



# GOING OUT 中国NGO走出去

A CDB SPECIAL ISSUE ON CHINA'S OWN OVERSEAS NGOS

**This CDB Special Issue is produced by China Development Brief**

It features one new article and ten articles from the CDB archives on the subject of Chinese NGOs working overseas. We have collected them here so that they can provide a useful resource to our readers.

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# China's Own Overseas NGOs: The Past, Present, and Future of Chinese NGOs "Going Out"

By Tom Bannister



For China-watchers, the subject of “overseas NGOs” was *the* hot topic in May 2015. On May 5<sup>th</sup> the second draft of the Overseas NGO Management Law was released on the NPC website for a period of public consultation<sup>1</sup>. In Beijing, all talk focused on how foreign NGOs – many of whom had operated in China for decades – would be controlled in the future. However, at the same time, several thousand kilometers to the west, Chinese NGOs were themselves confirming their own status as “overseas NGOs” by responding to the devastating earthquake that had just struck Nepal. Not only is this contrast important to note when reflecting on the role of foreign NGOs in China, it also represents a significant milestone for the growth of China’s civil society, and for the development of a truly global civil society.

China’s global influence has grown massively but remains dominated by government and business (much of it also state-owned). The projection of Chinese soft power also continues to revolve around state institutions. Chinese overseas aid is increasing at a slow but steady rate but remains state-directed and reliant on top-down material aid and infrastructure projects that can be very effective but cannot tackle all issues. Confucius Institutes spread state-delineated Chinese culture, increasing awareness and interaction,

but ultimately having their impact compromised by their state background, especially in the West. Chinese businesses have followed Hu Jintao’s 1999 call for Chinese businesses to “go out” (走出去战略) and massively increased their overseas investments. Again, this has brought benefits, including pouring low-cost consumer products into the welcoming hands of emerging markets. However Chinese overseas investment has also created new social, political, and environmental problems, many compounded by a lack of experience operating overseas.

The Chinese NGO sector has largely not participated in this global expansion. However, over the past decade the sector has become more professional, better resourced, and more mainstream. In the future Chinese NGOs can potentially play a more prominent role on the world stage. This would be a significant step for the development of both the domestic NGO sector and global civil society. Chinese NGOs “going out” can act as a catalyst for growth, channeling new resources, partnerships, legitimacy, opportunities, and confidence into Chinese civil society. It can also increase “people-to-people” contact, the often stated aim of many a foreign policy and international development goal. From the Chinese government’s perspective, it can add a useful new dimension to China’s soft power, presenting a face of China that may win new admirers, resolve the negative impacts of Chinese overseas investment, and increase Chinese representation in solutions to global issues. From the international perspective it can inject new skills and approaches into tackling problems such as climate change and diversify the current Western monopolization of the development sector. Finally, through increasing and diversifying China’s international involvement it can also help to reflexively re-frame and re-value the outside world’s involvement in China, at a time when there appears to be increasing hostility towards it.

<sup>1</sup> See here: [http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/xinwen/lfgz/flca/2015-05/05/content\\_1935666.htm](http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/xinwen/lfgz/flca/2015-05/05/content_1935666.htm) and here for CDB’s English-language news: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/news/foreign-ngo-law-released-online-for-public-consultation/>



## Background

### NGOs “Going out”

What do we mean by NGO’s “going out”? If we look at international experience outside of China, we see that NGOs that work on a global scale tend to become established at the local level before expanding their operations to the national level, and then beginning to operate outside of their countries borders to become “International NGOs” (INGOs). Some do so independently, others increasingly do so with government or intergovernmental resources that have been delegated to them. Many become involved in alliances with other NGOs and intergovernmental organisations. Some international NGOs – such as Oxfam and Save the Children – are now so big that they operate in similar ways to multinational corporations, with branch offices in different countries, vast budgets, and a huge international staff.



The 1992 Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro.

Outside of China, NGOs have internationalized particularly over the past three decades as the world has become increasingly globalized and government and intergovernmental action has been criticized for being too bureaucratic and ineffectual in dealing with certain types of global problems. NGOs have gained consultative status in the UN system or affiliation with existing gatherings and associations, playing a key role at important dialogues such as the 1992 Earth Summit. NGO-centric events have also been set up – such as the World Social Forum, first held in 2001 – to rival existing dialogues and mechanisms that involve

government or business. At their best, international NGOs have been praised for bringing innovative methods, increased flexibility, specialized skills, and greater access to tackling regional and global problems. At their worst they have been criticized for undermining the programs of under-resourced government, having their independence compromised by the agendas of foreign governments or powerful funders, and wasting resources through incoordination, unaccountability, and lack of understanding. Some of this criticism can be associated with the overwhelming dominance of INGOs from the Global North. However in recent years, increasing numbers of established INGOs have relocated to the Global South, and more and more NGOs from Global South countries in Asia, Africa, and South America have themselves begun to “go out”.

What about China? Firstly, it is important to note here the particularly complex definitional aspects of Chinese civil society. In China, as in many countries, a confusing array of organizations occupy the space that is variably called “civil society” or the “NGO”, “charity”, “philanthropy”, “third”, or “public welfare” sector. These include organizations with strong connections to the Chinese state that self-identify as “NGOs” (e.g. GONGOs<sup>2</sup>), and organizations that would be defined as NGOs in many areas of the world, but in China are legally registered as businesses. When dealing with this complex ecosystem it is best to employ a broad, inclusive definition of “NGOs” - one that recognizes that in the Chinese context especially, delineations between state and non-state are even more “complex, blurred, and negotiated”<sup>3</sup> than in many other civil societies - and to take each of these organizations on a case-by case basis, taking note not just of their background and partners but also their internal working practices, aims, and outputs.

As will be discussed below, many Chinese NGOs have long been connected with international actors through funding, support, and partnerships and are engaged in various degrees of “internationalizing” (国际化). However very few have been “going out” (走出去 or 走向国际) which can be considered to be operating short or long-term projects abroad, or even having fixed overseas’ branch offices. This is partly to do with the immaturity of the sector and partly due to some of

<sup>2</sup> “GONGO” stands for Government Organized Non-Governmental Organizations.

<sup>3</sup> Taken from the now-defunct LSE Centre for Civil Society’s working definition of “civil society” <http://www.lse.ac.uk/CCS/home.aspx>

the sector's unique development characteristics. One such characteristic is the fact that both government and foreign actors have played very prominent roles in giving birth to modern Chinese civil society. In the early reform-era, grassroots Chinese NGOs relied on foreign support while the Chinese government chose to largely ignore them, instead directing support towards the formation of GONGOs. In recent years this has changed with government support – as well as support from newly-established domestic Chinese funding organizations – increasingly available to NGOs operating in mainstream areas<sup>4</sup>. Another characteristic to note is that many Chinese NGOs that lack a government background have been prevented from establishing a nationwide presence – something that has been a natural second step for NGOs in other countries prior to “going out”. This has come about through various restrictive policies including limits on establishing branch offices and fundraising.

Given the above, it could be argued that Chinese civil society has developed in ways that have not been conducive to it “going out”. However two points can be noted here. One, that the growth of Chinese civil society has been recent, and therefore many organizations have previously not had the resources or experience to enable them to operate outside of China's borders. Secondly, this recent growth has occurred at a time that gives Chinese NGOs technological, economic, and ideological resources that were unavailable to NGOs that, for example in the West, developed much earlier<sup>5</sup>.

In terms of numbers, according to official statistics at the end of 2014 there were just over 600,000 registered “social organizations” in China. This figure includes foundations as well as many organizations that would be defined as “GONGOs” outside of China. It also

does not include the large number of organizations—estimated to be over one million – that would be classed as NGOs outside of China but exist inside China by registering as a business or remaining unregistered. How many of these organizations are operating internationally?<sup>6</sup> According to 2012 Ministry of Civil Affairs statistics quoted in a 2013 article written by Huang Haoming<sup>7</sup>, there were 556 Chinese

## “Up to now, few Chinese NGOs have been ‘going out’”

NGOs that could be classed as “international or involved in international affairs” (国际及其他涉外组织类的社会组织)<sup>8</sup>. This represented just 0.11% of the 2012 total of 499,000 registered organizations. The same article gives data from the China Foundation Centre (itself a registered NGO) that shows that in October 2013, a total of 51 Chinese foundations operated international projects. This figure represents just 1.50% of the then total of 3399 foundations. Other figures include those given in an article written by academic and managing director of the World Future Foundation, Lu Bo, who says that as of August 31st, 2014, 0.9% of registered Chinese foundations were operating abroad and estimated that the figure would be about the same for Chinese NGOs<sup>9</sup>. Whichever figures one uses, it is clear that up to now, few Chinese NGOs have been “going out”.

### Existing literature

Given its recent emergence, existing literature on the topic is understandably scarce. Over the past few years a number of Chinese academics have begun to focus

<sup>4</sup> Although NGOs on the periphery, working in relatively sensitive areas, continue to rely on foreign support.

<sup>5</sup> Examples include social media and crowdsourcing, the acceptance that NGOs can play an important role in distributing international aid, and an increasingly globalized society and economy.

<sup>6</sup> Once again there are official statistics and non-official estimations because NGOs that are not legally registered are not included in official statistics.

<sup>7</sup> Huang Haoming is the Executive Director of CANGO, the Chinese Association for NGO Cooperation. See here for the article: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/articles/huang-haomings-strategies-for-the-internationalization-of-chinese-ngos/>

<sup>8</sup> The 556 figure includes both “international NGOs” (国际类社会组织) and “others involved in international affairs” (其他涉外组织类的社会组织). The second category includes organizations that work inside China but have funding or partnerships from overseas NGOs or development agencies; Chinese organizations that employ foreign staff; and Chinese NGOs that participate in trainings or meetings outside of China. If these organizations are taken out then the number of NGOs “going out” would be much lower than 556.

<sup>9</sup> Lu Bo's article summarizes his PhD thesis on the topic of Chinese foundations working abroad. It will be published on the CDB website in Chinese and English in Autumn 2015.

on topics related to Chinese NGOs expanding overseas. These include Professor Deng Guosheng from the School of Public Policy and Management at Tsinghua University who at the end of 2013 published a book called “The Strategy and Roadmap of Chinese NGO’s Internationalization” (中国民间组织国际化的战略与路径). In 2014 with then Tsinghua colleague Yang Yifeng, Deng also published an article looking at the participation of NGO’s from other countries in foreign aid<sup>10</sup>. His most recent work on the subject is an article called “Trends in the Overseas Philanthropy of Chinese Foundations”<sup>11</sup>. This focuses on the most active domestic Chinese foundations because Deng rightfully considers them the most important actors in Chinese NGOs “going out”. Other Chinese academics who have begun to look at this topic include Huang Haoming, the Executive Director of CANGO (the Chinese Association for NGO Cooperation), a GONGO that has played a leading role in promoting the internationalization of China’s NGOs. In 2015 Huang published a book called “Study on Strategy and Route of China’s NGO Internationalization” (社会组织走出去 - 国际化发展战略与路径研究) which includes comparative case studies of the US, UK, Brazil and Japan and recommendations for policy makers and NGOs. Other academics have focused on profiling China’s most internationally active GONGOs. These include two ex-Tsinghua professors (currently at Shantou University Law School): Professor Lai Yulin who has studied the CFPA’s involvement in providing aid to Africa<sup>12</sup> and Yang Yifeng who has written about the experience of the China Youth Development Foundation<sup>13</sup>. Elsewhere, Lu Bo (mentioned above) wrote his PhD thesis on the subject of Chinese foundations going overseas and

had an article published in the CASS 2015 Blue Book of Charity titled “Chinese Foundations “Go Out”: Current Situation, Trends, and Future Prospects” (中国基金会“走出去”:趋势、现状与前景). Academics outside of China have also begun to tackle this topic, also primarily focusing on Chinese NGOs and GONGOs engaged in Africa. Jennifer Hsu, Timothy Hildebrandt, and Reza Hasmath have recently published work on Chinese overseas aid in Ethiopia and Malawi, concluding that while Chinese GONGOs are playing a limited role, Chinese grassroots NGOs are having little impact<sup>14</sup>. Approaching the topic from a different angle, Professor Chen Jie at the University of Western Australia has also written extensively about Chinese civil society’s place in global civil society. Chen’s outputs include a 2012 book on transnational civil society’s impact on China and a 2010 article on the transnational environmental movement’s effects on the environmental movement inside China<sup>15</sup>.

Aside from academic efforts there have also been a number of research initiatives undertaken by Chinese and international NGOs. The China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA) began researching the topic to coincide with their own aspirations for “going out”. In December 2013 they hosted the “People’s Forum on International Social Responsibility” that marked the release of a number of research outputs<sup>16</sup>, including Deng Guosheng’s book (mentioned above) and two other books: “China’s International Social Responsibility and the Role of Chinese Overseas Enterprises” (中国国际社会责任与中资海外企业角色) by Zhong Hongwu, Zhang En, and Wei Xiuli; and “Strategic Study on China’s Foreign Aid and International Social Responsibility” (中国对外援助与

<sup>10</sup> “A Comparison of NGOs’ Participation Patterns in Developed Countries’ Foreign Aid and What Can Be Learnt from It”, *Comparative Economic & Social Systems*, 174: 224-232.

<sup>11</sup> “Trends in the Overseas Philanthropy of Chinese Foundations”, Indiana University Research Center for Chinese Politics & Business and the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. Available at [http://www.philanthropy.iupui.edu/files/file/p6\\_deng\\_guosheng\\_2.pdf](http://www.philanthropy.iupui.edu/files/file/p6_deng_guosheng_2.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Lai, Yulin, “NGOs’ engagement in foreign aid: China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation’s aid to Africa”, *International Forum*, 2013, 1:36-42.

<sup>13</sup> “China Youth Development Foundation’s internationalization experiences” in Deng et al. (2013): “Internationalization of NGOs in China, Strategies and Path”, *China Social Sciences Press*, 37-43

<sup>14</sup> Hildebrandt, Timothy and Hasmath, Reza, ‘Going Out’ or Staying in? The Expansion of Chinese NGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa (2015). Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2612694> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2612694>

<sup>15</sup> *Transnational Civil Society in China: Intrusion and Impact*, London: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited; “Transnational Environmental Movement: impacts on the green civil society in China”, *Journal of Contemporary China* (Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver), 19(65): 503-523.

<sup>16</sup> See here for CDB’s report on the Forum: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/articles/chinese-aid-abroad-the-peoples-forum-on-international-social-responsibility/>



国际责任的战略研究) by Liu Hongwu and Huang Meibo. The event was notable because previous discussions of China's role in international development have been dominated by the government. In contrast, at the CFPA Forum, alongside influential figures from government departments, members of Chinese and international NGOs, academia, and businesses all participated. Another example of a research initiative on "Chinese NGOs' going out" is that undertaken by Oxfam Hong Kong who have been researching the topic with domestic Chinese partners that include the non-profit Social Resources Institute and the consultancy firm Syntao. Together they have held a series of workshops and produced reports such as their March 2014 study "Exploring in the the 'Mist'" which details Chinese NGOs working on promoting responsible agricultural investment in Chinese overseas corporations. According to the report, it is the first ever research that has been done on Chinese NGOs that work on issues related to the actions of Chinese enterprises overseas.

## Analysis: Never Really "in"

### International partnerships and dialogues

The modern Chinese NGO sector has of course never been fully detached from global civil society or global issues. Foreign influence has played a key role in its development, with overseas funding and support important to early Chinese NGOs, and remaining a vital lifeline to NGOs that operate in peripheral areas today. Indeed, many Chinese GONGOs were set up precisely to access international funding that was made newly available to NGOs in the 1990's and 2000's. INGOs, foundations, development agencies, and intergovernmental organizations have all been present in China for a long time<sup>17</sup>. Multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, various UN agencies, and major foundations such as the Ford Foundation, have been present since the very earliest days of the reform-era. Currently it is estimated that there are several thousand INGOs and foreign foundations working in China, with the majority having first entered the country in the late 1990's and 2000's. Most have regular contact

with Chinese NGOs. Foreign businesses, many of whom have also been working in China for a long time, have also worked with many Chinese NGOs, exposing them (as well as Chinese businesses) to new Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices and facilitating access to projects and partners outside of China<sup>18</sup>.

Aside from transferring funds, knowledge, and new working practices, these foreign actors have established a network of partnerships with domestic Chinese NGOs that have enabled them to become involved in international alliances and dialogues. A good example is the EU-China NGO Twinning Exchange which since 2012 has organized exchanges between Chinese and European NGOs to build capacity, cooperation, networks, and understanding<sup>19</sup>. Another example is SWITCH-Asia which was formed by the European Commission in 2008 to encourage sustainable development in Asia. It includes a Chinese network with both NGO, GONGO and government partners. Some Chinese NGOs have even formed their own international networks. For example the China Civil Climate Action Network (CCAN), which is composed of fifteen Chinese environmental NGOs, and was formed in 2007. It is connected to the international Climate Action Network - a global alliance of environmental NGOs - and aims to build the capacity of China's environmental NGOs through holding training workshops and connecting them with international counterparts.

**“foreign actors have established a network of partnerships with domestic Chinese NGOs that have enabled them to become involved in international alliances and dialogues”**

Chinese NGOs have also increasingly participated in international talks. Many of these have been organized

<sup>17</sup> Estimates vary greatly. CDB's 2012 "Special Report: The Roles and Challenges of International NGOs in China's Development" has an analysis of some estimates on pp.9-11 see here: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/International-NGOs-in-China1.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> For example the China Women's Development Foundation worked through the Thai Chamber of Commerce and Japanese enterprises in China to assist victims of the Thai flood and Japan earthquake. See CFPA brochure.

<sup>19</sup> See here: <http://www.eu-china-twinning.org/>. The author of this article is involved in this program.

by the UN system with a significant example being the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women which was held in Beijing in 1995. Not only did this involve existing Chinese NGOs in international dialogue, it also proved to be a major growth catalyst for the NGO sector, with many new NGOs being formed during and immediately after the Conference after political and societal space had been opened up<sup>20</sup>. In particular, Chinese NGOs have been particularly active in international talks on environmental issues and climate change. A notable example that saw mass Chinese NGO involvement was the 2002 World Summit which was held in South Africa and saw members from several Chinese environmental NGOs attend. For some delegates it was their first experience abroad<sup>21</sup>.

One of the key players in this participation in international dialogues is the membership organization CANGO (China Association for NGO Cooperation). They were officially registered in 1993 and although technically a GONGO have a relatively high degree of independence and demonstrate strong support for Chinese grassroots NGOs. CANGO has a network of Chinese 120 Chinese NGOs and a stated goal of facilitating exchanges between INGOs and Chinese NGOs. According to their latest report by the end of 2013 they had established "good working relationships" with 176 INGOs and international multilateral agencies ("国外民间组织和国际多双边机构")<sup>22</sup>. CANGO is an active participant in UN talks, especially in the UN Climate Summit, and also has Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

### **Operating projects overseas**

Alongside sending representatives to participate in international dialogues, over the past decade a growing trickle of Chinese NGOs have also begun to operate projects overseas, with some even establishing permanent offices. At the forefront of this pioneering

expansion have been GONGOs or foundations with government backgrounds. One example is the China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF), which is also a GONGO but has a relatively high degree of independence from its oversight organization, the Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL). Since its establishment in 1989 it has had an international focus, forming an internationalization strategy as early as 1995<sup>23</sup>.



The opening of the 23rd Project Hope for Africa primary school, in September 2015 in Namibia.

In 2011 the CYDF expanded its Project Hope to Africa, and has now built schools in countries including Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, and Burundi<sup>24</sup>. Another example is the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA), which - while also being technically a GONGO - also has a relatively high degree of autonomy. At first the CFPA's international efforts focused on donations; raising money and material supplies in China that were then transferred to a foreign partner organization.

This was the case with their involvement in disaster relief work (outlined in the section below), for example donating supplies via the INGO Mercy Corps after the 2005 Asian Tsunami. The CFPA then began to donate to project-based activities and in 2008 began their first direct implementation of a project overseas.

<sup>20</sup> See CDB's 2015 Special Issue on Women's Organizations in China, available to download here: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/publications/cdb-special-issue-womens-organizations/>

<sup>21</sup> See Chen, J (2012) *Transnational Civil Society in China: Intrusion and Impact*, London: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited: p. 82

<sup>22</sup> See here: <http://www.cango.org/upload/files/Annual%20Report%202013.pdf>

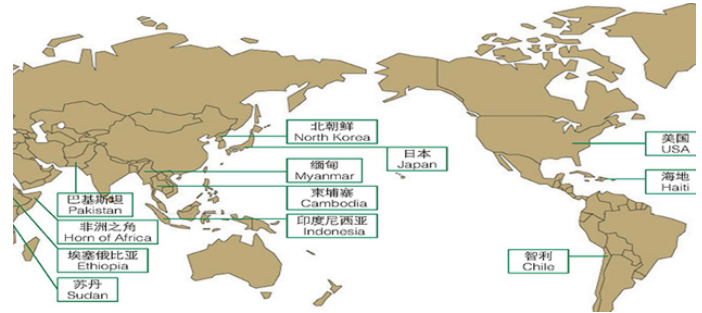
<sup>23</sup> See Deng (2014) p. 7 (cited with the authors permission).

<sup>24</sup> Project Hope has been running in China since 1989 and aims to improve access to education for children from poor rural families. See the CYDF Annual Report 2012 for a description of the expansion of the Project to Africa: <http://www.cydf.org.cn/uploadfile/2013/0902/20130902030915902.pdf>

This involved sending staff to manage the construction of the Abu-Ushar Friendship Hospital which was completed in 2011<sup>25</sup>. In 2009 the CFPA founded an International Development Department (IDD) and construction of more hospitals in Sudan followed with the CFPA establishing a permanent staff presence in Sudan in 2012<sup>26</sup>. In July 2015 the CFPA announced that it had managed to register an office in Myanmar as an international organization, with the local authorities. This became the CFPA's first officially registered overseas office<sup>27</sup>.

Although they now have a high degree of autonomy both the CYDF and CFPA have government backgrounds and retain strong government links. There are also NGOs that are more independent that have begun to operate overseas projects. The Global Environmental Institute (GEI), founded in 2004, is one of these<sup>28</sup>. GEI began working on sustainable rural development projects within China before initiating its first overseas projects in 2005 in Sri Lanka, cooperating with the local government on village biogas projects. Since 2007, alongside their renewable energy work, GEI began to also focus on Chinese overseas investments. One example of this is their work in Laos which focused on the Nam Ngum 5 hydropower project constructed by Chinese and local companies. Construction began on the dam in 2008 and GEI worked on mitigating the negative impacts on the local communities<sup>29</sup>. A second, smaller-scale example is Eco-Watch, a non-profit organization founded in 2006 in Kunming. They focus on promoting sustainable socio-economic rural development through research and working with technology companies. They have worked with organizations in Bangladesh to share experiences and disseminate technology, and are looking to work with more Global South countries in the future<sup>30</sup>. A third example of a non-GONGO organization that has

established projects overseas is the Amity Foundation. Since 2011 they have been working on biogas technology to Madagascar. In July 2015 they announced the opening of their first overseas "Service centre", with Qiu Zhonghui, the Secretary General of Amity, calling it a "*milestone on Amity's way towards internationalization and the friendly exchange between Africa and China*"<sup>31</sup>.



Map showing the CFPA's overseas aid on the CFPA website

Another type of Chinese NGO that has begun to operate projects abroad is organizations that were set up in China with a strong international focus. Two prominent examples include Morning Tears and Included. Morning Tears was founded in Xian by a Belgian national in 1998 to support the children of imprisoned people. On its website it describes itself as "*both a Chinese and international not for profit organization*". Since then it has expanded inside and outside of China. In 2005 an international coordinating body – the Morning Tears Alliance – was set up in Belgium to coordinate the country offices. As of 2015 Morning Tears has 11 offices set up in 9 countries with the international secretariat in Beijing. The non-profit Included has a similar story. It was set up in 2006 in Beijing to support migrant workers and now has a presence in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Kathmandu, Dhaka and London. It's Shanghai office is registered

<sup>25</sup> See: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/articles/the-sudan-china-abu-ushar-friendship-hospital-chinas-first-overseas-charitable-ngo-project/>

<sup>26</sup> Information from CFPA annual reports available to download here: <http://www.cfpa.org.cn/newList.cn?typeId=9f433ca1cc6f4310a74b06da506d7b18&p=1c626f8195104222b17f2d4505982ba5&p=e5218c11a30f4272a5a928382b0cf7ae>

<sup>27</sup> See the CDB news report on this event: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/news/first-overseas-office-of-cfpa-is-registered-in-myanmar/>

<sup>28</sup> See <http://www.geichina.org/>

<sup>29</sup> GEI have also made important contributions at the policy level, with MOFCOM's "Guidelines for Environmental Protection in Foreign Investment and Cooperation" being heavily based on GEI's recommendations. See here for an interview about this process: <http://www.internationalrivers.org/resources/interview-with-ren-peng-on-china-s-overseas-investment-guidelines-7943>

<sup>30</sup> From a presentation given in Hangzhou, September 2015, at the forum held by the Eu-China Twinning Exchange programme.

<sup>31</sup> See <http://www.amityfoundation.org/eng/amity-goes-africa>



with the local Civil Affairs Bureau and the organization in China has a partnership with the China Social Welfare Foundation and a charitable fund under the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA). Like Morning Tears they can be considered a hybrid Chinese-international NGO.

## “GEI began working on sustainable rural development projects within China before initiating its first overseas projects in 2005 in Sri Lanka”

### **Participation in humanitarian aid**

Alongside involvement in international dialogues and running projects overseas, Chinese NGOs have also been increasingly involved in humanitarian aid work outside of China's borders. Previously this was the sole preserve of the government, then, during the first decades of the reform era, GONGOs such as the China Red Cross and China Charity Federation began to get involved. This opened up space for more independent GONGOs (such as the CFPA), and those with non-government backgrounds (such as the Shenzhen-based One Foundation) to do overseas humanitarian work.

Prior to 2015 this was largely limited to the provision of material or financial aid and the CFPA again played a leading role. Their international humanitarian work started out in 2004 when they responded to the 2004 Asian tsunami<sup>32</sup>, donating \$5.3 million (USD) via Mercy Corps. Again working with Mercy Corps, the CFPA responded to 2005's Hurricane Katrina, carrying out a needs assessment and donating a small amount of aid. That same year they also worked with the INGO Islamic Relief Worldwide to bring aid to the victims of an earthquake in Pakistan, including sending a disaster investigation team, a needs assessment team, and material donations totaling RMB300,000. Since the watershed years of 2004/2005 the CFPA has responded to the 2010 Haiti earthquake (working with

the UN World Food Programme) and in the Philippines after 2013's Hurricane Haiyan (again with Mercy Corps). Aside from these CFPA initiatives, in 2013 Chinese NGOs also responded to the devastating Japan earthquake and tsunami. They included the CFPA again but also efforts from the Private Foundation Forum – a new alliance of 11 Chinese private foundations – who worked together to donate money to the reconstruction effort.

The trends described above shifted significantly with the relief effort following the April 2015 Nepal earthquake. In parallel with a strong Chinese government and GONGO response, many more Chinese NGOs responded (most estimates are around 30, including GONGOs<sup>33</sup>), at a faster rate, and in a more mature way, to an overseas disaster than ever before. Three types of Chinese “NGO” (including GONGOs and foundations) participated in the response. Firstly there were large foundations that had existing international partnerships. The three main organizations in this category were the Amity Foundation, which was already a member of the global ACT Alliance; the One Foundation, which had an existing partnership with Save the Children; and the CFPA, which again worked with Mercy Corps. These three organizations responded extremely quickly; the One Foundation for example convened a meeting just ten minutes after they received news of the earthquake, and the CFPA began mobilizing twenty minutes later<sup>34</sup>.

The second category of Chinese organization that was involved in Nepal were NGOs that had no established international partnerships and went to Nepal independently. A good example of this is the Lingshan Charitable Foundation (灵山慈善基金会) which partnered with monks in northern Nepal. Lingshan – a Buddhist faith-based organization founded in 2004 in Jiangsu – formed an alliance with the Suzhou-based Honghua Foundation on April 27th. Together they sent a six-man rescue team that arrived in Kathmandu on May 1st and returned to China on May 9th. Both Lingshan and Honghua mobilized volunteers to raise funds through China's rapidly expanding online-

<sup>32</sup> It is interesting to note that the tragic 2005 Asian tsunami was also crucial to the development of the One Foundation, one of China's most internationally active Foundations. Its founder Jet Li was influenced to establish the Foundation after witnessing the disaster first-hand.

<sup>33</sup> This figure is based on conversations with Chinese NGOs and INGO's that participated in the Nepal response.

<sup>34</sup> All information from CDB's reporting on the response. See here: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/tag/nepal-earthquake/>

fundraising platforms including Sina, Tencent, and Alipay.

The third type of Chinese organization that participated in the Nepal relief effort were those that worked behind the scenes to support the operations of the first two types. These included information-sharing organizations, coordinating mechanisms, and fundraising platforms. Two prominent examples of organizations that shared information were Zhuoming and Anping. Zhuoming (the Zhuoming Disaster Information Center, 卓明灾害信息服务中心) was set up as a volunteer organization after the 2008 Sichuan earthquake and started operating professionally after the 2010 Yushu earthquake.



Lingshan rescue team working in Kathmandu

Zhuoming specializes in processing disaster-related information and coordinating resources in a disaster response. They published an emergency report less than four hours after the Nepal earthquake struck and released a comprehensive brief on the earthquake and the rescue work just 24 hours later. Zhuoming also started recruiting volunteers through online social media right after the earthquake to update and

distribute information. Anping (the Anping Public Communication and Social Development Charitable Fund, 安平公共传播公益基金) aims to monitor the actions of Chinese non-profits while also promoting “good reporting” on the sector. It is funded by the CFPA and based at Peking University. Anping sent staff to Nepal to report on the activities of Chinese NGOs.

On the fundraising side, just hours after the earthquake, foundations began to set up accounts for their relief work on popular online fundraising platforms. Prominent example included Alipay, which raised 4,776,391.84RMB from 154146 donors (as of 21st August, 2015) with all money going to the One Foundation<sup>35</sup>; and Tencent which raised 23,010,102.4RMB from 279395 donors (as of 21st August, 2015) with the money going to a foundation of the donor's choice<sup>36</sup>. Through these platforms, as well as their own channels, the foundations involved were able to raise significant funds. As of May 8th the One Foundation had raised 14,240,000RMB from organizational donations and 11,570,000 from individual donors<sup>37</sup>; by May 22nd Amity had raised a total of 2,903,337.77RMB<sup>38</sup>; while the CFPA had already raised 3,802,889RMB by April 26th, the day after the earthquake struck<sup>39</sup>. These donation amounts may seem not too large when compared to fundraising after recent domestic disasters. Nevertheless they are notable for the speed in which they were initiated, the fact that they are for an overseas disaster, and their strong integration with technology and social media.

Alongside information-gathering and fundraising, coordinating mechanisms were also established, chief among them was the “Chinese NGO Coordinating Center for the 4.25 Nepal Earthquake” which was set up by the Disaster Relief Coordinating Alliance of Foundations (基金会救灾协调会). The Alliance was founded in 2013, ten days after the Ya'an earthquake by the CYDF, the CFPA, the Narada Foundation, the Tencent Foundation, and the One Foundation. After the Nepal earthquake they set up the Coordinating

<sup>35</sup> See <https://love.alipay.com/donate/itemDetail.htm?name=2015042520012742702>

<sup>36</sup> Choices included Amity, One Foundation, and the CFPA as well as other GONGOs. See [http://gongyi.qq.com/succor/jz\\_zt.htm?id=39](http://gongyi.qq.com/succor/jz_zt.htm?id=39)

<sup>37</sup> See <http://www.onefoundation.cn/index.php?m=article&a=show&id=818>

<sup>38</sup> See <http://www.amity.org.cn/article/view.aspx?id=8497>

<sup>39</sup> See <http://gongyi.sohu.com/20150427/n411966466.shtml>

Center with international organizations such as UNDP China, the Asia Foundation, and Save the Children.

## The Future: Challenges and Opportunities

The response to the Nepal earthquake represents a milestone for the development of the Chinese NGO sector. The strength and speed of the response shows how well resourced and professional some Chinese NGOs have become. The efficiency of the response – with rapid fundraising, needs assessments, and targeted supplies – shows a strategic, integrated and collaborative approach that contrasts with the sometimes chaotic participation of Chinese NGOs in previous disaster relief efforts within China.

Earthquakes of course also hold a special significance for the development of the sector. The 2008 Wenchuan earthquake has often been labeled a “catalyst” or “watershed” moment because it was a time of unprecedented mass NGO involvement in clear public view. At the time comparisons were made between the response at Wenchuan and the response after the devastating 1976 Tangshan earthquake when no NGOs responded (chiefly because there were none) and there was strict control of information. It’s therefore interesting to place Nepal on this earthquake trajectory as a further milestone in the growth and development of the sector. However it is a milestone with many caveats. Most importantly it is important to point out that the NGOs that were involved in Nepal and the work that they were involved in – the field of “disaster relief” – are not representative of the totality of Chinese civil society. Most Chinese NGOs – especially those that occupy the periphery of the sector because they deal with sensitive subjects – remain under-resourced, face significant pressures, and are unlikely to contemplate “going out” any time soon. Furthermore, as will be discussed below, in the future the external environment may become less conducive to growth. The positive developments that can be seen in Nepal may not be able to develop further and any momentum that has developed may fade. The legacy of Nepal depends very much on what happens in the

near future, and there are reasons to be both pessimistic and optimistic.

### Challenges

What obstacles do Chinese NGOs face in “going out”? As mentioned above, first of course is capacity. Most Chinese NGOs lack the resources available to the CFPA or the One Foundation. They lack organizational capacity, face significant funding issues, and have a shortage of qualified staff with foreign language skills and overseas experience. A major issue that impacts funding is public support. For fundraising organizations, questions still remain over how comfortable the Chinese public is with contributing funds for projects that are not related to a disaster. Increasingly this is not the case for money spent within China but remains a problem for raising funds to be spent overseas<sup>40</sup>. Chinese NGOs must therefore come up with ways to frame their overseas projects in ways that are acceptable to the Chinese government, funders, and public. This can include choosing projects that focus on issues that also have local relevance, steering clear of issues that remain politically sensitive, and framing involvement in language that is acceptable to everyone.

**“The response to the Nepal earthquake represents a milestone for the development of the Chinese NGO sector.”**

Linked with all of the above is the challenge of integrating into an established international system. Working in existing international alliances can enable Chinese NGOs to access funding, skills, and experience. However there is currently a lack of understanding of how international systems, rules, and mechanisms work. This was made clear in Nepal with Chinese media reports describing the Chinese NGOs there as “lonely islands” (孤島), detached from the international response<sup>41</sup>. Jock Baker – an independent consultant tasked by the Asia Foundation to assist and assess Chinese NGOs in Nepal – made this point

<sup>40</sup> This can especially be the case if the destination is economically developed or unfavorable to Chinese nationalist sentiment. Examples include the CFPA’s response to 2005’s Hurricane Katrina which was criticized by those who questioned whether a Chinese foundation should be directing resources to the US, and the relatively lukewarm response to 2013’s Hurricane Haiyan disaster in the Philippines, a country which China has several international disputes with.

<sup>41</sup> See: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/news/are-chinese-ngos-in-nepal-lonely-islands/>



about Sphere, an international set of principles and standards that apply to humanitarian work:

*“Awareness of international standards and systems like Sphere are relatively low. Chinese NGOs may know it on paper but they are not sure of how these can be put into practice. For example, our observations indicate that much of the assistance they are giving in Nepal is consistent with Sphere, they are not able to articulate what they are doing using the language of Sphere.”<sup>42</sup>*

Learning to co-operate is a related challenge. In his interview with CDB, Jock also pointed out that Chinese NGOs in Nepal had to get used to operating in an “NGO-rich” environment in which NGOs rather than government can take leading roles (Nepal has a strong civil society composed of both local and international NGOs). In the past, alliances that were formed between Chinese NGOs have been criticized for failing to materialize on the ground or for falling apart once the disaster relief period ends. The alliances that formed after Nepal may do the same. However it is also worth pointing out that many of the platforms and groupings that were active in the Nepal earthquake response – for example Zhuoming and the Disaster Relief Coordinating Alliance of Foundations – were the legacy of previous earthquakes.

Perhaps the greatest challenges are related to the current and future political and regulatory environment. There are many government actors that remain suspicious of NGOs, both Chinese and foreign<sup>43</sup>. This suspicion also extends overseas, with the belief that many local NGOs in foreign countries are “tools of Western influence”. The potential impact of future legislation looms over the entire sector. At the time of writing, the most likely related new law to be put in place first is the Overseas NGO Management Law, which was mentioned at the beginning of this article. It is currently in the drafting stage but its second draft was made publicly available in May 2015. The common consensus by many commentators – including most Chinese NGOs, overseas NGOs in China, and foreign businesses, academia and governments – was that although some kind of new regulation is required, what is being proposed will have negative impacts on many areas

including the growth of the Chinese NGO sector. Whatever its final form, the new Law is likely to have major impacts. Funding streams to many Chinese NGOs may be severed if INGOs are unable to register and if it becomes more difficult for INGOs to fund Chinese NGOs that are not officially registered with the MOCA. Not only will this stunt the growth of many Chinese NGOs but it will also impact those Chinese NGOs that – because most domestic funding is only available for domestic projects – use their international funding to focus on international issues.



The signing ceremony of the CFPA branch office in Nepal, August 2015

The new Law may also significantly impact opportunities for collaboration and knowledge exchange between Chinese and foreign organizations. Both Deng Guosheng and Huang Haoming identify interaction between foreign NGOs and Chinese NGOs as a key ingredient for internationalizing the Chinese NGO sector. For example in his 2014 article Deng finds a positive correlation between “exchanges” between INGOs and Chinese foundations and the overseas activities of Chinese foundations. For NGOs with limited funding, hiring foreign interns and foreign staff is an effective way to increase their capacity to expand overseas. This has been done by organizations mentioned in this article such as CANGO and GEI. If the Law is introduced, both cooperating on projects and employing foreign staff and volunteers, may become much more difficult. Due to administrative burdens written into the new Law, both foreign funding and cooperation in the future may be limited

<sup>42</sup> See: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/articles/learning-from-nepal-an-interview-with-humanitarian-relief-expert-jock-baker/#fn1-17010>

<sup>43</sup> This suspicious attitude was made clear recently with the failed Chinese proposal at the committee that deals with NGOs looking to participate in UN meetings, to withhold the names of countries that criticize NGOs at future UN meetings. See here for a media report of this incident: <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1697488/un-rejects-chinas-move-black-out-ngo-criticism?page=all>

to “elite” Chinese NGOs that deal with core service provision issues<sup>44</sup>. Unsurprisingly therefore, it will be the local NGOs that operate in peripheral areas that will lose out.

### **Opportunities**

Alongside the challenges listed above there are thankfully many more opportunities that allow us to perhaps predict an optimistic future for Chinese NGOs “going out”. Firstly, Nepal and other future disaster relief operations provide stepping-stones to further expansion. Following the CFPA’s establishment of a permanent presence in Africa and Myanmar, branch offices can be set up in Nepal allowing Chinese NGOs to participate in the strong civil society that was present there before the earthquake. At the time of writing this had just been done by the CFPA, who established their first overseas office in Kathmandu on August 13<sup>th</sup> 2015. They had applied to establish the office two months previously, several weeks after the earthquake struck<sup>45</sup>.

Both in the relief and recovery stages and possibly in the future, Nepal also offers Chinese NGOs opportunities to build trust with the Chinese government, the Chinese public, and global civil society. Because it aligns perfectly with Chinese foreign policy aims, there will likely be prolonged Chinese government involvement in the reconstruction phases. These same opportunities can also be found in the inevitable next emergency situation that will occur in the region. Each time they respond they build capacity, gain experience, and learn important lessons<sup>46</sup>. Significantly, disaster relief work - such as that being done in Nepal - is also an area that is guaranteed support from the government and, increasingly, the Chinese public. This presents an opportunity for Chinese NGOs to continue to work alongside government and GONGOs and in doing so, to build trust and demonstrate their added value, for example by helping Chinese government actors to connect with Nepali communities and Nepali and international NGOs. The fact that this takes place outside of

China’s borders may even mean that Chinese government actors can work with Chinese NGOs in ways and in fields that may be more difficult to do within China itself.

Related to the above, a large opportunity lies in reassessments of China’s current provision of overseas development aid. China’s traditional model relies on government-to-government interaction and focuses on infrastructure construction. This can be very effective but there is growing realization that it is somewhat one-dimensional. It is clear that some Chinese government actors are aware of the advantages that NGOs can bring, including greater efficiency, flexibility, creativity, and specialist expertise, particularly their ability to work at the community level. Connected with the above is a reassessment of China’s soft power. China has still not found the right soft power formula, especially when projecting it to the West or to China’s direct neighbors. It is also clear that some see increased Chinese involvement in overseas development as a potential solution. This can be seen recently with the proposed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which will aim to compete with existing multilateral development banks such as the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank. Chinese NGOs can take advantage of this momentum. An increase in the activities of Chinese NGOs overseas can project a new image of China that may be especially effective in the West where NGOs are an established presence and both Chinese business and Chinese government can suffer from reputation crises. The added value that Chinese NGOs would bring would also be welcomed by the influential international development sector. For example, as He Wen, Assistant General Secretary of the Amity Foundation, says:

*“A biogas digester, a practical equipment that turns organic waste into usable fuel, is very popular in rural China. We can take more useful technologies from rural China to meet demand in Africa. Western countries are quite developed and many of their skills may not fit into the African context quite well”*<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> See a related article here: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/articles/growing-elitism-in-the-chinese-ngo-sector/>

<sup>45</sup> See press release by the CFPA: <http://www.cfpa.org.cn/newDetail.cn?articleId=febbc3cb7ee84bf7a45541f8f1de65f9&p=1c626f8195104222b17f2d4505982ba5>

<sup>46</sup> For example, in the interview mentioned above, Jock Baker mentions that Chinese NGOs in Nepal discovered that they had good support from the local ethnic Chinese community, with Chinese-Nepali’s providing them with free meals, accommodation, and logistical support. This is an example of a lesson learnt that can be used to inform and improve future responses.

<sup>47</sup> See: [http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2013-04/29/content\\_16462082.htm](http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2013-04/29/content_16462082.htm)

The policy environment also includes a few positive areas as well. The Chinese Red Cross already receives government international aid funding and works closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Channeling this aid towards NGOs would not be such a great leap to make. According to the State Council's 2012 "Suggestions for Improving the Work of the Chinese Red Cross" (国务院关于促进红十字事业发展的意见), "international humanitarian relief and non-governmental diplomacy" are one of the five responsibilities of Chinese Red Cross. There is already discussion at MOFCOM (The Ministry of Commerce) and MOCA to include non-governmental actors in existing regulations that govern Chinese foreign aid, at the same time also giving them access to incentives such as tax breaks. The CFPA has already been in discussions with MOFCOM and the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) to cooperate to provide joint aid to both Africa and Southeast Asia<sup>48</sup>. Government rhetoric has also touched upon this. For example President Xi Jinping's speech to the 2nd China-Africa People's Forum talked about "people to people" exchanges being key to a more equal partnership. Currently this refers to GONGOs, but again it represents a trend away from the government monopolization of international development and in the future could feasibly include more independent NGOs.

Other opportunities relate to the fact that within the government there are certain actors that can act as allies to NGOs looking to work abroad. As mentioned above there are already existing government bodies set up to promote NGOs abroad. Examples include the China NGO Network for International Exchanges (中

国民间组织国际交流促进会) and the NGO forums that were recently established to run parallel to the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Although again, in reality "NGO" usually equates to "GONGO" for these actors, there is always the possibility that they will become more inclusive in the future. Within China there are also certain Professional Supervisory Units (PSU, 主管单位) – the government bodies in charge of supervising NGOs – that are known to be open to internationalizing. One example is the State Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development which has helped the CFPA to work in Africa by solving government bureaucratic hurdles<sup>49</sup>. Another example is the Central Committee of the China Youth League (CCCYL) – the PSU of the CYDF – which has assisted the CYDF in developing its Project Hope in Africa by strengthening their relationships with Chinese embassies in Africa<sup>50</sup>. Significant opportunities also lie in forming stronger relationships with the business sector. Chinese businesses are increasingly aware of the advantages of doing CSR work and assessing and mitigating social and environmental impacts. They are therefore increasingly interested in cooperating with NGOs<sup>51</sup>. In China itself, foreign businesses have helped Chinese GONGOs and NGOs to work abroad. For example the China Women's Development Foundation (a GONGO) worked with the Thai Chamber of Commerce to raise money from Thai businesses in China to assist in disaster relief work in Thailand<sup>52</sup>. As Chinese businesses have continued to expand overseas, they are gradually learning how to negate some of their negative impacts. Even the large enterprises (SOEs) that have been at the forefront of this expansion and do not have a great record of accountability and dealing with environmental and

<sup>48</sup> See [http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2013-12/17/content\\_17178063.htm](http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2013-12/17/content_17178063.htm)

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Wu Peng and (伍鹏) and Wu Shujun (吴淑君) of the CFPA's International Development Department (on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2014) in the CFPA Handbook "Chinese grassroots NGOs 'go out'" (中国民间组织走出去手册) available to download here: <http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.org.cn/news-17581.html>

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Yan Shi (严石) of the CYDF in the CFPA handbook (see above).

<sup>51</sup> See for example the new CDB report on Chinese businesses and NGOs here [http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.org.cn/service/action/topica.php?topic\\_id=102](http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.org.cn/service/action/topica.php?topic_id=102) and English-language translations here: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/tag/ngo-business-partnerships/>

<sup>52</sup> CFPA handbook (see above) p.14.



social impacts, are beginning to run CSR projects<sup>53</sup>. Private companies remain particularly dynamic in this field, for example the rapidly expanding Hainan Airlines. One year after Hainan Airlines opened up a new route to Angola they began funding work to cure people suffering from cataracts with their Chief Executive Li Xianhua saying *"we also need to shoulder more responsibility and give back to local people."*<sup>54</sup>

The added scrutiny that Chinese companies can receive when they work overseas can also make them become more proactive in being socially and environmentally responsible. There is therefore a great opportunity for Chinese NGOs to assist Chinese businesses in ameliorating the negative outcomes of their own "going out"<sup>55</sup>. In the future this can feed back into their investments within China as well<sup>56</sup>. Previous experience in Africa and Southeast Asia has shown that while NGOs can oppose Chinese investment, they can also help to assist it in fulfilling new commitments brought about by shifts in social attitudes and domestic and international policies. NGOs can inform Chinese businesses about risks and impacts, and can engage with local NGOs and communities. New policies and guidelines are also now available as tools for NGOs to use to make Chinese overseas investment more accountable. Some of these have emerged organically from the business sector while others have come from government, for example the 2013 "Guidelines for Environmental Protection in Foreign Investment and Cooperation" put in place by MOFCOM (with input from GEI). There are also those put in place by NGOs themselves, such as the Green Banking Innovation Awards, which aim to encourage Chinese banks to only make loans available to environmentally friendly investments.

Finally, there is also increasing public awareness and support for the Chinese NGO sector that can

significantly enhance the ability of Chinese NGOs to expand overseas. As mentioned above, many Chinese NGOs face funding, personnel, and skills deficiencies. However, in certain areas this is beginning to improve. Over the past decade many new Chinese foundations have become established, opening new funding channels. Society has become significantly more aware of the sector as information channels multiply, social

### **"Significant opportunities also lie in forming stronger relationships with the business sector"**

attitudes shift, society diversifies, and government becomes, in some areas, more receptive. The sector is beginning to become integrated with the education and business sectors. Chinese students can now choose to take non-profit management courses at university<sup>57</sup>. More and more employers now recognize the value of 'volunteering' and 'NGO-work' on an applicant's CV. There are also significant new capacity-building initiatives in place, implemented by government, NGOs, INGOs, and intergovernmental organizations. Many of these were mentioned above, such as the *EU-China NGO Twinning Program*. Another example is the recent CFPA-funded project which saw a CDB researcher (Guo Ting) work with two other researchers to produce a 115-page handbook titled "Chinese grassroots NGOs 'go out'" (中国民间组织走出去手册)<sup>58</sup>. The handbook contains detailed information about the procedures for Chinese NGOs looking to work abroad, including how to register with the Chinese and host country's government, how to operate projects in different countries, how to recruit and improve the skills of staff in preparation for

<sup>53</sup> For example the China National Petroleum Corporation, which has huge overseas investment, is beginning to start CSR projects overseas. See here for their 2014 CSR report (in English): [http://csr.cnpc.com.cn/csr/xhtml/PageAssets/2014\\_CSR\\_Report.pdf](http://csr.cnpc.com.cn/csr/xhtml/PageAssets/2014_CSR_Report.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> [http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2013-04/29/content\\_16462082.htm](http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2013-04/29/content_16462082.htm)

<sup>55</sup> Go to <http://gongyi.sina.com.cn/gyzx/2011-05-10/155626258.html>

<sup>56</sup> As Jin Jiamen, head of GEI, says "Chinese firms overseas are part of China's international image, so they get more attention and pressure than they do at home. It makes them more motivated to live up to their environmental and social responsibilities, so we aim to start overseas, then bring those experiences back home, to help companies deal with domestic problems." (<https://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/7292-How-NGOs-can-help-Chinese-firms-do-better-overseas>)

<sup>57</sup> For example, this course at Renmin University: <http://www.rdyjs.cn/ZGZZX/6582.html>

<sup>58</sup> The handbook can be downloaded here: <http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.org.cn/news-17581.html>

“going out”, and how to raise and manage funds for overseas projects.

## Conclusions

The future prospects for Chinese NGOs operating on the international stage remain uncertain. They ultimately depend on a large number of factors, many of them political, both domestic and international. However, thankfully, as can be seen above, there are more reasons to be optimistic than pessimistic. Domestically, over the past decade the sector has developed and matured. Many capacities have become significantly enhanced. Chinese society, business, and government have all, broadly speaking, become more supportive. It is clear however that all three need to learn to trust and value NGOs more.

This is especially apparent given current and near-future developments. In terms of economic trends, overseas Chinese investment is now entering a new phase with the Xi-Li administrations’ “Belt and Road Initiative” (一带一路). This will inevitably create many potential new social and environmental impacts. Failing to allow NGOs to assist in ameliorating these new problems would be the repetition of a mistake already made elsewhere. In terms of international relations, Chinese soft power has ultimately failed to be as effective as many in power hoped. In certain areas and in certain situations NGOs can add valuable new dimensions to China’s soft power initiative. Right now it would be naive to assume that any Chinese government or business relationship with NGOs overseas – both international and Chinese – would differ from current domestic approaches. For example, both will be more comfortable working with service-provision organizations than with advocacy or rights-based organizations. However, this would still represent progress.

The international development sector should also fully support the future overseas expansion of Chinese NGOs. There is very little to lose. The existential dilemmas that are being discussed right now in the international development sector show that it is crying out for new skills and approaches to help tackle global problems. After the Nepal earthquake, Indian NGOs worked alongside Chinese NGOs. Both found themselves in a similar position: having built up their capacity by responding to domestic disasters, the Nepal earthquake represented their largest ever response outside of their own borders. Not only is this

significant for Sino-Indian relations, especially at the “people-to-people” level, it is also positive for the development of a truly global civil society. The integration of the civil societies of the world’s two largest countries – representing a third of the world’s population – into existing global civil society would help to rectify many imbalances. It remains a long way off but Indian and Chinese NGOs working alongside each other in Nepal is a possible glimpse of a positive future.

Unfortunately, this positive “glimpse” comes at a time when forecasts of the future of domestic Chinese civil society are anything but positive. However, the sector has experienced many ups and downs before, with phases of growth followed by periods of retraction and “springs” followed by “winters”. Right now it appears that the climate is cooling. In part, this pessimistic assessment results from analyses of the impacts of upcoming legislation on overseas NGOs in China. Hopefully the activities of China’s own overseas NGOs can demonstrate the many positive contributions that a vibrant, diverse and connected international civil society can bring to China.

# Strategies for the Internationalization of Chinese NGOs: A Study by Huang Haoming



by Huang Haoming, Executive Director of CANGO<sup>1</sup>  
Translated by Zhao Chen  
Edited by CDB staff

China has become the world's second largest economy. Alongside the development of China's market economy and 'going out' strategy, Chinese economic enterprises have internationalized rapidly. However, the internationalization of Chinese NGOs<sup>2</sup> remains rudimentary. Internationalizing China's NGOs can facilitate a better understanding of the laws, policies, culture, communities, and religions of different countries. It can help Chinese organizations to understand the situation of other countries' NGOs and establish more partnerships with international organizations. Not only will this enable the development of China's domestic NGO sector but it will also transmit information and support to China's internationalizing business sector. Furthermore, the internationalization of NGOs also contributes to national diplomacy by improving interactions, trust, and co-operations between Chinese people and people from other nations. Through doing this is can help to answer the development conundrum posed by Xi

Jinping at a press conference after the 18th Party Congress: "how can China better understand the world, and how can the world better understand China". ("如何让中国更加了解世界, 让世界更加了解中国")

## Defining the Internationalization of NGOs

There is no clear definition of NGOs' internationalization. There are some similarities shared with the internationalization of business corporations. For example they are both politically and financially independent from the national government, they both have transnational operations, and they both establish headquarters. However the nature of these two kinds of institutions is different: NGOs are non-profit, working on public interest issues on behalf of the international community<sup>3</sup>. There are also similar strategies between an NGO's internationalization and a businesses' internationalization. Firstly, they operate on the international level, mainly developing projects based around the international community. Secondly, they have internationalized their organizational structure, which includes internationalizing their finance, human resources, and management. Once again, there are also many differences. These include different stakeholders, product and service models, influence exerted by their consumers, professionalism, and economic and cultural values<sup>4</sup>.

## Models of NGO's internationalization

There are various models that describe the internationalization of an NGO. The first model depicts how NGOs that are established on the national level develop gradually into regional and international

<sup>1</sup> This article originally appeared in Chinese in the CDB's Winter 2013 Quarterly. The English translation was published online here: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/articles/huang-haomings-strategies-for-the-internationalization-of-chinese-ngos/>

<sup>2</sup> The author refers to "social organizations" (社会组织) throughout this article, not "NGOs". By doing so he is referring to organizations that are registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs. We have translated the term as "NGOs".

<sup>3</sup> S. Hobb, Global Challenge to Statehood: The Increasingly Important Role of NGO", 5, Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies, 1997, pp 191-207.

<sup>4</sup> 黄浩明:非营利组织战略管理[M].北京:中国人民大学出版社, 2003.4-5



organizations. Following the influence of the globalizing economy, these NGOs set up headquarters in their home countries, and then branch out into other countries and regions. Another model focuses on the fact that NGOs establish partnerships with international organizations and local civil society, participating in international affairs and facilitating the internationalization of their organization. A third model is that NGOs operate projects and establish administrative offices overseas, localizing their management system. Finally another model is that NGOs expand their international co-operation partnerships by conducting regional and international research.

To summarize, these four models explain how by taking advantage of international networks and co-operations, the localization of professional talent, and the participation in international affairs, NGOs can internationalize, break free of the political influence of developed nations and enhance civil society's participation in international affairs.

## The Current Situation of Chinese NGOs' Internationalization

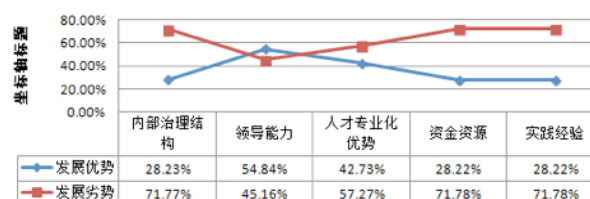
Chinese NGOs have rarely participated in international affairs. According to a 2012 statistical report on the development of social services published by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, 556 Chinese NGOs were involved in international affairs. This represented just 0.11% of the total of 499,000 registered NGOs in China (called "social organizations", 社会组织). Of these 556 NGOs, 499 were Social Associations (社会团体), 49 were Civil Non-enterprise Institutions (民办非企业单位), and 8 were foundations (基金会). These figures respectively counted for 0.18%, 0.22%, and 0.26% of the total amount of these types of organization in 2012. According to data from the China Foundation Centre, as of the 7th October 2013 China had 51 foundations that ran international projects, just 1.50% of a total of 3399 foundations. This included 34 public foundations (2.49% of the total of 1368), and 17 non-public fundraising foundations (0.84% of the total of 2013).

The participation of Chinese NGO's in international affairs can be said to display four features: 1) Chinese NGOs have started engaging in international humanitarian aid; 2) Chinese NGOs have actively expressed their voices through direct membership in

international NGOs, establishing networks between local and overseas NGOs and through participating in international affairs through co-operative projects; 3) Chinese NGO have strengthened co-operation with NGOs in developing countries; and 4) Chinese NGOs have actively cooperated with businesses to participate in international aid-giving.

**“By taking advantage of international networks and co-operations, the localization of professional talent, and the participation in international affairs, NGOs can internationalize, break free of the political influence of developed nations and enhance civil society's participation in international affairs.”**

The first part of our survey looked at the “external environment” of Chinese NGOs' internationalization. It focused on 11 areas. According to the responses we can see that the opportunities for developing Chinese NGO's internationalization can be described as “political environment”, “economic environment”, “cultural environment”, “international organizations”, “international environment” and “public attitudes”. The challenges were described as “legal environment”, “policy environment”, “international relations”, “foreign organizations”, and “localized partnerships”. According to the responses, the strengths outweigh the challenges. We also analyzed the “internal environment” of Chinese NGOs' internationalization. As the chart below shows, five indicators represented weaknesses: “internal management system”, “leadership”, “professional staff”, “financial resources”, and “international experience” [listed in order of appearance in the chart below].



All five were described as deficiencies. This reflects the overall development of Chinese NGOs, and the results are echoed in Professor Wang Ming's book “社会组织纲论”.

### **Main hurdles to internationalization**

With the rapid growth of the Chinese economy, the Chinese state has accomplished great diplomatic achievements and Chinese businesses have successfully followed their ‘going out’ strategy. However, the effective participation of China's NGO's in this ‘soft power’ initiative has encountered five major hurdles:

- the dual management system constrains the development of NGO's internationalization;
- the lack of policy impedes social organizations, private non-enterprise, and foundations from establishing overseas offices or branches. The relevant approval processes and methods are also lacking;
- narrow ideas, small scope, and insufficient funding limit Chinese NGO's participation in international affairs.
- there is a shortage of professional staff;
- governmental funding of Chinese NGOs is insufficient.

## **Strategies, Co-operation Models, and Priorities of Chinese NGOs' Internationalization**

### **Analysis of strategies**

According to the results from our survey, there are four feasible strategies for internationalizing Chinese NGOs:

- strengthen their co-operation and exchange with overseas NGOs. Two kinds of overseas NGOs are highlighted in this process: firstly, Chinese NGOs establish distance partnerships with local overseas NGOs (that remain in their country of origin), developing exchange programs and co-operations with them; secondly, Chinese NGOs co-operate with overseas NGOs that operate in China;
- participate in the UN multilateral system;
- participate in international conferences. Chinese NGO's participation in international conferences creates opportunities for them to get involved in

- activities held by international organizations and overseas NGOs;
- participate in international aid operations.

### **Analysis of cooperation models**

Based on those four strategies proposed above, five co-operation models are suggested:

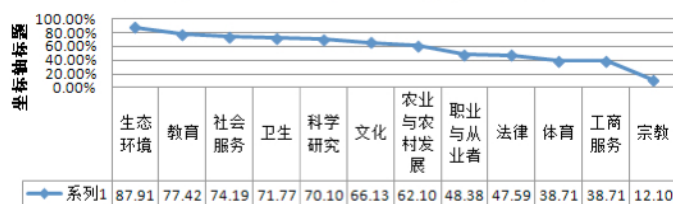
- ‘Local partnership’ [属地伙伴] model: Chinese NGOs establish long-term partnerships with local overseas NGOs [in their country of origin] which supports the internationalization of the Chinese NGO.
- ‘NGO operated, Government funded’ [民办官助] model: Chinese NGOs run programs overseas that the government supports through overseas aid funding.
- ‘NGO-enterprise co-operation’ [社办联企] model: NGO run projects and then co-operate with internationalized Chinese enterprise, using networks with the international community, local NGO, and communities to achieve a “win-win” outcome.
- ‘Borrowing the boat to go to sea’ [借船出海] model: Chinese NGOs develop themselves by learning from the experiences and networks acquired from existing partnerships with international NGOs and UN multilateral organizations.
- ‘NGO-Media co-operation’ [社媒合作] model: through media, especially new media, Chinese NGOs gain international vision, which advances their ‘going out’ strategy.

### **Analysis of priorities**

We asked those who took part in our survey about which type of projects they would list as “priorities” to work on overseas: “business service”, “agricultural and rural development”, “scientific research”, “education”, “sanitation”, “culture”, “sports”, “environment”, “social service”, “law”, “religion”, and “employment”. The results were encouraging and seven types of work received over 60% of support (listed in order of highest response): ecological environment, education, social service, sanitation, scientific research, culture, and agricultural and rural development. The five types of work that received less than 60% of support were (listed in order of highest response): employment-supporting, law, sports, business service and religion. Although “social service” [社会服务] achieved a rate of 74.19%, it is difficult to define what constitutes

“social service”. Therefore, our research team suggested that more attention should be paid on facilitating internationalization for organizations working on environment, education, health, scientific research, culture and agricultural and rural development.

图3：我国社会组织国际化战略“优先性”分析图



## Policy Recommendations for Chinese NGOs' Internationalization

The internationalization of Chinese NGOs is a significant component of Chinese soft power, and a long-term goal for those Chinese organizations' that already participate in giving foreign aid. To achieve this not only requires the consideration of future long-term policy and legislation, but also research on current policies. We make the following three recommendations:

### Recommendations on long-term policy and legislation

From a long-term strategic point of view, we need to consider legislating for Chinese NGO's participation in foreign aid. As soon as possible the Ministry of Commerce, along with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, the International Department, Ministry of Civil Affairs, and other Party and government offices, should formulate specific laws and regulations for Chinese NGOs to participate in foreign aid. We need to develop a legal foundation for internationalizing Chinese NGOs to ensure that they receive legal protection when they 'go out'.

Coordinating organizations should also be established at the ministerial level to internationalize Chinese NGOs. The current coordinating system for foreign aid at the ministerial level can be used. Special offices should be set up at the Ministry of Civil Affairs that coordinate with the Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Civil Affairs, the International Department, Ministry of Human

Resources and Social Security, Ministry of Finance, the National Tax Administration, State Administration of Foreign Exchange, and the General Administration of Customs.

NGO internationalization should be further strengthened by policy research, high-level planning, and national-level comparative studies, using social science research to guide policy theories. The government can assign academics and national think tanks to study how to adopt suitable strategies. Policy mechanisms related to the government's current outsourcing of social services to domestic NGOs should also be studied. In the spirit of the guiding opinions issued by the General Office of the State Council, the Ministry of Commerce should take the lead to cooperate with the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Civil Affairs, the National Development and Reform Commission, and other government organizations to establish a service-contracting system for China's foreign aid.

### **“We need to consider legislating for Chinese NGO's participation in foreign aid.”**

Long-term plans for NGO's internationalization should be formulated. Special funds should be set up within future national foreign aid budgets to support Chinese NGOs and assist them in running projects overseas. A co-funded model between government and non-government can be used. NGOs can operate the projects while the government can work as a supervisory agency, assisting in financial management and ensuring funds are used correctly.

### Policy recommendations for near-future work

Articles about NGO participation in foreign aid should be added into China's "Regulations on the Management of Foreign Aid", enabling Chinese NGOs to operate by rules and regulations that better develop their internationalization and forge a "NGO-Operated, Government-funded" model. The Ministry of Commerce should establish a special agency to contact with foreign aid and draft new rules and regulations for NGOs to take part in foreign aid, building up a raft of mechanisms for cooperation, exchange, and communication.



The Ministry of Civil Affairs should delegate power for authorizing an NGO's participation in overseas aid to the management board of the NGO or to a mechanism that has been established by that board (the NGO should still submit documents for filing with MOCA and its professional supervisory unit). MOCA should also formulate policies, and improve existing rules and regulations for overseas NGO working in China to encourage co-operation between local Chinese NGOs and overseas NGOs in China. This cooperation will form a component of the strategic alliances and support systems for the internationalization of Chinese NGOs.

### **“The State Administration of Foreign Exchange should simplify the procedure of donating funds and reduce the approvals required for exchange-rate management for NGOs”**

Elsewhere, the State Administration of Foreign Exchange should simplify the procedure of donating funds and reduce the approvals required for exchange-rate management for NGOs that are internationalizing. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security should give the power to establish salary pay scales to an internationalizing NGO's management board. Finally, the State Administration of Taxation should be advised to cut individual income tax for NGO staff, treating their income the same as the income of diplomatic staff. This will reduce double taxation and encourage NGOs to internationalize.

### **Recommendations for NGOs**

The internal governance structure of NGOs should be standardized and strategic research for NGOs' participation in international affairs should be strengthened. Opportunities and challenges encountered in the process of an NGO's internationalization should be analyzed according to China's own circumstances and feasible development solutions should be proposed. These should enable Chinese NGOs to integrate into the overall framework of China's diplomacy, and thereby improve the projection of Chinese soft power.

The capacity of NGOs' to participate in internationalization should be enhanced through capacity-building measures. Utilizing funding from governmental service contracting, a group of outstanding NGOs can be selected for fast-track internationalization. This group should be encouraged to develop their international communication, humanitarian aid, and human resource management skills, and thus gradually expand their scope and gain experience. A group of newly-established non-public fundraising foundations should also be encouraged to develop international exchanges and cooperative projects. At the same time they should also compete to gain funding and support from government sources.

NGOs' human resources should be strengthened and the overall quality of personnel should be enhanced. NGOs should take appropriate measures to improve staff salaries and equip them with the necessary knowledge on foreign affairs, communication, presentation, and social activities. This can be further improved through participation in international exchange programs. NGOs' capacity-building measures should also be developed to guarantee their legitimacy, transparency, and accountability. Special focus should be given to their management, creation and innovation, and implementation and sustainability capacities.

Chinese NGOs should be encouraged and supported to become members of international organizations, and to expand their networks and co-operations with established international organizations, and forge exchange and communication relationships with NGOs in developed and developing countries. Three aspects should be considered: first of all, lessons should be learned from the experience of NGOs in developing countries; secondly, in order to improve research, the historical experience of expanding and developing NGO sectors within developing countries should be drawn upon, especially Asian countries like the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka, and former socialist Eastern European countries; thirdly, Chinese participants should join international and regional NGO alliances and the committees and working groups of international organizations and international NGOs. Think-tanks and coordinating organizations should be established to offer more advice and services to the management departments of national NGOs. Research should be developed to study cultural differences, development strategies, NGO's self- and mutual-regulation, and development trajectories.

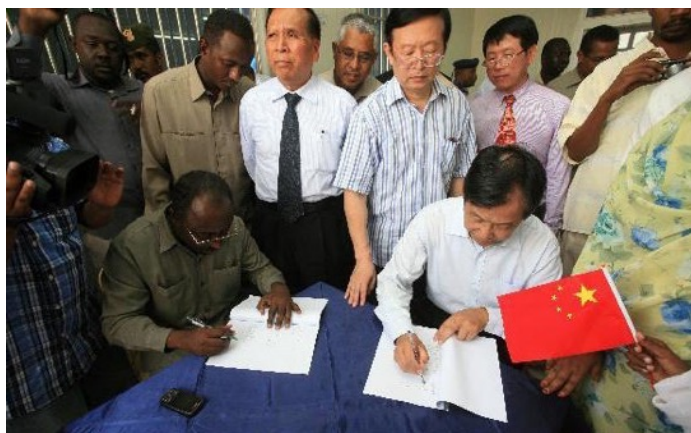
Overall, the successful internationalization of Chinese NGOs requires both support from government, business, society, international NGOs and international organizations, as well as self-development within NGOs through mutual learning, cooperation through exchanges, and development through competition. Only then will we see Chinese NGOs playing a significant role in international affairs and contributing to the advance of Chinese soft power.

# The China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation Internationalizes

By Wang Hui<sup>1</sup>

Translated by Bryan Davis

Reviewed by Lizzie Fulton



In the 1980s and 1990s, China was a leading recipient of international aid but that is slowly beginning to change with China's rapid development over the last 30 years. In the past decade, the Chinese government, at the central and provincial levels, and companies have begun providing more assistance to developing countries, mostly in the form of loans, trade deals, and investment. Up to now, Chinese GONGOs and NGOs have not played much of a role in China's foreign aid program, but the case of the CFPA shows that this is slowly starting to change.

In 2004, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (hereafter, CFPA, 中国扶贫基金会) began to shift its efforts to the entire world, proposing an "internationalization" development strategy. After careful deliberation, this strategy became the CFPA's new direction. What exactly does "internationalization" mean? In the words of He Daofeng, the CFPA's Deputy Director, it means that aid recipients, aid providers, and aid ideals and methods, be viewed from an international perspective, and that the CFPA's poverty relief work be expanded overseas. Mr. He believes that this strategy is closely related to facilitating China's economic development

and growing role in the global community, as well as the international community's changing expectations regarding the role China will play as a major power.

Mr. He explains, when a country's per capita annual income reaches 3000 USD, it generally marks what economists call the "Lewis Point" (the transition from labor excess to labor shortage). At this point, a country's labor cost rises, and its demographic advantage declines, thereby forcing local companies to internationalize. In this transition, aid organizations should also internationalize their resources and methods.

Moreover, as a country's economy develops, there is a large rise in donations from companies, which in turn leads to a demand from companies for internationalizing philanthropy. China's transition from an aid-receiving country to an aid-providing country has brought about new expectations of China from the global community. "You cannot ignore the world's suffering. You cannot turn a blind eye to African refugees. You cannot ignore the problems of the world!" Mr. He says with passion. "With these kinds of expectations, we had to respond, otherwise China could not take its place as a major power." Changes in the outside world led to corresponding changes in the CFPA. Our 20 years of experience allowed us to respond effectively to these new demands, Mr. He noted.

CFPA, however, was very cautious about implementing its internationalization strategy in the early stages, when it had no experience to draw from. Mr. He recalls that when CFPA first began working in international aid, it always worked with international organizations in the hope of accumulating international experience. It was extremely cautious, concerned that any problems might result in bad press that would destroy its international work before it had really begun.

<sup>1</sup> This article originally appeared in Chinese in the CDB's Spring 2010 Quarterly. The English translation was published online in 2011 here: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/articles/the-china-foundation-for-poverty-alleviation-internationalizes/>



After 2005, CFPA began working with Mercy Corps and other international aid organizations, providing emergency supplies and medicines to help tsunami-affected areas in India, the US in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and areas affected by the earthquake in Pakistan. In the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake, the CFPA raised RMB 2 million for the UN recovery effort in Haiti.

Criticism from the outside has also made it difficult for the CFPA to internationalize. People ask why is it that, even while China itself still has serious poverty, CFPA is so eager to cast its gaze to the world at large? In 2005, at the same time that CFPA was extending a helping hand to the Katrina disaster in the US, people called to complain, “What’s wrong with you? You’re ignoring problems at home. Even the government isn’t getting involved [with aid for Katrina]. What are you doing offering help?”

Mr. He explains, as a country develops, there are continual changes in the consciousness of the nation and its people. Different stages of development give rise to different opinions, which is to be expected. He even recommends that his employees record these complaints and criticisms and listen to them from time to time to observe the changes in China’s national identity and consciousness.

While the CFPA itself has had repeated internal debates over the same issues, Mr. He recalls, “discussion, experimentation, and progress remain our core values, and we also maintain an atmosphere that is open, transparent, and conducive to learning.” Thus, in the end, everyone was able to reach an understanding. At CFPA’s 2009 annual meeting, Mr. He even addressed the entire staff in a report on “how to meet the challenges posed by internationalization”. “It’s a lot better now. We don’t get abusive phone calls anymore,” He Daofeng added.

## Sudan as a Turning Point

Exploring its capabilities by providing early-stage emergency assistance to disaster-affected areas around the world allowed the Fund to gain some international experience. But Mr. He believes that it was not until October 2009, when CFPA completed its onsite survey in Sudan, that its “internationalization” really began. “CFPA went through five or six years of trial programs, but only now is it at a stage where we are ready to establish a real presence overseas.”

The CFPA has used its work in Sudan as the starting point for further aid work in Africa. It plans to establish 13 hospitals for women and children to lower the maternal and infant mortality rates. At present, the first batch of supplies has already been shipped from China and CFPA is preparing for construction of its first hospital.

**“It was not until October 2009, when CFPA completed its onsite survey in Sudan, that its ‘internationalization’ really began”**

The maternal death rate in Sudan, Mr. He explained, is 1,300 deaths for every 100,000 births, far higher than China’s 30 deaths for every 100,000 births. Even in the poorest areas of Tibet, the maternal death rate is only about 100 for every 100,000 births. For pregnant women in Sudan, giving birth is literally like knocking on death’s door.

“In the past three years, there have been no maternal deaths in any of the 12 counties where CFPA has projects in China.” CFPA would like to take the lessons from the “120 actions for mother-child safety” project carried out in China and apply them in Sudan and other countries that lack medical resources and hygienic facilities, in its effort to lower maternal and infant mortality rates.

Of course, given that there is a difference between the medical resources available in China and Sudan, the methods that CFPA uses in China will differ somewhat from those used in Sudan. CFPA’s work in Sudan will include donations of equipment and skills ranging from constructing hospitals and training medical and management staff to sending volunteers to work directly with local medical staff. “This will be a symbolic example of the foundation’s internationalization strategy.”

Within the organization, CFPA has set up an International Development Department to promote its internationalization strategy. With Sudan as the starting point, CFPA hopes in the future to expand its activities to nearby Ethiopia, Chad, and Kenya, as well as other African countries.

## Is CFPA Too Far Ahead of its Time?

It seems that after the misunderstandings and doubts that plagued the early stages of its work, the CFPA is slowly beginning to be understood and supported by others. The attitudes of both the government and companies are changing rapidly.

“Chinese companies have done a lot of charity overseas, but they do not sell it well. A lot of their money was not spent sensibly. The money given to local governments was not very effective. Now the [Chinese] government wants to encourage some of its departments to give it a try,” explains Mr. He.

**“Chinese companies have done a lot of charity overseas, but they do not sell it well.”**

In speaking about the lessons learned from implementing its internationalization strategy, Mr. He seems to have internalized the lessons perfectly. First, Mr. He explained, the thinking has to change. Next, internationalization has to become the overall focus of the organization. Third, you need specialized departments to implement the strategy. Fourth, you need suitable staff. Fifth, you need to choose a location. Sixth, decisions have to be made about the kind of projects needed at that location. Who are the potential donors for the project? Who are you aiming to help? Then you need to select partners. Also, there need to be ways to monitor project implementation.

As to whether CFPA's progress was “too far ahead of its time,” Mr. He did not have a direct answer. Compared to the emergency aid offered by other Chinese GONGOs, he said, CFPA has gone down a different path. GONGOs are stuck at the stage of simply allocating funds to disaster areas. He believes that CFPA should understand what the problems are in disaster-struck countries, and then design projects to deal directly with those problems. Otherwise, “how would it be any different from money from the government?”

“When Chinese companies go abroad, they need to be responsive to the needs of local communities. China's role on the international stage is changing. We're trying to meet new expectations, thinking about how to minimize the internationalization gap.” As to whether or not [Chinese grassroots] NGOs would be able to develop internationally, Mr. He remarked, effective charity cannot just depend on someone's passion. It's something that requires skill and specialization. Nowadays, more and more young people are joining aid organizations, bringing with them new ideas about the world. The emergence of all sorts of new charities will add to this energy. But, he cautions, “Everything changes gradually, without any bells or whistles. It doesn't just suddenly happen on one day. Only people with a steady heart, willing to think deeply, will be able to discover the course of this change.”

# A Chinese NGO with International Characteristics: The Morning Tears Advocacy Model

by Fiorinda Di Fabio<sup>2</sup>



**I**ntroduction: China's internationalization has led to the emergence of NGOs that no longer fit neatly into the Chinese NGO or international NGO category but rather constitute a hybrid. Fiorinda Di Fabio looks at one such hybrid and its blueprint for conducting effective advocacy on child protection and welfare in China.

Although China has witnessed an exponential increase in the number of NGOs over the last 30 years, there are still political and administrative restrictions that NGOs must confront when carrying out their work in the country. Nonetheless, some NGOs have been able to not just carry out their own activities, but also play a role in the government policy making process, despite not being legally recognized.

Over the last 15 years, as the Chinese central government began promoting the notion of “small government, big society” (小政府, 大社会) and “social management innovation” (社会管理创新), local governments have been experimenting with different kinds of partnerships with selected Chinese NGOs and INGOs. A few of these NGOs have been able to formulate mechanisms to influence the policy

making process by reinventing themselves and building new models.

Morning tears (its trademark name is uncapitalized) is one of the few NGOs to gain a voice in the policy making process by creating a strategy to conduct advocacy in China. It is a hybrid, Chinese-born international NGO established in Xi'an, China in 1998 as a grassroots organization, and subsequently internationalized in order to carry out its work effectively. Morning tears currently runs a child protection center for the children of imprisoned parents in Zhengzhou, Henan. This center is a pilot project started in collaboration with governmental authorities in 2009. Over the past 15 years, morning tears has helped more than 800 children and is currently assisting 250.

Morning tears was funded by a team of Chinese and foreign psychologists with the main goal of supporting the target group of the children of incarcerated parents in China. Policies and practices for these children did not exist in China before the government included them in the 11th Five Year Plan. In that Five Year Plan, the central government called for the assistance of organizations, including civil society organizations, in acquiring knowledge about good practices and policies for the target group. Specifically, the government needed help to standardize procedures to follow when children were rescued from the street, and transform those procedures into policies. Since 2003, morning tears has implemented policy-oriented activities such as trainings, pilot projects, and field trips, all of which have been effective means to influencing policy. Its most important achievement to date is participating in the drafting of the minimum protection standards and standard procedures for the target group at both the local and national levels, and drafting of the training material for caregivers both in child protection centers and inspection units. Thanks to the minimum protection standards, children of the incarcerated have been legally guaranteed minimum rights formulated according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Standard procedures have established responsibilities and modalities in the

<sup>2</sup> This article was originally published online in August 2013 here: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/articles/the-morning-tears-advocacy-model/>



protection and care of the target group. The training material for caregivers and inspectors conferred a professional orientation to the staff working with this group of children, guaranteeing better care for their difficulties, such as psychological traumas, social stigma, and intergenerational incarceration. To achieve those results, morning tears has established partnerships with two of the most important governmental institutions in the field of child protection in China: the Zhengzhou Child Protection Center (郑州市救助保护流浪少年儿童中心) and the National Training Center (民政部联合国儿童基金会流浪未成年人保护发展培训基地). As a rare case of a NGO influencing policy making, this organization's experience is a valuable example for other NGO practitioners seeking to have a voice in the policy formulation process.

Morning tears has been able to participate in the policy process because it combines advantages that come from being both a local and international organization. On one hand, morning tears has operated in ways that have allowed it to strengthen its social and political legitimacy in China, and its understanding of the local target group. These operational characteristics include: 1) a non-political approach; 2) a professional network; 3) the use of Chinese-style advocacy; and 4) a bilateral information exchange platform. At the same time, because of its international status, morning tears has been able to tap into the following resources: 1) sustainable funding; 2) international expertise; and 3) international legitimacy which gives it a solid economic base, access to international knowledge, and the broader recognition necessary to have a voice in the policy making process in China.

A non-political approach is the main characteristic needed by an NGO to achieve government recognition, and thereby access to the policy process, in China. An NGO's existence in China is only allowed as long as it does not interfere with the political system. The non-political nature of morning tears' work created space for it to assume the role of a technical advisor to the Chinese government to provide expert advice regarding best practices for the target group. Morning tears' role as technical advisor was made possible because some of its funders had worked with the target group for several years and had developed a reputation as international experts in the field.

Morning tears also was careful to work within the hierarchical, state system by making sure that their work was approved by higher levels of government. In this respect, Morning tears established a subordinate relationship with the governmental bodies involved: the National Training Center (民政部联合国儿童基金会流浪未成年人保护发展培训基地), which is directly managed by the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Zhengzhou Child Protection Center, which is part of the Zhengzhou Civil Affairs Bureau. Morning tears showed its respect for hierarchical relationships by sending to the meetings representatives – diplomats from several countries Morning Tears is registered in – who matched the ranks of the government official.

Second, morning tears worked through a professional network to achieve legitimacy for their policy work. This network included other supporting social actors and governmental bodies, in particular Zhengzhou University, and the Sanyuan Children Village of Xi'an

**“Morning tears has been able to participate in the policy process because it combines advantages that come from being both a local and international organization.”**

(东周儿童村), in their work both by providing funding and knowledge. Apart from its importance in legitimizing its policymaking position, morning tears' professional network has provided strong support in deepening its knowledge of the target group in China. Zhengzhou University, for example, has supported morning tears in the drafting of the minimum standards for the protection of children of incarcerated parents. One of morning tears' funders even enrolled in a Ph.D. program at Zhengzhou University to gain a full understanding of the target group in the area of Zhengzhou. The university provided morning tears with information about the specific difficulties these children encounter in Chinese society, their psychological traumas, the disorders they develop, and their family background. The Sanyuan village of Xi'an contributed to morning tears' work by sharing their previous field experiences with the same target group.

Finally, in its approach to advocacy, morning tears has adopted familiar Chinese policy making methods such as the point-to-surface approach (有点到面) in which policy making originates from local “experimental points” with the formal or informal support of higher-level policy-makers. Given this structure of the Chinese policymaking process, an NGO interested in shaping policy needs to be supported by empirical evidence. Zhengzhou is the national model for street children experimentation in China. Since the children of incarcerated parents are part of the street children group, morning tears started a pilot project which was included in the Zhengzhou model (郑州模式). The project was started up in 2009 and is based on a child protection center established by morning tears in Zhengzhou. The center hosts approximately 60 children who are monitored by a team of caregivers, social workers, and psychologists who are in charge of developing protection standards, operation procedures, and training materials based on the project experiences.

As a technical advisor, morning tears has worked within the mass line model (群众路线模型), which is a hierarchical structure the Chinese government uses to include social actors in the policy formulation and innovation process. Within the mass-line system, morning tears established a bilateral information exchange platform with the government. The purpose of this platform is to exchange regular information with the government about the best placement for the projects, the exact number of the children of imprisoned parents in different areas, international experiences, and information about the local target group.

Morning tears’s localized methods do not, on their own, provide the necessary requirements for an NGO to take part in the policy making process in China. As a Chinese-born international NGO, it also has the advantage of drawing on international resources. One important resource it possesses is its legal status through its registration in several Western countries. Since one of its founders is a Belgian citizen, the first morning tears branch was opened in Belgium in 2005. Soon afterwards, morning tears branches were registered in Spain in 2006, the Netherlands in 2008, Denmark in 2009, Italy and France in 2010, the U.S. in 2011, and Hong Kong in 2013. In all those countries, morning tears is registered as a non-profit organization. Even if it sometimes engages in awareness campaigns or funds other small national

projects, its main purpose is to fundraise for projects in China.

Morning tears’ status as an INGO made it easier to accept the presence of the organization in China because it meant that the target issue could be perceived as a shared issue among several countries in the world. The new international perception of the issue legitimized morning tears to have a say in the policy process because the government could accept its help without feeling weak.

**“The reasons behind its success lie in its nature as a non-governmental joint venture designed by Chinese and foreigners who both contributed to its local and international characteristics”**

A second resource is the international expertise morning tears has been able to bring in regarding the target group. There is a common perception among Chinese officials, that better knowledge comes from outside the country and foreign policy advisors are therefore usually welcomed. In 2006, for example, the foreign founder of morning tears was appointed as a consultant by the civil affairs bureau of Zhengzhou. Morning tears has also invited experts in child protection from different European countries to give training workshops to government bodies in Zhengzhou and visited the project in Zhengzhou.

Finally, as an NGO registered overseas, morning tears was able to gain financial support through its fundraising activities abroad. It is difficult for Chinese grassroots NGOs, particularly those that are unregistered, to fundraise in China. In addition, the government rarely provides financial support for NGOs others than GONGOs with a close connection to the government. Foreign governments generally prefer to finance GONGOs as well because they already enjoy a relationship with the government and will not cause political trouble. As a strategy to maintain its financial sustainability, morning tears therefore registered in other countries where it was able to fundraise and compete for EU grants directed at China-based projects. This international platform gave it the financial stability that is essential for the

kind of advocacy needed to have an impact on policy making.

Morning tears' blend of the local and international has allowed it to collaborate with government bodies on shaping child protection policy. The reasons behind its success lie in its nature as a non-governmental joint venture designed by Chinese and foreigners who both contributed to its local and international characteristics. One reason is the organization's dual-legitimacy, meaning that it was able to legitimize itself in China while its internationalization opened doors to international recognition. This combination was critical in putting morning tears in a position to shape policy. Local legitimacy was further strengthened through the creation of a bilateral information exchange and a professional network. Legitimacy has also been achieved through internationalization, which has enabled morning tears to represent the voices of more people while playing a role in the policy making process.

Another reason behind morning tears' success is the combination of Western and Chinese practices and expertise in its management and implementation of projects. The Chinese core contributed with knowledge of the unwritten rules of Chinese society and the target group's domestic situation, while the international dimension contributed the latest findings from other countries in relation to the practices of the target group. Pragmatic Chinese-style advocacy was made sustainable through international financial support provided by morning tears branches in other countries. This hybrid structure has made morning tears extremely flexible, adaptable and effective, and provides a model for other NGOs interested in shaping policy in China.



# Chinese NGOs Travel to Myanmar

by Yu Xiaogang, Chen Yu and Yang Yong<sup>1</sup>

Translated by Josh Friedman

Reviewed by Han Chen



*This article highlights a growing interest among China's NGOs in the regional and global impact of China's economic expansion overseas, and in engaging with other actors and issues outside of China.*

From June 23-30, 2011, the environmental NGO, Green Watershed, conducted a study of Chinese investment projects in Myanmar. The group traveled to Yangon, Mandalay, Rakhine and other places, meeting with local NGOs, community representatives, representatives of ethnic minorities, representatives of industry associations, the news media, and staff from Chinese companies with investment projects under construction. During the visit, an armed conflict broke out in the Kachin areas, so the Myitsone hydropower project inspection tour had to be canceled.

The group visited Chinese hydropower, oil and gas projects in Myanmar, looking at the influence of the projects on local residents, and listened and exchanged views with stakeholders in the projects. The final report suggested that Chinese investment

in Burma should pay attention to environmental and social impact assessments, conflict risk assessment, and focus on the interests of the people of Myanmar, and the proper handling of relations between the Myanmar government and its citizens. The report also calls for strengthening exchanges and cooperation between Chinese and Myanmar NGOs to jointly promote the sustainable development of China's overseas investment.

## Chinese oil and natural gas projects in Myanmar

Data shows that China is currently involved in at least 20 oil and gas projects in Myanmar, mostly on the west coast of Myanmar and the Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean. This includes the investment of about seven Chinese companies, including PetroChina, Sinopec, and CNOOC. The investment structure of these projects is extremely complex. In addition to domestic companies, many foreign companies are also involved, including shareholders from Myanmar, Singapore, India, and South Korea. China is using Myanmar as the starting point for construction of the 2380 km-long oil and gas pipeline project (over 700 km of the pipeline will pass through Myanmar) with Kyaukpyu Island as a starting point. The project includes the deep-water port terminals, rail, airports, logistics, steel, petrochemical, highway and other industrial clusters and infrastructure. To complement these projects, CITIC Group has started the Kyaukpyu Island Economic and Technological Development project. The three major oil companies, Sinopec, PetroChina, CNOOC also have offshore oil and gas fields in Rakhine State, the right to develop oil and gas projects in Sagaing Province, and other places.

Currently, the China oil and gas terminal project is under heavy construction, and the impact on the local environment has been highlighted. The 700-km pipeline project has not yet started on a major scale, but once it does, the impact will also be enormous.

On Kyaukpyu Island, the group visited the Chinese natural gas project site constructed by Korean companies, and China Petroleum's deepwater port site,

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and contacted several local and international public interest organizations. The group learned that the islanders do not quite understand the project, and local and international organizations are not very well informed. As these are poor areas, foreign companies provide some social services to improve public relations, but local residents stated that the Korean company carried out a number of public service projects, while Chinese companies did not and basically do not hire local workers. According to the Chinese project staff, funds from the company provided to the Government of Myanmar went to build a health clinic that is now idle. Providing funding directly to the government is China's established practice, and the company is aware of the drawbacks; but this approach has not changed in order to keep good relations with the Myanmar government.

**“Myanmar NGOs have emphasized paying attention to reducing the environmental and social impacts of the projects, and encouraging China to establish relations with local residents through public service projects.”**

As oil and gas pipeline projects affect a large area of Myanmar territory and its stakeholders, their environmental and social impacts cannot be overlooked. Myanmar NGOs have emphasized paying attention to reducing the environmental and social impacts of the projects, and encouraging China to establish relations with local residents through public service projects.

### **Chinese mineral development in Myanmar**

China's Ministry of Land and Resources and Myanmar's mining sector signed a memorandum of understanding on the development of Myanmar's mining industry and mineral resources. China's mineral development projects in Myanmar are on a smaller scale than its investment in hydropower, oil and gas projects. Local Kachin and Lahu organizations report that the Chinese companies, Beijixing, Hairixing, and Changwei are conducting mining activities in the states of Kachin and Shan.

Currently, the Chinese companies involved in the mining industry in Myanmar are mining and processing nonferrous metals. Rare metals and coal mining will develop rapidly, with the increased capacity of electricity supply in Myanmar. This trend has increased the concerns of NGOs in Myanmar. During the visit, the group found that Myanmar NGOs are very worried that the construction of hydropower stations by Chinese in Myanmar will further stimulate mining activity, and exacerbate environmental destruction and the disappearance of forest vegetation.

### **Chinese hydropower projects in Myanmar**

The capacity of the hydropower resources in Myanmar can be developed to about 50 million kilowatts, and the economy can be developed to about 40 million kilowatts mainly in the northern Kachin State and eastern Shan State, focused on the Irrawaddy and Salween tributaries of these rivers that originate in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau in China.

The Irrawaddy, Burma's largest river, is the mother river of the people of Myanmar. There are upstream points east and west of the source. The eastern source is Meikai En Jiang, China's domestic segment called Dulong River, and the western source from Myanmar, the Mai Li Jiang. After the confluence of the two rivers in northern Myitkyina, the Irrawaddy flows through the north and south of Myanmar, and empties in the southern alluvial plain into the Andaman Sea in the Indian Ocean. The river has a total length of 2,327 km, and drainage area of 431,000 square kilometers, accounting for 60 percent of the land area of Myanmar. The annual average flow of 455 billion cubic meters is 40% of Myanmar's total river runoff.

There is no watershed planning along the Irrawaddy, nor a plan for hydropower development. According to statistics, the China Power Investment Corporation is already developing hydropower in the tributaries of the Irrawaddy, on the Mali and N'Mai Rivers. The company is also planning a Myitsone power plant with a capacity of 4.1 million kilowatts for a total installed capacity of 16.5 million kilowatts. In addition, Chinese companies are also developing hydropower dams on the upper reaches of the Irrawaddy, on the Shweli and the Taiping Rivers.

The Salween River is Myanmar's second largest river. It empties into the Andaman Sea in southern Myanmar. China's Nujiang River, originating in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, is on its upper reach. The Nujiang and

Salween have a total length of 3,673 km, of which 2,020 km are in China. According to initial research, there are six hydropower dams planned for the Salween River, with a total installed capacity of 15.81 million kilowatts.

### **“There are now different coalitions forming in Myanmar to oppose the dam.”**

Currently, China Southern Power Grid, Huaneng Group, China Power Investment Group, Datang Group, and the Water Resources and Hydropower Construction Group are investing in the development of hydropower in Myanmar.

#### **Tai Ping River Power Station (Datang Holdings)**

In August 2010 the power plant began generating power, and was completely finished in January 2011. However, in early May 2011, the Taiping River Power Plant was the site of an armed conflict between the Kachin Independence Army and the Myanmar government forces. The “low-level” fighting between government troops and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) has continued on intermittently for a year. It is reported that China has evacuated more than 100 people from the region.

#### **Myitsone Hydropower Station**

The Myitsone hydropower station in Kachin, constructed by the China Power Investment Corporation, has been met with strong opposition. The location of the power plant on the upstream stretches of the Irrawaddy River in northern Myanmar is sacred to the Kachin people. The Myitsone dam site will flood important historical and cultural heritage sites in Kachin, and also cause irreversible ecological change for the Kachin people living in the basin. The Kachin State capital is located 50 kilometers downstream of the dam. Thus the dam has become a security risk for the local residents. Further downstream on the vast plain and delta region of Myanmar, there are ethnic enclaves, where a series of dams will control the most important rivers in Myanmar, leading to changes to agriculture, transport, fishing and breeding patterns that have been in place for centuries. As a result, since the beginning of construction, Kachin organizations, environmental

protection experts, social activists and people in the basin opposed and strongly criticized the dam.

There are now different coalitions forming in Myanmar to oppose the dam, including Myanmar Rivers Network, the Kachin Development Network, the National League for Democracy (NLD) and environmental protection, democracy and media groups. These organizations continue to express their views and concerns.

## **Reflections on the Study Trip**

### **(1) On Chinese investment in Myanmar**

For Chinese investment in Myanmar to smoothly reach its goals, there should be a clearer understanding of Myanmar's national conditions, attention to environmental and social impact assessments, carrying out sustainable development concepts in investment activities, actively fulfilling social responsibilities, and establishing a positive national and corporate image. The group believes that the following points are worth noting:

(a) Regarding environmental and social impact assessments, the groups we met all mentioned the environmental problems related to investments. . Although Myanmar has yet to develop the notion of environmental assessment and mature legal mechanisms, people still uphold environmental standards in their hearts, and Chinese companies should not ignore this standard. They should at least adhere to standards of international best practices and principles to limit and control their investment behavior. It is understood that the Chinese side has conducted an environmental assessment on the Myitsone Dam project, and the preliminary conclusion is that the project caused a huge threat to the environment. Although there has been no formal announcement, the environmental assessment report has still been widely circulated among social groups and NGOs. However, China does not agree with the recommendation of the environmental assessment to suspend the project, but rather continues to push it forward. Such an approach, even in China, is in violation of relevant laws. Within Myanmar, there were strong reactions to the disregard the Chinese company showed for the environmental assessment process.



(b) On whether to conduct a conflict risk assessment: This investment should first consider the problem of minority-controlled areas in Myanmar. As Myanmar's ethnic tensions increase, these become very sensitive areas for investment, due to the unstable political situation. The investment risk in Libya serves as a lesson. Improper investment practices in Myanmar could intensify the conflict. Among the relevant principles that the international community has already established, many are related to avoiding investment in areas of conflict. For example, the World Bank and the World Commission on Dams recommends that investors withdraw from risk areas to avoid potentially escalating the conflict. In Myanmar, the governments in ethnic regions maintain close relations with China, and the Chinese state owned key companies maintain good trade and political relations with the Myanmar government, and invest in areas of conflict. This makes it easy to introduce misunderstandings among the parties in Myanmar. For example, there is now much mistrust and suspicion from the Myanmar government and Kachin organizations towards the positions of Chinese enterprises and government. In such circumstances, China's investment in Myanmar should be guided by a conflict risk assessment.

**“Even if the Chinese company provides aid or donations, because these activities are carried out through an unpopular government, the public has no knowledge of or access to the correct information; and the projects do not really benefit the ordinary people”**

(c) On paying attention to the core interests of the people of Myanmar. In the course of our visit, the Burmese people from all walks of life mentioned how the Irrawaddy River is the mother river and one of the country's core interests, just as the Yangtze River has been regarded as the mother river of China and Chinese people. The information we got is that almost all of them are opposed to the Myitsone dam construction, as the project has not been understood, accepted, or endorsed by the majority of the people of Myanmar. For the people of Myanmar to fully enjoy the right to know and participate in the discussion on

the Myitsone dam project, it is very important that the Myanmar government avoids actions contrary to the interests of the people of Myanmar when deciding on the future of the river and destiny of the people who live near it.

(d) On appropriately handling relations with the Myanmar government and people of Myanmar. On the one hand, there are challenges facing Chinese companies investing in Myanmar, such as corruption in the Myanmar government. On the other hand, Myanmar's rich resources are very tempting, while local citizens are becoming increasingly aware of their human rights and right to participate. Chinese companies and corrupt officials in Myanmar made a number of development decisions without the knowledge of the public, which has stirred up public discontent towards Chinese companies. In some areas, even if the Chinese company provides aid or donations, because these activities are carried out through an unpopular government, the public has no knowledge of or access to the correct information; and the projects do not really benefit the ordinary people. During interviews, we learned that the Korean companies and the Government of India have extensive contacts with the people in Myanmar, to obtain public understanding and goodwill. Meanwhile the Chinese and the Chinese government's image in the minds of the people is just the opposite. Chinese companies (especially those companies whose investments have a significant impact on the local community and environment) fail to gain the understanding of the local population and thereby establish a healthy relationship.

## **(2). On the exchange and cooperation between Chinese and Myanmar NGOs**

The real situation in Myanmar could be communicated to Chinese officials by Chinese NGOs to disclose the truth and promote better overseas investment behavior. However, communication between the two countries' NGOs is limited, especially compared to official exchanges. During interviews, we felt the strong desire of local NGOs to communicate with their Chinese counterparts. In fact, such exchanges are beneficial to both countries' NGOs. On the one hand, Myanmar NGOs need to understand the world (especially the real issues facing similar third world countries). Foreign exchange is a good channel, and they can learn from Chinese NGOs' experience. Myanmar today has many similarities with China before the reform and opening up period. Chinese

NGOs' knowledge of that period can be useful for Myanmar NGOs to play a better role in the current situation. Also, due to information technology, some NGOs in Myanmar have been exposed to international NGO activities and ideas, and have applied them locally. This experience could also be useful for Chinese NGOs. Thus, communication between the two can be mutually beneficial. We sincerely hope that such exchanges can be further expanded. This will require the joint efforts of both Chinese and Myanmar NGOs.

# Laos' Ban Chim Village: The First Partnership Between a Chinese NGO and a Chinese Company Overseas

by Kong Qinghong<sup>1</sup>

Translated by Kate Smith

Reviewed by Phil Rogers



The challenge of Chinese NGOs working with Chinese enterprises overseas to develop environmental protection and community development measures has always been a difficult one. Three factors — the weakness of Chinese NGOs, the inveterate dependence of industry on the government, and their limited awareness of environmental and social responsibility — make cooperation extremely difficult. After three years of effort, GEI and the Nam Ngum 5 Power Company Limited, (hereafter referred to as “the NN5 Power Generation Company”), Laos branch of China Water Resources and Hydropower Construction Group (hereafter referred to as “Sinohydro”), signed a memorandum of cooperation in December of 2010.

*This article reports on the new trend of Chinese NGOs following companies overseas to monitor and work with them and other stakeholders to mitigate the social and environmental impact of Chinese investment on local communities abroad.*

Since 2007, the Chinese NGO, Global Environmental Institute (GEI), has focused its efforts on the environmental and social responsibility of Chinese enterprises with overseas investments. Not only does it hope to encourage the Chinese government to formulate relevant policies (such as a behavioral guidebook for overseas Chinese companies), it also intends to encourage and guide these companies to engage in socially and environmentally responsible behavior. They hope to cooperate with overseas enterprises on environmental protection and community development initiatives, with the aim of protecting the local environment and promoting the economic development of local communities.

**“The challenge of Chinese NGOs working with Chinese enterprises overseas to develop environmental protection and community development measures has always been a difficult one.”**

Their plan was to develop programs promoting biogas technology in Ban Chim Village of Phoungkhon County in Luang Prabang Province, which was affected by the construction of the NN5 Hydropower Station. By bringing expert Chinese biogas technology into Laos and making full use of livestock manure, they hoped to use this new and renewable clean energy technology for local farming, agriculture, and everyday use. Their aim was to meet Ban Chim Village's everyday energy demands, improve local villagers' standard of living, and, at the same time, significantly

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reduce the rate of deforestation to protect forest ecosystems. This action has created a precedent for cooperation between an NGO and an overseas Chinese enterprise.

### **Concerning Nam Ngum 5's hydropower station**

The NN5 Power Generation Company is the Laos branch of the Sinohydro Company. It is primarily responsible for the construction, operation and management of Sinohydro's investment in the construction of the Nam Ngum 5 Hydropower Station in Laos. It is also responsible for the construction of Nam Ou River's cascade hydropower station and the operation and management of Paklay Hydropower station. The Nam Ngum 5 Hydropower Station project is the first hydropower station developed using the BOT (build – operate – transfer) method to appear on the Laotian market. The project is located in Nan Ting River, 300 kilometers north of Vientiane, the capital of Laos. The power station has an installed capacity of 2 x 60MW, an annual generation capacity of 5.07 million kwh, and adjusting for the performance of the plant, a total investment of nearly \$200 million. The plan is to close the lock for water storage in March of 2012, and complete the project by the end of 2012.

### **Method of cooperation**

One could say that the cooperation between GEI and Sinohydro is full of twists and turns. Their best opportunity to work together was in 2008, when domestic and international NGOs began to focus their concerns on the environmental and social problems of companies investing overseas, and domestic and foreign media began reporting on the environmental problems arising from such investment. Hydroelectric dams are one of the areas that received close attention.

By invitation, GEI joined International Rivers to visit Sinohydro's Manager for Public Relations and initiate first contact. In the following year, GEI communicated regularly with Sinohydro. During the same period, GEI did some initial research on overseas corporate environmental policy, and carried out some preliminary advocacy and research on environmental policy directed toward the Laotian government.

GEI submitted a letter of intent to the Laotian government to cooperate on a program to promote community development for those living by the NN 5 Hydropower Station. It was an example of a good

opportunity, a good issue, and good preparation that ultimately led to the first cooperation between GEI and Sinohydro's Laos branch.

The Laos Ban Chim Village project to promote biogas technology is the first instance in which GEI and a Chinese overseas enterprise have cooperated to carry out projects in environmental and community development overseas. GEI and the NN5 Power Generation Company shared project operating costs. The project's budget is expected to reach \$72,100. GEI is responsible for hiring and paying the biogas experts, and supervising the construction progress, accounting for about 30% of the total project cost. The NN5 Power Generation Company will pay the costs of building materials and equipment fees for the construction of the biogas pond, and the local transportation and accommodation costs for the experts and other staff, accounting for about 70% of the total project costs. GEI and NN5 Power Generation Company have conducted several rounds of surveys and studies in the design of the biogas project, have sought the views of the local communities and gained strong support from community residents. This project could not only protect forest ecosystems, but also could increase the quality of life for local residents.

**“They also hope that companies will not just depend on local government departments, but will submit their community economic recovery and environmental management plans to experienced NGOs.”**

The way in which cooperation came about in this project has become an initial model for cooperation between GEI and other overseas enterprises, for instance in regards to how companies and NGOs can share financing and carrying out environmental protection and community development projects. With the further development of Chinese NGOs and Chinese companies' growing environmental and community awareness, GEI hopes that in the process of future overseas investment, Chinese companies will actively initiate cooperation with NGOs (with the company bearing the entire project costs). They also

hope that companies will not just depend on local government departments, but will submit their community economic recovery and environmental management plans to experienced NGOs to design and implement. GEI hopes to explore and develop further models of cooperation for Chinese enterprises and NGOs. With their special technical expertise and extensive experience in implementing community and environmental management projects, NGOs could guide and assist companies in fulfilling their environmental and social responsibilities.

### **Biogas technology promotion projects**

NN5 Hydropower Station reservoir is located near Ban Chim Village. It inundated the arable land of 35 households and a large area of lowland grazing land. Each family has been compensated for their loss of land with cash payment, food, and other materials, and villagers have been provided with training in cattle raising and planting technologies. In order to protect the forest surrounding the reservoir, reduce the villagers' chances to cut down trees on the mountain side, and improve the villagers' standard of living, GEI and NN5 Power Generation Company have coordinated to develop the biogas technology promotion project.



沼气池初建

Ban Chim Village is located in Laos' mountainous northern territory, and primarily inhabited by ethnic minorities, the majority of whom are Hmong. A Laotian translator once told me that Hmong people are united, are slow to accept new things, have a much slower lifestyle due to generational customs, and are easily satisfied. The biogas promotion and use project

has encountered several difficulties. First, it was difficult to get Laotians to accept and use biogas. Second, the collection of livestock manure has not been easy. Third, there was a lack of technical staff to maintain and manage the project. GEI and NN5 Power Generation Company took one year to ensure the villagers understood biogas and mobilized the enthusiasm of the villagers to use biogas through demonstrations. Due to the behavior of free-range cattle, collection of manure was relatively easy. With enthusiasm high, there was no problem with manure collection. There were many scenes of adults and children all collecting manure on the mountainside. It was reassuring to see indications that they were gradually accepting the biogas project.

The training of technically skilled staff is also very important. GEI and experts selected two people who had expressed interest in biogas and who were acknowledged to have strong skills for three months of training in Laos. GEI composed a manual on biogas construction and use in Laos (in both Chinese and Laotian) as reference for the Laotian construction and technical staff.

Communication is a major obstacle during the construction process. Even though experts and farmers are able to speak directly and in person, they can only hire translators as a bridge to facilitate communication and understanding due to the language barrier. Sometimes this leads to misunderstandings, making it very time consuming for the technical staff. But with the help of translation, everyone can eventually communicate smoothly and learn from each other.

### **Changes in the Laotian countryside**

A 2008 survey showed that, besides the use of a small amount of wood coal, more than 90% of Ban Chim's basic energy use is derived from firewood. Every household will, from time to time, go onto the mountain to cut firewood which is used mostly to boil water for cooking, with a smaller amount used for heating.

After the construction of the biogas project, the villagers will no longer have to climb the mountain for firewood, saving them much effort. A 32 cubic meter biogas pond can save a yearly average of 48 tons of firewood, equivalent to conserving 112 mu (roughly 18.5 acres) of forest. What were once bare and crooked saplings on the mountains surrounding Ban Chim, can now be seen to have recovered their

lushness and vigor.

One woman who participated in the construction of the biogas pool said: “Having biogas is very convenient. I use it every day to boil water and make food. I have to go to the mountain for firewood much less often, and there’s less smoke in the house.” This reporter visited a few households that use biogas. It was no longer like it was before when tears rolled down the people’s faces and they could only stay in the room a few minutes. Now the room’s air is fresh, the light is bright, and people no longer have to chat and sleep amidst the smoke.

**“Now the room’s air is fresh, the  
light is bright, and people no  
longer have to chat and sleep  
amidst the smoke.”**

Biogas has also brought great change to the livelihood of the villagers of Ban Chim. After the biogas project began, the residue was applied to soil as a fertilizer. With the exception of using a herbicide to kill weeds, other kinds of chemical pesticides and fertilizer are no longer used. Villagers also use the biogas residue to spray vegetables, eliminate aphids, and increase vegetable production. In order to increase the rate of seedling germination, biogas residue is also used to soak the seeds.

In addition, by connecting the biogas and the toilets, the water used to flush the toilets can flow directly into the biogas pool, both increasing the raw material in the pool, as well as preventing toilet odor, leading to purer and cleaner air.

Another change within the village is that children can study with the lights on. Before, only 13.3 percent of households in Ban Chim used small hydro or diesel engines. The rest of the households had no power. After the construction of the biogas pool, and the installation of biogas lamps, children can continue to study under their light. When the curtain of night falls, the biogas lamps light up Ban Chim, as well as the hopes of the village.



# Philanthropy as an Emerging Contributor to Development Cooperation: The Case of China

by Heather Grady, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors<sup>2</sup>  
Reviewed by Tom Bannister



The world is at a pivotal moment for global cooperation. Planning for the Post-2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is well underway. These processes are led by UN Member States and multilateral agencies. Other crucially important stakeholders, notably civil society organizations and the business sector, have gradually established their roles and are acknowledged as non-state actors who should at times be included. But one distinct set of actors – those in the philanthropy sector – are rarely engaged.

Development aid, and more broadly international public finance for sustainable development, will remain essential in the decades to come. But more attention and analysis is going to the shrinking proportion of ODA within total financial flows to the South. At the same time, private flows have grown significantly. The largest proportion comes from foreign direct investment, portfolio and equity flows; the second

largest is remittances; and the third is private philanthropy. All three of these can contribute to philanthropic outcomes, but philanthropy, if deployed well, can be particularly strategic and additive. The opportunity is enormous, since a broader range of philanthropists is emerging and becoming engaged in international giving, and domestic giving within developing countries itself is increasing.

But the emergence of philanthropy should not be viewed principally as a “gap filler” for ODA. Philanthropy often supports under-funded sectors like social inclusion, human rights, and gender equality. Moreover, a distinctive added value of philanthropy to the non-profit sector is through the creation of grantmaking portfolios that help build communities of practice, disciplinary fields, and social movements for positive change. Given the growing importance and enthusiasm around South-South cooperation and linkages, the burgeoning philanthropy originating in the global South, which has not been well-documented, is particularly important to explore and analyze.

## Resourcing Development and the Changing Shape of Global Financial Flows

Today, so-called developing countries (in this paper referred to as the global South) are driving global economic growth, principally but not only in middle-income countries. The 2013 Human Development Report *The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World*, notes that for the first time in 150 years, the combined GDP of the three largest economies of the South – China, India and Brazil – almost equals the combined GDP of the longstanding

<sup>2</sup> This article is an edited and abridged version of a report commissioned by the UNDP. The changes were made with permission of the author and the UNDP, and focus entirely on the China section included in the original. The unabridged report can be found [here](#).

industrialized powers of the North (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, UK and the US)<sup>3</sup>. The power and influence of these countries has grown, accompanied by independence from traditional multilateral and bilateral aid donors. Each year more middle-income countries become donors (even as they continue to receive aid from wealthier countries), to the point where the boundary of giver and receiver is blurred.

## The Expansion of Private Flows and Philanthropy's Contribution to Global Development

Private flows from North to South have increased enormously in recent years. In 2011, private capital investment, remittances and philanthropy from the 23 developed donor country DAC members amounted to about \$577 billion, over four times larger than official flows that year. Private capital flows remained largest at \$322 billion, and remittances from all DAC donors to the developing world were \$196 billion, a slight increase from \$190 billion in 2010. Total philanthropy from all DAC donors was reported to be \$59 billion in 2011, though the Hudson Institute, a leading analyst of such data, considers this underreported<sup>4</sup>.

Two of the institutions that have done detailed studies of giving in rapidly-growing economies are the Hudson Institute's Center for Global Prosperity and WINGS. The Hudson Institute has begun an in-depth analysis and comparison of Brazil, China, India and South Africa. These four nations have become deeply involved in foreign assistance not only through government aid but also through private investment, philanthropy, and remittances. Compared to their ODA-type flows which reached a maximum estimate of \$3.7 billion, according to World Bank data, remittances from these countries to developing countries amounted to \$14.2 billion in 2011. And the Center for Global Prosperity estimates another \$366 million was philanthropic contributions to international causes in the developing world<sup>5</sup>.

## Building Trust and Effectiveness of Philanthropy and Civil Society

An ingredient of enabling philanthropy to engage more meaningfully in development cooperation is the need to build trust not only in the role of philanthropic institutions, but in civil society more broadly. The Hudson Institute in 2013 completed a pilot study of 13 countries' philanthropic freedom or ease of giving, demonstrating that ease of giving can be successfully measured, and countries ranked and

**“In 2011, private capital investment, remittances and philanthropy from the 23 developed donor country DAC members amounted to about \$577 billion, over four times larger than official flows that year.”**

compared on their philanthropic freedom<sup>6</sup>. There must be trust that civil society is a force for good in society and that individual organizations are worth funding, making good use of money and achieving their stated goals. Governments have a key role to play by helping civil society to earn that trust from society, but not by excessive regulation, registration, and reporting requirements, which can be counterproductive. Excessive control has been shown to discourage philanthropic giving, both domestically and across borders. Where governments create an enabling environment for civil society by establishing a regulatory environment that is clear, accessible, impartial, and not overly burdensome, philanthropy and civil society can become true partners in the development of prosperous and inclusive societies.

<sup>3</sup> Human Development Report 2013: The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2013), [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/14/hdr2013\\_en\\_complete.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/14/hdr2013_en_complete.pdf). A telling point is that philanthropy is not mentioned at all in this report.

<sup>4</sup> Index of Global Philanthropy.

<sup>5</sup> Philanthropic Freedom: If You Can't Measure It, You Can't Improve It (Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute, 2013), <http://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/files/publications/FinalOnlineVersionPhilanthropicFreedomAPilotStudy.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in: Joan E. Spero, *Charity and Philanthropy in Russia, China, India and Brazil* (New York: Foundation Center, 2014), p. 8.

## The Case of China

Chinese philanthropy is of particular interest because of the country's size, skyrocketing generation of wealth, and its growing global footprint in terms of business and development assistance. The Hurun Research Institute in Shanghai estimates that China had more than 230 billionaires by 2012<sup>7</sup>. In China, as elsewhere, philanthropy has a long history. Rockefeller family historian Mary Bullock Brown located an archival document describing John D. Rockefeller's 1921 encounter with the Chinese business community's Chamber of Commerce, in which relating his own growing philanthropy in China spurred each of them to describe their many contributions to local schools and hospitals<sup>8</sup>. But even today international philanthropy is restricted in its scope, with only 18 foundations formally registered today [Editors note: according to the MOCA this figure is 23]. They have made an impact on the non-profit and philanthropy sectors nonetheless, as has the generosity of Hong Kong entrepreneurs like Li Ka-shing. His 2006 commitment to give one third of his wealth to his foundations is an inspiration for a growing number of Chinese philanthropists.

The Chinese government's approach to philanthropy and civil society has generally been to control it, and scandals over the years have tarnished the reputation of the sector. Most substantial charitable entities that receive donations are likely to be government-operated or –affiliated NGOs, and independent grassroots NGOs are often not registered, small in scale, and lacking in established management systems and/or transparency. This not only inhibits philanthropy, but leads many donors with significant resources to operate their own programs. Nevertheless, the leadership today, while carefully monitoring civil society activity, has accepted that philanthropy has an important role to play in the nation and internationally. In 2004 the first regulations on foundations came into being and provided for the establishment of private foundations (including family, corporate, and endowed), most of them government controlled. Around 2007 a philanthropic boom began, and private initiative in the social sector has grown, just as it had in the economic sector. A modern-day “golden age” has

been launched, in the words of China Development Brief's Chen Yimei. This growth is attributed by a range of sources to the impact of the Sichuan earthquake of 2008, which led many potential donors to view privately-governed entities as more accountable and effective than government-operated organizations. Large and reputable foundations like the Narada Foundation, Kaifeng Foundation, One Foundation, China Social Enterprise Foundation, and the Vantone Foundation are coveted partners for civil society, business and international philanthropy alike. More recently the main founder of e-commerce group

**“A modern-day ‘golden age’ has been launched, in the words of China Development Brief's Chen Yimei.”**

Ali Baba, Jack Ma, has pledged US\$3 billion to set up his new foundation. At the other end of the spectrum, very localized people-to-people lending and bottom-up philanthropy is also growing, enabled by companies such as CreditEase.

According to the China Foundation Center, there were over 3,600 foundations in China by the end of 2013. About 1300 of these are non-governmental in origin<sup>9</sup>. Less than 200 have their own endowments. The rest receive funding from the government, or raise and spend money from the public on an ongoing basis. It is estimated that only 50-100 are actual, pure grantmaking organizations who accept applications and fund a variety of grantees. About 600 of China's foundations are corporate and family foundations which give grants to others, but this generally represents a conduit to the same organization(s) year after year or are used implement projects of government origin, often in traditional areas like schools and hospitals.

China learns philanthropic practice through constant international exchange visits, advisory services, formal courses and curricula, and the internet, and is in some ways leapfrogging in practice. Of note – after learning about and creating a partnership with the US

<sup>7</sup> Mary Brown Bullock, author of *The Oil Prince's Legacy*, personal communication.

<sup>8</sup> This is calculated by subtracting foundations of state-owned enterprises and university foundations (since universities are by nature public).

<sup>9</sup> China Foundation Center, <http://cn.foundationcenter.org.cn/>.

Foundation Center, within a year the newly-established China Foundation Center had used their software to amass 90% of the data on Chinese philanthropy. Their website is an authoritative and comprehensive source of information on philanthropy in China<sup>10</sup>. Expanding such databases in other countries will be important in registering philanthropy's contributions to global and national development goals.

**“Chinese foundations operating abroad are likely to coordinate with the national or local government, even if they eventually choose to fund local NGOs.”**

There is also a shared sense of changes needed in the sector, summarized by Xu Yongguang as a diversification of the sector for the benefit of public welfare, a weakening of the state monopoly on charitable resources, and greater transparency across the field<sup>11</sup>. The China Foundation Center's Transparency Index will nurture this trend. The last Party Congress made an enormously important shift when it formally separated the notions of government and society, just as it had years ago separated government and the economy. The implications for domestic philanthropy are important, as it shifts the role of government and the Party to that of monitoring the social sectors rather than controlling them<sup>12</sup>. This bodes well for more space to develop partnerships across a range of issues, not least the Post-2015 Agenda, if they can be translated into locally relevant targets and activities to which a multiplicity of stakeholders can contribute. Areas like livelihoods, environment and health are enormous challenges that philanthropy can work with governments to address. Most China philanthropy watchers eagerly anticipate

the ability of philanthropy to enable a more effective and innovative NGO sector. So today's landscape, even if constrained, poses enormous possibilities in terms of finding partners for official development cooperation.

According to the China Foundation Center's information on Chinese giving across borders, about 50 Chinese foundations provide grants to other countries, generally in Asia and Africa. Many coordinate with the government of China or are government-affiliated foundations. For example, some provide foundation funding to countries where their parent state-owned enterprise has oil drilling operations. Chinese foundations operating abroad are likely to coordinate with the national or local government, even if they eventually choose to fund local NGOs.

One example of a Chinese foundation partnering with official development partners is the Hainan Airlines Foundation, which in May 2013 announced a contribution to the World Food Program (WFP) of 10 million Yuan (about US\$1.6 million) over 10 years. This funds the Take Home Rations project, part of a Ghana school feeding program. This followed earlier contributions from the Hainan Airlines Foundation to projects in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique providing free eye surgery<sup>13</sup>. In 2013 it pledged 10 million Yuan over five years for UNICEF's Change for Good program<sup>14</sup>. These contributions reflect the fact that HNA Group provided the investment capital for the establishment of Africa World Airlines in Ghana in 2012, the first African civil airline to be invested in by a Chinese company.

Chinese philanthropy experts note that China's investments in Africa, and benefits that come from natural resources there, should, and will, be accompanied by a philanthropic component to bolster responsible investing. The benefits of growing international philanthropy is undoubtedly the minority

<sup>10</sup> Xu Yongguang, "Towards a Healthier Philanthropy: Reforming China's Philanthropic Sector," in *Philanthropy for Health in China*, eds. Jennifer Ryan, Lincoln C. Chen, and Tony Saich (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> While true, instances of pressure, such as corporate philanthropy giving to the Olympics, will no doubt continue.

<sup>12</sup> "HNA Group Forms Strategic Partnership with World Food Programme — World's Largest Humanitarian Organization," Africa World Airlines, published May 22, 2013, [http://www.flyafriaworld.com/details.cfm?corpnews\\_scatid=30&corpnews\\_catid=9&corpnews\\_scatlinkid=34](http://www.flyafriaworld.com/details.cfm?corpnews_scatid=30&corpnews_catid=9&corpnews_scatlinkid=34).

<sup>13</sup> "Hainan Airlines to Raise Money for UN Children's Fund," ECNS, August 16, 2013, <http://www.ecns.cn/business/2013/08-16/77498.shtml>.

<sup>14</sup> "Chinese Philanthropists Support Hirola Sanctuary," The Nature Conservancy, <http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/africa/explore/chinese-hirola-gift.xml>.



view in China given the country's own needs. But expectations on China's philanthropy sector to grow their international giving are inevitable. Inclusion in broader multi-stakeholder partnership processes that build long-term engagements would be an innovative future step.

## Conservation Beyond Borders

An entirely different example is a recent donation from a group of Chinese philanthropists toward what grantee The Nature Conservancy (TNC) calls a new era of conservation philanthropy. The China Global Conservation Fund, initiated by Jack Ma and other members of the Conservancy's China Board of Trustees, is part of a cross-regional initiative, Conservation Beyond Borders, which will connect development projects in Africa, Latin America, and Asia Pacific with Chinese businesses, banks and agencies to find solutions that better balance development and conservation. A budget of \$500,000 aims to save the endangered hirola antelope and help efforts to hone and perfect a model of community-led conservation for future expansion to other priority landscapes in Africa. Local partners are the Northern Rangelands Trust, the Kenya Wildlife Service and Fauna & Flora International. TNC notes that environmental problems no longer stop at political borders. Ma himself said, "We are now all part of a global economy, and China's economic rise has created an opportunity and also a responsibility for the Chinese people to play a leading role in helping address the world's environmental problems."

## Some Conclusions

Philanthropy across the world resists easy definition and categorization. That may make it difficult to track its contribution to specific development goals. But it need not impede philanthropy's ascent into deep engagement with others in international development cooperation. Philanthropy, no matter where it originates, is driven by the imperative to meet human needs, alleviate suffering, and tackle the systemic challenges that prevent human development and progress. Social sectors have their own discourses and practices, and those of philanthropy and official development aid and cooperation are dissimilar. But philanthropy has much to offer, and therefore the headline must be: huge potential, but too little action to date. On one end of the spectrum it can be pathbreaking, supporting innovation, field building,

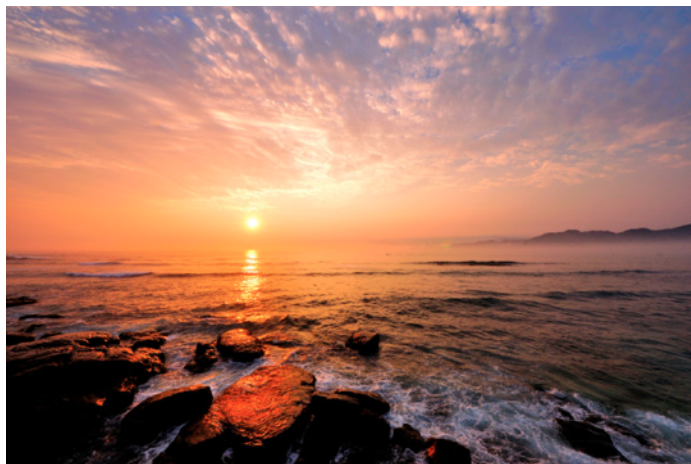
first movers and fast movers – and at the other, it provides patient capital for long-term challenges that require painstaking efforts that go beyond political winds and shorter-term business interests. Philanthropy needs to leverage the larger resources and expertise of official development cooperation actors; while governments and the UN system need to leverage the insights, innovations and more nimble approaches of philanthropy and those organizations who the sector supports.

**“Social sectors have their own discourses and practices, and those of philanthropy and official development aid and cooperation are dissimilar. But philanthropy**

Philanthropy reaches across borders and silos to create a better and safer world for all. The power of joining the forces of official development cooperation and philanthropy in the service of the SDGs will make a substantial difference. But this will require new mindsets, partnerships and forms of collaboration amongst the UN system, governments and the philanthropic sector alike. The challenge is worth surmounting for the leverage and greater impact it will bring. As noted historian of China Jonathan Spence put it recently, a new kind of internationalism is edging into the field of the possible.

# Chinese Aid Abroad: The People's Forum on International Social Responsibility

by Luke Winship and Tom Bannister<sup>15</sup>



Chinese overseas development aid has long been dominated by the state sector. However, an increasingly discussed topic is the role of the non-state – both the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors – in providing development assistance outside of China's borders. The China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA), the largest and most influential Chinese NGO working in the poverty alleviation sector, recently held a ground-breaking forum that addressed this more holistic approach to Chinese overseas aid.

## People Helping People

The 'People's Forum on International Social Responsibility' was held at the Overseas Exchange Center of Peking University (北京大学英杰国际交流中心) on the December 16th, 2013. The event marked the culmination of CFPA-funded research projects and the associated release of several publications on the topic of overseas development aid. These included three new books: *The Strategy and Roadmap of Chinese NGO's Internationalization* (中国民间组织国际化的战略与路径) by Deng Guosheng; *China's International Social Responsibility*

and the Role of Chinese Overseas Enterprises (中国国际社会责任与中资海外企业角色) by Zhong Hongwu, Zhang En, and Wei Xiuli; and *Strategic Study on China's Foreign Aid and International Social Responsibility* (中国对外援助与国际责任的战略研究) by Liu Hongwu and Huang Meibo. The Forum sought to focus on 'people' (the slogan of the forum was 'people helping people') and was supported by a number of academic, governmental, and non-governmental institutions, including the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Tsinghua and Zhejiang Normal universities, and the China Association for NGO Cooperation (CANGO).

The Forum was very well attended with over 300 participants, although unfortunately officials from Myanmar were absent as they were stuck in heavy snow in Kunming. Thankfully those who could make it represented a diverse and influential collection of interested parties. Alongside the authors of the books and report papers, there were also high-level government officials, representatives from Chinese enterprises, Chinese and international NGOs, and intergovernmental organizations. CDB's Executive Director Chen Yimei attended the event in person.

## The Aims of the Forum

According to the conference materials, the research project and the forum event had four goals which we paraphrase below:

### 1) Building consensus

We at the CFPA would like to encourage a pattern of China fulfilling its social responsibilities worldwide, whereby government decision-making is based on coordinated efforts with NGOs, think tanks, and enterprises. We not only want these organizations to cooperate extensively, but to offer dissenting opinions, alternative methodology, and constructive criticism to one another. We would also like to encourage this

<sup>15</sup> This article was first published in 2014 here: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/articles/chinese-aid-abroad-the-peoples-forum-on-international-social-responsibility/>

form of dialogue in aid-recipient countries, to bolster assistance programs and facilitate aid projects.

## 2) Summarizing experiences

We would like to showcase the most positive and constructive examples of Chinese overseas enterprises, as well as multinational corporations in China, strengthening intercommunication on and fulfilling their Corporate Social Responsibility [CSR].

## 3) Raising visibility and awareness

By promoting Chinese media coverage of Chinese entities fulfilling their international social responsibilities, we hope to increase the Chinese people's awareness of internationalization, especially in the NGO and philanthropic sector.

## 4) Conducting pilot projects

To demonstrate cooperation on issues of fulfilling Chinese international social responsibilities, we would like the government, enterprises, NGOs, the media, and think tanks to start by launching pilot projects in Africa and surrounding regions.



Zheng Wenkai, Deputy Director of the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development, speaking at the Conference.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The Forum commenced with opening speeches by the Executive President of the CFPA, and by several leading government officials. In the afternoon there was a presentation of awards to Chinese enterprises with outstanding records of overseas CSR work, and the forum concluded with closing speeches by the President of the CFPA, and the Secretary-General of the China NGO Network for International Exchanges. The main part of the day was divided up into four

thematic hour-long discussions. The first discussion aimed to contextualise contemporary Chinese foreign aid, and was called 'The Strategic Study of China's Foreign Aid and International Social Responsibility'. The second focused on the role of Chinese business enterprise abroad, the third looked at the role of Chinese NGOs, while the final discussion, the 'Study on China's International Social Responsibility and Myanmar Case,' focused on a case study of China's neighbour Myanmar. According to Yimei the primary conclusions of the four discussions were the following:

- 1) A coherent strategy needs to be developed about China's role in international development.
- 2) The Government should co-operate more frequently and effectively with Chinese NGOs in the provision of overseas aid.
- 3) There remain many institutional barriers that prevent Chinese NGOs from acting overseas. These barriers include constraints on capital, and registration issues.
- 4) Chinese NGOs still need to significantly strengthen their capacity before they can operate effectively abroad.
- 5) Domestic public opinion about China's role in promoting development overseas remains influenced by nationalistic sentiments and the view that China still needs development assistance domestically.

## 'Major Achievements' but Room for Improvement

While the Forum may have identified the many problems that impact Chinese overseas aid, the Forum itself can be deemed a success. Yimei is of the opinion that it represented several significant accomplishments. Firstly, the number and calibre of the participants – more than 300 influential figures from both the state and non-state sectors – impressed her. "For an NGO I think that this is a big achievement. This was the first kind of discussion at such a high level, especially as it was held by an NGO."

**“This was the first kind of discussion at such a high level, especially as it was held by an NGO.”**

In the past, the Chinese government has dominated



discourse on the role of China in international development, so for an NGO such as the CFPA to take the lead marks a notable shift. Officials from the Chinese government remained a significant presence at the event, with representatives from a number of ministries – including Civil Affairs, Commerce, Foreign Affairs, and the State Council – all speaking at the event. Also significant was the inclusion of several Chinese state-owned enterprises among the participants. That they all participated in the event is both indicative of the CFPA's influence, and the importance of the topic being discussed.

Secondly, Yimei found the forum especially meaningful because “the CFPA was able to bring the practitioners to the forum to present their cases – including CANGO, and the China Youth Development Foundation, whose Project Hope is funding the construction of schools throughout Africa.” Oxfam Hong Kong, Mercy Corps, Heifer International, and the United Nations Development Programme were among the international attendees, demonstrating that the spectrum of interested parties engaged in developing China's philanthropy abroad is diverse and increasingly a healthy balance between state and non-state, but also Chinese and international, actors. On the successes of the forum, Yimei concluded that, while “there have been some events in the past – such as roundtable events – this one had the largest participant pool and was the most influential.”



Over 300 influential figures attended the event.

Even with these successes, Yimei noted that there were several topics that did not receive enough emphasis or clarification in the Forum. Firstly, there was the matter of semantics in translation. The phrases “the internationalization of Chinese NGOs” (中国NGO的

国际化) and “Chinese NGOs going abroad” (中国 NGO 走上国际) were at times used interchangeably during the forum, but as Yimei and others noted, they do not have the same meaning. Indeed, these two expressions have different connotations and speak to different aspects of the development and maturity of Chinese NGOs as they enter the world stage.

Professor Deng Guosheng of Tsinghua University, one of the key academic speakers at the event, had meant to address this subject but was prevented by time constraints. Fortunately, Deng's analysis of the subject is available in his new book, which was one of the primary outputs of the CFPA-funded research project.

**“The forum was focused on how the government can engage NGOs in international development, but there was very little discussion on how Chinese NGOs' own development goals are in line with global development goals.”**

Yimei also felt that another shortcoming of the event was its preoccupation with government concerns: “The forum was focused on how the government can engage NGOs in international development, but there was very little discussion on how Chinese NGOs' own development goals are in line with global development goals. NGOs have their own agendas and goals, many of them in line with the UN's Millennium Development goals, but these weren't really discussed. That could easily be the subject of a second conference.” In addition to the views of Chinese NGOs not being properly represented, the topics were rarely, if at all, discussed from the perspective of the communities that all parties were aiming to help. This gap in perspective highlights the importance of one of the Forum's goals, the need for more and on-going dialogue not only between public and private actors, as well as foundations and NGOs, but also between the entire philanthropic sector and the communities receiving its support. Despite these shortcomings, the event still represents a significant milestone in advancing the discussion of China's policy towards international aid, and foreign affairs.



# Melissa Berman Interview: “China is part of global philanthropy now, no question”

by Chen Yimei, Executive Director of China Development Brief<sup>16</sup>



**R**PA by its name, is associated with the Rockefeller family. How is it related to the Rockefeller Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the other charitable organizations in the Rockefeller nonprofit family? What is RPA's unique role?

The Rockefeller family has been active in philanthropy and public service for more than 100 years. During that time they've created around 100 organizations around the world, several focused on philanthropy, such as the Rockefeller Foundation, which was founded in 1913 and operates largely independent of the family. There is only one family member on the board. Many years ago, the founders of the Rockefeller Foundation decided board members should be experts and not just family members. In the 1950s, the Rockefeller Family created the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and most of its board members are family

members. In the 1970s, they created the Rockefeller Family Fund and all of its board members are family members.

The roots of our organization go back to the Rockefeller family office, which managed their business affairs and philanthropic operations. About a dozen years ago, the Rockefeller family thought it would be good to launch an NGO to help more people, foundations and corporations do philanthropy well, and established Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors in 2002. RPA represents the heritage and values of the Rockefeller family, but we operate as a social enterprise that is independent, self-sustaining and nonprofit and thus have no owners. We are in close contact with the Rockefeller group of organizations but are not tied together in any formal way. The Rockefeller family has always felt that each organization it founded should have its independence and not be tied together in a formal way that might reduce the potential of each organization. Our role is to help donors around the world create thoughtful, effective philanthropy. We work with all kinds of donors – individuals, families, corporations, trusts. It's not our job to tell philanthropists what they should fund, but rather to help them achieve their philanthropic goals as effectively as possible. We do represent some core values of the Rockefeller family over the last hundred years in philanthropy and public service: taking a long-term view; respecting diverse opinions; trusting the nonprofit sector; and valuing independence both for the donors and for NGOs. We think it's best if organizations can avoid becoming overly dependent on any one funder. J.D. Rockefeller, for example, recognized early on that the University of Chicago would become a much more important institution if it had other funders besides him. In addition, Rockefeller University was spun out of the Rockefeller Foundation and became a much more important institution than if it had been entirely funded by Rockefeller. So independence is a core

<sup>16</sup> This article originally appeared on the CDB English-language website in 2014 here: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/articles/interview-with-melissa-berman-ceo-of-rockefeller-philanthropy-advisors-china-is-part-of-global-philanthropy-now-no-question/>

principle for the Rockefeller family in helping organizations achieve their full potential.

**Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors currently serves more than 160 donors giving to more than 70 countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America and North America” (RPA’s website). Over the last 14 years, you have traveled around the world on behalf of RPA to attend board meetings and give talks. What do you see as the most significant changes in global philanthropy over the last 10-15 years? Over the last five years?**

We’ve seen a great deal of change in philanthropy over the last decade or so. We’ve seen the emergence of a global culture of giving not just in the wealthiest countries, but also in Latin America, Asia-Pacific, and even parts of Africa. All societies and cultures value charitable giving. But especially among those with the greatest resources, something of a global community is beginning to emerge through the World Economic Forum, which began to feature speakers on philanthropy in 2001, and the Clinton Global Initiative in the mid-2000s, as well as through interactions between global businesses and business leaders. Increasingly, they talk about their philanthropy and social involvement and so ideas spread that way. I think there is a growing conviction among wealth holders that philanthropy is an important part of their life and their involvement can go well beyond generosity. They are looking to understanding the core issues that they are funding and are providing other kinds of capital, not just donated capital but also human resources, networks, technical knowledge, and investment capital. I also think it’s important for many funders to think about how their philanthropy reflects their heritage and builds a legacy.

In terms of more recent changes over the last few years, we’ve see more interest in solutions-based philanthropy, in identifying ways to have leverage in solving problems rather than just providing immediate relief from suffering. As people recognize they want to be part of a solution to a large, complicated problem, they can’t do it all themselves. They need to have partnerships with other philanthropists, and with the private and public sectors. The work of foundations such as Gates in exploring malaria vaccines, Hewlett in promoting deeper learning in education, and Ford in protecting the rights of women, come to mind as

examples of solution-based philanthropy.

**Can you explain the purpose of RPA’s newly launched program Philanthropy Roadmap? How do you explain its long-term goal of creating “a new culture of great giving”?**

The Philanthropy Roadmap was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Its purpose is to give people just starting out on a serious philanthropy program a set of tools to shape their own program. It presents a framework, of a series of questions for each person or foundation to answer – what’s my focus going to be, how long do I want this program to exist, how do I want my family to be involved, how do I fund locally, how do I think about assessing impact. We’re not telling people how to do things but offering a framework for them to use to answer these questions themselves, and providing real world examples. We’ve presented these materials as a set of short guides that are available both online and in print. One has been rewritten in Chinese, and is available with local Chinese cases, and we hope to get more translated.

**“As people recognize they want to be part of a solution to a large, complicated problem, they can’t do it all themselves. They need to have partnerships with other philanthropists, and with the private and public sectors.”**

**Why does RPA emphasize “thoughtful, effective” philanthropy? What are the major indicators of success in giving?**

We worked very hard as an organization, with the board and staff, to choose this phrase. By thoughtful, we mean respecting a wide range of approaches to philanthropy, from traditional philanthropy to the newest tools. We believe all of these approaches have a place, but one’s decision should be a conscious one made after some reflection. By effective, we mean philanthropy that doesn’t just focus on strategy, but also on results. But everyone defines “effectiveness” differently and it’s important to respect those differences. Some philanthropists, like Ford, are institution builders. For them, it’s effective to build an

institution that can carry out its purpose for a long period of time. Others define effectiveness in more quantitative terms such as, how many acres of land have been preserved, how many children have been fed. For still others, it has to do with how public attitudes or policy have been changed. All of these approaches are valid, but it's important for funders to think about what success will look like.

In terms of indicators for success in giving, we were part of a working group supported by the Hewlett Foundation that developed a set of indicators to assess the thoughtfulness of a grant-making program. They included questions such as: Do you have a clear mission and strategy? Have you developed your program based on knowledge about a problem in the field? Are you aware of what other philanthropists are doing? Do you look for indicators of progress with your strategy? Do you review and adjust regularly? If you can say yes to all of these questions, then I think you can say you have a thoughtful program, and the chances for effectiveness will likely be greater.

**“In terms of gaps and challenges in China, I would say that the NGO sector here isn’t as well developed as in other countries, and so many philanthropists operate their own programs rather than fund NGOs to carry them out.”**

**In the US, there are many organizations and companies like RPA who provide consulting services to foundations and/or NGOs. How did they emerge and develop? What role do they play in the development of philanthropy in the U.S.? What do you think about the potential for the development of similar Chinese organizations or companies?**

In the U.S., consulting organizations (also known as professional service organizations), both profit and nonprofit, have developed to help foundations and philanthropists and they succeed because they meet a market test. That test is that more and more funders want to make knowledge-based decisions, and need

expertise that isn't available to them personally or through their staff. Consulting organizations in philanthropy like RPA play an important role in spreading ideas and making connections among donors, and explaining philanthropy to the general public and stakeholders. We are an important source of information to people who advise wealth holders, to media, and sometimes to academic researchers who want to talk to practitioners.

I think the demand for consulting organizations will emerge in China and become part of the landscape of giving and philanthropy in China.

**In recent years, RPA has received many visits from Chinese foundations and philanthropists and explored working with quite a few of them to help with strategic planning, grant-making, and other issues. How would you assess China’s philanthropy development and what do you see are the gaps or challenges?**

We've been very impressed by the philanthropists and foundations we've met in China, and how fast philanthropy has developed, especially given the short amount of time they have had to develop, given that the legislation governing philanthropy is only about 10 years old. There are already regular conferences and publications on philanthropy in China, a high level of interest, and many of the Chinese foundations have significant resources and are addressing difficult challenges.

In terms of gaps and challenges in China, I would say that the NGO sector here isn't as well developed as in other countries, and so many philanthropists operate their own programs rather than fund NGOs to carry them out, but I believe, over time, NGOs will develop and will start to have more capacity to work with donors. That's a natural evolution. We saw this pattern in the U.S. when philanthropy began to operate at scale and big foundations had to operate their own programs but eventually they were able to put their funds into the hands of NGOs. I think it took a few decades for this change to happen in the U.S. The U.S. has always had a lot of nonprofits, but national NGOs only began to develop in the early 20th century.

I also think there is also more opportunity for more communication and exchange among Chinese philanthropists to coordinate their efforts, and share their knowledge.



**Where do you see China in the dynamic global philanthropy landscape? What does the international community look for or expect from Chinese philanthropic organizations and NGOs? For example, what do they look for or expect in terms of their development? In terms of working with the international philanthropic community? What impact do you think Chinese philanthropy will have on global philanthropy?**

China is part of global philanthropy now, no question. Most people in the international community would understand and expect that most Chinese philanthropists are more interested in helping their own country and that is very common everywhere in the world. It's also common and expected that people who emigrate from their home country want to direct donations back to their home country. China and overseas Chinese are part of that process. Because China is such a large country, and has a scale and magnitude that is very hard for people outside of China to comprehend, some of the very big undertakings in China will be very influential.

**Social impact investment is a popular word in China also. What do you see as the potential (both positive and negative) for SII compared with conventional philanthropy globally?**

I think social impact investing is an important tool for solving social problems. But it's only one of many tools and can often be used together with more traditional philanthropy. Some social impact bonds that have been launched in the U.S. and United Kingdom have components that are investment and components that are philanthropy. For social impact investment, the investment capital is generally the bigger component, but without the philanthropic capital, the deal doesn't get done. So it's not a question of either/or. It's a question of what is the best financial tool to use in a particular situation. Sometimes it's one tool, sometimes it's the other, and

other times, it's both.

**RPA serves donors by steering, educating and helping donors give. What advice would you give about working with Chinese donors who are getting more interested in philanthropy but have very little experience with giving and the idea of philanthropy? What do you think can be done to encourage Chinese to become engaged in philanthropy and to make more effective donations?**

I think Chinese donors have a growing number of opportunities to work with one another, and with organizations that have developed in China, to think through their plans for philanthropy. I think it's always helpful to hear examples from other countries, but ultimately, philanthropy in China has to be developed by China for China. In terms of encouraging more people to be more engaged in philanthropy, the more stories people read and get exposed to about philanthropy that has made a real difference, the more inspired they become. The more transparency among foundations and NGOs, the more trust gets built. This combination of inspiration and trust really helps philanthropy. Most people want to be generous, and inspiration and trust can help them act on that generosity.

**How do you engage NGOs in your work? Do you experience any conflict between serving donors and the NGOs or communities who need the support? Based on RPA's experience, what advice would you offer to Chinese NGOs in terms of attracting more support from donors, particularly donors that have limited experience with giving and little understanding of philanthropy?**

In terms of serving NGOs, and the conflict between serving donors or NGOs, we made a conscious decision early on to work for donors, not for NGOs looking for grants. That way we don't have a conflict of interest. We are happy to refer NGOs to



organizations that could help them.

We do think it's important for donors to treat NGOs with respect. The NGOs on the ground have an enormous amount of knowledge and expertise. Donors have knowledge and expertise too but each side should respect the other.

To attract support, NGOs need to be transparent about finances but also to be clear about how they're helping to solve the problem. Too many NGOs try to raise funds by describing how terrible a problem is and how it's getting worse. For donors interested in solving problems, that's not a good way to put it. You're essentially telling them there's no solution. If there's no solution, then why would donors want to fund the NGO's work? So my advice to NGOs would be, don't just present the problem, present the solution.

There is also often a gap between donors and NGOs in terms of culture, background, and even the language they use. It's important for both sides to listen and respond to what people are saying, and not just giving prepared statements. I've been in a situation where an NGO came into talk to us and said, "We want to talk to you about how your foundation can help us." I told him, we are not a foundation, but he went on anyway with his presentation, so he really wasted his own time and his time is valuable. So being willing to understand the framework, perspective and vocabulary of people with different backgrounds is very important.

### **What areas of work come up most when you advise philanthropists about giving?**

In recent years, areas that donors have expressed an interest in include poverty reduction, environment and climate change. There is also a growing interest in place-based philanthropy which means the funder looks at a certain geographic region which is very poor, and looks at it as a complete system and says, I want to help deal with health, education, environment and economic challenges in this region because they are all interconnected.

# Chinese NGOs Cross the Himalayas: From Tangshan to Wenchuan to Nepal?

by Tom Bannister, Associate Director of CDB<sup>1</sup> (English)  
Research Contributed by Weiming Wu



Disasters and emergencies are often significant for an emerging NGO sector. They can act as markers of growth, forming a window to assess the maturity of a sector. They can raise important questions about the value and role of civil society. And they can act as catalysts, providing opportunities for new organizations and alliances, lessons to be learnt and shared, and public awareness to increase.

Dotted along the growth trajectory of Chinese civil society are several such events: for example the SARS outbreak in 2003 where the role played by domestic NGOs demonstrated the value of having a strong civil society. However it is earthquakes that hold a particular significance for China. The 2008 Sichuan earthquake is often referred to as a ‘watershed’ moment. At the time, the mass involvement of NGOs was placed in stark contrast to the absence of non-state involvement after

the huge 1976 Tangshan earthquake. Now, seven years after the Sichuan earthquake, will the devastating and tragic Nepalese earthquake be seen as a new milestone for Chinese civil society?

## “All Necessary Disaster Assistance”

The earthquake in Nepal is rapidly becoming China’s largest relief effort outside its own borders. The Chinese state response has been swift and strong with President Xi Jinping offering to provide “all necessary disaster assistance to the Nepalese side.” The morning after the earthquake the China International Search and Rescue Team (CISAR) sent 62 experienced rescuers to Nepal<sup>2</sup>. Later in the day they would be followed by detachments of PLA soldiers and the Ministry of Commerce announcement that 20 million RMB of material aid would be dispatched<sup>3</sup>.

This strong response would have been easy to predict. It is indicative of China’s growing strength and international presence. It also aligns perfectly with Chinese foreign and trade policies. Nepal is strategically important to China, has significant natural resources, and last year China became Nepal’s biggest source of FDI. Strengthening trade and transport links with Nepal is part of China’s “new silk road” project and much of the aid will be delivered along highways that China has been building over the past few years<sup>4</sup>.

## China’s Civil Society Mobilizes

However if China’s strong state response is unsurprising, so too is the strong response from China’s civil society. China’s GONGOs (Government

<sup>1</sup> This article was first published online in April 2015 here: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/articles/chinese-ngos-cross-the-himalayas-from-tangshan-to-wenchuan-to-nepal/>

<sup>2</sup> [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-04/26/c\\_134184503.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-04/26/c_134184503.htm)<http://gb.cri.cn/42071/2015/04/26/6351s4943191.htm>

<sup>3</sup> [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-04/26/c\\_134186099.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-04/26/c_134186099.htm)

<sup>4</sup> <http://english.cntv.cn/2015/04/26/VIDE1430036401305320.shtml>

organized NGOs, organisations with strong links to the state) were quick to get involved. The Red Cross Society of China started to deliver the first batch of relief supplies to earthquake-stricken Nepal from Beijing on Monday<sup>5</sup>. More notably, organizations with more of a grassroots background were also very quick to respond. At the vanguard are three public-fundraising foundations: The One Foundation, the Amity Foundation, and the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (the CFPA, which has a state background but now operates relatively independently).



Supplies from the Amity Foundation are assembled

These foundations, as well as some others, are operating through alliances, both domestic and international, pre-existing and newly-created. One important domestic alliance is the Disaster Relief Coordinating Alliance of Foundations (基金会救灾协调会). This was founded in 2013, ten days after the Ya'an earthquake by the China Youth Development Foundation, the CFPA, the Narada Foundation, the Tencent Foundation, and the One Foundation. In the wake of Nepal's earthquake it set up the "Chinese NGO Coordinating Center for the 4.25 Nepal Earthquake" along with international organizations such as the UNDP (China office), the Asia Foundation, and Save the Children. The domestic office of the Center, which is based at Beijing Normal University, will build a joint information platform sharing the latest progress in Nepal and the relief work

done by Chinese NGOs. The CFPA will also set up a field office in Nepal with the help of Chinese government rescue teams, that will be responsible for bridging the relief work between international and Chinese NGOs.

The Amity Foundation is a founding member of an international alliance – the ACT Alliance. It made the decision to participate in the earthquake relief effort after discussion with the Alliance's secretariat in Geneva and its Nepalese partners. Amity first did research and evaluation in the earthquake stricken areas together with local partners in Nepal before sending their first rescue team on April 26th<sup>6</sup>. New partnership alliances were also created as a result of the earthquake, such as the "Shanyuan Disaster Relief Initiative" (善缘4.25赈灾行动) initiated by the The Shanyuan Foundation of Tibet (西藏善缘基金会) with the CFPA, Narada Foundation, China Fortune magazine, and Recende CSR. Other activities by domestic foundations include foundations donating money through the One Foundation. For example the Dunhe Foundation allied with the One Foundation to develop a disaster relief mechanism, as well as donating 500,000 RMB for the relief work. Similarly the Tencent Foundation donated 1 million RMB through the channels of the One Foundation for emergency use.

On the fundraising side, public-fundraising foundations were quick to utilize the new online and social media channels that have become very effective in recent years. Just hours after the earthquake foundations began to set up accounts for their relief work on popular online fundraising platforms such as Tencent Gongyi, Alipay Gongyi, and Sina Gongyi<sup>7</sup>. Tencent Gongyi, has raised more than 18 million yuan as of April 29 from more than 241,000 contributors, and the numbers are still climbing exponentially. People can give money to the public fundraising foundations they choose through the platform (see below)<sup>8</sup>.

Alongside fundraising and project work, there were also research and information gathering initiatives

<sup>5</sup> [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/photo/2015-04/28/c\\_134189904.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/photo/2015-04/28/c_134189904.htm)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.org.cn/news-17416.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://mt.sohu.com/20150427/n411940669.shtml>

<sup>8</sup> [http://gongyi.qq.com/succor/jz\\_zt.htm?id=39](http://gongyi.qq.com/succor/jz_zt.htm?id=39)

undertaken by NGOs that aimed to support Chinese involvement in the relief effort. The Zhuoming Disaster Information Center (卓明灾害信息服务中心), a volunteer organization that was set up after the 2008 Sichuan earthquake and specializing in processing disaster-related information and coordinating resources, published an emergency report less than four hours after the earthquake.



Tencent Gongyi's online giving platform

Just 24 hours later they released a comprehensive brief on the earthquake and the rescue work. The center also started recruiting volunteers through online social media right after the earthquake to update and distribute information. Another information-gathering initiative was undertaken by Anping (Anping Public Communication and Social Development Charitable Fund, 安平公共传播公益基金) which is funded by the CFPA and based at Peking University and aims to monitor the actions of Chinese non-profits as well as promote good reporting on the sector. Anping sent staff to Nepal to cover the activities of Chinese NGOs there<sup>9</sup>.

## A Step Forward for Chinese civil Society?

When contextualizing the Nepal relief effort it is important not to forget that Chinese NGOs have also responded quite strongly to another recent Asian earthquake – the one that hit Japan in 2011. During that relief and reconstruction effort, Chinese NGOs primarily donated money, and a few even partnered with Japanese NGOs. The dynamics of that assistance

was different to that in Nepal: Japanese civil society is more developed and better resourced than that that exists in China. Nepal may be different because Chinese organizations could find themselves as senior partners in some situations, and having to draw on their own experience participating in an increasingly long list of relief efforts.

The speed of the response is certainly a sign of the maturity of some actors within Chinese civil society. Within 24 hours, various types of relief associations, rescue teams, and information centers were established for the purpose of fund-raising and rescue and relief work. The One Foundation convened an emergency meeting just ten minutes after the earthquake<sup>10</sup>. The China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA) started an initiative (人道救援——尼泊尔特大地震及西藏地震响应救援) just half an hour later. This speed shows how well-resourced and professional these organizations have become.

**“The speed of the response is certainly a sign of the maturity of some actors within Chinese civil society.”**

Concordantly the speed and strength of the response is also demonstrative of a growing internationalization of the sector. Some organisations within Chinese civil society have now reached the stage where they are beginning to desire to tackle issues beyond their own borders. In recent years this has been a trend confined to GONGOs or a very small number of NGOs mainly working on environmental issues (for example the Global Environmental Institute). In the future this trend for Chinese involvement in global civil society will hopefully spread. As one of the world's least economically developed countries, Nepal is not well placed to reconstruct itself. In a similar way to how a prolonged involvement in Nepal aligns well with Chinese state foreign and trade policy, it also aligns well with the internationalizing aspirations of some of Chinese civil society's elite. Hopefully therefore, a sustained civil society involvement will accompany that of the state.

<sup>9</sup> <http://politics.caijing.com.cn/20150429/3871656.shtml>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.sxdaily.com.cn/n/2015/0428/c142-5672239.html>





*The Amity Foundation carries out needs assessments in Nepal*

The initial stages of the relief effort also highlight the development of organisations that support the sector and facilitate a more strategic, informed, and even collaborative approach. Concordantly it also shows the impact of greater flow and access to information. The latest developments from the earthquake stricken zone, including needs analyses and information about transportation and accommodation in Nepal were widely disseminated through online social media and through NGOs like Zhuoming. This contrasts with the efforts of volunteers and NGOs after the 2008 earthquake, when a lack of information and coordination meant that they sometimes created just as many problems as they solved.

However there are important caveats. The strength and speed of the civil society response should not be taken as a measure of the development of the whole sector. Disaster relief is one of the main areas that domestic NGOs and foundations feel that they can operate in and be guaranteed of state and societal support. It is tough and essential work and NGOs can contribute a great deal. However it represents a very small part of what Chinese NGOs do.

As of 2015 China has several million NGOs and several thousand foundations. The vast majority of these remain under-resourced with many – especially those operating in peripheral and “sensitive” areas – barely able to survive from day to day, let alone contemplate managing a cross-border relief effort. For fundraising organisations, questions still remain over

how comfortable the Chinese public is with contributing funds for projects that are not related to a disaster. Increasingly this is not the case for money spent within China but remains a problem for raising funds to be spent overseas.

While the alliances that have sprung into action are a positive development for Chinese civil society they are also not representative of the entire sector. Jin Jinping, Director of the Center for NPO Law at Peking University, said that in contrast to predominantly unilateral participation after the 2008 earthquake, non-governmental organizations started cooperating together in disaster relief work after the 2013 Lushan earthquake<sup>11</sup>. However Professor Jin also said that NGO alliances remain primarily relevant for disaster situations and outside of this field NGOs rarely cooperate with one another. Even in disasters, often the alliances only appear solid online. Offline they fall apart due to a lack of cooperation and communication. Whether the Nepalese earthquake alliances are more resilient remains to be seen.

It is too early to make firm conclusions about the significance of the Nepalese earthquake for Chinese civil society. It comes at a time when the general narrative and future prospects appear understandably gloomy. The actors involved in Nepal represent a significant and privileged minority. For those NGOs that operate in the safe centre of Chinese civil society – dealing primarily with service provision – it is a glimpse of a positive future filled with better resources and international collaboration. For those NGOs that operate on the periphery it is less relevant. A looming question mark still remains over their future.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.sxdaily.com.cn/n/2015/0428/c142-5672239.html>

# Learning from Nepal: An Interview with Humanitarian Relief Expert Jock Baker

*Interview by Tom Bannister*



*by The Asia Foundation and others to improve Chinese NGOs' capacity to respond to foreign disasters.*

**Tom Bannister: Can you describe what you have been doing in Nepal?**

**J**ock Baker: it has really been a dual role. My involvement with Chinese NGOs actually pre-dated the Nepal earthquake since my involvement stems from a long-term interest from some of the Chinese Foundations to become professional international humanitarian agencies. These foundations would like to build upon the experiences they have gained from responding to disasters in China to move out to respond to disasters outside China, particularly in the Asian region. There had already been some initial activities prior to the earthquake, although the numbers of people trained is still quite small.

When the Nepal earthquake struck, the role of the work I was doing shifted to assessing how the Chinese foundations were responding and the challenges they were facing.

**TB: What challenges were these?**

**JB:** The challenges they are facing can basically be divided into two main categories, those that international NGOs are facing generally in Nepal and those that are unique to Chinese NGOs. Chinese NGOs were not the only ones operating in Nepal who have limited international experience. There were a lot of Indian NGOs for example, which have gained experience responding to disasters in India over the years but are now responding for the first time outside of India.

My colleague Yue Yao has a lot of experience working with Chinese NGOs and has been able to help

*In China, The Asia Foundation has actively engaged in projects supporting Chinese non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to do work abroad. These NGOs who are interested in working overseas, especially the growing number of Chinese foundations, believe that responding to emergencies outside China is the key potential growth area for their international operations because they have successfully gained hands-on experience in the most natural disaster-prone country in the world. Earlier this year, The Asia Foundation had discussions with major domestic foundations and international NGOs (such as Save the Children and Mercy Corps) on launching a long-term capacity building project in this particular area. After the powerful 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck Nepal on April 23, a large number of Chinese NGOs responded swiftly and an NGO platform was set up in Beijing to coordinate relief efforts. As a member of this coordination platform, The Asia Foundation supported Mr. Jock Baker<sup>12</sup> and Mr. YUE Yao, two experienced specialists on international humanitarian assistance, to provide on-the-ground technical assistance to Chinese NGOs working in Nepal during the period from April 29 to May 9. Subsequently Mr. Baker and Mr. Yue travelled to Beijing and shared with Chinese foundations and international NGOs their initial impression on these international and Chinese NGOs' response to the Nepal earthquake. Such analysis and experience sharing will serve as a good foundation for the long-term efforts*

<sup>12</sup> Jock Baker became an independent consultant following a long career with a number of United Nations agencies and international NGOs in mainly field-based assignments in Asia, the Pacific, Africa, Central America and Eastern Europe. He has led a number of studies, lessons-learned reviews, independent reviews and evaluations covering a range of themes, including disaster resilience, humanitarian financing, country strategy evaluations, humanitarian accountability, value for money, mine action, climate change adaptation, post-conflict recovery, post-conflict microfinance programming and donor aid effectiveness. He has also led or participated in global institutional reviews for the donor governments, UN agencies and international NGOs and was an adviser for ALNAP's State of the Humanitarian System reports. He has published articles on a variety of subjects, including disaster risk reduction, interagency collaboration and capacity building, climate change, environmental assessment, and joint evaluation approaches.

Chinese organisations in Nepal in various ways, including setting up logistics systems. There are problems with emergency relief supplies getting into Nepal, with bottlenecks emerging at customs checks. We also provided some training on international disaster relief standards, for example Sphere2. We tried our best to provide a combination of hands-on training and practical support while Chinese NGOs were busy with ongoing operations. I worked with the UN and international NGOS for many years so one of my main roles in Nepal was to assist in connecting the Chinese organisations up with the international system.

Another challenge is that although Chinese NGOs are now used to responding to disasters in China, in China the government takes the lead in coordinating the response and providing relief assistance. However in Nepal, the government does not have this kind of capacity or resources so that NGOs, both international and national, have a relatively important role in responding to the disaster. Working alongside so many NGOs is something that Chinese NGOs have had to learn to do.



*The Indian NGO "White Army" off-loading food aid. Similar to the Chinese NGOs, this was their first experience working outside of their own country (photo by Jock Baker)*

### **TB: Which Chinese NGOs were you working with in Nepal?**

JB: There were basically two categories. There were a few large foundations that had pre-existing partnerships with international organisations and alliances that had been developed during responses to disasters in China. The One Foundation had an existing partnership with Save the Children, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation worked with Mercy Corps, and the Amity Foundation was a member of the global ACT Alliance. Most of the other Chinese NGOs didn't have these kinds of existing relations and

counted on developing partnerships themselves after they arrived in Nepal. For example the Buddhist faith-based organisation, the Lingshan Charitable Foundation, partnered with monks in northern Nepal to provide relief at the community level. Most of these small organisations were working through the district-level Nepali local government.

There were a number of search and rescue teams deployed as well, including of course, the Chinese government's search and rescue team which I understand was the first international rescue team to arrive in Nepal. The Chinese NGO search and rescue teams faced similar problems to other international search and rescue teams since coordination was being done by an overstretched Nepali government system with only partial information about needs. As a result, many of the international search and rescue teams, including Chinese NGOs, ended up focusing their operations in the Kathmandu valley.

Other NGOs were arriving even as we left Nepal in the beginning of May. Many were looking to participate in the recovery and reconstruction phase, for example a Hong Kong NGO was planning to conduct a psycho-social assessment looking at both immediate and longer-term needs.

**TB: Chinese NGOs have taken part in a few previous international relief efforts, for example in 2011 after the Japanese earthquake. However in those situations they were usually considered junior partners, operating in a country in which the civil society is more experienced. These represented learning process for Chinese NGOs. Have there been situations in Nepal where Chinese NGOs have taken the lead?**

JB: The smaller Chinese NGOs have been operating on their own providing small scale assistance with the help of local partners. There is a Chinese NGO platform based in Beijing that was set up after the earthquake which is providing daily situation reports. Although it is small-scale assistance, it can be quite effective because it is direct and targets visible needs. The larger NGOs like Amity and the One Foundation are working through international alliances and partnerships. Their international partners have been active in Nepal for many years and have already built strong partnerships with government and civil society organizations. They are making use of their pre-



existing networks to carry out needs assessments to ensure their assistance meets priority needs.

In Nepal we talked to international partners of Chinese NGOs, such as Save the Children and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and they were very happy with the performance of the Chinese foundations. As an example, even though the One Foundation didn't have a large presence in Nepal; just an English-speaking staff member acting as a liaison and coordinator and a search and rescue team. However they still managed to maintain effective cooperation between the Save the Children Federation and the One Foundation's head office in China. The One Foundation certainly seem to have good contacts because they were one of the few international NGOs in Nepal that was able to bring in relief materials immediately after the earthquake. Furthermore the feedback from the One Foundation's international partners was that the material supplies that the One Foundation was bringing in were what was actually needed based on accurate needs-assessments. This suggests that the One Foundation and Save the Children were operating really effectively as a team.

As for the Amity Foundation, they appeared to have integrated well into the ACT Alliance response where the relief effort was being led by LWF Nepal. We accompanied a team from Amity and LWF to conduct a needs assessment in a village outside of Kathmandu that had been almost completely destroyed. The Amity team has been actively participating in LWF-led assessments, planning meetings and distributions and is seen as a valuable member of the ACT team. They are currently discussing with ACT Alliance members about possible involvement in the recovery and reconstruction phase.

I think that during the next phase, the recovery period, Chinese NGOs could potentially assume an important role in certain areas. The Nepalese government has requested a handful of donors to assume lead roles during the recovery and reconstruction phase for different geographical regions and my understanding is that the Chinese government will take on a leading role in the northern central region. There thus seems to be good potential for partnerships between Chinese NGOs and the Chinese government. Even though they may not be familiar with the international humanitarian system – about how it works and how to use it to their advantage – Chinese NGOs do have some advantages. Nepal has a large ethnic Chinese population and Chinese NGOs have connected with

this community in a way that would be difficult for western NGOs. They are getting a lot of support from Chinese communities in Nepal.



*A young girl who had been buried under her collapsed house for 12 hours before being rescued (photo by Jock Baker)*

### **TB: What has the media response been towards Chinese NGO participation in Nepal?**

JB: From what I have seen, the media in Nepal has been very positive about Chinese assistance, although reporting has mainly focused on the response by the Chinese government. There is still relatively little awareness of the activities of Chinese NGOs in Nepal. They do not have a high profile in Nepal and face difficulties communicating what they are doing to a local audience due to language difficulties, a lack of knowledge about how the international humanitarian system functions, and other factors. At the same time, I think that Nepal is likely to be a milestone for both the Chinese government and Chinese NGOs participating in international relief efforts. Having talked to senior UN officials, I know that they are very impressed with the Chinese government response and, as I already mentioned, there has been a lot of good press surrounding it. The Chinese NGO response is much more low profile; there is much less awareness about what they are doing. Those who have had direct contact with Chinese NGOs couldn't be happier with what Chinese NGOs have been doing and there should be opportunities in future if Chinese NGOs can increase their professionalism and improve their communication.

**TB: What you said about the ethnic Chinese community in Nepal is interesting. Do you know any NGOs that have been set up in**



## **Nepal by local ethnic Chinese communities, and are helping out in the relief effort or cooperating with Chinese organisations?**

JB: From what I saw, it was not really local ethnic Chinese NGOs but business associations and local Chinese businesses that stepped in to help. One way that they have helped is that they are providing free meals and accommodations for Chinese aid workers. They have also helped out with logistics, providing transport to Chinese NGOs. So it doesn't have to be NGOs, it's also the private sector that are engaging with Chinese NGOs. It is also important to remember that China and Nepal are closely connected in many other ways. Many Nepalis speak Chinese and many Chinese have visited Nepal either as tourists or on working visits and would like to support the relief and recovery effort.

## **TB: What are the major needs that Chinese NGOs in Nepal have?**

JB: I think that we will have a better idea of this in a few months after we have properly assessed the performance of Chinese organisations in Nepal. Based on preliminary observations, I think that one of the things that Chinese NGOs are struggling with is that there is not a lot of understanding about how the international humanitarian system works. Awareness of international standards and systems like Sphere are relatively low. Chinese NGOs may know it on paper but they are not sure of how these can be put into practice. For example, our observations indicate that much of the assistance they are giving in Nepal is consistent with Sphere, they are not able to articulate what they are doing using the language of Sphere. So there needs to be more awareness of what the international system is and how to apply it in practice.

Another thing is that Chinese NGOs, along with other newcomers, are being challenged with developing clear strategies in Nepal. This is due to a few reasons, including the fact that there are a lot of other NGOs working in Nepal and it takes time for them to work out where they can offer added-value.

The other thing that is likely to limit the involvement of Chinese NGOs in Nepal is access to diverse sources of funding, including international funding available through the UN system. Their funding currently only comes just from their respective constituencies in China. However international NGOs

that are working alongside them can be part of the UN-led appeal and they have diverse funding sources from different countries around the world.

Of course many of the international NGOs in Nepal have been operating there for many years. So, addressing your previous questions, we may see Chinese NGOs who are involved in the relief effort eventually establishing a long-term presence in Nepal and, when the next disaster comes along – whether it is flood, an earthquake or other disaster type – they will be in a much better position to respond. They will have existing networks, a better understanding of how the international humanitarian system functions, and a much better sense of how they can add value.

## **TB: Earlier you mentioned Indian NGOs and their similar needs to Chinese NGOs. Can you expand upon that?**

JB: Our focus was on Chinese NGOs and Chinese foundations. However, when we were in the field, we observed and heard about Indian NGOs in Nepal who, like Chinese NGOs, were responding outside their countries for the first time. India is, of course, also a disaster-prone country like China. So like Chinese NGOs, these Indian NGOs had built up their experience responding to domestic disasters and then saw the Nepal earthquake as an opportunity to provide support outside of India. There are quite a few Indian NGOs working there providing search and rescue, and some are talking about taking a prolonged role in the recovery phase.

As with Chinese NGOs, many Indian NGOs seem to be operating outside of the international system. They are not familiar with working in the UN-coordinated system, that doesn't really happen in India either. Like China, the government, especially the army, plays a huge role in responding to disasters. One difference with India is that the disaster response is often state-led rather than led by the national government. However, similar to the context in China, Indian NGOs are used to working alongside a very strong government response and when they come to Nepal they have found themselves operating in a different context. Due to their lack of international experience, they are encountering comparable challenges to those faced by Chinese NGOs, for example dealing with international transfer of funds and customs procedures for relief supplies.

One advantage that India NGOs have is that, similar to Nepal, NGOs play a significant role in India during a response to a disaster and they are thus accustomed to working alongside many other NGOs.



*Jock attending a nightly coordination meeting of Chinese foundations in Kathmandu (photo from the CFPA)*

**TB: Do you have examples of Chinese NGOs working with Chinese government entities in Nepal?**

JB: The CFPA has a limited coordinating role as part of the platform that has been set up there. They set up informal evening meetings, with an open invitation to any Chinese organisation involved in the response where they could share what they have been doing. Newly arrived Chinese organizations could thus benefit by learning about the situation and from the experience of others.

There certainly seems to be a lot of potential. Chinese government and Chinese NGOs have worked together in disaster relief efforts inside of China. And as the Chinese government will certainly play a prominent role in the recovery phase, it seems to me that there will be this kind of collaboration in Nepal. Chinese NGOs may be able to help Chinese government efforts connect better with local Nepali groups and communities.

**Tom Bannister: Previous alliances between Chinese NGOs taking part in disaster relief work in China have been criticized for not materializing on the ground or for falling apart once the relief work has ended. Do you think Nepal is different? Do you think there will be stronger alliances afterwards?**

Jock Baker: I think the answer is probably yes and no. There will be some Chinese NGOs that continue their activities into the recovery and reconstruction phase and others that end their activities and return to China. But that is true of any international humanitarian response. The same thing will happen to Western NGOs that participate. In a way, the barriers are even higher for Western NGOs that are in Nepal but have no previous experience of international relief efforts. They have much more competition from similar organisations.

As to whether they are able to sustain their activities, funding will be an issue, as will the identification of viable partnerships that should go beyond the relief effort. Chinese NGOs are potentially in a very good place with regard to future humanitarian action. International NGOs have a much longer history and they have made many mistakes that Chinese NGOs can learn from. Another thing that I've discovered is that Chinese NGOs have a good connection with Chinese academic research, something that Western academics and NGOs often lack. Chinese academics that focus on disaster relief topics can have a very "hands on" approach to their research and are happy to work together with the agencies, both government and NGO, involved in Chinese disaster relief. I think that this active learning process combined with the opportunity to learn from the experiences of international actors bodes well for the future of Chinese engagement.

**TB: Maybe that's because most universities in China are administered by the government and there is a history in China of a strong government role in disaster relief. Therefore there is already an established academic link.**

JB: Yes I think so too. You have the National Disaster Reduction Committee that is an advisory board for the Ministry of Civil Affairs. The academics I have met that are members of that board are very practical people with a lot of international exposure. They have the potential to bring in outside learning and communicate it to a Chinese audience. I believe that this involvement with academics will help in also building the capacity of Chinese NGOs.

*Jock participates in an assessment with the Amity Foundation and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in a village that had been largely destroyed two hours north-east of Kathmandu (photo by Jock Baker)*



**TB: You have already mentioned some ways in which Chinese NGOs are cooperating with partners. How about their cooperation with the Nepalese government?**

JB: There has been quite close cooperation with the Nepalese government. Whereas direct contact with the UN appears to have been limited, most have made sincere efforts to cooperate with the Nepali government. That is what the Chinese organizations are used to doing in China and, at least at the district level, this should be an appropriate channel. The UN coordination mechanism has mainly been at a national level in Kathmandu, although they have also now setting up some sub hubs in the most badly affected areas. The coordination at the field level goes through Nepali government actors, although the capacity of those actors varies depending on location.

**TB: Do you think that Chinese NGOs tend to work better with government actors than their international counterparts, because that is what they are most used to?**

JB: Well they also have to learn because in China, the capacity of the government is much greater. In Nepal outside of Kathmandu, the local government has limited capacity and local and international NGOs are much bigger players. So I don't think it's an advantage; it varies across the NGO response.

**TB: So Nepali civil society has a lot of depth?**

JB: Yes, very much so. There are lots of Nepali NGOs. I understand that more than 30,000 Nepali NGOs were registered prior to the earthquake, so they outnumber international NGOs by a large margin and most of the programs of international NGOs are implemented through national partners. They have a very strong civil society, similar to the strong civil

societies that you can find in other South Asian countries such as India and Bangladesh. Chinese NGOs will probably have to work closely with local NGOs. Working through them makes sense; they have local expertise and tend to provide good value for money, both in terms of cost effectiveness and sustainability. However they also have their own problems to deal with. The capacity of many Nepali NGOs is often not very strong. They also have their own issues such as corruption and the caste system to deal with. Cultural aspects such as the caste system is just one part of the local culture that international NGOs, including Chinese ones, have to learn when they are operating there.

**“NGOs need to demonstrate that they can add value to a relief effort.”**

**TB: In the future, China – at both the government and non-government level – will probably participate in more and more international relief efforts. Regarding preparedness for future involvement in international relief efforts, does China currently participate in readiness planning or simulation exercises with other international or regional actors? Do Chinese NGOs get involved?**

JB: They do indeed, both government and non-government. The government has a large training centre outside of Beijing where they do training and simulation exercises, that's where the government teams keep a lot of their equipment. It's an international centre – I talked to individuals from Nepal and Bangladesh who have been trained there. It's also open to NGO teams participating in training. They also work with international partners. The UK and China have a community-based disaster management project, they plan to set up a kind of disaster learning center and they have six pilot communities projects across China. As I have already mentioned, in China there seems to be a focus on “hands on” learning – either through simulations or learning from real-life responses. Their experience in Nepal should translate into increased preparedness, learning how to be effective responders, how to deploy quickly, how to do needs assessments in unfamiliar



contexts. They are also learning what is needed to engage at the international level, including having the necessary language skills and an understanding of how the coordinating UN systems work.

In terms of sending relief supplies, China as a whole, both non- government and government, has considerable potential being a kind of regional hub supplier for relief supplies, similar to Dubai or Panama. These two places have set themselves up as regional hubs where lots of international agencies have release docks. China with its location, access to ports, and proximity to manufacturers, could do the same.

**TB: What agreements and mechanisms have regulated the Chinese involvement?**

JB: In Nepal there are rules and regulations for international NGOs. Newly arrived NGOs in Nepal are supposed to register with the social welfare council although the earthquake has disrupted normal processes. I heard that only three foreign NGOs out of the more than 100 that responded had actually registered and that the government had agreed to more flexible visa arrangements to facilitate the response. That's not unusual after a big disaster. Bureaucratic systems are often too slow to deal with the aftermath of a large-scale disaster and governments are obliged to make temporary flexible arrangements.

**TB: I wonder if experiences learnt from Nepal will streamline efforts to enable international responders to help in future relief efforts that occur within Chinese borders?**

JB: Yes possibly. Although I think that it is also important to remember that it shouldn't be an open door policy. Some NGOs do perform well in disaster responses, others are criticized for keeping money and not delivering results. NGOs need to demonstrate that they can add value to a relief effort. For example, to do the kind of smaller-scale community-based work which governments don't do that well. I've evaluated NGO humanitarian activities during many years and I certainly wouldn't say they are all perfect and there have been cases where they sometimes cause more problems than they solve. In the response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, evaluations found that there was a lot of wasted resources and unprofessional approaches. For example, many (though not all) international NGOs largely ignored local civil society. They had a lot of money and they felt that they didn't

need them, they didn't know how to work with them, they didn't speak the language.

**“NGOs must demonstrate the value that they add, to demonstrate to donors that they will get more for their money if they donate through the NGO than if they had given directly to the community.”**

Right now there is a big debate in the NGO community about certification of humanitarian agencies. Those in favor of certification argue that people in lifesaving professions like doctors, nurses and firefighters have to be certified. Therefore, if humanitarians are saving lives, why shouldn't they be certified too? Why can anyone come in to respond just because they work for an NGO? Having done a lot of evaluation and worked for several agencies, I think there is probably something to this argument, although there remains the questions about who certifies, and how do you certify without overly constraining the flexibility and independence of NGOs, which may be a strength. I think that in terms of becoming more professional and more thoughtful in their approach, there needs to be some kind of control and at the moment it's mainly the receiving countries that determine that. In Nepal, there has not been a lot of control, but in other countries like Ethiopia, they control very closely, and they control very carefully who comes in. In terms of international organizations, they certify themselves and they do joint monitoring visits each year with them, so they say, ok this is what you said you would do, we are going to check, and they check. There are currently efforts so that international NGOs come up with our own kind of professional standards.

Currently, professional standards, such as Sphere, are voluntary. The main question is how accountable the NGO is, because the money is not given to the NGOs, it is given to the NGO so that they can assist a community that has been affected by a disaster. So NGOs must demonstrate the value that they add, to demonstrate to donors that they will get more for their money if they donate through the NGO than if they had given directly to the community.



**TB:** From your responses to the questions, I think you have quite positive opinions about what Chinese NGOs have been doing in Nepal. I wonder if you think that it has also provided a good window for the Chinese government to further realize and recognize the worth of NGOs?

JB: Maybe. I am more positive about the future potential, especially if Chinese NGOs can learn from this disaster so that they can perform at a higher standard during the next response. There is definitely a better understanding within the Chinese government of international humanitarian relief efforts and the recognition that China now has a regional, if not global, role in humanitarian efforts and that includes Chinese NGOs. My understanding so far is that it's not yet the sort of working relationship that you see between Western government aid agencies and NGOs, but the trends are positive. They are finding out where it makes sense to collaborate, they'll learn from that and they'll come out of it positively. It looks good for the future.

**“It’s now very difficult for Western NGOs to raise funds if they can’t show their donors that they have independent evaluation and auditing processes.”**

**operations?**

JB: Well, they are learning something new every day. There is an issue with communication, with the English language, and understanding how international NGOs work. The local context is also very different from what they are used to and they have to learn how they can add value in an environment where many NGOs, both international and national, are operating. While they are responding they need to do a continuous updating of their assessment, and in the process they are learning, and hopefully they'll be doing it in such a way that they are capturing the important things. They should also be taking the opportunity to learn from the more experienced agencies on the ground. In this way they will be better placed to respond next time. Some examples of lessons learnt could be the

strong support they have received from the ethnic Chinese community in Nepal or the complementary relationship with the Chinese government. Both of these could contribute to a model for future responses.

**TB:** This month was the 7th anniversary of the Wenchuan earthquake. Many consider that earthquake to be a watershed moment for Chinese NGOs. Do you think that the Nepalese earthquake marks another watershed moment for Chinese NGOs?

JB: We will probably be better placed to answer that question a year or so from now, once we see what has been achieved and what has been the effect on Chinese NGOs, but in terms of potential, I think yes. I'd put my money on it. Certainly Nepal has been a great opportunity for the Chinese government, they've become a substantial regional player. It is definitely also a big opportunity for the NGOs, especially because they are going into an NGO-friendly environment.

**TB:** Disaster relief is only a small part of what NGOs do. I wonder if you see any benefits from Nepal for smaller Chinese grassroots NGOs that often find themselves struggling to survive?



*An Amity Foundation staff member conducting a needs assessment (photo by Jock Baker)*

**TB:** What are the main lessons that Chinese NGOs can learn from Nepal? What can Chinese NGOs do in the future to improve their capacity to take part in international

JB: Firstly Nepal has been an opportunity for these big Chinese foundations to see themselves how smaller Nepali community-based organizations function. Secondly they are going to share all of the lessons that they have learnt with their partners in China. This particularly includes things like monitoring and evaluation, which is an area that is perhaps less developed in most Chinese NGOs. The big NGOs, for example the One Foundation, are quite good at it. They do have monitoring and evaluation capacities. However this capacity can still be improved and it's a question of whether they are happy with what they have or if they want to develop further. It's now very difficult for Western NGOs to raise funds if they can't show their donors that they have independent evaluation and auditing processes. As I mentioned before, these are areas where the larger Western NGOs based have relatively more experience than Chinese NGOs, including the experience of making mistakes! So the possibility of learning from this experience and these mistakes can be a great advantage for Chinese NGOs. It can also enable them to demonstrate better how they can add value. This is also something that Chinese NGOs can and will improve upon. All of these are lessons that the Chinese NGOs in Nepal can convey back to NGOs that remained in China.

“Who should I contact for information about education programs for the *children of migrant workers*?”

“Who can we *partner* with for a *project* on reproductive health in Guangzhou?”

“Which environmental NGOs are working on **water issues** in Yunnan?”

Find out in  
China Development Brief's

# Chinese NGO Directory



CDB's Chinese NGO Directory includes detailed profiles of more than 250 Chinese grassroots NGOs (non-government organizations) and a report landscaping the Chinese non-profit sector. The Directory, which distinguishes independent, non-profit NGOs from government-run or affiliated institutions, was compiled through a thorough, year-long process in order to develop the most comprehensive and authoritative listing of the longest-running, active, and influential Chinese grassroots NGOs. Covering more than 28 provinces and municipalities, the Directory includes NGOs working in areas such as environmental protection, public health, migrants and labor, gender, child welfare, law and rights, disabilities, education and more.

The accompanying report, written by Dr. Shawn Shieh and Amanda Brown-Inz, includes analysis and mapping of the NGO landscape in China regarding geographic and sectoral trends, organizational capacity, and funding. Together, these resources will provide the international community with critical insight into the Chinese NGO community, enabling the development of greater collaboration and resource flow.

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