

Towards a Civil Society Based on Organic Solidarity: The Significance of Inter-Organizational Cooperation for Chinese Society¹

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Abstract

This article focuses on the continuous development of equal cooperation between nonprofit organizations in Chinese society over recent years. It attempts to explicate this phenomenon as a manifestation of accelerated structural differentiation of Chinese society as organic solidarity is formed. This article adopts Durkheim's concept of "organic solidarity" to frame the features involved in this phenomenon, such as autonomy in defining objectives of voluntary cooperation, and equal consultation as an indicator of the level of development of China's civil society. This is done in order to understand the mechanism by which horizontal linkages are created in contemporary Chinese society, and what their positive significance is for the healthy development of Chinese civil society. In view of this, the author further believes that at the same time we consider social science, we can only achieve a better understanding of China's current development into a modern, complex society by considering social differentiation and solidarity as well.

Keywords

Social organizations, Civil society, Organic solidarity, and Harmonious society

This article uses the phenomenon of inter-organizational cooperation to examine the development of Chinese civil society. On one hand, in terms of practical concerns, I hope to increase understanding of China's current transformation into a modern, complex society. On the other hand, in terms of theoretical concerns, I hope to link topics which have received a great deal of attention in recent years – (non-profit) social organizations, the third sector,

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and civil society – with classic theoretical problems from the social sciences. In this way I aim to raise academic awareness of non-profit organizations as a general social issue and a theoretical issue. This can allow us to more consciously link case studies and monographic studies of organizations with our understanding of Chinese society as a whole. It can also allow us to link our observations of experience around us with our understanding of trends across society as a whole.

In the face of China's current accelerated transformation into a modern and highly complex society,² a great number of surveys and studies of social differentiation have been published.³ They reveal one aspect of China's change from a relatively simple, homogenous society into a more complicated one: social differentiation as represented by the social division of labor (in production) and social stratification (in distribution and consumption).

However, complication of a system is always accompanied by two trends.⁴ Differentiation and integration are two parts of the same process. People dividing according to type (differentiation) and people grouping according to type (the positive linking of one group with another) occurs on both sides of a large process. Only in this way, through this larger pattern, can a society continue to become increasingly complex through separation and integration. Obviously, in comparison, there has been far from enough investigation and research in the social sciences of the other trend which is oppositional and yet complementary to differentiation. This naturally leads us to think of Durkheim.

113 years ago Durkheim was faced with the rapid social differentiation of European society and the chaos of a modern society that it drew people into. Having seen potential for growth and positive mechanisms for “organic solidarity” he published *The Theory of Social Division of Labor* as an example to later generations. With this Durkheim began the tradition in the social sciences of treating social differentiation and social solidarity as two driving

² Niklas Luhmann *Social Systems*, translated by John Bednarz, (Stanford: Stanford University, 1995), p. 407.

³ 边燕杰/ Bian Yanjie (ed.) “市场转型与社会分层: 美国社会学者分析中国”/Shi chang zhuan xing yuan she hui fen ceng: Meiguo she shui xue zhe fen xi Zhongguo (San lian shu dian: 2002) (“Market transformation and social stratification: American sociologists’ analysis of China”) is a collection of papers on Chinese social stratification written over a number of years; 李强/Liqiang “当代中国社会分层与流动” (Zhongguo jingji chu ban she: 1993). (“The stratification and mobility of contemporary Chinese society”).

⁴ Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, translated by Stephen Holmes and Charles Larmore, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, pp. xii.

mechanisms of the same process.⁵ This tradition is still alive in western academic circles: around 1994 a number of academic articles commemorating the centennial of the publication of *The Division of Labor in Society* were published. Among them was a paper which specifically examined the concept of “social solidarity”.⁶ As recently as 2005, there have also been a number of papers which adopted the concept of “social solidarity” to discuss post- 9/11 globalization and the possibility of a pluralistic society.⁷

This author’s research will reveal that Durkheim’s concept is also of use in understanding the progress of Chinese society. The situation we face today in terms of structural transformation is highly comparable to that faced by Durkheim. While existing research methods on the transformation and stratification of Chinese society are useful for considering sense of identity within strata and difference between strata they are not of use in answering questions about the possibility and style of positive connections between different strata. However, this is precisely the kind of problem which can be explored by drawing on the concept of “social solidarity” to study inter-organizational cooperation.

“Social solidarity” is a concept which is based on an understanding of the horizontal linkages in society, and has great significance in the study of Chinese social organizations. In the research on Chinese social organizations at the beginning of the 1990s it was equated with the emergence of Chinese civil society. Because, over a long period of time, scholars have been primarily concerned with the question of whether, and to what extent, civil society can develop across the whole of society, the relationship between the state and social organizations has long been a central topic in academia.

It has also meant that a mode of thinking which only examines the vertical relationships between state and civil society from the outside has dominated research which should be more diverse. In fact the concept of “civil society” includes a mode of thinking which examines the internal horizontal linkages

⁵ This tradition runs from Talcott Parsons to Luhmann (*The Differentiation of Society*: pp. x, 3-19) and draws on function theory and system theory to develop what became sophisticated social theories: the differentiation of society formed autonomous subsystems (such as government, religion, arts, education). Subsystems coexist in a mutual environment and constitute a social process (Luhmann, *Social Systems*). In this article I am unwilling to begin my discussion at this point, I only wish to elicit concepts about the types of social solidarity in order to analyze the development of China’s civil society groups.

⁶ Müller, Hans-Peter, “Social Differentiation and Organic Solidarity: The *Division of Labor* Revisited”, in *Sociological Forum*, 1994, Vol. 9, No. 1.

⁷ Edward Tiryakian, “Durkheim, Solidarity, and September 11”; Cladis, Mark, “Beyond Solidarity? Durkheim and Twenty-First Century Democracy in a Global Age”, both in *The Cambridge Companion to Durkheim*, edited by Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

of society when considering a problem. In introducing the concept of “social solidarity” today, apart from knowledge of superior-subordinate relations, vertical relations, relationships of administrative subordination, and relationships of dominance, it can also be used to better consider society’s internal equal relations, equal relations, consultative relations, and cooperative relations.

1. Durkheim’s Types of Social Solidarity

In Durkheim’s era (1858-1917), population mobility and social differentiation (the division of labor and class differentiation) was a salient fact which concerned academics discussing questions of social progress and order, and morals. Before Durkheim, there existed viewpoints on both the moral and social aspects of social differentiation.⁸ However, Durkheim’s method reflected his own concerns about the issue.

In the era in which he lived, over a long period of time, Europe had sunk into a modern crisis of an industrial society. Durkheim lived in the deeply troubled Third French Republic. He hoped that research in the social sciences could discover the root causes of social anomie, and diagnose and treat the social malady. His work *The Division of Labor in Society* proved directly that a new differentiation of society (a process) could produce new integration (a mechanism).

In reading Durkheim, amid reason for much loss of hope in modern society he also gave people reason for faith in social development. Durkheim’s technique of taking a positive (optimistic) view of the society of his time was to emphasize the necessary, positive, and intrinsic link between social complexity caused by the social division of labor; the development of individual personality as indicator of individual happiness; and the development of civic morals as common norms. His analysis made people believe that in a new society, individuals have more opportunity to let personality develop more freely. This kind of development does not necessarily create social disorder, but, in fact, has exactly the opposite effect. It necessarily allows society to have more opportunity to create common norms or the “civic morals”.

Durkheim used the division of labor as a means of observation to depict the complex relationship between man and society: in a highly heterogeneous society, personal integrity is dependent on the existence of others; individual and society are interdependent, and mutually complementary. This is what he

⁸ See Müller, “Social Differentiation and Organic Solidarity: The *Division of Labor* Revisited”, pp. 76-77.

describes as a society which has successfully made the transition to a complex one. Freer individuals and a more united society are not only compatible, they are mutually complementary. He called social solidarity under these conditions “organic solidarity”, which distinguished it from the “mechanical solidarity” of the traditional era. His two terms of description for social solidarity can be interpreted in terms of historical narrative and typological designation.

Historically, as a traditional society transforms into a modern one, mechanical solidarity is replaced by organic solidarity. In Durkheim’s analytical model of change for social structure, society’s becoming group living has two different root causes: one is the similarity of personal consciousness, the second is the division of labor in society. They represent different social structures and different types of society.

In traditional societies, people live in small areas, in small communities. Because their consciousness is highly homogenous, they group together. In large societies they form highly cohesive individual segments. This is Durkheim’s traditional “segmental society”. Locally, people draw on interpersonal interaction to produce relatively strong social solidarity. However, this kind of solidarity cannot spread to the whole of society, because people in large societies do not have sufficient real contact. This is only a certain degree of solidarity which is based purely on the similarity of consciousness.

In entering the process of industrialization, the development of the division of labor causes society, in different areas and on different levels, to become closely organized. New organizational structures replace original segmented structures and cause individuals who have become detached from the former “segments” to gradually become joined together in real life. This is the newly formed organizational society, in which the degree of the division of labor and the power of social cohesion or the strength of moral consciousness, are directly proportional.

In terms of type, “mechanical solidarity” and “organic solidarity” are oppositional concepts. Simply put, mechanical solidarity is necessary for a society to function, but in terms of individual freedom it is repressive. Mechanical solidarity stems from similarity in the consciousness of members of society. Personal individuality and personality are subsumed under an almost monolithic collective consciousness and have no opportunity to develop.

The individual has no freedom of choice, because in the traditional societies that mechanical solidarity represents, in the contest between individual and society, the centrifugal pull on an individual to leave the group and the centripetal pull created by collective consciousness, both linked in a relationship whereby as one waxes the other wanes. The development of social solidarity

and individual personality are opposite; when solidarity has developed to the highest degree, individuality is completely lost.

Conversely, organic solidarity and individual freedom are mutually complementary. Organic solidarity stems from the division of work and cooperation among members of society in activities (complementarity) and the symbiosis of consciousness. Because division of labor makes exchange a necessity, exchange means actors are mutually complementary in function and symbiotic in form.⁹

Durkheim modified the original formation of “individual and society” to “individual, secondary group, and state”. Organizations and groups in society attest to the formation of organic solidarity. Durkheim said that society is not a disorganized rabble; secondary groups constitute basic elements of our social structure:

If a series of secondary groups didn't exist between the government and the individual, then the state could not survive. If the link between these secondary groups and the individual is extremely close, they will forcefully assimilate the individual into the activities of the group, and thus bring the individual into mainstream social life.¹⁰

When he discussed “secondary groups” he was mainly referring to “corporate bodies” and “occupational groups”.

Secondary groups support organic solidarity because their formation and operation are concomitant with norms and morals. According to Durkheim, the division of labor necessarily means the formation of specialized organizations, and also means the formation of concomitant occupational morals and legal norms. Individual freedom is the product of a series of norms. The role of the collective lies in becoming proactively involved in the formation of every norm. Norms can guarantee individual freedom and can also avoid excessive individualism.

With regard to dealing with social anomie, it is also necessary to firstly establish secondary groups, and then establish a corresponding system of norms. Secondary groups are moral intermediaries in linking atomized individuals and powerful states. They play a pivotal role in individuals coalescing into mutually trusting, mutually identifying moral communities. The reason secondary groups are indispensable is not because they act as utilitarian groups for promoting economic development, but because of their tangible influence

⁹ Émile Durkheim: *The Division of Labor in Society*, 25.

¹⁰ Émile Durkheim: *Preface to the Second Edition of The Division of Labor in Society*, (1902), 40-41.

on the production of moral communities.¹¹ In societies which are highly differentiated, and where individuals enjoy a high degree of freedom, specific codes of ethics should be reflected in specific levels of secondary organizations or organizational entities.

On one hand secondary groups are intermediate links between the individual and the state. On the other hand secondary groups and the state are mutually restrictive, but guarantee the development of individual freedom. They guarantee that an organic solidarity based on these two aspects can really come into being. Durkheim said that only through the state could the individual be free of suppression by secondary groups and only with the help of secondary groups could the individual avoid the tyranny of the state. The simultaneous existence of the two is an institutional condition for personal liberation and individual freedom.¹²

Here I use "individual" to designate "citizen". This necessarily means that individuals within the state enjoy broad opportunities for choice and universal rights. These rights cannot be stripped by specific secondary groups. Only with the intervention of the state can the particularism of secondary groups be overcome.¹³ This role of the state can prevent the internal solidarity of organizations degenerating into the mechanical solidarity of segment societies. Because all citizens can choose from a wide range of secondary groups, different groups cannot fully control or monopolize any citizen.

Of course, the best evidence that secondary groups' internal solidarity poses neither hindrance nor threat to the organic solidarity of the society as a whole is the different types of cooperation between groups. Although in his own time Durkheim did not cite positive facts, he believed in the logic that the division of labor necessarily leads to cooperation and common consciousness. Using a union of employers and a union of workers as an example, he came to the conclusion that even when groups are oppositional, they will establish some kind of positive link. He said that in order to solve the problem of social anomie people should rebuild corporate bodies (occupational groups). For example, we already have a union of employers and a union of workers. Although they are separate, if there is a suitable, common mechanism, they can link without losing their respective characteristics.¹⁴

In *The Preface To The Second Edition Of The Social Division of Labor in Society*, Durkheim did not expand on this thesis further, but he has certainly

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹² Émile Durkheim *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals* (1958), translated by 渠东/Qu Dong and 付德根/Fu Degen (Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2001), 66-69.

¹³ Émile Durkheim *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁴ Émile Durkheim *Preface to the Second Edition of The Division of Labor in Society*, 18.

already indicated the line of reasoning behind the argument. This article takes exactly this train of thought as the point of departure for my own exploration of organic solidarity in Chinese civil society.

2. The Evolution of Types of Chinese Social Solidarity

Durkheim's concept of two types of social solidarity has always been widely adopted in academic circles, but it has also been continually criticized by later generations. One important problem is Durkheim's choice of the terms "mechanical" and "organic". His argument that traditional and modern social solidarity are of different types has been widely accepted, but the terms he used have created a great deal of confusion. In traditional societies, people essentially lived in small communities; interpersonal connections were all encompassing and included aspects such as belief, morals, customs, feelings, and memories. This is more akin to the holistic relationships connoted in the word "organic".

In modern, estranged society interpersonal relationships are more unidimensional and institutional, and consequently are inflexible and impersonal. This kind of relationship seems more "mechanical". In addition, according to this linguistic sense, "mechanical" is artificial and driven by external forces, whereas premodern society, we are inclined to believe, was natural with people cooperating of their own accord on the basis of inherent homogeneity. It would seem more appropriate to say that this is "organic".

In short, Durkheim's forms of classification have academic value, but having been used in his era they create ambiguity for later generations. What I feel is interesting is that if this group of concepts was used to analyze the changing situation in contemporary Chinese society, it would in fact be wholly appropriate. I believe that contemporary Chinese society happens to be undergoing the transformation from mechanical to organic solidarity that Durkheim described. Here "mechanical solidarity" refers to the segmental society he discussed, with a lack of individual freedom and which derives from "similarity in collective consciousness". It also refers to the semantic meaning of "mechanical": people in society are passively driven by external forces and play the role of cogs and screws.

Here "organic solidarity" refers to the compatibility between division of labor and integration discussed by Durkheim. It also refers to the character of positive bonds formed with other people based on voluntariness, freedom, and initiative, because "organic" refers to a flexible life mechanism, continual regeneration and a self-regulating adaptability. In conclusion, if we use "organic

solidarity” to refer to a characteristic of the way people form groups, we refer to a mechanism where people rely on ideas and aspirations to negotiate and cooperate on a basis of mutual difference.

The shift in Chinese society before 1949 from a traditional society to a modern one can also be seen as the transformation from mechanical to organic solidarity as described by Durkheim. Before and after the launch of westernization, industrialization, and urbanization in their modern senses, ideas about “locality” evolved into ideas about compatriots. Traditionally a person was “born here, grew up here, and grew old here” (生于斯、长于斯并终老于斯). Even if he went to another place at some stage in his life to work as an official or to do business, he would generally return to his hometown in the end. This is what Mr. Fei Xiaotong succinctly defined as “native-soil society” (乡土社会):¹⁵ one place, one area of native soil, which appealed to everybody in that area through their own specific organizations. These included local spiritual groups, spring and autumn societies (春社和秋社), poetry groups for local literati, book groups, music groups, temple fair organizations, dance troupe organizations, Qingmiao Festival organizations (青苗会), organizations for irrigation projects, hometown organizations, brotherhoods, organizations for the elderly, and clans (familial, patriarchal, and ethnic).

This kind of native-soil solidarity is a characteristic of community in the sense that Ferdinand Tönnies used it.¹⁶ However, using Durkheim’s concept to evaluate social evolution and the development of individual personality, this is mechanical solidarity; from the point of view of the nation a sense of locality is too strong and from the perspective of the individual there is inadequate freedom.

On one hand, large-scale industry, population mobility and new ways of thinking precipitated by the invasion (by external forces) and of implantation (by oneself) of modern factors seriously affected native-soil solidarity. On the other hand they prompted new forms of group formation: guilds and chambers of commerce,¹⁷ academic societies, parties and organizations in the modern sense developed broadly across the country. With cities as their bases, they

¹⁵ 费孝通/Fei Xiaotong, “乡土中国”, 1947, reprinted by San lian shu dian, 1985:1-7. (“*From the Soil*”).

¹⁶ Ferdinand Tönnies *Community and Society* translated by Lin Rong Yuan (The Commercial Press, 1999).

¹⁷ See also Marie-Claire Bergère *The Golden Age of the Chinese Bourgeoisie* (1911-1937) (translated by Zhang Fuqiang and Xu Shifen) (Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 1994); (1911-1937); 朱英/Zhu Ying “转型时期的社会与国家：以近代中国商会为主体的历史透视” / Zhuan Xing Shi Qi De She Hui Yu Guo Jia: Yi Jin Dai Zhongguo Shang Hui Wei Zhu Ti De Li Shi Tou Shi (Central China Normal University Press, 1997) (“Society and state in a time of transformation: A historical perspective of China’s recent Chamber of Commerce”).

had a national impact on economics, thinking, learning, and politics. They created a national arena and created internal links in fundamental areas of the modern state, even though the substance of the links conflicted with compromise, cooperation, and coexistence. These links had the historical characteristic of developing a modern, complex society, and had greater individual freedom as one of their conditions. In terms of scope, they exceed the local; therefore we should say they are closer to Durkheim's organic solidarity. The configuration of Chinese group formation shifted from the local "society and organization" to the nation-state "society", moreover it began to develop the initial characteristics of a civil society.¹⁸

Lu Xun and his generation of scholars complained that Chinese people were disunited like a "pan of loose sand" (一盘散沙). They spoke from a national perspective, and directed their criticism at the intermediary state where native soil solidarity had already disintegrated and national solidarity had not yet been completely formed. In that era the transformation from the old order to the new had put society in long-term conflict, with intellectuals caught in the middle of painful criticism and calls for self-reflection. The change from mechanical to organic solidarity was by no means a smooth one. People had been living in a long-term state of acute social anomie, continually losing hope and patience, and thus they channeled more and more of their strength into the revolution.

After the success of the revolution, the natural progression from mechanical solidarity, in the Durkheimian sense, to organic solidarity was suspended. The establishment of order in the new society followed a planned route. Consequently the social solidarity which emerged became a form of planned social solidarity.¹⁹ This was the work unit society (单位社会)²⁰ which was established at the height of Chinese socialist revolutionary practice.

Work unit society relied upon the state administration's extremely strong capacity to mobilize and organize people, and to entrust the structural blueprint to society for them to create. Individuals were organized into specific work units (单位), such as party, government, army, industry, and project work units, village committees, production teams, and teams for reeducation

¹⁸ William Rowe, "The Problem of 'Civil Society' in Late Imperial China", in *Modern China*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1993.

¹⁹ Robert S. Lynd, "Planned Social Solidarity in the Soviet Union", in *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 51, No. 3, 1945.

²⁰ 路风/Lu Feng: 《单位：一种特殊的社会组织形式》/Dan Wei: Yi Zhong Te Shu De She Hui Zu Zhi Xing Shi, *Zhongguo she hui ke xue*, 1989:1 ("The work unit: A special form of social organisation" in *Chinese Social Sciences*).

through physical labor. The work unit managed the individual's file, residence registration, work and means of livelihood.

Therefore the work unit was exclusively dependent. They were subordinate to superior work units, and were a tool for completing the duties set by them. In terms of institutional design, it is a link in a vertical system. Whether horizontal linkages occur is usually determined by the directives and mandate of the superior work unit. At that time, there were many vivid expressions to describe the relationship between people and the state, for example "I am a brick; move me wherever I am needed" (我是一块砖, 哪里需要往哪里搬). In many writings the individual is honored to become a cog or screw in the revolutionary machine. The state of affairs that corresponded to this high degree of organization and sense of affiliation was, in some sense, an overreaction to the chaotic political situation and state of disunity that intellectuals were so unwilling to accept during China's transformation from native-soil society to modern, complex society.

This kind of system solved some problems and also created new ones. When these problems became solidified within the system, they became particularly acute. The system established a unified order, but caused society to gradually lose its vitality. It caused the individual to lose the social space to exercise his recently won freedom. Even though this freedom was not universal, it had already become a part of life. In terms of Durkheim's theory of the evolution of social solidarity, in the course of the difficulties of transforming from traditional, mechanical to modern, organic solidarity, it had drawn society into a different kind of mechanical solidarity.

In terms of the lack of development of a space for the free exercise of individual autonomy and agency, both these types of mechanical solidarity are extremely similar. In terms of the possibility of horizontal linkages being restricted by the parochialism of societies and organizations or the self-sufficiency of work units, they are also extremely similar. To some extent they are both "segmental societies".²¹ However, relatively speaking, traditional mechanical solidarity is a natural state of simple societies. It is the consequence of the relatively weak capacity of the state to mobilize people. Contemporary mechanical solidarity is a kind of artificially planned state of the modern, complex society. It is the result of excessive intervention by a strong state in social life.

China's historical choices that have been made as part Opening Up and Reform over the past twenty or more years can be framed in political,

²¹ Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, 346.

economic or cultural terms. However, here we only want to conceptualize them from a social perspective as another development from mechanical to organic solidarity. This path is the mainstream of modern, global social development. It combines the common values of people towards social democracy and prosperity, individual freedom, and dignity. It represents the experience of those societies that developed first, in the midst of the accelerated vicissitudes of modern history and in the face of increasingly vigorous and complex differentiation, to be able to establish order, maintain basic social stability, and even to create, to a certain extent, social harmony amid all these complications.

More than 20 years of Opening Up and Reform has been implemented on the way in which groups are formed. It is currently transforming China into a new kind of society based on organic solidarity, in terms of the way people form groups in social life. In the general sense this is an accelerated shift toward a differentiated (specialized and stratified) and complex society. At the same time it is also a society where horizontal linkages play a major role, and where cooperation between parts of society at all levels and a sense of dependence is constantly increasing. In terms of individual social life, individuals are starting to be able to utilize an open system, and become members of formal organizations, or flexibly utilize existing social space to launch community groups and activities.

In conclusion, under mutually dependent conditions between the state and intermediary groups, and prerequisites for each party retaining autonomy, the individual has the chance to establish horizontal social linkages and form their own organization. Social groups can actively create opportunities to establish horizontal social linkages and reach their objectives through cooperation. That is to say, "organic solidarity" in contemporary China has already become a new mechanism, quality, and trend of social organization. Of course, organic solidarity as a property of the way in which linkages are formed between people, groups, and organizations in actual distribution across society is asymmetric and unbalanced. However, this situation does not stop us concluding that overall China is becoming a society based on organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity still plays a role in society. This stems from the effect of historical continuity, such as social consequences caused by departments, work units, and businesses whose management is controlled by old mechanisms. It is also due to the fact that some of modern China's management mechanisms (such as in the military and law enforcement departments) can only operate more effectively by relying on mechanical solidarity.

3. Cases of Inter-Organizational Cooperation Attest to the Shift towards Organic Solidarity

Chinese society's advance toward organic solidarity can be clearly seen from the development of social organizations. In the past twenty or more years, the pervasiveness of participation in organizations has expanded, the speed of quantitative change has increased, and the visibility of social function and public space has increased. This all attests to China's evolution from a vertically linked homogenous, segmented, work unit society into a market and civil society where horizontal linkages for equal cooperation are also developing.

Durkheim's analytical model reveals another dimension of social solidarity when examining social differentiation. When society becomes increasingly differentiated in comparison with the vertical state system, individuals have an increasing amount of free time, free space, and independent control of resources. When society's internal components are further differentiated, people's interests, benefits, and status are also differentiated. Consequently, there is increasingly widespread formation of social groups along the lines of shared characteristics. This perspective, which takes the individual as its point of departure, focuses on the first level of solidarity in the process of social differentiation. It is also the level of social solidarity that Durkheim dealt with at relative length. Individuals, who have obtained a certain level of freedom, create or join organizations on their own terms.

At present in China, although this is institutionally restricted to some extent, it should be recognized that this is already a relatively prevalent phenomenon. Regardless of whether it is professionals, ordinary citizens, or residents from rural areas, they all have some opportunity to join social organizations and experience the regular activities of a voluntary organization. These organizations range from small, specialist, rural cooperative groups, temple fairs, town sports and cultural entertainment groups, and proprietor committees to large national trade associations and academic organizations.

Examples of this include the several national social sciences academic organizations which provide opportunities for numerous scholars to join interest groups which go beyond personnel relationships of administrative subordination, and increase specialist cooperative mechanisms based on freedom and voluntariness. From this academics that were originally separated by disparate university departments and scientific research facilities, have established a national, integrated network. This is, without doubt, a new kind of organic solidarity which has emerged in recent years. It is a form of connection

mechanism which gives free rein to individual autonomy, organizational flexibility, and overall social efficacy.

The topic of cooperation between social organizations that this article lays particular emphasis on allows us to say more about the second level of social solidarity. The increase of organizations, in terms of both scale and population density, in itself denotes that the vertical social relationships of a unified structure have been changed. This also means equal relationships start to develop and become important. Cooperation between organizations as a positive aspect of equal relationships, necessarily flourishes. This is a higher level of solidarity in a complex, differentiated society. If enough organizations freely enter into equal consultation and cooperation with other organizations, overall this can represent a form of solidarity in society.

If horizontal cooperation can prevent rural, grassroots organizations from becoming insular and isolated again, and establish links with different groups regardless of whether they are rural or urban; if they can allow the organizations which are comprised of members of business and enterprise work units to break out of the confines of work unit, industry, or locality; then seen from other angles, a society which has been divided by various systems (both formal and informal), and densely interwoven by the threads of organizations' horizontal cooperation becomes an intrinsically linked whole or, in Luhmann's sense, a social system. In this way a society based on organic solidarity has a greater capacity for self-organization, greater vitality, and greater flexibility and efficacy in ameliorating internal contradictions or external shocks.

Cooperation between social organizations should include inter-organizational cooperation and cooperation between organizations and other groups or departments. Before organizations cooperate they are independent, during cooperation they are autonomous, and in terms of the results from cooperation, they are mutually beneficial. Organizations cooperate in a society full of possibilities and uncertainties. In terms of the concept of "organic solidarity", relationships which have a lot of theoretical possibilities allow mutual benefit to become a reality. This kind of reality is not a simple matter, and includes certain abstract qualities; this is also the nature of general social relations.

That cooperation can take place demonstrates the desire of the parties involved. That cooperation can be completed demonstrates that different parties have the ability to coordinate their actions. After the completion of cooperation the different parties form an abstract cooperative relationship, it includes mutual, positive treatment, trust, and possibly also the standards and expectations for future cooperation. These can all be conditions for lower trade costs and greater efficacy of future cooperation.

In this way the cycle can spread to become the mainstream of the whole society. This constitutes society's organic solidarity, and a society based

on organic solidarity. When summarizing Durkheim's thesis on the subject, Luhmann pointed out a chain of concepts which included "society – collectivity – solidarity – morals – norms".²² By introducing it here we can show that organizations' cooperative behavior reflects a series of abstract meanings about social integration. Below I will sketch out what I have observed in recent years in terms of cooperation between Chinese folk societies and related social organizations. I will attempt to discuss organizations above the level of the individual and their implications for organic solidarity in Chinese civil society.

When the China Folklore Society was founded in May, 1983, it was run by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Initially it was eligible to receive an annual subsidy from the Academy of 8000 yuan. This kind of vertical relationship can provide the basic conditions for the activity of a society. The society does not need to open up more space for activities; under this kind of relationship framework it can simply develop academic activities. In this phase the society can be defined as "state-led civil society":²³ it receives the guidance and financial support of state organs, but is not itself a state organ; rather it is an organization.

The foundation of the society represents the efforts of the state at that time to actively support specific organizations. However the relationships between the state and other organizations which emerged during the same period were completely different. One example is an organization for the Dragon Tablet Fair (龙牌会) from a county in Hebei, which afterwards established good relations with the China Folklore Society. Around 1980 the organization began to secretly hold worship ceremonies during the Dragon Tablet Festival (龙抬头节).²⁴ According to research on members of the organization we carried out in 1996, the villagers said at the time they faced pressure from the village cadre, and were also worried that the leaders of the organization would be arrested by the authorities.

One organization was a national group of intellectuals established in Beijing with a very strong state background. The other was a semi-secret organization of peasants, which was active within their village. They both emerged at the beginning of the 1980s and, within a small sphere, had a certain degree of visibility and renown. Their emergence reveals two things. In that period different organizations were developing from the two different areas of state and

²² Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, p. 7.

²³ B. Michael Frolic, "State-led Civil Society", in Timothy Brook and B. Micael Frolic (eds.), *Civil Society in China*, Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1997, p. 48.

²⁴ For a more detailed account of dragon tablet fair and temple fairs please see 高丙中/Gao Bingzhong "一座博物馆——庙宇建筑的民族志：论成为政治艺术的双名制"/Yi zuo bo wu guan – miao yu de min zu zhi ("The Ethnography of a Museum-Temple") 2006.

grassroots society. Chinese civil society was beginning to germinate, but regardless of whether they were a semi-official organization or the most basic, purely grassroots organization, they were both extremely insular, even to the extent of being closed. Basically, both kinds of organization did not have cooperative relations with other organizations. For a scholarly society there is possibly not too great a need for such cooperation, but for the Dragon Tablet Fair organization, the main concern was being constrained by the still strictly controlled social space.

Around 1990, the China Folklore Society and Hebei's Dragon Tablet Fair organization both entered a new phase of development. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences required societies which it had formerly governed to become independent. A key institutional change was that they would no longer provide any subsidies; societies had to find their own means of funding, and develop by themselves. The China Folklore Society was forced to rely on very meager membership fees to finance itself. It also did not have the capacity to launch any further activities (not even internal academic activities), so consequently began to turn to society to seek resources.

However, there is a huge difference between having the courage to go into the water and being a good swimmer. For the society's attempts to be successful, they required time to build up useful connections and explore suitable approaches. The Dragon Tablet Fair organization was originally rooted in society. Whether it would survive or not, flourish or perish, would be directly determined by the free time, public space, and liquid assets society could provide.

Around 1990, after fixing farm output quota for each household, peasants had already pooled cash which was at their own disposal. They were also already accustomed to organizing their own schedule of activities and had boldly begun to attempt to work with groups that were important to them. Because of this, the scale of the Dragon Tablet Fair organization's temple fair was greatly expanded from an activity involving a few people in the village originally, to a collective festival which involved people within a radius of around two and a half kilometers. At this time, more than 30 other temple fair organizations from other villages were invited to join the Dragon Tablet Fair organization. As part of the mutually beneficial cooperation, the Dragon Tablet Fair organization also participated in the temple fairs of other villages. In this way the system resembled reciprocal visits among relatives.

Not only was the Dragon Tablet Fair organization able to exponentially expand the activity, after giving financial assistance to the village's poorest households and the primary school, there was also tens of thousands of yuan surplus left over from contributions.

At this stage the academic society was still learning how to form positive bonds with organizations in society, but was still unable to establish truly beneficial relationships. They still appeared as a disassociated atom in a highly uncertain, complex society. The Dragon Tablet Fair organization had already broken out of the confines of the village, and attracted 100,000 people to its three-day temple fair. It brought together the vast group of people in the surrounding area through folk ceremony, and created a form of local social solidarity. However, this kind of solidarity faced tense relations with larger communities. The local government had misgivings about this activity, because the aspects of folk belief of the fair conflicted with state ideology. Future development allowed the two organizations to form a closer symbiotic relationship, by making up for the Dragon Tablet Fair organization's deficiencies through their interaction.

In the first few years following 2000, both organizations established positive social relations across a wider area. From 1995 the China Folklore Society began cooperation with the Hebei Provincial Folk Society to review its Dragon Tablet Fair organization and temple fair. Apart from the travel costs of academics and postgraduate scholars participating in the review, the society was not required to contribute financially. The Dragon Tablet Fair organization covered the costs of scholars' accommodation in the village and provided various necessities to facilitate the smooth completion of the survey.

Their cooperation created a social arrangement whereby unless they cooperated they could not come into being. Over the past twelve years the society has created a survey and research base, scholars have published more than twenty articles on their findings, and their students have completed degree theses, and gained doctorate and master's degrees.

In 2003, after ratification by local government, the Dragon Tablet Fair organization constructed a building that would act as both a museum and a temple. However, the government's Ministry of Tourism only recorded it as a single tourist site. According to the originally demarcated social categories the parties involved in the cooperation are very different organizations: the county government is official, the society is a legal, civil organization, and the Dragon Tablet Fair organization is a traditional folk belief organization which has no legal status.

One difference between these cooperative partners is the distance between official and civil, another is the opposition between those who make and uphold the law, and those who break it. The third difference is the contradictory ideologies of the representatives of science and the practitioners of superstition. This multi-party cooperation has obviously traversed existing social boundaries and linking relationships on the basis of each party's respective

conditions. In so doing they have produced a mentality of mutual acceptance and mutual recognition, even according to differing prerequisites.

This cooperation has been enshrined in a building. Village residents provided a memorial tablet of a dragon. According to official and academic classification this is part of folk belief, which is unlike Christianity, Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism, Daoism which all have legal status and legal channels for handling affairs. If the villagers were to apply by themselves to build a temple, they would first need the approval of the Bureau of Religion. They would then need to be granted a certificate of land use by the Bureau of Land Management, as well as having their building plans approved by the Ministry of Construction and Planning. According to standard procedure, there would be no way for the villagers to legally begin construction, because the Bureau for Religion would not accept the Dragon Tablet Fair organization's application, as they do not represent a legally recognized religion.

However, cooperation creates miracles. In 2003 we joined the Dragon Tablet Fair organization and saw a temple; this was the "Dragon Ancestral Hall". The signs to the left and right of the main entrance read "Hebei Province Fan Village Dragon Tablet Fair Organization" and "Zhaozhou Dragon Culture Museum" respectively. Afterwards I heard that the total construction costs for the temple were 260,000 yuan. Members of the organization proudly explained, "We based it entirely on Bolin Temple's main hall". Bolin Temple is a nearby Buddhist site of interest. It truly was a construction project that could only be implemented and completed through the engineering of a complex society.

Looking back over the process of cooperation we can vividly see how cooperation between organizations facilitates the occurrence and running of social organic solidarity. The dragon memorial tablet which the villagers donated is traditionally rotated between the houses of the villagers (during normal times) and a large tent (during temple fairs). From the end of the 1970s when the Dragon Tablet Fair organization resumed activities they have always faced the pressure of being labeled as carrying out "superstitious activity" and therefore kept their activities as quiet as possible. The arrival of folk scholars led them to the positive construction of "dragon culture". In 1996, some folk scholars mentioned the idea of a "museum", and the leaders of the Dragon Tablet Fair organization began to seriously consider the idea. In 2000 the newly elected chairman of the organization began to actively raise funds. On one hand he drew on communication between cadres from the county cultural center, which was a great supporter of folk culture, and the government, and declared he wanted to build a museum for dragon culture. On the other hand he advertised within the village that he wanted to build a temple and was raising funds.

At this time the county government was actively planning tourism projects. Organizations that came forward and related functionary departments began discussions. They reached the decision to combine the dragon culture museum, and the Zhaozhouqiao and Bolin temples to create a tourist attraction that would be promoted within the county. Consequently the County Planning Committee listed the project, and the Ministry of Land Management and the Ministry of Construction and Planning both approved the project. The actual costs for the project were more than 200,000 yuan, with the majority of the money coming from collections by village residents, and with 20,000 contributed by the county and towns. The money that was borrowed was to be paid back over time by the Dragon Tablet Fair organization. The money accrued from the sale of incense at the temple each year was to be the Dragon Tablet Fair organization's credit.

We see how the Dragon Tablet Fair organization has been influenced by the China Folklore Society in changing its orientation from "superstition" to culture, and combined the original idea of a temple with the idea of a modern museum. In this way, their objective gained support, understanding and acquiescence from all parties involved.

Government organs also positioned themselves as collaborators in providing public cultural goods. They were able to accept the views of scholars and frame the villagers' appeal as a cultural undertaking, and were also able to provide institutional support and a small amount of financial assistance to a controversial civil society organization. Finally they were able to co-opt the success of a civil society cause as their own achievement. These originally disparate, even oppositional, social entities were able to establish positive relationships by modifying themselves. They thus established new, positive relationships with each party providing resources based on consideration of their objectives and capabilities. Finally, they were able to reach their own objectives and assist the other party in achieving theirs.

From the two plaques at the front of this building we can also clearly see what the villagers, government and intellectuals gained from the project. In fact, the project has implications of universal significance: the cooperation of those involved created valuable organic solidarity for the society. Regardless of what specific connotations the original dragon tablet of the Dragon Tablet Fair organization had, it turned out to be a symbol of village and local identity.

When the Dragon Tablet Fair organization was influenced by scholars who followed a strong nationalist state ideology, and began to trace themselves back to the dragon culture of remote antiquity and back to a symbol of the Chinese people, they defined themselves in a new way. There was not only an exterior change manifested by the two plaques, but also an internal change

of structure and identity. Cooperation between villagers, government departments, and intellectuals allowed the dragon tablet to change from a symbol of village identity, to a symbol of local identity, and finally to a symbol of state (nation state) identity in the minds of the villagers. Relations (including awareness of real-life relationships) between members of the Dragon Tablet Fair organization, the people, and the nation state increased and also allowed them to express their identification with the state.

From this example we see enormous space, and social and cultural distance can be transcended by the formation of social organizations and by cooperation among organizations. Originally disparate individuals, groups, and departments can be integrated and multi-level social solidarity within a large community can be formed.

The China Folklore Society is not only active among grassroots societies, such as the one mentioned above, they are also involved in national issues, and in cooperation with other organizations and institutions. In this way, they are able to jointly influence the discussion and solution of these issues.

The society has criticized the law banning fireworks in many cities and urban areas. In the past twenty or more years, society members have published a large number of articles and speeches in local media discussing the importance of protecting festival traditions, and have called for an amendment to the bylaw banning fireworks. They have had notable success by collaborating with organizations from the firework industry. The China Folklore Society argued for the necessity of protecting traditions, while the organizations promised to produce safer fireworks, to guarantee the feasibility of lifting the ban.

In July, 2007, the National Fireworks Organization held a development forum in Beijing, to which they invited the Chinese Consumer Organization, the China Folklore Society, and relevant government departments. The forum was aimed at allowing relevant parties to exchange opinions on the issue of amending the ban on fireworks in urban areas, in order to seek consensus, and influence the legislation of the Local People's Congress. Before long the Beijing People's Congress amended the statute banning fireworks and the folk tradition of setting off fireworks was conditionally resumed during the 2006 Spring Festival.

I use this example in the hope of demonstrating that after society focuses on a point of contention, group cooperation can be used to make a difference. It can allow various parties to consult, compromise, act in unison, and allow real disputes and dissension to be resolved. In so doing it can allow society to reach a new acceptance. At the same time this is also a process where a clear difference of ideas becomes, to some extent, a new consensus. The establishment of links, the coordination of relationships, cooperative action, the sharing of

results and a consensus of ideas are all part of the process of the reproduction of a society based on organic solidarity society.

Cooperation with other social organizations obviously increased the resources the China Folklore Society could obtain, and their initiative and capacity for action in pursuing objectives. Consequently, it essentially put the work of the society above actively seeking cooperation. Once the society lost its state subsidy, it was unable to allocate resources through vertical relationships with leaders. For a while it became a body which was not accustomed to integrating with society to seek cooperation and establish horizontal social linkages.

After 2003 the society established cooperative relationships with groups, such as the Beijing Folk Museum (an institution) and Huaxia Folk Garden (a company). In so doing, they received a large amount of funding and hosted the "Academic Symposium to Commemorate 20 Years of the China Folklore Society" and "Calendar of the Nation State, International Symposium". These events were unprecedented in scale and had their own offices and full-time staff.

The society has made the "Treating Traditional Festivals as National Holidays" one of the objectives of its work in recent years, and is connected to part of the work of the government. On one hand the society provided a research report to the Civilization Office of the CPC Central Committee entitled "The Cultural Significance of Traditional Festivals and their Celebration as Holidays". On the other hand, it participated in the Civilization Office's work on the protection of intangible cultural heritage to promote the selection of traditional festivals as the representative of intangible cultural heritage and the protection of authentic culture.

In focusing on reaching social consensus, they hosted successive symposia with the Beijing Folk Arts Museum, Hebei Folk Culture Association, and Shanghai Tongji University Research Center. They hoped to appeal to academic and public opinion to add important festivals to statutory national holidays. The society used horizontal linkages to secure resources and simultaneously combined their own objectives with those of others. In this way they carried out their work, and followed a path of progress whereby they worked mutually to achieve their own aims and those of their partners. This case demonstrates that organizations are the promoters as well as the beneficiaries of organic solidarity in contemporary society. It further illustrates that organizations are a driving force in positively facilitating order and promoting the positive development of society, in a highly contradictory, complex society.²⁵

²⁵ Zheng Hangsheng 郑杭生: 《社会运行导论》/She Hui Yun Xing Dao Lun, (China Renmin University Press, 1993) 中国人民大学出版社, 1993 年。

From these few examples that involved the China Folklore Society, we can see cooperation between organizations today has already developed myriad possibilities. An organization can cooperate with an organization of the same size and character. It can also cooperate with organizations and institutions which have obvious differences. Regardless of whether it is cooperation with other organizations, nongovernmental, non-enterprise work units, government departments, or commercial institutions, they all take mutual independence as a prerequisite. In their interaction they emphasize similarities while downplaying difference, draw on each other's strengths to offset their own weaknesses, and draw mutual benefit from results. In addition, they also produce a way of sharing new social arrangements or change old contradictions to allow all parties to continue to coexist more harmoniously. From the old model of "ideas of government + action of government's subordinate institutions" to the new model of "ideas of a body with a multiplicity of interests + interaction and negotiation + division of labor and collaboration", we clearly see new eras of a social mechanism.

4. Significance of Durkheim's Theoretical Method for Research on China's Civil Society

In summary, the guidance that Durkheim's writings give us and the implications from the materials of our limited experience lead us to the conclusion: if we look increasingly broadly, the individual as the citizen of the state can freely enter and leave intermediary groups to lead a social life where s/he can autonomously enter negotiations to take collective action. Thus in this way the trend towards a civil society based on organic solidarity manifests itself.

We have noticed that the question of whether China's current society is a civil society or not is still a controversial issue. However, in terms of the national constitution, Chinese society should be a civil society. There is some distance between the constitution and actual society. This kind of distance, in positive terms, shows that the pursuit of the establishment of a civil society is the ideal of the state. The level of freedom the individual has to effectively participate in the activities of organizations, and the level of freedom social groups have within organizations, are indicators of the civil properties of Chinese society.

We also believe that society's negotiating power with regard to the state is crucially determined by the level of organic solidarity of the society. When this solidarity is nearing its perfection, this is also the moment when the realization of the ideal of a Chinese civil society is imminent. Therefore, we believe that

in cooperation among organizations, assessing the type and level of social solidarity is a very effective method for understanding the status of development of Chinese civil society.

Our research has returned to some earlier concepts about the study of social experience. Of course this is because we hoped to find support from academic history, but it is also because Durkheim's point of view that classifications of solidarity represent a horizontal observation of society is at present actually a novel one. Of course mastering a conceptual tool of this perspective is not limited to "social solidarity". Similarly, concepts, such as "legitimacy", "social capital" and "social network", all have this kind of potential.²⁶ These concepts are suitable for observing what kind of (civil) society contemporary China is. As the Chinese saying goes: "seen from one side it is a mountain ridge; from another it is a mountain peak", therefore a vertical field of vision plus a horizontal field of vision should be able to more holistically represent the facts about China's social organizations and civil society. We see another dimension where "social differentiation", "social stratification" and other research approaches are failing to have an effect in intellectual production. It is thus better to understand the rapid complication that Chinese society is currently undergoing and maintain academic insight to predict its development trend.

With regards to a new application of the classical concept of "social solidarity" in the Chinese context, it has wider academic significance and value. Classical terms from Sociology and social theory, such as "legitimacy", "social solidarity", "capital", "capitalism", and "class" have been used to understand societies, such as China which are undergoing this current transformation. This approach is becoming an approved academic method.

In China Qu Jingdong has committed himself to the interpretation and application of several of Durkheim's works.²⁷ Overseas, scholars such as Ivan Szelenyi, Gil Eyal, and Eleanor Townsley²⁸ have found intellectual resources in

²⁶ 如丘海雄、陈健民/Qiu Xiaixiong, Chen Jianmin 《社团、社会资本与政经发展》/She tuan, she hui zi ben yu zheng jing fa zhan /She hui yan jiu, (Organizations, Social Capital and Political and Economic Development in Sociological Studies, 1999) 载《社会学研究》1999年第4期; 高丙中/Gao Bingzhong 《社会团体的合法性问题》/She hui tuan ti de he fa xing wen ti, 载《中国社会科学》/Zhongguo she hui ke xue (Problems of Legitimacy for Social Groups in Social Sciences in China) 2000年第2期; 林南/Lin Nan 《社会资本: 关于社会结构与行动的理论》/She hui zi ben: Guan yu she hui de jie gou yu xing dong de li lun (Social Capital: Theory of Social Structure and Action) (张磊译) (上海人民出版社, 2005年)。

²⁷ 如渠敬东/Qu Jingdong 《缺席与断裂: 有关失范的社会学研究》/Que xi yu duan li: You guan shi fan de she hui xue yan jie (Shanghai ren min chu ban she, 1999) (上海人民出版社, 1999年)。(Absence and Rupture: Sociological Study of Anomie).

²⁸ Eyal, Gil and Ivan Szelenyi, Eleanor Townsley, *Making Capitalism Without Capitalists: Class Formation and Elite Struggles in Post-Communist Central Europe*, Verso, 1998.

Marx and Weber's explanation of the origins of capitalism in order to analyze social change in Eastern Europe and fly the flag of neoclassical sociology.²⁹ This demonstrates that classical theory still has derivative intellectual value today. Finally, with regard to the research of social solidarity, and particularly organic solidarity, it can provide academia with theoretical support and practical guidelines for a "harmonious society". It can put the ideal of a harmonious society of ancient civilization into the category of civil society for consideration. Our future task is to bring the development of a mechanism for "organic solidarity" into practice.

²⁹ Eyal, Gil and Ivan Szelenyi, Eleanor Townsley, *Making Capitalism Without Capitalists*, p. 16.