Title
The transnational diffusion of global environmental concerns via INGOs in China: a new framework for understanding diffusion in authoritarian contexts

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The Transnational Diffusion of Global Environmental Concerns via INGOs in China:
A New Framework for Understanding Diffusion in Authoritarian Contexts

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in
Sociology

by

Setsuko Matsuzawa

Committee in Charge:
Professor Richard Madsen, Chair
Professor Richard Feinberg
Professor Paul Pickowicz
Professor Christena Turner
Professor Carlos Waismann

2007
The dissertation of Setsuko Matsuzawa is approved
and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication
of microfilm:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2007
For My Parents

Who Have Given Me Life and Freedom and Love
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<td>BHN</td>
<td>Basic Human Needs</td>
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<td>CASS</td>
<td>Chinese Academy of Social Sciences</td>
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<td>CBIK</td>
<td>Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge</td>
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<td>CANGO</td>
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<td>EBAs</td>
<td>Endemic Bird Areas</td>
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<td>ETDZs</td>
<td>Economic and Technical Development Zones</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Growth Domestic Product</td>
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<td>FDI</td>
<td>Foreign Direct Investment</td>
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<td>FON</td>
<td>Friends of Nature</td>
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<td>GONGOs</td>
<td>Government-Organized NGO</td>
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<td>GTZ</td>
<td>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit</td>
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<tr>
<td>GVB</td>
<td>Global Village Beijing</td>
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<td>ICMOD</td>
<td>International Center for Integrated Mountain Development</td>
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<td>IDF</td>
<td>Institutional Development Fund</td>
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<td>IDS</td>
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<td>International Energy Agency</td>
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<td>IRN</td>
<td>International Rivers Network</td>
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<td>Kunming Institute of Botany</td>
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<td>MOCA</td>
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<td>NDRC</td>
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<td>NEPA</td>
<td>National Environmental Protection Agency</td>
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<td>National Environmental Protection Bureau</td>
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<td>National Environmental Protection Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<td>NFPP</td>
<td>National Forest Protection Program</td>
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<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non-Governmental</td>
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<td>NSMs</td>
<td>New Social Movements</td>
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<td>ODA</td>
<td>Overseas Development Assistance</td>
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<td>OSMs</td>
<td>Old Social Movements Organizations</td>
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<td>PAP</td>
<td>People’s Armed Police</td>
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<td>POS</td>
<td>Political Opportunity Structures</td>
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<td>PRA</td>
<td>Participatory Rural Appraisal</td>
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<td>PRC</td>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
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<td>RMB</td>
<td>Ren Min Bi (Chinese currency)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SARS</td>
<td>Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome</td>
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<td>SEPA</td>
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<td>SEZs</td>
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<td>TNCs</td>
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<td>UDHR</td>
<td>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</td>
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<td>U.N.</td>
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<td>UNCED</td>
<td>United Nations Conference on Environment and Development</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
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<td>UN-NGLS</td>
<td>U.N. Non-Governmental Liaison Service</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
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<td>World Fund for Nature</td>
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<td>YAS</td>
<td>Yunnan Academy of Sciences</td>
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<td>YASS</td>
<td>Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences</td>
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<td>YGRP</td>
<td>Yunnan Great River Project</td>
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<td>YINGO</td>
<td>Yunnan International NGO</td>
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<tr>
<td>YPAO</td>
<td>Yunnan Poverty Alleviation Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>YPG</td>
<td>Yunnan Provincial Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>YUM</td>
<td>Yunnan Uplands Management</td>
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</table>
This dissertation allowed me to achieve three specific goals that I wanted to achieve during my Ph.D. program. These goals were obtaining a Ph.D., acquiring a new language, and conducting at least a year of fieldwork in a developing country.

I would like to thank the Chair of my committee, Professor Richard Madsen, and the other members of my committee—Professors Christena Turner, Carlos Waisman, Richard Feinberg, and Paul Pickowicz—for their invaluable guidance, support, and enthusiasm during the course of my graduate work. All the members provided me with special opportunities, such as being a guest speaker or a panelist in their courses. I appreciated these opportunities very much because I wanted to obtain a sense of how my research would be received by non-specialists as well as by the general undergraduate student body. Without their dedicated assistance and guidance, I would not have developed a challenging dissertation topic or have completed it.

I also thank professors, staff members, and graduate students of the UCSD sociology department, many of whom have helped me on different occasions. In particular, the graduate student mutual support groups, such as the “Super Club” and the “NGO Study Group,” have provided me with unselfish support, intellectual stimulation, and friendship. Next, I wish to thank the anonymous undergraduate students at UCSD who gave me useful and heart-felt student evaluations on my teaching. Their comments were among the major reasons why I have chosen to seek a career in academia.

This dissertation would not have been possible without many helpful hands from people in China. I especially thank Professor Yin Shaotin, Chair of the anthropology
department of Yunnan University, for allowing me to affiliate with his department. The affiliation helped me to contact Yunnan provincial governments, Yunnan academics, and Yunnan NGOs. In particular, it helped me to obtain information regarding governmental constraints on researchers when the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) scare broke out in China in 2004.

Generous funding for this study, as well as for most of my graduate career, was provided by the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation, the National Science Foundation, the Social Science Research Council (International pre-dissertation fellowship), the University of California (a dissertation fellowship from the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, a Pacific Rim Research Grant, and the Regents fellowship), the US Department of Education (the Fulbright-Hays dissertation fellowship and the Title VI Foreign Language & Area Studies fellowship), and the World Bank (Joint Japan/World Bank Graduate Program Scholarship).

I owe gratitude to my family for their wholehearted support of my decisions at different stages of my life. Growing up observing my father’s obtaining a Doctorate in Japan naturally gave me confidence in my own ability to achieve the same level of education. My fondness for books originated in my childhood. Every night, my mother would read to me my favorite story books, sometimes again and again, sometimes until she lost her voice (I did not always fall asleep quickly). Lastly, but most of all, I thank my husband, Eric Christopherson. He traveled with me to China. He read my dissertation chapter by chapter as many times as other committee members. His constructive criticisms, his encouragement, and his devoted help in editing were invaluable assets to me.
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PUBLICATIONS


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AREAS OF INTEREST

Globalization, Political Sociology, Sociology of Culture, Comparative and Historical Sociology, Environment, International Development, Social Movements, Qualitative Methods, East Asian Societies (China and Japan), Law & Society, Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs), Civil Society.

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Reading knowledge of French
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Transnational Diffusion of Global Environmental Concerns via INGOs in China:
A New Framework for Understanding Diffusion in Authoritarian Contexts

by

Setsuko Matsuzawa

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology
University of California, San Diego, 2007

Professor Richard Madsen, Chair

In the twentieth century, the international community set out to build a global consensus on, and to attain political commitments to, environmental protection. Through this historical process, the roles of environmental international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in the international and transnational arenas have grown dramatically. Despite much scholarly emphasis on the increasing power and influence of INGOs, little attention has been paid to the processes by which INGOs actually spread international norms and concerns.
The question my dissertation addresses is: How do INGOs spread ideas and practices regarding global environmental concerns in an authoritarian context? My study specifically seeks to examine diffusion processes: the conditions and mechanisms through which global environmental concerns spread from INGOs (transmitters) to local actors (adopters) in China.

The central findings of my study are: (1) INGOs as transmitters play significant roles in determining the likelihood of diffusion; and (2) the external political environment mediates diffusion processes.

By documenting the significant and varied roles that INGOs play in diffusion processes, my findings challenge the predominant, adopter-centered diffusion theory, which envisions adopters as key actors in the diffusion process and assumes a lack of agency on the part of transmitters. I argue that INGOs, or what I call "concerned transmitters," fully participate in the constructive nature of diffusion, and that INGOs’ relations with potential adopters, as well as the state, shape diffusion processes.

My findings also address a gap in the existing literature by highlighting the importance of examining external political and cultural structures, for they shape the interpersonal relations between transmitters and adopters. The existing literature demonstrates little concern for external structures, focusing largely upon interpersonal relations between transmitters and adopters.

I spent fourteen months conducting fieldwork, including in-depth interviews and participant observation, and conducting archival research in Yunnan, Beijing, and New York.
Chapter 1

The Transnational Diffusion of Global Environmental Concerns via INGOs:
Introduction to the Chinese Case

International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs)\(^1\) constitute “the most rapidly growing sector of transnational politics today” (Tarrow 1998:188). Sociology scholars in cultural institutions and social movements, as well as international relations scholars, have described the growing roles that INGOs play in constructing, spreading, implementing, strengthening, and monitoring international norms on the environment, human rights, and other areas (Frank, Hironaka, Meyer, Schofer, and Tuma 1999; Kamieniecki 1993; Kick and Siknik 1998a; Khagram, Riker, and Siknik 2002). In particular, the rise of environmental INGOs in the international arena has been remarkable.

In the twentieth century, the international community set out to build a global consensus on, and to attain political commitments to, environmental protection. Through this historical process, environmental INGOs have risen from social movement outsiders in the industrial era to solid international players in the post-industrial era.

Despite the early establishment of environmental INGOs in the late nineteenth century\(^2\), early environmental INGOs were out of step with the old social movements (OSMs) of the era, which centered on industrial and materialist issues, such as wages, trade unions, and working conditions. In the post-industrial era, when people had grown

---

\(^1\) The *Yearbook of International Organizations* defines INGOs as NGOs that have a decision-making structure with voting participation from at least three countries.

\(^2\) The first environmental INGO was founded in 1882.
more concerned about postmaterial values, including the environment (Inglehart 1990),
environmental INGOs developed into mainstream organizations and took on key roles
within new social movements (NSMs). Environmental INGOs gained legitimacy and an
entrée into the official interstate polity once the states became involved in environmental
issues. The authority derived from sovereign states lent legitimacy to environmental
INGOs and their concerns (Tilly 1978). The concomitant rise of environmentalism and
the NGO sector helped environmental NGOs to become more influential within the
international community. The donor community began providing civil society assistance
in the 1980s, and expanded its efforts during the 1990s so that INGOs have become
financially empowered. Northern governments (donors) still increasingly channel their
aid through both international and local NGOs (Carothers 2000, 1999; Henderson 2003).

Despite much scholarly emphasis on the increasing power and influence of
INGOs in the international and transnational arenas, little attention has been paid to the
processes by which INGOs actually spread international norms and concerns. The
question my study addresses is: How do INGOs spread ideas and practices regarding
global environmental concerns in an authoritarian context? My study specifically seeks
to examine diffusion processes: the conditions and mechanisms through which global
environmental concerns spread from INGOs (transmitters) to local actors (adopters).
INGOs are what I label “concerned transmitters” because, I believe, they seek—often
avidly—to achieve diffusion via consistent, direct, interpersonal contacts with potential
adopters, whereas traditional diffusion theory views transmitters as unconcerned in
regard to whether diffusion is achieved. Throughout my dissertation, I use the term,
“global environmental concerns.” Here I mean concerns that contribute to environmental
protection. I believe that the term is broad enough to indicate diverse interests in environmentalism among INGOs.

I have chosen an authoritarian context to examine diffusion processes because an authoritarian regime, in general, poses more challenges to transnational activities through its imposition of political constraints on society.

By using authoritarian China as a case, my research aims to illuminate how INGOs promote and advance global environmental concerns in an authoritarian context. Keck and Sikkink (1998a: 208), in their human rights study, argue that China remains a “difficult environment” for effective transnational activities because the Chinese state is independent from material external pressures, such as aid and economic and military pressure. Meyer et al. suggests that China has historically resisted external aid (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997: 173). However, I argue that the Chinese state’s high vulnerability on issues of the environment provides opportunities for INGOs. My study provides a detailed analysis of the interactions between INGOs and Chinese local actors, such as governments and NGOs, in the field of environmental protection and within China’s political environment, providing both theoretical insights and empirical observations that may prove valuable within other authoritarian contexts. My study contributes to diffusion theory in sociology and to other areas of inquiry, including civil society, social movements, globalization, international relations; and environmental cooperation.

Diffusion Theory
As I argue in detail in Chapter Two, the theoretical framework I use to answer my research question is diffusion theory. This theory addresses when and how new ideas and practices spread from transmitters to adopters. It is a useful theoretical tool by which to examine interactions between transmitters and adopters. Scholars (McAdam and Rucht 1993) have found that one of the two major mechanisms of diffusion is direct and interpersonal interactions between transmitters and adopters (the relational mode of diffusion). The other mechanism is diffusion via the media and the internet (the nonrelational mode of diffusion).

In the field of sociology, institutionalists have applied diffusion theory to understand the cross-national diffusion of organizational innovations (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer et al. 1997) and policy practices (Strang and Meyer 1993). Social movement scholars have applied the theory to understand the cross-national diffusion of social movement ideas and tactics (McAdam and Rucht 1993; Chabot 2002).

Scholars in both fields emphasize the importance of some similarities between transmitters and adopters for diffusion to take place. Institutionalists focus on pre-existing structural similarities. Strang and Meyer (1993), for example, argue that as long as transmitters and adopters share pre-existing structural or institutional similarities, diffusion can occur via non-relational modes (e.g., the media and the internet) in the absence of relational modes (direct and interpersonal interactions). Social movement scholars focus on the constructive nature of similarities. McAdam and Rucht, for example, argue that relational modes of diffusion primarily create the conditions of

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3 Institutionalists argue that international norms (world culture in a certain sense) help to generate similar organizations in different countries. To help explain this phenomenon, they apply the concept of diffusion. But they treat the concept as a mechanism that gradually leads organizations to isomorphic convergence in terms of their functions and forms.
diffusion by constructing a minimal identification (a created similarity) with transmitters by adopters (1993: 60).

Building on the social movement approach to diffusion theory in sociology, I focus on relational modes of diffusion between INGOs (concerned transmitters) and domestic local actors (potential adopters) in order to understand the constructive nature of diffusion processes in an authoritarian social context.

In my study, transmitters and adopters are “hyper different” (Chabot 2002) in terms of culture and political structures. Chabot’s study (2002) on the diffusion of Gandhian repertoires between Indian activists (transmitters) and American civil rights activists (adopters) in the American South described complicated processes among hyper different groups, leading to the establishment of a minimum identification and to the reinvention of ideas.

Although scholars have begun studying the effects of the internet on diffusion processes (Ayres 1999; W.L. Bennett 2003; Rheingold 2002), the non-relational mode of diffusion, such as via the media or the internet, is beyond the scope of my study on diffusion. Yet, I will note that the use of the media by ENGOs and the role of the internet in the development of ENGOs in an authoritarian context provide interesting new areas of investigation (See Yang 2005, 2003), despite the power of authoritarian regimes to largely dictate non-relational modes of diffusion.

In an authoritarian context, INGOs face not only cultural differences, but also political structural differences. One of the purposes of my study is to understand how a political environment imposed by an authoritarian regime upon INGOs affects the diffusion processes of global environmental concerns among INGOs and local actors.
Although diffusion theory is useful in analyzing the interpersonal relationships between transmitters and adopters, it does not provide a tool by which to analyze the political environment external to such interpersonal relationships. Thus, I propose to supplement it with social movement theory’s political opportunity structures (POS) in order to identify key variables that help to explain outcomes of diffusion affected by the external political environment. The key variables derived from both diffusion theory and POS I use to analyze three case studies on the diffusion of global environmental concerns from INGOs to local actors in China.

**China and Environmental Protection**

China’s current environmental conditions have become a serious concern among not only the Chinese central government, but also the international community. China is the world’s largest producer and consumer of coals as well as the world’s second largest carbon emitter.\(^4\) What it does environmentally has potentially significant impacts for other nations. Consider, for example, that carbon dioxide, which is produced by burning fossil fuels, such as coals, is an important contributor to global warming. Yet, the domestic implications of pollution are the immediate focus of the Chinese central government. According to the World Bank, air pollution alone cost China’s economy more than 7 percent of its GDP in 1995, largely due to the health costs of people suffering from respiratory disease (World Bank 1997). Yet the daunting implications of pollution are not limited to the economic sphere. Pollution incurs political costs to the

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Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Bernstein 2000, 96). In recent years, both pollution and the displacement of people have led to social discontent and serious grievances. There have been local riots and protests in rural settings, sometimes leading to violent clashes with local police forces, deaths, and the arrests of protesters (O’Brien and Li 2006; Jing 2000). Yet despite China’s recent environmental record—and its disastrous destruction of nature in the past\(^5\)—the Chinese state, I will argue, has a high “state vulnerability” on global environmental concerns.

Official concern for pollution in China first emerged while the Chinese government prepared for the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Yu and Zhang 1988). After the conference, the Chinese central government set out to institutionalize environmental protection by establishing governmental environmental bureaucracies and by passing environmental laws. This was a surprising development for a country that had maintained an isolation policy (until 1978) from the rest of the world for decades. There had been neither external (international) nor internal pressures applied to the Chinese central government to spur it to take up environmental protection seriously and quickly. In the absence of a wide-scale environmental activism in China, the impetus to create the Chinese environmental regime derived from Chinese leaders exposed to the modern concept of environmental protection through their participation at the conference. Ever since, I will argue, the Chinese state has largely led the construction of China’s environmentalism.

\(^5\) I refer to the environmentally destructive development projects pursued under Chairman Mao’s “Great Leap Forward” policies (1958-60).
Decentralization since China’s 1979 economic reforms, however, has made the central government incapable of dictating national environmental policies from the center to the local political level, where industrial projects of parochial importance, with little or no regard for environmental protection, tend to be pursued (Alford and Shen 1998). The Chinese state apparatus for environmental protection has continuously struggled to enforce environmental laws at the local level.

After China participated in the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), which was concurrently held with a "Global NGO Forum," China’s authoritarian regime came to realize that its Government-organized NGOs (GONGOs), which are extensions of the Chinese government, were inadequate for meeting its goals on environmental protection. Since then, the regime has sought to protect the environment and to raise environmental awareness by (reluctantly) allowing the emergence of the individual-organized environmental NGO (ENGO), a new type of organization in China that is more autonomous from the state. China’s first individual-organized ENGO, Friends of Nature (FON), was established in March 1994. Chinese ENGOs have since proliferated quickly.

The regime’s reluctance toward ENGOs originated from its historical suspicions of social organizations, which the regime considers as being susceptible to foreign (Western) influences. The Beijing Student Movement of 1989, which ended in the Tiananmen massacre, was a reminder to the regime of such suspicions, given that the student leaders were active participants in political salons at universities. The Chinese regime is particularly aware that environmental activism via ENGOs could become a powerful
counter power to the state because of cases in several formerly authoritarian countries (e.g., Taiwan, South Korea, the Philippines, Hungary, and Russia).

Despite its historical and contemporary suspicions toward external influences, the Chinese regime has also sought to complement its own efforts in environmental protection by allowing more global actors—such as multilateral and bilateral aid agencies and INGOs—to directly aid local actors, especially in monetary terms. The influence of INGOs in the field of environmental protection has become difficult to ignore. INGOs bring about cooperation and collective action in the international arena (see, for example, Keohane and Levy 1996; Schreurs and Economy 1997; Darst 2001). In the transnational and domestic arenas, INGOs define environmental issues, place them on the political agenda, raise awareness, mobilize domestic actors to push governments to take actions, and participate in monitoring and implementation (Kamieniecki 1993; Princen and Finger 1994; Keck and Siknik 1998; Khagram, Riker, and Siknik 2002). Following the 1995 U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995, INGOs, in general, became more active in China. Between 1995-6, there was a surge of new INGOs in China (Zweig 2002). According to 2002 source, there were 33 INGOs with 91 environmental projects in China.6

A repressive regime, such as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), does not underestimate the power and influence of INGOs on society and social actors. The Chinese state is especially concerned about interactions between INGOs and China’s newly emerging NGO sector, including ENGOs. This is because INGOs bring to China not only financial and human resources, such as money and experts, but also ideas and

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practices in the name of the environment, which may not be compatible with state interests. Therefore, the regime has created and maintained a political environment in which the diffusion of ideas and practices that conflict with, or threaten, state interests is difficult to achieve without reinvention to fit the local context.

The institutionalized repressiveness of the Chinese state includes the imposition of a legal framework upon social organizations. The regime also imposes its official discourse upon civil society in efforts to control the social and political impacts of China’s emerging NGO sector. While all INGOs with offices in China are subjected to the repressive state through a registration process, the Chinese state specifically targets foreign foundations for repression via the 2004 Regulations for the Management of Foundations. Given the repressive nature of the Chinese regime, its knowledge of the history of ENGOs in democratization movements, and its historically cautious attitudes toward external influences, the state presents substantial challenges to INGOs in promoting their own ideas and practices on global environmental concerns in China.

Both the state’s high vulnerability on global environmental concerns and its state repressiveness toward social organizations are key aspects of China’s peculiar political structures.

Summary of Findings

The central findings of my study are: (1) INGOs as transmitters play significant roles in determining the likelihood of diffusion; and (2) the external political environment mediates diffusion processes. My study affirms McAdam and Rucht’s argument (1993) that the likelihood of diffusion primarily depends upon whether a minimal identification
between the transmitter and the adopter is developed through constant and direct interpersonal contacts (relational channels). My findings go beyond their argument by suggesting that the ability of an INGO to construct a minimum identification with potential adopters and its willingness to reinvent ideas and practices to fit the local environment are critical factors in predicting whether diffusion will take place. Largely due to China’s political environment, some INGOs (transmitters) are willing to compromise, within limits, on the implementation of their own ideas and practices by allowing adopters flexibility in addressing local concerns.

Global environmental concerns are not disseminated from INGOs to Chinese adopters in a straight-forward way because of the particular nature of the Chinese state and the particular sets of relations between INGOs and the state. My study presents a complex portrait of the diffusion process, one that goes beyond simply the relationship between the transmitter and the adopter, mediated by the external political environment.

I use a new theoretical framework to explain how INGOs spread ideas and practices regarding global environmental concerns in an authoritarian context. My study of INGOs in China supports the analytical value of two core concepts found in social movements theory: diffusion theory and political opportunity structures (POS). I supplement diffusion theory with POS in order to identify key variables that help to explain outcomes of diffusion affected by the external political environment.

By documenting the significant and varied roles that INGOs play in diffusion processes, my findings challenge the predominant, adopter-centered diffusion theory, which envisions adopters as key actors in the diffusion process and assumes a lack of agency on the part of transmitters (INGOs in my study). I argue that INGOs, or what I
call “concerned transmitters,” fully participate in the constructive nature of diffusion, and that INGOs’ relations with potential adopters, as well as the state, shape diffusion processes. My study on the three INGOs (transmitters) in Yunnan illuminates these processes. It sheds light on the roles that transmitters play in the cultural construction of a mutually acceptable identification. It demonstrates how INGOs may readjust their ideas to fit local contexts. It suggests that if INGOs do not possess the ability or desire to construct a minimal identification, to work with the state and elite allies in governments, and to reinvent its own ideas for the sake of local implementation, then diffusion is not likely to be achieved.

My findings also begin to fill in a gap in the existing literature by highlighting the importance of examining external political and cultural structures, for they shape the interpersonal relations between transmitters and adopters. The existing literature demonstrates little concern for external structures because it largely focuses on the interpersonal relations between transmitters and adopters. My findings illuminate the importance of examining the political structures of the adopter’s country, which mediate the cultural processes in which both the construction of identification and the reinvention of ideas between transmitters and adopters are embedded. Political structures are perhaps especially important in a repressive authoritarian political context, such as that of China.

Building on insights from both diffusion theory and empirical observations of the Chinese cases, my study identifies the key variables that help to explain different outcomes of diffusion from INGOs (transmitters) to local actors in China (adopters), such as governments and NGOs. Theses variables are: (1) an INGO’s ability to construct a minimal identification; (2) an INGO’s ability to cooperate with the state and elite allies in
governments; (3) an INGO’s ability or willingness to reinvent its own ideas for the sake of local implementation; and (4) external factors that mediate diffusion processes.

My study further identifies key variables that help to assess the effects of domestic political structures on the diffusion process in a repressive authoritarian context. To analyze the fourth variable, presented above, I have developed a new set of variables based primarily on key dimensions of political opportunity structures (POS) in social movement theory (see Chapter Two). These new variables are: (1) the degree of state vulnerability; (2) the presence or absence of elite allies; and (3) the state’s capacity and propensity for repression.

**Research Design**

My research aims to illuminate how INGOs promote and advance global environmental concerns within an authoritarian context. My study provides a new framework for understanding diffusion cases in authoritarian contexts by modifying diffusion theory using a unique set of variables based on POS.

I chose to focus my research on China for the following reasons. In regard to the diffusion of ideas and practices via INGOs, China provides one of the most difficult environments in the world. On one hand, since China’s farewell to isolation in 1978, it has eagerly sought to become a distinguished member of the international community. Concern with its self-image in the international arena has led China to become more
sensitive to international norms (Johnston 1998). On the other hand, China has
developed and maintained a reputation in the donor community as a difficult country.\(^7\)

Scholars confirm this view. For example, Meyer et al. found that China has
exhibited historical resistance to external aid (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997:
173). Keck and Siknik argue that China provides a “difficult environment” for effective
transnational activities” (1998a: 208) because the nation is largely independent from
material external pressures, such as foreign aid and economic and military pressures.

We can expect, given the difficult environment, that the extent to which INGOs in
China can spread their ideas and practices regarding global environmental concerns may
also be achievable and measurable in other states and other authoritarian contexts. To
date, no scholars have studied the diffusion of global environmental concerns via INGOs
in China.

From an environmental policy standpoint, lastly, China is an important focus of
research. Its population size (it is the largest nation) and current environmental
conditions (for example, it is the world’s largest producer and consumer of coals as well
as the world’s second largest carbon emitter) make it one of the keys to affecting the state
of the future environment worldwide. China’s economy is developing at a tremendous
rate and on an unprecedented scale, and as China continues to develop as “the world’s
factory,” what it does environmentally will have significant implications for other
nations.

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\(^7\) My interviews with officers from bilateral agencies confirm this statement. Interviews with officials
from three bilateral agencies (Japan, Netherlands, and the U.K.). Oct. 8, 2000, June 28, 2004 and Oct. 29,
2004.
Research Site

Yunnan, a Southwest province, was my primarily fourteen-month fieldwork site (the fourteen months ranged from August 2003 to November 2004) in China. I conducted preliminary research (June-August 2001) in Yunnan, and found that the province to be an ideal place to conduct my study of INGOs and their interactions with Chinese local actors, such as governments and NGOs, in the field of environmental protection.

Yunnan is a land of rich ethnic cultures and rich ecological resources, yet it is also one of China’s poorest provinces. According to the 2005 China Human Development Report, published by the China Development Research Foundation, Yunnan ranks 29th among 31 provinces and cities in China (with a score of 0.657). Yunnan has significant environmental problems, such as water pollution, endangered species, and ecological hotspots, which have attracted national and/or international attention. Yunnan’s water pollution in the Dianchi Lake (one of the three most polluted lakes in China) and in its international rivers, and Yunnan’s deforestation by excess logging, have been under political attack from the central government as well as environmentalists. Yunnan’s timber industry, the largest in China, had attracted national media attention because illegal logging destroys the habitat of the “snub-nosed monkey,” an endangered species. A Beijing based ENGO (Friends of Nature) and student groups had led an anti-logging campaign in late 1995, resulting in a logging ban. Parts of the mountains in Northwest Yunnan are designated as one of the world’s ecological hotspots.

8 China officially recognizes 55 ethnic minority groups. Yunnan has 51 ethnic minority groups, which constitute one-third of the provincial population (Chen 2002).

Recognizing its own limited ability to address these problems, the Yunnan Provincial Government (YPG) has made foreign assistance a central part of its economic development strategy. Since the inception of China’s first Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) project in 1990 in Yunnan, funded by the Ford Foundation, the YPG has encouraged INGOs to come to Yunnan. In 1993, it established the Yunnan International NGO (YINGO), a Government-Organized NGO (GONGO), to help INGOs to establish their offices in Yunnan. YINGO also acts as a problem solver between INGOs and local governments. According to a YINGO official, conflict arises when INGOs do not demonstrate concern for the basic needs of local people, such as water, electricity, and roads. Thus, YINGO helps to ensure that INGOs are aware of local needs.

After the inauguration of the Western Development (xibu dakaifa) Campaign, the Chinese central government has also encouraged donors, including INGOs, to work in China’s marginal provinces, such as the Western provinces, including Yunnan. Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province, now hosts the largest number of INGO offices in China (Ma 2006: 177).

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10 For more information on the Ford Foundation, see http://www.fordfound.org.

11 As I discuss in Chapter Three, YINGO, a GONGO, oversees INGOs, excepting foreign foundations, in Yunnan.


13 Xibu dakaifa is also translated as the “Great Development of the West,” the “Go West Campaign,” and a Campaign to “Open Up the West.”

14 Interviews with staff members from both INGOs and bilateral agencies in China.

15 There were 14 INGO offices in Yunnan in 2003. These INGOs were from the U.S., the U.K., Hong Kong, Australia, and Zimbabwe. Hong Kong INGOs are treated as foreign NGOs. Interview with a Yunnan International NGO (YINGO) staff member, September 25, 2003.
Although I selected Yunnan to conduct my study largely because of its proliferation of INGOs, beginning relatively early in comparison to other provinces, I argue that Yunnan is in most ways representative of other poor provinces in regard to their struggles to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from commercial sources and in their desire for help from INGOs. The YPG’s strategy to incorporate INGOs into its development strategies to satisfy diverse needs in Yunnan could serve as a model for other poor provinces. Yunnan’s technical and policy elites, who initially acquired technical skills and knowledge through their interactions with the Ford Foundation in the 1990s, have begun to serve as ambassadors to the neighborhood provinces, such as Sichuan and Guizhou, by sharing their technical knowledge with their counterparts.\footnote{Interviews with Anthony Saich, April, 2004.}

INGOs also strive to reach out to other provinces. For example, the Ford Foundation, which had concentrated its efforts in Yunnan since the opening of its field office in Beijing in 1988, has recently begun shifting its focus on other neighborhood provinces, such as Guizhou. The Ford Foundation is employing similar strategies of diffusion that worked for them in Yunnan.\footnote{Interview with a program officer, August 5, 2004.}

Data Collection Methods

My research consists of three case studies of INGOs in order to comparatively understand the diffusion processes of global environmental concerns between INGOs and local actors within a similar external political environment. I identified three INGOs, each of which uses issues of the environment as a vehicle for their advocacy. Each
INGO also has past and/or current relationships in Yunnan with local Chinese actors, such as governments and NGOs. I chose to study U.S.-based INGOs in order to hold the effects of bilateral relations (the U.S.-China relations) on INGOs constant. The three INGOs, the Ford Foundation, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the International Rivers Network (IRN), are all U.S.-based, but are each a different type of INGO—philanthropic, environmental, and social movement organizations, respectively.

Although all three INGOs use issues of the environment as a vehicle for their advocacy, what they wish to achieve in China in relation to the environment, and their means to achieve their goals, differ. The varying goals of the INGOs are important to my study because the degree of state vulnerability to global environmental concerns differs depending on the specific goals of INGOs (see Chapter Five). The Ford Foundation aims, primary through making grants, to create and then support organizations that can apply social science methods to environmental projects. TNC aims at conservation by implementing its conservation projects. The IRN supports anti-dam activism.

The degree and length of their operations in Yunnan also differ. The Ford Foundation is the largest INGO donor to China. Since opening its field office in Beijing in 1988, the Ford Foundation has focused on China’s Southwest, particularly Yunnan province. In 2000, 41.3 percent of its China program grants went to Yunnan (Ma 2006: 193). Ford’s historical involvement throughout the 1990s in investing in human resources in Yunnan, coupled with its support for the emergence of environmental NGOs

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18 For more information on The Nature Conservancy, see http://www.nature.org.
19 For more information on the IRN, see http://www.irn.org.
20 $1,715,447 US out of $4,152,837 US in total.
in the province, provides a suitable case for studying the diffusion of ideas and the creation of NGOs.

TNC is one of the world’s leading conservation organizations. Although TNC has been working in 28 countries since 1980, it was not until 1996 that it conducted studies in China for the first time. In 1998, the Yunnan Provincial Government (YPG) officially invited TNC to Yunnan to serve as an adviser on a large-scale conservation/protected area project called the Yunnan Great River Project (YGRP). The YPG and TNC agreed to jointly invest in the project, a total of $5 million US dollars ($3 million by YPG and $2 million by TNC). The same year, TNC established its first office in Kunming, Yunnan’s capital. TNC’s efforts in regard to the YGRP provide a suitable case for studying the diffusion of ideas on conservation between an International ENGO and Chinese local officials.

The IRN is known for its worldwide activism against the construction of dams and for its defense of the rights of communities affected by the construction of dams. Regarding China, the IRN led an international campaign in the late 1980s against the construction plan for the Three Gorges Dam project that included a boycott of Discover Card of Morgan Stanley, one of the financiers for the dam. The recent controversy over the Nujiang hydropower dam project in Yunnan brought the IRN’s Hong Kong office into close contact with Green Watershed,21 a local environmental NGO (ENGO). The interactions between the IRN Hong Kong and the local NGO provide a suitable case for studying the diffusion of ideas and practices on anti-dam activism.

21 For more information, see www.greenwatershed.org.
I have focused on the relational modes of diffusion between INGOs (transmitters) and domestic local actors (potential adopters), such as governments and NGOs, in order to understand the constructive nature of diffusion processes in China. In order to obtain my data, I conducted 14 months of fieldwork, completing 40 in-depth interviews in China and the USA, and made numerous participant observations in China. I also conducted archival research at the Ford Foundation’s headquarters in New York city to learn more about the history of its China field office and the Yunnan Uplands Management (YUM) project.

During my fieldwork in China, I was officially affiliated with the Anthropology Department of Yunnan University. This affiliation was important in executing my research effectively in China. The university sponsored my obtainment of a student visa and wrote me an introduction letter that I could show to local government officials when I requested an interview. The affiliation also facilitated my access to interviewees because some alumni work for local ENGOs. The Anthropology department also provided me with important information regarding governmental constraints on researchers when the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) scare broke out in China in 2004.

I conducted in-depth interviews (one to two hours in length) with current and former staff members from the three INGOs and with officials from Yunnan provincial governments, such as the Yunnan Provincial Environmental Protection Bureau, the Yunnan Civil Affairs Office, the Yunnan Project 18 Office, and the Yunnan Poverty Alleviation Office. Other interviews were conducted with staff at a few Yunnan research institutes (including the Yunnan Academy of Social Science), with officials from bilateral
agencies (including those of the U.K., Japan, the Netherlands, and Germany), and with a founder and/or staff member from local NGOs, mostly ENGOs, in Yunnan.

Most interviews were conducted in the offices of the interviewees in Yunnan or Beijing. Some were conducted over lunch or dinner. I conducted a few telephone interviews. All interviews were semi-structured and conducted in either English or Chinese, in some cases, both languages. I did not use a translator when Chinese was spoken. However, I sometimes double-checked with interviewees about unclear terms by writing Chinese characters for the terms as I understood them, to ensure my understanding. Because the Human Subjects Committee at UCSD did not allow me to tape the interview conversations, due to its concern for the willingness of potential Chinese interviewees to talk frankly to me, I paid extra attention to my note-taking. In a few cases, I conducted follow-up interviews.

I made interview appointments by telephone. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I anticipated more difficulties in interviewing Yunnan’s provincial government officials than staff members from INGOs and Chinese NGOs. This is because I had often heard of difficulties from researchers in interviewing Chinese government officials. In some cases, I had to wait until my interviewees could find the time to speak to me, yet the majority of my interview requests were ultimately granted regardless of affiliation. The only significant exception was the refusal of senior level officials of TNC in the Kunming office to grant interviews. However, I was able to conduct several interviews with non-senior level staff members and former staff members.

To complement the interviews, I attended special activities, meetings, workshops, and training sessions organized by local Chinese NGOs, governments, and universities.
Such activities took place in Beijing and, more frequently, Kunming, as well as other parts of Yunnan. In addition, I collected and analyzed written materials, such as conference, workshop, and training materials, the publications of the three INGOs and those of Chinese ENGOs, as well as Yunnan government publications.

**Chapter Overview**

The following chapter, Chapter Two, “Diffusion Theory: Transnational Diffusion and International NGOs,” establishes the study’s theoretical framework. My review of the sociological literature on diffusion theory finds that the existing literature alone cannot fully explain diffusion processes in China from INGOs (concerned transmitters) to local actors (adopters), such as governments and NGOs. This is because (1) the existing literature envisions adopters as key actors in the diffusion process and assumes a lack of agency on the part of transmitters (INGOs in my study) and (2) the existing literature also demonstrates little concern for external political structures that shape the interpersonal relations between transmitters and adopters. Therefore, the chapter proposes to incorporate political opportunity structures (POS), a contemporary social movement theory, into my analysis of diffusion in order to assess the effects of domestic political structures on the diffusion process of global environmental concerns in an authoritarian context.

In Chapter Three and Four, I provide China’s domestic political contexts in which the diffusion between INGOs and Chinese local actors—such as governments and NGOs—takes place. These chapters lay the foundation for my argument that the political environment external to interpersonal relationships mediates diffusion processes.
Chapter Three, “China’s NGO Sector and its Political Environment: The Relationship between the Repressive State and the Newly Emerging NGO Sector,” examines one of the analytical dimensions of POS, “the repressiveness of the state.” It specifically examines the historical and current relationships between the Chinese state and the newly emerging NGO sector in China, including INGOs.

The rise of the NGO sector worldwide and the emphasis of donors on civil society assistance helped China’s NGO sector to emerge in the mid 1990s and since continue to develop. Meanwhile, the Chinese regime has maintained its historical suspicions of external influences via Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) projects and social organizations—the main reason for Chinese state control over its NGO sector. Since the 1989 Tiananmen student movement, in particular, the state’s capacity and propensity for repression toward NGOs has been institutionalized. Thus, the newly emerging NGO sector in China, including INGOs, operates under the tight control of a repressive state.

I argue that the Chinese state not only imposes a legal framework upon social organizations, but also imposes its official discourse on civil society in efforts to control the social and political impacts of the NGO sector. According to the state’s official discourse, NGOs are social service providers who complement the government’s work (e.g., on poverty alleviation). Such a political environment likely sets limits on any Chinese NGOs or INGOs that wish to engage in activism that conflicts with state interests.

Chapter Four, “The Development of China’s Environmental Sector: State Vulnerability to Global Environmental Concerns,” examines another analytical dimension of POS, “state vulnerability.” I argue that the Chinese state has historically
shown high “state vulnerability” on global environmental concerns. The chapter examines the early formation of China’s environmental regime, which consists of environmental governmental institutions and environmental laws and regulations, and the recent emergence of environmental NGOs (ENGOs), new social forces. It also explores the reasons why the Chinese state has treated issues of the environment differently from other internationally recognized concerns, such as human rights.

My research finds that the establishment of China’s environmental regime has been driven by political and policy elites. The Chinese government’s concern for the environment initially emerged in response to external factors, such as U.N. conferences. The Chinese regime also supported the emergence of China’s environmental NGO sector, beginning in the mid-1990s, in order to enhance China’s international image and to create potential allies that could promote public participation in environmental protection.

From the state perspective, ENGOs complement the state’s efforts in “greening” China (Ho 2001). On the other hand, Peter Ho wonders whether greening is possible without conflict being generated as a result of the emergence of ENGOs as a counter-power to the state. The current Chinese regime is well aware of such risks, given that the conflicts Ho described have arisen during transitions to democracy in now formerly authoritarian countries (Alford and Shen 1998).

China’s environmental regime continues to be elite-driven today because ENGOs tend to be led by Chinese intellectuals with reformist beliefs and international connections. I argue that the elite nature of Chinese ENGOs actually helps them to ally with environmentally conscious political and policy elites and to interact with donors, such as INGOs. Such connections are extremely important for Chinese ENGOs because
they heavily depend on financial assistance from INGOs and political protection from political and policy elites.

Chapter Five, “INGOs as Concerned Transmitters in Yunnan: Identification, Adaptation, and Political Opportunity Structures (POS),” discusses three case studies in Yunnan of the diffusion of ideas and practices in the name of the environment between INGOs as transmitters and their potential adopters. The chapter examines not only the direct and interpersonal relationships between INGOs and their potential adopters, but also how and to what extent the different dimensions of POS—state repressiveness, state vulnerability, and the presence or absence of elite allies—affect the diffusion process at the local level. The third dimension of POS, “the presence or absence of elite allies,” is included in my analyses of each case study.

The three case studies focus on the following INGOs: the Ford Foundation, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the International Rivers Network (IRN). Each organization has brought environmental ideas and practices to Yunnan during the past ten years, and they have all faced China’s POS. The Ford Foundation brought ideas of, and support for, NGOs. TNC brought ideas of conservation. The IRN brought ideas and practices of anti-dam activism. The three case studies are comparatively assessed in order to understand the conditions through which global environmental concerns spread from INGOs to local actors in China.

The dissertation’s concluding chapter, Chapter Six, “The Transnational Diffusion of Global Environmental Concerns via INGOs in China: Conclusions and Contributions,” reviews the central findings of my research and assesses the general contributions that my research makes to diffusion theory in sociology and to other areas of inquiry, including
civil society, social movements, international relations, globalization, and environmental cooperation.

I modified diffusion theory using a unique set of variables based on political opportunity structures (POS) so as to incorporate the external political environment into my analysis of the outcomes of diffusion. This modification not only aids in understanding the Chinese case better, but also provides a better framework for understanding diffusion cases in other authoritarian political contexts.
Chapter 2

Diffusion Theory:
Transnational Diffusion and International NGOs

Introduction

Scholars have recognized the growing roles that International NGOs (INGOs) play in constructing, spreading, implementing, strengthening, and monitoring international norms on the environment, human rights, and other issues (Boli and Thomas, 1997; Keck and Sikknik 1998a; Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink 2002). There are two major reasons for the expanding roles of INGOs. First, INGOs have become legitimate participants in the international arena. For example, they attend United Nations (U.N.) conferences,22 where global actors—global institutions, the states, and INGOs—attempt to build global consensus and attain political commitments. Second, INGOs have increasingly formed direct relations with global institutions, domestic NGOs, and each other, bypassing the state entirely in some cases. Some scholars describe this phenomenon as the emergence of “global civil society” (Wapner 1996; Lipschutz 1996; Anheier, Glasius, and Kaldor 2002). Despite these expanding roles of INGOs, authoritarian societies remain to be tough test cases for INGO activities (Keck and Sikknik 1998a). My study addresses the following question: How do INGOs spread ideas and practices regarding global environmental concerns in an authoritarian context?

Diffusion theory provides a powerful framework for addressing this question. The purpose of this chapter is to review the sociological literature on diffusion theory. I

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propose to modify diffusion theory with political opportunity structures (POS) in order to explain diffusion of global environmental concerns in an authoritarian context.

Specifically, I examine diffusion processes: the conditions and mechanisms through which global environmental concerns spread from INGOs (transmitters) to local actors in China (adopters), such as governments and NGOs. Although international relations scholars tend to focus on collective and loosely connected transnational relationships, such as transnational networks, (Keck and Sikknik 1998b), my study focuses on the denser, more direct, and more interpersonal relationships between INGOs and domestic local actors. My research findings suggest that global environmental concerns are not disseminated in a straight-forward way, as classical diffusion theorists may suggest, because of the particular nature of the Chinese state and the particular sets of relations between INGOs and the state. My study on China shows that diffusion is more complex than that.

My findings challenge the predominant adopter-centered diffusion theory, which envisions adopters as key actors in the diffusion process and neglects transmitters. I argue that INGOs, or what I call “concerned transmitters,” fully participate in the constructive nature of diffusion and that INGOs’ relations with potential adopters shape the diffusion process.

My findings also highlight the importance of examining political and cultural structures, for they shape the interpersonal relations between transmitters and adopters. In order to assess the effects of domestic political structures and cultures on the diffusion process, my analysis will examine political opportunity structures (POS), a contemporary social movement theory. An analysis of POS is especially important in seeking to
understand an authoritarian context. POS help us understand why environmental issues are treated favorably by the Chinese central government despite the regime’s general phobia of external influences.

In the sections below, I first examine diffusion theory to assess the extent to which it is applicable to the Chinese case. Second, I discuss the concept of political opportunity structure in social movement theory, highlighting its analytical values in examining the political environment in which the relationships between INGOs and Chinese governments and NGOs are embedded.

**Diffusion Theory**

Diffusion theory addresses when and how new ideas and practices spread from the transmitter to the adopter. Scholars in different fields analyze diffusion processes in different contexts to understand the conditions under which diffusion is likely to occur and the mechanisms by which it does (Rogers 1995). In the field of sociology, institutionalists have applied the theory to understand the cross-national diffusion of organizational innovations and policy practices (Strang and Meyer 1993). Social movement scholars have built on the institutionalist perspective and added new insights to diffusion theory (McAdam and Rucht 1993; Chabot 2002).

There are two major mechanisms of diffusion: the “relational” mode of diffusion and the “nonrelational” mode of diffusion (McAdam and Rucht 1993). Diffusion via relational channels occurs through direct interpersonal contacts between transmitters and adopters. Diffusion via nonrelational channels occurs through the indirect transfer of information (e.g., the mass media). The advent of the internet has expanded
nonrelational channels (Ayres 1999; W. L. Bennett 2003; Rheingold 2002). In addition to these two modes, Sydney Tarrow has recently suggested a third mechanism of diffusion that he calls “mediated diffusion” (Tarrow 2005: 104). Third parties, such as institutions and individuals, mediate diffusion, serving as brokers between transmitters and adopters. In China, all three modes of diffusion are present. As more and more INGOs begin operating in China, relational diffusion has become more common. Likewise, the spread of the internet has increasingly helped Chinese local actors gain access to external information (non-relational diffusion). INGOs can be seen as brokers between donors (original transmitters) who fund INGOs for certain causes and Chinese local actors (adopters) and they mediate diffusion.

Scholars have argued that there must be a certain degree of “similarities” in structural and/or cultural characteristics between transmitters and adopters for diffusion to occur. There are two major approaches to understanding similarities. The first approach focuses on pre-existing similarities in structural or institutional characteristics between transmitters and adopters. Institutionalists take this approach. For example, Strand and Meyer (1993) conducted a study on the cross-national diffusion of organizational innovations and macro policy practices. They were puzzled by a uniformity of policy practices worldwide despite the obvious absence of direct and relational contacts. This led them to focus on similarities in organizational structures and functions. They contend that as long as transmitters and adopters share structural or institutional similarities, diffusion can occur via the nonrelational mode in the absence of the relational mode. This institutional perspective is applicable to China. Prior to the open-up policy in 1978, China’s isolation policy made the relational mode of diffusion
very unlikely (or extremely limited). Yet, certain organizations and macro-policy practices did emerge. In the field of environmental protection, for instance, the Chinese central government, following the worldwide trend, established environmental agencies and began implementing environmental policies.

The second approach focuses on the constructive nature of similarities between transmitters and adopters. For example, McAdam and Rucht (1993), social movement scholars, conducted a study on the cross-national diffusion of movement ideas between student movement leaders in the U.S. and in Germany. McAdam and Rucht agree with Strand and Meyer that pre-existing similarities between transmitters and adopters are important, but they depart from the institutionalist perspective by emphasizing the constructive nature of similarities. They further emphasize the importance of the relational mode of diffusion in constructing similarities even in the cross-national contexts. In the field of social movements, the importance of relational ties, such as interpersonal networks, has often been stressed in the domestic context (McAdam 1988). Yet, in the cross-national contexts, it is assumed that such extensive relational ties tend to be absent and/or difficult to establish. McAdam and Rucht contend that, even in the cross-national contexts, consistent and direct interpersonal contacts still play the critical role in constructing similarities by helping to form an initial identification of adopters with transmitters. Once built, this identification facilitates diffusion through nonrelational channels. The greater the identification, the more diffusion is likely to take place. Therefore, unlike Strand and Meyer who do not consider the relational mode of diffusion, McAdam and Rucht conclude that diffusion occurs via a combination of both
relational and nonrelational channels and that relational channels are important in constructing “a minimal identification” with transmitters by adopters (1993: 60).

In the case of China, the likelihood of diffusion via relational channels has increased as more and more INGOs begin directly operating in China. Yet, diffusion does not take place straightforwardly especially in China because of the particular nature of the Chinese state and the particular sets of relations between INGOs and local actors. The political environment must be taken into account when we study diffusion in China.

Like McAdam and Rucht (1993), Chabot, in his study on the cross-national diffusion (2002), argues that relational channels of diffusion are the key to establishing an initial sense of identification among adopters with transmitters, even in the case of highly divergent groups. Diffusion of the Gandhian repertoire took place between two very different movement actors: Gandhian activists in the Indian non-violence movement and leaders in the American civil rights movement. According to McAdam and Rucht’s theory, for diffusion to occur, American civil rights activists (adopters) must first overcome their “hyper differences” (2002: 102) with Indian activists (transmitters) and build a minimum sense of identification with them. Diffusion in this case took years and involved different generations of activists.

Chabot further argues that adopters must adopt movement tactics and ideas not by blindly imitating them, but by reinventing or adapting them to fit their particular environment. Diffusion as a process may be begun given a minimum level of identification among adopters, but it may not be completed without a reinvention of ideas by adopters. In his case, small groups of radical activists developed strategies, which included the use of African-American specific institutions, such as churches, civic
associations, and universities, to promote the Gandhian repertoire, and the use of American labor movement’s tactics (e.g., the sit-down strike). This case is highly relevant to my study on China because it demonstrates difficulties in overcoming differences in cultures and situations. It also suggests that a certain degree of compromise between transmitters and adopters is necessary in order to make diffusion happen.

Both McAdam and Rucht (1993) and Chabot (2002) view diffusion as a cultural process and stress the importance of agency. Direct interpersonal contacts between adopters and transmitters are critical for diffusion to take place. Through relational channels, an initial identification among adopters with transmitters is constructed, and diffusion is further facilitated through non-relational channels. As Chabot points out, identification is not the only cultural product in the diffusion process; ideas are another. Ideas must be reinvented or adapted to fit the local (adopters’) environment. Through this process, ideas become more familiar to adopters. This construction of familiarities of ideas and practices is very important in the case of China to overcome their “hyper differences” between transmitters and adopters. My study shows that some INGOs (transmitters) are willing to compromise, within their acceptable range, by allowing adopters to change ideas and practices regarding global environmental concerns.

Building on the work I have discussed, I apply diffusion theory with an emphasis on agency and culture to study the diffusion of global environmental concerns via INGOs. Yet, I make a few minor modifications, discussed below.

The predominant literature on diffusion focuses on adopters and shows less concern for the intentions of transmitters. This is probably because the classical
definition of diffusion is adopter-centered, and treats transmitters as fixed. It assumes that adopters do all the cultural work. Adopters are the ones who identify themselves with transmitters. Adopters are the ones who reinvent or adapt ideas to fit local cultures largely because they are more familiar with local situations than transmitters.

In these cultural processes, the roles that transmitters play in constructing identification among adopters and in reinventing ideas have been neglected. Although McAdam and Rucht (1993) hint that minimum identification, in a social movement context, is collectively developed by transmitters and adopters, they do not explore how the identity of the transmitter might be affected by the external environment in which the diffusion process is embedded. I argue that adopters are not necessarily the only participants in the construction of similarities and familiarities. I would like to shed light on the roles that transmitters play in the cultural construction of a mutually acceptable identification and in readjusting their ideas to fit the local contexts. I believe that my study on INGOs (transmitters) in China presents a salient case for these processes.

One may ask why transmitters want to become involved in the diffusion process and how we know whether transmitters care about whether diffusion takes place or not? As I will discuss in the next section, INGOs as transmitters are indeed interested in the occurrence of diffusion and are involved in the diffusion process. This is largely because the legitimacy of INGOs in the eyes of donors is tied to their ability to effectively use funding moneys.

The exiting literature is also lacking, in my view, because it emphasizes the cultural construction of identification and/or ideas at the expense of other salient factors. In particular, it demonstrates little concern for external structures. Although Chabot’s
analysis (2002) suggests that adopters’ social and cultural contexts should be incorporated into analyses of how ideas and practices are incorporated into local settings, his analysis does not include political structure as a factor that filters diffusion. This is probably because political structure in a democratic context, such as the U.S., poses less significant obstacles to the diffusion process. However, I would speculate that political structures in Jim Crow South would have been a significant factor that affected diffusion. Thus, I would like to emphasize the importance of examining political structures of adopters’ country, which mediates the cultural processes. This is especially true in an authoritarian context, such as China.

The effects of political structures are clearly relevant to the nonrelational mode of diffusion. An absence of a free media would certainly affect the diffusion process. New ideas might not reach adopters or might reach in an intentionally altered form (e.g., censorship), unless adopters have access to the international free media or other channels of diffusion, such as uncensored internet access. The effects of a political environment on the relational mode of diffusion could be very subtle. The social construction of similarities and familiarities in diffusion process is a cultural product, but the process can be easily mediated by the political environment in which adopters (and transmitters in some cases) live. This is especially true in a non-democratic political context in which the state is eager to eliminate unwanted external influences.

To analyze such a political structure, the concept of political opportunity structures (POS) will be introduced in a later section. My purpose in using POS is not to find cross-national structural similarities, but to demonstrate how political opportunities within the adopter’s country affect the diffusion process positively or negatively. Marco
G. Giugni (2002) makes a similar point in terms of the cross-national diffusion of movement tactics. He argues that certain movement tactics may not spread to a potential adopters’ country due to a lack of political opportunities, even when potential adopters have formed a minimum identification with transmitters. His argument views political opportunities as simply either blockages or openings to diffusion, but mine goes beyond his by suggesting that the extent of political opportunities shapes the reinvention or adaptation of ideas and practices of global environmental concerns in China.

**Diffusion Theory and the Study of INGOs**

INGOs, with their ubiquitous status, financial and human resources, and access to the international arenas, have become powerful advocates of international norms regarding the environment, human rights, women’s rights, peace, and so on. INGOs not only participate in the construction of international norms (Boli and Thomas 1997), but also disseminate, implement, and monitor them (Keck and Sikkink 1998a; Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink 2002). International relations scholars tend to focus on loosely knitted transnational relationships, such as transnational advocacy networks (TANs), which consist of INGOs, NGOs, governments, and intergovernmental organizations (Keck and Sikkink 1998b). The essential activity of such networks is information sharing, through which the diffusion of certain international norms occurs. In some cases, actors in these networks develop interpersonal contacts and form alliances that become the bases for transnational actions. Although I share with international relations scholars an interest in the roles of INGOs play in disseminating international norms, I focus on the intimate relationships between INGOs (transmitters) and domestic actors.
(potential adopters). Diffusion theory helps us understand the roles that INGOs play in constructing a minimum identification and reinventing or localizing international norms in order to advance them. Efforts of INGOs in this regard are particularly interesting in the case of China. INGOs face what Keck and Sikknik identified as a “difficult environment” for effective transnational activities (1998a: 208) because China is largely independent from material external pressures, such as aid, economic and military pressure.

INGOs: Concerned Transmitters

INGOs are what I label “concerned transmitters.” Such transmitters are so concerned about the occurrences of diffusion that they are willing to have consistent, direct, interpersonal contacts with adopters. To facilitate their efforts, INGOs are even willing to set up an office in the potential adopter’s countries. My hypothesis is that the more they are concerned about the occurrences of diffusion, the more likely they are to reach out to adopters through direct, interpersonal and/or indirect contacts, including communicative means (e.g., the internet), to ensure that adopters accept their ideas and practices. Investigating my hypothesis requires knowing what kind of goals INGOs are trying to achieve and to what extent they allow themselves to compromise to achieve their goals. No literature has systematically explored what the diffusion process looks like while taking a close look at INGOs.

The concept of a concerned transmitter is not a new idea. Missionary work traditionally fits this concept. Transnational corporations (TNCs) are also modern examples of “concerned transmitters.” The commonality among concerned transmitters
is that they engage in negotiations to sell their ideas and practices to potential buyers (adopters). Both the missionaries and INGOs are engaged in dialogue. TNCs try to achieve the same goal via marketing. TNCs, on a regular basis, conduct market research in order to make their products fit the tastes of their targeted consumers (adopters). A corporate image is very important to TNCs because consumers, especially socially conscious ones, are more likely to buy a product from a TNC with which they can identify themselves. Therefore, TNCs are often willing to present their images in a way that aids the identification process for consumers.

My study on INGOs in China shows how the nature of the Chinese state and the relationship between INGOs and the state further affect activities of INGOs and to what extent INGOs are willing to adjust themselves to such circumstances.

The Transnational Diffusion of Global Environmental Concerns in China

My study presents an interesting example of the transnational diffusion of global environmental concerns as an international norm between transmitters and adopters who are “hyper different” (Chabot 2002) in terms of their cultures and political situations. My study focuses on the relational channels of diffusion between INGOs (transmitters) and Chinese local actors (adopters), such as Chinese local governments and Chinese environmental NGOs. It examines the constructive nature of identification and ideas. Political structures are also incorporated into my analysis of diffusion process. As in any non-democratic setting, China presents significant structural obstacles to diffusion. The most problematic of all is the Chinese communist regime’s historical suspicion toward external influences brought inside the nation by foreign entities (e.g., via the
missionaries, via foreign aid). Thus, the regime wants to be very selective in accepting external influences. The attitudes of the regime create the particular political environment and the particular sets of relations between INGOs and the state. Use of the nonrelational mode of diffusion is limited because China has no free media and internet.23 The Chinese citizens have neither a fundamental right to activism, nor free speech, especially on politically sensitive topics. The Chinese state’s social control, in the form of a regulatory framework, governs not only its people but also INGOs that operate in China. INGOs as transmitters must overcome these cultural and political hyper differences in order to facilitate diffusion.

The Relational Mode of Diffusion

The existing literature suggests that for diffusion to take place, a minimum identification of adopters with transmitters must be initially established through relational channel (McAdam and Rucht 1993). In the context of cross-national diffusion, it is assumed that such extensive relational ties tend to be absent. In the case of China, some extensive relational contacts exist between INGOs and Chinese domestic actors. Because some INGOs have a permanent presence in China by opening their offices, it is relatively easier for them to develop relational contacts. I argue that INGOs are eager to get involved in diffusion process, even if they foresee more obstacles. Although the Chinese domestic environment poses foreseeable obstacles to diffusion, some INGOs are willing

23 A special governmental unit monitors and screens internet traffic and blocks access to overseas Web sites considered “hostile or harmful.” Internet service and content providers, both domestic and Western, must comply with onerous restrictions designed to suppress political dissent. See, Minxin Pei, *Will China’s Capitalist Revolution Turn Democratic*, June 2006, www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/minxin1. Accessed July 1, 2006.
to come to China, establish their offices, and form direct relational contacts with potential adopters in order to disseminate and/or implement global environmental concerns.

It is true that, in some cases, INGOs’ ubiquity allows them to bypass the state and operate under the radar of the authority. However, by establishing an office in China, INGOs become more visible to the Chinese authority and they are subject to the Chinese regime’s social control through laws and regulations. Despite the inconvenience, some INGOs are willing to make themselves visible in order to have a long-term relationship not only with potential adopters but also with the Chinese state. INGOs are motivated not only by their own concerns about China’s precarious environmental conditions and/or other situations, but also by their own legitimacy. INGOs appear to gain further legitimacy through their work in China. I asked several representatives of INGOs the reason why they elect to work in China, despite difficulties. Many pointed out that to claim themselves to be INGOs, they cannot ignore China. Having projects in China is integral to being considered as international in focus. INGOs are competing to receive financial support from donors, such as international agencies and northern governments interested in advancing certain global norms (Keck and Sikkink 1998a; Risse and Sikkink 1999). The legitimacy of INGOs in the eyes of donors is tied to INGOs’ ability to effectively use donors’ funding for their interested causes.

In terms of the relationship between INGOs and local actors, the arguments in the globalization literature often suggest that the power relationship between the powerful North (developed countries) vs. the powerless South (developing countries) is reflected in the local context because resource and information generally flows from global to local (from the North to the South). In the context of diffusion, this means that adopters in the
South are forced to blindly adopt ideas or norms in the North, or fiercely reject them. However, the relationship between INGOs and local actors is more mutual and interdependent in China. Because of the particular political environment in China, INGOs want to find local adopters, such as governments, NGOs, etc., which can not only adopt their ideas and practices, but also help INGOs swim through the Chinese political stream and reach out to marginalized populations. Under these circumstances, the success of INGOs as transmitters highly depends on adopters. Therefore, INGOs are very careful in identifying potential adopters and establishing relational ties with them.

Because the structural similarities between INGOs and Chinese NGOs encourage identification, INGOs may hope local Chinese NGOs to be attractive potential adopters. However, INGOs soon discover that Chinese NGOs in themselves have very complex institutional identities. The complexity of Chinese NGOs relates to the historical development of social organizations in China. The majority of Chinese “self-proclaimed” NGOs are what Western scholars label Government Organized NGOs (GONGOs). It means that GONGOs are founded by government officials and/or are attached to government offices. Therefore, GONGOs are not equivalent to Western NGOs. Individually organized NGOs (non-GONGOs) in China are much more autonomous from the state than GONGOs. Yet, they still have difficulties in completely removing the influence of government because legal requirements require NGOs to have a government supervisory unit. As a result, NGOs are supposedly “non-government,” but are not in fact. When I used the term, “fei-zhenfu,” the direct translation of “non-government” in Chinese, to Chinese NGO representatives, some laughed and said that non-government is not possible in China. “An organization among people” (minjien
zuzhi) is the common term to refer to NGOs in China. Under these circumstances, some INGOs rely on their existing personal social networks in identifying potential adopters in China and they fully participate in the construction of a minimum identification of adopters.

The existing literature also suggests that for diffusion to take place, a reinvention or adaptation of ideas and practices in the local context is required between hyper different groups (Chabot 2002). My study on China shows that global environmental concerns are adapted to fit the local environment, particularly, the Chinese political environment. I argue that INGOs, as concerned transmitters, fully participate in this process of adaptation. INGOs try to ensure that global environmental concerns, as a global norm, should not diverge too much from the original form due to adaptation. Some INGOs also hope to disseminate other norms, such as participatory and democratic governance, and human rights, along with global environmental concerns. Thus, both transmitters and adopters try to find a mutual ground of adaptation because both are aware that they are operating under the political constraint imposed by the Chinese regime.

In my study, for example, a local environmental NGO in Yunnan province adapted international discourse and practices of anti-dam movements to fit the Chinese political context. In terms of discourse, the adopter toned down the politically sensitive elements of anti-dam discourse, such as ethnic minority rights, and framed its arguments based on compliance with existing international guidelines and Chinese laws on resettlement. In terms of practices, the adopter and the transmitter used a U.N. sponsored conference held in Beijing as a vehicle for promoting their cause and made frequent visits
to dam affected villages to build a support network among different villages. This somewhat controversial anti-dam activism spread through the relational and nonrelational (the media and words of month) channels of diffusion. As a result, other environmental and non-environmental NGOs outside Yunnan got more interested in the dam controversy in Yunnan and consequently became aware of some new tactics of activism, emphasizing existing Chinese laws.

Adoption of certain norms and ideas is also tied to a shift in the political environment at the domestic level. As I described above, “legal mobilization”—a form of political activity in which the citizenry uses [existing laws, institutions, and norms] on its own behalf,” (Zamans 1983: 690)—has recently spread as a framework of activism in China to challenge governments regardless of causes and settings (urban or rural). This may be an ironic result of the Chinese regime’s on-going promotion of its own new central policy, “legal governance,” with the hope of creating a citizenry that abide the law. For example, adopters perceive the recent enactment of the Environmental Impact Assessment Law as an opportunity for stronger activism and more support from domestic elite allies on the environmental cause.

As this case suggests, diffusion can be fully understood by examining not only relational dynamics between the adopter and the transmitter, but also the political environment in which the relational dynamics is embedded. In my study on China, an analysis of a change in the political environment tells us that even seemingly unified attitudes of the Chinese regime toward external influences still provide opportunities for

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24 For legal mobilization in China’s rural context, see Kevin O’Brian and Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
some INGOs to advance certain global norms better than other norms. Without examining the political opportunities, it is difficult for us to understand how such selectiveness of norms emerges. Therefore, my study on diffusion of global environmental concern in China incorporates an analysis of Chinese political opportunity structures. In the next section, I will introduce concepts of political opportunity structures (POS) in detail.

**Political Opportunity Structures (POS)**

Concept of political opportunity structures (POS) focuses on the political alignment of relevant actors within the larger political environment to create opportunities (McAdam 1982). Although the concept was developed to examine movement outcomes in a social movement context, I argue that they are useful for analyzing the external political environment that affect the relational mode of diffusion. POS are particularly useful for understanding how different political alignments of relevant actors—such as INGOs, the Chinese state, and political elites—may condition the likelihood of diffusion.

McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996: 27) highlight four key dimensions of political opportunity structures (POS) in the context of domestic social movements: (1) the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system; (2) the stability or instability of elite political alignments; (3) the presence or absence of elite allies; and (4) the state’s capacity and propensity for repression. I will examine each variable to assess its relevance to diffusion of global environmental concerns.
The first dimension again is the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system. The general rule, in a social movement context, is that social movements are most likely to occur in political systems that are not completely closed because political openness encourages grievances to emerge. China has no electoral system so that official channels between the state and its domestic actors are very limited. An exception is found under the Regulation on Letters and Visits, which allows concerned citizens to write a letter to and/or visit the Letters and Visits Office and/or members of the People’s Congress to express their grievances. Yet, the letters and visits system does not appear to completely absorb growing social grievances, as social discontent in forms of protests and riots are prevalent in rural China. The growing number of collective protests and riots by industrial workers, peasants, and urban residents attests that China’s institutionalized political system is not completely closed. Kevin O’Brien and Lianjiang Li (2006) argue that some Chinese rural protesters have learned to exercise “rightful protests,” exploiting loopholes of the authoritarian state. They contend that the emergence of such tactical innovation depends more on agency (e.g., skillful activists) rather than on the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system. I also believe that relative openness or closure is not significant to the topic under study because the level of openness in China has not changed much. My study also suggests that tactical innovation may depend more on agency rather than on the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system.

The second dimension is the stability or instability of elite political alignments. Although political cleavages exist within the CCP, the Chinese regime, in post-Tiananmen
era, has been unified against social elites—the intelligentsia, professionals, and private entrepreneurs—who might otherwise present a counter-force to the regime. The regime has been successful in co-opting or controlling most social elites. Within this domestic political context, the regime has reluctantly allowed a certain degree of environmental activism to emerge in the hope it can contribute to environmental protection. However, well aware of the political implications of environmental activism—as witnessed in formerly authoritarian countries in Asia and Eastern Europe—the Chinese regime tightly controls social organizations, such as NGOs. Therefore, ideas and practices of environmental activism that may conflict with state interests are difficult to adopt without modifications.

Although the dimensions of POS are developed for domestic context, I will extend the second variable to the international context and pose a question: “Are China’s elite political alignments stable when facing the international polity?” Because global environmental concerns are considered as international norm, any country that does not meet international expectations may be criticized by the international community. China’s environmental problems are no longer simply a domestic issue. Being the world’s largest producer and consumer of coal, and the world’s second largest carbon emitter (The World Bank 1997), China is viewed as a major contributor to global warming.

In order to evaluate the Chinese state’s vulnerability to international pressures, I introduce a concept from international relations: “state vulnerability” which is the degree of state sensitivity to international pressure. State vulnerability is assessed both normatively and materially (Keck and Sikkink 1998a: 208). In the international polity, China is Janus-
faced. In a normative sense, China is relatively sensitive because it desires to maintain a good standing in the international community. Since China ended its isolation policy in 1978, it has made considerable effort to be a good member of the international community by joining the U.N. and signing a number of international agreements, including ones on the environment. Alastair Johnston argues that China’s wish to demonstrate its sensitivity to international norms is a reason for China to take environmental protection seriously (Johnston 1998). Yet, I argue that China is only sensitive to selective international norms. Environmental protection is certainly one of the international norms that the Chinese regime shows its sensitivity. In a material sense, China is insensitive to international norms because it is independent from material external pressures, such as aid and economic and military sanctions (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997; Keck and Sikknik 1998a). Although China welcomes external financial and technical help for environmental problem, it can withstand material external pressures if it is necessary.

The third dimension is the presence or absence of elite allies. I argue that the presence of elite allies, in the Chinese case, is the most beneficial political opportunity for diffusion of global environmental concerns. Since China’s state vulnerability in terms of material external pressure is very low, it is important for INGOs to have domestic elite supporters. Global environmental concerns have elite supporters thanks to the early formation of the Chinese environmental regime (for more detail, see Chapter 4). Since China’s participation in the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (the Stockholm Conference), the Chinese environmental regime has slowly been institutionalized via governmental environmental agency and offices, and environmental laws and regulations. As Charles Tilly (1978) has pointed out, the involvement of
national governments grants environmental issues and organizations, such as NGOs, greater legitimacy. The existence of the Chinese environmental regime has given environmental NGOs and their cause legitimacy easier than other types of NGOs.\textsuperscript{25}

Chinese environmental NGOs have a specific elite ally. A state agency hopes to use the international norms of NGO participation in environmental protection to their own advantage. For example, the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) has been pondering cooperation with domestic environmental NGOs. SEPA’s willingness to ally with environmental NGOs heightened after the enactment of China’s Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Law in 2003. The EIA requires environmental reviews in the planning stages of major public and private development projects, and public consultation. The new law has empowered the SEPA by giving the SEPA the gatekeeper role in approving environmental reviews. SEPA seeks to strengthen its low administrative standing in the central government by allying with Chinese environmental NGOs, and consequently to enforce environmental regulations more effectively.

The fourth dimension is the state’s capacity and propensity for repression. A repressive regime creates a political environment in which ideas and practices that conflict with state interests are difficult to be adopted without modifications. This is especially true when the regime’s “state vulnerability” is low. The repressive nature of the Chinese regime is evident. The Chinese state has been suppressing the occurrences of tens of thousands of rural protests every year with the use of the People’s Armed Police (PAP), a large anti-riot paramilitary force. From the INGOs’ standpoint, keeping a good

\textsuperscript{25} Chinese NGOs working on family planning issues have a similar advantage.
relationship with the Chinese regime is, in general, in their best interests, especially when the regime is relatively immune from international pressure.

Based on the above analysis on four dimensions of POS, I will adjust key dimensions of POS, which are critical to understanding the political environment that affects diffusion of global environmental norms in China. The new dimensions are: (1) the degree of state vulnerability; (2) the presence or absence of elite allies; and (3) the state’s capacity and propensity for repression.

**Conclusion**

This chapter examined diffusion theory to understand the processes in which global (Western) environmental concerns spread from INGOs (transmitters) to local actors in China (adopters), such as governments and NGOs. The existing literature in sociology on diffusion theory illuminates the mechanism of the relational mode of diffusion. It emphasizes the roles of culture and agency in constructing similarities and/or familiarities. Although I agree with the existing literature on the importance of culture and agency in the process of diffusion, its adopter-centered approach cannot fully explain the roles of INGOs as concerned transmitters in the Chinese case. I argue that we must pay more attention to transmitters because adopters are not necessarily the only participants of the social construction of similarities and/or familiarities. I also argue that we must be more concerned about external political structure that may affect the process of the cultural construction. In order to understand political structure, POS are added to an analysis of diffusion. I readjusted the variables of POS in order to explain the Chinese case.
Building on the emphasis of culture and agency, I apply diffusion theory for understanding diffusion process of global environmental concerns via INGOs in an authoritarian context with an emphasis on the roles of transmitters and on the POS.
Chapter 3

China’s NGO Sector and its Political Environment: The Relationship between the Repressive State and the Newly Emerging NGO sector

Introduction

This chapter focuses on China’s domestic political environment in which diffusion between INGOs and Chinese NGOs takes place. More and more INGOs began operating in China especially after the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995. INGOs bring to China not only financial and human resources, such as money and experts, but also ideas and practices. However, a repressive regime, such as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), is not wholeheartedly welcoming to INGOs as it is wary of external influences. Therefore, the regime creates and maintains a political environment in which the diffusion of ideas and practices that conflict with, or threaten, state interests is difficult to achieve without modifications.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the relationship between the Chinese state and the newly emerging NGO sector in China, including INGOs. I argue that the Chinese regime not only imposes a legal framework upon social organizations, but also imposes its official discourse on civil society, in efforts to control the social and political impacts of such organizations, including NGOs. The first section introduces the perspective of donors, including INGOs, by discussing the rise of the NGO sector worldwide and the emphasis of donors on civil society assistance.26 Secondly, this

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26 Donor organizations provide this type of assistance using various program names. Examples include, “Governance and Civil Society” (the Ford Foundation), and “Democracy and Governance” (USAID: United States Agency for International Development). Donors place different priorities on civil society assistance. I will return to this point in a later section.
chapter discusses China’s historical suspicions of external influences via Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) projects and social organizations—the main reason for Chinese state control over its NGO sector. Thirdly, I discuss the emergence and development of China’s NGO sector and the means by which the Chinese regime seeks to control China’s NGO sector.

Donors’ Emphasis on Civil Society Assistance and the Rise of the NGO Sector

Civil society re-entered academic discourse in the early 1990s, triggered by the sudden collapse of communist regimes in the former Eastern bloc in the late 1980s. Scholars do not fully agree on the definition of “civil society.” They at least agree that civil society is a realm that lies outside the state. What makes civil society so special to both academic and non-academic circles is its purported linkage with democracy. Some scholars have developed theories of democracy arguing that a strong civil society may help to institute and to consolidate democracy and/or good governance (Putnam 1993, 1995, 2000). Although the definition of good governance also varies, “good governance has been associated with democracy and good civil rights, with transparency, with the rule of law, and with efficient public services.”27

Donors concerned primarily with economic growth had increasingly become interested in issues of governance for two major reasons. First, and most importantly, the end of the Cold War eliminated the geo-political justification for supplying foreign aid, spurring a search to find a new justification to take its place. Donor agencies began

claiming that their aid could assist fledgling democracies in the former Eastern bloc to become fully democratic. This was done in order to persuade donor constituencies of the importance of continuous foreign aid in the post-Cold War era (Crawford 2001).

Secondly, donors had learned lessons from past, unsuccessful projects. Many development projects, driven by the equitable growth discourse of the 1970s and by the structural adjustment discourse of the 1980s, had proven unsustainable. Changes in macroeconomic policy could not overcome institutional barriers to development, such as corruption,28 poor adherence to the rule of law, and an inefficient public sector (Crawford 2001; World Bank 2003). Donors increasingly became more strident in calling for institutional reforms that would make governments in developing countries more accountable, efficient, and transparent. Thus, to promote good governance and/or democracy in developing countries, Western civil society discourse entered into international development discourse.

By the mid-1990’s, “civil society assistance” had emerged as a central theme of development discourse. Donors have by now assisted—or attempted to assist—many countries to construct civil society. One commonality among donors is that they have all sought convenient quantifiable indicators of civil society in order to justify their civil society assistance in terms of program design, budgets, monitoring methods, evaluation methods, and so on. Although NGOs are not synonymous with civil society, donors have identified them as the primary vehicles of civil society assistance (Henderson 2003, 2). Thus, civil society assistance, in practice, becomes donor funding of NGOs with the

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intent of instituting and consolidating democracy and/or improving the institutional performance of governments (good governance).

Due to the rise of civil society assistance, NGOs appear to have attained a new, loftier status within the donor community. But NGOs are by no means newcomers in development. Since the 1970s, NGOs worldwide have been active participants in development by providing the poor and the disadvantaged with basic human needs (BHN), such as water, food, basic health care, etc. In the 1980s, when donors were placing an emphasis on newly emerging international concepts, such as participation, community development, and local development, they recognized that NGOs, especially service or development NGOs, were well-suited to promoting their goals, given the ubiquity and the grassroots approaches of NGOs. Thus, donors have increasingly channeled their aid through both international and local NGOs (Carothers, 1999, 214).

The rise of civil society assistance in the 1990s has made NGOs the darling of the donor community. Donors now envision NGOs as agents of civic development and have redefined the roles of NGOs from a sustainable development standpoint. By so doing, donors have shaped civil society discourse, emphasizing the linkage among NGOs, civil society, democracy, and good governance.

Donors’ emphasis on civil society assistance has helped to increase the number of NGOs worldwide (Carothers 1999, 214). Lester Salamon calls this phenomenon the “global associational revolution” (Salamon and Anheier 1996, 4). The number of international NGOs (INGOs) increased by 25 percent in the 1990s, and domestic grassroots organizations multiplied rapidly (Anheier, Glasius, and Kaldor 2002).
China’s Reluctance to Overseas Development Assistance (ODA)

Since China’s farewell to isolation in 1978, it has been eager to become a distinguished member of the international community. China has joined international organizations and has signed and ratified close to 200 international treaties and conventions. Concern with its self-image in the international arena has led China to become more sensitive to international norms (Johnston 1998). Nevertheless, China has developed a reputation in the donor community as a difficult country. For example, John Meyer et al., in their study on World Society and the Nation-State, point out that “Chinese policy continues a long pattern of resistance to external aid” (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997: 173). My interviews with officers from bilateral agencies confirm this statement.29

China has a mixed attitude toward ODA. As a developing country, China needs ODA. Yet, to receive ODA, China has to accept conditions attached by donors and to adopt international practices brought by donors through their ODA programs. Complying with international norms and practices is not always easy for the Chinese government. It fears that China may become dependent on foreign aid and that foreign national interests disguised in the form of aid may undermine China’s national interests, sovereignty and policies. China’s suspicions concerning ODA originate in part from China’s historical experiences as a victim of imperialism and as a communist nation (which will be discussed in the next section). Since 1978, in sum, China’s door has been

open to an ODA inflow, but China has been struggling to control undesirable foreign influences.

**China’s Historical Response to Foreign Influence**

Beginning with the Opium War in 1840, China suffered from a series of foreign imperialist invasions, which kept the country oppressed and fragmented until the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was founded by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1949. During the Republican period (1912-1948), there was a rural reconstruction program in Hunan province led by James Yen, who successfully drew aid from both the Rockefeller Foundation and the United States government, channeled through the China Aid Act of 1948 (Chang 1972, 91) under U.S. President Truman.\(^\text{30}\) This initiative ended with the communist takeover of China.

After World War II, Mao’s CCP concentrated on the creation of communist culture with an emphasis on self-sacrifice and communist interests over personal life. During the Cold War era, America was portrayed as an imperial capitalist (Wylie 1962). The penetration of American influence inside China, whether via missionaries or foundations, was viewed as a cultural invasion, a threat to communist culture. This isolationist stance lasted until 1978.

Yet even today, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist discourses continue to resurface. In such discourses, donors are viewed as evil foreign interests and ODA is seen as a mechanism by which evil foreign interests seek to infiltrate and control China.

\(^{30}\) The China Aid Act of 1948 provided $265 million, ten percent of which was earmarked for rural reconstruction. The aid also supported the Kuomintang (KMT) government’s fight against Communism and inflation (Chang 1972, 91-2).
For example, during and after the Tiananmen massacre in June 1989, economic and cultural exchange programs supported by American foundations through their ODA programs were regarded as counterrevolutionary strategies to brainwash the Chinese people. China’s State Security Ministry, reporting to Party Central, accused these programs of being American methods of ideological and cultural infiltration designed to initiate a “peaceful evolution” that would transform China from a socialist to a capitalist society (Nathan and Link 2001, 338-9). In 1996, a book entitled, “China Can Say No: Political and Emotional Choices in the Post Cold War Era” (Song and Zhang, et al 1996), accused the Ford Foundation of being a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) spy, which had obtained funds from the CIA\textsuperscript{31} to carry out “peaceful evolution” in China. The accusation was a reflection of the tense U.S.-China relations at that time over the cross-strait relations between China and Taiwan.

It is due to the historical and contemporary factors described above that when more INGOs began to enter into China’s ODA sectors in the late 1980s, the Chinese State was eager to control them. In the sections below, I will describe the emergence and development of the NGO sector in China, show how China’s party-state has implemented its legal framework to control the sector, and demonstrate how China’s social and political structure imposes constraints on donor discourse and on the activities of civil society assistance.

\textsuperscript{31} The Ford Foundation insists that its funds have no strings attached. The Ford Foundation’s brochure (The Ford Foundation at a Glance, Jan. 2003), which I obtained from Ford’s Beijing Office in Aug. 2004, clearly states in both Chinese and English that the Foundation is a private, non-profit entity and that it does not accept any new donations.
The Emergence and Development of the NGO Sector in China

According to the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA), which currently oversees the nation’s NGOs, China’s NGOs (Minjian Zuzhi in Chinese) consist of social organizations (Shehui Tuanti) and people-run non-business units (Minban fei-qiyie danwei).

In the pre-reform era, especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), China’s party-state did not allow any social organizations to exist, except mass organizations. Mass organizations are a type of social organizations, an extension of China’s party-state. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established China’s eight mass organizations in the early days of Mao’s era (1949-78). They function as a traditional Leninist transmission-belt, a common system under totalitarian regimes, through which the state dictates to the civilian population. The CCP policies were transmitted through these organizations to eight civilian constituencies: workers; women; youth; scientists and technicians; writers; overseas Chinese; and the commercial community. Today, these mass organizations remain part of the party-state apparatus. The CCP appoints the key positions in each of these organizations.

In the wake of the 1978 reforms, the Chinese central government drastically altered its social organization policy, creating “three self policies” (san zi zhengce), requiring social organizations to adopt self-governing, self-funding, and self-hiring. By returning certain functions back to the society, the central government hoped to release itself from financial burdens and inefficient management (Ma 2002, 121).

Under this governmental initiative, new social organizations have developed. The first to emerge were research-oriented professional organizations. The central government sought to enhance the effectiveness of various policies—especially in the
fields of poverty alleviation, reproductive health, and environment protection—by establishing or sponsoring professional associations, consisting of technical experts, such as engineers and scientists. Professional associations have worked with different levels of the Chinese government in order to implement governmental policies and to complement governmental responsibilities. A typical example is the China Family Planning Association. It is sponsored by the State Planning Commission and assists the government in implementing China’s one-child policy.

Western scholars call such new social organizations “Government Organized NGOs,” or GONGOs (Knup 1997, Ho 2001). They are generally viewed as extended governmental units and are staffed by government retirees or government cadres. Some Chinese people sarcastically told me that the purposes for establishing GONGOs were for “laofang” and “tuifang.” The first Chinese term refers to a social protection plan against aging, the second, retirement. GONGOs often provide retired government officials with a job and thereby protect them from losing income after retirement.

Some GONGOs, particularly in the areas of environment and reproductive health, have obtained some degree of organizational autonomy from state control (Wu 2002, Mas 2000). (In Chapter Four, I will discuss the case of an environmental NGO whose organizational identity shifted from a GONGO to an NGO.)

Another important purpose in creating GONGOs was to bring in more foreign donor funding (Saich 2001). The rise of civil society assistance had driven INGOs to fund more social organizations in China. INGOs, in general, preferred to fund NGOs,
even quasi NGOs, such as GONGOs, rather than governments or governmental research institutions.\textsuperscript{32}

The second group of social organizations to emerge were “individual-organized” NGOs, which are more autonomous from the state than GONGOs. In March 1994, China’s first non-GONGO, Friends of Nature (FON), an environmental NGO, was founded in Beijing. FON’s founder’s star quality,\textsuperscript{33} its status as a pioneer NGO, and its successful advocacy\textsuperscript{34} of environmental causes have made FON a prominent organization.

By the end of 1996, MOCA reported that there were 186,666 social organizations.\textsuperscript{35} There was a brief setback during the 1997 rectification campaign, following the 1996 Sixth Plenum of the 14\textsuperscript{th} CCP Central Committee. All the existing social organizations, except mass organizations, were re-evaluated and more than 14,000 were dissolved (Fung 1999), which was about 7.5 percent of the total. However, this political environment was officially reversed in September 1997 at the 15\textsuperscript{th} Party congress when the CCP set a new reform goal, summarized by the slogan, “small government, big society.” Jiang Zemin, CCP General Secretary, made a speech emphasizing the need to “cultivate and develop social intermediary organizations” (Saich 2000, 128).

\textsuperscript{32} Interviews with several officers of INGOs active in China, 2004.

\textsuperscript{33} FON’s founder, Liang Conjie, is a grandson of Liang Qichao, a reformer during the late Qing Dynasty. Liang Conjie has also been a member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference.

\textsuperscript{34} NGO engagement in advocacy is still hard to do in China. However, the Chinese central government allows advocacy on certain issues. In the next chapter (Chapter Four), I will discuss FON’s environmental advocacy to protect the snub-nosed monkey in Yunnan province in 1995.

Although official CCP support should have opened up more space for NGOs, their numbers did not, in fact, increase. According to official statistics from MOCA, the number of Chinese NGOs, counting both GONGOs and individually organized NGOs, was 165,600 by the end of 1998.\(^{36}\) This suggests that the party-state has continued to monitor and control NGOs carefully.

Chinese leaders in the central government did not welcome the emergence of “individual-organized” Chinese NGOs, but tolerated them.\(^{37}\) By the mid-1990s, NGOs had become a worldwide phenomenon. The Chinese central government wanted to demonstrate to the world its sensitivity to international norms (Johnston 1998) by creating NGOs equivalent to Western NGOs. The U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995, was an opportunity for the Chinese central government to showcase China’s sensitivity to international norms. As the host nation, China needed women’s NGOs to display to the world. The U.N. conference thus helped to create an opportunity for more autonomous women’s groups to emerge.

At the time, international organizations, such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), had been promoting an NGO model of poverty alleviation, featuring the success story of Grameen Bank,\(^{38}\) a local financial association in Bangladesh. This may have persuaded Chinese leaders to incorporate NGOs into China’s reform strategy, particularly in the area of poverty alleviation.


Today, the Chinese central government intends to place the NGO sector, not local
governments, in charge of China’s poverty alleviation efforts. In 2000, the central
government’s Leading Group on Poverty Alleviation and Development adopted a Ten-
Year Poverty Reduction Strategy, officially enlisting NGOs in the implementation of
poverty alleviation projects.39 A downsizing of the government had weakened the
capacity of local governments to deliver social services to the poor. There had also been
many past instances of corruption in which local governments had misused poverty
alleviation funds (Onishi 2001, 62). And corruption had been viewed by central leaders,
since the 1990s, as the greatest threat to the survival of the CCP and to the current regime
(Dickson 2000, 48).

In addition to institutional reasons, there was a financial reason for enlisting
NGOs. Borrowing for projects such as poverty alleviation, which do not generate a
financial return via a collection of user fees,40 was something the Chinese central
government proved reluctant to do. Meanwhile, Chinese NGOs increased their capacities
as social service providers by attracting funding from foreign sources. Some Chinese
NGOs claim that they and other civil society players, such as research institutions and
universities, have raised more than 50 billion RMB (about $6 billion) for poverty
reduction since the mid-1990s.41

39 Edes, Bart W., *Milestone NGO Meeting in the PRC: Chinese NGOs are gaining ground in fighting rural

40 Projects such as infrastructure, energy, and water supply, etc., generate a financial return. *China Development Brief E-mail Update*, May 3, 2004.

41 Edes, Bart W., *Milestone NGO Meeting in the PRC: Chinese NGOs are gaining ground in fighting rural
The party-state’s acknowledgement of Chinese NGOs as social service providers not only encourages service or development NGOs to increase in number, but also delimits the role of NGOs to that of social service providers. The party-state is willing to tolerate NGOs as long as it can control them and frame their roles to benefit its own interests.

State Legal Framework Controlling the NGO Sector in China

The student leaders of the Beijing Student Movement of 1989, which ended in the Tiananmen massacre, were active participants in political salons at universities. Within four months of the massacre, China’s party-state aimed at regaining its grip on social organizations by implementing a legal framework. It enacted “Management Regulations on the Registration of Social Organizations.” These required all social organizations, except mass organizations, to re-register with a local Civil Affairs office. To re-register, social organizations needed sponsorship from governments, mass organizations, or other government-sponsored organizations, as well as the approval of a local Civil Affairs office. The re-registration requirements made it more difficult than before for social organizations to obtain or maintain their legal statuses. Thus, the regulations allowed the CCP not only to abolish unwanted political organizations, but also to tighten control over certain organizations in the economic and social spheres.

Since 1989, China’s party-state has not loosened its control over political organizations. In response to my question on what kind of social organizations face the most difficulty in being approved, an officer from a local civil affairs office said, “The
purpose of social organizations is to serve the public interest. Thus, China does not need political or religious organizations. His comment implies that the party-state views these types of organizations as threats to its rule. The 1999 crackdown on the Falun Gong sect, a religious group, is perhaps evidence.

In the 1990s, the number of both INGOs and “individual-organized” Chinese NGOs surged. The growth of autonomous Chinese NGOs, which have attracted a sizable amount of foreign funding, has increased for China’s mass organizations the amount of competition for funding. In September 1998, the “Regulations for Registration and Management of Social Organizations” replaced the 1989 Regulations. The 1998 regulations aim at ensuring for mass organizations a monopoly of representation by banning autonomous organizations that represent the same interests as mass organizations. Under this corporatist framework, for example, the All China Federation of Trade Unions cannot be challenged by independent groups seeking to represent the interests of workers (Saich 2001, 174).

By maintaining such monopolies, the CCP aims to ensure a hierarchical order among social organizations. Mass organizations, being state apparatus, are protected. Through this legal framework, the party-state has effectively discouraged the formation of national-level autonomous NGOs, thereby keeping China’s NGOs fragmented and highly localized (Ho 2001).

The teeth of the 1998 regulations are found in the “Dual Management System” provision (Wang 2000), concerning the registration requirements that Chinese social organizations must face. The Chinese state intends to control Chinese social

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42 Interview with an official from the Yunnan Provincial Civil Affairs Office. September 12, 2003.
organizations by placing them under the scrutiny of two governmental monitoring organizations: a governmental sponsor unit and MOCA. In order to ensure the sponsor unit’s control over social organizations, one board member of a social organization must be appointed from its governmental sponsor unit (Saich 2000). The new Regulations omit the right to appeal against the Civil Affairs office’s refusal to approve an organization (Mas 2000).

To register with MOCA’s local administrative office, a social organization must have a governmental sponsor unit, office space, registration fees, full-time staff, a charter, and an organizational breakdown showing the proposed division of labor.43

An official from a local Civil Affairs office44 commented that finding a governmental sponsor unit is the most difficult registration requirement for most social organizations. He offered two reasons. First, due to a downsizing of the government, the number of governmental units has been decreasing. Secondly, a sponsor unit must have professional knowledge about the activities of the social organization it supervises. If a social organization is advocating a new issue that only a few governmental agencies are familiar with, or interested in, then it will be difficult to find a governmental sponsor.

Representatives from local Chinese NGOs in Yunnan affirmed the official’s comments.45 They indicated that it is difficult to find a sponsor unit without having good contacts with governmental organizations. The Chinese term, Guanxi (personal

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41 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
relations), seems to be the key to successfully finding a sponsor unit. Scholars have
documented the importance of *Guanxi*\(^{46}\) in many Chinese social contexts. *Guanxi* is
developed through the exchange of personal favors.

A hefty annual registration fee requirement weeded out small Chinese social
organizations with only a few full-time staff. In Yunnan, for example, both the “Man and
Nature Foundation” (founded in 1995) and the “Green Plateau” (founded in 1999) found
the annual registration fee of 30,000 RMB ($3,600) for NGOs troublesome. The “Man
and Nature Foundation” registered as a foundation rather than an NGO because the
annual registration fee for a foundation was only 10,000 RMB. Due to lack of funding,
the “Man and Nature Foundation” had stopped its operations at the time of my interview
in 2001.\(^{47}\) A representative of the “Green Plateau” also expressed financial insecurities in
2001.\(^{48}\) The organization ceased its operations in 2003.

These Yunnan social organizations also lacked technical competencies, which
hindered and thwarted their applications for foreign funding. The “Man and Nature
Foundation,” especially, had to rely on private donations from domestic sources, rather
than foreign funding.

The current legal framework, however, has some holes. First, if a Chinese social
organization identifies itself as a commercial corporate entity, it can avoid both having a
governmental sponsor unit and registering with a local Civil Affairs office.

\(^{46}\) For more information about Guanxi, see, e.g., Gold, Guthrie, and Wank (2002).

\(^{47}\) Interview, July 2, 2001.

\(^{48}\) Interview, August 10, 2001.
Secondly, a governmental sponsor unit does not necessarily function as a monitoring organization in a strict sense. An NGO can change its sponsor unit and it can shop around to find the best one. As evident in the relationship between INGOs and their government sponsor units (for example, see my description of the relationship between the Ford Foundation and CASS in the later section), the more powerful and famous a Chinese NGO becomes, the easier it can find the best governmental sponsor unit for it, due to the prospect of mutual benefits.

Regarding the requirement of a governmental sponsor unit, Qiao Shenqian,49 Deputy Head of the NGO Registration Service Center of MOCA, recently stated at a seminar on International Cooperation and Public Participation held in Beijing: “It is imperative to drop the obligation NGOs now have to be sponsored by a government department.” He added, “I hope it will not take too long.” His statement should not be interpreted to mean that the party-state is willing to loosen its grip. Rather, it should be interpreted to mean that it acknowledges the inefficacy of a governmental sponsor unit, and is trying instead to increase the supervisory power of MOCA, or develop other means of state control. For example, the party-state may be able—as it has done with mass organizations, whose key positions are appointed by the CCP—to strengthen its control over social organizations through the use of the CCP membership.

The Yunnan NGO Newsletter, an official newsletter of the Yunnan Provincial Civil Affairs Office, states that the central government demands that NGOs establish a CCP unit within their organizations. According to the CCP’s charter, if there are more than three CCP members among the full-time staff of an NGO, then it must establish a basic CCP unit within the organization. A CCP unit inside an NGO functions as an internal watchdog of the organization. In this way, the CCP institutes and expands its control over Chinese NGOs from the inside.

As for INGOs, except for the 2004 Regulations for the Management of Foundations, which govern foreign foundations, no Chinese regulations currently govern them. Yet, INGOs still need the approval of a governmental unit in order to register. Without being registered, they cannot operate in China, due to an inability to establish a bank account.

At the provincial level, some governments have established a GONGO that serves as a gate keeper of INGOs established in their provinces. The GONGO also acts as a matchmaker between governmental units and INGOs.

In Yunnan province, the GONGO, Yunnan International NGO (YINGO), was established in 1993. YINGO’s governmental sponsor unit is the provincial subunit of the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM). YINGO helps INGOs to register in Yunnan. With YINGO’s help, INGOs wishing to establish an office in Yunnan seek the approval of the provincial office of the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM). Upon obtaining it, they

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50 Yunnan NGO Newsletter, the Yunnan Provincial Civil Affairs Office, Nov. 24, 2003. The newsletter is distributed to NGOs in Yunnan.

51 Interview with YINGO staff member, September 25, 2003.
register with the Yunnan Industry and Commerce Department.\textsuperscript{52} YINGO also has a very close relationship with the Yunnan Provincial Civil Affairs office. The Civil Affairs office does not have legal jurisdiction over INGOs, except foreign foundations, but it cooperates with YINGO in monitoring INGOs.

INGOs prefer to avoid registering with the Civil Affairs office because it requires them to have a governmental sponsor unit to whom they must report. For example, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), a U.S. based environmental NGO, first registered in 1997 with the Yunnan Industry and Commerce Department as a “foundation,” using the Chinese name, \textit{Da Zuran Jijinghui} (Great Nature Foundation). Then, to avoid a bureaucratic headache in the wake of the 2004 regulations that require all foundations to register with a Civil Affairs office, TNC changed its legal status from a foundation to an association, using the Chinese name, \textit{Da Zuran Xiehui} (Great Nature Association).

\textbf{State Discourse on Civil Society and the NGO Sector}

China’s party-state acknowledges that NGO development has become a worldwide phenomenon, which would be difficult to reverse or resist inside China. The party-state tolerates Chinese NGOs to show its sensitivity to international norms and to attract foreign funding (but it only tolerates those it can maintain its grip on). Since the adoption of “Small Government, Big Society” at the 15\textsuperscript{th} Party congress in September 1997, the CCP has encouraged the NGO sector to be social service providers, essentially enlisting NGOs to help stabilize the society. I argue that China’s party-state is aware of the possible (unwanted) implications of the empowerment of the NGO sector. Therefore,

\textsuperscript{52} Interview with a YINGO staff member, September 25, 2003.
it not only imposes a legal framework upon NGOs, but also its official discourse on civil society, in order to control the social and political impacts of such organizations.

The Official Chinese Version of Civil Society Discourse

The Chinese state considers NGOs as mainly social service providers. This view serves the interests of China’s party-state. The CCP does not want a “peaceful evolution” as some donors may seek to promote through their civil society assistance. For the CCP, NGOs should be utilized to stabilize Chinese society and thereby consolidate its own power.

An official textbook on Chinese NGOs, which is used for training Chinese political cadres, emphasizes their apolitical nature. The textbook identifies three major roles for Chinese NGOs: (1) as a bridge between the government and the people; (2) as an assistant to the government; and (3) as an important part of the national economy. The textbook declares that Chinese NGOs are promoters of China’s modernization and democratization. The textbook also describes the roles of Chinese NGOs in the political arena from a functionalist standpoint. “Chinese NGOs are not a political power, and do not directly participate in political activities. However, their activities can influence the political process by performing their duties in society” (Meng 2001, 16-20).

I argue that the Chinese central government wants NGOs to provide better social services, especially those that address basic human needs (BHN) and help to alleviate poverty. It also seeks, to a lesser extent, advocacy NGOs to advocate on certain issues in a manner that is in line with the aims of the party-state. Advocacy is only allowed in
limited, key areas, such as the environment, AIDS, and reproductive health (population control). Such issues pose significant economic, social, and political threats to the nation.

Advocacy on controversial issues, such as human rights, politics, religion, etc., is basically prohibited. For example, the *Yunnan NGO Newsletter* for March 2003 reports that the Nanjing city civil affairs office, together with the public security agency (China’s police force), had investigated an *illegal* (emphasis added) NGO, “a Committee to Support Unemployed Workers’ Rights,” after staff members from this NGO had visited a government office and complained about the office’s registration applications. This case exemplifies the difficulties in engaging in rights-based advocacy in China, including the difficulty of creating support groups for disadvantaged populations. A case like this surely instills negativity towards rights-based organizations, discourages their development, and intimidates other NGOs.

The party-state seems generally against rights-based advocacy. Concerning women’s issues, for example, advocacy for battered women is more acceptable than advocacy for women’s legal rights. A Chinese female lawyer commented, “Women can seek help if they get hurt. But if they advocate for their right not to get hurt, it will not be acceptable.”

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53 Issues concerning unemployed workers have been increasing sensitive in China. China has as many as 150 million unemployed workers (Jackson 2000, 4). There have been some incidents of labor unrest, which have created some social instability (Lee, 2003, Chan 2001, Chen 1998).

54 Interview with a female lawyer from a women’s rights NGO, August 6, 2004.
The term, civil society (Gongmin Shehui in Chinese), appears in both Chinese academic circles and Chinese NGO circles. But it seems to be lacking from the official discourse found in Chinese government statements. When I spoke to officials from the local civil affairs office, they hardly used this term in any context.

I argue that China’s party-state is conceptually aware that NGOs can be agents of social change and that they can help to develop civil society in China. To avoid its development, the party-state tries to control NGOs via the imposition of its official discourse. Chinese official discourse on civil society does not acknowledge the linkage between NGOs and civil society. It treats Chinese NGOs as having nothing to do with the development of civil society.

When I spoke to staff members from Chinese NGOs, they seemed relatively pessimistic about the possibility that China would ever have a civil society. These staff members clearly view NGOs as one part of civil society and understand their potential to contribute to the development of civil society in China. Yet, they share the opinion that the party-state’s control over NGOs is too strong to defy. As the textbook for the Chinese political cadres describes, the CCP does not allow Chinese NGOs to become political powers, individually or as a group, or to directly participate in political activities. Thus, Chinese official discourse is only contested by the members of Chinese NGOs in private.

In 2004, the NGO Center at Tsinghua University in Beijing undertook an international research program entitled, the Civil Society Index (CSI), initiated by
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation.\textsuperscript{55} The study methods include a survey, interviews, and group discussions. My participant observation of a one-day expert meeting in Beijing\textsuperscript{56} suggests that Chinese NGOs in Beijing are aware of their potential to contribute to the development of China’s civil society, but assume they will not reach their potential due to government intervention.

The NGO center invited twenty-one representatives from Chinese NGOs in Beijing and two officials from the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA) to attend the meeting. The NGO representatives were from: the Chinese office of an INGO, a university club, university research institutes, a women’s right group, a Children’s rights group, an environmental group, a nonprofit journalist group, and so on. The participants first took a CIVICUS survey, which the NGO center had translated into Chinese.

In the Chinese version of the survey questionnaires, the NGO center introduced CIVICUS’s definition of civil society: “[T]he arena between family, government, and market, where people voluntarily associate to advance common interests.” The NGO center stated that this definition of civil society is an internationally common one. On the same sheet, however, the NGO center also stated that civil society in the Chinese social context is equivalent to the society of NGO.\textsuperscript{57}

This suggests that the NGO center follows—and probably must follow, being a university research center—the Chinese official version of civil society discourse.

\textsuperscript{55} CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation is an international alliance of over 1,000 members from 105 countries. It has worked for over a decade to strengthen citizen action and civil society throughout the world. http://www.civicus.org/new/default.asp. Accessed July 23, 2005.

\textsuperscript{56} Participant Observation at “Expert Meeting on China’s NGO Development” in Beijing, August 6, 2004.

\textsuperscript{57} The Chinese survey questionnaires prepared by the NGO center were obtained at the “Expert Meeting on China’s NGO Development” in Beijing, August 6, 2004.
Further evidence is found in the fact that civil society related publications from the NGO center (e.g., Wang 2000) reflect the approach promoted through the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project,58 a study on the expansion of the nonprofit sector in 42 countries (Salamon and Anheier 1999). In the project, the nonprofit sector is defined as a sector between the state and the market, and it is interchangeably referred to as the civil society sector, the voluntary sector, the third sector,59 or the independent sector. The view of civil society, by the project, as equivalent to the nonprofit sector conveniently fits the Chinese official version on civil society.

The Expert Meeting participants discussed the definition of civil society. Many linked civil society with freedom, democracy, and equality, and all agreed that Chinese NGOs are currently not contributing to these issues enough in China. Survey results later revealed that 66 percent of the participants felt limitations on their advocacy, and that 80 percent thought their activities received unnecessary government intervention. The discussion moderator from the NGO center provocatively mentioned that graduate students majoring in public policy and management at Tsinghua University once had a class discussion on how to protest against the government. A few NGO representatives directly complained to the two officials from MOCA about their difficult experiences in dealing with MOCA. Such complaints included MOCA’s interventions in their activities and its burdensome bureaucratic procedures concerning registration. For example, MOCA had requested that one NGO change its name because the original name had contained the phrase, China (Zhong guo in Chinese), a phrase whose usage is reserved.

58 The NGO center once presented, as a guest speaker, Dr. Lester M. Salamon, one of the leaders of the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project.

59 The first sector is the state and the second sector is the market.
only for mass organizations and other national organizations. Local organizations are prohibited from using such a phrase, in part because, in the view of the central government, it suggests a pretension for being a nationally-based organization (Saich 2000).

Throughout the meeting, MOCA officials quietly listened to the NGO representatives and left early after lunch. Their intention in attending the meeting was probably not to defend their official roles, but to monitor what transpired at the meeting.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA), the Gate Keeper of the Chinese NGO Sector

Since the 1988 regulations, described in an earlier section, MOCA has managed Chinese NGOs. NGO management is a new addition to MOCA’s traditional set of ministerial responsibilities, involving social protection, such as disaster relief, and social security for children and seniors. Because of these traditional tasks, MOCA has maintained many local offices at the lower administrative levels. The extensive geographical spread of MOCA works as an advantage in monitoring and regulating NGOs.

MOCA enforces the registration requirements on social organizations when they first try to officially establish themselves. MOCA thoroughly reviews the applicant’s organizational charter to ensure that the purposes of the proposed organization are legitimate and do not duplicate the purposes of existing organizations. Once a social

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organization is registered, MOCA monitors it once per year by reviewing the organization’s annual reports, including financial reports. When MOCA identifies a potential problem, it conducts an investigation. By regulating the names, purposes, and activities of social organizations, MOCA transmits the official version of civil society discourse to Chinese NGOs.

MOCA’s status as the gate keeper of Chinese NGOs makes it important to donors. Both multilateral and bilateral donors must negotiate with MOCA on the terms and conditions of their civil society assistance. Foreign foundations too have been dealing with MOCA since 2004, when they were first required to register with MOCA. Due to its roles and influence, MOCA now also receives major donor funding. For example, the World Bank funds MOCA, via its Institutional Development Fund (IDF), to strengthen MOCA’s institutional capacity to improve (emphasis added) China’s NGO development. Thus, ironically, civil society assistance in China not only helps to develop civil society, but it also strengthens the state apparatus controlling the NGO sector.

Donors and the Repressive State

It is not surprising that donors, in general, complain of difficulties in promoting civil society assistance in China. Besides the undemocratic nature of the Chinese regime, which was brutally demonstrated in the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre, there are two major obstacles that donors must overcome.

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61 Ibid.

First, as I have already argued, the party-state’s suspicions about donor intentions still persist despite China’s increasing sensitivity to international norms in recent years. The view that considers civil society as agents of social change, especially, worries the party-state. Although not all donors may intend to foment a “peaceful evolution,” civil society assistance certainly has the potential to instigate social change in China. Thus, the Chinese state tries to control the ODA sector as much as possible. Secondly, China does not possess a tradition of Western civic practice, which is, according to Putnam (1994), critical to the development of civil society.

In the wake of the 1989 Beijing Student Movement, which ended with bloodshed in Tiananmen square, a scholarly debate commenced on whether civil society is emerging in China. Some scholars have argued for the rise of civil society in China (Burns 1989; Huan 1989; Strand 1990; Sullivan 1990). Yet, the majority view is otherwise. Most scholars do not endorse the existence of civil society in China (White, Howell, and Shang 1996, Howell and Pearce 2001).

Most donors have been very careful with issues of democracy. The party-state has not hesitated to act against donors intervening in the political matters of China. For example, in 1996, it shut down the Beijing office of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, a German-based political foundation. The Naumann Foundation had organized a pro-Tibet international conference, “Free Tibet,” in Bonn, Germany, and it had refused to change the name of the conference when the Chinese central government made such a

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request.\textsuperscript{64} In this political environment, many donors have avoided taking a confrontational approach toward China over sensitive issues, including democracy. Donors that emphasize democracy, such as the Open Society Institute,\textsuperscript{65} and USAID, find difficulties promoting democracy in China. The political structure of China gives donors who seek to remain involved in China a complicated challenge as to how they should frame civil society assistance in a way that is acceptable to the party-state.

\textbf{The Chinese State and INGOs in China}

INGOs contribute approximately 13 percent of the ODA’s net disbursements worldwide (Zweig 2002, 250). In terms of financial impacts, INGOs are much less powerful than other types of donors, such as multilateral or bilateral donors. However, from the Chinese state’s standpoint, INGOs are the hardest of all types of donors to control, while multilateral donors, such as the World Bank and the U.N. agencies, are the easiest. In the case of multilateral and bilateral donors, the Chinese central government is a project counterpart. Thus, it can impose some contractual constraints upon donors. Diplomacy is also required between China and its multilateral or bilateral counterparts.

China is often a member of their governing bodies, which provides China with significant influence on multilateral donor policies (Zweig 2002). For example, at the World Bank Headquarters in Washington D.C., where the Bank’s Board of Executives review and approve the Bank’s lending projects for all of its borrower

\textsuperscript{64} David Sanger, “Two Roads to China: Nice and Not So Nice—Boeing’s Strategy is Appeasement; Microsoft Growls,” New York Times, June 9, 1996.

\textsuperscript{65} An American-based Foundation, founded by George Soros. It closed its office in China following the Tiananmen massacre in 1989.
countries, including China, one of the 24 executive directors is Chinese and officially represents China.66

Bilateral donors must represent their own national interests and maintain a diplomatic relationship with the Chinese central government. Whatever bilateral donors state, and however they act, is in the public domain of China. Therefore, bilateral donors lack political cover and flexibility, which may limit their direct contributions to the development of civil society in China. An official from the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) stated, “The Chinese (central) government is tough. Our funding (for civil society development in China) mainly goes to INGOs. Ford (the Ford Foundation) and the WWF (the World Wildlife Fund) have a good political cover. Thus, they can influence policies.”67

INGOs are more flexible in terms of choosing their project counterparts. INGOs can directly negotiate with local governments about their local project plans and make individual deals. If difficulties arise, then INGOs can move to other places and begin negotiating with other local governments. INGOs were early advocators of participatory development projects, which are designed to encourage the participation of individuals and groups—such as trade unions, women’s organizations, and cooperatives—in civic problem solving. The experience of INGOs in reaching out to such sectors, as well as their ubiquity and their flexibility, often allows them to operate under the radar of MOCA and to form direct relationships with local NGOs.

66 An e-mail correspondence with a Senior External Affairs Officer at the World Bank Beijing Office. July 19, 2005.

An INGO can help to establish a local NGO by directly providing seed funding. It can also approach individuals or groups who have the ability to become NGO founders and guide them through the steps of establishing an NGO. (I will describe examples in Chapter Four.) It can also hire local NGOs as consultants in order to implement their projects. Multilateral donors can administer grants to NGOs too, but it is more common practice (for bilateral donors too) to hire NGOs as consultants to undertake part of their projects. A common practice among bilateral donors is to fund home-base INGOs active in China (Zweig 2002, 238). Yet both multilateral and bilateral donors tend to be under the tight surveillance of the Chinese government—at all levels. Thus, it can be difficult for them, as opposed to INGOs, to form close relationships with Chinese local NGOs.

The absence of regulations governing INGOs in China, with the exception of foreign foundations\(^68\), has created a legal vacuum favoring INGOs and undermining state control over them. INGOs originally had a “gate keeper.” I define the term as a Chinese organization that regulates and monitors the entry and operation of donors in China. Official guidelines, from a 1987 State Council document, stipulate that the NGO Division of the Chinese International Center for Economic and Technical Exchange (CICETE)\(^69\) is the sole official organization empowered to regulate and monitor INGOs in China (Zweig 2002, 252). Yet, as INGOs began to enter into China’s ODA sectors, CICETE’s gate

\(^{68}\) In March, 2004, the 1988 “Measures for the Management of Foundations” were replaced by “Regulations for the Management of Foundations.” The 2004 Regulations require both foreign and Chinese foundations to have a Chinese governmental sponsor unit, and to “re-register” with the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

\(^{69}\) CICETE’s NGO Division created the China Association for NGOs (CANGO) in 1992, which registered in 1993 as a social organization affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (MOFTEC). MOFTEC is currently the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM). CANGO acts as a match-maker between foreign donors, which bring funding, and Chinese NGOs and local governments, which propose projects to be funded. See Zweig 2002, 253.
keeper role was quickly undermined. Unlike multilateral and bilateral donors, INGOs did not necessarily go through the official central government channels, which enabled INGOs to slip under the radar of CICETE, for CICETE had no administrative base at the local level to detect the activities of INGOs.

When the Ford Foundation first set up an office in Beijing in 1988, it also avoided CICETE’s control. However, the State Council insisted that in order for the Foundation to obtain permission to operate in China, the Foundation must obtain a Chinese governmental sponsor to act as a supervising unit. To minimize the possibility of tight control from the sponsor unit, the Ford Foundation asked the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) to serve as its sponsor unit. CASS was a comfortable choice for the Foundation because it had been a major participant in academic and professional exchanges supported by the Foundation since the dawn of diplomatic normalization between the U.S. and China in 1979. CASS lobbied the State Council on behalf of the Ford Foundation and became Ford’s sponsor unit.

CASS’s bid to become the supervisory unit for the Ford Foundation was not motivated solely out of good will. CASS intended to benefit financially. Between 1988 and 1995, CASS received grants from Ford totaling $6.5 million, or about 16 percent of Ford’s total China program. The Ford Foundation also had to accept two seconded staff from the foreign affairs department of CASS to work at Ford’s Beijing office.

Since the late 1980s, there has been a steady increase in the number of INGOs in China (Zweig 2002, 254). The Tiananmen massacre did not completely discourage new

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70 A representative of a foreign foundation in China affirmed that Chinese counterparts expect a financial benefit from their sponsorship arrangements.

INGOs to continue to establish themselves in China. The Chinese leadership became concerned about the power and influence of INGOs on the Chinese urban middle class, a population whom the regime considered as sensitive to such influence. Eventually, the Chinese central government encouraged new INGOs to set up their offices in China’s hinterland provinces in Southwest China. Sending INGOs away from China’s center to its marginal areas gave the Chinese leaders peace of mind. As for the INGOs, establishing their offices in rural China did not seem to be a bad idea, once they arrived. For they soon realized that they could operate without many bureaucratic hurdles.

Between 1995-6, there was a surge of INGOs. This was partly because the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995, brought the attention of many INGOs to the situation in China. This conference was the largest-ever gathering of government and NGO representatives at a UN conference. NGO delegations came from 180 countries, and the number of NGO representatives was about 1,200. The conference showcased the power and influence of NGOs. The powerful presentation of NGOs at the U.N. Conference concerned China’s party-state. Shortly after the U.N. Conference, the party-state turned with suspicion toward China’s domestic NGOs and their relationship with INGOs. As I mentioned, the 1996 Sixth Plenum of the 14th CCP Central Committee focused on combating Western influence and “bourgeois liberalism,” shorthand for Western values, such as democracy and freedom. The

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72 Interview with Anthony Saich. April 7, 2004. Such examples include Save the Children U.K., and OXFAM Hong Kong.

plenum resulted in a freeze in the registration of social organizations as well as the 1997 rectification campaign, which aimed at improving the “quality” of social groups (Mas 2000).75

Local government interests now also affect state control of INGOs. Decentralization since the 1978 reforms has, in certain fields, rendered the central government incapable of dictating national policies from the center to the local political level. As a result of decentralization, individual provinces have sought ways to become more independent from central government assistance, which consequently has weakened state control over some provinces. For example, China’s coastal provinces, which host China’s special economic zones (SEZs) and economic and technical development zones (ETDZs), have benefited by a massive inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI), and they have become richer and more independent. Other provinces have not enjoyed such political and economic privileges. To develop, the poorer provinces have been eager to welcome INGOs into their provinces. They have been willing to negotiate with INGOs and to make concessions to them.

Conclusion

Despite the difficult political environment in China, especially since the Tiananmen massacre of 1989, the nation’s NGO sector has experienced a surge in number that began in the mid-1990s. International discourse on civil society and other

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74 This rhetoric appears whenever the CCP feels threatened by Western influence. In the aftermath of the Tiananmen massacre, the Chinese leadership accused Western establishments in China of promoting “bourgeois liberalization” (Suettinger 2003).

75 This political environment did not last long.
issues, such as poverty alleviation, the environment, and women’s issues, has helped to justify the development of China’s NGO sector. Foreign donor funding via INGOs has been the key financial source for many NGOs.

What civil society is, and what roles Chinese NGOs should play in Chinese society, is contested between donors, Chinese NGOs, and China’s party-state. However, this contestation does not appear in the public domain in China. The party-state has been able to control civil society discourse in an effort to protect China’s political and social orders. The party-state has framed the roles of Chinese NGOs as social service providers in order to enlist them into carrying out its reform policies (e.g., on poverty alleviation). The party-state has tried to incorporate China’s NGO sector into the party-state scheme, just as it has done with mass organizations, by assigning them certain functions to perform and by demanding a basic CCP unit within each organization. The successful incorporation of the NGO sector by the CCP would help to stabilize the society and strengthen CCP rule.

Chapter Four focuses on China’s environmental sector. Despite the Chinese state’s general phobia of foreign influences, it has conceded to certain foreign influences that, it believes, are likely to benefit state interests. For example, I argue that the Chinese state has shown high “state vulnerability” to global environmental concerns. China’s first individual-organized NGO, Friends of Nature (FON), is an environmental NGO. This is not merely a coincidence. I will examine some factors that have helped China’s environmental sector to emerge. I will also examine how local intellectuals in Yunnan came to establish environmental NGOs.
Chapter 4

The Development of China’s Environmental Sector:
State Vulnerability to Global Environmental Concerns

Introduction

Chapter Four focuses on the institutionalizing of environmental protection in China. The Chinese state has developed China’s environmental regime, which consists of environmental governmental institutions and environmental laws and regulations. Although the Chinese state, in general, maintains its suspicions towards external influences and social organizations, it has shown high “state vulnerability” on global environmental concerns, to the extent that the state has reluctantly allowed environmental NGOs (ENGOs) to emerge. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the reasons why the Chinese state has treated issues of the environment differently from other internationally recognized concerns, such as human rights.\(^{76}\)

My research finds that the establishment of China’s environmental regime has been political and policy elite-driven, not bottom-up. In other countries, the institutionalization of environmental protection often begins in response to internal pressures from the social movements sector. In China, however, the institutionalization of environmental protection did not emerge as a response to environmental advocacy from below because a significant scale of environmental activism was almost absent until the mid-1990s. Rather, the Chinese government’s concern for the environment initially

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\(^{76}\) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was unanimously adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 1948. It was reaffirmed in 1993 by 171 countries attending the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, Austria. China did not sign the covenants until 1998, although it could have as early as 1966. See http://www.unhchr.ch.
emerged in response to external factors, such as U.N. conferences. The creation of the Chinese environmental regime coincided with events and consensuses at the international level. China’s political and policy elites had access to international conferences.

I argue that political and policy elites with knowledge of the international environmental consensus responded to this external factor explaining China’s high “state vulnerability” on global environmental concerns. They also supported the emergence of China’s environmental NGO sector in the mid-1990s despite the Chinese regime’s general reluctance to creating such a social force. As history shows, environmental groups have played major roles in social movements leading to democratization in Eastern Europe as well as Asia. Examples include the Philippines, Taiwan, Hungary, and Russia (Lee et al. 1999; Weller and Hsiao 1998; Reardon-Anderson 1992; Gille 2000; Pickvance 1998). The current Chinese regime is well aware of such historical lessons (Alford and Shen 1998). Yet, political and policy elites reluctantly allowed ENGOs to emerge in order to enhance China’s international image and to create potential allies that could promote public participation in environmental protection. From the state perspective, ENGOs complement the state’s efforts in “greening” China (Ho 2001). Peter Ho wonders whether greening is possible without conflict being generated as a result of the emergence of ENGOs as a counter-power to the state.

China’s environmental regime continued to be elite-driven even after the emergence of Chinese ENGOs in the mid-1990s because ENGOs tend to be led by Chinese intellectuals with reformist beliefs and international connections. I argue that the elite nature of Chinese ENGOs actually helps them to ally with environmentally conscious political and policy elites and to interact with donors, such as INGOs.
Consequently, Chinese ENGOs have gradually been extending their legitimacy among China’s policy and political elites, Western donors, and the Chinese middle-class.

In the section below, I first describe the initial institutionalization of environmental protection. I discuss external factors, such as the U.N. conferences on the environment (1972 and 1992), and internal factors, such as changes in policies and in the economic status of China. I describe how the state has been influenced by these factors in creating China’s environmental regime. Secondly, I discuss local environmental agendas and ENGOs in Yunnan in order to demonstrate how local intellectuals come to establish ENGOs. These examples sought that the international environmental agenda, not the local environmental agenda, was more important to Yunnan ENGOs in their emergence and for their survival.

**Mao’s Early Assault on the Environment**

History shows that environmental records under communist regimes have been uniformly disastrous. An emphasis on economic growth, often via heavy industry, and a lack of environmental movements are contributory factors. China is no exception. During the pre-reform era (1949-1979), the primary focus of China’s communist leadership was upon economic development based on resource excavation and heavy industry. Little concern was paid to environmental protection. During this period, especially under Chairman Mao, a modern concept of environmental protection\(^{77}\) was

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\(^{77}\) International opinion surveys indicate that there is virtually a global consensus on the need to protect the environment regardless of the degree of economic development in individual countries (Dunlap et al. 1993).
absent. Environmental degradation was believed to be a problem only for capitalist market economies (Ross 1988).

Judith Shapiro describes this era in her book, “Mao’s War Against Nature” (2001). Chairman Mao espoused, Ren Ding Sheng Tian [Man Must Conquer Nature] (2001, 90). Nature must be remolded and tamed to improve man’s life. Under his “Great Leap Forward” policy (1958-60), Mao mobilized society to assault nature, man’s enemy, in a militaristic fashion. Under the Weibu, Zaotian [Encircle the Lakes, Create Farmland] campaign, Mao converted grass land into farm land and filled up lakes in order to produce more grain. For example, Dianchi (Lake Dian) in Yunnan Province, currently one of the three most polluted lakes in China, had once been a 1,000-square kilometer lake. Its size shrank to less than one-third (2001, 119). Dams were built throughout the nation to produce more energy. Steel and iron furnaces proliferated too. (They literally appeared in people’s back yards to help fulfill Mao’s order to produce more steel and iron.) The destruction of nature and environmental pollution resulted from Mao’s policies. China is now challenged by severe environmental problems and will continue to be for many years to come.

**The Creation of the Chinese Environmental Regime**

In other countries, notably in the U.S., local citizen activism led to environmental movements, which eventually resulted in the formation of ENGOs at the national level. In China, in the 1970s, there were cases of popular protests against pollution, which
succeeded in pressing the government to act. I argue that official concerns for the environment at the national level in China did not emerge as a response to environmental advocacy from below because a wider scale of environmental activism was almost absent until the mid-1990s, primarily due to political constraints on such an activism. Rather, official concerns for the environment in China initially emerged in response to external factors, such as U.N. conferences. The creation of the Chinese environmental regime, consisting of governmental institutions, laws and regulations, and NGOs, coincides with events and consensuses at the international level. It was Chinese leaders who led the nation to war against nature; it was also Chinese leaders who first became aware of the modern concept of environmental protection in the 1970s, through their participation in international conferences, spurring the creation of the Chinese environmental regime.

External Factors: U.N. Conferences on the Environment

Many scholars have argued that U.N. conferences and international organizations play significant roles in setting domestic agendas and in helping to form domestic organizations to implement conference agenda, such as environmental protection and women’s rights (Frank, Hironaka, Meyer, Schofer, and Tuma 1999, Berkovitch 1999, Keck and Sikknik 1998a, Khagram 2002). In the field of the environment, there are two major U.N. conferences in which the international community established a global environmental consensus. They are the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, also known as the “Stockholm Conference,” and the 1992 United Nations

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78 There were, for example, popular protests over industrial pollution in Shanghai as early as 1979. The city government partially or completely closed down 49 factories (Ross 1988, 146).
Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the “Rio Conference.” Both the Rio and Stockholm Declarations present non-binding guidelines and principles. Therefore, there are no legal obligations\textsuperscript{79} imposed upon signatories.

The creation of the Chinese environmental regime began with the first of the two U.N. conferences. China’s participation in the 1972 Stockholm Conference spurred the Chinese central government to institutionalize environmental protection by establishing governmental environmental bureaucracies and by passing environmental laws. China’s participation in the 1992 Rio Conference opened the door to the emergence of China’s individual-organized NGOs.

Although China maintained its isolation policy, it participated in the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. Official concern for pollution in China emerged while the Chinese government prepared for the conference (Yu and Zhang 2002). At the Conference, China acknowledged the severity of its environmental problems in the country, but blamed capitalist industrial countries for global pollution (Ross 1988, 137-139). After the Stockholm Conference, the Chinese central government set out to institutionalize environmental protection. It was said that Premier Zhou took the country’s environmental conditions seriously (Ross 1988). In 1973, the State Planning Commission in China held the nation’s first National Conference on Environmental Protection. The conference addressed the need for incorporating environmental considerations into economic planning. In 1974, the central government established the National Environmental Protection Office (NEPO) and some local offices.

\textsuperscript{79} However, certain portions of the Stockholm Declaration in particular may be binding as customary international law. Such examples include “principle 21,” which stipulates the sovereign right to resources, and the responsibilities not to cause environmental damages to other States (Weiss, Szasz, and Magraw 1992, 172, 176).
at the provincial level. In 1978, the Chinese constitution was amended to include environmental protection as one of the most fundamental commitments to Chinese society (Panayotou 1998, 434). In 1979, the central government promulgated China’s first environmental law, the Environmental Protection Law of 1979 (EPL 1979), just as economic reforms were being launched.

In the 1980s, the Chinese government enacted several other laws related to the environment, including a second environmental law, the Environmental Protection Law of 1989 (EPL 1989). Although the institutionalization of environmental protection continued, NEPO struggled to implement environmental laws at the local level. NEPO’s relatively low status within the governmental bureaucratic hierarchy affected its enforcement abilities because higher status bureaucracies were able to ignore NEPO (Sinkule and Ortolano, 1995). NEPO was further hampered by decentralization policy, which was part of the 1978 reforms. Not only was the organization decentralized, but its local offices received less financial assistance from the central government for projects and all staff salaries were transferred to provincial government payrolls. This made it difficult for NEPO to criticize provincial projects that were environmentally unfriendly.

Thus, NEPO lacked both the financial resources and the political capacity to enforce laws at the local level. Local industrial bureaus and factories continued to ignore the stipulations of local environmental protection offices without fear.81

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NEPO gradually climbed the bureaucratic ladder. In 1984, the State Council elevated the bureaucratic rank of NEPO to that of a bureau. In 1988, the National Environmental Protection Bureau (NEPB) became an agency, the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) (Yu and Zhang 2002, 85). Over the next ten years, however, NEPA’s struggles with enforcement continued. In 1998, the central government decided to increase the enforcement power of the environmental agencies, and finally elevated NEPA to ministerial status and renamed it the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA). At the same time, SEPA’s staff was cut in half, as part of a broader bureaucratic reform. During the Tenth Five-year Plan (2001-5), the central government pledged to spend 1.3 percent of its GDP on the environment sector (Economy 2005, 103).

The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) confirmed the acceptance of NGOs in the official intergovernmental arena and further solidified the legitimacy of NGOs. A "Global NGO Forum" was concurrently held with the UNCED in Rio de Janeiro. NGOs were granted official accreditation, which gave them access to national delegations as well as the right to propose draft treaties and influence negotiations. More than 1,400 NGOs were officially represented at the UNCED (McCoy and McCully 1993). Chapter 27, paragraph 6, of Agenda 21, the Action Plan of the Rio Summit, officially addresses the role of NGOs as social partners of the UN system and governments in the process of formulating and implementing policies on environmentally sustainable development by the twenty-first century.

At the UNCED, the Chinese leadership was embarrassed where Chinese GONGOs (Government Organized NGOs), which were participating in the "Global NGO
Forum," could not function in any meaningful way at the conference (Economy 2005, 113). Chinese GONGOs, which are generally viewed as extended governmental units and are staffed by government retirees or government officials, probably lacked an NGO mentality as well as the professional language that would have allowed them to communicate with other ENGOs from around the world. This embarrassing experience may have motivated the environmentally conscious political and policy elites to consider the need for having NGOs. And not simply GONGOs.

The birth of Friends of Nature (FON) in March 1994, China’s first environmental NGO, as well as its first autonomous NGO, coincided with China’s adoption of Agenda 21, the national implementation plan from the Rio Declaration (Hu 2000, 163). Chinese central government officials had, in fact, encouraged the founder of FON, Liang Congjie, to register his group as an NGO (Economy 2005, 113). The term, “non-governmental organization,” was not widely known to China. Newly emerged Chinese ENGOs, such as Friends of Nature and Global Village Beijing (established in 1996), quickly obtained international recognition and received a prestigious international award that gave them further legitimacy at the domestic level. Although the emergence of Chinese NGOs helped to boost China’s international image, this is not the only reason why the Chinese central government continues to allow autonomous NGOs to emerge.

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82 FON’s founder, Liang Congjie, is a grandson of Liang Qichao, a reformer during the late Qing Dynasty. Liang Congjie once had been a member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference.

83 It is said that the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995, first introduced the term to China (Ma 2006:181).

84 The Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service and the Sophie Prize were awarded in 2002.
The Chinese leadership has come to realize that ENGOs not only to help improve China’s international image, but also to raise public awareness on environmental protection (Economy 2005, 113). The creation of Chinese ENGOs was the first serious step toward public participation in environmental protection.

Internal Factors: China’s Serious Environmental Problems

As I described earlier, the Chinese environmental regime, despite its early establishment, lacks teeth to implement environmental protection measures. Although the Chinese leadership acknowledges the usefulness of ENGOs, which can promote public participation in environmental protection, it has been reluctant to allow new social forces to emerge. The Chinese party-state is aware that environmental activism may evolve into a political force, as in former non-democratic regimes in Asia and Eastern Europe. Yet, the state may have concluded that having ENGOs is better than not having ENGOs because of China’s severe environmental problems and the lack of sufficient financial and human resources dedicated to coping with the problems.

In 1997, the World Bank published a report, *Clear Water, Blue Skies: China’s Environment in the New Century*. It exposed China’s precarious environmental conditions to the world. For example, it stated that China is the world’s largest producer and consumer of coal and the world’s second largest carbon emitter. The World Bank also estimated that air pollution alone had cost China’s economy more than 7 percent of its GDP in 1995. This report caused the Chinese government increased concern with the serious environmental problems within its borders and with the future environmental costs to the Chinese economy (Johnston 1998).
Issues of pollution are the cause of social discontent and serious grievances, incurring political costs to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Bernstein 2000, 96). There have been riots and protests in rural China due to pollution problems (Economy 2004, Jing 2003).

The World Bank report suggests that citizen awareness and involvement in environmental issues are crucial in enhancing the effectiveness of environmental laws and regulations in China (World Bank 1997). Chinese leaders acknowledge that the central government alone is no longer capable of dictating national environmental policies from the center to local governments, due to decentralization, the introduction of a market economy, and the lack of financial or other incentives (Ma et al. 1994). Many powerful politicians have personal ties to enterprise polluters and are unwilling to address pollution and anti-pollution measures that would financially burden enterprises (Kondo and Fujikura 2001).

As of July 1999, China no longer qualified for soft loans from multilateral donors, which are reserved for the poorest countries. The Chinese central government now had to borrow from multilateral donors on commercial terms. The Chinese regime welcomed the ability of NGOs to attract foreign funding. Overall, Chinese NGOs are important sources for attracting foreign funding to carry out environmental projects in China. For example, China’s first environmental NGO, Friends of Nature, has received funding from several international agencies, including the Ford Foundation, Save Our Future, Hong Kong Caritas, and Shell, a major oil company. Between 1994 and 2001, FON raised more than 1,320,000 RMB (U.S. $161,700) from international sources, and 984,000
RMB (U.S. $120,540) from domestic sources. While downsizing has weakened the capacity of local governments to deliver public services to the people, the NGO sector has emerged as an alternative source of public services, an efficient source. Unlike Chinese local governments, the NGO sector is relatively free from corruption problems, partly because NGOs are typically required to report to their foreign donors.

A state agency may hope to use the international norms of NGO participation in environmental protection to its own advantage. For example, the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) has been cooperating with domestic ENGOs. SEPA has created a framework, “NGO–based public participation,” given that one of its mandates is to “promote the participation of the public and non-governmental organizations in environmental protection.” SEPA’s willingness to ally with ENGOs heightened especially after the enactment of China’s Environmental Impact Assessment Law in 2003, which appointed SEPA as the gate keeper of major public and private development projects. SEPA seeks to strengthen its low administrative standing in the central government by allying with Chinese ENGOs, and consequently enforces environmental regulations more effectively. In October 2003, SEPA organized China’s first “Green Forum,” a public relations event, in which ENGOs participated.

ENGOs in China are flourishing and they seem to be meeting the government’s expectations. According to Deng Guosheng, deputy director of the NGO research center of Tsinghua University’s School of Public Policy and Management, there are currently some 2,000 registered ENGOs, of which 100 to 300 wield serious influence. 

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At a recent nationwide contest in Sep. 2004, ten cases for implementing sustainable development projects were selected as best from 118 entries. NGOs occupied six out of the ten best cases. The contest was open to government bodies, research organizations, companies, NGOs, and individuals. Most of the ten best cases were funded by international donors (China daily Mar. 30, 2005).

I have argued that the existence of environmentally conscious political and policy elites could explain China’s high “state vulnerability” on global environmental concerns, and that the creation of the Chinese environmental regime, including ENGOs, has been an elite-led phenomenon. Although there is now an emphasis on environmental protection at the central level, the political and cultural climate toward environmental protection at the local administrative level can vary. In the next sections, I will turn my attention to China’s local level to explore the relationship between local environmental agendas and the emergence of local ENGOs. I will first present the case of Yunnan Province, describing its significant local environmental agendas. Secondly, I will describe how local ENGOs in Yunnan emerged and who led them.

**Environmental Agendas in Yunnan Province**

With the creation of the Chinese environmental regime, supported by environmentally conscious political and policy elites at the center, China now has a mechanism by which to address environmental issues nationally and locally. Yet, China’s uneven economic development may affect the degree of environmental policy implementation by region. Wealthy provinces and cities have not only superior economic resources to purchase cleaner technology, but also educated citizens who have
become environmentally conscious and demand a decent environment. To catch up with wealthy provinces economically, poor provinces are constantly tempted to pursue their economic interests at the cost of environmental protection.

Yunnan province is a great example for exploring how a poor province in China tries to address environmental protection, and how local ENGOs are formed. On one hand, Yunnan is known for its beautiful landscape and rich ethnic minority cultures, resources which have made Yunnan one of China’s tourist destinations and its capital, Kunming, the host of many conferences and Expos during the past decade. On the other hand, Yunnan has significant environmental problems, such as water pollution, endangered species, and ecological hotspots, which have attracted national and/or international attention.

Water Pollution in Dianchi (Lake Dian)

When I told ordinary people in Kunming that I came to Yunnan to study issues of environmental protection, they almost always asked me if I had visited Dianchi (Lake Dian). The pollution of the lake dates back at least to the late 1970s. The elderly in Kunming nostalgically told me that they drank water from Dianchi, ate fish from there, and swam there in their childhood. Dianchi today has lost not only two-thirds of its original size due to Mao’s assault against nature, but also its purity, which had once caused a Qing Dynasty poet to praise the magnificent beauty of the Lake. The current view of Dianchi from Kunming’s Daguan Park, which is located at the Northern end of the lake, is not impressive. The lake is filled with blue-green algae blooms, evidence of severe eutrophication caused by organic and chemical pollution. Both household
wastewater and factory sewage flow into the lake. During several motor boat rides crossing Dianchi, my life jacket did not provide me any comfort given the color of the water. The water quality of Dianchi is somewhat better (the level three) in its Southern part, where it is ok to swim and fish.\(^{87}\)

Largely because of Dianchi’s water pollution, the Yunnan Provincial Environmental Protection Office was established in 1972. It was established much earlier than in other provinces and has since been upgraded to bureau status.\(^{88}\) As of 2003, more than $4.4 billion U.S. has been spent in vain to clean up Dianchi (Yunnan Provincial Environmental Protection Bureau 2004, 6). China’s 1995 national environmental strategy designated Dianchi as one of the three highest priority lakes in China to be cleaned up (U.S. Embassy, Beijing 2000).\(^{89}\) One official at the Yunnan Provincial EPB (Environmental Protection Bureau) commented that the damage to Dianchi is too severe to be solved easily and noted that Lake Biwa, Japan’s largest lake, took years to restore despite Japanese technology.\(^{90}\)

Water pollution in Lake Biwa in Japan in the late 1960s triggered local environmental movements led by local residents, especially housewives. The local movements promoted the use of powdered soap, instead of synthetic detergents, the

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\(^{87}\) I visited a village in Chenggong, which is located at the Southern end of Dianchi, for three planting activities. Fishermen there export tiny white fish caught in Dianchi to Japan. July 10-15, 2001.

\(^{88}\) Interview of a Yunnan Provincial EPB official, June 18, 2004.


\(^{90}\) Interview with a Yunnan Provincial EPB official, June 18, 2004. According to my e-mail correspondence with a Japanese expert on Lake Biwa, dated on November 16, 2005, Lake Biwa has not completely restored its purification system.
major cause of eutrophication, and they expanded their activism nationwide. As a result, detergents containing phosphorus gradually disappeared from stores throughout Japan.91

Currently, the Kunming EPB is in charge of the Dianchi clean up efforts. According to Elizabeth Economy’s interview with Kunming EPB officials, approximately 70 percent of all waste discharge comes from chemical refineries, and the most problematic polluters are state-owned companies that the Kunming EPB cannot take to court (Economy 2002, 8). My interview with a Yunnan Provincial EPB officer confirms difficulties in regulating state-owned companies:

State owned companies were established in the 1970s and 1980s. They lack new technology and money to replace old technology. It is difficult for us to impose environmental laws and regulations on them because we are aware of their technological and financial difficulties. It is easier for us to impose fines on new companies because we know that they can afford to pay. If we force state-owned company polluters to stop their operations, we will create new problems, in addition to pollution, such as the lay-off of workers and labor problems. We believe that educating companies (about laws and regulations)92 is our first priority, not punishing them. We, the EPB, should not be an enemy of companies. Rather, we should help companies to improve.

A Kunming EPB official also stated that the EPB would like assistance from NGOs to promote the use of natural fertilizers by educating farmers to switch from chemical fertilizers (Economy 2002, 8). Despite the long history of Dianchi pollution, and local people’s sentiments toward, and traditional pride in, the lake, Dianchi has never

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92 A light metals business owner in Kunming whom I befriended expressed that he wants to hire an environmental regulation expert, if he can find one, because the regulations seem very complicated. He also told me that his company spends 10,000 RMB (US $1,250) every month to bribe government officials to benefit his company. September 2003.
been a major source of environmental activism in Yunnan. In the past, some NGOs have occasionally organized a Dianchi clean up campaign as part of international Earth day activities. Yet, major local ENGOs, which emerged in the mid-1990s, have not demonstrated much interest in Dianchi. They seem busy in pursuing their own environmental agendas, which are more in keeping with the interests of international donors.

**Endangered Species: Snub-Nosed Monkeys**

Scholars who are interested in China’s environmental activism are probably aware of the nationally publicized 1995 environmental campaign in Yunnan to protect the habitat of the snub-nosed monkey—one of China’s most endangered species—from deforestation caused by excess logging. This campaign based on citizen concern for the plight of the monkeys led to China’s first NGO-led environmental campaign against a local county government.

Xi Zhinong, a photographer in Yunnan’s Forestry Department, learned in 1995 that Deqin county, in Deqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (a Tibetan minority prefecture), Yunnan province, had sold loggers the right to clear-cut a 200-square kilometer swath of primeval forest, which is the habitat of at least 200 snub-nosed monkeys, or a little less than one-fifth of the total remaining population. Deqin county at that time derived 90 percent of its revenue from the timber industry, and therefore it was unwilling to forfeit revenue for the sake of the monkey. Xi lobbied in vain to the vice

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93 They are also called Golden Monkeys. The monkey became the mascot of the World Horticultural Exposition in Kunming, a capital of Yunnan Province, held in 1999.
director of Yunnan’s Forestry Department to intervene in this county government’s plans (Saywell 1998).

Xi consulted with Tang Xiayang, a well respected environment author and the founder of Green Camp, an environmental group. At Tang’s suggestion, Xi contacted Liang Congjie, the founder of FON, China’s first environmental NGO, in Beijing. Liang suggested that Xi write a letter to Song Jian, China’s Minister for Science and Technology, and publicize the plight of the monkeys via the media.94 FON95 also joined the anti-logging campaign. Having learned of the plight of the monkeys, 200 students from the Beijing Forestry College attended a candlelight vigil for the monkeys in Yunnan.96 Many student environmentalists are members of FON.

Song Jian ordered the Ministry of Forestry in Beijing to investigate the problem and stop the clear-cutting. As a result, a logging ban was implemented and enforced in Yunnan in 1996. Although the county government was eventually compensated for lost income, the logging ban caused the further impoverishment of some predominantly Tibetan ethnic minority communities. They lost their major income source and could not find an alternative source.97 Poverty, ethnic minorities, and environmental protection are intertwined in Yunnan.

94 Interview with Xi Zhinong, July 2, 2001.

95 Since its inception, FON has been actively involved in the protection of the Tibetan antelope. See more detail at: www.fon.org.cn.

96 I must point out that ground travel from Beijing to Yunnan and then to Deqin county was not an easy matter due to the poor transportation infrastructure at that time.

97 After the logging ban, the production of Matsutake mushrooms, a high-value Japanese luxury food, has become one of the important sources of government revenue. See, Yeh 2000.
Xi’s grassroots activism catalyzed environmentalists, ENGOs, and the media, and made a difference. Although Xi, a Yunnan native, first raised an outcry, the campaign was mobilized by Beijing-based environmentalists and environmental organizations, such as FON and the student groups. The first Yunnan-based ENGO was just about to emerge.

The success of this environmental campaign owed to two main factors. First, Song might never have taken Xi’s letter seriously enough to take immediate action, if it had not been for Liang’s support. Secondly, the protection of endangered species was a relatively safe cause for environmental activism in the eyes of the Chinese state. Thus, Song possessed the capacity to act, and to act swiftly. The situation would surely have been difficult if the campaign targeted state-owned or private enterprises, which have powerful political backers. In the 2000s, however, environmental NGOs began dealing with more politically sensitive issues, such as dam construction and the displacement of people.

Although Xi’s act received much praise from environmentalists, Xi consequently lost his job with the Yunnan Forestry Department. He and his wife, Shi Lihong, moved to Beijing and Xi joined CCTV as a reporter. While in Beijing, Xi kept his grassroots activist spirit, and was involved with the protection of the Tibetan Antelope, led by Friends of Nature (FON). Yet, Xi could not seem to escape from his passion for the monkeys. He and his wife returned to Yunnan in 1999 and in March 2000 established Green Plateau, an ENGO. Its mission is to protect the monkeys by providing the local people with environmental education. Its work has been recognized by the wider environmental community. In 2000, the Hong Kong Friends of the Earth awarded Green
Plateau the “Earth Award” and a prize of 20,000 RMB (about $2,500 US). When I interviewed Xi in Kunming in 2001, he invited me to his minimalist new office at his home. He was hopeful but worried about funding. Green Plateau ceased its operations in 2002.

The unsustainability of Green Plateau may be traced to two problems. First, Green Plateau was unable to keep funding flowing in. Without obtaining constant sources of funding, such as membership and/or international donors, an organization cannot survive in the long run. Secondly, the Green Plateau’s activism was never locally owned. The 1995 campaign was successful but it was largely led by Beijing-based participants. Once the campaign resulted in the logging ban, many may have felt that the purpose of the activism was achieved and such activism lost its momentum.

Ecological Hotspots

Yunnan is well known to natural scientists who are concerned about issues of biodiversity and conservation because the Mountains of Southwest China, which include Northwest Yunnan, have been designated as one of the world’s ecological hotspots.

In 1988, Norman Myers, a British ecologist, defined the biodiversity hotspot concept to identify conservation priorities. The Center for Applied Biodiversity Science at Conservation International, a Washington DC based INGO (established in 1987), adopted Myers’ concept of hotspots as its institutional blueprint in 1989. In 1996, it reassessed the hotspots concept. To qualify as a hotspot, a region must meet two strict

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98 The money was used to establish a Snub-nosed Monkey Protection Fund (China Development Brief, August 2001, 276).

criteria: it must contain at least 1,500 species of vascular plants (or greater than 0.5 percent of the world’s total) as endemics, and it must have lost at least 70 percent of its original habitat. In 2000, the scientific journal, the *Nature*, identified 25 biodiversity hotspots.\textsuperscript{100} The concept of hotspots has helped to build a consensus among the world’s conservation scientists that hotspots require immediate attention. Recognizing the Mountains of Southwest China as a hotspot, conservation scientists in the world came in flocks to China to preach the imperative to promote sustainable development.

According to a Western conservationist\textsuperscript{101} who had worked in Yunnan and other parts of China for two years, the Chinese knowledge community of natural scientists welcomed the concept of hotspots for the following reasons. First, the recognition of ecological hotspots and the interaction with international scientists made Chinese scientists feel that they belonged to the international knowledge community of the natural sciences. Secondly, ecological hotspots gave Chinese scientists legitimate reasons to ask the international community for help in the name of conservation. Thirdly, despite China’s emphasis on science since Deng Xiaoping’s era, scientists felt like underdogs because their work had received little social recognition. Chinese scientists hoped that ecological hotspots would give their work some social recognition.

Because of public sector reforms in China in the mid to late 1990s, governmental research institutes have lost financial and human resources over the past 5-10 years.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid. Hotspots are not the only system devised for assessing global conservation priorities. BirdLife International, for instance, has identified 218 “Endemic Bird Areas” (EBAs). The World Wildlife Fund in the U.S has derived a system called, the “Global 200 Ecoregions.” Sixty percent of the Global 200 terrestrial Ecoregions and 78 percent of the EBAs overlap with hotspots.

\textsuperscript{101} Telephone interview, June 2, 2004.
Scientists now have to conduct fund-raising activities themselves, and they are under tremendous pressure, due to “cut-throat” competition and “a survival of the fittest” mentality among peers. According to a Western researcher who worked at two different Chinese research institutions for a total of three years, some Chinese researchers told him that they cannot trust their colleagues due to the cut-throat attitudes toward competition.\textsuperscript{102} There are now significant incentives for Chinese scientists to join international projects, which give them opportunities to earn extra research funding and to publish, which is especially important because Chinese scientists are evaluated based on the quantity, not the quality, of their publications. One Chinese researcher jokingly said to me about this situation, “Some of us are forced to start selling candied fruits in the street,\textsuperscript{103} if we do not have access to foreign funding.”\textsuperscript{104} The atmosphere within governmental research institutes encourages researchers to become entrepreneurs to “go out and bring money into the institutes.”\textsuperscript{105}

Two former YASS (Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences) researchers who together founded the Center for Community Development Studies (CSD),\textsuperscript{106} a social development NGO in Yunnan, told me that YCASS now encourages its staff member’s entrepreneurship. The YCASS president recently made a speech about the center at a

\textsuperscript{102} Interview, January 14, 2004.

\textsuperscript{103} There are many street benders who sell lolli pop candies in China.


\textsuperscript{105} My experiences interviewing researchers in Yunnan typically included being asked at some point whether I could help them with access to Japanese foundations, such as the Toyota Foundation.

\textsuperscript{106} The NGO has also taken up issues of the environment, including forestry and pesticide.
national CASS conference, suggesting that it serves as a model for other CASS researchers who might consider following in their footsteps.\textsuperscript{107}

\section*{The Emergence of Major ENGOs in Yunnan}

In Yunnan, neither the Dianchi’s long-sustained water pollution nor the activism to protect the snub-nosed monkey engendered the emergence and survival of local ENGOs. As indicated previously, Xi and Shi’s grassroots organization, Green Plateau, was short-lived (2000-2003). The major ENGOs in Yunnan that have emerged and survived are professional organizations led by scientists who are primarily concerned with scientific environmental issues, such as the protection of biodiversity, indigenous (people’s) knowledge, and watershed. These NGOs seek a balance between scientific research and advocacy. Their emphasis on science separates them from the major ENGOs in Beijing, such as FON and Global Village Beijing (GVB), whose major activities are environmental education.

The leaders of the two major ENGOs in Yunnan share important commonalities. They both are what Guobing Yang describes as “organizational entrepreneurs with professional expertise and international connections” (Yang 2005, 61). Organizational entrepreneurs are leaders of organizations that are the most influential in their field (DiMaggio 1988). Unlike Beijing-based ENGOs, which easily attract international attention due to their location, Yunnan-based ENGOs must appeal to donors with their expertise and by using their international connections.

\textsuperscript{107} Interview, November 22, 2004.
The leaders of these two Yunnan-based ENGOs possess similar cultural capital that allows them to extend their social capital and to convert it to economic capital. They are scientists with entrepreneurial spirits. Before becoming ENGO leaders, they were both scientists at governmental research institutes. They have overseas educational experiences through the Yunnan Upland Management project (1990-99), a Ford Foundation funded project, and work experience with INGOs. Because of relationships with their former governmental research institutes, both of their NGOs maintain GONGO characteristics, but they strive to lead scientific research-based grass-roots NGOs, and seek to balance their activities between research and advocacy.

As with most Chinese NGOs, foreign funding has been the key to growth and survival. For these Yunnan-based NGOs, research is essential for maintaining the science-based nature of their organizations and for attracting foreign funding. The two leaders also agree that advocacy is critical in order that their NGOs contribute to society by making people’s voices available to governments.

**Xu Jianchu: The Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge (CBIK)**

Three male researchers from the Ethno-Botany Department of the Kunming Institute of Botany (KIB), under the Yunnan Academy of Sciences (YAS), together with the wife of a KIB staffer, founded “The Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge” (CBIK) in 1995. It was the first Chinese ENGO in Yunnan. At the time of my first interview with one of the founders (September 2, 2003), two founders had retired.
from KIB. One founder, Xu Jianchu, still wore two hats, one as the CBIK representative\textsuperscript{108} and the other as a KIB researcher.

In 1990, the Yunnan Academy of Sciences (YAS) sent Pei Shengji, a KIB senior researcher, to work with the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD),\textsuperscript{109} a Nepal-based INGO. Through ICIMOD projects, Pei became familiar with the agenda of the international community of natural scientists. He learned that the international community pays significant attention to issues of “biodiversity” and “indigenous knowledge.” Pei became aware that what he studies as a botanist in Yunnan is valuable to the international community. To his knowledge, Yunnan is one of the best places in China to research both biodiversity and the indigenous knowledge of ethnic minorities.\textsuperscript{110}

Around the same time, Xu Jianchu, a young KIB researcher, was selected to participate in the Yunnan Upland Management project (YUM), China’s first internationally funded Poverty Alleviation project in the province. The Ford Foundation funded the project. Xu states that his YUM experience taught him how to put theory into action. CBIK’s organizational slogan, “We are learning by doing,” stems from his experience with YUM. Through YUM, he was sent to the Philippines to study. Xu stated, “Observing a strong society full of active NGOs in the Philippines influenced my

\textsuperscript{108} A follow-up interview (October 13, 2004) with the new CBIK representative revealed that Xu became the president of CBIK. The new representative is also a former KIB researcher.


\textsuperscript{110} Interview with Wang Chun, another CBIK founder. December 24, 2003.
thinking a lot. Upon my return, I wanted to try new things, … for example, creating a new networking mechanism, … an NGO.”111

Because of their international connections and their exposure to international trends, Pei and Xu came up with the idea of creating an NGO that specializes in biodiversity and indigenous knowledge. When asked why they wanted to create a new organization, an NGO, Xu answered:

All the governmental institutions, including KIB, espouse the slogan, “For the nation, for the people (wei le guojia, wei le renmin).”112 Although this sounds good, there is a political meaning behind it, which makes them act in a certain way. I wanted to create an NGO in order to bring a new philosophy to a new organization.

Although Xu became the leader of an ENGO, he does not claim to be an “environmentalist.” His vision as an NGO leader is to do something meaningful and useful for society through CBIK. Whether he is an environmentalist or not does not matter. Xu’s career goal is to join the professional staff of an INGO, such as the Ford Foundation. CBIK is a career step for Xu to strengthen his cultural capital (by acquiring a better command of English) and to increase his social capital (by expanding his international connections).

In 1993, the four founders of CBIK proposed to establish their ENGO and began preparing to register it with the Yunnan Civil Affairs Office. It took almost two years to officially establish CBIK because the civil affairs office was very deliberate in allowing

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112 Especially during the Maoist era, these were political slogans for the Chinese government.
Yunnan’s first ENGO to be established.\textsuperscript{113} The initial registration fee of 30,000 RMB was difficult to obtain. Yet, Xu’s connections with the Ford Foundation and the WWF soon assisted CBIK to raise the money. CBIK first set up its office in the building of the Yunnan Academy of Sciences (YAS), CBIK’s governmental sponsor unit.

Despite Xu’s wish to bring a new philosophy to a new organization, CBIK struggled to establish its own organizational identity.\textsuperscript{114} At the beginning, CBIK maintained a very close relationship with KIB, the employer of three CBIK founders. As a membership research association, CBIK needed a minimum of 50 members in order to register with the civil affairs office. CBIK listed 30 KIB staff members as CBIK members. Some KIB staff members volunteered to work for CBIK, but the majority of the 30 KIB members were simply CBIK newsletter subscribers.

Due to the over-lapping staff members and joint projects between CBIK, an NGO, and KIB, a governmental institute, some scholars consider CBIK to be a GONGO (Government Organized NGO). For example, Judith Shapiro refers to CBIK as a quasi-academic umbrella group (Shapiro 2001, 209). In fact, it is not an unusual practice for governmental institutions to create an NGO whose staff members are government workers. I have seen NGO offices in the governmental buildings in Yunnan. A founder of a small NGO in Yunnan insisted when I interviewed him in 2001 that CBIK is not a

\textsuperscript{113} CBIK submitted its application for registration several times. The most difficult registration requirements were to: 1) find a sponsor unit; and 2) fund an annual registration fee of 30,000 RMB (U.S. $3,600). The Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences was CBIK’s first sponsor unit in 1995. In 1999, the Yunnan Forestry Agency replaced it. The Ford Foundation helped CBIK to finance its annual registration fee.

\textsuperscript{114} Interviews with CBIK staff members on January 14, 2004; June 3, 9, 10, and 15, 2004.
real NGO and that it is an extension of the government (or KIB).\textsuperscript{115} A Western bilateral agency officer told me that the GONGO-like attributes of so-called NGOs are the reason why his agency is very reluctant to fund NGOs in Yunnan.\textsuperscript{116}

CBIK gradually emerged from KIB’s shadow. It increased the number of full-time staff members from 6 in 1995 to 30 in 2004\textsuperscript{117} and started to manage its own projects (rather than continue to co-manage them with KIB). CBIK’s organizational focus on indigenous knowledge forced the organization to hire new blood. Although KIB was able to help CBIK on biodiversity issues, CBIK was a relative novice on issues of indigenous knowledge. As CBIK wished to expand its professional expertise beyond biodiversity issues, it began hiring more staff members with an anthropological educational background. Newly hired staff members, including foreign consultants, helped to shift CBIK’s understanding of indigenous knowledge from a mechanical understanding (through the categorization of indigenous people) to an anthropological understanding.

There has been a constant self-criticism among CBIK staff members about what CBIK is, and what roles it should play as an NGO. My interviews with CBIK staff members revealed a widespread view that CBIK’s role is that of a social service provider. “Government can no longer provide all services. We can fill gaps in the areas from which government has retreated. We see government as our partner.” Some staff

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\textsuperscript{115} Interview, July 2, 2001. \\
\textsuperscript{116} Interview with an officer of the Dutch bilateral agency, October 29, 2004. \\
\textsuperscript{117} CBIK’s membership also grew over time. It currently has 105 members, including research professionals, development practitioners and resource managers. http://www.cbik.org/cbik-en/. Accessed November 23, 2005.
\end{flushright}
members expressed a more politically charged image of their NGO as an agent of social change. They also strongly believe that CBIK is a grassroots organization because it works closely with ordinary people.

Xu does not appreciate that others consider CBIK to be a GONGO because of its tie with KIB. He describes CBIK as a scientist-created NGO. He equates CBIK with a U.S. based environmental NGO, the “Environmental Defense Fund,” which had also been started by a small group of scientists. Scientific expertise seemed to be a way to expand CBIK’s cultural and economic capital as an organization. Xu emphasizes that because CBIK is a science-based NGO, others (donors, government, and people) can trust and respect CBIK and its work, which helps to bring funding to CBIK. As for social capital, some CBIK staff members believe that CBIK’s international connections are basically Xu’s personal connections and that CBIK should cultivate international connections as an organization.

CBIK provides both social and natural science expertise. A few Chinese staff members at CBIK have Masters degrees in anthropology, botany, biology, etc. CBIK’s foreign staff members are proof of Xu’s social capital. There are French, British, and American staff members. Some found their positions by responding to a job listing on CBIK’s English internet website. Some found theirs through a personal connection with Xu. Some obtained an internship at CBIK through a personal connection with CBIK’s international advisory board of members who are mostly foreign scholars. Australian

Volunteers International, an Australian government funded organization, sends their staff members, such as geographers and institutional analysts, to CBIK on a regular basis.

Foreign staff members are an important part of CBIK’s operation because they can contribute to CBIK’s accumulation of cultural capital and social capital. They are expected to help CBIK not only in the area of their own expertise, but also via English publications and grant writing. English publications are important to CBIK because they enable the NGO to maintain visibility among donors and to compete with governmental research institutes. Writing grant proposals in English is a fundamental operation within CBIK, which relies on approximately 90 percent of its funding from foreign donors. Yet, it seems that Xu is the one who makes sure that certain buzz words are used in CBIK’s grant proposals. One foreign staff member told me that Xu likes certain terms, such as “accountability,” “transparency,” and “efficiency.” Xu uses his cultural capital to ensure that CBIK’s grant proposals appeal to donors.

Yu Xiaogang: Green Watershed

Yu Xiaogang, a former researcher at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences (YASS), founded “Green Watershed” in 2002. Its organizational mission is to promote public participation in the protection and management of Yunnan’s watershed. Its office is located in one of YCASS’s old office buildings. These buildings are occupied entirely by associations (xiehui in Chinese). In the same building site, the Center for Community Development Studies (CDS), a social development NGO, founded in 1999, occupies

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another building. Like Yu, the two founders of CDS are also former YCASS researchers who participated in YUM and traveled overseas to study through YUM.

Yu Xiaogang, the sole founder of Green Watershed, has a long history of interacting with INGOs through his role as a YCASS researcher. In 1982, Yu met Peter Geithner, the Ford Foundation program officer in charge of Ford’s Developing Country Programs at that time, when Geithner visited Yunnan. Yu asked Geithner to consider Yunnan as one of Ford’s future project sites. After the Ford Foundation opened its Beijing office in 1988 and began considering a poverty alleviation project in Southwest China, Geithner, now the Beijing office representative, invited Yu to Beijing to discuss the matter.

Yu participated in YUM as a YCASS researcher and traveled to Thailand for study. Through these experiences—of participating in an international project, and of studying overseas—he felt that he learned new knowledge that he wanted to promote in China. He observed the activities of NGOs in Thailand and met representatives of grassroots NGOs and international NGOs at conferences. Although Yu thought that there would be many challenges to becoming the representative of an NGO in China, establishing one became Yu’s long-term dream. Replying to my question, “Why an NGO? What is so special about an NGO?” Yu replied:
NGOs can provide a good forum (or channel) for disseminating new knowledge to society. To conduct thorough research and to facilitate a dialogue from a long-term perspective, I chose an NGO as my vehicle. I can integrate knowledge from different fields and incorporate more people into an NGO. Conducting good research and engaging in long-term efforts requires some funding. Donors find it easier to fund you, if you are an NGO. Most importantly, the reforms of research institutes (i.e., the public sector reforms, which downsized governmental institutions) have led to expanded roles for NGOs and civil society. The central government is aiming at transparency and at a more open society. NGOs can bring some degree of democracy because NGOs are more connected to people and can do new things, such as pilot projects. You know, NGOs were the first to initiate micro-finance projects (e.g., the Grameen Bank, a local financial association, in Bangladesh). NGOs can bring suggestions to governments.

I asked Yu, “What are the differences between NGOs and governmental research institutes, then?” Yu answered:

Governmental experts are good at studying and researching, but not good at implementing. NGOs can be good at all of these. NGOs are more independent from government and more neutral in nature. Thus, NGOs can be more active in reform than governmental institutes, and NGOs are more connected to people. NGOs try to change (reform) policies, while governmental experts try to improve policies. Furthermore, if governmental experts are funded by governments, it is hard for them to be critical toward governmental policies.

The opportunity for Yu to make his dream come true came when he was conducting a study on watershed at YCASS in 1998-99. Through the study, Yu found watershed management in Yunnan to be very weak and suggested more comprehensive management policies. In 1999, Yu met the director of the Southeast Asia division of Oxfam USA, who eventually funded YCASS’s watershed project in Lashihai between
Yu was a former social scientist at YCASS. But this did not seem to color his NGO as a GONGO to the extent that it had with CBIK. Donors and other NGOs seem to consider Green Watershed as an individual-organized NGO. This is probably because only one out of six staff members at Green Watershed had formerly worked at YCASS. Green Watershed’s projects, moreover, have been independent from YCASS.

Green Watershed needed to legitimize its organizational identity for a different reason than CBIK’s. Within a year of Green Watershed’s founding, the Nujiang Dam Construction environmental controversy in Yunnan emerged. (I will describe this controversy in detail in the next chapter in analyzing the diffusion between INGOs and Chinese actors.) Green Watershed has been the most vocal Chinese ENGO involved with the case.

Yu is proud of Green Watershed’s advocacy role in the Nujiang controversy, and of his organization’s image as a risk taker. Yet, he is concerned that people in both the Chinese and international environmental communities view Green Watershed as only an advocacy group, and one without a background in scientific research. According to Yu, scientific research, advocacy, and practice through project implementation are the three pillars of Green Watershed’s activities, and he believes that advocacy should be based on scientific research. An emphasis on science, it is believed throughout Green Watershed, enhances the legitimacy of the organization, which in turn helps Green Watershed to
maintain its cultural and social capital. Without such capital, it is difficult to sustain an NGO in Yunnan.

What is an NGO in Yu’s opinion? He emphasized that NGOs contribute to political governance in China. “In China, government and business (the first and second sectors) are too closely connected. Thus, we need NGOs, as a part of the third sector, and the media, as the fourth sector, in order to counterbalance the first and second sectors.”

His understanding of civil society is much closer to Western models, such as Gellner’s (1994). Gellner argues that civil society is a form of social control, whose main task is to counterbalance state expansion. Yu’s view on civil society is reflected in Green Watershed’s involvement in controversial advocacy.

Conclusion

As the Chinese state has been attempting to “green” China through the institutionalization of a Chinese environmental regime, beginning in the 1970s, political opportunities have opened up for Chinese ENGOs. They are becoming an essential part of the environmental regime in the eyes of the state. Chinese political and policy elites expect that ENGOs will increase China’s international image as a responsible major power in terms of international environmental protection (Johnston 1998: 563-4), attract foreign funding, and contribute to public participation in environmental protection within China. I have argued that Chinese state vulnerability to global environmental concerns has been a selective choice. As the World Bank suggested, environmental problems cost the Chinese economy. Thus, the state has decided to enlist ENGOs to complement the

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120 Interview, November 6, 2004.
state’s efforts in “greening” China (Ho 2001) despite the possibility of empowering them. (I will explore this point in the next chapter in analyzing the case of anti-dam activism.)

The emergence of Chinese ENGOs in the mid-1990s did not fundamentally change the fact that China’s environmental initiatives are elite-driven. Chinese environmental NGOs tend to be led by Chinese intellectuals with reformist ideas and international connections. In a sense, Chinese environmental NGOs are elitist organizations, mostly consisting of educated middle class members.

For example, in Yunnan province, the two major local ENGOs were both founded by local scientists with knowledge of scientific environmental discourse and international connections. These ENGO leaders possessed the experience to implement international projects by using international practices, such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), and the ability to speak the same language as the international donor community. Both ENGOs first became well-known among the international donor community, rather than the Chinese community. The two ENGOs continue to strengthen their international connections and to receive financial and intellectual support from foreign sources. As the case of Green Plateau suggests, ENGOs that lack professional expertise and international connections have trouble in sustaining themselves in Yunnan.

The elite nature of major Chinese ENGOs does not, however, imply that they stand aloof from the Chinese people and their society. I argue that the elite nature of Chinese ENGOs actually helps them to ally with political and policy elites and to interact with donors, such as INGOs. Consequently, Chinese ENGOs have gradually been extending their legitimacy among China’s policy and political elites, Western donors, and the Chinese middle-class.
Chapter Five presents three case studies of INGOs that have been operating in Yunnan. The Chinese state’s vulnerability to global environmental concerns has also opened a door for INGOs to come to China to support environment-related activities. Each case study demonstrates how the diffusion of global environmental concerns takes place or does not take place between INGOs as the transmitters and local Chinese actors as the potential adopters.
Chapter 5

INGOs as Concerned Transmitters in Yunnan: Identification, Adaptation, and Political Opportunity Structures (POS)

Introduction

Chapter Five focuses on three case studies in Yunnan of the diffusion of ideas and practices in the name of the environment between INGOs as transmitters and their potential adopters. The strong presence of INGOs at the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995, increased the visibility and legitimacy of INGOs in China. Since then, more INGOs have begun operating in China. Yet, the Chinese regime maintains its historical suspicion towards social organizations, including INGOs, and is now afraid of the direct and powerful influence of INGOs upon Chinese social actors (Ma 2006: 172).

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how and to what extent political opportunity structures (POS)—state repressiveness, state vulnerability, and the presence or absence of elite allies—affect the diffusion process at the local level. POS in China provide INGOs with a mixed environment. The Chinese state can be repressive towards any ideas and practices of INGOs that are deemed to conflict with state interests and consequently undermine CCP rule. Democracy and freedom of religion are such ideas. However, as I argued in the previous chapter, the Chinese state is highly vulnerable to issues of the environment largely due to its concern for current and future economic costs to the nation. INGOs that wish to advocate on issues of the environment, therefore, anticipate state vulnerability and expect support from the existence of an environmentally conscious elite. The challenges to INGOs are to neutralize or avoid state repressiveness...
as much as possible and to adjust to political climates and cultures at the local level, which may be very different from those at the central level, as demonstrated in the case of the Snub-Nosed Monkey in Chapter Four.

This chapter first examines the Western Development Campaign, a national political Campaign launched in 1999 to develop China’s western region, to demonstrate how state objectives for both economic development and environmental protection via conservation creates challenges for western provinces. Secondly, the chapter introduces three case studies of the diffusion of ideas and practices in relation to the environment in Yunnan between INGOs and their potential adopters. The three case studies center on the following INGOs: the Ford Foundation, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the International Rivers Network (IRN). Each organization has brought ideas and practices in relation to the environment to Yunnan during the past ten years, and they have all faced China’s POS.

The Western Development Campaign: The State’s Reassertion of Power

China’s unprecedented economic growth since the 1978 economic reforms has not benefited all the regions equally. For example, the “Western Region” of China has lagged far behind the Eastern Region in economic development. Many provinces in southwest China include some of China’s poorest counties and were targeted by the

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121 This “Western Region” is a politically defined area. The region originally consisted of six provinces (Gansu, Guizhou, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Sichuan, and Yunnan), five autonomous regions (Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet, and Xinjiang), and one municipality (Chongqing). The area encompasses 71.5 percent of the national territory, hosts 28.9 percent of the national population and 72.6 percent of China’s ethnic minorities, and produces 17.5 percent of China’s GDP (State Statistics Bureau 2000). In September 2001, the Xiangxi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Hunan Province, the Ensui Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Hubei Province, and the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, Jilin Province were added to the “Western Region” (Holbig 2004).
central government for poverty alleviation in the 1980s and the 1990s. Due to the Western Region’s geographical disadvantage of being inland as well as its weak infrastructure, less than 5 percent\(^{122}\) of annual foreign direct investment (FDI) in China goes to the region (State Statistics Bureau 2000).

In 1999, the Chinese central government inaugurated the Western Development (\textit{Xibu dakaifa}) Campaign\(^{123}\) whose purported objectives are to develop the Western region of China and to reduce regional disparities in economic development. The Campaign signifies that Chinese leaders have resurrected the old modernity paradigm of nation building to the Western Region. The state’s two main priorities of the Campaign are mega infrastructure projects and state environmentalism (Goodman 2004; Yeh 2004). The state intends not only to shape the Western Region’s landscape, natural resources, and people, but also to attract foreign direct investment to the region. The Campaign’s emphasis on both economic development and conservation is a challenge to poor provinces in the Western Region, where economic development has rarely gone hand in hand with conservation.

The planned mega projects are highly concentrated on hydropower development and water management. China’s state policy is to increase the proportion of its hydro energy production from 19 to 40 percent by 2015, which would make China “the World’s Number One hydro-superpower.”\(^{124}\) The Three Gorges project on the Yangtze River and

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\(^{122}\) A Western source estimates that the figure is only about 3 percent. See Browne, Andrew, “China Looks West to Underpin Prosperity,” \textit{Reuters English News Service}, March 6, 2000.

\(^{123}\) \textit{Xibu dakaifa} is also translated as the “Great Development of the West,” the “Go West Campaign,” and a Campaign to “Open Up the West” etc.

\(^{124}\) People’s Daily, March 20, 2000.
the Xiaolangdi water control project on the Yellow River are the two major hydropower projects. Hydropower development, in general, has potentially adverse impacts on the ecosystem, such as the loss of biodiversity and the depletion of riverine and river-mouth ecologies. Because of these hydropower projects, environmentalists inside and outside the nation question whether the Chinese leadership is truly committed to ecological protection. The construction of the Three Gorges Dam officially began in 1994 despite much publicized international and national environmental opposition.

State environmentalism in the context of the Western Development Campaign emphasizes state control over land, natural resources, and forests, rather than environmental protection. The Ministry of Land and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Water Resources, and the State Forestry Bureau are included in the State Council Leading Group for the Western Development Campaign (Sasaki 2001, 18), and perhaps tellingly, the State Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) is not included in the Group (Economy 2000).

There are the following state environmental policies and plans. The National Forest Protection Program (NFPP), announced after the 1998 Yangtze River flood disaster, required a complete logging ban in the upper reaches of the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers (Harkness 1998). The logging ban immediately terminated people’s access to the forest and impoverished some ethnic minority communities whose household incomes had heavily relied upon timber revenue (e.g., a Tibetan minority prefecture in northwest Yunnan).

Current forest coverage in China as a whole is 14 percent, and it is diminishing annually by about 0.9 percent (McCormack 2001, 15). The logging ban may halt
deforestation, but China needs an extensive reforestation plan. With the Upland Conversion Policy for Reforestation, China hopes to convert a total of 11.61 million hectares of arable land on slopes steeper than 25 degrees into forest and grassland over ten years (2001 and 2010) in areas along the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers (Wei 2001, 45). This reforestation policy is also called “grain for green” because the state promises to subsidize grain to farmers who convert their arable land to forest or grassland.

China is expected to construct a nature reserve/protected area in Western China. China’s rare fauna and flora are state resources that the Chinese central government must protect and preserve before sub-national levels of government exploit them. Between 2001 and 2010, the state and local governments are expected to newly create 270 nature reserves/protected areas in a total of 14 provinces and cities. Currently, China’s nature reserves/protected areas occupy 6.56 percent of the nation’s total land area. With this aggressive plan, the size of the nature reserves/protected areas will more or less double (to 13.33 percent of the nation’s total land area) (Wei 2001, 45). A U.S. based international ENGO, (TNC), has taken part in implementing this plan with its well publicized project, the Yunnan Great River Project (YGRP).

The Western Development Campaign is the major reason why more INGOs have had better access to China’s Western Region. The central government has encouraged INGOs to “Go West” to render poor provinces assistance. As a result, global actors have come to test the political waters of China’s Western Region.

Yunnan Province and Its Development Strategies
The Yunnan Provincial Government (YPG) in the Western Region promulgated “Great Ethnic Culture Province” and “Green Economy Province” as its two guiding political slogans in implementing the Western Development Campaign in Yunnan. The province has sought to achieve economic development that takes advantage of Yunnan’s rich ethnic cultures and rich ecological resources. Although Yunnan is resource rich, it is too poor to address provincial goals on its own, which has led, in recent years, to an increase in financial assistance from ODA projects and NGO projects.

The idea of a “Great Ethnic Cultural Province,” which aims at economic development based on the tourist industry (Xiong and Wang, et al 2002, 71), is nothing new to Yunnan. In the early 1990s, the provincial government began concentrating on tourism, hoping to develop it into the second pillar of Yunnan’s economy, the first pillar being the tobacco industry (d’Hooghe 1994, 292). Yunnan’s tourism industry was helped by the State Council’s decision in 1992 to select Kunming, the capital of Yunnan—over Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan—as the permanent host of an annual trade Exposition targeting the South-East Asian market. Since 1993, the Kunming Expo, kunjiaohui in Chinese, has annually brought foreign visitors and businesses to Yunnan.

The shift from tobacco to tourism turned out to be a wise move on the provincial government’s part. The tobacco industry, which had provided 70 percent of the province’s tax revenues throughout the early 1990s (Litzinger 2004, 489), collapsed. The competition with imported tobacco from Vietnam as well as farmland conversion policy contributed to the decline.

The slogan, “Strong Green Economy Province,” emerged shortly after “Great Ethnic Cultural Province.” Yunnan is very rich in both biological resources and raw
Yunnan’s biological resources are recognized as one of the world’s ecological hotspots. Yunnan has six mineral resources whose reserves are the largest in China. The distribution of minerals is controlled by the central government (Hooghe 1994, 288). The “Project 18” Office of the Yunnan provincial government, which had a mandate to implement 18 projects to develop ecological resources in Yunnan, developed the slogan. An internal document from the office defines the green economy as an economy based on biological resources, especially green plants (Liu 1999). When former premier Zhu Rongji visited Yunnan in August 1999, he emphasized the importance of developing ecological resources and encouraged the office to implement more than 18 projects. After his visit, the Project 18 Office was renamed the Bio-Resources Innovation Development office in December 1999.125

In 2000, the newly renamed office co-organized the Cultures and Biodiversity Congress (CUBIC), an international conference on biodiversity and indigenous knowledge in Kunming. Other co-organizers included the Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge (CBIK), a local environmental NGO (see chapter four), the Kunming Institute of Botany (KIB), and the Bio-Resources Germplasm Conservation & Development Foundation of Yunnan. Some international donors, including but not limited to the Ford Foundation, the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD),126 and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), co-sponsored the CUBIC, along with the Yunnan provincial government. While the official

125 Interview with a former provincial officer from the Bio-Resources Innovation Development office. August 8, 2004.

126 See Chapter Four, footnote 34.
theme of the conference was the provincial slogan, “Strong Green Economy Province,” the international donor participants succeeded in addressing other agendas at the conference. The conference addressed not only eco-tourism and cultural tourism, the central agenda of the province, but also community-based resource management and intellectual property rights, including the resource rights of local communities. Some donors further emphasized the importance of local people’s participation in decision-making and the protection of their rights.127

The Yunnan Provincial Government (YPG) has made foreign assistance a central part of its economic development strategy. Since the inception of China’s first ODA project in 1990 in Yunnan, funded by the Ford Foundation, the YPG has encouraged INGOs to come to Yunnan. It established the Yunnan International NGO (YINGO) in order to help INGOs establish their offices in Yunnan.128 Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province, has the largest number129 of INGO offices (Ma 2006: 177). As CUBIC exemplifies, donors bring projects and money to China in order to advocate and promote their own ideas and practices. As I described in Chapter Three, unlike multilateral and bilateral donors, which face tighter state control by the Chinese central government, INGOs can more freely form close relationships with Chinese local actors.

In the section below, I will discuss three case studies of the diffusion of ideas and/or practices between INGOs and their potential adopters in Yunnan. The three

127 E-mail correspondence with one of the foreign organizers. Apr. 29, 2004.
128 As I discussed in Chapter Three, YINGO, a GONGO, oversees INGOs, excepting foreign foundations, in Yunnan.
129 There were 14 INGO offices in Yunnan in 2003. These INGOs were from the U.S., the U.K., Hong Kong, Australia, and Zimbabwe. Hong Kong INGOs are treated as foreign NGOs. Interview with a Yunnan International NGO (YINGO) staff member, September 25, 2003.
INGOs are the Ford Foundation, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the International Rivers Network (IRN). They each brought new ideas and/or practices to Yunnan.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC): Ideas of Conservation

As part of the Chinese central government’s aggressive plan to newly create 270 nature reserves/protected areas between 2001 and 2010 in China, the Yunnan Provincial Government (YPG) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), a U.S. based international ENGO, have been implementing a large-scale nature conservation/protected area project called the Yunnan Great River Project (YGRP). This project is a good research site for studying the diffusion of ideas on conservation between an International ENGO and Chinese local officials.

TNC is one of a few international ENGOs that engage in not only fund-raising for conservation, but also in the implementation of conservation projects. Although TNC has acquired its international experiences by working in 28 countries since 1980, China is a relatively new territory for them. In 1996, TNC, for the first time, conducted studies, in Inner Mongolia and Hainan, collecting the body of scientific data regarding fauna and flora. The YGRP is TNC’s first major project in China.

The Chinese central government chose Yunnan with the hope that the YGRP would provide the rest of the nation with a standardized model for protected area management.\textsuperscript{130} In 1997, Carol Fox, the regional representative of the TNC’s Pacific Region office in Hawaii, and a U.S. embassy staff member in Chengdu met with officials from both the powerful State Development & Planning Commission at the central

\textsuperscript{130} Interview, June 2, 2004.
government (currently renamed the National Development and Reform Commission) and
the Yunnan Provincial Government (YPG). They discussed the creation of a
conservation area in northwest Yunnan.

In 1998, TNC and the Yunnan Provincial Government agreed on jointly investing
a total of $5 million ($3 million by YPG and $2 million by TNC) for the YGRP. The
Yunnan Provincial Government officially invited TNC to come to Yunnan to serve as an
adviser on the project. TNC established its first office in Kunming, Yunnan’s capital, in
1998. Although YGRP began in 1998, a year before the inauguration of the Western
Development Campaign, both its mega size and its conservation purpose are aligned with
the Western Development Campaign. The project area encompasses 66,870 square
kilometers (25,819 square miles), which constitutes 17.48 percent of Yunnan’s total
provincial territory. The YGRP is approximately eight times the size of Yellowstone
National Park. The YGRP is an unusually large-scale project for TNC. The ENGO itself
did not originally expect that the YGRP would become so large.131

The Project’s mission is:

to preserve the biological and cultural diversity of northwest Yunnan
Province and promote the long-term economic well-being of its citizens
by successfully integrating conservation and economic goals through
compatible development strategies.132

This mission statement appears to reflect the Yunnan provincial government’s goals of
creating both a Great Ethnic Culture province and a Strong Green Economy province

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131 Interview, December 4, 2003.

132 Preserving China’s Natural and Cultural Heritage: A Ten-Year Strategy for Conservation &
Sustainable Development in China Based on the Yunnan Great Rivers Project, The Nature Conservancy
China Program. Internal documents with no date. Obtained from TNC’s Kunming office in October 2003.
more than it reflects TNC’s goals in protecting nature. The mission statement clearly suggests that YGRP aims at economic prosperity while incorporating conservation into its development plan. The statement interprets the project from a more economic development standpoint than a conservation standpoint.

During the first phase of the YGRP, the planning stage, from 1998 to 2001, TNC worked with the YPG. The relationship between TNC and the YPG was amicable. TNC provided the YPG with research expertise and assistance. Foreign scientists, who were hired by TNC as consultants, and Chinese scientists worked together in Yunnan’s protected area to take scientific inventories. It was easy for TNC to collaborate with Chinese scientists because the two groups spoke the same “language” and shared the same passion for conservation.133

Ideas and practices of conservation were then very new to China. Therefore, TNC had to disseminate them first among provincial officials. TNC communicated well with the YPG about conservation via organizing workshops. In 2000 alone, there were three provincial workshops attended by 70 provincial officials in total. The workshops helped provincial officials to understand the importance of conservation and to form an initial identification with TNC. This initial identification between provincial officials and TNC was quite important because it helped TNC to overcome the Chinese government’s longstanding phobia toward external influence, its suspicions towards INGOs, and its lack of understanding on conservation. Although the YPG had invited TNC to Yunnan, that did not mean there were no skeptics inside the YPG.

133 Interview, June 2, 2004.
By the end of the first phase, in March 2001, TNC and the YPG had produced the “Conservation and Development Action Plan for Northwest Yunnan,” a blueprint for project implementation. It was approximately a 55-page document, produced both in Chinese and English. The Action Plan identified five model project areas: Laojunshan, Lashihai, Meili, Nujiang, and Shangri-la Gorge.

In 2002, the National Development & Reform Commission (NDRC) at the central government asked TNC to organize a national workshop in Kunming on the Yunnan Great River Project (YGRP). The workshop aimed to disseminate ideas and practices on conservation among provincial officials. Two governmental representatives from each of the provinces in China were invited to attend. At the workshop, TNC introduced the YGRP as a standardized model for park planning in protected areas of China. TNC also introduced U.S. cases of protected area management, such as Yellowstone National Park, to demonstrate its efficacy. The workshop was well received. Some provincial representatives were so intrigued that they officially asked TNC to come to their provinces and provide the same help for them.

However, during the second phase of the YGRP, the implementation stage, from 2002 to date, TNC has been facing difficulties. It began working with sub-provincial level governments in order to implement the project, but it has had difficulties in gaining cooperation from them. The project does not seem to satisfy expectations and agendas at the sub-provincial level. Therefore, local governments are not particularly interested in

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134 Interview, June 2, 2004.

135 Interview, October 9, 2003.
cooperating with TNC, despite knowing that both the central and the Yunnan provincial
governments have been backing the project.

The ideas and practices of conservation are very new to China especially at the
local administrative level. At the provincial level, TNC was successful in disseminating
ideas, developing adopters of conservation ideas and practices, and creating elite allies. It
may be the case that it was relatively easy for the YPG officials, who tend to be college
educated and middle class, to understand the importance of conservation and its possible
long-term economic benefits. At the sub-provincial level, however, TNC faces a less
educated, less worldly group, more resistant to new ideas and practices. As the case of
the snub-nosed monkey showed, local administrative levels tend to be independent from
both central and provincial government politics and do not necessarily follow central
government policies.

TNC’s project area includes 15 counties and cities in four ethnic minority
prefectures. Thus, TNC was sometimes caught in the middle between local demands
and provincial demands. For example, Ralph Litzinger, in his ethnographic study of a
TNC sponsored county workshop on the YGRP, documented that TNC was unable to
accommodate the local Tibetan people’s ancestral rights to name their traditional
landscapes in the Tibetan language, due to the Han-centered provincial government’s
political pressure (Litzinger 2004).

Under such circumstances, the ideas and practices of conservation can be difficult
to sell at the local administrative level. The following statements suggest that there is a

136 The four prefectures are the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous
Prefecture, Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture, and Lijiang Prefecture (where the Naxi, a minority group,
predominantly resides).
difference in priorities between TNC and Chinese local governments, a contributing factor, perhaps, in why local potential adopters have encountered difficulties in forming a minimal identification with TNC. Prof. Qu Xiaokun, a biodiversity coordinator for the project, wrote his observation on the challenges to the implementation of the YGRP (Qu 2002, 75). One of the challenges that he observed is an “insufficient clarity of TNC’s goals…. TNC’s purpose is first and foremost to protect nature. TNC’s mission, however, is not an easy concept for officials and ‘common people’ in China to grasp…” (Qu 2002, 76). My interviewee, a foreign conservationist, made the following statement. “In China, economic development fundamentally comes first over conservation. It means that science tends to be secondary to economy in decision-making. You know, (natural) scientists are bad at communication. So, it is hard for us to persuade people who have different priorities.”

It is natural that potential adopters experience reservations, resistance, or ignorance towards new ideas and practices. And without TNC explaining to local officials the direct economic benefits from the project, it does not seem surprising that TNC found it difficult to obtain their willing cooperation. The blueprint of the project included some programs to assist local governments to find alternative income sources. However, TNC faced difficulties in implementing these programs for the following reasons.

TNC’s traditional method of conservation is to buy and own the land it seeks to conserve. Land that TNC buys in the U.S. or elsewhere is not populated (or sparsely


138 For the land trust movement in America, see e.g., Brewer (2003).
populated). TNC can manage the land as it wishes. Prior to initiating its work in China, TNC had not dealt with a large population residing in its project sites. The lack of experience in dealing with a large population and its social needs likely presented TNC significant challenges in implementing the YGRP. TNC not only does not own the YGRP project site, but the site is home to 3.02 million people, 7.47 percent of Yunnan’s total population. The possible relocation of people and the need to develop income generation schemes were new challenges for TNC. The ENGO is predominantly a natural science based professional organization ill equipped to address the poverty alleviation needs of a large population.139

Eco-tourism is, for example, one way to generate sources of income for local populations. Yet, TNC’s sub-project components within the YGRP have been driven by individual staff member interests. The projects thus tend to discontinue or change course drastically whenever the staff member in charge leaves the project or TNC altogether, resulting in a lack of continuity.140

In the view of local county officials, if TNC cannot provide sources of income to local people through the implementation of the YGRP, then they are not especially eager to listen to the ideas or implement the practices of conservation (Qu 2002). In sum, TNC struggled—and largely failed—to establish a minimal identification with local county officials because, on one hand, they were primarily interested in conservation and lacked experience in dealing with local populations, while on the other hand, local county officials were primarily interested in the economic ramifications of the YGRP.

139 Interview. October 9, 2003.
140 Interview. April 7, 2004.
TNC’s inability to establish a minimal identification with local county officials delayed the project implementation. Another impediment was TNC’s meeting in December 2002 with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, which strained its relationship with the Yunnan provincial government. Mr. Henry M. Paulson, Jr., Chairman and CEO of the Goldman Sachs Group, Inc., as well as TNC’s chairman of the board of governors, met President Jiang. According to TNC, the purpose of the meeting was to discuss agendas important to the Goldman Sachs Group. In addition, Mr. Paulson asked Jiang in person for his support of TNC’s project in a meeting attended by Rose Niu, TNC China Program Director; Ed Norton, TNC China Program Senior Advisor; and from China, the governor of Yunnan; the director of the State Forestry Bureau; and the Minister of the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA).

Regardless of TNC’s intentions, the meeting with President Jiang seemed to backfire. The Yunnan Provincial Government (YPG) did not approve of TNC’s meeting with Jiang. YPG, in general, interpreted the meeting as follows. TNC met with Jiang because it was experiencing difficulties in implementing its project in Yunnan. The YPG felt embarrassment or loss of face, and it had not wanted Jiang to know that the project’s implementation had been delayed. A YPG official stated to me: “Without patience (emphasis added), TNC went to the Chinese central government and tried to get an official stamp for the project from President Jiang Zemin in order to accelerate the process.”141 Another YPG official said, “TNC went to the big boss to order us. This is a top-down way of cooperation.”142 The YPG interpreted President Jiang’s supportive

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comments on the YGRP as an unwelcome intervention and as pressure from the central government on provincial efforts.

TNC faced another challenge. The Yunnan Provincial Government and the Huadian Group, a state-owned electric enterprise, agreed to construct a hydropower dam across Nujiang (the Nu River) and within one of TNC’s conservation project sites. This incident epitomizes the clash between the two priorities of the Western Development Campaign: conservation versus economic development. The ideas of conservation that TNC had been promoting in Yunnan were being directly challenged by an economic development plan unfriendly to the environment.

Although the dam construction plan in Nujiang would have a direct impact on the YGRP, no one informed TNC of the agreement. TNC did not learn of it until September 2003, bespeaking of the distance between TNC and the provincial government. The construction agreement put TNC in a tremendously difficult position. For political reasons, it remained silent regarding the dam for six months. TNC finally expressed, via an official statement, its basic position on dams on the Great Rivers, in March 11, 2004, after Premier Wen had temporally suspended the proposed Nujiang dam.

It had been support from the Chinese central government for conservation that had originally brought TNC to Yunnan. Hoping to overcome difficulties in implementation, TNC had appealed to state vulnerability to the environment by meeting

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143 The next section will describe the Nujiang hydropower dam in more detail.

144 Interview with TNC’s communications officer. October 9, 2003.

with President Jiang. Yet, by resorting to President’s Jiang’s authority, TNC alienated provincial elite allies who otherwise might have supported ideas of conservation. TNC may have underestimated the difficulties in constructing a minimal identification with sub-provincial level officials and in maintaining support from provincial elite allies.

The International Rivers Network (IRN): Ideas and Practices of Anti-Dam Activism

The International Rivers Network (IRN) is an international NGO based in Berkeley, California. The IRN is known for its worldwide activism against the construction of dams and for its defense of the rights of communities affected by the construction of dams. The IRN maintains that the development model based on dams not only damages the environment, but also violates human rights by ignoring the voices of local communities in the decision-making process. The IRN works with a global network of local communities, social movement organizations, NGOs, and other partners.

In China, the IRN has undertaken a broad-based strategy against Morgan Stanley—including boycotting the company’s Discover Card—to force the financier to withdraw from providing fund-raising assistance for the infamous Three Gorges Dam, the World’s largest hydropower dam (Economy 2004, 206). In the late 1980s, the

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146 For more information on the IRN, see http://www.irn.org.


The construction plan of the Three Gorges Dam project elicited both international and national outcries. The massive project required the displacement and relocation of approximately 1.4 million people. The campaign against the Three Gorges Dam demonstrates many of the difficulties in engaging in anti-dam campaigns in China. Acclaimed journalist Dai Qing was jailed for campaigning against the dam through the publication of *Yangtze! Yangtze!* (1989). She has not been allowed to publish her work or to speak in public since. (China’s environmental NGOs were non-existent at the time.)

The recent controversy over the Nujiang hydropower dam project in Yunnan is a good research site for studying the diffusion of ideas and practices of anti-dam activism between an INGO (the IRN) and a Chinese local ENGO in Yunnan. Without NGO activism on this issue, the Nujiang hydropower dam project might not have become a national controversy. This case suggests that environmental activism among Chinese NGOs has begun to shift from politically benign issues, such as animal protection, to politically sensitive issues, such as dam construction and the displacement of people.

### The Nujiang (Nu River) Dam Controversy

The dam construction agreement on the Nujiang hydropower dam project was signed between the Yunnan Provincial Government and the Huadian Group, a state-owned electric enterprise, on March 14, 2003. Eight of the thirteen dams were to be built

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149 The current official figure from Xinhua News Agency, dated October 2, 2006.

150 See Chapter Four for China’s first NGO-led environmental campaign (in 1995) to protect the habitat of the snub-nosed monkey in Yunnan.
across the middle reaches of Nujiang (the Nu River) in the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture (Lisu minority prefecture) in Yunnan. In comparison to the Three Gorges Dam project, the Nu River hydropower dam project has received less national and international attention. Although lesser in scale than the Three Gorges Dam, the Nu River Dam, if it is ever built, will have significant impacts upon the area’s ecological and cultural diversity. The planned construction site encompasses one of the world’s ecological hotspots, a UNESCO World Heritage natural site, “Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas” (2003), and ethnic minority populations. Fifty thousand people are slated to be displaced and relocated because of the dam.

In August 2003, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) of the central government approved the dam construction and was supposed to present the plan to the state council for final approval with the intent to begin construction in September 2003 (Yardley 2005). Given the impetus of the state’s Western Development Campaign, the proposed construction of the Nujiang dam was expected to move ahead swiftly, or at least that was what many within the Nujiang prefecture government believed. Yet, in February 2004, due to an outcry from environmental groups and scholars, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao temporarily suspended the dam construction plan.

The Nujiang prefecture government was disappointed by the suspension because it had been eager to pursue the hydropower development plan. The prefecture government argued that the dam project was the only way to lead the prefecture to prosperity and to lift

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152 For more information, see http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1083.
the primitive (emphasis added) lives of minority people. The prefecture government had estimated in 2002 that the dams could generate 105 million RMB (US $12.7 million) per year, or ten times the prefecture’s existing annual financial revenue. The central government had committed to investing 901 million RMB for the dam construction.

The Diffusion of Anti-Dam Activism

Strong and innovative activism against the Nujiang Dam project came from a local ENGO in Yunnan. Green Watershed, which I discussed in Chapter Four, has been the most aggressive and vocal NGO opponent of the Nujiang dam project. Due to the Three Gorges Dam, ideas of anti-dam activism are no longer new to China, but practices of anti-dam activism are still quite risky. Hydropower development in China’s Western region is a key component of the central government policy. Despite the foreseeable difficulties of activism, Green Watershed has not only engaged in anti-dam activism, but has also adopted some of the most innovative tactical repertoires of activism, some approaches perhaps being unprecedented for a Chinese NGO. The close, direct, and interpersonal interactions between Green Watershed and the IRN may help to explain Green Watershed’s unconventional approach to anti-dam activism.

The Nujiang dam controversy has brought Green Watershed into close contact with the Hong Kong office of the IRN. Yu Xiaogang, of Green Watershed explained, “We are the only ENGO in Yunnan promoting public participation in the protection and

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153 Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture is one of China’s poorest minority autonomous areas. Lijiang Prefecture’s GDP per capita was 935 RMB (US $120) in 2002. Fifty percent of the prefecture population still faces the wenbao problem, a lack of basic human needs (BHNs).

management of Yunnan’s watershed. It is natural for the IRN to contact us.” Green Watershed has not only received financial support from the IRN, but has also collaborated with it. To a lesser extent, other international ENGOs, such as Conservation International and OXFAM America, have been cooperating with Green Watershed in opposing the Nujiang dam.

Despite the three-hour air travel time between Hong Kong and Yunnan’s capital of Kunming, the IRN’s Hong Kong office has established dense relational ties with Green Watershed. The IRN staff members visit Green Watershed in Kunming on a regular basis to conduct field visits together in villages affected by the Nujiang hydropower dam project. Through these efforts, the mission of the IRN, linking human rights and environmental protection via anti-dam activism, has been transmitted to Green Watershed. The purpose of the joint visits is to provide villagers with information on the dam projects as well as on the rights of their community. According to Green Watershed, villagers are often not well informed of the project or of their rights and entitlements. Green Watershed tries to educate villagers in the Nujiang county about Chinese resettlement policies, such as the Kaifaxing yimin fangzhen (China’s developmental resettlement plan), and the resettlement policies of international organizations (e.g., the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank). In so doing, Green Watershed feels that it is helping to implement the Chinese central government’s policies on resettlement. Although the Kaifaxing yimin fangzhen is a national policy, its application varies significantly by province. Green Watershed hopes that villagers in the Nujiang county, if relocated, will demand appropriate compensation in accordance with the plan. In the

155 For more information, see www.oxfamamerica.org.
case of the Three Gorges Dam project, mismanagement of the compensation fund due to corruption was one of the biggest problems.

Green Watershed uses a unique tactic for spreading the resettlement experiences of villagers. It often brings people who have experienced resettlement at different dam sites into a proposed new dam site to have them speak about their experiences to the villagers there. When Green Watershed staff visited villages in the Nujiang county, the local police followed them and spied on their activities. When I interviewed Yu in late 2004, Green Watershed was under investigation and had received a verbal warning from both the governor of Yunnan and the head of the provincial CCP. 156 Green Watershed was suspected of instigating ordinary people to oppose the government.

The IRN is known for financing local NGOs to attend UN conferences held outside their home countries. Green Watershed has also used conferences to promote its causes. It managed, for example, to participate in the United Nations Symposium on Dam & Sustainable Development, held in Beijing during October 27-29, 2004. 157 No Chinese grassroots NGOs had originally been invited to the symposium, but as soon as Green Watershed learned of the event, it contacted the organizers and persuaded them to allow a Green Watershed representative and eight dam-affected villagers to participate in the symposium. Green Watershed argued that stakeholder participation in U.N. conferences, including the participation of people significantly affected by dam construction, is an internationally accepted norm, and that without stakeholder participation, the symposium would have a credibility problem.

156 Interview, August 31, 2004.

157 Interview, Nov. 6, 2004.
Although the organizers were initially reluctant to invite them, stating that the gathering was a high-level U.N. symposium and that lay people were not welcome, they finally conceded. At the conference, Green Watershed, in cooperation with the IRN and Oxfam America, managed to provide villagers an opportunity to ask questions to the other participants at the symposium. Representatives from Green Watershed, the IRN, and OXFAM America sat at the same table with two U.N. representatives, two World Bank representatives, and three Chinese government officials from the powerful National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC). The NGO representatives suggested a revision to a draft of the Hydropower Declaration, the product of the symposium.

Although Green Watershed never felt welcomed at the symposium, it believes that its own participation had remarkable impacts. The opening speech at the symposium mentioned neither NGOs nor dam-affected villagers. The focus of the symposium was: “We must develop hydropower.” However, one-third of the closing speeches at the symposium referenced NGOs, the people, and Social Impact Assessments (SIA). Green Watershed believes that it was able to present the issues of the dam-affected people at the symposium effectively because it spoke in terms of internationally recognized development concepts, such as sustainable development, stakeholders, SIA, people’s participation, etc. Such concepts are also compatible with the Chinese central government’s policies. The ability to speak the same language as U.N. officials, World Bank officials, and the Chinese central government assisted the originally uninvited participants to sit at the same table as these officials and to discuss issues with them on a more or less equal footing.
Since the Rio Summit in 1992, NGOs appear to have solidified their status within the intergovernmental environmental arena. They have become active participants at U.N. conferences, especially those addressing sustainable development. U.N. conferences seem to have legitimated an NGO presence in the international arena. It now appears, moreover, that U.N. conferences can be a vehicle for activism. Green Watershed was able to justify its group participation at the U.N. symposium in Beijing, based on this international trend.

Green Watershed has acquired practices of activism through its relational ties with the IRN. Yet, what if Green Watershed had acted alone? Would the Chinese authorities still have included Green Watershed in the U.N. conference? It is almost certain that the higher profile of international NGOs, such as the IRN and OXFAM America, helped to lend Green Watershed legitimacy while attending the U.N. symposium. Consider that Green Watershed was prevented from participating in an international conference in Laos in early 2005 when it acted alone. Provincial authorities stopped staff members of Green Watershed at the Kunming airport and confiscated their passports. According to Yu, the provincial authorities did not want Green Watershed to travel to abroad and publicize the Nujiang dam hydropower controversy outside China.

The incident above does not imply that all members of the provincial government are uniformly against Green Watershed. Another incident shows that Green Watershed has supporters within the provincial government. The NGO’s submission of a report condemning the proposed Nujiang dam to both the Central Disciplinary Committee in Beijing and the YPG (Yunnan Provincial Government) almost caused the arrest of the leader of Green Watershed and the closure of the NGO. But Green Watershed found
defenders in the Yunnan Civil Affairs Bureau, the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, and the Yunnan Association of Science and Technology, its sponsor organization (Economy 2005).\textsuperscript{158}

Yu, the founder of Green Watershed, calls his organization a “risk-taker NGO.” According to him, there is only a small number of risk-taker NGOs in China that try to push the political envelope. The majority of Chinese NGOs are, he maintains, not risk-takers. He placed a glass upside down on the desk and asked me to imagine that there was a grasshopper inside.

At the beginning, the grasshopper will try to jump its maximum, not seeing himself surrounded by a glass wall. Gradually, he will learn how high he can jump without hurting himself. The grasshopper is tamed, and will become a “good boy,” knowing his limitations.

Yu, Green Watershed

Yu and Green Watershed do not mind taking risks as an NGO as evidenced through its collaboration with the IRN with regard to the Nujiang dam controversy. However, Green Watershed does not wish to be labeled as a die-hard anti-dam group, such as the IRN, because it believes that it would undermine its ability to maintain an open dialogue with the Nujiang county government and the people. Therefore, Green Watershed tones down the politically sensitive elements (e.g., ethnic minority rights) of its anti-dam discourse, and frames its arguments based on compliance with existing international guidelines and Chinese laws on resettlement. Green Watershed also reaches

out to dam supporters, hoping to find common ground between opponents and supporters. For example, it met with Nujiang county officials and the dam developers.

The Diffusion of Anti-Dam Activism among Chinese NGOs

Green Watershed’s controversial anti-dam activism helped to publicize the Nujiang dam case. As a result, other environmental and non-environmental NGOs outside Yunnan became interested in the Nujiang dam controversy, and consequently became aware of some new tactics of activism.

Although China’s current legal framework is designed to keep China’s NGOs fragmented and highly localized (Ho 2001), the Nujiang dam controversy has given China’s environmental constituencies opportunities to work together. Although NGOs (both the environmental and non-environmental varieties) have been reluctant to officially endorse Green Watershed’s somewhat radical tactics, some NGOs have been unofficially supportive of Green Watershed’s efforts. For example, one NGO in Beijing made its office space available to Green Watershed during the U.N. symposium.

In Beijing, NGOs such as the Green Earth Volunteers and the Institute for Environment and Development (IED), along with a journalist group, created a Nujiang website¹⁵⁹ and printed a colorful pamphlet to educate the public on the endangered Nujiang. Financial support for the initiative was provided by many established Chinese ENGOs, including Global Village Beijing (GVB), Green China, and Friends of Nature (FON), as well as international NGOs, including Green Peace Hong Kong, the

¹⁵⁹ http://www.nujiang.ngo.cn.
Siemenppu Foundation, and Conservation International. The pamphlet, “Our Attachment to Nu River,” contains beautiful color photographs of scenery and people, in an effort to appeal to public sentiments about Nujiang. The pamphlet discusses the importance of Nujiang, pointing out that it is an ecological hotspot, a UNESCO World Heritage natural site, and a habitat for ethnic minorities. The pamphlet certainly targets China’s educated urban middle class, who comprise a large portion of China’s environmental constituency.160

These Beijing NGOs had, in appealing to China’s middle class, initially used emotional and sentimental discourse by emphasizing the sacred image of nature and the social disruptions to ethnic minority populations in the Nujiang county if the dam were to be built. But in February 2004, after Prime Minister Wen Jiabao suspended the dam construction plan until an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) study could be completed, the group stopped applying this type of discourse and grew more interested in using international discourse regarding the dam project. (The reasons will be discussed in the next section.)

After the suspension, environmental NGOs shifted their strategies to employ “‘legal mobilization,’ a form of political activity by which the citizenry uses [existing laws, institutions, and norms] on its own behalf” (Zamans 1983: 690). This form of mobilization has recently spread as a framework of activism in China to challenge governments, regardless of causes and settings (urban or rural).161 Environmental NGOs

160 As I argued in Chapter Four, China’s environmental activism has largely been led by the Chinese intellectual class, who are an urban-based middle class.
perceived the enactment of China’s 2003 Environmental Impact Assessment Law as an opportunity for stronger activism and to gain more support from domestic elite allies. For example, in August, 2005, sixty-one Chinese social organizations and ninety-nine Chinese individuals signed a petition, submitted to the Chinese central government, calling for public disclosure of the EIA report on the (temporarily suspended) Nu River hydropower dam development project. A majority of the sixty-one Chinese organizations were environmental NGOs. Also joining the petition were a few Chinese law firms, women’s rights NGOs, and worker’s rights NGOs. The petition suggests that various types of Chinese NGOs now engage in legal mobilization and work together.

Political Opportunity Structures (POS) for Activism against the Nujiang Dam

The tight relational ties between the IRN and Green Watershed explain in part the successful diffusion of innovative anti-dam activism in the Nujiang case. However, they do not fully explain why anti-dam strategies among Chinese environmental NGOs as a group have shifted from sentimental discourse to legal mobilization.

As I briefly stated in the previous section, the shift coincides with the enactment of the 2003 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) law, which has created new political opportunities for anti-dam activism. I argue that the enactment of China’s EIA law has encouraged Chinese NGOs to take advantage of the state’s sensitivity to its own official political rhetoric—“The creation of a legally governed nation (fazhi guojia jianshe)”—and to request the state’s compliance with its own laws. Under the above-mentioned political opportunities for anti-dam activism.

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For a discussion of legal mobilization in China’s rural context, see Kevin O’Brien and Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
slogan, the Chinese state has been emphasizing the importance of abiding by the law, its hope being that respect for the law will help to govern the nation more effectively. This central government’s policy has created unexpected opportunities for Chinese NGOs. They can now try to take advantage of state vulnerability to its own official rhetoric. Now, it has become much more difficult for the central government to dismiss even anti-dam activism flatly, due to the demands of compliance with existing international guidelines and Chinese laws on resettlement.

I also argue that the recent, legal empowerment of elite governmental allies who have been willing to join with Chinese NGOs in the name of particular causes has also provided political opportunities for Chinese NGOs and their activism. China’s EIA law requires—as with EIA laws in other countries—environmental reviews in the planning stages (before construction) of major public and private development projects, as well as public consultation. The enactment of China’s EIA law in 2003 not only provided Chinese ENGOs with a legal basis for their activism, but also empowered the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) by assigning it the gatekeeper role in approving environmental reviews. Prior to the EIA law, as I explained in Chapter Four, SEPA did not have much bureaucratic power to implement and enforce environmental laws and regulations. SEPA now seeks to take advantage of this opportunity and expand its own bureaucratic power by allying with Chinese ENGOs, and consequently enforces environmental laws and regulations more effectively. SEPA’s ambitions promise opportunities for Chinese ENGOs in the future via alliances with the regulation agency.

The Nujiang dam controversy became a first test case for SEPA’s empowerment. The agency, despite its weak administrative standing in Chinese bureaucratic politics,
criticized the proposed Nujiang dam project in its official newspaper, after the powerful National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) approved the construction in August 2003. In the following month, SEPA became a gate-keeper with the enactment of the EIA law.

Taking advantage of its newly endowed gate-keeper role, SEPA has allied with China’s major environmental constituencies, including academia and Chinese environmental NGOs, in order to enforce the EIA law. For example, immediately after the enactment of the EIA law, SEPA convened an expert meeting on the Nujiang dam in Beijing on September 3, 2003. In addition to academic meetings, SEPA also organized China’s first “Green Forum,” a public relations event attended by environmental NGOs, which took place in October, 2003. During the forum, Wang Yongchen, a staff member of the Green Earth Volunteers, an environmental NGO based in Beijing, collected signatures from Chinese music and film stars on a petition for the protection of the Nujiang. She eventually collected sixty-two signatures.162

The Ford Foundation: Ideas of, and Support for, NGOs

The Ford Foundation, one of the major U.S. philanthropic organizations, is an International NGO. It was the first foreign foundation to open a field office in China (in Beijing in 1988). The Ford Foundation is—and has long been—the largest INGO donor

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to China. From 1988 to 2002, the Ford Foundation spent nearly $150 million US on China program grants.\textsuperscript{163}

The China program’s goals are to: (1) strengthen democratic values; (2) reduce poverty and injustice; (3) promote international cooperation; and (4) advance human achievement.\textsuperscript{164} The Ford Foundation typically works with technical elites, such as policy elites and social science elites, in government, academia, and non-governmental institutions.\textsuperscript{165} Building a close working relationship with such elites has enabled the Ford Foundation to walk along fine political lines in China and to maintain its cutting-edge reputation among donors.\textsuperscript{166} The Ford Foundation was the first INGO to take up many politically sensitive issues in China, such as HIV/AIDS, sexuality and reproductive health, human rights, civil society, village elections, and migrant labor.

Unlike TNC and the IRN, the Ford Foundation is not an international Environmental NGO. To the Ford Foundation, the environment is not specifically a conservation or an anti-dam issue. Rather, the Ford Foundation has supported a broad, environmental-based agenda, largely by assisting organizations that engage in environmental projects. Among Ford’s China programs, the Environment and Development Program was its largest in 2000 and 2001 (Ma 2006: 191) and has remained


\textsuperscript{165} However, Ford’s relationships with government and civil society vary by country. For example, the Ford Foundation must deal with the government in India, while in Kenya, Ford mainly works with civil society because the Kenyan government is not much interested in monitoring Ford’s projects. Interview with Nick Menzies, March 2004.

\textsuperscript{166} Interviews with staff members from both INGOs and bilateral agencies in China.
one of its major programs. Under the program, the Ford Foundation has made grants to Chinese government organizations, INGOs, and Chinese NGOs. In particular, the funding has been invaluable to the emergence and the sustainability of Chinese environmental NGOs. Many individual organized Chinese environmental NGOs are grantees of the Ford Foundation.

The Ford Foundation and Yunnan

Since the opening of the field office in Beijing, the Ford Foundation has focused on China’s Southwest, particularly Yunnan province. In 2000, 41.3 percent of the Ford Foundation’s China program grants went to Yunnan (Ma 2006: 193). Ford’s historical involvement since the late 1980s in investing human resources in Yunnan and its support for the emergence of environmental NGOs in the province help to make Yunnan a good research site for studying the diffusion of ideas and the creation of NGOs. Without the Ford Foundation’s early involvement in the province, it might have been difficult for Yunnan’s NGOs to start up and to sustain themselves. Ford’s involvement in Yunnan caused a snow ball effect by attracting the attention of more donors, which eventually led to Yunnan becoming known among the donor community as China’s sole periphery province with active international cooperation.

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168 Yunnan ranks fifth from the bottom out of 31 provinces and cities on the United Nations Development Program’s Human Development Index of 1999 (with a score of 0.51). According to 2005 China Human Development Report, published by the China Development Research Foundation, Yunnan ranks 29th (with a score of 0.657).
The Ford Foundation first became involved in Yunnan with its poverty alleviation project. In 1986, the Chinese central government officially undertook poverty alleviation in rural China as part of the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1986-90). Once the Ford Foundation’s Beijing Office opened in 1988, it agreed, at the request of China’s State Council, to render assistance to China’s efforts at poverty alleviation. The Ford Foundation, in its FY 88 China program review, stated that, with the opening of the Beijing Office, it intended to increase its access to, and its contacts with, the Chinese people and Chinese grantees located beyond China’s major cities (Ford Foundation 1987, 5). The Foundation’s physical presence in Beijing made the organization better suited to fund a long-term project-based program, which requires more monitoring, through site visits, than in comparison to the cultural and educational exchange programs it had provided in the past. In 1989, the Ford Foundation decided to fund China’s first ODA project on poverty alleviation, the Yunnan Uplands Management Program, under its Rural Poverty and Resources Program (Ford Foundation 1995), which changed its name to the Environment and Development Program in 1999.

The Ford Foundation chose Yunnan not only because of its severe poverty, but also because of its geographical proximity to Southeast Asian countries. The Ford Foundation had funded similar projects in mountainous areas in Thailand. Mountainous areas in both Thailand and Yunnan have a high concentration of poor ethnic minorities.

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169 To this day, the situation in rural China continues to be one of the primary concerns of the Chinese government. The government recently labeled the problem “San Nong” (three Nong) problems. The Nong refers to Nong Cun (Villages), Nong Min (peasants), and Nong Ye (agriculture).

170 Even as late as 1994, there were 73 national grade poverty counties in Yunnan, or about 12% of the total number (592) of national grade poverty counties in the entire nation. Yunnan’s number of national grade poverty counties was the highest of any of the three southwest provinces. Sichuan Province had 43 and Guizhou had 48 such counties. http://asp2.6to23.com/hope2/ziliao/zl002.htm. Accessed April 17, 2004.
and share similar ecological characteristics. The Ford Foundation hoped that the
scientific knowledge and operational expertise acquired through its past projects in
Thailand would be useful to Yunnan (Ford Foundation 1988).

Yunnan’s perceived backwardness and its political unimportance in the eyes of
China’s political center was also a blessing because the Foundation wished to implement
experimental projects, emphasizing the “participatory approach,” in places where the
political and bureaucratic constraints would likely be less than in major cities.

The Yunnan Uplands Management (YUM) Program

In 1990, the Ford Foundation began funding the “Yunnan Uplands Management
(YUM) Program,” China’s first ODA project on rural poverty. (The program lasted from
1990 to 1999.) The Yunnan Poverty Alleviation Office (YPAO) led YUM, bringing
together 11 governmental institutions in Yunnan. The YPAO proposed that the YUM
project aim at reducing the severe poverty suffered by poor populations in the
mountainous Yunnan uplands through community development. From the Ford


172 My experience as a researcher in Yunnan was that I had easier access to Yunnan’s provincial offices in
comparison to the Beijing bureaucracies. Yunnan government officials often joked about how lucky I had
been to choose Yunnan as my research site.


174 The 11 institutions included three governmental agencies: the Yunnan Poverty Alleviation Office
(YPAO); the Yunnan Agriculture Agency; and the Yunnan Forestry Agency. Eight research institutions
were involved: the Kunming Institute of Botany (KIB); the Kunming Institute of Ecology (KIE); Southwest
Forestry College; the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences (YASS); the Yunnan Academy of Sciences
(YAS); Yunnan Agriculture University; the Yunnan Academy of Forestry; and the Yunnan Institute of
Geography. In addition to the original 11 institutions, two governmental agencies—the Yunnan Land
Management Agency and the Yunnan Water Electricity Agency—participated later.

175 The average annual net income per peasant in Yunnan’s minority counties is 1,025 RMB (U.S. $120).
Foundation’s standpoint, the YUM would be a vehicle for producing local technical elites who could speak the same “language” in the field of international development as their international counterparts through exposure to social science methods, such as the participatory approach. The “language” refers to concepts, knowledge, and methodologies associated with development projects in the world. The Ford Foundation views the application of social science knowledge and methodologies to policy formulation as critical in effectively addressing development problems. The Ford Foundation hoped that Yunnan elites through the YUM program would adopt this vision.

In practice, the Ford Foundation program officers emphasized this vision through their personal interactions with YUM participants when they paid on-site visits to Yunnan and/or when they had telephone dialogues over grant proposals subsequently submitted by the YUM office. In fact, Ford’s program officers were carefully guiding the YUM office in the drafting of grant proposals.

YUM had three major project components, two of which were dedicated to training participatory approaches, such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), a method associated with social forestry projects. Forest management is especially a useful concept in Yunnan as its provincial territory has a large amount of forest coverage.

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177 Interview with Nick Menzies, March 2004.


179 In the field of development, a set of activities over forests, such as forest planning, property and management rights, and the distribution of benefits derived from forestry, have come to be called social or community forestry. Ford Foundation, Annual Review on Rural Poverty and Resources/Poor Area Development, 1993.
First, the basics of PRA were introduced in classroom settings. PRA methods were referred to as “new and innovative” methods in communicating with local elites, so that those being taught might feel privileged to learn the methods. PRA instructors came from overseas, including the Philippines, the UK and the USA. One instructor was PRA’s founder, Dr. Robert Chambers from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex in the UK. The international atmosphere helped to legitimize the importance and seriousness of the PRA training taking place in Yunnan. Secondly, PRA was practiced in the field. After the provincial officials and government researchers became familiar with the concepts and methods of PRA in classroom settings, some participants in their twenties from four research institutions in Kunming, were sent to poverty stricken villages in order to conduct fieldwork by applying PRA. YUM’s third project component was the Overseas Educational Fellowship program, which began in 1993. It was intended that YUM participants would fortify their knowledge and experience learned through the program via overseas education.

Through the YUM program, the ability to speak the same “language” as their counterparts in the international development community became a source of cultural capital among Yunnan elites, along with the ability to speak, read, and write English. Today, Yunnan has a group of professionals who have the technical ability to draft successful grant applications in English, along with the ability to be able partners in ODA projects. The “knowledge profession” (Madsen 1987) has expanded in Yunnan and perhaps beyond. Yunnan’s professionals have begun to serve as ambassadors to the
neighborhood provinces, such as Sichuan and Guizhou, in sharing technical knowledge and PRA.\textsuperscript{180}

The ability to speak the same “language” facilitated communication between global actors and Yunnan’s technical elites. Yunnan’s technical elites became more open toward attracting foreign aid. Seeking foreign money is no longer viewed as begging or as a compromise with foreigners, but rather as a proof of intellectual sophistication, of skills and talent.\textsuperscript{181}

**NGO Development**

The Ford Foundation, through the YUM program, was able to create technical professionals who now speak the language of the participatory approach. But, to Ford’s regret, the YUM program could not change operational practices and the mentality of the governmental institutions of the YUM participants. The diffusion of the technical methods taught via YUM stopped at the individual level and did not extend to the institutional level.

I suggest a reason for the failure. Most of the YUM participants were relatively young staff members at their governmental institutions. The young were selected for YUM because their command of English was typically better than that of older staff, because they were often more eager to learn something new, and because they typically

\textsuperscript{180} Interviews with Anthony Saich, April, 2004.

\textsuperscript{181} Nick Menzies’ fieldnotes, dated Oct. 29, 1989, documented that an old cadre of elites in government did not hesitate to express their suspicions concerning ODA. By contrast, my interviews with about 25 of Yunnan’s elites in government, research institutes, universities, and NGOs, between August 2003 and November 2004, found them speaking with pride about having obtained foreign funding and having undertaken international projects.
had less significant administrative responsibilities than senior researchers at their home institutions. When the young YUM participants returned to their home institutions, they did not have the voice or power to institute PRA and other technical knowledge inside their own organizations. They learned new and innovative methods by participating in YUM, but their old institutions had insufficient innovative capacity or inclination to adopt the methods. Vested institutional interests opposing change may have been stronger than young innovative voices.

During the YUM program, the Ford Foundation was concerned about the generally weak capacity of Chinese local governmental institutions to deliver public services. The Foundation began identifying “which institutions and individuals had potential to go further and had ideas that were worth supporting.”\textsuperscript{182} In the mid-1990s, the Ford Foundation also decided to support the development of civil society by adding a civil society program as a new theme to its China program. The Foundation, in its Program Reviews of 1995, stated that China’s civil society, if it could be said to exist in China, was weak. The Foundation also suggested that many Chinese NGOs are “set up by government agencies to tap alternative, non-governmental sources of funding.”\textsuperscript{183} Nonetheless, Ford saw possibilities for the development of the NGO sector as an agent of civic development and decided to fund Chinese NGOs.

In its civil society program, the Ford Foundation initially began selling the Chinese central government on the idea of building intermediate organizations that could


\textsuperscript{183} Ford Foundation Program Reviews, Beijing, February 1995.
provide technical information to governments at all levels. The Foundation emphasized the usefulness of such intermediate organizations to complement the government’s work. This line of argument was in harmony with China’s official vision of civil society, which was as a provider of social services rather than as an agent of social change.

To assist in the development of civil society in China, the Ford Foundation funded the Yunnan PRA Network, a membership association, which was founded in 1993 as a result of the comraderie developed during PRA training. In China, education-based social networks, such as those formed by university alumni, are very strong. The Yunnan PRA Network has about 100 members, consisting of staff from the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences (YASS), and from universities, research institutes, and governments. The Yunnan PRA Network engages in social forestry types of projects and applies PRA.

The Ford Foundation also provided financial assistance to the Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge (CBIK), which was founded by four KIB staff members in 1995 as Yunnan’s first environmental NGO. CBIK’s leader was a YUM participant. (In Chapter Four, I discussed CBIK.) The Ford foundation paid for CBIK’s annual NGO registration fee of 30,000 RMB (U.S. $3,600). Without the registration fee, CBIK could not have officially registered as an NGO with the Yunnan Civil Affairs Office. The Ford Foundation also funded CBIK’s first project, based on a grant proposal, which gave CBIK its initial start as an NGO. The Ford Foundation has been a major donor for CBIK ever since. CBIK feels that it would have not survived without the Ford

184 Interviews with a former Ford Foundation Program Officer, August 2004.
Foundation’s financial support. CBIK has in very recent years reduced its heavy financial reliance upon the Ford Foundation by diversifying, attracting income from other foreign donors. In 2005, the Ford Foundation accounted for only 20 percent of CBIK’s foreign source funding.

Conclusion: A Comparative Analysis of the Three INGOs

Below, I have created Table 5-1 in order to comparatively analyze the three cases of INGOs discussed. The Ford Foundation, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the International Rivers Network (IRN) are all U.S. based, but are each a different type of INGO—philanthropic, environmental, and social movement organizations,— respectively. The chief commonality among them is that each INGO uses issues of the environment as a vehicle for their advocacy. Yet, what they wish to achieve in China in relation to the environment and their means to achieve their goals also differ. The Ford Foundation, through making grants, aims to create and then support organizations that can apply social science methods to environmental projects. TNC aims at conservation by implementing its conservation projects. The IRN supports anti-dam activism.

By making the decision to operate within China, these three INGOs have all subjected themselves to China’s political opportunity structures (POS): state vulnerability to certain environmental issues, the capacity for state repressiveness, and the existence of elite allies within various levels of government. INGOs must decide how to deal with these political environments.

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185 Interview, June 3, 2004.

Table 5-1 A Comparison of Three International NGOs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Organization</th>
<th>Ford Foundation</th>
<th>The Nature Conservancy (TNC)</th>
<th>International Rivers Network (IRN) Hong Kong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year of Initial Involvement in Yunnan</td>
<td>Philanthropy</td>
<td>Environmental NGO</td>
<td>Social Movement Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 (1)</td>
<td>1998 (2)</td>
<td>2003 (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals in Relation to Environment</td>
<td>The creation of and support for environmental organizations</td>
<td>Conservation</td>
<td>Anti-Dam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Grant-making</td>
<td>Project Implementation</td>
<td>Activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Vulnerability to Their Goals</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Relations</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>No Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial Relations</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>Initially Good, Now Poor</td>
<td>No Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Adopters</td>
<td>• Policy/Technical Elites • Environmental NGOs</td>
<td>Provincial and local governments</td>
<td>Green Watershed (Yunnan NGO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Adopter Relations</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffusion</td>
<td>Very Good (4)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Good (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) The Ford Foundation, however, made its first general-or non-environmental-grant to China in 1952.
(2) The Nature Conservancy conducted its first scientific study in China in 1996.
(3) The IRN was involved in the Campaign Against the Three Gorges Dam in China in the late 1980s.
(4) Diffusion took place when the transmitter and the adopter identified common grounds.
(5) Diffusion took place with modifications.

The diffusion that has taken place between the Ford Foundation and Chinese technical elites was achieved through identifying common grounds. The Chinese state, in
principle, is somewhat vulnerable to the development of environmental organizations because it realizes that China’s environmental problems cannot be solved without the participation of the people. For example, SEPA has been emphasizing people’s participation in environmental protection and has reached out to environmental NGOs.

The Ford Foundation has maintained a very close working relationship with the Chinese state through routine policy dialogues with relevant central governmental officials as well as researchers at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), the Ford Foundation’s supervisory unit. I argue that the Ford Foundation’s close direct relationship with technical and policy elites in governments at both the central and provincial (Yunnan province, in this case) levels helps to explain why the diffusion between the Ford Foundation and potential adopters (technical and policy elites) takes place. The Ford Foundation’s constant policy dialogues with potential adopters in government not only help to develop minimum identification but also ideas and practices that are mutually accepted by the transmitter and the adopter.

The Ford Foundation is a transmitter who is willing to adjust its ideas and practices to fit the Chinese context. For example, the Ford Foundation initially advocated to the central government for the creation of intermediate organizations to assist governments in providing technical information. This line of argument was in harmony with China’s needs for professional organizations. The idea of creating such intermediate organizations to complement the government’s work has produced new organizations that have more innovative ideas and apply technical methods.

The Ford foundation has focused on certain provinces, such as Yunnan, to concentrate its efforts in creating elite allies at the local provincial level. The YUM
program is an example. I conclude that the Ford Foundation’s consistent efforts to engage in dialogues with policy and technical elites within government helps to create elite allies who become, at the same time, potential adopters of Ford’s ideas.

The diffusion between TNC and potential adopters was difficult and ultimately poor. The Chinese state is vulnerable to conservation as it relates to the protection of land from natural disaster (e.g., flood) and the management of natural resources. The state placed conservation as one of the major components of the Western Development Campaign. TNC was invited to come to Yunnan. It was initially successful in forming a minimal identification with Yunnan provincial government officials and in bringing ideas of conservation. At the sub-provincial level, however, TNC failed to achieve a minimal identification among local government officials. TNC sought a quick resolution to this problem by not going back to elite allies within the provincial government, but instead by appealing to President Jiang Zemin at the central government. This tactic backfired. TNC made the provincial elites angry and quickly alienated them.

The diffusion between the IRN and Green Watershed took place with modifications. As a modernist state with the important goal of implementing its Western Development policy, the Chinese State is not very vulnerable to anti-dam activism. Recognizing this, the IRN Hong Kong bypassed the Chinese state and concentrated on forming a tight-knit relationship with Green Watershed in Yunnan. By bypassing the state, the IRN Hong Kong was able to avoid the state’s repressive control via regulations. The IRN’s anti-dam mission is clear. The organization identifies itself as a counter power to modernist states and does not attempt to find elite allies within the government.
Green Watershed adopted the ideas and practices of anti-dam activism, particularly those emphasizing international and domestic legal norms, but avoided taking a clear anti-dam stance. The modification was acceptable to the IRN Hong Kong because China’s political environment significantly affects Green Watershed. It is natural that Green Watershed would be more sensitive to state repressiveness and would seek to develop and maintain elite allies within the government. As I discussed, the Yunnan Civil Affairs Bureau, the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, and the Yunnan Association of Science and Technology all defended Green Watershed when the local NGO angered both the Central Disciplinary Committee in Beijing and the YPG (Yunnan Provincial Government) by submitting a scientific report condemning the proposed Nujiang dam.

Based on the diffusion between the IRN Hong Kong and Green Watershed, I conclude that a minimal identification between the transmitter and the adopter is a necessary condition for the occurrence of diffusion. However, the ideas were not straightforwardly transmitted to Green Watershed due to China’s POS. Because of the IRN’s lack of relationships with domestic elite allies and the lack of state vulnerability to anti-dam activism, Green Watershed’s relationship with the IRN Hong Kong did not provide the local NGO with political protection. Green Watershed had to protect itself from state repression by finding elite allies in the provincial government on its own.

Based on the three INGO cases, I conclude that the likelihood of diffusion primarily depends upon whether a minimal identification between the transmitter and the adopter is developed. However, POS are so significant in China that they mediate the diffusion process. Both a lack of state vulnerability to anti-dam activism and state
repressiveness influenced Green Watershed to adopt ideas of anti-dam activism with modifications. Green Watershed needed to have local elite allies to protect its position.

The Ford Foundation owes its success with diffusion to consistent policy dialogues with policy and technical elites at the central and local levels. During such dialogues, transmitters and adopters find sufficient common ground. TNC, though it enjoyed high state vulnerability to conservation, failed to foster a minimum identification among sub-provincial officials. TNC failed to maintain local elite allies who could have assisted TNC in the diffusion of its ideas on conservation to potential adopters at the sub-provincial level.
The purposes of this chapter are to review the central findings of my research and to assess the general contributions that my research makes to diffusion theory in Sociology and to other areas of inquiry, including civil society, social movements, international relations, globalization, and environmental cooperation.

The research question that I addressed was: How do INGOs spread ideas and practices regarding global environmental concerns in an authoritarian context? The theoretical framework I used to answer this question was diffusion theory, which is often used in Sociology in the context of social movements. I examined diffusion processes: the conditions and mechanisms through which global environmental concerns spread from INGOs (transmitters) to local actors (adopters) in China, such as governments and NGOs. I focused on the “relational” mode of diffusion, which is the denser, more direct, and more interpersonal mode, based on the relationships between INGOs and domestic local actors. (The “non-relational” mode makes use of the media and the internet.) McAdam and Rucht argue that relational modes primarily create the conditions of diffusion by constructing a minimal identification with transmitters by adopters (1993: 60).

China’s precarious environmental conditions and their current and future impacts on the global environment have become serious concerns for the international community. INGOs, with financial support from Northern governments (developed countries), find
China a good place to operate in order to gain and maintain their own legitimacy as an INGO and they are willing to come to China to render their help.

China’s authoritarian regime recognizes its increasing needs for serious environmental protection efforts, largely due to the economic costs of pollution, and it has shown high “state vulnerability” on global environmental concerns, to the extent that it has reluctantly allowed the emergence of the individual-organized environmental NGO (ENGO), a new type of organization in China that is more autonomous from the state. The majority of such ENGOs in China rely heavily upon financial assistance from foreign sources, including INGOs. While INGOs bring financial resources to China, they also bring new ideas and practices regarding global environmental concerns. Certain ideas and practices in the name of the environment may not be compatible with state interests.

The Chinese regime is wary of the social and political impacts of interaction between INGOs and the Chinese ENGO sector, especially because environmental activism in several formerly authoritarian countries played an important role in the democratization process. China has therefore not only imposed a legal framework upon social organizations, but has also imposed its official discourse upon civil society in efforts to control the social and political impacts of such organizations, including ENGOs. Given the repressive nature of the Chinese regime, its knowledge of the history of ENGOs in democratization movements, and its historically cautious attitudes toward external influences, the diffusion of ideas and practices regarding global environmental concerns, faces substantial challenges.
Summary of Central Findings

The central findings of my study are: (1) INGOs as transmitters play significant roles in determining the likelihood of diffusion, and (2) the external political environment mediates diffusion processes. My study affirms McAdam and Rucht’s argument (1993) that the likelihood of diffusion primarily depends upon whether a minimal identification between the transmitter and the adopter is developed through constant and direct interpersonal contacts (relational channels). My findings go beyond their argument by suggesting that the ability of an INGO to construct a minimum identification with potential adopters and its willingness to reinvent ideas and practices to fit the local environment are critical factors in predicting whether diffusion will take place. Largely due to China’s political environment, some INGOs (transmitters) are willing to compromise, within limits, on the implementation of their own ideas and practices by allowing adopters flexibility in addressing other local concerns.

Global environmental concerns are not disseminated from INGOs to Chinese adopters in a straight-forward way because of the particular nature of the Chinese state and the particular sets of relations between INGOs and the state. My study presents a complex portrait of the diffusion process, one that goes beyond simply the relationship between the transmitter and the adopter, meditated by the external political environment.

The case of the Nature Conservancy (TNC) demonstrated that TNC failed to construct a minimal identification among local government officials at the sub-provincial level; it also failed to maintain a minimal identification among provincial government officials. With no solid minimal identification between transmitters and adopters, state vulnerability to conservation was not sufficient for diffusion to take place in a local
setting. TNC further failed to allow its ideas of conservation to be reinvented to fit the local (adopter’s) needs and interests. As a result, the quality of the diffusion between TNC and potential adopters was poor.

TNC initially succeeded in constructing a minimal identification among provincial officials through its cooperation efforts in dialogues and via provincial workshops. TNC and the Yunnan Provincial Government (YPG) jointly produced a blueprint for the Yunnan Great River Project (YGRP). But communicating with less educated local government officials at the sub-provincial level about conservation turned out to be a very difficult task for TNC. The INGO’s failure to achieve a minimal identification among local government officials contributed to a delay in the implementation of the YGRP.

TNC also failed to maintain the minimal identification established with provincial officials. TNC’s meeting with President Jiang Zemin at the central government—an effort to use Jiang’s authority to solve the implementation problem in Yunnan—angered and alienated provincial officials who otherwise might have continue to support ideas of conservation. Although ideas of conservation were strongly supported by the Chinese state, TNC could not leverage this support because of its failure to construct or maintain a minimal identification with potential adopters. The INGO may have underestimated the difficulties in constructing a minimal identification with sub-provincial level officials and in maintaining support from provincial elite allies.

TNC also failed to allow the reinvention or adaptation of its ideas of conservation to fit the local environment. The mission statement of the YGRP interprets the project more from an economic development standpoint than from a conservation standpoint.
Thus, it was legitimate for local officials to expect economic benefits from the project to accrue to their counties. As Prof. Qu pointed out, TNC seemed to maintain its own ideas of conservation, not emphasizing economic development enough to obtain the willing cooperation of local officials at the sub-provincial level. TNC also lacked the expertise required to reinvent or adapt its ideas of conservation. The blueprint for the project included some income generation programs, and the INGO faced difficulties in implementing these programs, having never before addressed poverty alleviation needs or dealt with a large population.

The cases of both the Ford Foundation and the International Rivers Network (IRN) presented good evidence of diffusion. These cases demonstrated the important roles that INGOs play in constructing a minimal identification with potential adopters because both INGOs made considerable efforts in that regard. These cases also suggest that the relationship between INGOs and the Chinese state influences the reinvention and adaptation of ideas on global environmental concerns.

The diffusion that has taken place between the Ford Foundation and Chinese technical and policy elites was achieved through the INGO’s lengthy efforts in identifying common grounds with potential adopters. The Ford Foundation, one of the major US philanthropic organizations, typically works with policy and technical elites within governments. It has worked, for example, with China’s State Council, with its Ministry of Civil Affairs, and with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). The Ford Foundation’s constant policy dialogues with potential adopters in governments not only help to develop minimum identification among them but also ideas and practices that are mutually accepted by the transmitter and the adopter. In addition to policy
dialogues, the Ford Foundation also uses grant proposals as a communicative tool with potential grantees (adopters).

The INGO was successful in convincing the Chinese state to allow the creation of NGOs that could serve as intermediate organizations, complementing the government’s work as a provider of social services. Ford was successful even though the emergence and development of such organizations may lead to unintended consequences for Chinese society or may complicate the rule of the Chinese party-state. The state’s high vulnerability on issues of the environment, however, provided Ford with a safe area of advocacy.

The Ford Foundation has focused on particular provinces, such as Yunnan, and particular types of organizations, such as ENGOs, to concentrate its efforts in creating elite allies at the local provincial level. The Ford Foundation’s consistent efforts to engage in dialogues with policy and technical elites within different levels of government has resulted in the creation of elite allies who are, at the same time, potential adopters of Ford’s ideas.

The diffusion between the IRN and Green Watershed took place with modifications. The IRN typically works with a global network of local communities, social movement organizations, NGOs, and other partners. As a social movement organization known for its clear anti-dam stance, the IRN recognizes that its interests are not compatible with those of the modernist Chinese state. Thus, the IRN Hong Kong bypassed the Chinese state and concentrated on forming a tight-knit relationship with Green Watershed, a local ENGO, in Yunnan. They jointly engaged in activism opposing the Nujiang hydropower dam project in Nujiang county. Despite the three-hour air travel
time between Hong Kong and Yunnan’s capital of Kunming, the IRN staff members visited Green Watershed in Kunming on a regular basis to conduct field visits together in villages affected by the dam project. Through these efforts, a minimal identification was established between the IRN and Green Watershed.

Green Watershed adopted the ideas and practices of anti-dam activism, particularly those emphasizing international and domestic legal norms, but avoided taking a clear anti-dam stance. This modification was acceptable to the IRN Hong Kong because China’s political environment significantly affects the ENGO.

It is natural that Green Watershed would be sensitive to state repressiveness and would seek to develop and maintain elite allies within the government. Although its relationship with the IRN Hong Kong rendered Green Watershed legitimacy in the international arena, such as at UN conferences, the INGO did not provide the ENGO with political protection from China’s repressive state. Green Watershed had to protect itself from state repression toward anti-dam activism by finding elite allies in the provincial government on its own. And Green Watershed believed that a strong anti-dam stance would undermine its ability to maintain an open dialogue with the Nujiang county government and the people. Therefore, the ENGO toned down the politically sensitive elements (e.g., ethnic minority rights) of its anti-dam discourse and framed its arguments based on compliance with existing international guidelines and Chinese laws on resettlement.

**Contributions of My Study of INGOs in China**
Primary Scholarly Contributions: Diffusion Theory

Diffusion theory provided a powerful framework for addressing my research question. Building on insights from both diffusion theory and empirical observations of the Chinese cases, my study identified the key variables that help to explain different outcomes of diffusion from INGOs (transmitters) to local actors in China (adopters), such as governments and NGOs. These variables are: (1) an INGO’s ability to construct a minimal identification; (2) an INGO’s ability to cooperate with the state and elite allies in governments; (3) an INGO’s ability or willingness to reinvent its own ideas for the sake of local implementation; and (4) external factors that mediate diffusion processes.

By documenting the significant and varied roles that INGOs play in diffusion processes, the findings based on my case studies challenge the predominant adopter-centered diffusion theory, which envisions adopters as key actors in the diffusion process and assumes a lack of agency on the part of transmitters (INGOs in my study). I argued that INGOs, or what I call “concerned transmitters,” fully participate in the constructive nature of diffusion and that INGOs’ relations with potential adopters, as well as the state, shape diffusion processes. My study on the three INGOs (transmitters) in Yunnan illuminates these processes. It sheds light on the roles that transmitters play in the cultural construction of a mutually acceptable identification. It demonstrates how INGOs may readjust their ideas to fit local contexts. It suggests that if INGOs do not possess the ability or desire to construct a minimal identification, to work with the state and elite allies in governments, and to reinvent its own ideas for the sake of local implementation, then diffusion is not likely to be achieved.
My findings also begin to fill in a gap in the existing literature by highlighting the importance of examining external political and cultural structures, for they shape the interpersonal relations between transmitters and adopters. The existing literature demonstrates little concern for external structures because it largely focuses on the interpersonal relations between transmitters and adopters. My findings illuminate the importance of examining the political structures of the adopter’s country, which mediate the cultural processes in which both the construction of identification and the reinvention of ideas between transmitters and adopters are embedded. Political structures are perhaps especially important in a repressive authoritarian political context, such as that of China.

My study further identified key variables that help to assess the effects of domestic political structures on the diffusion process in a repressive authoritarian context. To analyze the fourth variable, presented above, important in explaining the outcomes of diffusion, I developed a new set of variables based primarily on key dimensions of political opportunity structures (POS) in social movement theory (see Chapter Two). These new variables were: (1) the degree of state vulnerability; (2) the presence or absence of elite allies; and (3) the state’s capacity and propensity for repression.

In a normative sense, as was seen in Chapter Four, the Chinese state has shown high “state sensitivity” on global environmental concerns. It was the state’s conscious choice that led to the early formation of the Chinese environmental regime, which consists of environmental governmental institutions and environmental laws and regulations. Largely due to concern for the future pollution costs, the Chinese state has, since the mid-1990s, reluctantly allowed environmental NGOs (ENGOs), which tend to be led by Chinese intellectuals, to emerge. However, China’s state vulnerability to issues
of the environment has not necessarily been transferred to local governments. A lack of vulnerability to environmental issues at the local government level helps to explain why TNC struggled in Yunnan. And it was not, as the two cases of Yunnan’s ENGOs, showed, local environmental problems explaining the emergence of local ENGOs, but rather “organizational entrepreneurs with professional expertise and international connections” (Yang 2005, 61). The international environmental agenda, not the local environmental agenda, was more important to Yunnan ENGOs in their emergence and development.

The degree of state vulnerability to global environmental concerns differs depending on the specific goals of INGOs. As was documented in Chapter Three, the newly emerging NGO sector in China, including INGOs, operates under the tight control of a repressive state. The Chinese state not only imposes a legal framework upon social organizations, but also imposes its official discourse on civil society in efforts to control the social and political impacts of the NGO sector. According to the state’s official discourse, NGOs are social service providers who complement the government’s work (e.g., on poverty alleviation). As a result, any Chinese NGOs and INGOs that engage in activism on politically sensitive topics must proceed carefully.

As the Three Gorges Dam controversy in the late 1980s demonstrated, the Chinese state has shown low state vulnerability on anti-dam issues. The IRN Hong Kong chose to bypass the state because it was well aware that its anti-dam activism would not be viewed as compatible with state interests. Because of the lack of state vulnerability to anti-dam issues as well as a history of state repressiveness toward state counter-interests, Green Watershed adopted the IRN’s ideas of anti-dam activism with modifications. At
the same time, Green Watershed sought a political protection from the repressive state by developing domestic elite allies within provincial governments that could provide support for its organization and activities.

As Chapter Five documents, the presence or absence of elite allies significantly affects the diffusion process. For example, the presence or absence of elite allies was the key dimension affecting diffusion in the cases of the Ford Foundation and TNC.

China’s state vulnerability was not highly relevant to the Ford Foundation’s goal of creating new types of social organizations within China, including ENGOs. In order to advance their goal, the Ford Foundation, through dialogue, developed policy and technical elite allies within different levels of government. Through the development of such elites, the Ford Foundation was able to identify common grounds with potential adopters.

TNC enjoyed high state vulnerability to its primary goal of conservation, but it failed to develop elite allies at the local level and failed to maintain its elite allies at the provincial level.

As Chapter Three documents, after the 1989 Tiananmen student movement, the state’s capacity and propensity for repression toward NGOs were institutionalized. The state imposed both a legal framework upon social organizations and its own official discourse on civil society in efforts to control the social and political impacts of NGOs, including INGOs. While all INGOs with offices in China were subjected to the repressive state through the registration process, the Chinese state also specifically targeted foreign foundations for repression by enacting the 2004 Regulations for the Management of Foundations. The likelihood of the state repressing an INGO depends
most crucially on the INGO’s goals. TNC’s primary goal of conservation, for example, was not in conflict with the state’s views of its own interests, whereas the IRN’s primary goal of anti-dam activism was construed by the IRN itself as being in conflict with the state interests. Thus, TNC sought support from the state, and the IRN avoided contact with the state.

Secondary Scholarly Contributions: Civil Society, Social Movements, International Relations, and Environmental Cooperation

By providing both theoretical insights on, and empirical observations of, INGOs in the field of environmental protection and within China’s political environment, my study also contributes to other areas of scholarly inquiry. These areas are civil society, social movements, international relations, globalization, and environmental cooperation. The study’s specific contributions to each area are presented below.

First, my study contributes to our understanding of the status of China’s emerging civil society and of the mechanisms by which China’s party-state is trying to control its development. Although China’s current legal framework is designed to keep China’s NGOs fragmented and highly localized (Ho 2001), the activism over the Nujiang Hydropower Dam controversy tells us that Chinese ENGOs are extending their networks to each other. As the 2005 petition promulgated by multiple NGOs (See chapter Five) showed, social networks of activism went beyond ENGOs, extending to other types of social actors, such as women’s rights NGOs, worker’s rights NGOs, lawyers, and academics. This is important evidence that Chinese social actors have been learning political action and practicing new activism jointly.
By focusing on social actors and organizations, civil society theory has made important contributions in explaining domestic political changes and political transitions to democracy. In non-democratic settings, civil society organizations tend to become increasingly well organized and powerful and eventually challenge the authority and legitimacy of incumbent authoritarian regimes. The activism over the Nujiang Hydropower Dam controversy suggests that environmental activism among Chinese NGOs has begun to shift from politically benign issues, such as animal protection, to politically sensitive issues, such as dam construction and the displacement of people. This shift suggests that a certain level of autonomy from the state now exists among Chinese NGOs and that they are comfortable in exploring the limits of their autonomy. Chinese ENGOs appear willing to push the boundaries of their autonomy despite the political risks involved. The empowerment of Chinese ENGOs is also supported by certain state organizations, such as SEPA. SEPA seeks to strengthen its low administrative standing in the central government by allying with China’s major environmental constituencies, including academia and Chinese ENGOs, in order to enforce EIA law.

Secondly, my study contributes to social movement, specifically in regard to how environmental activism emerges and develops in non-democratic regimes. The need for such a contribution is especially acute in relation to Asia. As J. Timmons Roberts states, “compared with the avalanche of literature on the Americas, Europe, and even Africa, Asia has remained a virtual blind spot in attempts to understand environmental change and environmental social movements from a global or comparative perspective” (Roberts 1995).
Under the political oppression of non-democratic regimes, environmental issues have provided a relatively safe forum where people can push the political boundaries. Environmental movements in Eastern Europe (especially in Hungary and Lithuania) and the Soviet Union were instrumental in bringing down communist regimes (Gille 2000; Pickvance 1998). In Asia (e.g., South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines), environmental organizations have been part of larger social movements opposing authoritarianism and advancing democratic participation (Lee et al. 1999; Weller and Hsiao 1998; Alford and Shen 1998).

Thirdly, my study helps to provide both international relations scholars—who are interested in non-state actors—and social movement scholars—who are interested in the international dimensions of movements—a more comprehensive understanding of non-state actors by documenting the dense, micro-level interactions of INGOs with domestic local actors in an authoritarian context. Such micro-level analysis would seem to complement the international relations literature, which tends to focus on macro-level international or transnational relationships, such as transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikknik 1998).

Scholars in international relations and social movements have concentrated on the kinds of help that global actors offer local actors. INGOs not only help local actors financially (Keck and Sikknik 1998; Passy 1999), but also help them to acquire international recognition for their activities, as well as domestic legitimacy from the state (Keck and Sikknik 1998; McAdam 1998). My focus goes beyond that to include the recognition and legitimacy that INGOs seek through alliances with local actors and explores the limitations of INGOs in diffusion processes.
Keck and Sikknik, in their study on transnational advocacy networks on human rights, have speculated that China provides a “difficult environment” for effective transnational activities because the repressive state is independent from material external pressures, such as aid and economic and military pressure (1998a: 208). Although it is true that the Chinese state is independent from material external pressures, my study suggests that the Chinese state has high state vulnerability to issues of the environment. This vulnerability suggests that the likelihood of the state repressing an INGO depends most crucially on the INGO’s goals. The Chinese state has historically low vulnerability, for example, to issues of human rights.

Local actors are very careful of the repressive state. Although some Chinese ENGOs have developed a close relationship with INGOs, and appreciate the financial support and technical assistance provided by INGOs, they prefer to dialogue with the Chinese state by themselves rather than involve foreigners. Local actors are not willing to use what Keck and Sikknik (1998) call “the boomerang effect”: asking INGOs to try to bring pressure on the Chinese state from the outside. For example, even Green Watershed, the ENGO that engaged in innovative anti-dam activism through its interactions with the IRN Hong Kong, has sought to maintain its independence from its international allies. This is a method by which the ENGO protects itself from the repressive state. Thus, “the boomerang effect” has not taken place in China.

Fourthly, my study sheds light on the globalization processes by which ideas and practices flow—via new transnational actors, such as INGOs—and more or less homogenize. Although transnational actors are powerful actors in such processes, this
does not mean that local actors are either passive recipients or active resistors. The flow of ideas and practices can go both ways.

Finally, my study contributes to our understanding of donor practices by providing concrete examples of the difficulties that donors face in advancing their causes under different political structures. My study serves the needs of environmental policy-makers and practitioners by providing concrete cases of diffusion on global environmental concerns. Such information could be used to aid in establishing cooperative mechanisms in the field of environmental management and environmental law and regulations.

I modified diffusion theory using a unique set of variables based on political opportunity structures (POS) so as to incorporate the external political environment into my analysis. This modification I intended not only to aid in understanding the Chinese case better, but also to provide a better framework for understanding diffusion cases in other political contexts.

China provides an interesting research site for the study of the diffusion of ideas and practices on global environmental concerns in non-democratic settings between INGOs and Chinese adopters. As discussed above, my study makes significant contributions to diffusion theory in Sociology and to other areas of scholarly inquiry.
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