1997-2003 (million)



\* Source: CNNIC, *Zhongguo Hulian Wangluo Fazhan Zhuangkuang Tongji Baogao* [Semiannual Reports on the Development of Internet in China] [<http://www.cnnic.net.cn/index/0E/00/11/index.htm>].

Interaction between members is both the main cause and function of association. The Bulletin Board System (BBS) on the Internet is a virtual forum that provides a general community structure around which users can gather and interact. Any individual who frequents a virtual forum or BBS can be considered a member of that community, simply by their attendance. The BBS community consists of a variety of boards, each of which focuses on a specific topic, like current affairs, history, reading, literature, arts, techniques, hobbies, mutual help, and volunteering. Some eminent BBS forums have large numbers of loyal members. For example, set up by *People Daily's Net* in May 1999, *Qiangguo Luntan* (Strengthening China Forum, <http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/start>) is one of the most renowned political forums, with 290,000 membership IDs. On average, about 12,000 pieces of messages are posted everyday. The highest number of simultaneous online members amounts to 50,000. Also set up in 1999, *Tianya Virtual Club* (<http://www.tianyaclub.com>) has now more than 1 million registered IDs. *SMTH BBS* (<http://www.smth.org>), the earliest in China, is one of most famous university-based BBS. With more than 150,000 member IDs, it always has more than 10,000 members spontaneously online. According to the estimation of its managers, the real membership should be no less than 100,000. *SMTH* offers over 300 boards, covering almost every area of university life.

Figure 11. BBS Users, 1999-2004 (million)



\* Source: Zhongguo Hulan Wangluo Fazhan Zhuangkuang Tongji Baogao.

Calculated from CNNIC's 13<sup>th</sup> surveys, Figure 11 traces the growth of Chinese BBS users in the last few years. By January 2004, as many as 15 million Chinese were regular BBS users.

How many BBS forums are there in China? There is no systematic statistics available, but it is possible to come up with a rough estimate. There were altogether 595,550 websites in the country by the end of 2003. They could be divided into seven broad categories: websites of enterprises, commercial website, personal websites, websites of education and research institutions, other business websites, government websites, and websites of nonprofit organizations. In its 13<sup>th</sup> survey, CNNIC reported that 19.2 percent of 422,245 websites of enterprises provided BBS forums, which meant 81,071 BBS on this type of websites alone. The BBS forums on enterprises websites were mostly oriented toward their customers or staff, and related to its products or services. Most of them have little influence in the public. Among 48,835 commercial websites, 9.1 percent of them set up the 4,444 BBS forums.<sup>12</sup> Many BBS forums provided by commercial websites have enormous influence on internet users. Examples include SINA.com, SOHU.com and Xilu.com. Xilu.com is a professional provider of virtual communities, where some 520,000 forums have registered with more than 10 million member IDs. At any moment, more than 10,000 persons visit those forums. As for 19,058 gov-

12. The number of this type of BBSes do not seem to be very stable. CNNIC's 2002 survey identified 8,470 BBS forums provided by commercial websites.

ernment websites, 35.6% of them provided 6,785 BBS forums. Although there is no data on the education and research institutions' BBS in the CNNIC survey, we know that 160 college BBS forums have registered at <http://www.cn-bbs.org> by 2003, each of which provides on average 17 bulletin boards. On average, each college BBS has 13,730 member IDs. Finally, there are 38,711 personal websites, many of which also set up BBS forums, even though we have no way to establish the exact number of personal BBS forums. Adding the estimates together, we are confident to conclude that there are no less than 100,000 BBS forums in China, probably many more.

Each bulletin board functions as a virtual community. To what extent is a virtual community different from a traditional association? Two types of activities are worth noting. First, opposed to the open forum, close forums have emerged recently. These forums have clear goals and orientations. Their memberships do not open to the public and reference from the existing member is always the prerequisite to join the forum. Rights and obligations are always clearly declared and must be obeyed. The close forum is very much like an association. *Dogn Club* (<http://www.dogn.net>), a close forum oriented to the serious-minded communication, is a good example. It is open for browsing, but the membership is under strict control. The club establishes a 5-person membership committee to screen applications. One veto from any committee member will deny an application. Now it has only 386 member ID and 12 boards. *League for BBS Masters* is another example. Founded in September 2001, it is a confidential forum aiming at building a virtual association for the communication of BBS masters. The precondition for its membership is that the applicant has to be a master of large-sized BBS. Internal referee is required for anyone who intends to apply for membership. Second, virtual associational life can be transformed from the cyberspace into formal or informal associations in the real world. Get-togethers of net-mates are now quite common for the BBS users. Some members of a tourist BBS may travel together; sports lovers may play balls every weekend; and reading groups may meet to debate on some issues. *Guantian Teahouse*, a board in *Tianya Club* (<http://www.tianyaclub.com>), is virtual tea bar for those who are interested in political debate and attracts many prominent scholars and writers from both liberal and new left camps. Despite their conflicting ideological orientations, net-mates of the BBS organized lectures at different cities from time to time. As Table 10 shows, during the summer in 2003, 14 gathering were held by the

net-mates of *Guantian* in nine cities. Constitutionalism, citizenship, and democratizations were hot topics in the gathering.

Table 10. Recent Gatherings of Guantian Teahouse Board in Tianya Club

Date	City	Topics	# of Participants
2003-6-28	Hangzhou, Zhejiang	Lecture on the Economic Sociological Explanation of China's Reform	
2003-6-29	Hangzhou, Zhejiang	Environmental Protecting Hiking	
2003-7-11	Beijing	Dinner Talk on Constitutionalism	Around 20 persons
2003-7-13	Guangzhou, Guangdong	Lecture on News Reform	
2003-7-19	Guangzhou, Guangdong	Climbing	20 persons
2003-7-26	Xi'an, Shaanxi	Internet, Citizenship and Democratization	7 persons
2003-7-26	Beijing	Lecture on Rule by Law, Given by Dr. Yu Jianrong, a Famous Scholar in the Field of Rural Politics	About 50 persons
2003-8-2	Chengdu, Sichuan	Constitutional Reform	
2003-8-6	Wenzhou, Zhejiang	Confucianism and Culture and Development of Wenzhou	
2003-8-9	Wuhan, Hubei		
2003-8-10	Beijing	Lecture Given by Dr. Liu Junning, a Political Scientist	80 persons
2003-8-26	Shanghai	Chinese Culture and Democracy, Internet and Public Opinion	About 20 persons
2003-8-27	Ji'nan, Shandong	Huang Jing's Case (A Well-known Dating Rape Case of the Year)	About 30 persons
2003-9-3	Xi'an, Shaanxi	History, Democratization, Labor	

No doubt, the Internet has greatly expanded the social space for Chinese associational life.

## VII. Summary

This paper provides a quantitative assessment of the density and diver-

sity of associational life in China. Table 11 summarizes our findings presented in the preceding sections. Clearly, if our attention were to be focused on what Chinese called “social organizations” or worse yet on those social organizations that are financially, functionally, and politically autonomous from the state, we would miss large parts of China’s associational landscapes.

The findings about the number of operating associations run parallel with those about the participation rate of associational life. The 1990 World Value Survey, for instance, found that 27.6 percent of Chinese had active membership in one or more associations (Table 12). Commissioned by UNDP, our own 2001 survey confirmed the results of the World Value Survey (Table 13). Therefore, it is hardly an exaggeration for us to conclude, “Yes, China is indeed part of the global association revolution.”



Table 11. The Total Estimated Number of Associations in China

Category	Number
Registered Social Organizations	142,000
Registered Private Non-enterprise Units	124,000
Unregistered Social Organizations	40,000
Unregistered Private Non-enterprise Units	250,000
Eight Mass Organizations	5,378,424
Other Quasi-Government Associations	1,338,220
Grassroots Groups	758,700
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,031,344</b>

Table 12. Active Membership in any Organizations Except Political Party

# of Associations that Interviewee Participated	Frequency	Percent
0	1810	72.4
1	468	18.7
2	149	6.0
3	57	2.3
4	13	0.5
5	2	0.1
6	1	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2500</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Source: World Value Survey (1990).

Table 13. Have You Participated in Associational Activities

Answer	Frequency	Percent
Yes	422	23.9
No	1345	76.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1767</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Source: Our own databank.

Of course, the organizations listed in Table 11 differ greatly from one another in their origins, natures, internal structures, sources of financing, membership profiles, relationships with the state, and so on, even though they all help form durable networks of more or less institutionalized relationships among their members. Therefore, mapping out the landscapes is at best the first step to study the associational revolution in China. Many more questions need to be scrutinized before we can fully grasp the significance of the revolution. What factors have contributed to China's recent associational revolution? Why has the associational space in China been populated more by certain types of organizations than others? How are different types of association organized internally? What kinds of people are most likely to join associations? Are all associations alike with respect to both the amount and the sort of social capital "produced"? Are memberships of a particular associational sector are more likely to score highly on certain dimensions of social capital than on others? To what extent is the social capital generated by these organizations of benefit not only to their own members but also to the society as a whole? What kinds of social capital are different categories of associations likely to produce, bonding or bridging? What types of associations are more capable of fostering cooperation, civic engagement, tolerance, trust, and the norms of reciprocity? Does participation in nonpolitical or involuntary organizations help stimulate political involvement and interest? Is associational life really the school for democratic citizenship? How conducive is associational life to the formation of civic and democratic virtues? Do association members tend to act as better citizens than non-members do? Those questions will guide our future research.

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