

Charity Paradigm Change in Contemporary China: From Anti-socialist Activity to Civic Duty

Abstract:

This article addresses a remarkable conceptual change in China: the replacement of the perception of charities as organizations associated with anti-governmental activity by one that views charities as organized expressions of civic duty. This shift occurred within a period of just twenty years. Following theories of public policy paradigm change, this study analyses 1) the specific societal, institutional and rhetorical changes that were required for the rehabilitation of charity in China, 2) the articulation of a blueprint for the new paradigm, and 3) the implementation of the model in practice, focusing on attempts to foster a charitable spirit and culture. This study is based on official documents and articles in the *People's Daily* (人民日报). Furthermore, the analysis is complemented by interviews with staff members of Charity Associations carried out in Tianjin in 2007 and 2008. The findings contribute to the broader discussion of the features of China's civil society by elaborating on the boundaries of acceptable civic action. The study shows how the party-state has permitted the emergence of a space for the expression of a voluntary charitable spirit while still expecting that charitable spirit to be expressed within the confines of state-defined morally correct acts.

Key words: Charity, Paradigm change, Tianjin, State-society relations, Non-profit organizations

Author: Outi Luova, Adjunct professor, Centre for East Asian Studies, University of Turku, Finland.

An article in the *People's Daily* (人民日报) on 24 February 1994 on the rehabilitation of charity signalled a reversal in the official attitude toward charity in China.¹ The article included an explanation of the meaning of charity for readers. This was necessary for two reasons: First, during the years of revolution before the establishment of the People's Republic of China, communists had classified charities as 'anti-revolutionary forces'. After 1949, this stigma remained undiminished and it even strengthened during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1969).² Second, due to the expulsion of charities and the closing of all charitable institutions in the early 1950s, the concept of charity faded from the everyday vocabulary of the mainland Chinese. In a totally altered tone, the same article championed the values of charity. Since then, the charitable sector in China has expanded, aided in part by frequently occurring natural disasters and moral campaigns promoted by the party-state. In 2006, participation in charitable activities was declared to be a central attribute of the modern responsible citizen.³

This article addresses a remarkable policy paradigm shift in contemporary China: namely, replacement of the perception of charities as organizations associated with anti-socialism with the perception that charities are organized expressions of civic duty. This shift occurred within a period of just twenty years. One motive was the urgent need to acquire additional resources for the frail social relief sector, but another, equally crucial, factor was the need to strengthen communitarian values and mutual benevolence in a country in the throes of rapid social and economic transformation. This article focusses on the latter dimension — the normative goals of the party-state in its attempts to foster responsible citizens. By analysing this fundamental change, this study provides new historically informed insights into the space and boundaries of civic action in China. It also illuminates the recent history and normative context of China's growing charitable sector, including China's new Charity Law, which came into force in September 2016.

Despite several studies on the history of charity⁴ and current practices surrounding charity,⁵ detailed studies on the development of the contemporary charitable sector are lacking. This article contributes to the field by inquiring into the conceptual and normative changes which have made charities possible in present-day China. The focus is not on the emergence of charitable organizations or on their activities but rather on how the party-state has redefined and nurtured charitable values and culture.

Theories of public policy paradigm change provide effective tools for analysing this type of conceptual shift, which also entails the gradual reorganization of institutions, rules, actors and, not least, the relationship between the individual and the state. The study utilises the framework proposed by Carson and colleagues.⁶ They define policy paradigm shift as a process 'which entails fundamental conceptual and organizational changes which guide policy in a markedly different direction'.⁷ According to them, this process often includes incremental changes in secondary issues that prepare the ground for a shift in core issues. The old values and structures are not eliminated, but they must adapt to the new values and goals.⁸ Other central themes of their analysis are definitions of new boundaries for what is thinkable or unthinkable, possible and acceptable actions, and right or wrong, as well as defining which actors are recognized as having credibility, authority, rights and responsibilities.⁹ Following this framework, this study analyses 1) the incremental changes that paved the way for this paradigm shift, 2) the articulation of a blueprint for the new paradigm, and 3) the

implementation of the model ('operative blueprint') in practise,¹⁰ focussing on the attempts to foster a charitable spirit and culture.

The findings contribute to the broader discussion of the features of China's civil society by elaborating the boundaries of acceptable civic action. This study confirms the characterization of China's state–society relationship as consultative authoritarianism, within which the party-state has allowed more autonomous space for civil society while simultaneously developing sophisticated tools of social control.¹¹ The study shows that the officially defined objective of charities is to foster citizens who participate in the construction of a harmonious society but who don't act as a transformative force towards a more egalitarian society. The party-state has permitted the emergence of space for the expression of a voluntary charitable spirit, but that spirit is expected to be expressed within the confines of state-defined morally correct acts.

This study is based on documents issued by the Communist party and the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and articles published in the official newspaper of the Communist party, *People's Daily*. Furthermore, the analysis is complemented by interviews carried out with staff members of government-organized Charity Associations (慈善协会) in the city of Tianjin in 2007 and 2008.

This article first analyses the specific societal, institutional and rhetorical changes that were required for the rehabilitation of charity in China. How was the concept introduced step by step to readers of the *People's Daily*, and how did the necessary institutional framework develop? It then follows the formulation of the official blueprint for the charity field as described in key documents. Then, the study discusses attempts to foster a charitable spirit and culture among citizens of China. Finally, the article concludes by summarizing the findings.

Socialist paradigm of charity in China

China has a long indigenous tradition of charitable thought and action. The idea of benevolence towards the needy can be found in Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist ethical traditions.¹² However, in the dominant school of thought, Confucianism, benevolence (仁) mainly extended to one's relatives and close friends; it did not apply to strangers.¹³ The term

charity (慈善) came into more frequent use in modern China as a reference to the charitable activities of both Chinese and Westerners that expanded in response to widespread social disorder. Within the communist movement, the term became linked to the activities of Western missionaries and other foreign charitable actors, thus discrediting charities, as the Communists regarded such activity as an inseparable part of the efforts by Western countries to conquer China. Together with the Western charitable organizations, traditional Chinese charities were placed in the category of bourgeois activities that corroded the revolutionary fighting spirit of the masses by providing them with food, clothes and shelter. After the victory of the Communists, charitable institutions were either closed or incorporated into China's new social welfare system. By definition, in a socialist country, the state provides for basic welfare and disaster relief. Charities were regarded as an inherent feature of unequal capitalist societies, and as such, were not ideologically applicable to a socialist country.¹⁴ The hostility towards charities sharpened during the Cultural Revolution and continued throughout the 1970s.

However, other types of charitable activities, namely, volunteering, although of a more obligatory type, prevailed during Mao's rule. China has a long tradition of small-scale neighbourhood help (邻里互助),¹⁵ which continued after the revolution in the form of mutual-help activities, undertaken in the spirit of a model soldier named Lei Feng, who had, according to the canonized stories, devoted all of his free time to helping other people. These types of good deeds were in line with the Chinese socialist ideology that placed emphasis on an individual's selfless contributions to their own unit, the society and the state. During Mao's time, China also sent volunteers to some Third World countries in the spirit of international solidarity. Hence, the idea of extending help to strangers outside of one's own group gained stronger ground.¹⁶ While, as in traditional Chinese thought, benevolence mainly extended to one's relatives and close friends, these changes can be regarded as significant, smoothing the path for charitable activities in China.

In 1978, China changed its development paradigm. Along with the new modernization policy, the charity paradigm was also gradually reframed. How did Chinese leadership redefine the role of charity?

Cautious steps towards a new policy paradigm

The term *charity* remained in the shadows during the 1980s, but other developments paved the way for the re-emergence of charities. First, the overall changes brought about by the policies of reform and ‘opening up’ enabled the establishment of semi-governmental welfare organizations and cooperation with foreign countries. Second, the need to develop new social welfare services for urban residents prompted the state to seek out new financial resources. Deng Xiaoping’s new policy of ‘letting some people get rich first’ and the establishment of associations and foundations provided the basic preconditions for charities to operate.

The Red Cross Society of China resumed its domestic activities in 1978, and another major organization whose activities were interrupted in the 1950s, the China Welfare Institute, was re-established in 1982 as the Soong Ching-Ling Foundation. The reestablishment of these organizations was prompted by some long-serving cadres of the Ministry of Civil Affairs who proposed the establishment of foundations to raise additional funds for social relief.¹⁷ Many of the new institutions were affiliated with communist mass organizations and their main purpose was to raise funds from overseas Chinese. Since the late 1970s, the overseas Chinese had been encouraged to contribute to China’s modernization programme; they were also called upon to contribute to the welfare of Chinese children and disadvantaged societal groups. The new foundations and Chinese embassies were mobilized to raise funds overseas.¹⁸ For example, the China Children and Teenagers’ Fund and Soong Ching-Ling Foundation received significant endowments from overseas Chinese communities and international NGOs.¹⁹ Such cooperation with foreign partners was an important learning experience which helped the new foundations to develop their structure and activities, formulating a ‘Chinese socialist’ way of managing foundations.

The foundations also collected domestic donations. For example, the proceeds accruing from the Guizhou Art Academy’s charity bazaar (义买) in 1982 were donated to the Children and Teenagers’ Fund. Gu Zigang, an employee of the National Library, bequeathed the Fund over 4000 yuan in 1985.²⁰

However, the atmosphere was not yet ripe for charitable activities to receive official approval. While it was acceptable to support children through official foundations, several localized attempts to collect funds for disaster relief failed. For example, in 1985, a civil servant

proposed that clothes and quilts could be collected in the city to help disaster victims, but the proposal was rejected as inappropriate because it brought into question the government's ability to respond to the needs of those in distress. However, attitudes and practices were changing. In 1986, some localities collected goods to help disaster victims.²¹

As new fund-raising organizations emerged, the terminology applied to them remained largely unchanged. These organizations were not officially labelled charities; rather, the politically more neutral terms 'foundation' (基金会) or 'fund' (基金) were used. Neither were domestic Chinese donations to the new foundations characterised as charity. Instead, the donors were said to 'support welfare undertakings'. However, the *People's Daily* started to write about foreign charities in a favourable light, indicating a significant change in the official discourse. The paper published articles describing charitable activities taking place outside China as well as activities conducted by foreigners in China. For example, in 1984, the newspaper wrote about the Beijing–Hong Kong long-distance charity run and about a Frenchman who drove from Europe through China to Japan to raise charitable funds for children's education.²² The negative tone towards charities had vanished, but the term itself could not yet be used to describe domestic activities. However, the first cautious steps towards the rehabilitation of the notion of charity had been taken.

The objection to fully rehabilitating charities likely reflects heated, behind-the-scenes political disputes regarding whether or not the re-establishment of charities would lead to the introduction of Western capitalist values and institutions to the country. The 1980s was a period of intensive rhetorical analysis and battle to define the ruling ideology.²³ In this dispute, the establishment of 'imperialist-capitalist' charitable organizations touched a nerve. For instance, the introduction of community service to China in the mid-1980s was criticized severely on the grounds that it represented a westernization of China's social service system. Community services were made possible only after strong assurances were given that social work would be built upon Chinese traditions and based on local conditions. In 1987, Cui Naifu, the minister of civil affairs at that time, strongly contested the claims that the emerging grassroots social services were copied from foreign publications or emulated practices that had been observed during trips abroad. Vice-Minister Zhang Dejiang emphasized the specific Chinese characteristics of the new community-level social services.²⁴ The profoundly negative definition of charity during Mao's time made it difficult for the proponents of charities to justify their redefinition and rehabilitation. Charities and socialism had been

regarded as incompatible. As the discussion in the next part makes clear, following their rehabilitation, charities were defined within the framework of Chinese traditional and socialist values in order to provide distance from the Maoist discourse that regarded charities as tools of the Western exploitative capitalist class.

The first state-led campaign to collect funds was organized in 1991 after severe floods in central China. This campaign signalled official approval for domestic fund-raising.²⁵ The liberal turn in the political climate in 1992 removed the last obstacles to the rehabilitation of charities. After a series of changes in secondary issues, the time was ripe for a shift in core values. The Jilin Charity Association was created in January 1993,²⁶ after which several other provinces and cities established their own Charity Associations. The Red Cross and other organizations also began arranging fund-raising activities. In February 1994, the charitable sector received official recognition in the *People's Daily* in the glowing terms described at the beginning of this article. Thereafter, regular news began to appear in the *People's Daily* on the charitable activities of Chinese citizens undertaken in China.

The late rehabilitation of charities in China is best understood against the background of their history. The term *charity*, as described above, bore the heavy historical burden of its perceived associations with Western imperialism and anti-revolutionary subversion. It was difficult to shed such antipathies during a period of so much other rapid societal change, especially given the concern about the corrosive impact of capitalism and Western values on China's values and model of socialism. A first cautious discursive shift took place with regard to foreign charities, which were presented in positive terms. Simultaneously, domestic organizations were permitted to test suitable practices for fund raising in the Chinese socio-political context. The positive outcomes of these small "secondary" shifts helped to convince authorities that charitable activities could be arranged and managed in a 'Chinese' manner. The official approval of the term *charity* in a purely domestic context marked the definitive policy paradigm change.

The next section studies more closely the incorporation of the concept of charity into state-defined and -promoted moral values and the elevation of charity to a civic duty.

Crafting a new blueprint for charities: Charity as a civic duty

Based on the traditional Chinese idea that correct moral self-cultivation of individuals is the key to social stability, the political elite of the early 1980s sought to develop a solid system of moral order to avoid chaos.²⁷ The state-led campaigns of the reform period to cultivate socialist spiritual culture started in the early 1980s. Charity became part of the vocabulary of these campaigns in 1996.

The moral campaigns were consolidated in 1986 when the Communist Party defined the guidelines for the construction of socialist spiritual culture and launched the first mass activity on this theme.²⁸ Subsequently, these types of campaigns were launched regularly. A 1996 resolution on the construction of spiritual culture urged citizens to contribute to the public welfare, help the poor and do good deeds for society. Soon after the campaign was launched, a high-level seminar concluded that charities could provide an important basis for the construction of ideology and morale.²⁹ This conclusion incorporated charitable values into the correct moral code; they could be cherished by the Chinese people, but they were not yet given a central role.

This change took place at the same time that the Ministry of Civil Affairs published a circular on the development of charitable organizations.³⁰ The Ministry was in urgent need of additional resources to cover the increasing burden of social relief now that the old work unit-based social welfare system was being dismantled. The circular stated that charities were needed to transfer resources from society to the poor and, ultimately, to maintain social stability.

To steer values towards correct paths, the Communist party issued the ‘Outline for the Realization and the Construction of a New Civic Morality’ in 2001.³¹ The Outline listed several detrimental tendencies to be addressed, such as the blurring of the line between good and bad, hedonism, mammonism and extreme individualism. To tackle these ‘poor’ practices, the document called for the strengthening of patriotism, collectivism, socialism, healthy living styles, and the spirit of serving the people.³² The document did not mention the term charity, but it urged civil servants to support public welfare activities, including charitable projects such as Project Hope (希望项目) and the Heart-Warming Project (暖心项目), which

collected funds for children's education. Hence, although not mentioned directly, charitable values and their importance were visible in the Outline.

However, the Outline highlighted a noteworthy conceptual change related to charities. The document brought the term 'citizenship' into political and educational discourse. Instead of political indoctrination, the campaign now emphasized the independent social position of citizens and their sense of rights and duties in addition to cultivating responsible citizens who have internalized moral and social norms.³³ This was a significant change in principle. Yet its actual implementation has been cautious and its practical meaning has remained ambiguous.

In 2005, the construction of citizens' moral values was placed in a new framework, as the new leaders Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao launched strategies that emphasized social issues in addition to economic goals. The charitable sector gained an important role in the notion of a harmonious society, and to define the sector's new tasks, the state issued a Five-Year Programme (2006–2010) for the development of the charity sector, the first of its kind in China.³⁴ Now the charities came to the fore, and charitable values were defined as central moral norms of responsible citizens.

The text of the Programme started with a customary reiteration of the traditional Chinese values supporting charity: to help those in distress, assist the old and orphans, help the disabled and sick and support education. The first goal defined in the document was the wide dissemination of a *culture of charity* to strengthen the charitable consciousness of citizens and the social responsibility of companies. Charitable culture was depicted as customs such as honesty and friendliness, mutual help, giving help to people living in poverty and distress, and contributing to society more generally. In this way, the latent potential of charities could be released; charities and participation in charitable activities would become generally accepted and create a noble societal atmosphere. The document also proposed the inclusion of charitable culture into campaigns for the construction of socialist moral and spiritual civilization. The pragmatic goal defined by the document was transferring resources from the rich to the poor with the aim of alleviating social contradictions, promoting equality and improving relations between people. The ultimate goal was stated as the maintenance of social stability. In addition to giving to the traditional recipients of charitable donations, the document encouraged the expansion of charitable activities into culture, environmental

protection and ‘other fields’. Organizations were allowed to collect donations for a wide range of causes based on their preferences.

In sum, by 2006 the party-state had crafted a new blueprint that defined the framework for charitable activities in China. Based on the previously mentioned documents and moral codes, it is possible to discern three core values that the party wanted to promote with the help of charities: 1) the traditional Chinese value of mutual help, 2) a sense of civic responsibility, and 3) socialist morals encompassing collectivism, patriotism and the desire to wholeheartedly serve the people. Strong references within this blueprint to traditional Chinese and socialist values reflected the emphasis on developing charities with ‘Chinese characteristics’. These served as a defence against those who eventually criticized party leadership for importing Western non-socialist values and structures into China.

Traditionally, charities and religious values were interwoven in China;³⁵ however, the new official descriptions of charitable values did not refer to any religion or philosophy. The party-state wanted to maintain its monopoly on defining central values without interference from any other authority. Confucian values, such as those of benevolence and responsibility, were visible in the definitions of charitable values, but during the period covered by this study, Confucius was not mentioned in the political texts related to charities. However, while religious institutions were not mentioned in the official documents, they were still allowed to collect funds for charitable purposes, as described in more detail in the next section. Religions were now acceptable as sources of charitable inspiration but not as a basis for fundamental moral values.

Fostering charitable spirit and culture in Tianjin

The paradigm blueprints represent an ideal, while their actual implementation is often another story. The study of the ‘operative blueprint’, the concrete practices under the new policy paradigm, forms the third part of this article. The following focusses on the attempts to foster a charitable spirit and a culture of giving through the Charity Associations in China’s fourth largest city, Tianjin.

Arguably, various pro-charity efforts are less effective at mobilizing donors than are disasters that people actually witness with their own eyes. The devastating floods of 1998 incited the

first major wave of donations in China, and the 2004 tsunami led the Chinese people to donate to disaster relief in foreign countries for the first time. A major question was how to turn such ‘eyeball charity’ into a charitable culture — generally adopted habitual conduct on the part of dutiful citizens. In this task, moral education played an important role. While party-led campaigns on citizens’ morality were central resources, there were other means as well. The government-affiliated Charity Associations provided an important tool for awareness-building. The local charity associations formed a loose network which was guided by the national-level China Charity Federation (中华慈善总会) under the supervision of the Ministry of Civil Affairs.³⁶ As organizations connected to the party-state, official values and policies were embedded within their education endeavours, providing a relevant empirical case for an inquiry into state-guided attempts to foster charitable culture in China.

The municipal-level Tianjin Charity Association was officially established in 1995. The Association had sub-units at all levels of administration and even in residential communities and villages. In 2007, seventeen of Tianjin’s eighteen sub-municipal areas had a Charity Association and more than 30 towns and street-level government offices had taken the initiative to create charity groups. Even some grassroots-level administrative units in residential communities set up charity stations.³⁷ One of the main tasks of these Charity Associations was to disseminate information about charitable values and charitable activities. This was important in the 1990s because these Associations were not widely known or trusted by the people.³⁸ To raise awareness, the Associations cooperated with the local media and published their own magazines. For example, in cooperation with the Tianjin Charity Association, Tianjin newspapers ran columns about benevolent acts and relief work; similar topics were discussed on local radio programmes.³⁹ In addition, some of the Associations became engaged in media work. The Charity Association of Tianjin's Heping district published a magazine called *Charity*. The Association of the Tianjin New Economic Development Area had its own monthly bulletin and a weekly programme which was broadcast on the local television station. However, the ability of the sub-municipal districts and counties to publicize charitable values and activities varied widely. To reach residents in all parts of the city, the city-level Association helped sub-municipal units to arrange activities during city-wide charity campaigns.⁴⁰

Children were a particular target group for moral education. It was considered important in the interest of societal harmony to educate people on the significance of charity at a young

age. Charity Associations arranged activities in conjunction with schools. They discussed the importance of charitable values with pupils and organized activities to instil charitable values in children. For example, the Association of Tianjin's Dagang district organized awareness-building projects and events as a part of the 'Angel' campaign in cooperation with the district-level Department of Education. The campaign was included in the regular school curriculum of moral education. In Dagang's Primary School Number Two, the chairperson of the local Charity Association gave classes on the subject of charity and pupils compiled a small charity journal and gave speeches at a charity-themed school conference. The Association also placed a donation box in the school for pupils to donate their spare coins. In order to concretize the meaning of charity as a personal good deed, pupils were asked to donate their own money, not their parents'. The donations were used for the benefit of disadvantaged pupils. Furthermore, the Association arranged mutual-help activities in the school and organized children's visits to elderly peoples' homes. In these ways, pupils acted as 'little angels of charity'.⁴¹ In the spirit of the party-led moral campaigns, such activities aimed to raise children into citizens who take care of the surrounding society.

Another traditional Chinese method of education involved selecting exemplary citizens and disseminating word of their good deeds. According to Bakken, one of the fundamental assumptions of the Chinese theory of learning is that people are innately capable of learning from models.⁴² In that spirit, the Ministry of Civil Affairs encouraged local governments to reward exemplary benefactors. Tianjin Charity Association nominated the first charity 'stars' in 2005.⁴³ Even the head of the Communist party, Hu Jintao (General Secretary 2002–2012) started giving awards to benefactors.

As religious institutions and figures were now allowed to operate in the field of charity and cultivate the spirit of charity, temples, churches and mosques re-established practices for the collection of donations for the less fortunate. For instance, during the fieldwork for this study in Tianjin in 2007, I observed following charitable activities. The Grand Mosque of Tianjin received alms from the members of the local Muslim community in various forms: monthly payments from their salaries, financial and material donations for the local poor families during festivities, and disaster relief to poor areas in Western China. The congregation of the Catholic Xikai church organized an association engaged in charitable work. The Buddhist Jianfu Guanyin temple collected donations for various causes, including disaster relief. Also, representatives from the religious sphere could promote charitable culture, for example by

being appointed as honorary members of the Charity Associations.⁴⁴ The Tianjin Charity Association had one Buddhist representative, Shi Miaoxian, on its council.⁴⁵ Sister Shi was the head of a local monastery and vice chair of the local Buddhist association. She was also elected as a ‘Charity Star’ in both 2005 and 2009.⁴⁶

A specific feature of the official Chinese approach to charity was the central role of the state in defining the target groups and recipients of charitable aid, extending to defining the appropriate size for donations. As mentioned in the previous section, the old and orphans, the disabled and sick, and impoverished households were defined as main target groups. As new disadvantaged groups with the potential to become politically explosive emerged, the state urged charitable associations to widen their coverage to encompass these groups as well. As a result, laid-off workers were included in the target groups for charitable aid. Chinese people were not accustomed to providing help to able-bodied adults, but as the state faced severe resource constraints, the Associations began channelling some aid to this group.

In Tianjin, the Charity Association solicited and allocated donations in the spirit of the national-level policies and in accordance with the more detailed directions defined by municipal leadership.⁴⁷ Between the years 2000 and 2004, the largest shares of donations were directed to social relief (orphans, the disabled, the poor and the unemployed; 3,9 million RMB) and nearly as much to education (3,7 million RMB). Amounts that totalled approximately two million RMB were allocated to the health sector, public welfare institutions and poverty-stricken areas.⁴⁸ The dire unemployment situation and the urgent need for additional resources for social relief were apparent in the selection of beneficiaries. Although children and the elderly remained the main beneficiaries, the association started to channel support to poor families who were approved for the minimum livelihood guarantee system (低保户). Specific target groups included families in which both parents were laid off.⁴⁹ The Five-Year Programme for the development of the charity sector did not mention migrant workers as preferred targets for charitable donations but listed them among important targets for grassroots volunteer work.⁵⁰ Thus, migrant workers were included in the sphere of local volunteer services in their areas of residence, but they were left outside of the more structured charitable support schemes. Similar to feelings toward those out of work, donors were not interested in helping fit-for-work adults.⁵¹ Still, the local-level charity stations in the Heping district helped migrant workers who were swindled by their bosses and left without a salary by giving them food and money for a return ticket to their homes. The affluent district

was willing and able to provide social relief to anyone who came to ask for help, regardless of the beneficiaries' registered place of residence.⁵²

The party-state also sometimes defined the morally appropriate size of individual donations. Such defined giving contradicted the notion of charity as voluntary and could rather be seen as a state-imposed duty of a good, exemplary citizen. During government-run charity campaigns, the general pattern in workplaces was to define an appropriate level of donation for each employee category. Party members and leaders were obliged to donate a certain amount according to their position. For example, the party committee of an electricity company in the Dongli district set an additional party-membership fee for employees who were party members. The fees were collected to a specific fund that was managed by the Tianjin Charity Association and used for the benefit of orphans in the district.⁵³ The amount of donation could also be defined based on one's salary or rank. For example, leaders and staff members of Dagang district government were expected to donate the equivalent of one day's salary annually to the local Charity Association.⁵⁴

Through these programs the party-state approved and promoted the cultivation of responsible citizens who share the burden of poverty relief with the state. The main forms of activity were nothing new when compared with Mao's period: moral education at schools, information dissemination through media, and various campaigns that aimed to mobilize people and raise awareness. A new feature was that semi-governmental and religious institutions were again given the right to act. However, while the official charity blueprint emphasized the self-determining social position of dutiful citizens who take independent action to contribute to society, the actual practices defined ready-made and sometimes very strict frameworks within which charitable giving was expected to take place.

Conclusions

The paradigm shift of China's charity policy started with cautious incremental changes in issues of secondary importance. The first core change, the official approval of charities, took place after several rearrangements in institutional structures and experiments in the forms of activities. The second important change, the inclusion of charity in the key civic duties of citizens, was possible after ten more years of consolidative work.

China's new policy paradigm of charity included fundamentally different underlying assumptions distinguishing it from the Maoist assumptions regarding charity. Under the aegis of China's modernisation policy, the party-state accepted the existence of organizations that in principle were ideologically alien to China's political system. To maintain social stability, the party-state allowed and invited individuals to share the responsibility for disaster and poverty relief. Furthermore, the charity blueprint encouraged individuals to take independent action as responsible citizens.

However, China's new charity policy paradigm did not in essence entail completely new features, which is typical of paradigm changes in general. The new policy paradigm can be described as a reassessment of traditional moral values, re-establishment of charitable institutions in new forms and reorganization of the relationship between the individual and the state.

The rehabilitation of charities required solid justification in terms of Chinese traditions and socialist-humanist values because during the Maoist period, charities had been defined in derogatory terms as Western imperialist and capitalist activities. Hence, the concept of 'charitable activities and culture with Chinese characteristics' was based on a notion of equality, a tradition of mutual benevolence, and the dutiful person's sense of responsibility for the well-being of others. This is one of many examples of the redefinition of capitalist concepts to allow adoption by a nominally socialist China. The best known reconceptualization concerns the introduction of the idea of 'socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics'. Capitalist models deemed important for China's development and stability were adopted despite the existence of clear ideological contradictions, as long as careful redefinitions were provided to legitimize their use.

The values incorporated in Chinese charitable morals encompassed traditional Chinese values of mutual help, a sense of responsibility and values derived from Chinese socialist ideals: collectivism, patriotism and the desire to wholeheartedly serve the people. By promoting the ideal of a charitable culture, the state sought to nourish the virtue of self-cultivation, ultimately creating citizens who take care of the society surrounding them, participating in the construction of a harmonious society and taking the initiative to contribute to society within the confines defined by the party-state. Meanwhile, the state kept its monopoly on defining the moral foundation for charitable contributions, and sometimes even their appropriate

modes and relevant recipients. The spirit of charity was expected to be expressed within the confines of state-defined morally correct acts.

These changes promoted the emergence of civil society in China by creating new spaces for civic action and by defining citizens as active participants of society. However, this transformation was conditioned by party-state–drawn boundaries of charitable action. The official blueprint for the new policy paradigm promised more autonomy than could be realized in the actual socio-political context. Ultimately, China’s authoritarian party-state needs charities to maintain social stability and the political status quo, but it is unwilling to allow charitable impulses to develop into critical solidarity.

Acknowledgements:

The author wishes to thank Guan Xinping for commenting on an earlier version of this article, as well as the anonymous referees for their comments. Acknowledgements are also due to Ari-Joonas Pitkänen for editorial assistance.

Funding:

This work was supported by the Academy of Finland [grant number 116755].

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Notes

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