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**Book review: Urio, Paolo/Ying, Yuan: L'émergence des ONG en Chine: Le
changement du rôle de l'Etat-Parti**

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Urio, Paolo/Ying, Yuan: *L'émergence des ONG en Chine: Le changement du rôle de l'Etat-Parti*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2014, 289 pp. with notes, references, and index, ISBN 978-3-034-31583-8.

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The book under review explores the emergence of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in China and the changing role of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in dealing with the increasingly varied galaxy of organizations and groups, comprising the country's Third Sector. In particular the book focuses on organizations active within the realm of social services.

Comprising seven chapters and a brief conclusion, this book is divided into three main thematic areas: the first centres on the autonomy of Chinese NGOs vis-à-vis the Party/State, in light of the socio-political and juridical context these organizations live in; the second examines the impact of international funding on the development of Chinese NGOs and debates whether such “external aid” facilitates the transfer of Western values and ideas to China, while the third sketches the profile and individual stories of the founders of some of the most important NGOs currently operating in China.

Underlying the book are several important questions the authors seek to answer: in which specific sectors did NGOs emerge; what is the profile of the founders and personnel of these charitable NGOs; to which degree are Chinese NGOs affected by the financial donations of the Party/State; what is the impact of international sponsors on Chinese NGOs and; how autonomous are Chinese NGOs.

At the start of book the authors, Paolo Urio and Yuan Ying, contextualize the issue under research by briefly analysing Deng Xiaoping's market-oriented reforms and the far-reaching effects these have had on the population, on society, on the Party/State and on the job market, which in 1978 was practically non-existent.

In fact, the analysis in Chapter 1 starts by detailing the consequences of introducing a system of market competition among state-owned enterprises, which led to great numbers of laid off workers and to the slow dismantling of the *danwei* system. These actions also represented the end of several “cradle-to-grave” welfare services, such as health insurance for millions of individuals who were suddenly left to their own devices. The authors identify the State as the major obstacle to the country's process of smooth development, as also discussed in several debates within China in the 1980s.

Urio and Ying devise the case of China as especially interesting in light of the fact that even though the CCP has retained its hegemonic position after launching its modernisation reforms, it has nevertheless remained open towards the introduction of market-based mechanisms. In this introductory chapter, the authors already provide some tentative conclusions, and claim that the State is still firmly in control when it comes to regulating the Third Sector domain. It may have relinquished or distanced itself from specific peripheral regions but it monitors and keeps strict control in urban centres. Thus, in the opinion of the authors, the development of new charitable NGOs active in the social domain of China is simply the result of the gradual adaption and transformation of the control practices that the State exercises towards society. In fact, the State supports (feebly) some social actors and re-orientes international donations and funds towards the domains that the State itself considers more appropriate to serve its own interests; these would be the domains which provide social services at local levels but are politically non-sensitive.

In the second part of this first introductory chapter the authors dive into a literature review, mostly of French sources such as Béatrice Hibou, about the Chinese State's changing role. Urio and Ying furthermore review the work of other civil society experts, such as Jude Howell and Tony Saich, among others, to show that the Third Sector is never completely void of relations with the State, as it can entertain various interactions with it, for instance under the form of financial donations.

Hereafter, the authors offer an explanation in regards to the rationale behind the approach chosen for their research: namely, a qualitative approach centred on the analysis of the strategies of new emerging actors and stakeholders, which in turn have led to the development of new types of social structures. Urio and Ying claim that the associative domain in China has evolved and grown largely outside of the governmental sphere, and that, yet, it is indispensable for such groups to be able to rely on good relations with the authorities in order to thrive and survive. The authors pinpoint the positioning of these charitable NGOs as “sandwiched” between the State and citizens; because of the numerous relations they entertain with the Party/State, these associations can never be completely independent from it.

The State, on its part, can either regard these associations as positive, whenever they fill a gap in providing services that the State itself is not able to offer, or negatively, if they position themselves as political entities or entertain conflicting and adversarial relations with the authorities. The State therefore sets a number of administrative measures aimed at curtailing their freedom, such as limiting the number of NGOs active in one specific sector in a given geographical area, to name but one of the most significant.

Chapter 2 contextualizes the emergence of NGOs around the world and in China. The analysis begins by introducing the philosophical and religious origins of charitable NGOs in Europe, which the authors trace back to religious associations such as the Jesuits, who founded schools and other institutes to assist those in need. The chapter continues by establishing a link between the emergence of NGOs in Europe and the end of the Cold War as a specific reaction to the dysfunctions of states and market economies. Urio and Ying pinpoint several factors which have played a role in the rise of NGOs, starting from the 1980s: 1) the crisis of the developmental State; 2) the expansion of neoliberalism and the United Nations' Millennium Declaration; 3) the technological and communications' revolution; 4) the global environmental crisis and emerging ideas of sustainable development.

In the final part of Chapter 2, the specific context and dimensions under which NGOs have appeared in China is finally presented. Against the backdrop of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms this section describes how the country's rapid economic modernization created a new mass of urban poor and brought forth the right conditions for the emergence of the Third Sector. In the authors' definition, the emergence of charitable organizations is precisely this: an answer to the increased vulnerability of society.

Chapter 3 presents in detail the socio-juridical context in which charitable NGOs have emerged in China. In the first part of the chapter Urio and Ying analyse the changing attitude of the State towards NGOs, since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) in 1949, through the study of the legal directives and regulations set up by the government for these groups. This part is divided into three chronological periods: "The New China Epoch" (1949–1965); "The Cultural Revolution" (1966–1976); and the period since the modernization reforms launched by Deng Xiaoping in 1978.

In the second and final part of the chapter the authors illustrate the main features and requirements of the legal system in place to regulate several aspects pertaining to the civil society sector, ranging from these groups' official registration to their fiscal and financial management.

Chapter 4 deals with the diversity of Chinese NGOs; its goal is to sketch, with the help of official surveys, a general overview of the development of NGOs offering public services since 1988, this being the year in which official data and figures start being available to the public.

The chapter is divided into two parts; a first one which focuses on the variety of officially recognized organizations and a second one which presents the point of view of many Chinese scholars in regards to the correct designation and different categories of existing NGOs.

Chapter 5 deals with the relationship that Chinese NGOs entertain with the authorities concerning the type of funding they receive. The authors support

their analysis with the data collected by Chinese scholar Jia Xijing, based at Qinghua University. Towards the end of the chapter the authors make use of concrete examples of cases, encountered in their fieldwork, to portray the more “privileged” categories of NGO and set forth the conditions these need to fulfil in order to become eligible for financial support on part of the government.

Chapter 6 analyses the relationship of Chinese NGOs with international donors. It starts by linking the presence of International NGOs (INGOs) in China with the more or less covert intent to foster the establishment and development of a democratic regime in the country an issue, which is highly sensitive for the CCP, who considers it a threat to its own hegemonic position. This chapter attempts to find out whether, in light of such difficult positioning vis-à-vis the Party/State, foreign NGOs have completely forsaken this basic ideal of working for the establishment of a liberal democracy in China or whether they have merely toned down their stance while remaining faithful to their fundamental values and goals in a more discreet way. The chapter focuses mostly on the financial and monetary aspect of donations and funding to dissect the relationship between foreign and Chinese NGOs.

Finally, chapter 7 sketches the personal background of the founders and employees of some of the leading social groups with whom the authors have carried out extensive interviews, in an attempt to deepen their insight into the dynamics of China’s complex and varied NGOs’ galaxy. Specifically the analysis centres on the social profile of the founders and staff of such associations and continues, in the second part of the chapter, to analyse the increasing professionalism of such charitable groups.

In the conclusions Urio and Ying claim that the State, since 1978, has diminished its influence on both society and on the economy, abandoning the totalitarian and absolute control it had exercised during the Mao Zedong era. In this changing context the authors have tried to understand and situate the emergence of NGOs; in China these groups’ development is shaped both by the (partial) retreat of the State as well as by the limitations it nevertheless still imposes on them. Within this apparent contradiction some social groups which have emerged offer services that the State itself cannot provide while others represent a threat to the State.

The authors conclude by enumerating the various progresses made by China for instance in the economic sphere and, even though aware of the many limitations that remain in place for individual freedom, shine a light on the recent improvement of the law on working contracts, which limits the power of employers, increases safety measures in case of layoffs and includes some mechanisms for the automatic renewal of working contracts for temporary work.

At the end of the concluding chapter, the authors address what is in store for the future. They enumerate some possible scenarios, and identify the most likely one; China will move (and partly already has) towards an organizational model, which is based on Confucian values, economic efficiency and social equity. At that point, China will de facto become one of the main constituents of a new multi-polar world, together with the United States, Europe (or the Eurozone), Latin America and, in due time, Africa. If, the authors conclude, both foreign and domestic NGOs alike will be able to contribute to such a realization, then China will truly gain back its status of a great culture and great world power.

To conclude, the chapters are generally well-structured. Due to the interesting and readily accessible nature of the topic at stake, this book represents a valuable reading for both experts of China's Third Sector, as well as for policy-makers and a more general readership alike.

This study is important because it contributes to the body of work on China's changing State/society relations and contentious politics, studying how citizens and groups cope with an authoritarian system which allows only limited action in regards to individual grievances of a various nature.

The research is well-written and original in its choice of case studies; in fact, it chooses to analyse NGOs and associations which have been only sporadically looked at in the past such as the YMCA (Young Man's Christian Association); furthermore, the book presents us with very much needed overview of the crucial factors which allow the Third Sector to grow in China, despite the Party/State's still authoritarian and hegemonic behaviour.