The State's Evolving Relationship with Urban Society:
China's Neighborhood Organizations in Comparative Perspective

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I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout its fifty-five years of existence, the People's Republic of China has made mighty efforts to organize urban society. It has sought to co-opt, manage or dominate major forms of organization within the cities, including those based on workplace, trade or profession, religion, and place of residence. For much of its history it has asserted a monopoly on the representation of interests, devising new types of association as new constituencies emerge and tolerating few competitors to its own sanctioned associations.

The world of organizations within urban Chinese society can no longer be thought of as a monopoly by the Party-state. Though corralled into business associations and milked by the tax bureaucracies, private firms enjoy wide latitude to operate as they please internally. The cities are home to a proliferating number of NGOs that pursue social purposes under varying degrees of government oversight. In some of the newly built, privately owned residential neighborhoods, homeowners' groups have been permitted to emerge to oversee property management companies, as discussed later in this chapter. Communities of migrants have at times been able to form highly self-governing communities on urban peripheries.²

The official organizational apparatus nonetheless remains highly salient. Yet its relationship to society is not well understood. This chapter considers a major portion of this apparatus: the dense and pervasive network of roughly 90,000 neighborhood organizations known as Residents’ Committees [RC].³ These committees are groups of individuals paid by the state to serve as its designated liaisons within the neighborhood, in most cases operating out of a permanent local office. The members act as the grass-roots contacts and informants of the police

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³ In Chinese these organizations are known formally as jumin weiyuanhui or shequ jumin weiyuanhui, or juweihui for short.
and the government, carrying out a number of administrative tasks, from monitoring family-planning compliance to maintaining the household-registry rolls. At the same time, they also provide a range of services to their constituents, listen to and act on their suggestions and complaints, and organize social and public-benefit activities for them to take part in if they choose.4

Inherently puzzling, the RCs and organizations like them in other countries confound a number of social-science categories. Hired by the state yet part of the community in which they serve, the RC staff occupy an unfamiliar type of intermediary position between state and society. They are not accountable to their neighborhoods through anything like a genuine electoral mechanism, yet they often work hard to build at least an image of responsiveness and legitimacy. They combine service functions with routine monitoring and complicity in occasional episodes of repression; their work involves a mixture of gentleness and domination. They are an extension of a powerful state, yet unlike such institutions as the work unit they possess few carrots and sticks with which to goad and prod their constituents into compliance on an everyday basis.

II. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

It is not obvious how the Residents’ Committees should be conceptualized theoretically. A number of analytic constructs that are commonly employed in the study of China and state socialist systems are not entirely fruitful for understanding these organizations. The RCs are not simply a vestigial holdover from the Communist Party's early years of mobilizing and subduing Chinese society. These are not the atrophying appendages of a “waning” state; rather, they are being adapted and rebuilt within the rapidly changing social and economic environment of

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China’s cities. Contrary to their official designation as “autonomous, mass-type organizations,” they are not manifestations of civil society, as they lack the requisite autonomy from the state. While related to the standard “transmission belt” mass organizations found generally in Communist Party-led systems, they are also much more interesting than this label would suggest.

To be sure, other state-socialist systems such as the USSR and Cuba have featured neighborhood-based organizations that are similar to the RCs. But we argue that to see the RCs merely within a “comparative communism” context would in fact lead to a distorted view of them. These local groups are best understood as manifestations of a broader phenomenon. This neighborhood institution is one instance of what may be thought of as grass-roots administrative engagement, in which states create, sponsor and manage networks of organizations at the most local of levels that facilitate governance and policing by building personal relationships with members of society.

It is crucial to note that administrative engagement is by no means confined to one type of political regime. Variants of this kind of institution can be found under many types of political systems and historical contexts. In today’s world, some of the most elaborate and persistent can be found in the countries of East and Southeast Asia, including democracies as well as authoritarian states.

In Taiwan, for instance, city districts are divided into neighborhoods, known as li, each of which is directed by a lizhang, who is paid a monthly stipend of around US$1,500 by the state. Once appointed by the formerly dominant Kuomintang party, the island's approximately 4,800 lizhang are now elected to four-year terms by their constituents. Working hand-in-hand with an unelected civil servant known as a liganshi, the lizhang handle a range of official duties under the supervision of the district authorities. South Korea's roughly 58,000 urban tongjang perform a similar set of functions, though they are appointed rather than elected and their stipends are

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6 The total number of li as of the end of 1999 is given as 4,796 in a government statistical handbook. Neizheng tongji shouce (Taipei: Neizhengbu tongjichu, 2000).

7 Read's field research in Taipei, December 2003.
much smaller. Just as the lizhang draw on the help of a set of volunteers known as linzhang, each of whom takes responsibility for a small section of the neighborhood, so too the tongjang are aided by banjang. Like China's RCs, these institutions operate on what might be called an ultra-local scale. In Taipei, there are approximately 2,000 households per li and 100 per lin, while in Seoul, there are about 250 households per tong and 34 per ban.

Empirically speaking, it is not difficult to think of familiar phenomena that constitute partial or weak forms of grass-roots engagement by the state. Even in liberal democracies like the United States, governments strive to maintain certain kinds of links with constituents. Bureaucracies employ specialists to act as intermediaries with those who receive special government support or supervision. For instance, social workers establish relationships with welfare recipients; parole officers try to get to know and understand the circumstances of the parolees in their charge. The concept of community policing represents an attempt to bring police officers into closer contact with the localities they serve, and initiatives like the Neighborhood Watch Program try to involve ordinary citizens in reporting suspicious activity to the state. Looking to the not-so-distant past, we see that there were once even more highly articulated ties between state actors, politicians, and citizens at large — for instance, in networks of city government machines, ward committeemen, and precinct captains. The organizations considered in this chapter, however, are substantially more institutionalized than Neighborhood Watch groups, more deeply embedded in local society than most community policing initiatives, and more functionally diffuse than welfare caseworkers. Unlike political machines, they are focused more on governance than on ensuring a political party's electoral dominance.

State-sponsored institutions of grassroots engagement have received relatively little study within the social sciences. Yet any thorough analysis of the way cities work in China or

8 Officials of the South Korean Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs, in an interview on July 12, 2004, provided the figure of 57,993 tong in cities nationwide as of December 31, 2003.

9 The Taipei figures are derived from the city's Civil Affairs bureau web site at http://www.ca.taipei.gov.tw/civil/page.htm. The Seoul figures stem from a chart provided by Mr. Suh Young Kwon of the city's Local Autonomy Assistance Division in an interview on July 13, 2004.

10 This is not to deny or minimize the party-related functions of grassroots engagement institutions. While there are now many non-KMT lizhang, they have historically had a pronounced role as party activists, and some continue vote mobilization and even vote-buying to this day. On the lizhang's role as KMT stalwarts during the authoritarian period, see Shelley Rigger, Politics in Taiwan: Voting for Democracy (London: Routledge, 1999).
elsewhere in East Asia must take them into account. They form an intimate link between municipal administration and large segments of the urban population, a link that both the state and members of society utilize for purposes that they find important. From the state's perspective, networks of deeply rooted local organizations are useful in a number of different ways. They help it acquire information about individual citizens, allowing it more precisely and effectively to apply policy as well as interventions from police or other agencies. They convey information about laws, policies, campaigns, and initiatives to individual constituents. They embed state action within personal, face-to-face relationships, and thus endeavor to make it more accepted and legitimate. Finally, they get citizens themselves involved in state-supported tasks, for instance by coordinating the production of public goods or the resolution of collective action problems.

The outcomes that this contributes to can be unequivocally benign or deeply oppressive, and are commonly somewhere in between. For example, the role that local informants play in assisting the police aids in providing security for all their constituents, while also making it easier for states to repress deviants who are branded as threatening. Grassroots engagement can help keep authoritarian regimes in power just as it helps bolster public health and social welfare. Regardless of our normative feelings about the appropriateness of these undertakings, the results they contribute to matter.

But whether in China or in Taiwan or South Korea, these grass-roots institutions are more than just a tool for the state to use. They also provide a set of structured opportunities and constraints that affect the way citizens express their interests, act to address problems and needs, and interact with others around them. They offer a channel — never the only channel, but one that is immediately at hand — through which individual citizens are encouraged to direct their inquiries, requests, and demands regarding local matters. As well, they invite constituents to contribute their own time and energy to activities that support administrative or policing work, and also organize activities, outings, festivals and get-togethers that shape the social structure and cohesiveness of the locality. Individual citizens, of course, may or may not find these channels and pursuits appealing. They may choose to take part, or they may ignore or resist them.

In this paper, we pursue two goals. The first is to provide an empirical overview of the
RC system, focused on Beijing. This not only makes clear how the system works and what it does, but illustrates urban governments' efforts to bolster and revamp this organizational network in recent years in response to several sets of changing circumstances. The second is to lay out in a more analytic fashion the multiple ways in which individuals within the urban population respond to and interact with this system. How much contact to city residents have with these committees? How do the RCs help or harm them? Do people perceive this system in a positive or a negative light? The answers to these questions provide insight into the state's evolving relationship with urban society.

This chapter grows out of a long-term collaboration between the two co-authors investigating organizations in East Asia and elsewhere that “straddle” the state-society boundary. The paper draws upon several different types of data. Read spent fourteen months in 1999 and 2000 carrying out research in Beijing, focusing on ten neighborhood research sites around the city. He made short trips to six other cities (Qingdao, Shijiazhuang, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hengyang, and Benxi), in order to visit neighborhoods there, and conducted follow-up research in July 2003, December 2003, and July 2004. A series of private interviews with Beijing residents afforded perspectives on their attitudes toward and participation in neighborhood organizations. These topics were also the focus of a battery of questions on the 2001 Beijing Law and Community Survey (BLCS), a project that was led by Ethan Michelson of Indiana University and Li Lulu of People's University and that yielded a sample of 1,070 RC constituents. Finally, Read carried out preliminary fieldwork on Taiwan's lizhang (December 2003) and South Korea's tong/ban system (July 2004).

III: RESIDENTS' COMMITTEES IN BEIJING AND ELSEWHERE

As mentioned in section I, the RCs form an immense network covering a large majority of China's urban neighborhoods, with the exception of some newly built housing developments and recently urbanized areas. The characteristics of specific neighborhoods and RC staff members vary from place to place, of course, but their general features follow a single basic template. Table 1 shows the place of the RCs in the urban administrative hierarchy. Large Chinese cities have three levels of government: the city government, district governments, and Street Offices (sometimes called subdistricts or wards in English). The Street Offices directly
organize and manage the Residents' Committees, which serve as their local contacts; the offices maintain a specialized staff to liaise with the RCs, and frequently call the committee members in to attend meetings and receive instructions. Through this system, the state reaches deep into the fabric of neighborhood life.

### Table 1: Levels of Administration in Beijing and Other Chinese Cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Chinese term</th>
<th>Number in Beijing</th>
<th>Number nationwide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City Government</td>
<td><em>shi zhengfu</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Government</td>
<td><em>qu zhengfu</em></td>
<td>(in city core) 8</td>
<td>830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street Office</td>
<td><em>jiedao banshichu</em></td>
<td>105</td>
<td>5,576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents' Committee</td>
<td><em>jumin weiyuanhui</em></td>
<td>1,822</td>
<td>91,893</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Sources and comments: national figures for cities, districts, and Street Offices: China Statistical Yearbook 2003, table 1-1 [2002 data]; national figures for RCs: China Civil Affairs Statistical Yearbook 2002 [2001 data]; Beijing Street Offices: Beijing Statistical Yearbook 2002 [2001 data]; Beijing RCs: unpublished figures for the year 2003 from the Beijing city government, on file with Read. The national figure for city governments includes prefecture-level [*diji*] cities, county-level [*xianji*] cities, and the four provincial-level cities. All Beijing figures do not include the outlying suburbs, including nine districts and two counties, that are part of the greater Beijing administrative region.)

Table 2 [this table and all others following are appended to the end of the chapter text] provides some basic figures on Beijing's RCs, broken down by district. The top four districts in the table lie in the heart of Beijing and are surrounded by the latter four, which are considered suburban districts (*jinjiao*). The inner-city RCs are somewhat larger in terms of average population. The scale of the RCs is in flux, however, as Beijing and other cities consolidate and merge them while experimenting with other administrative modifications. Beijing's RCs now average around 3,700 constituents (1,350 households) each. Though these figures no doubt understate the actual population, as they do not include temporary residents, they indicate that the area under an RC's jurisdiction is still small enough that (at least in principle) its staff can be personally familiar with a substantial proportion of the residents.

The RCs facilitate a wide range of state policies and programs. The most prominent among them include:

- Assisting the police. In Beijing, officers from the local police substation are assigned to cover one or two RCs on an ongoing basis. They visit the committee office regularly to
look into the circumstances of crimes or offenders in the neighborhood. RC staff not only
gather information on behalf of the police, but also accompany officers on visits to
residents' homes when necessary. In sum, this represents a particularly elaborate and
thorough form of community policing, one that is highly effective in allowing the regime
to identify and respond to threats such as dissidents and (recently) adherents of the
banned spiritual sect Falun Gong, but that is more commonly directed toward
conventional violations such as burglary, prostitution, and the like.

- Maintaining the system of household registry [hukou]. Controls on population mobility
are not nearly as rigid as they were in the pre-reform era. City government and police
nonetheless continue to maintain household registry rolls, which identify the residents at
particular addresses, their ID numbers, and demographic characteristics. A closely related
task is registering and keeping track of the large population of rural migrants.

- Helping to implement the one-child-per-family birth control policy. RCs maintain
records on women of childbearing age within the neighborhood, specifying such details
as the method of birth control each uses. They carry out educational programs, but also
report unauthorized pregnancies to officials at higher levels.

- Facilitating welfare programs. RC staff keep in touch with disadvantaged individuals
such as those in certain categories of unemployment, those with disabilities, and elderly
persons with no independent means of support. Based on their relatively detailed
knowledge of residents' circumstances, the RCs help the state assess eligibility for state
assistance, although they do not themselves make these determinations, nor do they
disburse aid money.

- Conveying information from the state. Whether in the form of internal government
publications (books, pamphlets, bulletins) or briefings conducted by Street Office staff,
the committees regularly receive updated information about state laws, campaigns,
programs and policies. Part of their function is to help convey this material to residents
and to educate them on it. This is done through visual displays situated in public places
throughout the neighborhood (whether simple bulletin boards, colorful chalkboard
presentations, or illuminated panels), courses that are taught in rooms in the RC office, or
through interpersonal contact with constituents.
Some of these functions, such as assisting with the implementation of the one-child policy, are not found in Taiwan and South Korea because comparable family planning programs do not exist there. Others, however, do have counterparts in those countries. Both the lizhang and the tongjang are sometimes asked to help police gather information concerning crime cases. The lizhang are only peripherally involved in household registry records, but do help determine welfare eligibility. The tongjang help keep the household registry up-to-date, organize civil defense preparation, and together with the banjang form part of an elaborate system to convey information from the national, city, and district governments to neighborhood dwellers. Indeed, the banjang circulate official publications and convene meetings of ban residents at which the primary agenda item generally is the presentation of a set of messages and announcements from higher state authorities — though these meetings, called bansanghoe, are in many places held irregularly rather than at the monthly intervals that were once enforced. All this emphasizes that the governance-supporting tasks of the RCs are by no means unique to China, nor to present or former state-socialist systems.

Returning to the Chinese case, all of the above government programs could be carried out without the permanent, neighborhood-based apparatus of the RC. Police, for instance, can undertake certain kinds of community policing activities themselves; welfare work can be performed by professional social workers. Why then do governments go to the trouble and expense of maintaining grassroots engagement bodies like the RCs? What these functions all have in common is that they are all made much easier and less disruptive by being carried out by individuals who are deeply familiar with the locality and the people in it. Many of these state duties involve the gathering of the kind of "local knowledge" that bureaucrats in state offices far removed from the neighborhood would otherwise have no access to. Moreover, the RCs’ close ties to constituents change the nature of policy implementation. Whether the state's goal is to counsel and monitor a recidivist criminal, keep tabs on birth control practices, or determine whether or not a welfare applicant has unreported sources of income, the premise of grassroots engagement is that it helps to have these things done by neighborhood people rather than anonymous civil servants.

It is important to note that the actual character of these state-assigned functions varies and most of them are ambiguous in their relationship to residents' interests. In each case, the RC
could be doing something that intrudes, inconveniences, or otherwise strikes people as noxious. Yet it could also be doing something residents perceive as beneficial. The RC’s policing-related tasks certainly do involve helping the authorities sniff out political dissent — which some residents might object to. Yet the great majority of their work with the police revolves around efforts to prevent burglary, talking to former offenders in the neighborhood, and mediating disputes — all of which is quite likely to be seen in a favorable light.

The previous paragraphs have focused specifically on what could be termed the “hard” functions of the RC, the things it does that have a major payoff to the state in terms of policing and policy implementation. But to understand the breadth and character of contact between RCs and their constituents, one also has to look at the many roles that the committee plays other than that of government information-collector. These functions include:

- Listening to input from residents. The RC staff serve as sounding boards for all manner of complaints and suggestions from their constituents, usually over local matters: noise pollution, trash and waste disposal, and crime prevention are just some of the most frequent topics at issue. Sometimes the RC is willing and able to act on these requests or demands, other times not, but the point is that residents often see them at least as a potential source of solutions. Committee staff also provide an ear for lonely residents who come to the RC office simply in search of someone to talk to.
- Mediating disputes between neighbors and within families. Usually at the request of one of the parties to the conflict, RCs intervene in squabbles between households over such matters as noise, shared utility bills, and the use of shared facilities like kitchens and courtyards.
- Providing a range of small goods and services, usually free of charge. For instance, the RCs in Beijing have all been equipped with blood pressure meters and they give free tests to anyone who wants one. They sometimes purchase commodities like dish detergent and sell them to residents at bulk rate. The committees also were used in recent years to distribute free water-conserving spigots to their constituents as part of a city resource-protection program.
- Leading charity collection drives. In response to what are usually government-organized campaigns, RCs encourage residents to contribute to causes like relief for
victims of floods and earthquakes. They sometimes go door-to-door to solicit funds, or post notices asking people to come to the committee office to donate.

- Coordinating collective action in response to local problems. Examples include efforts to clean up dirty hallways, or to have all residents apply roach poison simultaneously within a certain building so that the pests will not just flee into others' homes.

These many tasks are dual in what they accomplish; they have both a “face-value” function as well as an underlying purpose. They have in common the aim of bringing the RC into contact with as many constituents as possible in a benign context. They aim to build interpersonal familiarity between RC staff and residents, and to generate the sense that the RC is a useful entity. Even if these contacts are only casual and occasional, they aim to develop a feeling that the RC is looking out for the interests of the public. (Section V presents some basic data on these contacts.)

In addition to cultivating this relatively shallow, occasional interaction with many constituents, the RC also provides a welcoming venue for those residents who wish to participate in social and civic activities in a more active and sustained way. One of the responsibilities assigned to the RC is to sponsor group undertakings. In Beijing this was one of the criteria by which Street Offices would assess them in their yearly evaluations, and the committees were expected to keep documentary evidence including photos of the get-togethers held under their auspices. These took various forms. Some committees led choral groups, others dance classes. Quite prevalent are exercise groups practicing both the traditional taiji [taichi] and the newly popular jianshenqiu, a rubber ball attached to a bungee cord used to whack oneself therapeutically on the back in a series of synchronized movements. One RC chair in a relatively affluent neighborhood organized her circle of middle-aged-and-older associates into a fashion show team, which would get together to show off their latest apparel. RCs would also lead outings to parks and other attractions, and some maintain activity centers where residents can read books or play low-stakes majiang [mah-jongg].

In addition to these recreational endeavors, the RCs organize the most receptive of residents to participate in various forms of service. These individuals, often designated as “small-group heads,” “building heads,” “courtyard heads,” or the like, act as the committee's contact people within a portion of the RC's jurisdiction. Any given neighborhood may have 20 to 50
such people, generically termed “activists.” They help the Residents’ Committee with many aspects of its work, from disseminating announcements to keeping in contact with welfare cases. They bring disputes among their neighbors to the RC’s attention as part of the mediation program. When the RC — and the police — need to find out something about a particular household, they often contact the activist who lives nearby. But activists don’t just work on behalf of the RC; they may also do little chores like going door-to-door to collect fees for sanitation, gas, or electricity; help deliver mail or newspapers; or sweep the hallway floors. Some residents also choose to take a shift in the RC-sponsored security patrols, analogous to Neighborhood Watch groups, which can be seen keeping an eye on local comings and goings and proudly sporting their distinctive red arm-bands.

In a few of the Beijing neighborhoods, the security patrollers were given very small cash payments on a monthly basis in compensation for the hours of service they put in. Those partial exceptions aside, activists serve on a volunteer basis. Their motivation for taking part in this type of voluntary work seems to be the pleasures of sociability, a sense of empowerment, and the fulfillment from playing a valued part, however minor, in the ranks of the city’s administrative apparatus. They also gain the opportunity to have a hand in discussing and addressing problems around the neighborhood. At times they may even have an impact on the selection of RC staff.

IV. A CHANGING INSTITUTION

Understanding the ways in which the institution of the RC is evolving requires thinking about three separate aspects of change. The first consists of the structures of the state and the administrative programs carried out through these structures. The second is the evolving physical and spacial setting of residential neighborhoods. The third consists of the needs and preferences of residents relative to the RCs.

Ever since its founding, the state has carried out administrative tasks and exercised political control in urban areas largely through the workplace or “work unit” (danwei), and much scholarly attention has focused on this institution. Nonetheless, city governments have always

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maintained the Residents' Committees as their alley-level, grass-roots liaisons, and their importance to the state has arguably increased over time, at least in certain respects. Even at its peak, the state-owned workplace only incorporated a portion of the urban population, and in recent years this portion has shrunk as state firms lay off workers and migrants stream in from the countryside. Although the authorities have made efforts to establish an organizational presence within the growing number of foreign-invested and private companies (for instance, by introducing Party branches), it is clear that these entities will never exercise a danwei-like state administrative role over their employees. Although specific work units in politically important sectors (news, higher education, heavy industry) certainly remain closely overseen by the state, the general trend is to rely less on the work unit and instead to build up government capacity.

As the primary purpose of the RCs is to facilitate governance tasks, the rising challenges facing cities led them to devote increasing attention and resources to the neighborhood organizations over the course of the past 15 years. Extolled at the highest levels of the Chinese Communist Party and coordinated by the national Ministry of Civil Affairs, this effort proceeds under the banner of “community building” [shequ jianshe]. While this project borrows from an imported, public-relations-friendly discourse of community development, it is driven by a highly statist vision of community centered around government-dominated organizations, particularly the RCs (now often relabeled “Community Residents' Committees.”) A key component of shequ jianshe is shequ dangjian, community Party-building, which aims to enliven neighborhood-based Party branches and in particular to keep retired or laid-off Party members actively engaged in the organization. As with so many CCP projects, the redoubled focus on the RCs has both a state-security motivation as well as a service-delivery motivation. It aims to maintain oversight of residential neighborhoods but also to establish a better administrative “platform” [pingtai] from which to facilitate the delivery of more and more sophisticated forms of welfare.

The physical, built environment of the residential neighborhoods within which RCs operate has been undergoing far-reaching transformation in the past 15 years. Older neighborhoods of often dilapidated one- or two-story homes have been demolished and rebuilt at a rapid clip in Beijing, Shanghai and other cities. At the same time, the work units which, in the post-revolutionary decades, built concentrated on-site housing blocks for workers and staff have been gradually moving away from the direct provision of housing. Residential construction has
shifted to the creation of new estates of privately owned condominiums run by professional property management companies.12

All this has had a corresponding impact on the nature of the RC’s role in the neighborhood. To begin with, the development of the organizational “software” of the RC lags considerably behind the pace of the “hardware” of housing construction. It can take several years for city and district governments to build new RCs (and in some cases on city peripheries, whole new Street Offices to oversee them.) Even after RC staff are hired and trained, the newly built organizations generally have to start from scratch and swim against the current in trying to recreate the subtle web of interpersonal ties that underpin their operations in the older neighborhoods. The staff at least initially are strangers to their constituents. Moreover, in modern neighborhoods run by management companies, residents have far fewer reasons to seek them out. Maintenance matters, security, and most fees are handled by the property management company. The RC’s role as liaison to the housing offices is superfluous. The RCs have less to offer by way of small favors and conveniences, as more and more needs are met by market-based providers.

If property management companies take away some of the RC’s function as the neighborhood’s all-purpose go-to office, a new type of organization bears the potential of undercutting its status as the residents’ primary “representative” body. Authorized under national policies issued in 1994 and 2003, homeowners’ organizations (yehu weiyuanhui, YWH) are forming in a growing number of housing developments. Perhaps 6,000 to 7,000 of them are in existence, primarily in newly built, privately owned commercial housing.13 These groups vary widely, from those that are dominated by developers to a minority that are democratically


13 Shanghai is far ahead of other cities in terms of the number of officially recognized homeowners’ groups. By the end of 2003, 4,756 homeowners committees had been established in Shanghai, at least an order of magnitude more than the figures for other cities. Shanghai is also distinct in allowing significant numbers of ye weihui in formerly state-owned neighborhoods (jianggaifang) in addition to commercial housing (shangpinfang). Interview with Shanghai housing official Xin Yiming, June 30, 2004.
elected by owners themselves. The national guidelines on YWH assert the primacy of the RC over the homeowners' groups. In practice, relations between the two bodies range from cooperative in some cases to conflictual in others. It is as yet unclear just what degree of autonomy the government will ultimately permit for the YWH and how compatible these “two centers” of power in the neighborhood will be. At a minimum, they complicate the neighborhood's administrative milieu.14

Given these three sets of evolving circumstances, how are the RCs themselves changing? One reform that has not yet taken place is democratization. Though according to law and rhetoric the RC members are to be elected by their neighborhood constituents, in fact they are still essentially hand-picked by the Street Offices. In the large majority of cases, elections follow a pre-rehearsed script in which votes are cast only by a group of perhaps 30 to 50 "residents' representatives" who are chosen for electoral duty by the Street Office and the Residents' Committee themselves on the basis of their supportiveness. Candidates are for the most part determined in advance by the Street Office, sometimes in consultation with the RC incumbents. Generally there are no more candidates than there are positions to be filled, although sometimes there is a measure of competition for one or two of the RC positions.

A number of cities have experimented with electoral procedures by relaxing one or more of the above constraints in some cases, although not so far as to render the elections free and fair by democratic standards. Table 3 illustrates the way in which, in the 2003 round of RC elections in Beijing, a small fraction of neighborhoods (fewer than 10 percent) held votes where balloting was not limited just to residents' representatives. In 11 neighborhoods, all residents were eligible to vote; in 146 neighborhoods, one member of each household could vote. (No data are readily available as to how many actually voted in these cases, how well-publicized the elections were, etc.)

Table 4 shows the degree of competition for this round of RC elections, expressed in terms of the percentage of candidates who failed to be elected (9.5 percent in aggregate). This is

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consistent with field observations indicating that competition is highly limited. Arranging elections in which, for instance, there are eight candidates for seven RC positions (and the contestation does not involve the chair, vice-chair, or Party secretary positions) is a way to create a superficial impression of democracy, and sometimes to get rid of a troublesome or unpopular incumbent. Note that the numbers for the eight districts (once again, outlying suburbs have been omitted) are generally quite similar to one another, as districts follow instructions from the city Civil Affairs Bureau, although there is some room for district-level initiative.

Instead of democratization, RC reforms have focused on streamlining the system, consolidating it, and recruiting better-credentialed and younger staff. Between the years 2000 and 2003 alone, the total number of committees in the eight districts at the heart of Beijing was reduced by more than half, from 3,885 to 1,822. This was accomplished by merging many smaller RCs and sending home some of the older staff members. The changes did not begin in 2000, but were part of an ongoing process of reform stretching back at least to the early 1990s.

This state-led revitalization of the RCs has made the positions more remunerative and the hiring process increasingly competitive. Once staffed largely by homemakers who were paid little or nothing, the committees now employ middle-school and high-school graduates who often have substantial organizational experience from previous jobs. Typically these are people who have been laid off or taken early retirement from ailing state-sector enterprises. Though RC workers are still not considered part of the municipal bureaucracy, nor do they have the type of professional identity one would associated with trained social workers, their compensation has risen significantly throughout China. Stipends of 300-500 yuan per month are common in Beijing and other large cities, and some better-educated staff recruited under special programs make more than 1,000 yuan — hardly enough to get rich on, but among low-skilled middle-aged urbanites in China's unemployment-stricken economy, this represents a stable income that is better than many have.

Table 5 illustrates that RC staff are, now as always, far more likely to be female than male. The average RC employee in Beijing is a woman with a high school or vocational high school education — though, as the table indicates, significant numbers of people with vocational college or even college degrees now serve in RCs. Unlike the stereotypical bound-footed old lady of yesteryear, the average staff member is in her mid 40s. Nearly 48 percent of RC staff are
members of the Communist Party, an increase from 40 percent in 2000. This reflects diligent efforts by the authorities to maintain the Party committees that are associated with each RC, to ensure that at least one of the leaders of each RC is a Party member, and generally to keep this institution under Party as well as Street Office supervision.

The nature of the activities undertaken by the RCs has evolved over the course of a full half-century of their existence. RCs were established in the early 1950s, shortly after the Communists took control of the cities. They were part of the way the revolutionary leadership consolidated its grip on urban society and tried to transform it. The RCs helped the state to identify and monitor people who were considered threats to the new order. In the Cultural Revolution, they even led rallies against people in the neighborhood who had been designated class enemies. They also helped the housing authorities ascertain whose homes were big enough that they should be shared with other households. In the late 1960s and 1970s, when urban families were required to send many of their children out into the countryside to learn from the peasants, the RCs had to check that they were not sneaking back to their parents' homes. To be sure, even in this period they also undertook a number of benign activities such as offering literacy classes, but nonetheless their more politicized and intrusive practices shaped popular perceptions of them throughout the Mao era.

As the Communist Party has carried out reform policies and sharply curtailed its ambitions for class transformation along socialist lines, the RCs have quietly realigned their position with respect to urban society. They still play an important role in policing and policy implementation, which is the biggest reason why city governments have labored to revitalize them. But as discussed below, these monitoring duties have become less antagonistic to most urbanites, while their role as providers of services and sponsors of social and civic activities has been greatly augmented.

V. RCs and Their Constituents

What is the basic nature of constituents' relations with their RCs? Do not residents live in fear of this organization which, after all, represents the eyes and ears of the state? As we will see, residents' attitudes toward the RCs vary widely. To begin with, it should be pointed out that, for
most people, the RCs are not something to be feared. While in certain respects they are backed by the formidable coercive resources of the state, including the police, the system operates in such a way as to minimize the use of coercion or pressure and reserve it for exceptional circumstances. The RC in fact has relatively few favors and sanctions that it can apply in its dealings with constituents.¹⁵ Unlike the work unit, the RC has no control over people's salaries or their access to housing. Residents can opt not to cooperate with it. Indeed, most of the time they can ignore it entirely if they choose.

As noted in Section III, in order to carry out their duties efficiently and smoothly, RCs try to cultivate personal contact and familiarity with their constituents. In part, this is based on the staff's existing ties with their own neighborhoods, as many committee members in older parts of the cities are long-time residents of the neighborhoods they serve. The RC also makes itself useful to residents by offering services of various kinds, and by being available to discuss many sorts of issues that residents might care to talk about.

The Beijing Law and Community Survey provides some indicators of just how often Beijing residents approach the staff of their RC in connection with one of these functions. One section of the survey listed a series of reasons, gleaned from fieldwork, why people might visit their local committee office and asked the respondent whether he or she had ever done so for that reason. Table 6 displays the results. Particularly notable is the frequency with which respondents visited the RC for such mundane purposes as paying fees, taking care of documents, and receiving low-cost goods or services. Nearly a quarter of the sample also reported having visited the RC to express an opinion on issues of local concern, such as neighborhood security. Much smaller, but still considerable in absolute terms, are the numbers of people who have been to the RC regarding a dispute of some sort. Close to two-thirds (63.8 percent) of the respondents indicated that they had sought out the RC for at least one of these reasons.

In terms of their actual value to residents, some of the above services are trivial at best. Others can have a perhaps surprising degree of utility. "Mediation" at a neighborhood level, by

¹⁵ This is not equally true for all residents, of course. Those who depend on state welfare support, for instance, may require the RC's favor. Also, in a few cases within any typical community, migrants or long-term residents will need the RC's impetratur (granted in exchange for rent or fees) in order to run a shop or other small business in the neighborhood.
Note that “age of neighborhood” is measured here by the average number of years lived there by respondents in that neighborhood — thus “new” neighborhoods could in fact be simply “high turnover” neighborhoods, though in fact they do appear to be newly built.
newly built areas, particularly in privately owned developments where owners' organizations are beginning to be active.

The more casual forms of interaction that constituents have with their RCs, together with the various activities of a highly-involved minority of residents, add up to a substantial amount of face-to-face contact between RCs and those they administer. Chart 2 shows that more than 75 percent of our Beijing sample reported some degree of contact with the RC in the past two years. To be sure, for many residents this is sporadic and infrequent. But more than 30 percent of our sample reported contact with an RC staff member at least every other month or so. The thick tail in the distribution below illustrates that a considerable minority of citizens has extremely frequent interaction with the RC. Though somewhat abstract, this chart gives a hint of the RC’s position as an interface between state and society. Though quite a few citizens may not even know where their RC’s office is located, generally speaking the RC is in close enough touch with enough of its constituents to have a good sense of the goings-on within its domain.

What do ordinary citizens think of the RCs? One survey question asked simply: “Overall, are you satisfied with the Residents’ Committee in the neighborhood where you live?” More than 60 percent of respondents indicated some degree of satisfaction; another 16 percent were neutral (Chart 3). We certainly might wonder whether this is measuring marginal satisfaction given very low expectations, in other words, whether people are saying “given that we have to have these dreadful busybodies around, mine is not quite as awful as it might be.” So we asked another question as well, designed to measure respondents' perceptions of the RC's dispensability (Chart 4). It stated “suppose a place had no Residents’ Committee” and asked, essentially, whether or not this would make the residents any worse off. Over 70 percent of respondents answered that not having an RC would entail either “big trouble” or “a certain amount of trouble” for residents — as opposed to “a small amount of trouble” or “no trouble.” This suggests that Beijing residents tend to perceive it as a useful institution, at least on balance.

At the same time, as Chart 5 shows, this broad-based feeling that the RC is generally satisfactory and useful should not be taken as implying deep trust in this institution. Only about a quarter of our respondents selected one of two “trusting” answer categories in our question designed to measure how comfortable people are sharing personal information with their RC.

Survey results, taken by themselves, would not be entirely convincing. We might
wonder, for instance, whether respondents felt some kind of pressure to give positive answers (though the responses to the trust question imply that this was not the case.) Interviews conducted in private also uncovered widespread approval for RCs, albeit with great variation from person to person. Some interviewees complained that the RCs were of no help in solving problems that really mattered to them, like finding a job. Others were angry about specific decisions that RCs had made. But many others looked favorably on their RCs, for a variety of reasons. Some liked knowing that the RC is keeping an eye on things while they're away at work. Others appreciated knowing that they can call someone when the sewer backs up. Some find it useful to contact the RC when they need to get certain kinds of documents officially certified. Apart from the factors mentioned above such as the recent increase in the committees' commitment to service-provision, another important factor underlying residents' attitudes seems to be fear of the burgeoning rural migrant population, whom urbanites tend to view with suspicion. As state controls on mobility have grown less rigid, there has in fact been an increasing demand by urban residents for supervision of this feared underclass.17

VI: CONCLUSIONS

This paper has considered China's Residents' Committees not simply as a Chinese or a state-socialist phenomenon, but as a case of something we refer to as grassroots administrative engagement. The RCs are fundamentally different from autonomous organizations of civil society. The state hires their members, pays them, and directly oversees them; it thus determines their basic purposes, shapes the tenor of their activities, and constrains them to a large degree. Well-functioning RCs balance this, however, by being as responsive to the requests of individual constituents as they can; by providing a variety of minor services; and by offering residents ways to join with their neighbors in recreational and public-spirited activities.

It should be noted that the state-managed nature of the RCs, while limiting them in certain respects, also bolsters their appeal as a locus for popular involvement and participation,

in some obvious and some less obvious ways. The scale of government investment in these
groups means that they are readily accessible in virtually every neighborhood. Their status as
government liaisons and their links to higher levels of the bureaucracy make them a source for
authoritative information or resolutions to local problems. And finally their official status
increases (rather than decreases) their appeal to certain types of volunteers, for whom
participation in RC activities provides a sense of taking part in an important civic project and a
national mission.

Thus we find significant levels of volunteering by residents in RC-sponsored programs
despite their heavily statist nature. This in itself is not an unprecedented finding within studies of
state socialism, but it also casts these organizations in a light quite different from that of many
prevailing interpretations. The specific circumstances of today's China, where the Communist
Party has abandoned many of its former goals of social transformation, make this all the more
striking. Local activists take part in their neighborhoods as volunteers; the direct or indirect
pressures to participate identified by scholars looking at earlier periods in China and the USSR
are essentially absent, nor do they receive the kinds of substantial material rewards expected by
clientelist theories. They involve themselves in these “public” organizations even though there
exist alternative ways to seek sociability and fulfillment within the private sphere through
individual friendships, social networks, and even a tentative but growing crop of independent
organizations.

As today's RC system operates under the slogan of “community building,” it is natural to
ask whether this institution indeed builds community. We find in the Chinese case that the RCs
do indeed act to promote social ties among constituents — yet in a selective way that is
constrained and shaped by the state. The RCs offer opportunities for residents to interact together
and take part in collective undertakings, but it encourages certain types of people to take part
more than others, specifically those who are supportive of the committee's work. The RC's don't
employ in their repertoire of activities some practices that would seem to be obvious ways of
developing solidarity: for instance, the RCs almost never hold open public meetings in which all
residents could freely discuss neighborhood matters. Research on other cases of grassroots

\[18\] Read, “States, Social Networks, and Citizens,” elaborates on this point.
engagement will be able to determine whether this type of institution faces inherent limits on its capacity to promote community, or whether it in fact has substantially greater possibilities for doing so than the Chinese case suggests.

This paper has highlighted the important analytic distinction between grassroots engagement and civil society organizations. But it is also important to consider the implications of the fact that, from the perspective of individuals seeking ways to take part in group activities that are enjoyable and convey a sense of meaning, what organizations like the RCs provide have considerable overlap with what autonomous organizations might offer. In other words, it makes sense that these groups may, in effect, compete with civil society, acting as a dispersed set of sponges soaking up citizens' participatory energies. Why form your own exercise group when there is one already organized for you right outside your apartment building? This effect is presumably magnified in a setting like China, where civil society is embryonic and frail.

Finally, we have seen that grassroots engagement plays an important role in policing, governance, and policy implementation; indeed, from the state's perspective this is its principal raison d'être. The RCs facilitate a particularly extensive set of governance functions. It should be clear from the discussion in section III that the RCs rely for their effectiveness on the way they generate face-to-face relationships with constituents. These ties come about in a number of ways, including the existing social networks of persons who become RC staff members; the practices through which the RC encourages residents to come in contact with it; and the way they offer themselves as focal points for social and volunteer activities.

Looking at the Chinese case in light of parallel institutions elsewhere, like Taiwan's urban \textit{lizhang} network and Korea's \textit{tong/ban} system, provides an important comparative perspective, particularly as we consider the future evolution of this system. It emphasizes a way in which China's cities bear similarities to East Asian counterparts in terms of organizational infrastructure. It reminds us that state-fostered local institutions do not necessarily wither away even in the context of the kind of dramatic regime transition that took place in Taiwan and South Korea in the late 1980s and 1990s. The \textit{lizhang} (though not the \textit{tongjiang} and \textit{banjang}) also point to a way in which democratically elected (as opposed to government appointed) local representatives can fit snugly into a system of close state-society ties. In turn, the Chinese RCs suggest that even in the absence of electoral accountability, a significant portion of urban
constituents may be positively disposed toward this type of state institution, even as others treat it coldly. In short, while there is no one “East Asian model” of grassroots administrative engagement, we may well expect the organizational structure of China's cities to continue to develop in ways that parallel other metropolises within the region rather than mimicking their North American or European counterparts.
Table 2: Basic Figures on Beijing's Street Offices and RCs, by District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Beijing district</th>
<th>Permanent, non-agric. population</th>
<th>Number of street offices</th>
<th>Number of RCs</th>
<th>Population per street office</th>
<th>Population per RC</th>
<th>Households per RC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dongcheng</td>
<td>630,000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>63,000</td>
<td>4,599</td>
<td>1,708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xicheng</td>
<td>786,000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>78,600</td>
<td>4,031</td>
<td>1,446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chongwen</td>
<td>412,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>58,857</td>
<td>5,282</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuanwu</td>
<td>566,000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>70,750</td>
<td>5,054</td>
<td>1,830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaoyang</td>
<td>1,552,000</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>70,545</td>
<td>4,460</td>
<td>1,678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haidian</td>
<td>1,669,000</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>75,864</td>
<td>2,873</td>
<td>929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fengtai</td>
<td>836,000</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>52,250</td>
<td>3,440</td>
<td>1,321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shijingshan</td>
<td>335,000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>33,500</td>
<td>2,617</td>
<td>914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,786,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>105</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,822</strong></td>
<td><strong>64,629</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,724</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,339</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Population, street offices: Beijing Statistical Yearbook 2002 [2001 data]; RCs: unpublished figures for the year 2003 from the Beijing city government, on file with Read. Population and household figures were rounded in the original source. Population figures include only permanent residents and for Chaoyang, Haidian, Fengtai and Shijingshan include only “non-agricultural” residents.)

Table 3: Beijing Elections for RCs in 2003: Type of Voting, by District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Beijing district</th>
<th>Number of RCs holding elections</th>
<th>Quanmin: An election in which all residents may vote</th>
<th>Hu daibiao: An election in which one member per household may vote</th>
<th>Jumin daibiao: Voting by “residents’ representatives&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dongcheng</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xicheng</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chongwen</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuanwu</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaoyang</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haidian</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fengtai</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shijingshan</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,684</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>146</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,527</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>8.7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>90.7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>90.7%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Unpublished figures from the Beijing city government, on file with Read.)
Table 4: Beijing Elections for RCs in 2003: Degree of Competition, by District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Beijing district</th>
<th>Number of formal candidates</th>
<th>Number of candidates who failed to be elected</th>
<th>Percentage of candidates who failed to be elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dongcheng</td>
<td>1,105</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xicheng</td>
<td>1,699</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chongwen</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuanwu</td>
<td>704</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaoyang</td>
<td>2,692</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haidian</td>
<td>3,410</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fengtai</td>
<td>2,202</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shijingshan</td>
<td>822</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>13,234</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,258</strong></td>
<td><strong>9.5%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Unpublished figures from the Beijing city government, on file with Read.)

Table 5: Beijing RC Staff in 2003, by District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Beijing district</th>
<th>Total number of staff</th>
<th>Average staff per RC</th>
<th>Average age</th>
<th>Percent female</th>
<th>Percent who are CCP members</th>
<th>Percent with post-secondary education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dongcheng</td>
<td>1,149</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>87.1%</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xicheng</td>
<td>1,415</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>68.5%</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chongwen</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuanwu</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>82.6%</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaoyang</td>
<td>2,399</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haidian</td>
<td>3,208</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fengtai</td>
<td>2,028</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>85.6%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shijingshan</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>81.3%</td>
<td>53.1%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12,183</strong></td>
<td><strong>6.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>45.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>79.3%</strong></td>
<td><strong>47.6%</strong></td>
<td><strong>31.4%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Unpublished figures from the Beijing city government, on file with Read.)
Table 6: Visiting RCs for Specific Reasons:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have been to an RC office:</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to pay or discuss fees (such as fees for trash, water, gas, heating, electricity, cable television)</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>26.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to discuss welfare-related matters (such as Relief Cards, the minimum guaranteed income, all kinds of aid, etc.)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>7.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to take care of documents and permits, or to get something stamped</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>29.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to discuss or give input on neighborhood issues</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>23.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for free or low-cost services or goods</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>48.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because of a dispute with a neighbor</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>5.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because of a dispute within the family</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for any of the above reasons</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>63.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Beijing Law and Community Survey, 2001) The total number of respondents is 1,070.
Table 7: Participation in RC-Sponsored Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent in category of respondent who:</th>
<th>All respondents</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Retirees</th>
<th>Party Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributes regularly to RC charity drives</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participates in RC social events</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participates in RC patrols</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holds a neighborhood volunteer post</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent that are:</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Retirees</th>
<th>Party Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contribute regularly to RC charity drives</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in RC social events</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>57.0%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in RC patrols</td>
<td>72.6%</td>
<td>83.6%</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold a neighborhood volunteer post</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>86.5%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Beijing Law and Community Survey, 2001)
Chart 1: Participation in RC Activities: Fraction of Sample by Age of Neighborhood

(Source: Beijing Law and Community Survey, 2001)
Chart 2: Frequency of Beijing Citizens' Contact with Their RC Staff

(Source: Beijing Law and Community Survey, 2001)
Chart 3: Respondents' Satisfaction with Residents' Committee

Question D13. “Overall, are you satisfied with the Residents' Committee in the neighborhood where you live? Are you ...”

(Source: Beijing Law and Community Survey, 2001)
Chart 4: Perceived Dispensability of Residents' Committee

Question D16. “Suppose a place had no Residents' Committee. Do you think that, for the residents, this would lead to ...”

[Bar chart showing percentage of respondents for different levels of perceived trouble: Big trouble, A certain amount of trouble, Neutral, Small inconveniences, No trouble]
Chart 5: Degree of Thick Trust in Residents' Committee

Question D12: “In terms of your own relations with the Residents' Committee, do you feel that [you] ...”

Exact wording of answer categories:
1. You can talk about any kind of matter with them
2. You can talk about most kinds of matters with them, holding little back
3. You can talk about a few things with them, holding quite a bit back, or
4. You basically do not discuss things with them; you are fairly cautious with them?