

BACK TO THE FUTURE? THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA'S NEW CENTRAL DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

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Despite nearly 75 years of shaping society, the Communist Party of China (CPC) remains focused on creating a perfect society rooted in its ideology. Under Xi Jinping, “social governance” has evolved into a system prioritising party dominance over individual and organisational autonomy. In March 2023, the party took a further step in this direction with the establishment of the CPC’s Department of Social Work to reinforce grassroots governance and party building. Social work is slated to become a full organisational system in all localities and at all four main levels from centre to county. This department extends CPC influence across all localities, coordinating control over non-public enterprises, economic and social organisations, and new employment sectors. Social work is similar to but different from the better-known “united front work”. The latter refers to the party’s work with forces that have been united with the CPC to work under the party’s leadership. Social work by contrast points to the party’s activities to construct grassroots political power and maintain social stability in dealing with forces in society that do not necessarily subscribe to the party’s goals. The Department of Social Work seeks to align society more closely with CPC objectives, reducing autonomy and ensuring adherence to party discipline. Foreign entities engaging with Chinese counterparts must now navigate a landscape with an even more intense grip of the CPC’s central authorities over Chinese businesses, civil society, grassroots government and volunteer organisations.

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Chinese:

回到未来？新的中共中央社会工作部

尽管中国共产党（CPC）进行社会改造已近 75 年，仍然专注于创建一个植根于其意识形态的完美社会。在习近平的领导下，“社会治理”优先考虑党的统治，而非个人和组织自治。2023 年 3 月，党在这个方向上又迈出一步，成立了社会工作部，以加强基层治理和党的建设。社会工作将成为从中央到县四个主要层次的完整组织体系。该部门将党的影响力延伸到各地，统筹管理非公有制企业、经济社会组织、新就业领域等。社会工作与更广泛为人所知的“统战工作”相似但又不同。后者是指党和已经被团结的力量在党的领导下开展工作。相比之下，社会工作是指党在处理社会上不一定认同党的目标的力量时，为建设基层政权和维护社会稳定而进行的活动。社会工作致力于使社会与中国共产党的目标更加紧密地结合起来，减少自治并确保遵守党的纪律。与中国同行打交道的外国实体现在必须应对中共中央对中国企业、民间社会、基层政府和志愿者组织更加严格的控制

French:

RETOUR VERS LE FUTUR? LE NOUVEAU DÉPARTEMENT CENTRAL DU TRAVAIL SOCIAL DU PARTI COMMUNISTE DE CHINE

Bien qu'il ait façonné la société pendant près de 75 ans, le Parti communiste chinois (PCC) reste focalisé sur la création d'une société parfaite ancrée dans son idéologie. Sous Xi Jinping, la « gouvernance sociale » a évolué vers un système donnant la priorité à la domination du PCC plutôt qu'à l'autonomie des individus et des organisations. En mars 2023, le parti a fait un pas supplémentaire dans cette direction avec la création du Département du travail social du PCC pour renforcer la gouvernance au niveau de la base et la construction du parti. Le travail social devrait devenir un système organisationnel à part entière dans toutes les localités et à chaque échelon administratif, du centre au comté. Ce département étend l'influence du PCC en coordonnant le contrôle sur les entreprises non publiques, les organisations économiques et sociales et les nouveaux secteurs d'emploi. Le travail social est similaire mais différent du « travail du Front uni » plus connu. Ce dernier fait référence au travail du parti avec les forces qui se sont unies au PCC pour travailler sous sa direction. Le travail social, en revanche, souligne les activités du parti visant à construire un pouvoir politique au niveau de la base et à maintenir la stabilité sociale en faisant face à des forces sociales qui ne souscrivent pas nécessairement aux objectifs du parti. Le Département du travail social cherche à aligner plus étroitement la société sur les objectifs du PCC, en réduisant l'autonomie et en garantissant le respect de la discipline de parti. Les entités étrangères qui s'engagent avec leurs homologues chinois doivent désormais naviguer dans un paysage caractérisé par une emprise encore plus forte des autorités centrales du PCC sur les entreprises chinoises, la société civile, les autorités et les organisations bénévoles locales.

Spanish:

¿REGRESO AL FUTURO? EL PARTIDO COMUNISTA DEL NUEVO DEPARTAMENTO CENTRAL DE TRABAJO SOCIAL DE CHINA

A pesar de casi 75 años de dar forma a la sociedad, el Partido Comunista de China (PCC) sigue centrado en crear una sociedad perfecta basada en su ideología. Bajo Xi Jinping, la “gobernanza social” ha evolucionado hasta convertirse en un sistema que prioriza el dominio del partido sobre la autonomía individual y organizacional. En marzo de 2023, el partido dio un paso más en esta dirección con el establecimiento del Departamento de Trabajo Social del PCC para reforzar la gobernanza de base y la construcción del partido. Está previsto que el trabajo social se convierta en un sistema organizativo completo en todas las localidades y en los cuatro niveles principales, desde el centro hasta el condado. Este departamento extiende la influencia del PCC a todas las localidades, coordinando el control sobre las empresas no públicas, las organizaciones económicas y sociales y los nuevos sectores de empleo. El trabajo social es similar pero diferente al más conocido “trabajo del frente único”. Este último se refiere al trabajo del partido con fuerzas que se han unido con el PCC para trabajar bajo el liderazgo del partido. El trabajo social, por el contrario, apunta a las actividades del partido para construir poder político de base y mantener la estabilidad social al lidiar con fuerzas en la sociedad que no necesariamente suscriben los objetivos del partido. El Departamento de Trabajo Social busca alinear más estrechamente a la sociedad con los objetivos del PCC, reduciendo la autonomía y garantizando el cumplimiento de la disciplina partidaria. Las entidades extranjeras que interactúan con sus homólogos chinos deben navegar ahora en un panorama en el que las autoridades centrales del PCC ejercen un control aún más intenso sobre las empresas, la sociedad civil, el gobierno de base y las organizaciones de voluntarios chinos.

Executive Summary

1. In the past 15 years under Xi Jinping, the concept of “social governance” has come to include a new architecture of surveillance and control that puts the autonomy and self-governance of individuals, households, civil society, enterprises and other institutions in the service of the party and the state.
2. Although social governance remains a cornerstone of the party’s society-making project, it is increasingly welded to strengthening the Communist Party of China’s (CPC) organisational power. The lack of party control over local social organisation work and the social instability during the sudden end to the COVID-19 lockdown likely made this approach much more urgent.
3. In March 2023, the government and party reorganisation announced immediately after the annual National People’s Congress the creation of a new functional organ of the party called the Department of Social Work.
4. The new department will coordinate and organise governance and party building work in non-public enterprises, social organisations and among groups in new forms of employment (mainly in digital technologies and the gig-economy). The new department will also guide the work of state organs handling complaints and petitions, urban and rural community governance, and grassroots governance.
5. The Department of Social Work aims to elevate the party’s penetration and grip over society to a whole new level and degree of coordination. It seeks to integrate social governance into party work, further reducing the autonomy of civil society, the non-state sector of the economy and grassroots communities, and making protest, strikes and social movements even harder to organise.
6. Social work is similar to but different from the better-known “united front work” which involves aligning external forces with the CPC to work under the party’s leadership. “Social work” by contrast points to the party’s activities to construct

grassroots political power and maintain social stability in dealing with forces in society that do not necessarily subscribe to the party's goals.

7. The tasks of social work are a mixed bag that the CPC believes it has been unable to get sufficient grip on. The answer that social work provides focuses very heavily on building and strengthening the party in these areas, particularly on supervision, discipline and punishment.
8. The party's social work will draw society, economy and culture in China closer to the CPC. They will increasingly be subjected to the requirements of party building and party discipline, losing even more of their autonomy and being aligned further with the wishes and priorities of the party leadership.
9. In their engagement with Chinese partners, clients and competitors, foreign actors will have to reckon with an even more intense grip of the CPC's central authorities over Chinese businesses, civil society, grassroots governance and volunteer work. The extent of their autonomy from the centre's wishes and priorities can now even less be assumed and should be carefully and continuously assessed.