

State of Exchange

Migrant NGOs and the Chinese Government

JENNIFER Y.J. HSU



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Introduction

How do non-governmental organizations (NGOs) impact state behaviour? This was my initial meta-question at the commencement of fieldwork for this monograph during the height of the summer of 2006. I was routinely struck by the precision with which some NGOs were able to pinpoint the levels of the state that they ought to engage with, to the extent that they knew the individuals who could potentially affect their activities. The reverse was certainly not the case: NGOs were not able to clearly delineate how their activities affected the state. The narratives gathered during those warm days in Beijing and Shanghai directed my attention to the various levels at which NGOs interact with the state. The Chinese “state” was not simply “the state,” but *multiple* states. The narratives suggested intimate linkages with the local state. What, then, were the boundaries of the state – local and central – if NGOs were at times woven into the complex web of the state?

Subsequent episodes and experiences over the years suggested that delineating the boundaries of the Chinese state was not an easy task. In an interview with a Shanghai municipal official in 2007, I was upbraided for asking questions. I was put squarely in my place by this official: my role was to listen – to listen to a lecture about the achievements of her department concerning migrant workers. Clearly, the boundaries of the local Shanghai state were reinforced by her schoolmarmish demeanour: the state directs and we must all listen and concur. A similar situation occurred during my visit to the Beijing Municipal Commission of Urban Planning, when the entire office was subsumed by the histrionics of a

local resident protesting a decision to demolish her residence. Waving documents and shouting with great frustration, she rejected the decision of the local authorities, and staff members trying to placate her failed miserably. The local state insofar as urban planning was concerned was absolute in its decision to demolish local residences.

From another standpoint, the protest of this local resident at the site of the commission suggests that the boundaries of the local state may be open to question. That is, protests of such nature are much more frequent and local, and rather than preventing such actions, the local authorities are somewhat open to dialogue and/or negotiation. Not all agents of the state are obstinate or impenetrable. I slowly developed good relations with the head of the Cultural Department of a *juweihui* (residents' committee) outside of Beijing, and this led to her attempts to recruit me into the local dance troupe facilitated by the *juweihui*. Or if dancing was not my forte, how about becoming involved in planning for International Women's Day? she asked. Our conversations were casual and we brainstormed ways to make the *juweihui's* activities more attractive to the local community. It was at the local level of the state where conversations developed and dialogue ensued. Further interactions with other *jiedao* or *juweihui* staff in both Beijing and Shanghai suggested that conversations with agents of the state could be easy. In discussing career choices, a local Shanghai trade official outlined his rather unusual path to his current position: after working as a dentist for many years, he decided to pursue a career in local government. How do these vignettes explain "the state"? Moreover, how could I determine where the various levels of the state ended and began? To add to the *mélange*, the NGOs I interviewed were often clear, in their narratives, about wanting to establish closer ties with the local state.

I argue that the answer to these questions lies in conceptualizing the Chinese state as comprising multiple layers, spaces, and agendas that are not necessarily inclusive of or coordinated with each other. When local states interact and establish partnerships with NGOs, they become mutually constitutive; the boundaries and spaces of the local state enlarge to accommodate the NGO, and vice versa. As seen in the foregoing sketches, the various layers of the state – whether at the municipal or *juweihui* level – matter greatly for how individuals and NGOs carry out their day-to-day activities.

As NGOs proliferate across China, they will no doubt capture the attention of central and local states. As they try to make sense of this change, the local authorities will attempt to embrace and incorporate

NGOs; at the very least, the presence of NGOs will register on the state's radar and the state will seek to ensure control and to interpret their growth according to their own terms. Spaces of the state therefore multiply as central and local states start to engage with these NGOs.

Analyses of the state have waxed and waned over time across the social sciences, but the state has always remained central in studies of China's development, transition, and ascendancy over the last thirty years. The Chinese state was never "kicked out" or "brought-back in" (Evans et al. 1985). In most analyses, it was either unabashedly at the front and centre of the discussion or lurking somewhere in the shadows, but all the while omnipresent.¹ Given the unprecedented socio-economic changes that have taken place over the same period, it is surprising that attempts to understand the Chinese state and state-society relations have focused steadfastly on an undifferentiated concept of the "state." China's state-led economic development policies make a state-centred analysis quite a reasonable proposition. Nonetheless, the Chinese state in the twenty-first century is an increasingly heterogeneous entity. The social protests that have erupted because of a range of issues, from land grabs by local authorities to environmental concerns, surely necessitate a more comprehensive and differentiated view of the state. The heterogeneity of the state is also partly attributable to growth in the number of NGOs operating in China.

This book examines how the state and NGOs transform each other. I demonstrate this through a case study of migrant NGOs in Beijing and Shanghai, where these NGOs are making strong efforts to engage with central and local authorities. Migrant NGOs in both cities have become important resources for migrant workers, providing information, support, and assistance on a range of issues. Despite their importance to migrant workers, however, I argue that the local state is becoming more crucial in the work and activities of NGOs in terms of their ability to conduct and scale up their programs and ultimately provide migrants in Beijing and Shanghai with access to services. Note that the core of this book is not on migrant workers per se; rather, it examines the organizational behaviour of NGOs that seek to speak on their behalf. It is interesting to situate this sector of NGOs in the layers and spaces framework where the presence of the central and local states manifest in different forms. Furthermore, how the different layers of the state respond to issues as advocated by the NGOs, from migrant children's education to labour rights, provides an important indicator regarding the future integration of migrants into China's urban centres. Nonetheless, it is the

growing presence of the local state that gives rise to the notion of the state as layered. In an era when NGOs are proliferating nationwide, the Chinese state is engaging with society as a means of remaining relevant and legitimate. Through this process of engagement, the state is penetrating different spaces to ensure its survival.

For the purpose of this book, the term “space” refers to both the physical location – Beijing and Shanghai, for example – and a social process; thus, NGOs and their work represent a space that different *layers* of the state have permeated through their engagement with NGOs. The task of reconceptualizing and problematizing the state requires an appreciation of the social changes and problems that have resulted from economic development and the emergence of NGOs representing the marginalized of Chinese society.

CHINESE STATE AND SOCIETY

The emergence of an NGO sector in China has often been viewed as a sign that the state is loosening its grip on society; in fact, interpreting the prevalence of NGOs from a civil society standpoint can highlight the proactive role of non-state actors in China’s transformation. The findings of this study suggest, however, that the policies and regulations governing NGOs in most cases tend to replicate the dominant role of the central state. While the state may no longer be wielding overt forms of control, such as coercion and propaganda to manage society, more subtle mechanisms or tacit sanctioning are used to supervise non-state stakeholders (Hsu and Hasmath 2014a). In this new form of management, the state selects certain groups to mediate on behalf of their constituents, and it is the state that maintains the relationship while the chosen organizations must adhere to the rules and regulations (Hsu and Hasmath 2014a). Strategies such as tacit sanctioning demonstrate that the state is still in power but that forms of engagement with social stakeholders have evolved since 1978, and that social stakeholders now have greater opportunities to respond to a number of social issues and concerns. Indeed, the role and capacity of the NGO sector to deal with the growing social challenges of Chinese society are under the close scrutiny and management of the state. If they are constrained by the state, what then is the exact function of NGOs and how effective can they be in achieving their social goals? Further complicating this is the presence of international NGOs (INGOs), which have entered China with a variety of programs and

objectives, often causing concern in both central and local states. The motives of INGOs are called into question by the central state particularly against the backdrop of recent developments in other transition countries where political reforms have been facilitated with the active involvement of such international non-state actors. At the local level, INGOs often encounter difficulties in implementing their projects because of suspicion on the part of local officials.

In light of such complex interactions between actors at different levels of the state, there appears to be a strong case for including a wider range of non-state stakeholders in the analysis. The civil society framework is clearly beneficial as it shines a light on the undercurrents of change and brings to the fore such a range of non-state stakeholders. Seeing change from the perspective of social stakeholders rather than that of the state reveals the potential for the former to be catalysts for societal change. As we consider the concept of NGOs as stakeholders, it is important to remember that neither state nor society operates in the absence of the other, as the two are mutually constitutive. Yet even a focus on civil society development does not provide an adequate picture of the diversity of the Chinese state or the way in which state and NGOs interact. The privileging of one stakeholder over another in such an analysis is bound to obscure the dynamics of the other. Some writers have responded to this dilemma by putting the state back in the spotlight, while others have used a state corporatist framework to comprehend state-society relations in China, particularly with regard to the regulations that pertain to NGOs. A particular contribution of the literature on the corporatist Chinese state is its demonstration of the importance of assessing the impact of the local state on socio-economic developments. While state corporatism can explain the economic actions of the local state, the success of China's development on a national level is more often explained with reference to the developmental state framework. Both concepts – state corporatism and the developmental state – suggest that the diversification of civil society can occur within the context of a state that is seeking to coordinate the process. Consequently, these two frameworks provide a meta-framework for comprehending the state that is arguably well suited to China because of the authoritarian nature of the Chinese state. Concomitantly, the civil society perspective seeks to grant a prime role to societal actors. Yet if we train our gaze solely on the state or society, we miss the adjustments that are occurring within the state and between the state and society, or what I have conceptualized as layers and spaces of the state, and we neglect the dynamism that exists between state and NGOs. Building on these

previous frameworks, my own framework of layers and spaces, operationalized by a typology of state-NGO relations, as outlined below, moves beyond the state-society dichotomy with a careful balance of the two, to appreciate the various actions that are taking place between actors and within each actor.

To grasp the changes occurring within the Chinese state and to fully utilize the proposed framework, we must factor in the growing importance of the local state, which is having to shoulder greater responsibility as a social service provider. Local authorities are investigating ways to accomplish this, and have experimented with NGOs as potential contractors. The local state is thus an active stakeholder in the development and work of NGOs, particularly when NGOs are intimately engaged with its constituents in the community. The study provides a typology of state-NGO interactions that will help differentiate the goals of central and local states as they cooperate or collaborate with NGOs. Using Jennifer Coston's article (1998) as a starting point – with modifications to reflect the realities that constrain NGOs in non-liberal democratic systems – I argue that there are three models of state-migrant NGO relationships: symbolic, asymmetric, and strategic. Suffice it to say that each layer of the Chinese state engages with migrant NGOs in different ways, depending on a number of factors, including the sector, size, and overall agenda of the level of state in question. *Symbolic cooperation* refers to the state's acknowledgment and acceptance of the NGO and its work, possibly without a working relationship between state and NGO. An *asymmetric relationship* is one in which the NGO, due to the power monopoly of the state, becomes dependent on the state to facilitate its work. *Strategic collaboration* enables the state to make choices in its engagement with NGOs for the purpose of fulfilling certain goals, such as economic goals. The typology does not prescribe or present a set of rigid categories. Instead, its use enables a deeper analysis of the various levels of the state, not just the central state.

Unlike the state corporatist or developmental state frameworks, which assume a level of homogeneity of the state and the notion that all apparatuses of the state are driven by economic incentives to engage with NGOs, the layers and spaces approach paired with the typology offered in this book presents a dynamic picture of state-NGO relations. The typology will be expanded in [Chapter 1](#), and [Chapters 3, 4, and 5](#) will explore it through case studies; it suffices at this point to mention that the typology exposes the different motivations of the state in its engagement with NGOs.

DEFINING, CONTEXTUALIZING, AND OPERATIONALIZING
LAYERS AND SPACES

In light of the complex, dynamic nature of the state and its relations with society, I adopt a framework of *layers* and *spaces* to explain the NGO phenomenon within the context of the Chinese state. While there is growing consensus that the Chinese state is heterogeneous (Saich 2002; Howell 2006), I articulate the specifics of this heterogeneity by analyzing each layer of the Chinese state and examining how each one collaborates, cooperates, and interacts with migrant NGOs. The layers of the Chinese state are the central government, municipal government (*shi*), district (*qu*), street neighbourhood (*jiedao*), and residents' committees (*juweihui*) in Beijing and Shanghai. Each of these local levels of the state are found across China's cities. These administrative layers are not new to China. In fact, the durability of such a hierarchy should be understood within the context of the state's pursuit of various political and economic strategies and goals (Cartier 2011). Prior to the 1978 economic reforms, the "hegemonic" (White 1993, 11) nature of the Chinese state ensured that engagement with society occurred largely in a top-down manner. For example, changes within society as a result of large-scale economic development were determined by the state, as in the case of mass campaigns such as the Great Leap Forward, reinforcing the hierarchy of the Chinese state. Since the adoption of economic reforms from the late 1970s onward, various layers of the state have come to participate in economic development, reinforcing the different administrative layers of the state.

I examine each layer to show the contrast between central and local states in terms of their engagement with NGOs. In the process, it becomes clearer that there is good reason for the Chinese state to collaborate and cooperate with NGOs in different ways. I demonstrate that the Chinese state is not simply a vertical construction but also extends horizontally into new spaces, those occupied by NGOs. While the Chinese bureaucracy is organized in terms of vertical-horizontal (*tiao-kuai*), relations (Mertha 2005; Cartier 2011) such studies do not account for the fact that the state is moving into non-traditional and non-state areas, or "new" spaces. These non-state spaces, however, represent the working space, or domain of activity, in which NGOs operate.² As detailed in [Chapter 1](#), the process of decentralization has led to greater autonomy of the local state, but local authorities must also be responsible for revenue generation and delivery of social services, among their other responsibilities – duties once largely the responsibility of the central state. However, due

to budget constraints – a major consequence of decentralization – local states tacitly allow NGOs to deliver services to the community. As a result of the local state's limited capacity, the number of NGOs has increased in order to take advantage of this space that has opened up. Hence, decentralization and the subsequent lack of government capacity (skills and financial) – and, one may also say, willingness – has created this new space where NGOs seek to conduct their work. Although this space is the site of NGO activities, it is also a site into which different layers of the state have entered for variety of reasons, as seen in the context of the typology of state-NGO relations (symbolic, asymmetric, and strategic) alluded to earlier. The state reconstitutes and reinterprets the space on its own terms, and in the process seeks to remain relevant in a rapidly changing society.

While layers of interaction between state and society provide us with a useful tool for analysis, all of these interactions occur in concrete locations and thus in space. In locational terms, and in the context of this book, that space is Beijing or Shanghai. Still, space ought not to be conceived merely in locational or geographical terms or as a commodity, but rather as a social process and ultimately as a political tool. Conceiving of space as a social process refers to the idea that space can embody an assortment of social relations, and to the idea of a process in which the state *becomes*, rather than is, the final product (Staeheli 2008, 162); that is, the state is not a static entity but is constantly changing. Thus, spaces of the state encompass spaces of NGOs, and NGOs are sites that the state can penetrate to advance its own agenda.

To operationalize the layers and spaces framework, I adopt a typology of state-NGO relations as an analytical tool to make sense of some of the main features of their relationship. By analyzing the various typologies between different levels of the Chinese state and migrant NGOs, I provide a basis for theorizing about state-NGO relations. Symbolic, asymmetric, and strategic – the investigation of state-NGO relations within this typology reveals the distinct strategies and motives that drive collaborative opportunities between different layers of the state and NGOs. Unlike the central state, the local states in both Beijing and Shanghai adopt a variety of informal strategies in their collaboration and cooperation with migrant NGOs. These strategies significantly shape the future of China's NGO sector, as it leads to encroachment by the state into the NGOs' domain of activities. At the central level, this can take the form of regulations that govern NGOs, whereas the type of NGO may be a defining factor for local authorities.

The engagement between the state and NGOs is often referred to as “collaboration.” Ann Marie Thomson and James Perry (2006, 21) provide

a useful point of departure: “A process framework for collaboration suggests that collaboration occurs over time as organizations interact formally and informally through repetitive sequences of negotiation, development of commitments, and execution of those commitments.”³ The notion of process is further emphasized by Barbara Gray (1989) and David Sink (1998), according to whom different stakeholders with a share in a problem come together to find solutions that they could not achieve alone. Peter Ring and Andrew Van de Ven (1994) observe that multiple organizations will embark on a course of action together if they can, at a minimum, align their expectations. If the commitments are fulfilled in a reciprocal manner, the participants will continue or increase their course of collaboration. If the commitments are not fulfilled with reciprocity, the participants will seek to renegotiate or reduce their involvement. Consequently, collaboration is a non-linear and iterative process. Although the terms “collaboration” and “cooperation” are often used interchangeably, scholars tend to differentiate the two according to “depth of interaction, integration, commitment, and complexity, with cooperation falling at the low end of the continuum and collaboration at the high end” (Thomson and Perry 2006, 23). In the context of this study, both terms will be utilized, with the caveat that the depth of the stakeholders’ interactions affects whether relationships are collaborative or cooperative. Together, my account of state and migrant NGO relations, including collaboration, in China is conceptualized within the framework of layers and spaces. The typology of state-NGO relations – symbolic, asymmetric, and strategic – enables the operationalization of the idea that the state is composed of many layers and spaces.

Economic reforms and decentralization have opened up new pockets for non-state stakeholders to emerge, as noted earlier; as a result, NGOs are seeking or engaging in various types of relationships with different levels of the state. Simultaneously, NGOs are working in new spaces, some once realms of the state, others uncharted territory for both state and NGOs. Neither central nor local states are reclaiming that space, however, but are engaging with NGOs to ensure a level of control and management. Spaces of NGOs can become spaces of the state, a by-product of state-NGO engagement. Accordingly, spaces of the state are porous and can expand and contract depending on the relationships with NGOs. One important outcome of this process is that space is inherently political because of the constant interaction and negotiation that take place in this space. By engaging with NGOs, the different layers of the state appropriate and interpret NGO space to give it meaning within its

own context, and ultimately utilizes such space to proceed with its own agenda. The layers and spaces framework enables us to see the state not as a static entity but rather as a space (and a dynamic entity) in which social relations are produced, reconstituted, and/or transformed across various scales, whether central or local.

CHINA: MIGRANTS AND NGOs

China's rapid socio-economic transformation has generated extraordinary movements of people from rural to urban centres in search of higher wages and a perceived better standard of living. Rural-urban labour migration peaked in the early 2000s and has since declined, due in part to the impact of the global economic crisis. At the height of labour migration, it was estimated that some 100–200 million migrants had moved to urban centres, despite the restrictions of the *hukou*, or household registration system.⁴ The continuation of the *hukou* today causes much of the problems that migrant workers face, particularly as social and welfare benefits are tied to one's residence and are not easily transferrable to a new place of residence.⁵ Migrant workers in China's urban areas are largely without access to social services provided by the state or local government. Moreover, an abundance of migrant workers makes them easy targets for unscrupulous employers, who delay paying their wages and provide poor working conditions. As a result, thousands of protests related to labour disputes are reported each year, unnerving the state in its quest to maintain stability. The intensification of such disputes is exemplified by the fact that China's labour dispute arbitration committee handled just under 48,000 disputes in 1996, compared with 350,000 in 2007, with the figure nearly doubling to 693,000 in 2008 after the passage of the Labour Contract Law and the Labour Dispute Mediation and Arbitration Law (*China Labour Bulletin* 2011a). Fang Cai and Meiyang Wang (2012, 12) further note that the number of labour dispute cases in China's Eastern region (including Beijing and Shanghai, among other regions) in 2008 grew by 98 percent from the previous year, faster than in the Central region (50 percent) and in the Western region (61 percent). Without access to state support in their host city, migrants have come to rely on the NGOs that have emerged, which represent and act as service providers to the migrant cohort. In cases of labour disputes, labour-oriented NGOs have sought to provide free legal counsel and representation. Their work demonstrates how NGOs seek to transform urban conditions for their members, and in this process engage with the state at various levels.

Addressing issues associated with internal labour migration, such as the emerging friction between urban residents and rural labourers, and health and safety standards for millions of migrant workers is an immense and daunting task, requiring national and local attention. Migrants are a significant proportion of the urban population and they fuel the growth and expansion of Chinese cities. For example, Beijing and Shanghai each received 8.6 percent of China's labour migrants in 2015 (*China Labour Bulletin* 2016). According to Cai and Wang (2008, 255), a combination of labour input, human capital accumulation, and labour reallocation has contributed close to 70 percent of China's GDP growth since 1978. Despite their importance to the urban economy, however, migrants are treated unfavourably by authorities. For instance, Beijing municipal departments compete against each other to maximize the fees that migrant workers have to pay to register in their communities and places of work (He 2003), despite laws of the central state that ban such practices. In the face of such local government actions, different types of NGOs have emerged to address the shortcomings of the central and local authorities with regard to the needs of migrant workers. Beijing and Shanghai provide a perfect window through which to examine the complexities of the urban Chinese state and to see how each layer, from the central to the local, responds to the city's physical and social transformation. The impact of internal labour migration and the subsequent rise of migrant NGOs is indicative of the new spaces emerging for non-state actors, and is also a testament to the changing nature of state-society relations in post-1978 China. A focus on migrant NGOs therefore captures an important area in the post-reform era that apparatuses of neither the state nor society have had previous experience in dealing with, notably issues such as labour rights and migrant children's education.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The work of migrant NGOs in Beijing and Shanghai as explored in this book reveals the strategies used to establish collaboration and cooperation with different levels of the state. Subsequent chapters provide a rich picture of the work and the types of interactions involved. The diversity of the migrant NGO sector in the two cities contributes not only to the growing pluralization of Chinese society but also to the ensuing relationships with the different layers of the state. These relationships, as we shall see, are key components for disaggregating the state. A study of Beijing and Shanghai

is ideal for capturing the heterogeneity of the state, particularly the local state, and, as will be seen in subsequent chapters, the role of the district, *jiedao*, and *juweihui* punctuate the everyday work of the NGOs.

The types of engagement between the different layers of the state and NGOs are also influenced by the work and focus of the NGOs. The NGOs in Beijing and Shanghai can be divided into four categories: legal and advocacy, social service delivery, community development/integration, and education. The initiatives undertaken by the NGOs interviewed in Beijing indicate that they are bridging the gap in welfare provision to migrant workers and communities, as the local state has thus far failed to provide comprehensive services to migrants due to the constraints of the *hukou* system.⁶ However, their work and the impact of the programs are framed within the legal boundaries set by the state for NGOs.

A review of the work of the NGOs in each of these categories demonstrates that they are making significant efforts to establish collaborative opportunities with local authorities. These efforts can be attributed to the day-to-day impact of local authorities on migrant NGOs. Local authorities are proactive and have established a number of partnerships with NGOs, a sign that action by the local state is contributing to the heterogeneity of the Chinese state, and in the process extending its boundaries into a variety of social spaces. The pluralization of state space is demonstrated by the expansion of the local state's boundaries into the domains of NGOs.

Taking inspiration from earlier research on the nexus between state and society (see, e.g., Migdal, Kohli, and Shue 1994; Evans 1995; Pearson 1997; Shue 1998; Migdal 2001; Read 2012; Hildebrandt 2013; Teets 2014), my purpose here is to further this tradition through an intimate and detailed study of migrant NGOs that takes an interdisciplinary approach towards state-NGO relations. By drawing on different disciplines – development studies, sociology, political geography, and political science – this study shows that such questions of how state and NGOs transform each other is not confined to a single discipline. I discuss the methodology here, and provide the modes of interaction between state and NGOs in [Appendix 1](#) ([Table 1](#)), the interview schedule in [Appendix 2](#) ([Tables 2 to 7](#)), and basic information on the NGOs featured in this study in [Appendix 3](#) ([Table 8](#)).

Comprehending the work of migrant NGOs and their interactions with different layers of the state required detailed conversations with NGO representatives. In addition, adopting a participant observation approach wherever permissible to observe the NGOs' work provided context for this study. This book will therefore offer the reader an

insight into the quotidian details of their work as well as their trials and tribulations.

The period prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympics was one of great rejuvenation in terms of urban development, coupled with the climax of rural-urban migration, and migrant NGOs were simultaneously hopeful and apprehensive. The Colour Revolutions that swept across post-Soviet nations (2002–05) aroused in the Chinese leadership deep suspicion of both domestic and international NGOs (Wilson 2009), which raised the anxieties of NGOs over conducting their work with a careful eye on the sensitivity of the state. Just as important, however, were their relationships with the local authorities, often both a burden and a necessity for the NGOs. NGO representatives would lament the “cluelessness” of local officials about NGOs, while an equal number of representatives would praise their local government collaborators for their progressiveness in reaching out to them. Accordingly, an in-depth case study approach, where individual narratives are juxtaposed with the broader socio-political context, is particularly relevant and useful in developing a refined picture of state-NGO relations (Fernando 2011).

This study focuses on non-governmental organizations that assisted migrant workers with matters such as employment training, migrant children’s education, health, and other issues in Beijing and Shanghai during the period from 2006 to 2012. In particular, I examine how these NGOs interacted with the different levels of the Chinese state – central, municipal, district, street neighbourhood (*jiedao*), and residents’ committees (*juweihui*) – to determine the nature of state-NGO relations and what this means for the future of the Chinese NGO sector. The focus of this book is not on individual migrants or migrant cohorts, but rather on the NGOs that assist and represent them. The book is based on in-depth interviews that I conducted in Beijing and Shanghai between 2006 and 2012 with eighteen NGOs (nine in each city) working with and/or representing migrants. Where permitted, I undertook follow-up interviews. I conducted further interviews (some with follow-up) with international NGOs working in China, mass organizations, and Chinese academics and government officials (see [Appendix 2](#) for a full list of interviews). Where possible, I conducted participant observation—observing the work of NGOs—including participation in NGO activities and attending migrant-related conferences. Local newspapers, Chinese academic journals, and materials published by the NGOs and government departments were collected during the fieldwork and are cited throughout this study. To understand the impact of rural-urban migration, I visited ActionAid

International China's partner project sites in October 2006 in four villages in Huai'an County in Hebei Province. The field trip helped put into perspective the changing demographics of China's urban and rural areas.

The Beijing and Shanghai NGOs featured in this book function as both individual case studies of state-society relations in two jurisdictions and also as a single case study of the sector.⁷ The NGOs working with migrants at the start of the project in 2006 comprised a relatively small sector in both cities, so personal introductions and a snowball effect in the selection of NGOs, with interviewees recommending their colleagues in the sector, played an important role in the project. In addition, NGOs were selected based on the range of activities and services provided to their migrant constituency. The organizations interviewed in Beijing demonstrate the diversity of issues tackled by the NGOs (see also Ren 2013), whereas Shanghai highlights the influence of policy experimentation on community development. Interviews with other stakeholders working with migrants, including mass organizations (Communist Youth League of China and Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions), government representatives, Chinese academics, and international organizations provide a fuller picture. Interviews with representatives of mass organizations and the government (at both central and local levels) required introductions from colleagues and friends. This reduced my autonomy as a researcher by causing me to be more cautious with the interview questions in order not to jeopardize the relationship between the interviewee and my acquaintance.⁸ Although the scale of this research may prevent me from generalizing across the national spectrum of NGOs, the framework and typology developed in this book can be applied in other contexts, including other NGO sectors and jurisdictions outside China.

Beijing and Shanghai differ in how state-society relations manifest themselves and in the nature of the NGO sector. The cities were selected based on the comparability of their administrative structure – both are directly controlled municipalities under the central government – but they are sufficiently different in terms of social and economic factors. The principal feature of the case study method is the ability to develop a detailed understanding of a single case or several related cases. It is “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence” (Robson 2002, 178). Using a case study approach provides insights into the intricacies of a local situation. R.E. Stake (2005, 444) clarifies the importance of case studies: “For a qualitative research community, a case study concentrates on experiential

knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political, and other contexts.” The knowledge derived from the case study is central as it transmits the experience of the stakeholders and can enrich the reader’s experience with the case presented (Stake 2005, 454). The two detailed case studies of Beijing and Shanghai are compared and contrasted – within the spatial framework and typology – allowing for some assertions to be made and possible extrapolations into the future of the state-NGO relationship.

With Beijing as the capital of China and the seat of government, its politically charged environment is often thought of as detrimental to the development of local NGOs. Beijing is known as the “administrative-cultural city” and Shanghai as the “metropolis city” (Redfield and Singer 1954). As the administrative-cultural centre of China, Beijing is dominated by bureaucrats. Shanghai, on the other hand, is noted for its entrepreneurs and is thus the economic heart of China. Factors such as well-developed economic relations over the last century and proximity to other economic centres of the Eastern seaboard have contributed to Shanghai’s economic dynamism and set it well on the path to becoming a world city (Yusuf and Wu 2002). In contrast, Beijing is struggling to overcome the “shadow of its 800-year history as the country’s feudal capital” (Li 1996, 140). This rivalry was reflected in each city’s devotion of resources to signature events: the 2008 Olympics in Beijing and the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai. Each event was an attempt to reassert the cultural significance and dominance of the host city.

Shanghai is often portrayed as an open and modern city due to its location and historical background as a treaty port. According to Yang Dongping, Shanghai’s openness has also allowed some integration and melding of elite and popular cultures (quoted in Li 1996). While there is greater diversity in Shanghai and a willingness to accept new ideas, it would appear that through the passage of time, the tendency is for differences to converge and become integrated into a singular NGO model. This contrasts with Beijing’s “internal contradictions” (Li 1996, 150), where the old exists alongside the new and ideologies remain dichotomous. The political process of articulating the differences is given primacy, affecting the distribution of political power. Thus, maintaining differences between the political elites and non-elites ensures that the hierarchy is maintained. Consequently, the focus on politics and hierarchy is echoed in the way migrants, migrant NGOs, and the state relate to each other.⁹ Beijing’s experience in dealing with migrant communities and settlements is exemplified in Zhejiang village (see Biao 1999;

Zhang 2001), located in Nanyuan, which had the highest concentration of migrants in Beijing during the early to mid-1990s (approximately 70,000 to 80,000, mainly from Zhejiang Province). The growth of this village threatened Beijing's authorities, who were unable to police, tax, or sufficiently monitor its development (Zhang 2001). Thus, Beijing and Shanghai have their cultural, social, economic, and political differences and thus present both opportunities and constraints for migrant NGOs. How each layer of the state negotiates the new social terrain is shown through the Beijing and Shanghai case studies, with important implications for state-NGO relations.

The categories of work the surveyed NGOs are engaged in – legal and advocacy, social service delivery, community development/integration, and education – requires careful analysis because the type of work shapes their collaborative opportunities with the different layers of the state. In addition, the organization's work and impact are framed within the legal boundaries set by the state for NGOs. Nonetheless, the work initiated by the NGOs interviewed in Beijing and Shanghai demonstrate a milestone in the provision of welfare to migrant communities.

The legal and advocacy NGOs have framed their work within the language established by the central state regarding the legal rights of all migrant workers. To some extent, they have been successful in collaborating with both central and local authorities. The social service delivery NGOs, which provide invaluable services to migrants, have not had the same collaborative opportunities as their counterparts in the first category. This can be largely attributed to the shifting of responsibility for social welfare provision from the central to the local states; with decreasing capacity to provide direct social services to their own residents, it is highly likely that local states will respond to the needs of migrant workers. NGOs working in the realm of community development and integration have pushed hard to collaborate with local district authorities and have undertaken a range of measures to educate local officials about their work. Those working with migrant children focus almost solely on the provision of extracurricular activities or education. Thus, the four different categories of NGOs have sought to provide a range of different services to the migrant population. While all have recognized that collaboration with the authorities can enhance their work, the strategies used to establish such opportunities suggest that NGOs are not passive actors. Moreover, the different layers of the state have extended their boundaries into the NGOs' domain and capitalized on the NGOs' activities to fulfill their own agendas.

The work conducted by Beijing's migrant NGOs and their relationship to the various layers of the state is diverse. The situation in Shanghai is significantly different, as NGOs there do not focus wholly on the migrant cohort. Instead, they are local community development groups that address a range of local concerns, such as resident welfare and community education. Migrants fit within the bigger picture of community building. The uniformity of projects across Shanghai's NGOs can be seen as reflecting the need to work with migrants to ensure their gradual integration into Shanghai society as more and more migrants remain in cities.

The migrant NGOs in Beijing and Shanghai provide an important indicator of the future of state-society relations as they not only represent an increasingly marginalized social group but may also provide further insights on the extent of migrants' issues and why their existence may indicate a pluralization of Chinese society.¹⁰ Migrant NGOs support their constituents – albeit with limitations imposed for the most part by government regulations and funding – in a variety of ways, whether through the provision of social welfare services or legal representation, thereby providing an outlet for migrants to voice their concerns, with the potential to affect central state policy. NGOs can advocate on behalf of migrants with local authorities, particularly at the district level and below, to implement relevant programs and services. Finally, migrant NGOs can initiate projects that can potentially set standards for the sector if they become models that the municipal government approves of and promotes. Examining the interaction of NGOs with the Chinese state at different levels provides an analytical lens for comprehending how the state is transformed through its interaction with NGOs.

CONCLUSION

The following chapters will contextualize and draw out the central and local states' engagement with migrant NGOs in Beijing and Shanghai. The first two chapters will set the background and theoretical framework for the book. [Chapter 1](#) will present a detailed layers and spaces framework by drawing on works from different disciplines. Paired with the framework is the typology of state-NGO relations; the development of NGO literature has made it possible for us to look beyond China in developing the typology. [Chapters 3, 4, and 5](#) will detail state-NGO relations across the typology offered – symbolic, asymmetric, and strategic – within a spatial dimension. [Chapter 6](#) will analyze the different layers

of the state and their movement into new and old spaces, including INGOs and mass organizations. The concluding chapter discusses the theoretical implications of the study for understanding state-NGO relations more broadly. For those working on and in the NGO sector, the landscape changes rapidly according to the political environment. Thus, the epilogue provides a brief insight into the changes that have taken place since this book was completed. The conceptual framework of layers and spaces will provide guidance on how best to understand three important features of Chinese state-society relations. First, the objective of adopting the framework is to highlight the emergence of non-state actors, such as NGOs, in contemporary China and what their proliferation means for state-society relations. Second, the framework provides a richer conception of the state in terms of layers and spaces. Third, the framework elucidates the importance of the local state, especially in the development of NGOs. As the book charts the relationship between the state and NGOs through this conceptual framework, it makes the future of the Chinese state more predictable.

Recognizing the heterogeneity of the Chinese state requires an appropriate conceptual framework for interpreting the state's diversity. The layers and spaces framework utilized in this monograph enables us to unpack the different dimensions of the state; more broadly, it provides a blueprint for looking at other jurisdictions in transition. As we move into a new era of politics in areas such as North Africa and the Middle East, where social stakeholders such as NGOs have come to the fore as agents of political transition, it will be crucial to distinguish political behaviour at the central and local state levels. The Chinese experience can provide us with a greater understanding of best practices and lessons learned in the realm of state-society relations.