

A SPECIAL REPORT

MAPPING CHINA'S PUBLIC INTEREST NGOS

In *Chinese NGO Directory: A Civil Society in the Making* (A China
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In spite of imposing political, economic and social barriers, grassroots, public interest NGOs have come a long way in China. The term “grassroots” is used here to refer to private, independent organizations started by individual citizens with few or no ties to the government. The term “public interest” refers to NGOs working on social and environmental issues that extend beyond the narrow interests of the organization or its members. During the early 1980s, in the early days of “reform and opening”, there was no independent NGO sector to speak of. Even by the early 1990s, there were only a handful of truly independent NGOs working on public interest issues. The sector was small enough that everyone working in it knew everyone else. It was truly a “small circle” of like-minded colleagues. But it was also a vulnerable group that subsisted on the margins of society. Much has changed over the last decade. These NGOs have grown rapidly, and become increasingly diverse in terms of their missions, their organizational form, their development strategies, their partners and their funders. They are no longer only a “small circle” and are slowly joining the mainstream of society. But one thing has not changed: these NGOs are still not clearly visible to, or well understood by, the Chinese and international communities. This Directory and Special Report was produced in an effort to bring some of the more established and recognized NGOs into the public spotlight.

The purpose of this Special Report is to provide an overview and analysis of the grassroots, public interest NGOs covered in this Directory, and recommendations on how to support these NGOs. The Introduction discusses the Directory’s making in the context of previous NGO Directories published in China, and our reasons for creating this Directory, which is to highlight and focus attention on this group of NGOs.

The Scope and Methodology section defines the scope of the NGOs we include in the Directory and lays out our reasons for focusing on what is actually a very small subset of China’s NGO community. Those reasons include wanting to highlight and advocate for a group of NGOs that are dedicated to addressing many of China’s social and environmental problems, yet remains marginalized, vulnerable and poorly understood by both Chinese and foreigners. It also discusses the methodology we used to select the NGOs included in this Directory. To be included in the Directory, NGOs had to meet several criteria. They had to be established for at least two years, active in running programs or projects, and relatively influential. To identify these NGOs, we looked to NGOs that had been reported on by CDB in the past, as well as NGOs recommended by nine reputable partners that serve as regional platforms for NGOs in their area.

The third section – the Landscape of Chinese NGOs – maps the NGO landscape by drawing on data provided by the NGOs in this Directory. It looks at the geographic and sectoral distribution of these NGOs, their years in existence, registration status, and their budget and staff size. This analysis shows that NGOs tend to be concentrated in certain regions, mostly in major cities and along the coast, and focused more on social service sectors such as education, child welfare, disabilities and elder care. The exception to this emphasis on services was the environmental sector, which is known for its advocacy work, and was the largest sector among this group of NGOs. The data also show China’s grassroots, public interest NGOs to be

quite young, with 82 percent of those in the Directory established after 2000. In addition, they tend to be small and lacking in legal status and financial and human resources. About 56 percent of the NGOs in the Directory had a staff under 10 people, and 72 percent had budgets under RMB 3 million (about US\$476,000). In addition, a large number – about 39 percent – were not registered as NGOs, but as businesses or were unregistered.

Finally, this section also examines those who fund these NGOs. It looks at the distribution of funding coming from international organizations, Chinese foundations, the government, Chinese GONGOs and businesses. While the data we have on funding is fairly general, it suggests that funding patterns for NGOs have diversified. Whereas in the past, many NGOs relied heavily on international donors, now NGOs appear to draw from a wider range of Chinese donors. This finding is yet another indication of the gradual mainstreaming of China's NGOs.

The final section of this report provides recommendations on how to use this Directory and support China's grassroots NGOs. Key recommendations include:

Patience, persistence, and understanding are critical. Many Chinese NGOs lack the staffing and capacity to deal promptly with requests from non-Chinese speakers. Aside from the profiles in this Directory, some NGOs have a fair amount of information on the internet about them. These are the NGOs that generally have someone on their staff who speaks English, and should be the first point of contact for those with no Chinese language skills.

Approach the NGO with respect and humility, as an equal partner. Working with a Chinese NGO requires being flexible and adapting to sudden personnel or regulatory changes. Chinese NGOs understand the need to have their programs monitored and evaluated but they also appreciate being given the responsibility and autonomy to implement their programs without undue interference and excessive reporting requirements.

Consider changing or being more flexible with your funding, and monitoring and evaluation, guidelines when working with Chinese NGOs. As our report shows, many NGOs are still quite small in scale and lack the staff and expertise needed to implement large-scale projects. Consider offering smaller grants, around \$20,000-\$50,000, which can go a long way in China.

Capacity building has always been and continues to be a high priority for many Chinese NGOs. Aside from funding, consider providing other forms of pro-bono support such as mentoring, advice and coaching, particularly to new grantees who would benefit from getting help mastering international reporting and financial management standards.

Consider partnering with another organization such as a Chinese or international foundation, GONGO or business that already works with local grassroots NGOs. At the end of this Directory, we have compiled a list of Supporting Organizations that have a record of supporting and working with grassroots NGOs.

INTRODUCTION

The making of directories arises out of a basic human desire to inform people about the whereabouts and activities of others, to bring people together. This desire seems to be stronger, and more easily realized, where there is a relatively open marketplace, and mechanisms and incentives, for people to get together, buy and trade, and exchange information and services. In China during the 1980s, these conditions were not present. Information was difficult to come by and jealously guarded by individual work units which often stamped their materials “for internal use only” (内部资料), not to be shared with outsiders and particularly not with foreigners. With the liberalization and globalization of China’s economy and society since the 1990s, and the rapid growth of information technologies, it may come as no surprise to see directories and other publicly-shared information in China on the rise.

NGO directories in China are clearly a beneficiary of this era of more open and globalized marketplaces, and communication and information flows. In 1995, the 4th World Conference on Women was held in Beijing, bringing together women’s NGOs from other parts of the world to talk about women’s issues. The Conference had a major impact in introducing NGOs to a Chinese audience and raising the question of whether China had NGOs of their own and, if so, how one could find them. Soon afterwards, with the support of the Ford Foundation, the first Directory of Chinese Women’s NGOs was published in 1997. Almost all of these “NGOs” were what we now called government-organized NGOs (GONGOs), such as the Women’s Federation, and government-affiliated academic or research units, but it was a start. A second edition of this directory was published in 2001 with support from the World Bank and Oxfam Hong Kong.

The years 2001-2002 was a bumper year for NGO directories, driven in significant part by foreign support and expertise. In addition to the second edition of the Chinese Women’s NGO Directory, the Tsinghua University NGO Research Centre put together a directory of 500 NGOs in 2001 with support from the United Nations Centre for Regional Development.¹ Most of these NGOs were membership associations (社会团体) whose origins can be traced to some functional bureau in China’s massive bureaucracy and so earned the name GONGOs, although there were a few grassroots NGOs. About the same time, China Development Brief, which had been started by a British journalist named Nick Young, put together and published its own directory of 250 NGOs. Unlike the Tsinghua NGO Research Centre Directory, CDB’s directory was focused on a smaller subset of public interest NGOs working on development issues. It too contained a number of GONGOs – mass organizations and national-level membership associations. But it also contained a number of grassroots NGOs. This was quite a feat considering that there were not that many grassroots NGOs at the time. The oldest grassroots NGOs in that directory – Huiling, Red Maple Women’s Psychological Counseling Center, Beijing University Women’s Legal Aid Center, Green Volunteer League of Chongqing, Friends of Nature – were at that time less than a decade old. In 2005, CDB published a Directory of 200 International NGOs that was also put online and is still available on our new website at www.chinadevelopmentbrief.cn. More recently, there have been sectoral directories

1 Tsinghua University NGO Research Centre, ed., *The 500 NGOs in China* (United Nations Centre for Regional Development, 2002).

created for environmental organizations, HIV/AIDS organizations, and online directories created for CSR purposes.

With all of these NGO directories out there, why create yet another Chinese NGO directory? In fact, some of our Chinese colleagues asked the same question. After all, as a Chinese NGO that served as a networking platform for other NGOs, they knew most of the Chinese NGOs, or so they thought. As Chinese NGOs like to say, we're all part of a small circle. But the last few years have seen significant changes that made such a new directory necessary. One was the rapid growth and diversification of Chinese NGOs over the last decade in a legal environment that remained ambiguous and unclear. Some NGOs were registered as social organizations (社会组织, the Chinese term for what we know as nonprofits or charities in other countries) with Civil Affairs, but many others were not. Were they NGOs too? Moreover, many of these newer NGOs were not in our 2001 Chinese Directory. As our analysis later in this report shows, most of the NGOs in this Directory were established after 2001.² Another change has been the gradual mainstreaming of NGOs over the past few years. There has also been a growing awareness of NGOs by the government, the media, the public, and foreigners visiting or working in China, and from that awareness has sprung a desire for more interaction and partnerships with NGOs. In other words, Chinese NGOs have been moving out of their "small circle" and are being discovered by the larger domestic and international community. Given these changes, the need for an updated directory to introduce this growing circle of NGOs to the outside world seemed more pressing than ever.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This new directory was not meant to be comprehensive and in fact is only a snapshot of a small subset of the Chinese NGO community. Our aim was not to include all Chinese NGOs, whatever that term means. As we explain further down, the notion of a Chinese NGO is too nebulous and contested for us to draw clear or even fuzzy lines defining a Chinese NGO community. Even the term NGO is problematic and the responses we received from the NGOs profiled here reflect the diverse terminology used. Social organizations (社会组织), public benefit organizations (公益组织), charitable organizations (慈善组织), and popular organizations (民间组织) were all terms used interchangeably with NGO. Neither was this directory meant to be a selection of the best Chinese NGOs. If we cannot even agree on what an NGO is in the Chinese context, then how can we even think about choosing the best? This directory is then, above all, selective, imperfect and dynamic. It only lists the NGOs that we were able to get a hold of, and that sent us back information. Some well-known NGOs are not in this directory because they did not send us their information. It is also meant to be dynamic because we intend to add more NGOs to this directory in the years ahead.

2 This is consistent with a 2007 survey of 350 grassroots NGOs conducted by the Tianze Economic Research Institute in which 68 percent were founded after 2000. See Deng, Guosheng, "The Hidden Rules Governing China's Unregistered NGOs: Management and Consequences," *The China Review*, 10:1 (Spring, 2010), fn 28.

Our goal was really quite modest: to create a directory that would be used as a heuristic tool to serve as a rough guide revealing the outlines, and some of the members, of the universe of what we call Chinese NGOs. Unlike previous NGO directories, this directory would focus on a small segment of China's NGOs: grassroots NGOs working in the public interest or public benefit (公益) sector. The term "grassroots" has several meanings in the NGO community in China. For some, it refers to organizations established voluntarily by private individuals who generally have no ties to the government. Wang Ming, considered by many to be the dean of Chinese NGO scholars, calls these organizations "bottom-up" NGOs, as opposed to the "top-down" GONGOs.³ For others, the term "grassroots" refers to a smaller subset of these "bottom-up" NGOs: small, community-based organizations that are often quite informal. We use "grassroots" in the first sense because we wanted to identify those NGOs in China that come closest to the essential characteristics of civil society organizations worldwide: voluntary, private, nonprofit, and self-governing.⁴ Thus, our Directory would exclude not just GONGOs but also most grassroots organizations and groups that fall into the category of "mutual-help" organizations or membership associations which generally do not work in the public benefit sector. These include many of the small rural technical associations and community-based organizations organized around economic, recreational and cultural activities.⁵ The NGOs in our Directory had to address environmental and social concerns that went beyond the narrow interests of their organization or members, whether it be working to improve the lives of marginalized communities, advocating for the legal rights of vulnerable groups, or educating young people about the environment. These are the NGOs that China Development Brief has been covering since 1996 and thus the NGOs with which we are most familiar, so it made sense to start with this group.

We noted that the grassroots, public benefit NGOs in this Directory make up only a small portion of China's NGOs, but just how small? That depends on how one defines and counts them. There are a range of estimates and no consensus. For the year 2005, when many of these estimates were made, the minimum estimate was around 620,000.⁶ This estimate only counts social organizations registered with Civil Affairs (320,000, of which a good number are GONGOs) and unregistered social organizations such as those registered as businesses (estimated at around 300,000). A more expansive estimate would include small, localized organizations such as student clubs, community-based organizations, and virtual organizations. In 2005, their

3 "NGOs in China," in *The 500 NGOs in China*, pp.5-6.

4 Salamon, Lester, et.al., *Global Civil Society: Dimensions of the Nonprofit Sector, Vol. 1* (John Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies, 1999), pp.3-4.

5 For good, thorough discussions of the many different types of associations which could conceivably fall into the category of civil society organizations in China, see Watson, Andrew, "Civil Society in a Transitional State: The Rise of Associations in China," in Unger, Jonathan, ed., *Associations and the Chinese State* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), and Yu, Keping, "Civil Society in China: Concepts, Classification and Institutional Environment," in Deng, Zhenglai, ed., *State and Civil Society: the Chinese Perspective* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2011), pp.64-96.

6 These estimates are taken from Wang, Shaoguang and Jianyu He, "Associational Revolution in China: Mapping the Landscape", *Korea Observer* 35:3 (Autumn, 2004), and He, Zengke, "Institutional Barriers to the Development of Civil Society in China," in Zheng Yongnian and Joseph Fewsmith, eds., *China's Opening Society: the Non-state Sector and Governance* (Routledge, 2008), pp. 163-164.

number was estimated to be around 759,000. If we add this to our 620,000 figure, we come up with a total of 1.379 million. An even more expansive estimate would include mass organizations and GONGOs which numbered about 6.7 million in 2005 which would bring our grand total to 8.079 million. To call mass organizations and GONGOs, which are creations of the Communist party-state, NGOs is a stretch, but many of these organizations do self-identify as NGOs to the outside world. Finally, some scholars consider self-governing organizations in the city and countryside, such as the neighborhood committees (78,000) and village committees (644,000), should count as community organizations. If we include these, then we arrive at a maximum estimate of 8.8 million. And this figure does not even include the rural associations which some scholars believe should be counted and number anywhere from 1 to 1.6 million.⁷ Even if we focus just on the minimum estimate of 620,000, and ignore all the other organizations that claim NGO status, then the 250 or so NGOs listed in this directory represents only a very miniscule part – about 0.04 percent - of the associational universe in China.

Why focus on this very small subset of NGOs and ignore the others? The most straightforward reason is that it made our job easier. It took us about a year to just catalogue around 300 NGOs. To reach all of the other NGOs and quasi-NGOs out there, we would need the help of the People's Liberation Army and even then, that might not be enough. A more important reason is that these are the NGOs most in need of, and deserving of support, because of their nature, their status, and their mission. Grassroots NGOs, in contrast to their GONGO cousins, tend to express the characteristics generally associated with civil society in that they come closest to being voluntary, private, nonprofit, and self-governing. When a civil society flowers in China, it will grow from the soil nurtured by the NGOs in this Directory. Grassroots NGOs are most in need because of their low status in the social and political hierarchy. They lack the influence and resources of GONGOs that enjoy close ties to the system. Indeed, they are a marginalized, vulnerable group just like the communities they serve. Finally, in a country where the pursuit of wealth and conspicuous consumption is widespread, these organizations are deserving because of their mission to address broader social and environmental problems that extend beyond their small circle, working to improve the lives of marginalized, vulnerable communities such as migrant workers, farmers in the West of China, ethnic minorities, girls and women, those living with HIV/AIDS, the elderly, children, the LGBT community and even grassroots NGOs themselves. In carrying out their work, these NGOs believe they are helping the Communist Party build a better, more stable and ultimately a happier society. We believe the work of these NGOs needs to be better publicized and promoted to the outside world.

Finally, we focused on this group of NGOs because, by setting them off from other “social organizations” such as mass organizations, GONGOs, trade associations, etc., we wanted to advocate on their behalf. Too often, this group gets lost in the crowd because the term “social organization” or NGO or nonprofit organization (NPO) is used to refer not only to grassroots NGOs but also mass organizations and GONGOs which are bigger, more numerous and better known. That is a shame because to call mass organizations and many of the GONGOs “NGOs” is to stretch the concept beyond familiarity.

7 Watson, Andrew, “Civil Society in a Transitional State,” pp.35-36.

At the same time, we recognize that the line between GONGOs and grassroots NGOs is not clear cut. It is more of a spectrum where on one end are GONGOs that were created by government agencies and staffed by government officials that retain an administrative rank and on the other end are grassroots NGOs started by private individuals with no ties to the party-state. There are also NGOs that fall in the grey area in the middle of the spectrum. Examples might be GONGOs such as the Foundation for Poverty Alleviation which have detached themselves from the government and become a more professional foundation, and the China Association for STDs and AIDs and Chinese Red Cross which have supported grassroots NGOs in the form of grants or fiscal sponsorships. Then there are grassroots NGOs that affix themselves to public institutions in order to gain some sort of legitimate status. They could be seen as GONGOs on the surface, but NGOs at their core. A good example is the well-known, independent Beijing University Women's Legal Aid Center which was part of the Beijing University Law School until 2010, when it registered as a business under the name, Beijing Zhongze Women's Legal Consulting Center. In the end, though, behind all these fine distinctions lies a very real difference in mindset, values and approach between GONGOs and grassroots NGOs.

Once we decided to focus on this subset of grassroots, public interest NGOs, the challenge was still how to narrow the numbers to something more manageable given that we lacked the resources to contact and collect information about all the grassroots NGOs in China. As a result, we decided to do a first cut of these NGOs by using three criteria:

- 1) The NGO had to have been established for at least two years. Some NGOs come and go, and we wanted to make sure the NGO had managed to continue its operations into the third year.
- 2) The NGO had to be active in running programs or projects during its existence.
- 3) The NGO had to be known outside its small circle and received some kind of external recognition by other organizations.

To identify NGOs that met these criteria, we started with NGOs that that had been covered in CDB's publication over the last 10 years. To be covered in CDB was an indication that the NGO was doing something distinctive that was getting the attention of others in the NGO community.

As a Beijing-based NGO, we also wanted to avoid a regional bias. We therefore worked with nine regional NGO partners that serve as networking, capacity-building platforms to help us identify NGOs that met our criteria. We sent them a list of NGOs in that region, and asked them to revise the list, taking out NGOs that were no longer operating or active, and adding others they believed met our criteria. In East China, our partners were the NPO Development Center and Nonprofit Incubator (NPI) in Shanghai, and Amity Foundation's NGO Development Center and Justice for All in Nanjing. In South China, our partners were the Institute for Civil Society Studies at the Sun Yatsen in Guangzhou and NGO CN, which had recently relocated from Kunming to Guangzhou. For Southwest China, we consulted both NGO CN and the 512 Voluntary Relief Services Center in Chengdu. In Northwest China, we received

assistance from the Shaanxi Research Association for Women and Family and a network of NGOs in Qinghai.

Once we decided on a list of around 300 NGOs nationwide, we then contacted them. If they responded and agreed to be included in the Directory, then we sent them a form similar to the profiles in this Directory for them to fill out. Thus, the NGOs that you see in this Directory are those that filled out the form and returned it to us before the deadline.

There were certain limitations with our methodology for selecting these NGOs. One had to do with our criteria for selecting NGOs being somewhat imprecise and subjective. The criterion that the NGO had to be established for at least two years was the most objective and therefore the easiest to apply, but the application of the “active” and “influential” criteria were obviously shaped by perception. Some NGOs also had different perceptions of what constituted grassroots NGOs and included some NGOs that others might call GONGOs. This problem stemmed from the lack of clear-cut distinctions between grassroots NGOs and GONGOs, an issue that we addressed above. Finally, our choice of regional partners also skewed our results by giving greater emphasis to the areas where those partners were based. For example, we had four partners in East China which resulted in the inclusion of more NGOs from that region than we had expected. Likewise, the absence of a regional partner in northeast China resulted in fewer NGOs from that region.

Despite these limitations, we believe we have taken an important step in identifying many of the better-known, grassroots NGOs working in the public interest sector in China. In doing so, we have tried to capture their diversity, civic spirit and compassion, and to provide readers with a glimpse of the colorful *mélange* that constitutes the grassroots NGO community. The Directory includes many of China’s oldest and best-known NGOs: Huiling, which works with young adults with intellectual disabilities; Shaanxi Research Center for Women and Family; the Center for Legal Aid to Pollution Victims; Beijing Stars and Rain, which works with autistic children; and the Institute for Contemporary Observation, which works on labor issues in Guangdong, among others. Also making an appearance are well-known, second-generation NGOs such as Nonprofit Incubator (NPI), Beijing Huizeren, which works on volunteer development, Green Watershed, Shining Stone, which works on community organizing, and Ark of Love, which works with the AIDS community. Newer, up-and-coming NGOs include the China Foundation Center, China Dolls Center for Rare Diseases, Green Anhui, and Gesanghua Tutoring. Finally, there are the many, many other NGOs that we do not hear about but go by colorful names such as: the Kaifeng Love Town Volunteers Center, IYouShe Community Cultural Center, “Don’t Eat Friends” Vegan Initiative, Firefly Help for Disabled Station, and EasyTry Social Work Service Center. These are the names of just a few of the more than 250 NGOs listed in this Directory.

THE LANDSCAPE OF CHINESE NGOS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The data collected for this project provided CDB with an interesting snapshot of the contemporary Chinese grassroots NGO field. Of course, we must begin with the qualifier that our data was irrevocably shaped by China Development Brief’s own

organizational networks and geographical location. While we made every effort to reach out to a diverse group of organizations, the mapping of such a complex environment is unavoidably determined by the information to which we have access. Thus, this analysis is carried out with the full acknowledgment that there may be other activities in the country of which we were not aware.

In the following section, we consolidate this data and analyze aggregate trends according to organizational characteristics such as location, sector, budget, and staff size. The landscape that emerges is enlightening, revealing a Chinese civil society that is still quite nascent and centered in the major metropolises of Beijing and Shanghai, but with a burgeoning pool of financial sponsors and a growing sense of self-awareness and professional savvy. While restrictive registration conditions continue to limit the scope and channels of development for the third sector, it seems that NGOs have found creative means to continue pursuing their organizational missions, and that promising new initiatives have sprung up across the board.

Geographic Distribution

In mapping the landscape of Chinese grassroots NGOs, location is clearly an important aspect to consider. Local climates for NGOs often vary drastically, leading to NGOs to cluster in certain areas of the country. There are a number of factors that may influence the location of NGOs, including but not limited to the support of local authorities, the needs of local communities, the proximity of foundations, international organizations, businesses and other funders, the nature of local Civil Affairs regulations and the way they are interpreted and implemented, and the general political climate of the area. Traditionally, Beijing has had the heaviest concentration of NGOs, and our data supported this trend-- Beijing was by far the most popular location for the NGOs in our directory, comprising almost 30 percent of all organizations (Figure 1).⁸ Aside from Beijing, other areas have emerged as hubs for NGO activity. Shanghai had the second-highest percentage of NGOs at 12 percent, while Guangdong had approximately seven percent of the total number of NGOs. Like Beijing, both regions are heavily urbanized, possess strong economies, and are leaders in NGO regulatory reform.⁹

8 As explained earlier, a great effort was made to reach out to NGOs nationwide and to consult with national networks, although it is possible that CDB's strong network of Beijing organizations led to a slight Beijing bias.

9 For more on these reforms, see the Policy Briefs posted monthly to China Development Brief (English)'s website.



Figure 1. NGOs by Province

Another hub for NGOs was in the populous province of Sichuan, a trend no doubt influenced by the massive Wenchuan earthquake of 2008, which for some marked a turning point in NGOs visibility and recognition by the government.¹⁰ Roughly 10 percent of the organizations in our directory were based in Sichuan, indicating that the NGO influx which began in 2008 has continued to encourage the development of NGOs in the region. Jiangsu was tied with Guangdong with seven percent (Nanjing has developed into another major center for NGO development), followed by Shaanxi at six percent, and Anhui, Qinghai, Yunnan, and Zhejiang at four percent. The remainder of the provinces held two percent or less of the total in our sample. China’s northeast, in particular, has never been a NGO stronghold and the numbers which, showed only four NGOs from this region, confirmed this expectation. These numbers suggest that while NGOs do indeed span the nation, the heaviest concentrations remain in certain spaces which may be more amenable or possess greater capacity for NGO registration, or which may offer a more appealing environment for NGO work.

10 See Shieh, Shawn and Guosheng Deng, “An Emerging Civil Society: the Impact of the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake on China’s Civic Associations,” *The China Journal* 65 (January 2011), pp.181-194, also available [online](#).

If there were any surprises, it was the relatively low number of NGOs in Yunnan, a province known for its NGO activity due to the many international NGOs that flocked to the province in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Conversations with NGOs working in Yunnan suggest that some NGOs in the province have closed down or left due to a political and regulatory environment that has become more restrictive. According to some observers, provincial authorities have in the past few years been seeking to exercise greater regulation over what was perceived to be a relatively unregulated landscape of hundreds of unregistered international and Chinese NGOs working in the province.

Distribution by Sector

An understanding of the sectoral distribution of the NGOs in this Directory is also important (Figure 2). The variety of sectors noted by our NGO respondents reflects the many societal roles that NGOs fulfill-- ranging from advocacy for disadvantaged groups such as minorities, migrant workers, or women, to traditional service providers aiding the elderly and children. Both advocacy and social service organizations seem to be prevalent in China, and a single organization may also engage in both types of work. Additionally, we have deemed it useful to consider sector distribution not only on a national scale, but on a provincial scale as well, in order to deduce certain trends in sector popularity.

According to our data, service provision is a high priority for Chinese NGOs, with more than half of all organizations providing services in the fields of education, disabilities, elder care, and child welfare (as well as the expansive and increasingly popular term, “social work”). This trend correlates with the government's vision for the non-profit sector, as reflected in its “small government, big society” slogan that has dominated official discourse concerning the social services sector since the 1990s, and the more recent discussion of “social management innovation,” which refers specifically to a reliance on non-state actors to provide social services.¹¹

11 See the articles [“Government Procurement Promotes Social Work Agencies”](#) and [“How the Official Discourse of ‘Social Management Innovation’ Has Expanded the Space for NGOs”](#) on China Development Brief (English)’s website.

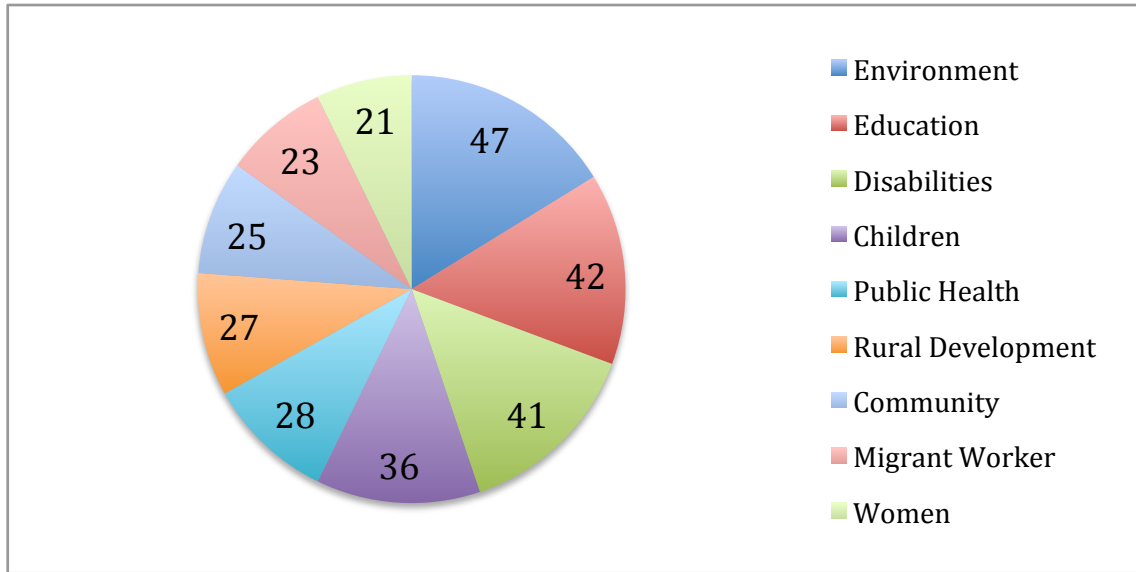


Figure 2: NGOs by Sector¹²

These types of NGOs tended to concentrate in areas such as Beijing, Shanghai, Sichuan, and Guangdong, where local Civil Affairs Bureau are more reform-minded, and possess more funding to encourage an organizational focus on service provision. Half of the elderly care NGOs, for instance, were located in Beijing, Shanghai, and Sichuan, while Beijing alone had almost one-quarter of the total number of disability-focused NGOs. Additional hubs were Jiangsu, another relatively developed region in which nearly 50 percent of organizations were centered around service provision, and Shaanxi, which, at least in our sample, held the greatest number of disability care groups outside of Beijing. Beside government initiatives encouraging the development of social service organizations, these types of organizations may also be more likely to emerge in metropolises due to the prevalence of urban residents who lack an urban hukou registration, and are thus unable to access government social services and are forced to seek other venues for social services, such as NGOs.

Overall, the largest sector was environment protection, with 46 NGOs (roughly 20 percent) citing it as an organizational focus. The strength of the environmental NGO sector is the result of a long struggle by community organizers critical of excessive development at the expense of the environment, as well as the internationalization of environmental issues in recent years. These trends have led to an increasingly vocal environmental protection community and environmental protection education efforts, and a more tolerant government attitude toward these types of groups. According to our data, environmental groups span the country, showing up even in remote provinces such as Gansu and Ningxia, which speaks to the growing awareness of environmental issues throughout the country.

¹² Other sectors not shown include: Volunteering -15; Legal Aid -11; Culture -10; Disaster Relief - 8; Ethnic Minorities - 7; Elderly - 7; Social Enterprise - 6; LGBT -4; Media -4; CSR - 2; Think Tank -1. The numbers add up to more than 251 because a number of NGOs work in more than one sector.

The third sectoral characteristic that we considered was advocacy for human rights or identity politics issues. Historically, these types of groups have met with the most resistance from the government, as they have been perceived as more sensitive, and serving to represent the interests of overseas organizations and governments. In keeping with this trend, the majority of groups working on these issues were based in areas such as Beijing and Shanghai, where there may be more contact with the international community and more access to funding for these types of projects. Of the LGBT groups included in the directory, for instance, 50 percent were based in Beijing. This may also relate to the relative prosperity of these areas, which may encourage the emergence of identity-based activities, unlike less developed areas where economic development issues may be more pressing.

Years in Existence, Registration Status and Capacity

By looking at other trends among the NGOs in our directory, we are also able to provide a snapshot of the institutional characteristics of the NGOs themselves. For instance, the vast majority of NGOs were founded after the year 2000, with 90 NGOs (36 percent) being established during the 2001-2005 period, and 115 NGOs (46 percent) being established in the most recent period (2006-2011), giving a sense of the relative youth of China's NGO sector compared with other parts of the world (Figure 3). Only 18 of the organizations in our directory were founded before 1995, and only 6 before 1990. This data also reinforces Ministry of Civil Affairs statistics, and anecdotal evidence, showing that the NGO sector has grown especially quickly and steadily over the last decade. As one Chinese scholar said, “in the old days back in the early 2000s, you knew most of the grassroots, public interest NGOs out there, but now that’s just not possible because there are so many more of them.”

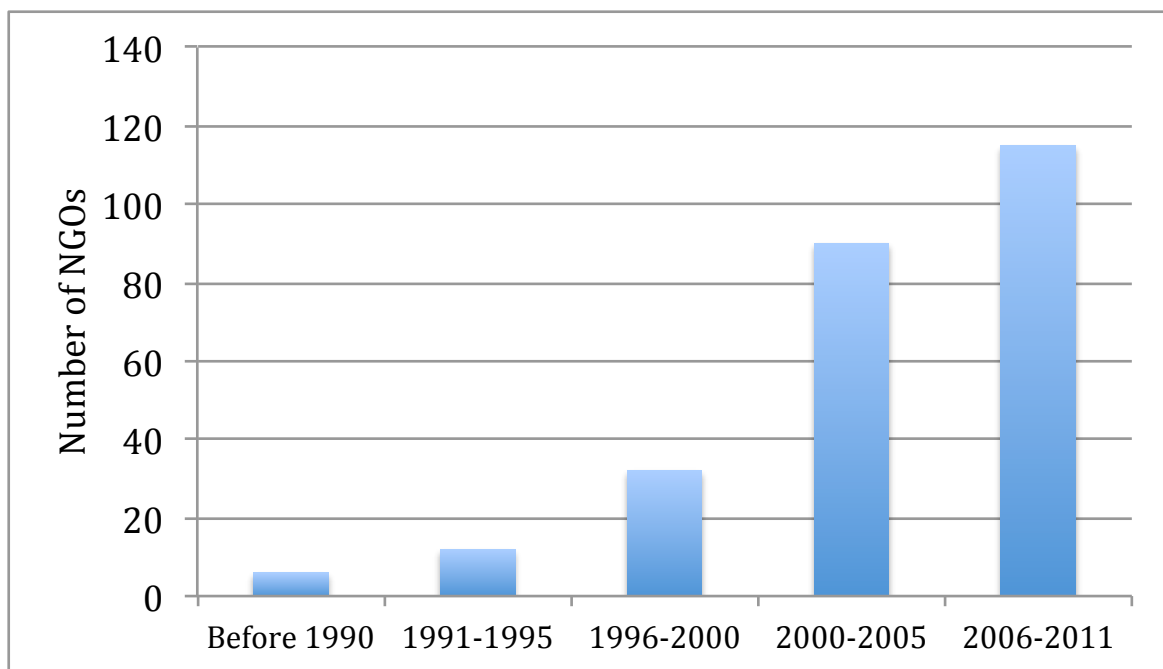


Figure 3: NGOs by Year of Establishment

Registration type was another interesting factor to examine (Figure 4), as only slightly more than half of the organizations in the directory had registered with the relevant Civil Affairs department as “social organizations” (社会组织). Of these, 38 (15 percent) were registered as SAs (社会团体) and 105 (41 percent) were registered as CNEUs (民办非企业). This distribution comes as no surprise given that organizations must meet a higher bar for SA registration, and anecdotal evidence suggests that few grassroots groups are able to register as such unless they have strong institutional or personal ties with local registration authorities. Another 57 organizations (22 percent), did not register as non-profits at all, but instead were registered as businesses through the Industry and Commerce department. This data reflects a critical facet of the landscape *for* NGOs: faced with the difficulties of registration, many organizations either choose to register as businesses, or do not register at all, which was the case with 17 (7 percent) of the groups in our directory. Another 26 (10 percent) characterized their registration as “other,” which could include “attaching” (挂靠) one's organization to a larger, registered organization such as a university, GONGO or even company.

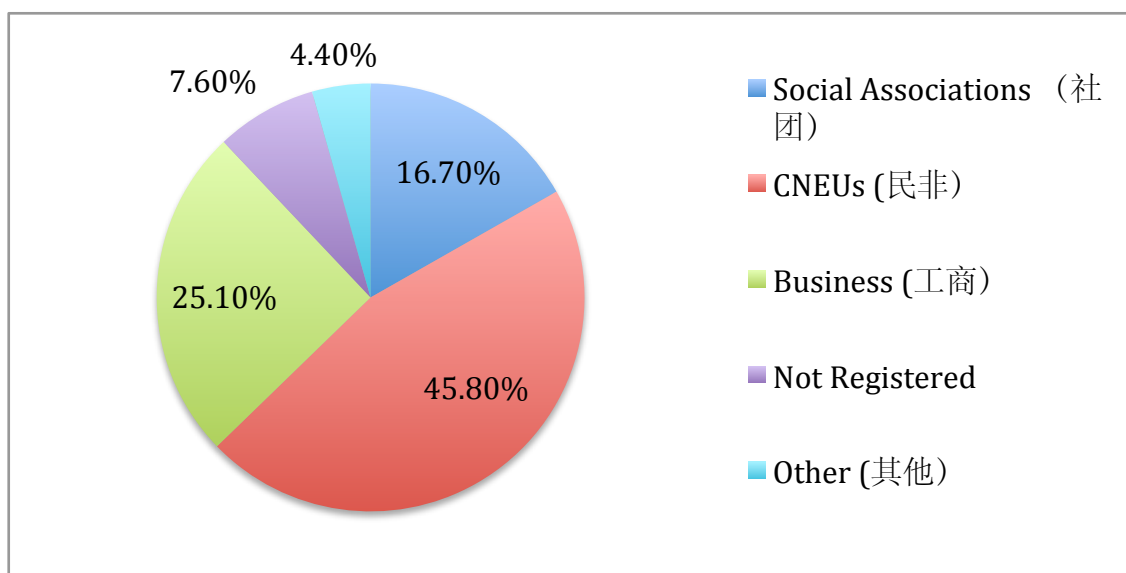


Figure 4: NGOs by Registration Type

Other data provided a sense of the organizational capacity of these NGOs. Roughly 140 of the NGOs (56 percent), for instance, operated with a staff of 10 or less (Figure 5). Almost one-quarter of the groups had between 1 and 5 staff members. Only 34 (14 percent) had more than 20 staff members, indicating that the scale of operations is fairly small among grassroots NGOs. Another indicator of operational scale is the annual budget (Figure 6). Many NGOs were reluctant to share this data, or perhaps did not have a clear sense of their yearly budget, and so we only had access to this data for around two-thirds of the organizations. Based on the data that we did receive, it seems that most organizations operate on a moderate budget-- only 28 (11 percent) had a budget of over RMB 3,000,000, while there were 44 (18 percent) with a budget

of between RMB 100,000 and RMB 500,000, 43 (17 percent) with a budget of RMB 500,000 to RMB 1,000,000, and 47 (19 percent) with a budget of RMB 1,000,000 to RMB 3,000,000. Less than 10 organizations (4 percent) had a budget of less than RMB 100,000.

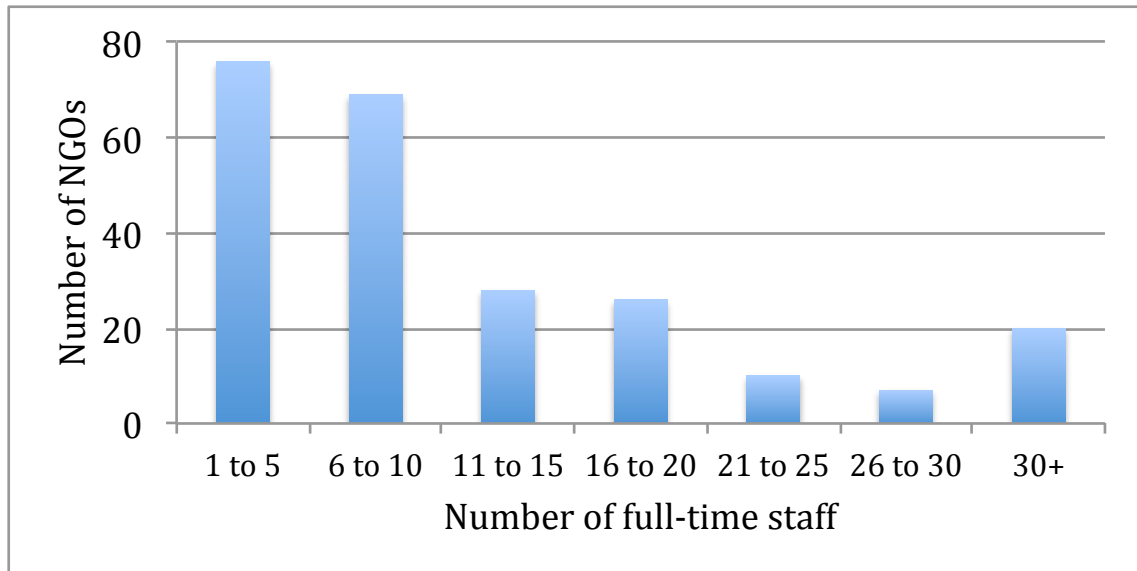


Figure 5: NGOs by Number of Full-time Staff

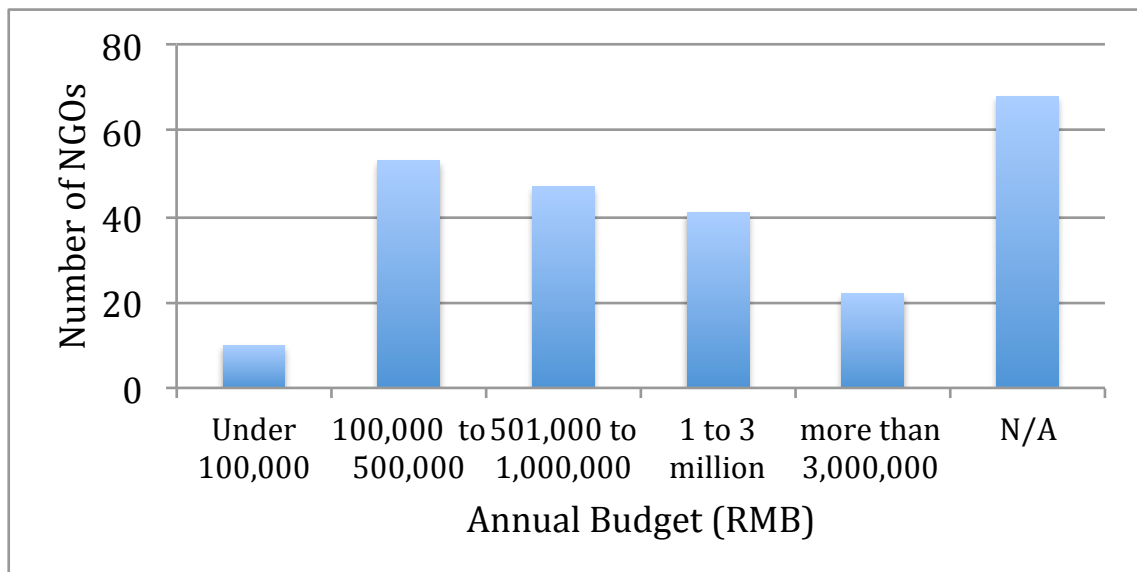


Figure 6: NGOs by Annual Budget

Who Funds Grassroots NGOs?

In attempting to map the landscape of Chinese grassroots NGOs, we also thought that it would be useful to consider the kinds of organizations that provide financial support for Chinese NGOs. As the majority of Chinese grassroots NGOs rely heavily on

funding from outside groups, often in the form of foundation or embassy grants, we felt it was important to gain a better understanding of the landscape of donor organizations operating in China. We caution that our form only asked NGOs to list their “Major Funders” and not the amounts contributed by these funders. Still, we feel that this data still provides a valuable picture of the types of organizations providing support, and the sectors and regions where this support is prevalent.

International Organizations

We included in this category international foundations and NGOs, multilateral agencies and foreign embassies. Of the international foundations and NGOs listed in the NGO profiles as funders, Oxfam Hong Kong (31) and the Ford Foundation (28) made the most appearances by far, followed by the German foundation, Misereor (15). Other international foundations/NGOs that deserve mention include Give2Asia (7), the Asia Foundation (5), the German foundation, EED (5), the Hong Kong-based Kadoorie Charitable Foundation (5), Global Greengrants Fund (5) and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (4). Foreign embassies and consulates included those from Canada, the U.S., the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Sweden, Switzerland, France and Belgium. Mention of multilateral agencies such as the United Nations, and its affiliated agencies, the World Bank, the European Union, and the Global Fund occurred less frequently, perhaps a sign of declining international assistance to China.

The vast majority of funding from international organizations was channeled toward NGOs in Beijing. This category includes: international foundations and NGOs which provided 93 grants to Beijing NGOs; multilateral groups such as the World Bank and the United Nations, which supported 16 Beijing NGOs; and embassies which provided more than 20 grants to Beijing NGOs. International foundation and NGO funding also went to a significant number of groups outside of Beijing: Sichuan (25), Shaanxi (21), Guangdong (20), Yunnan (14), and Qinghai (13). Multilateral organization and embassy funding was also present in other areas, though in less substantial numbers. Funding from multilateral organizations went to groups in Sichuan (6) and Shaanxi (5) as well as a smattering of organizations in Shanghai, Yunnan, Gansu, Jiangsu, Qinghai, Zhejiang, Guangdong, Anhui, and Henan. Embassy funding also supported groups in Shanghai (4), Qinghai (3), and Fujian (3), along with one organization per province in Gansu, Shaanxi, Guangdong, Jiangsu, and Chongqing.

In terms of sectoral distribution, international funders supported a wide range of initiatives: foundations and NGOs focused on women and gender (39), education (37), environment (36), and HIV (29); multilateral agencies focused on women and gender (11), environment (10), and public health (9); while embassies focused on migrant workers (11), women and gender (10), and environment (6). Other internationally-supported initiatives included community development, NGO capacity building, legal aid, minorities, LGBT, culture, disabilities, and children. These trends indicate that there does seem to be some sort of consistency among the interests of international groups working with NGOs in China, particularly in terms of an emphasis on the environment and women, which are both international issues involving networks of global actors.

Chinese Foundations

Chinese foundations are still somewhat of a nascent presence in Chinese society, as the registration mechanisms for private foundations were developed as recently as 2004. Yet the numbers of private foundations have expanded rapidly since 2004, so that now there are more than 2,000 such organizations-- although the vast majority do not yet carry out grantmaking activities. The data presented here, then, refer generally to funding by a small vanguard, including the Narada Foundation, the One Foundation, YouChange China Social Entrepreneur Foundation, the Tencent Foundation, and the SEE Foundation. We have also included the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation in this section because of its efforts to detach itself from the government and become a more professional foundation.

Looking at the data, Beijing NGOs are again the most heavily represented groups, with 77 instances of Chinese foundations providing support for Beijing NGOs. Shanghai and Sichuan were also quite high on the list, with 36 and 31 instances of Chinese foundations funding Chinese NGO projects. A significant number of groups in Shaanxi, Gansu, Yunnan, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Qinghai also received funding from Chinese foundations. If we consider more closely the giving patterns among the most well-represented individual foundations in our data: the Narada (or Nandu) Foundation supported a total of 33 groups from our directory, with 14 in Beijing, 6 in Shanghai, 5 in Sichuan, and 2 or fewer in Yunnan, Gansu, Shaanxi, Henan, and Guizhou; the One Foundation supported a total of 22 of the groups in our directory, with 9 in Beijing, and 3 or fewer in Shaanxi, Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu, Anhui, Jiangsu, and Guangdong; YouChange supported a total of 13 of the groups in our directory, with 7 in Beijing, and 2 or fewer in Shanghai, Shaanxi, Yunnan, and Sichuan; and Alashan SEE supported 10 of these groups, with 3 in Sichuan, 2 in Beijing, Yunnan, and Fujian, and 1 in Henan.

In terms of sectoral distribution, Chinese foundation funding patterns showed both similarities and differences with international funding patterns. One similarity was that environment and education were again at the top of the list. According to our data, environmental groups received 52 instances of support by Chinese foundations, and educational initiatives received 46 instances of support. Likewise, community development, NGO capacity building, HIV, migrant workers, and children received a considerable amount of support.

Chinese foundation funding patterns, however, diverged from their international counterparts in other areas. Chinese foundations, for example, were mentioned more often than international organizations in supporting sectors such as social work, disabilities, and disaster relief, for example. Conversely, international organizations were mentioned more often than Chinese foundations in supporting sectors such as women and gender, legal aid and LGBT. The biggest contrast was in funding for women and gender NGOs, with Chinese foundations listed 17 times, in contrast to 39 times for international foundations and NGOs.

Looking more closely at the most-represented foundations, Narada spread its support fairly evenly across a range of sectors; of the times the One Foundation was listed as a funder, a quarter of those were for environmental NGOs, and 14 percent each for capacity building and disabilities; while YouChange concentrated its funding

activities in poverty alleviation (23 percent), rural development (18 percent), and the environment (14 percent).

Government and GONGOs

Another interesting trend that we noted among NGO funders was the significant amount of support from government agencies and GONGOs, which we believe has grown over the last few years. Government funding may come in the form of gifts to the institution, or it may be received through government contracting of services, an increasingly popular model for social service provision. The majority of government agencies providing funding for Chinese NGOs came from Civil Affairs Bureau and Subdistrict Offices (also known as Street Committees, 街道办事处), while the most common GONGOs lending financial support were the Disabled Persons' Federation, China Charity Federation, Communist Youth League, the China Association of STD & AIDS Prevention and Control, and capacity-building organizations such as the China Association for NGO Promotion (CANGO) and the China NPO Association (although in general, GONGOs are considerably more likely to serve as collaborative partners to NGOs than as funders, a trend noticeable in the significant number of government organizations listed as "partners" rather than "funders" in organizations' profiles).

Government and GONGO funding differed from the geographic trend that we noted earlier, in that Shanghai was the most common location for this type of funding, with 23 groups receiving funding from government agencies, and 4 from GONGOs. Shanghai's prominence makes sense given that it was one of the first cities to promote government contracting on a large-scale. Beijing was next, with 13 from government agencies and 5 from GONGOs, followed by Jiangsu, Guangdong, Sichuan, and Chongqing. The support from government agencies spanned a fairly wide range, although the greatest amount of support went to NGOs working on public health, social work, children, and volunteers, supporting our earlier observation that the government is currently focused on supporting organizations that will aid in the development of a non-state social service sector. The GONGO that was mentioned most when it came to funding was the China Disabled Persons' Federation (CDPF) and its local affiliates, with the data showing the CDPF funding 9 disabilities groups, and 3-4 public health, social work, and children groups respectively.

Businesses

The last type of organization that we consider is businesses, which seems to also be a growing area for Chinese NGO funding. This area will no doubt expand further in the future, once a coherent Charity Law is put together which can streamline the process of enacting tax deductibility for funding support for non-profits. Businesses may currently deduct up to 12 percent of their taxable income for donations to approved charitable organizations, but the process of registering for tax deductibility and of receiving the tax deduction, are prohibitively complex. Nonetheless, businesses have already begun to support the non-profit sector in significant amounts.

In terms of geographic distribution, Shanghai is once again the hotspot for this type of funding from Chinese businesses, with 18 Chinese businesses cited as funders by Chinese NGOs. Beijing followed with 12, and, with three to five Chinese businesses

cited as funders, Fujian, Qinghai, Chongqing, and Guangdong. In terms of the sectoral distribution, disabilities was the most common, with 23 percent, followed by environment at 22 percent, and education at 20 percent.

International businesses, on the other hand, kept with the trend among international organizations clustering their funding support in Beijing, with 27 businesses providing funding to Chinese NGOs. Shanghai followed with 14, while the rest of the provinces held 3 or less instances of international business funding support for Chinese NGOs. The organizations supported by international businesses focused on environment, children, and education.

Terminology

As one final note on our analysis of the data provided in the profiles of these Chinese grassroots NGOs, we also looked at the terms that NGOs used in their profiles to derive some understanding of the terms NGOs used in describing their work. One term that we searched for was “advocacy,” or *changdao* (倡导). Advocacy is an aspect of NGO activity that is often sought by international organizations which may be interested in Chinese NGOs' potential to build up China's nascent civil society, serving as a third sector that has the space to critique and assist in policy development. Yet *China Development Brief's 2006 NGO Advocacy in China* report notes the somewhat awkward nature of the use of the term *changdao* as a translation for advocacy, as it connotes “guidance by moral, political and intellectual authorities,” and expresses that the term may be an uncomfortable fit as a translated concept.¹³ The report also reveals that in in-depth interviews with 20 Chinese grassroots NGOs, only 8 mentioned the term *changdao* of their own volition. We compared that with the text of the more than 250 profiles that we received for this directory, and found that the term seems to have become significantly more common, as 104 of the groups included the term *changdao* in their description of organizational activities. This data suggests that over the past 5 years, the term does seem to have become more commonplace among Chinese NGOs.

Conversely, the Chinese government has its own initiatives for Chinese NGOs, which as mentioned earlier, seem to center around re-envisioning NGOs as social service providers, funded through government contracts. While it is difficult to ascertain what effect these initiatives may have had on the discourse on NGOs, we thought that the term “social work” or *shehuigongzuo* (社会工作) might serve as a useful indicator, as recent government discourse about the shifts in the non-profit sector have generally centered around the issue of developing the field of social work, and the 12th Five Year Plan includes a major initiative to drastically increase the number of social workers and social work organizations. Searching for *shehuigongzuo* and *shegong* (a shortened version of the term), we located 46 groups that included these terms in their profile. This number indicates that the term has begun to take hold in the Chinese NGO community, but we venture that the term may become much more widespread in years to come.

13 Young, Nick. *NGO Advocacy in China* (2006), p.10.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON USING THE DIRECTORY AND SUPPORTING CHINESE NGOs

We hope the Directory will serve as an important resource for potential partners, donors, and volunteers to contact these NGOs. In this spirit, we offer the following recommendations for those seeking to fund, partner with and work in Chinese NGOs:

1) ***Patience, persistence, and understanding are critical.*** Many Chinese NGOs lack the staffing and capacity to deal promptly with requests from non-Chinese speakers. The fact that this Directory is printed in English may be somewhat deceptive. A number of these NGOs may have difficulty communicating in English. As we found out, a number of NGOs are also not easy to get a hold of. It may require several emails or phone calls. It is also helpful to know something about the NGO, if possible, before contacting them. Information about Chinese NGOs is scarce and uneven. The Directory profiles provide some information, and you may also be able to find out something about the NGO or the sector by doing a general internet search, or a search on China Development Brief (English)'s website at www.chinadevelopmentbrief.cn. Some NGOs in this Directory have a fair amount of information on the internet about them or their founders, some of whom have won international awards. These are the NGOs that generally have someone on their staff who speaks English, and should be the first point of contact for those with no Chinese language skills. But many other NGOs have almost nothing available in English.

2) ***Approach the NGO with respect and humility, as an equal partner.*** China's NGOs are quite different from NGOs in the West. Many lack capacity and professional skills, and have an operating style that they have developed in a Chinese environment very different to what we are used to in more open societies. But they are also eager to learn. Working with a Chinese NGO requires being flexible and adapting to sudden personnel or regulatory changes. Chinese NGOs understand the need to have their programs monitored and evaluated but they also appreciate being given the responsibility and autonomy to implement their programs without undue interference and excessive reporting requirements.

3) ***Consider changing or being more flexible with your funding, and monitoring and evaluation, guidelines when working with Chinese NGOs.*** As our report shows, many NGOs are still quite small in scale and lack the staff and expertise needed to implement large-scale projects. Consider offering smaller grants, around \$20,000-\$50,000, which can go a long way in China. As the Ford Foundation has demonstrated in its more than 20 years of work in China, smaller grants spread out among a larger pool of NGOs can have a substantial impact in growing the sector. Smaller grants should also require a more simplified monitoring and evaluation process. For larger grants, consider allowing NGOs to use the funds to cover "core" administrative costs for staff and office expenses, or to cover training on organizational and financial management, grant writing, and other areas. Many grants are project-driven in that they only cover the costs related to the project, but provide little or no support for the core staff who are charged with carrying out the project. These kinds of grants are not conducive to promoting the growth or long-term sustainability of the independent NGO sector in China.

4) ***Capacity building has always been and continues to be a high priority for many Chinese NGOs.*** Aside from funding, consider providing other forms of pro-bono support such as mentoring, advice and coaching, particularly to new grantees who would benefit from getting help mastering international reporting and financial management standards. In the long run, instilling these professional standards within Chinese NGOs will help build trust between them and their donors/partners.

5) ***Consider partnering with another organization such as a Chinese or international foundation, GONGO or business that already works with local grassroots NGOs.*** At the end of this Directory, we have compiled a list of Supporting Organizations that have a record of supporting and working with grassroots NGOs.

6) ***Be sensitive to the political environment but avoid making black and white judgments.*** Given the lack of good information in China, rumors can take on a life of their own. Certain sectors or NGOs, such as those working in labor, legal aid, media or HIV/AIDS develop a reputation for being sensitive, particularly if they have encountered a problem in the past. Getting involved in charity is seen as safer than getting involved in advocacy. Our recommendation is to avoid jumping to these conclusions too quickly and sidestepping these sectors or NGOs. There are a number of good NGOs working in these areas, sometimes even with the active support of local authorities or GONGOs, and there are ways to support and work with them, but more research and due diligence will be required.