Workshop Report

New Mentalities of Government in China:
Emerging Professions, Vocations and Associations

Until quite recently, government in China operated almost entirely through official organs and agencies in a hierarchical and highly regulated system of formal authority. This system administered and managed a wide range of economic, social and public affairs, and mobilized the entire population, through urban work-units and rural collectives, to participate in the governing of everyday life. In the post-1978 era of market-based economic reform, the old 'mass-line' mode of government has been progressively replaced by more complex and diffuse forms of governance, which increasingly rely on expertise and service provision from a rapidly growing cohort of diverse professionals and new associations.

The notion that China was governed solely through totalitarian and authoritarian forms of politics was always a simplification, but today such models have very little explanatory usefulness. This workshop brought together a number of leading scholars from a range of social science disciplines in order to expand upon a more nuanced analytical approach to understanding the complexities of government in contemporary China. Building on recent studies that have adapted Michel Foucault's concept of 'governmentality' to the Chinese context, workshop participants examined some of the ways in which new professionals and associations are governing, managing and providing for an increasingly mobile and heterogeneous population. In particular they focussed on how such interventions operate upon and within the everyday lives of the population through a double action encompassing both the government of others and the government of the self.

The success of this workshop was greatly enhanced through the participation of two internationally renowned Foucault scholars: Professor Barry Hindess (Emeritus, ANU; ASSA Fellow) and Professor Michael Dutton (Goldsmiths, UK; ASSA Fellow). Hindess and Dutton launched proceedings with reappraisals of the concept of 'governmentality' and its relationship to other aspects of Foucault's work. Hindess reminded us that the concept derived from a particular reading of European history and challenged participants to think carefully about how it could be deployed in the very different cultural and historical context of China. He also suggested that the influential 'British school of governmentality studies' offered a somewhat narrow interpretation of Foucault's ideas and encouraged us to push the theoretical framework in other directions. Picking up on this theme, Dutton argued that one of the most significant elements missing from governmentality studies is a plausible account of 'the political'. In the China context this issue is especially important in order to understand the shift in governmental strategy from the radical and passionate politics of the Maoist era to the bureaucratic and developmental politics of the reform era.

The first panel of papers addressed the government of space focussing on professionals engaged in urban cultural policy and spatial planning of the built environment. Professor Carolyn Cartier (UTS) foregrounded her paper with a summary of the potentially fruitful theoretical interplays between urban geography, governmentality studies and China studies. Bringing these themes together around urban cultural policy, Cartier showed that while authorities in many major Chinese cities have sought to follow global practice through promoting the establishment of 'creative industries' and 'cultural precincts', the form of governmentality they employ (more

interventionist than neoliberal) undermines the possibility and limits the space for creative and cultural activity to flourish. In the second paper, Dr David Bray (Sydney) showed how in recent years professional spatial planners have been afforded increasingly influential roles in the reconfiguration of China's built environments. Not only does this signal a 'spatial turn' in the management of economic development, but through the invention of spatial archetypes for new villages and urban residential areas, spatial planners have played a major role in establishing new frameworks for the government of everyday life. In the final part of his paper, Bray sought to augment the governmentality approach through using actor network theory to examine the material impact of newly designed residential environments on everyday life in a case study rural community.

Governing health and bodies was the theme for the following panel. Dr Yu Haiqing (UNSW) presented research on health authorities' changing approach to the management of HIV/AIDS in China. Having shifted from a state of denial, authorities now practice what Yu characterises as a 'rogue logic': a mode of governmentality which essentialises the HIV positive 'other' as unruly and distanced, so as to create a state of exception to justify an out-of-the-law governmentality. This rogue logic is often paired with discourses of suzhi (human quality) and 'crisis' to form a new mode of governance that is premised on the neoliberal principles of self-regulation and self-governing. At the same time, it produces a form of counter-biopolitics, as new political subjectivities and forms of social activism are forged around the deleterious effect of exclusion on ailing bodies. In the second paper, Dr Terry Woronov (Sydney) examined the new phenomenon of 'beauty bloggers' who utilise new media technologies to advise consumers on how to navigate their way through the seemingly limitless choice of beauty products now available on the retail market. Through analysis of key popular blogs, Woronov argued that they are framed so as to inculcate desires for self-development through consumption of beauty and fashion products. Moreover, she pointed out that the bloggers themselves should be understood, in Foucauldian terms, as a new cohort of experts engaged in training young, gendered subjects in new consumption-based regimes of caring for the self.

The third panel focussed on the rapidly expanding domains of philanthropy, charitable giving and volunteerism in contemporary China. Building on a comparative analysis of philanthropy in China and the USA, Associate Professor Elaine Jeffreys (UTS) argued that in China, elite philanthropy is construed not as a voluntary responsibility of the rich who deserve their wealth, but as a discipline on elites to counter the negative distributive consequences of wealth creation in an era of economic reform and sharp retrenchment of earlier radically egalitarian socialist policies. Jeffreys' research shows how government-sponsored moves to professionalise philanthropy have combined with strong media and public supervision of charitable activities to regulate and discipline the activities of wealthy elites, in a manner that does not have an obvious parallel in western countries. In the following paper, Dr Lisa Hoffman (Washington, USA) presented anthropological research on the emergence of volunteerism and charitable giving as ways for addressing social problems in urban communities. This relatively new phenomenon signals a shift from state-led and directed welfare provisioning to a more complex governmental assemblage which includes the market, employers, social organizations and community/citizen volunteers. In Hoffman's view, not only does this result in the formation of new socialities and subjectivities, but also suggests that conventional concepts of state, economy and civil society may be more limiting than explanatory.

The final three papers, focussing respectively on cultural production, social work and the changing role of the hospital, further illustrated a key workshop theme; namely, that in contemporary China new forms of expertise and new mentalities of government have emerged in a wide range of diverse fields. In the first paper, Dr Jenny Chio (Emory, USA) examined the

domain of non-state, or independent, film and video productions, suggesting that the emergence and ongoing existence of this domain of cultural production can be understood as a rational attempt by both filmmakers and the state to take advantage of the contemporary global moment of 'independent media' as a form of social and economic capital. Contrary to the widespread belief that Chinese authorities operate rigid systems of censorship, Chio's research shows that the logics at work in this mode of governance are flexible and geared at determining not what the ultimate limits of cultural production might be, but rather at managing distribution and circulation. The emergence of social work as a new profession since the 1990s also signals an increasingly nuanced governmental approach, in this case around the management of social problems. As Professor Gary Sigley (UWA) pointed out, this shift in approach was made possible through a number of key governmental interventions: the re-establishment of Social Work as a discipline for study at tertiary-level educational institutions; the formation of professional associations for social workers; and the creation of specific jobs for social workers within local government organisations. Yet, the expansion of the role and scope of social work has also been constrained, according to Sigley's analysis, by the tendency for local authorities to retain control over 'social management' and through their unwillingness to accede wider authority to this new profession. In the final paper of the workshop, Dr Melinda Cooper (Sydney) showed how the Chinese hospital system is caught between the conflicting tasks of delivering basic health care, maintaining operating budgets, and operating as a clinical research site for foreign and domestic drug developers. Through analysis of recent rounds of healthcare reform, Cooper argued that, building on the CCP's traditions of 'pragmatic experimentalism', governmental authorities have sought to leverage existing scientific expertise and a huge patient base in an attempt to turn the hospital system into a source of indigenous biomedical experimentation and innovation.

Following the success of this workshop, participants have entrusted the convenors to produce a scholarly publication which it is intended will include all nine papers bookended with contributions from Professors Hindess and Dutton.