

Development of Citizen-Organized Environmental NGOs in China

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Abstract Social movement theories provide a framework for explaining the post-1990 rise in China's citizen-organized environmental nongovernmental organizations (ENGOS), which consisted of at least 128 organizations as of 2004. We use a political process model, which is based on favorable political opportunities, cognitive liberation, and indigenous organizational strength, to explain the sharp growth in citizen organized ENGOS. In addition, we employ a world society perspective to help clarify why the political environment in China became favorable for ENGO growth, and how international ENGO practices were diffused within China. Our analysis shows that the relatively high status of ENGO founders together with their personal and professional networks also played important roles in ENGO growth.

Résumé Certaines théories du mouvement social offrent un cadre pour expliquer comment la montée, suite aux années 1990, d'une structure pour expliquer comment les Organisations non gouvernementales environnementales organisées par les citoyens chinois, qui a présidé à la création d'au moins 128 organisations dès 2004. Nous utilisons un modèle de processus politique, basé sur la force organisationnelle indigène, pour rendre compte de la croissance de grande ampleur qui a été l'œuvre des Organisations non gouvernementales environnementales organisées par les citoyens chinois. De plus, nous faisons recours à une perspective de société globale pour nous aider à clarifier pourquoi l'environnement politique en Chine a adopté les Organisations non gouvernementales environnementales, et comment les pratiques de leur internationalisation ont été diffusées au sein de la Chine. Notre analyse

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montre que le statut relativement haut des fondateurs les Organisations non gouvernementales environnementales de concert avec leurs réseaux professionnels a également joué un rôle important pour leur croissance.

Zusammenfassung Theorien der sozialen Bewegung bilden einen Rahmen, um die Zunahme von nichtstaatlichen Organisationen für den Naturschutz (Naturschutz-NGOs), die in China von Bürgern nach 1990 organisiert wurden, und von denen es bei 2004 wenigstens 128 Organisationen gab, zu erklären. Wir nutzen ein political-process-model, das auf günstigen politischen Möglichkeiten, kognitiver Befreiung und einheimischer organisatorischer Stärke basiert, um den starken Zuwachs an Naturschutz-NGOs, die von Bürgern organisiert sind, zu erklären. Zusätzlich wenden wir die Perspektive einer Weltgesellschaft an, um erklären zu helfen, warum das politische Umfeld in China für die Zunahme von Naturschutz-NGOs günstig war und wie Praktiken internationaler Naturschutz-NGOs innerhalb Chinas verbreitet wurden. Unsere Analyse zeigt, dass das relativ hohe Ansehen der Gründer von Naturschutz-NGOs zusammen mit deren privaten und beruflichen Netzwerken ebenfalls wichtige Rollen beim Zuwachs von Naturschutz-NGOs spielten.

Resumen Las teorías de los movimientos sociales ofrecen un argumento para explicar la aparición en China de organizaciones no gubernamentales ambientalistas (ONGA) organizadas por ciudadanos tras la década de los 90, que suman, al menos, 128 organizaciones desde 2004. Para explicar el fuerte crecimiento de las ONGA organizadas por ciudadanos, hemos utilizado un modelo de proceso político, basado en oportunidades políticas favorables, la liberación cognitiva y la fuerza organizativa indígena. Además, empleamos una perspectiva de sociedad mundial para ayudar a aclarar por qué el entorno político de China ha sido favorable al crecimiento de las ONGA, y cómo las prácticas de las ONGA se difundían en China. Nuestros análisis demuestran que el estatus relativamente alto de los fundadores de las ONGA junto con sus redes personales y profesionales han desempeñado también un importante papel en el crecimiento de las ONGA.

Keywords China · Environmental NGOs · Political process model · World society · Social movements

Introduction

A number of researchers have examined the rapid increase—since the mid-1990s—in the number of Chinese environmental nongovernmental organizations (ENGOS), but explaining this rise in ENGO formation remains a challenge. This paper examines factors affecting the growth in numbers of a particular group of ENGOS, namely, those organized and led by citizens.¹ Before presenting our research

¹ The term “nongovernmental organization” is not used in Chinese official documents. We use the term as it is commonly employed in other countries and by environmental groups in China. For a discussion of use of the term “nongovernmental organization,” see (Ru 2004, pp. 16–21).

methods and results, we introduce aspects of social movement theory and previous studies of Chinese ENGOS, as well as some characteristics of the 128 citizen-organized ENGOS included in our study. Our results are then detailed in four parts concerning: (1) Characteristics of and relationships among ENGO founders at the time their organizations were created, and how these characteristics and relationships affected the ability of founders to function as organizational leaders; (2) Use of a political process model of social movements to explain ways in which elements of that model account for the proliferation of citizen-organized ENGOS that took place starting in the late 1990s; (3) Use of the world society perspective to examine why environmental protection has become part of the Chinese government's agenda since the 1970s and ways in which international environmental practices have been diffused in China; and, (4) Issues regarding the spatial distribution of the 128 citizen-organized ENGOS.

We demonstrate that the political process model of Doug McAdam (1982, 1999)—especially model elements concerning changes in political opportunities—provides a framework for understanding the proliferation of citizen-organized ENGOS in China. We also use the world society concepts of John Meyer et al. (1997a) to clarify why the Chinese state created favorable political opportunities for Chinese ENGOS and how the diffusion of international ENGO practices took place among Chinese ENGOS. We also show that relationships among ENGO founders were important in accounting for the growth in citizen-organized ENGOS.

Social Movement Theories and Prior Studies of ENGOS in China

Scholars have studied the emergence of NGOs and other groups within social movements for many decades, and these studies provide insights that can help explain the emergence and growth of Chinese ENGOS since the late 1990s. We discuss aspects of the literature in terms of the following different perspectives: strain theories; political process models; and the propagation of global cultural values. Concepts in social movement theory linked to resource mobilization are considered in the context of the political process model.

Our intention throughout is not to test or validate particular theories. Instead, we employ theories to help explain our empirical observations. Our overall goal is to understand the range of factors that have contributed to the growth of citizen-organized ENGOS in China.

Strain Theories: Environmental Degradation as a Source of Grievance

The role of social strain or “breakdown” as a factor influencing the creation of social movements is at the core of older social movement theories. For much of the twentieth century, social movements were studied as a subfield of “collective behavior,” which also concerned crowds, rumors, panics, and riots. The underlying theme was that periods of “strain and breakdown [e.g., due to economic depressions] generate collective behavior because the social controls and moral imperatives that normally constrain such behavior are weakened or absent”

(Buechler 2007, p. 47). In the context of social movements, these social strains were seen “as stimulating the formation of advocacy organizations designed to solve pressing social problems” (Jenkins 1987, p. 298).

There is a psychological emphasis in these traditional theories: in addition to having common grievances, individuals share: “generalized beliefs... about the causes and possible means of reducing grievances” (McCarthy and Zald 1977, p. 1214). Collective action is hypothesized to occur when the grievances become too burdensome for individuals to tolerate. Critics of these theories have frequently argued that social strains sufficient to cause significant grievances in a society can be found at any time. McAdam (1999, p. 11) observed that “at best, system strain is a necessary, but insufficient, cause of social movement.” McCarthy and Zald (1977, p. 1285) went further by arguing that, for some purposes, “grievance and discontent may be defined, created and manipulated by issue entrepreneurs and organizations.”

While strain theories have fallen out of favor with social movement scholars in general, Snow et al. (1998) argued it may have been premature for critics to discount strain theory and provided a theoretical refinement to a variation of strain theory referred to as “breakdown theory.” Snow and his colleagues argue that a driving force in the emergence of social movements is the notion of disruption (or threats of disruption) to the taken-for-granted routines and expectations associated with everyday life, what these scholars refer to as the “quotidian.” In the context of the environment, they cite examples of disruptive events consisting of actual (or threatened) violations of zones of privacy and control that individuals consider to be outside the purview of external agents, such as corporations and governments. Their environment-related examples involve the threats posed by toxic waste dumps and other facilities deemed by opponents to be direct threats to human health and safety.

In the Chinese context, severe pollution causing unsafe drinking water or unhealthy levels of air pollution have threatened the normalcy of everyday life. Based on strain (or breakdown) theories, the adverse human health effects caused by pollution might be expected to motivate affected parties to create organizations to curb environmental destruction.

Environmental degradation linked to economic development in China has been extensively documented (see, e.g., Economy 2004). Notwithstanding a broad array of environmental laws and regulations, environmental deterioration continues for reasons that include China’s extraordinary rate of economic growth and inadequate regulatory enforcement. Moreover, some local governments have employed a deliberate strategy of “pollute first, clean later,” which involves promoting growth by intentionally treating polluters leniently (Ho 2006, pp. 13–14).

An explicit link between economic development, environmental degradation, and ENGO formation has been claimed in some contexts. The underlying notion is that after development reaches a level high enough to satisfy safety, security, and other basic human needs, “people start to pursue more luxuriant causes, such as a sense of belonging and quality-of-life” (Ho 2001, p. 894). Some have suggested a relationship between responses to environmental destruction and ENGO formation in China. For example, based on her studies, Brettell lists “the deterioration of China’s environment and a rising awareness of environmental problems by the

public” as “[s]ome of the forces that are encouraging the development of ENGOs” (Brettell 2000, p. 50).

Political Process Models

Another set of ideas from social movement theory highlights the role of a social movement’s context, rather than the psychological state of the movement’s members. These ideas are brought together in a widely cited monograph by McAdam (1982, 1999), in which he introduced a “political process model” to analyze aspects of the civil rights movement in the United States between 1930 and 1970.

McAdam’s model rests on three pillars, one of which he refers to as “cognitive liberation,” a term used to refer to a recognition by individuals that change is called for and that by acting collectively they can bring it about. According to McAdam (1999, p. 48), cognitive liberation depends on “whether favorable shifts in political opportunities will be defined as such by a large enough group of people to facilitate collective protest.” Put another way, as a prerequisite for mobilization, individuals must recognize favorable shifts in political opportunities and believe that their collective action will yield positive changes.

A second pillar of the political process model is linked to the ability to mobilize resources. Do aspiring participants in the movement have what McAdam (1982) termed the “indigenous organizational strength” needed to create and sustain the movement. In this context, McAdam emphasized the importance to a movement of having recognized leaders and associational networks. The general notion of organizational capacity—the ability to mobilize resources by raising money, rallying supporters, having elite allies, gaining media attention, and so forth—is common to both the indigenous organizational strength concept detailed by McAdam and the resource mobilization perspective on social movements elaborated by McCarthy and Zald (1977) and Jenkins (1983), among others. Over time, the distinctions between the terms indigenous organizational strength and resource mobilization have blurred. However, originally the stress in the resource mobilization literature was on formal “social movement organizations,” whereas proponents of the political process approach argue that the most consequential social movements have depended on grassroots or indigenous organizational strength.²

The third pillar of the political process model concerns the structure of political opportunities, and this is the part of the model we and many others have emphasized (cf. Meyer 2004). In elaborating on the significance of political opportunities, McAdam (1996) made connections to earlier work by Lipsky (1970), arguing that it recognized that the “ebb and flow of protest activity was a function of changes that left the broader political system more vulnerable or receptive to the demands of particular groups” (McAdam 1996, p. 23). He also referred to work by Eisinger (1973), who employed the term “political opportunity structures” to help account

² Doug McAdam, Stanford University, personal communication via email on November 23, 2008.

for variations in “riot behavior” in American cities. As McAdam (1996, p. 23) put it:

Within ten years, the key premise informing the work of Lipsky and Eisinger had been appropriated as the *central tenet* in a new ‘political process’ model of social movements. Proponents of the model... saw the timing and fate of movements as largely dependent upon the opportunities afforded insurgents by the shifting institutional structure and ideological disposition of those in power. (emphasis added)

In response to charges that the term “political opportunities” was so ambiguous that it had lost its power as an analytic construct, McAdam reviewed the literature to identify the following four dimensions of political opportunity structures, which, he argued, were “highly consensual”: (1) The relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system; (2) The stability or instability of that broad set of elite alliances that typically undergird a polity; (3) The presence or absence of elite allies; and, (4) The state capacity and propensity for repression (McAdam 1996, p. 27).

Later we present our own analysis of favorable shifts in political opportunities for Chinese ENGOs. Here we indicate ways in which such changes have been detailed by others. Ho, for example, describes the central government’s support for ENGOs as a part of what he called the “greening” of the Chinese state, a process that helped shape the gradual development of ENGOs in China (Ho 2001, pp. 897–898). Some scholars have explained the state’s support for ENGOs as reflecting the central government’s recognition of its limited capacity both to address adverse effects of development and to monitor local enforcement of national environmental rules (Thompson and Lu 2006; Turner 2004; Wong 2005; Yang 2005). In this regard, for example, Schwartz (2004, pp. 45–46) highlights the ability to have highly committed ENGO members assist “an over-strained and under-funded environmental protection bureaucracy” with aspects of environmental policy implementation, and the goodwill and funding from the international community that these ENGOs attract. He also notes that although environmental protection is a major concern among the Chinese people, it is not a politically threatening cause and ENGOs generally lack a broader political agenda.

World Society Perspectives

While our explanation for the growth of Chinese ENGOs relies heavily on the analytic framework provided by the political process model above, we also use the world society perspective of John Meyer and his colleagues to provide insights into why new political opportunities for Chinese ENGOs emerged and how ideas related to practices used by ENGOs in other countries were diffused. In a widely cited paper, Meyer and others explored the proposition that “[m]any features of the contemporary nation-state derive from worldwide models constructed and propagated through global cultural and associational processes” (Meyer et al. 1997a, pp. 144–145). Subsequent papers from a number of researchers demonstrated the diffusion of these worldwide models in the specific context of environmental

management and international ENGOs (Frank et al. 2000a, b, 2007; Hironaka 2000; Meyer et al. 1997b).

In the view of Meyer and his colleagues, the nation-state is “culturally constructed,” where the “culture involved is substantially organized on a worldwide basis, not simply built up from the local circumstances and history” (Meyer et al. 1997a, p. 147). A modern nation-state adopts “universalistic cultural principles” and practices as part of the process of presenting itself as rational and responsible member of the world community. Policies and goal statements may be quite different from realities on the ground, but this occurs because of the challenges in making operational elements taken from foreign countries that may not be consistent with domestic practices and resource availability. One of the outcomes of these global processes is what Frank et al. (2000a, p. 96) characterized as the “global institutionalization of the principle that nation-states bear responsibility for environmental protection.”

The social construction of terms like “nature” and “environment” has also played a role in this global institutionalization process. As argued by Frank et al. (2000a), in the mid to late nineteenth century, nature was viewed in the context of “creationism.” Within a half a century, the framing had changed and nature was increasingly viewed as a resource to be used by humans, but nature’s bounty was not to be wasted by reckless or inefficient use. Still another shift in meaning and usage occurred in the last half of the twentieth century, when the term “environment” came to be used more frequently than “nature,” and environment was often presented in a global context; consider, for example, terms such as “global ecosystems” and “global climate change.”

The work of Hironaka (2000) on the global diffusion of environmental impact assessment (EIA) requirements demonstrates the reasoning used by scholars who have adopted this world society perspective in the context of environmental management. Soon after EIA requirements were implemented in the United States in 1970, they began to be adopted by other nations. By 1990, about 50 countries had formally adopted EIA laws and regulations, and many others were carrying out EIAs because of requirements imposed by multilateral and bilateral aid agencies. Hironaka (2000, p. 67) argues that “in most countries, EIA legislation has been adopted primarily in response to encouragement from the global environmental regime rather than due to the intrinsic procedural efficiencies of the EIAs or due to pressure from domestic environmental groups.” In Hironaka’s analysis, elements of this global environmental regime include:

- International governmental organizations—e.g., OECD and the United Nations Environment Programme—which provided guidelines for instituting EIA legislation as well as advisors and training;
- International NGOs, such as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, which encouraged the many agencies and citizens groups among its members to push for EIA legislation in their home countries;
- Bilateral and multilateral aid organizations, which promoted EIA by requiring it as part of development loan packages; and,

- Technical specialists who were able to use science to present EIA as a procedure applicable in all countries.

Legitimation takes place as a result of these different processes. As Meyer et al. (1997a, p. 157) point out, one process “by which world-societal elements authorize and fashion national states... [is through] the legitimation of the actorhood of such subnational units as individuals and organized interests.” Moreover, they argue, “in pursuing the externally legitimated identities and purposes by creating agencies and programs [e.g., environmental protection programs], nation-states also promote the domestic actors involved,” such as domestic ENGOs (Meyer et al. 1997a, p. 160).

In commenting on the role of organizational legitimacy in the growth of Chinese ENGOs, we employ a definition of legitimacy due to Suchman (1995, p. 574): “A generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.” For Suchman (1995, p. 574), organizational legitimacy exists when members of a society agree that an organization (or an organizational form such as ENGOs) is aligned with socially accepted ideas about what goals, activities, and structures are appropriate or correct. Thus, the more ENGOs are viewed as commonplace elements in the Chinese sociopolitical arena, the more legitimate they become in the eyes of both the government and the citizenry.

For an organization, legitimacy has practical advantages. In addition to being able to mobilize members and attract supporters, legitimated organizations are able to withstand claims of being unnecessary (Meyer and Rowan 1977, p. 350). We argue below that the legitimacy afforded by China’s NGO registration process has allowed ENGOs to become legally recognized and has opened up opportunities for obtaining training and support from international ENGOs. On a related matter, the central government’s support of ENGO participation in international environmental meetings contributed to the acceptance of ENGOs, whether properly registered or not, as a legitimate organizational form in China.

Research Approach

Results from studies of Chinese ENGOs are often not comparable because they characterize fundamentally different types of “social organizations” (*shehui tuanti*) as NGOs.³ Three main categories of social organizations can be distinguished: organizations created, organized, and managed by state agencies (often referred to as government-organized NGOs or “GONGOS”); organizations created and run by citizens; and a collection of various hybrid forms that lie between the other two types.

In studying NGOs in China, scholars have often selected small samples of NGOs opportunistically (e.g., based on access to interview subjects) and used case studies to formulate their arguments. Even though organizations created and managed by

³ In China, the term “social organizations” (*shehui tuanti*) refers broadly to not-for-profit organizations that are voluntarily organized by citizens to pursue their members’ interests. These organizations are legally required to register with civil affairs agencies at different levels of government based on the geographic scope of their activities. For details, see Ru and Ortolano (2008).

government agencies would not satisfy a typical definition of an NGO, many researchers have treated them as NGOs. For example, Wu (2002) included as an NGO the Center for Environmental Education and Communication, an organization classified officially in 2004 as a non-enterprise entity (*shiyè danwei*) and managed by the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA, elevated in 2008 to be the Ministry of Environmental Protection).

Our study differs from many others dealing with Chinese ENGOs in the following two ways: (1) All organizations in our study have a comparable organizational form: citizen-organized ENGOs, which are ENGOs founded and run by citizens; and, (2) Our research includes 128 such organizations, whereas most studies of Chinese ENGOs look at only one or several organizations.

Definition of Citizen-Organized ENGOs

In China, the term “nongovernmental organization” is not used in official government terminology. Given the absence of a government definition, we define a group as an NGO if it possesses the following characteristics (regardless of the group’s name or whether it is registered with the government): organized, private, self-governing, nonprofit, socially oriented, and voluntary (cf., Salamon and Anheier 1997, pp. 33–34). Furthermore, an NGO is an *environmental* NGO if its primary goal is protecting the environment by either curbing pollution or protecting nature, or both. Finally, we add the modifier, *citizen-organized*, for an ENGO that was founded by citizens and elected its leaders without any intervention by the state. This definition excludes so-called “government organized NGOs.” Because environmental groups founded by college students operate primarily within their affiliated colleges and universities, we did not include them individually in our study. (On the importance of college student groups, see Lu 2001.) However, *alliances* of student environmental groups that have acted far beyond the boundaries of individual universities or colleges are included.

Identification of Citizen-Organized ENGOs

To generate as complete a list of citizen-organized ENGOs as possible (up to and including 2004), we used “snowball sampling” along with a review of relevant literature, Internet resources, and media reports. Results of the first national ENGO survey, carried out by the China Environmental Federation (CEF 2006), were also employed. In addition, we searched grant lists of domestic and international organizations that supported NGOs in China.

Using procedures noted above, we identified, as carefully as we could, the population of citizen-organized ENGOs in China as of 2004. We found 128 such entities, and used data on them to explain the growth of citizen-organized ENGOs based on some of the theories noted above. We searched the Internet and reviewed literature to obtain information such as the founding date, names and backgrounds of ENGO founders, and government registration status.

In addition, we held face-to-face interviews with leaders and key members of 16 citizen-organized ENGOs in 2001 and 2002 in Beijing, Yunnan, and Sichuan; and in

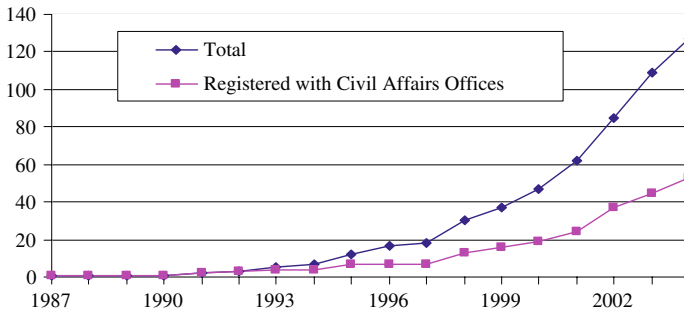


Fig. 1 Growth of citizen-organized ENGOs (1987–2004)

2006 we conducted telephone interviews with leaders of nine additional citizen-organized ENGOs. Constraints on resources and information prevented us from obtaining information directly from founders of the remaining ENGOs. In total, we gathered more than just basic data on 67 of the 128 organizations.

Figure 1 shows the years in which the 128 citizen-organized ENGOs were created. Only one of these NGOs was founded in the 1980s, and as of 1994 the total number was still less than a dozen. The rapid growth in citizen-organized ENGOs took place later, with an annual growth rate of 25% between 1995 and 2004.

In 2004, at least 53 of the 128 ENGOs were registered in accordance with regulations issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA), and at least 25 of them used other strategies for gaining a legal right to exist as an organization; for example, by registering as a for-profit entity or using other registration strategies described by Lu (2007). In addition, at least 32 of the 128 ENGOs violated the law in that they were not registered in any form with the government. We were unable to identify the registration status of the other 18 ENGOs in our study.

We begin our analysis by presenting characteristics of the subset of 67 citizen-organized ENGOs for which we have relatively detailed information. We then take up the question of why the number of citizen-organized ENGOs began increasing sharply after the mid-1990s. This question is analyzed using the political process model of Doug McAdam as supplemented by the world society perspective of John Meyer and his colleagues. Finally we attempt to explain the spatial distribution of the 128 ENGOs using a version of strain theory, but find that observed data are not consistent with outcomes expected based on strain theory.

Characteristics of Citizen-Organized ENGOS

The analysis of ENGO characteristics below is restricted to 67 of the 128 citizen-organized ENGOs we were able to identify as of 2004. Information is from our face-to-face and telephone interviews with 25 of the 67 ENGO founders, and Internet and print sources of information on the other 42 founders. We were unable to obtain the detailed information needed to include the remaining 61 of the 128 ENGOs in the discussion below.

Connections among ENGO Founders

As shown in Fig. 2, notable connections exist among founders of 31 of the 67 ENGOs. (Names of organizations in the figure are given in Table 1.) Arrows in the figure represent the following relationships: (1) Founder(s) of an ENGO targeted by an arrow worked in the other organization before creating the targeted NGO (some ENGOs had more than one founder); and/or (2) In establishing an ENGO, the founder(s) of the organization targeted by an arrow received direct support from the other ENGO.

Figure 2 also shows that an organization may have relationships of the aforementioned types with more than one ENGO. For example, the founder of the Tibetan Antelope Information Center (TAIC) had previously worked as a volunteer in three NGOs: the College Student Green Forum (Green Forum); Friends of Nature (FON); and Green Camp. Thus three arrows point towards TAIC.

Collectively, the five ENGOs with relatively large circles in Fig. 2—China Small Animal Protection Association (CCAPA); FON; Green Earth Volunteers (GEV); Green Camp; and Green Forum—had a direct or indirect influence on the creation of almost all other organizations in the figure. Founders of these five organizations were directly linked to founders of about 20 other ENGOs. In some cases, founders of some of these five organizations (e.g., Green Forum) were themselves founders of other ENGOs.

As shown in Fig. 2, FON has had a particularly extensive influence on China’s environmental movement. Founders of 17 of the 67 citizen-organized ENGOs examined here were once FON members, staffs, volunteers, or supporters. Notwithstanding the broad reach of FON, it has not created local branches. One reason is that local branches are prohibited under registration procedures created by MOCA. According to one of GEV’s leaders, the Chinese government views “overly large networks suspiciously” (Jin Jiaman, cited by Turner and Wu 2001, p. 12). In addition, leaders of the new organizations started with FON’s assistance often believe that in starting a new NGO they can best meet their particular environmental objectives using their own strategies. For example, the founder of CAWA, who was

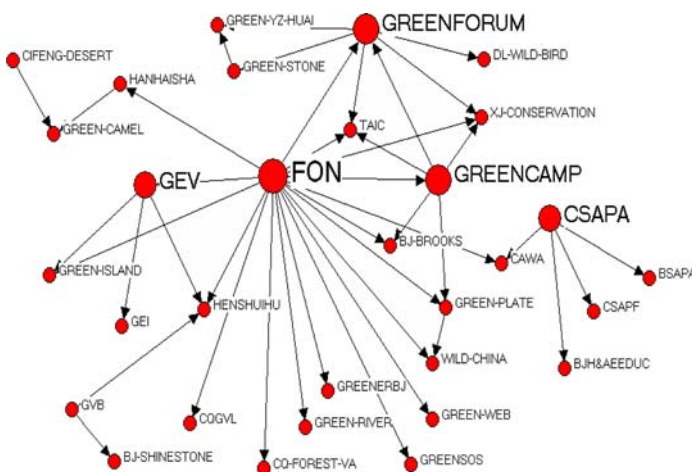


Fig. 2 Connections among founders of citizen-organized ENGOs

Table 1 Acronyms for ENGOs in the network of founders

Acronym	ENGO	Acronym	ENGO
BJ-Brooks	Beijing Brooks Education Ctr.	Greenerbj	Greener Beijing
BJH and AEEDUC	Beijing Human and Animal Environ. Education Center	Greenforum	College Student Green Forum
BJ-Shinestone	Beijing Shine Stone Community Action	Green-Island	Green Island
BSAPA	Beijing Small Animal Protection Association	Green-Plate	Green Plateau
CAWA	Capital Animal Welfare Association	Green-River	Green River
Cifeng-Desert	Cifeng Desert Green Engineering Institute	GreenSOS	Green Student Organizations Society
CQ-Forest-VA	Chongqing Forest Volunteer Association	Green-Stone	Green Stone
CQGVL	Chongqing Green Volunteer League	Green-Web	Green Web
CSAPA	China Small Animal Protection Association	Green-YZ-Huai	Green Yangtze and Huai Rivers
CSAPF	China Small Animal Protection Fund	GVB	Global Village Beijing
DL-Wild-Bird	Dalian Wild Bird Society	Hanhaisha	Han Hai Sha
FON	Friends of Nature	Henshuihu	Henshuihu Earth's Daughter Environment Volunteer Assoc.
GEI	Global Environ. Institute	TAIC	Tibetan Antelope Info. Center
GEV	Green Earth Volunteers	Wild-China	Wild China Film
Green-Camel	Green Camel	XJ-Conservation	Xinjiang Natural Conservation Fund
Greencamp	College Student Green Camp		

connected with both FON and CSAPA, created CAWA after determining that neither FON nor CSAPA could effectively protect small animals, which was her area of interest (interview with CAWA founder, Beijing, March 2001).⁴

Many highly connected founders in Fig. 2 had experience working with international NGOs, and thus they became conduits for diffusing widely accepted international NGO practices among Chinese ENGOs. In this context, we use the term “practices” to include the procedures that ENGOs use to raise funds, manage projects, and develop the capacity of staffs and volunteer members.⁵

⁴ For numerous examples of FON's influence on other NGOs, see Economy (2004, pp. 146–149).

⁵ Based on their interactions with international ENGOs, a few Chinese ENGOs in our study developed a sense that they should have (a) rights to access environmental information held by the government and (b) rights to participate in environmental decision making processes. These are norms of good governance; the state should make information and participation opportunities available to citizens because citizens have a right to this.

By helping to create additional ENGOs and providing their own socially accepted ENGOs as models, founders of FON and other organizations at key nodes in Fig. 2 helped to make the existence of ENGOs more commonplace and thus more comprehensible to the society at large. Legitimacy of ENGOs is enhanced when they are viewed as ordinary elements of a society.

Characteristics of ENGO Founders

Below we characterize the founders of most of the 67 NGOs examined here based on education, profession, and national stature. Figure 3 includes educational background percentages based on data for only 60 of the 67 organizations because we were unable to ascertain educational backgrounds of seven of the 67 founders. As the figure shows, founders of 85% of the ENGO founders in the sample of 60 have an educational background that includes at least one degree from a college or university. This is notable given that only 5.4% of China's population in 2004 had a college education or higher (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2005). Our results are consistent with those in a national ENGO study (CEF 2006), which showed that over 90% of all surveyed ENGO leaders had a college education.

Table 2 lists the occupations of founders of all 67 citizen-organized ENGOs before those individuals established their NGOs. In total, 48 of the 67 ENGOs (73%) had founders who can be characterized as professionals inasmuch as they worked as: business people, college and university professors, government officials, journalists, military officers, members of local Political Consultative Conferences (PCCs), researchers, writers, and other white collar professionals. The remaining 19 were volunteers, photographers, farmers, workers, students, high school teachers, and NGO staff members.

Moreover, of the 19 NGO founders who did not have professional jobs before becoming ENGO leaders, six had a relatively high status because they were well-known environmental activists in China based on their earlier experiences with other NGOs. Among the other 13 leaders, one was a nationally-famous

Fig. 3 Educational degrees of founders of 60 citizen-organized ENGOs

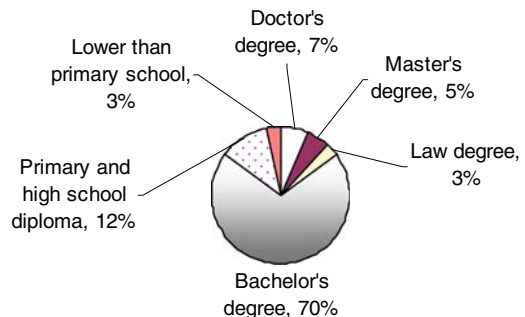


Table 2 Occupations of founders before establishing NGOs

Occupational category	Number
Volunteer	1
Photographer	1
Military officer	1
PCC member	1
Writer	2
Farmer/Worker	3
Student	4
High school teacher	4
Businessman/businesswoman	5
NGO staff member	5
Government official	6
College/University professor	7
Researcher	8
Journalist	9
Other white collar professions ^a	10
Total	67

^a This includes software engineers and other white collar jobs (typically held by only one of the founders) that could not be grouped with other categories

photographer and explorer, and another, a high school teacher, was nationally known for her school-based environmental activities.

ENGO founders with high status and strong *guanxi* networks are often able to use status and *guanxi* together to effectively advance their organizations. (*Guanxi* relationships, which play an important role in Chinese daily life, are based on long-lasting relationships built through mutual exchanges of favors and/or gifts; see Xie and Mol 2006, p. 276.) The combined influence of status and *guanxi* is clearly seen in the context of ENGOs attempting to register with MOCA, since registration involves the often challenging task of finding a governmental body willing to serve as the supervisor and sponsor of the ENGO. The challenges result because possible supervisory units generally see few gains and many risks in sponsoring a group as a social organization. Two examples demonstrate how professional status and *guanxi* can smooth the way to registration. One ENGO founder, a highly respected environmental economist, employed his prior connections with staff of a municipal environmental protection bureau to gain their sponsorship of his organization (interview with ENGO founder, March 2001, Beijing). Similarly, another founder used his reputation as a scientist and his connections with staff at a provincial department to gain their sponsorship for his ENGO (interview with ENGO founder, August 2001, Kunming).

The way in which the *guanxi* of founders has influenced the work of ENGOs is further demonstrated in the context of a proposal to build 13 dams on the Nu River, a case used to illustrate several points in this paper. GEV's founder had a close relationship with a SEPA staff member, and the latter encouraged the founder to help mobilize ENGOs to oppose the proposed dams. Eventually, the contact in SEPA provided the GEV founder with substantive environmental information and

details on how the government's policy debate was unfolding (Lu 2007, p. 61). In addition, FON, an ally of GEV in the anti-dam campaign, used its "strong access to political institutions" to "bring scientific reports made by GEV-related experts [into] various points in the policy making process" (Xie and Mol 2006, p. 283). Other illustrations of how ENGO leaders have employed their *guanxi* networks and informal communication channels to meet organizational objectives are given by Lu (2007) and Xie and Mol (2006).

Political Process Model and ENGO Growth

Below we use McAdam's political process model as a framework for understanding the growth in the numbers of citizen-organized ENGOs. Recall that the model rests on three pillars: (1) "Cognitive liberation," i.e., a group's recognition of political opportunities as they unfold and a sense of the efficacy of collective action to bring about positive changes; (2) The "indigenous organizational strength" a movement needs to mobilize resources and sustain itself; and, (3) Favorable changes in the structure of political opportunities. Below, we elaborate on the form of each of these three pillars in the context of citizen-organized ENGOs in China.

Cognitive Liberation and Indigenous Organizational Strength

There was a sense of cognitive liberation among environmental advocates in China in the late 1980s and early 1990s in that they became aware that collective action could improve the quality of the environment and that, by selecting activities that were non-controversial, they could engage in activities to make improvements without experiencing government repression. These were the years in which activities such as bird watching and environmental education were dominant. As time went on, groups perceived the changes in political opportunities detailed below. Eventually, the citizen-organized ENGOs became confident that they could safely take on more contentious subjects, such as helping the media to expose violations of environmental regulations by both polluters and local governmental officials. The contact with international ENGOs also played a role in the cognitive liberation experienced by the Chinese ENGOs. These interactions, detailed below in our discussion based on the world society perspective, helped domestic ENGOs enhance their sense of political efficacy by giving them new resources and exposing them to new strategies.

The indigenous organizational strength of citizen-organized Chinese ENGOs is based, in many cases, on the leadership abilities of their founders and the enthusiastic, and often highly skillful, volunteers that participate in their activities. Moreover, the networking among domestic ENGO founders contributed significantly to the development of human and social capital with the Chinese ENGO movement: more experienced ENGO leaders shared practices related to working with staffs and volunteers, managing projects, etc., with ENGO leaders who had recently founded their organizations. In addition, by observing well-functioning ENGOs in action, founders of new ENGOs learned about ways of obtaining funding

and mobilizing supporters. And, as elaborated below in our discussion of the world society perspective, the assistance and training provided by international ENGOs (and also foreign governments, e.g., training on fundraising sponsored by the US Embassy in Beijing) also played a role in the capacity building process.

The strength of ENGO networks is reflected clearly in the ENGO-media campaign against proposed dams on the Nu River. In this campaign, the founder of GEV was at the center of a network that included Green Watershed, an NGO in Yunnan Province, as well as several national groups: FON, GVB, and Beijing Brooks Education Center (BBEC) (Xie and Mol 2006, p. 283). Each of these groups had a role in the national campaign, and so did the media. Based partly on the efforts of GEV's founder, a nationally renowned radio journalist, the campaign to stop the dams on the Nu River was covered by more than 180 domestic media outlets (Lu 2007, p. 60).

In reporting on issues linked to the mobilization of resources by Chinese ENGOs, Yang (2005) emphasized the role of ENGO leaders in taking advantage of the media, the Internet, links to international ENGOs, and access to international funding. Economy (2004, pp. 138–169), who detailed the entrepreneurship of a number of founders of Chinese ENGOs, discussed how founders used their political and social connections and organizational skills to attract funding, recruit supporters and, more generally, advance their ENGOs. And Schwartz detailed the several ways that the personal status, entrepreneurial skills, and *guanxi* relationships of a particular ENGO founder, Liang Congjie of FON, were used to “achieve domestic and international credibility for [FON], and attract domestic and international funding” (Schwartz 2004, p. 40).

Changes in the Structure of Political Opportunities

The significance of expanded political opportunities for ENGOs in China is examined below in the context of the four dimensions of political opportunity structures outlined by McAdam (1996): (1) Increasing openness of the institutionalized political system; (2) Instability of elite alignments; (3) The presence of elite allies; and, (4) Diminishing state repression.

In considering the ways in which the institutionalized political system has become more open, we begin by examining the registration procedure the state created to maintain control of all NGOs. While the registration procedure has state control as its goal, it also provided social organizations with an opportunity to gain legal recognition from the state. The legal status of registered NGOs enables them to open bank accounts and have their own official stamps, which are important in preparing contracts and other legal documents. A registered NGO can also purchase official receipts from local finance bureaus for purposes of collecting member dues, as well as official receipts from local tax bureaus for collecting payments for services rendered. The receipts demonstrate the legal status of NGOs and allow the state to keep track of revenues.

Along with the above-mentioned privileges, a registered NGO is subject to a system of state control designed to be operated at two levels: (1) MOCA and its local offices can unregister NGOs that pose problems for the state and punish NGOs

that violate rules; and (2) agencies that sponsor NGOs have responsibilities to supervise their day-to-day operations.

Notwithstanding the state's intention to use a system of dual control, in practice, the supervisory organizations play the principal role in controlling NGOs they sponsor (Ru and Ortolano 2008). Because MOCA and local civil affairs offices face significant resource limitations, they have tolerated the existence of many unregistered social organizations, including ENGOs. In the face of surging associational demands of Chinese society, these offices have simply not had the capacity to register and monitor the large number of social organizations that have been created.

This is not to suggest that MOCA and the local civil affairs offices exert no control at all. From time to time, MOCA and its local offices have exercised strict control by eliminating both registered and unregistered social organizations that were viewed as threatening. In addition, these offices have often penalized NGOs that could be shown, via inspections of required annual audits, to have engaged in financial or other misdeeds.

Apart from the registration process, institutionalized political processes have been opened in other ways, and they are detailed by Ru (2004, pp. 125–133) in terms of the following:

- The central government has included ENGOs in discussions of policies and practices of environmental agencies, and ENGOs have participated in the local implementation of national environmental programs;
- High ranking environmental officials have endorsed and encouraged the work of ENGOs;
- ENGOs have been allowed to participate in international environmental activities, and to accept assistance from foreign organizations, including international ENGOs, such as WWF.

As an example of ENGO inclusion in government activities, the Beijing Municipal Government called upon two citizen-organized ENGOs—FON and GVB—to participate in the planning of the Beijing 2008 Olympics. Interestingly, each of these two ENGOs has an unorthodox registration status in that neither is registered with an office of MOCA.⁶ The irregular registration status of FON and GVB was not a barrier to their planning of the Beijing Olympics or their participation in international activities largely because of the high personal status of the leaders of these ENGOs and their excellent reputations as environmentalists.⁷

The central government is receptive to ENGOs because it sees their local monitoring and “watchdog” functions as important in curbing the adverse impacts of pollution. Chinese leaders recognize that environmental destruction has the potential for limiting China's economic development, and many studies have shown

⁶ GVB is registered with Beijing Industrial and Commercial Bureau as a for-profit company. As for FON, notwithstanding that it has consistently presented itself as an independent ENGO, the organization is a branch of a national NGO registered with MOCA.

⁷ The central government endorsed participation of these two ENGOs in international environmental activities, such as the NGO Forum for the Second GEF Assembly in Beijing and UN Earth Summit in South Africa in 2002.

that damage from air and water pollution has amounted to several percent of China's GDP. For example, the total cost of air and water pollution in China was recently estimated to be as high as 5.8% of GDP (World Bank and SEPA 2007). In addition, China is an integral part of the international community, and encouragement of ENGO activity aligns well that role.

The second of the four dimensions of political opportunity structures in McAdam's analysis involves instability in elite alignments. A lack of agreement among elites is demonstrated by differing views among national and local officials on the desirability of local environmental monitoring by ENGOs, and this division creates opportunities for collective action. In characterizing this split, Cooper (2006, pp. 130–132) describes the central government as being generally supportive of ENGOs, whereas local governments are sometimes quite wary, concerned that ENGOs might become "too independent."

A much discussed example demonstrating how ENGOs were able to engage in political processes as a result of divisions among elites concerns the controversy over proposed dams on the Nu River. Multiple conflicts existed: SEPA opposed the dams, but the National Development and Reform Commission was strongly in favor; and the local government in the vicinity of the dams opposed them, but the provincial government supported them. These differences of opinion provided opportunities for an alliance of ENGOs and the media to wage a nationwide campaign.

In this particular controversy, there has been disagreement among observers about whether the ENGOs together with the media precipitated the divisions among elites or whether these differences existed and the elites used the ENGOs as instruments in meeting their own goals. Some observers (e.g., Thompson and Lu 2006, p. 29) report that an extensive ENGO-media campaign led Premier Wen Jiabao to temporarily halt the proposed dams. However, Lu (2007, p. 61) argues that SEPA opposed the dams well before the premier's decision and encouraged ENGO opposition to obtain "backing from scholars and experts who could put forward cogent arguments against the [Nu River] dams." Lu (2007, p. 63) found that some ENGO leaders see no causal link between the premier's decision and the anti-dam campaign waged by ENGOs and a generally sympathetic media.⁸ As one NGO director put it, this case only demonstrates that "SEPA has been in action, and successfully used NGOs to help achieve its objective" (Lu 2007, p. 63 quoting an NGO director she interviewed). According to this view, SEPA's prior decision to block the dams was based on the proponent's failure to produce a required assessment of environmental impacts. More generally, the relationship between SEPA and the ENGOs in the Nu River case demonstrates that symbiotic relationships sometimes exist between environmental agencies and ENGOs.

The Nu River campaign is also important for what it says about the increasing legitimacy of NGOs. An important part of the media coverage involved educating the public and policymakers by disseminating information generated by

⁸ NGO-media linkages were strong. Green Environmental Volunteers (GEV), one of the NGOs at the center of the movement, has a cofounder who was a journalist; and about 30% of GEV's members were connected to the media (Xie and Mol 2006, p. 283; Lu 2007, p. 60). See also Wen (1998).

environmental experts related to GEV (Xie and Mol 2006, p. 283). As a consequence, many citizens and public officials became increasingly familiar with the work of ENGOs. And Premier Wen Jiabao's endorsement of the ENGO's pleas to halt construction provided further support for the legitimacy of ENGOs (Xie and Mol 2006, p. 287).

The third dimension in McAdam's framework concerns the presence of elite allies. The previously mentioned alliance between SEPA and ENGOs in the Nu River case provides one example. In addition, numerous examples can be provided of endorsements of ENGOs by high-ranking officials. For example, the former administrator of SEPA, Xie Zhenghua, publicly encouraged ENGOs to monitor environmental practices at local levels (Xie made this comment in December 2003 at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, Washington D.C.). In addition, in 1996, both State Councilor Song Jian and Vice Premier Jiang Cunyun backed NGO efforts to protect Yunnan's golden monkeys (Ru 2004, pp. 187–209). And in 2000, Premier Wen Jiabao supported NGO efforts to curb illegal hunting of Tibetan antelopes (Ru 2004, pp. 210–248); as mentioned, he also endorsed NGO efforts to block dam construction on the Nu River (Yardley 2005).

State repression or the lack of it constitutes the fourth dimension in McAdam's framework for analyzing political opportunity structures. There is little question that the state is capable of clamping down on NGOs. Under circumstances in which the state has perceived a threat to its authority (e.g., activities of the Falun Gong in the 1990s), it has imposed increasingly stringent requirements and called for the re-registration of all social organizations, thereby creating a mechanism to eliminate the legal status of problematic registered groups. This is demonstrated in Fig. 4. Between 1992 and 2003, the total number of registered social organizations at first increased, but by 2004, the total number had fallen below 1992 levels. The drop occurred because of a state conducted "cleanup-and-consolidation campaign," implemented from 1997 to 2002. As a result, the number of registered social organization dropped from about 185,000 in 1996 to about 133,000 in 2002.

ENGOs have been relatively free of state repression. In our earlier study (Ru and Ortolano 2008), we found that many of the dozens of ENGOs in that research censored themselves to avoid state interference. These organizations knew, from the experience of others, the kinds of activities that would lead to scrutiny and possible

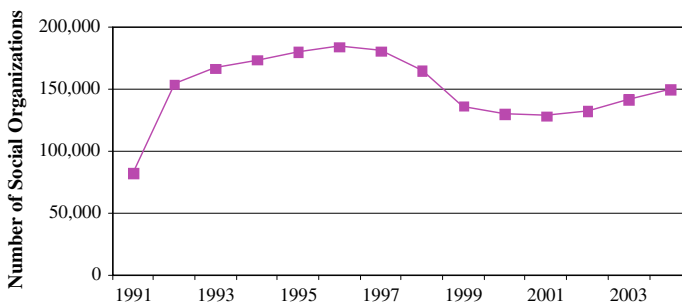


Fig. 4 Growth of registered social organizations. Sources: 1990 to 2001, MOCA (2002); 2002, MOCA (2003); 2003, MOCA (2004); and 2004, MOCA (2005)

repression by state regulators. Examples include using questionable financial accounting and advocating for democratization. The ENGOs felt that by avoiding such activities they could take advantage of favorable political opportunities to pursue their environmental protection goals.⁹

During our face-to-face interviews with founders of 16 citizen-organized ENGOs in this study, they showed little interest in confronting the state. Indeed, several founders made clear their interest in cooperating with the government. For example, when one interviewee created his organization, he felt it “should have a cooperative and harmonious relationship with the government” (interview with founder, March, 2001, Beijing). Another ENGO founder said “the role [of his organization] is to assist the government in promoting development.” He believed his organization could “supplement and expand the government’s efforts in habitat conservation,” but should “not explore options not supported by the government” (interview with founder, August 2001, Kunming). A third interviewee was more circumspect. He said “NGOs had to tolerate the government because they would never be able to achieve their conservation goals if the government did not grant them access to conservation areas” (interview with founder, November 2001, Chengdu).

This is not to say that ENGOs have never been subject to punishments by the government, particularly local governments that have been subject to ENGO monitoring. Indeed, the Nu River basin includes an instance in which activities of an ENGO, Green Watershed, elicited an adverse response: the Yunnan government “launched a thorough investigation [of Green Watershed], restricted its activities and barred its director from traveling abroad” (Lu 2007, p. 62).

World Society Perspective in Analyzing Growth of ENGOs in China

Below we use the basic arguments of the world society approach to comment on the central government’s position on ENGOs and to characterize the diffusion of ENGO practices. The overall argument takes the following form: China’s entry into the global community has been accompanied by pressures to accept principles that are widely viewed as appropriate for modern nation-states. As Frank and his colleagues put it in describing the international diffusion of environmental norms, “there is growing agreement that the nation-state *is by definition* responsible for the continued vitality of the natural environment... and that certain activities (such as designating parks and participating in international bodies) fulfill that responsibility” (Frank et al. 2000a, p. 101, emphasis in original). According to the world society perspective, it follows that China would join other nations in accepting responsibility for protecting the environment and adopting internationally accepted environmental management practices and norms. Frank and his colleagues support their views by showing how, in all parts of the world, the number of environmental activities within nation-states, including the number of domestic chapters of

⁹ This point is emphasized by Tang and Zhan (2008). See, also, Cooper (2006, p. 133). Yang (2005, p. 63) offers a contrasting (but not contradictory) perspective: environmental discourse encouraged by ENGOs “affirms democratic values of civic participation.”

international ENGOS, has skyrocketed since the early 1970s (Frank et al. 2000a, p. 98).

Mechanisms for the broad diffusion of environmental management practices include the work of: International governmental organizations, particularly units of the United Nations, which provide venues to facilitate international environmental treaty formation and environmental goal setting (e.g., the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development); International ENGOS, such as Greenpeace and WWF, with their emphasis on sharing with Chinese ENGOS strategies and other information about day-to-day operations and promoting accountability in environmental policy implementation; and, International development assistance organizations, particularly the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, which advocate the adoption of internationally accepted environmental practices, such as environmental impact assessment for proposed projects and citizen involvement in environmental decision-making. Scientists play a role in all these contexts, since advances in science provide the basis for framing global environmental problems and for arguing that particular practices, such as environmental impact assessment, are universally applicable.

Compared to many other developing countries, the Chinese government recognized the need to take responsibility for environmental management early. An important milestone in this process was China's participation in the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. Based on reports from the Chinese delegation to that conference, Premier Zhou Enlai placed environmental protection on China's agenda. Since the mid-1970s, China has created a sophisticated set of laws and regulations, as well as the administrative apparatus for implementation (Sinkule and Ortolano 1995; Ma and Ortolano 2000).

As mentioned, China has also created formal procedures that allow ENGOS to become registered and therefore recognized as legal entities. The legitimacy provided by the registration process, as well as the previously described encouragement by the central government for ENGOS, allowed these organizations to take advantage of the support offered to them by international ENGOS. Indeed, the privileges associated with registration, such as the ability to set up bank accounts, facilitated the transfer of funds from international to domestic ENGOS.

Many founders of citizen-organized ENGOS have had extensive contacts with international ENGOS. In embracing approaches used by those organizations, the founders contributed to the diffusion of internationally accepted ENGO practices within China, and adoption of those practices enhanced the legitimacy of domestic ENGOS. This view is consistent with Meyer et al. (1997a), who note that legitimating sub-national units such as domestic NGOs is one way through which elements of world culture influence nation-states.

Numerous examples can be cited to demonstrate the mechanisms used to transfer international ENGO practices from foreign ENGOS to domestic ones:

- Founders work abroad at ENGOS—BEDI's founder was a visiting scholar for several years at Resources for the Future, a Washington, D.C.-based ENGO that conducts policy analyses and uses them to apprise decision makers of alternative policy options. This use of policy analysis to inform government officials is the

approach followed by BEDI (interview with BEDI's founder, March 2001, Beijing).

- Founders work with international ENGOs within China—Founders of IED and the Beijing Earthview Center headed the China offices of international ENGOs before they transformed those offices into independent ENGOs. As another example, the founder of the Xinjiang Conservation Fund established the Fund while working in China as a coordinator for two US NGOs—Pacific Environment and the Global Greengrants Fund (GGF).
- Founders participate in international environmental meetings and study trips abroad—FON's founders developed their idea for creating the organization based, in part, on what they learned by attending the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (Yang 2000). They also learned much about international practices as a result of study trips abroad. For example, during a study trip to Germany, FON's leaders saw how a van could be used to bring environmental education activities directly to children. Indeed, FON's "antelope van" is modeled on a "fox van" supported by a German NGO: Save Our Future.¹⁰ Moreover, FON's leaders and founders of at least two other citizen-organized ENGOs—Green River and Yunnan Ecology Network—participated in the International Visitor Leadership Program sponsored by the US State Department to learn how ENGOs operate in the United States (Liang 1999, and interviews with Green River's founder, November 2001, Chengdu; and Yunnan Ecology Network's founder, August 2001, Kunmin).
- International ENGOs support Chinese ENGOs financially—In 1993, the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) encouraged CSAPA's founder to establish an animal shelter at which housed animals would be neutered, and IFAW provided funding to support those activities (interviews with CSAPA's founder, January and February 2001, Beijing.)
- International ENGOs inspire Chinese ENGOs—After IFAW introduced its Doctor Dog program into China, CAWA decided to carry out similar activities in Beijing (interview with founder of CAWA, April 2001, Beijing). In this program, disabled children visit with pets and learn how to care for them; the activity also enhances the children's self-esteem. As another example, the Japanese Sand Dune Association began working to combat desertification in Inner Mongolia in 1991, and Beijing ENGOs organized summer trips to help tree planting efforts at the site. Some Chinese environmental activists who visited the site became inspired to form their own organizations to impede desertification, such as Hanhaisha in Beijing and the Ruoergai Green Camel in Sichuan (Guan 2004).
- Locally organized trainings run by foreign organizations—The Leadership for Environment and Development (LEAD) program, established by the Rockefeller Foundation to help train potential leaders in environment and development has been active in China. Moreover, the Institute of Environment and Development, operating with the LEAD Program, has provided training in sustainable

¹⁰ Save Our Future (in German) <http://www.save-our-future.de/content/erfolge/index.htm>

development practices to mid-career professionals, including ENGO leaders and staff members from several organizations in our study.

International organizations partner with and support Chinese ENGOs for practical reasons: because of China's impacts on the global environment, China is a priority for many international organizations and Chinese ENGOs provide a point of entry. For the Chinese organizations, the benefits include—in addition to funding, training, and technical support—enhanced legitimacy from gaining the support of international organizations.

Spatial Distribution of ENGOs: An Unexplained Outcome

Table 3 contains the distribution of the 128 citizen-organized ENGOs by province. (Following customary usage, the term province refers to a province, an autonomous region, or a municipality that is administered by China's central government.) Because of information constraints, we could not explore use of the political process model to explain the spatial distribution shown in the table. That would require, for example, information on differences in political opportunity structures among provinces, which we did not have because our in-depth interviews were conducted in only three provinces. Because we were able to obtain economic development data by province, we decided to investigate whether strain theory could provide an explanation for the spatial distribution of the ENGOs.

Recall from the initial section of this paper that the strain-theory related argument for explaining the growth of ENGOs in China can be summarized as follows. Enhanced awareness of environmental pollution accompanies increased economic development, and this awareness manifests itself as rising unwillingness to accept adverse effects of pollution and an accompanying demand for improved environmental quality. As economic development reaches levels that allow people to satisfy their basic needs, they become motivated to mobilize to reduce pollution levels down to a more acceptable level.

National surveys of the environmental awareness of Chinese citizens were conducted in 1995 (CEPF 1995), 1998 (SEPA and MOE 1998) and 2001 (CEJA

Table 3 Distribution of 128 citizen-organized ENGOs in provincial-level areas

Number of NGOs	Provincial-level areas
1	Anhui, Gansu, Neimenggu, Jilin
2	Guangxi, Qinghai, Shanxi, Tianjin
3	Chongqing, Hunan, Liaoning, Shanghai
4	Guizhou, Hubei, Shaanxi, Shandong
5	Fujian, Henan
6	Guangdong, Hebei
7	Jiangsu, Sichuan, Zhejiang
10	Yunnan
35	Beijing

2001), and results indicate that the environmental awareness of Chinese citizens increased (along with per capita income) during this period.

If the spatial data in Table 3 was consistent with a strain-theory argument, we would expect to find a statistically significant correlation between the number of citizen-organized NGOs in a province and the level of provincial economic development. In examining this argument, we used per capita gross domestic product (GDP) as a proxy for the level of economic growth in a province and assumed that increases in per capita GDP would be accompanied by rising pollution. This assumption can be refuted in particular circumstances in which cleaner technologies are employed or environmental enforcement is rigorous. However, the assumption appears reasonable given that China's environmental regulatory system has been unable to keep pace with the adverse effects of rapid economic development (Economy 2004; Edmonds 1994; Ma and Ortolano 2000).

Figure 5 which is for the year 2004, shows the number of NGOs in a province (from Table 3) and the corresponding per capita GDP. With several times as many citizen-organized NGOs as other provincial-level areas, Beijing is clearly an outlier, and it is therefore excluded from the figure. No statistically significant correlation exists between the number of citizen-organized NGOs and the level of provincial economic development. As of 2004, some highly developed areas had few citizen-organized NGOs; e.g., Guangdong had six and Shanghai had only three. At the same time some poor provinces (e.g., Yunnan) had relatively large numbers of NGOs. Data in Fig. 5 is not consistent with the argument that environmental harm from rapid economic development is a source of grievance leading to the creation of citizen-organized NGOs in China.

Our finding of no linkage between economic development and the emergence of citizen-organized NGOs at the provincial level is consistent with Tang and Zhan (2008), who noted that while many cities along the south and east coast of China

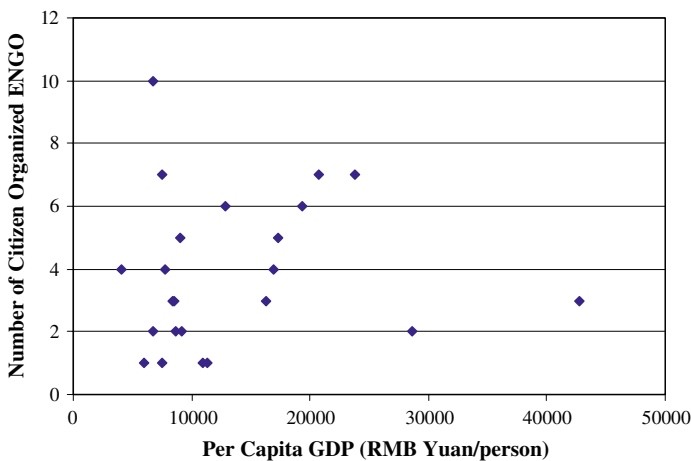


Fig. 5 Number of NGOs versus provincial-level GDP per capita (as of 2004)

have become increasingly prosperous with an emerging middle class, no evident correlation exists between numbers of ENGOs and levels of municipal economic development.

In addition, many pollution protests have taken place in poor, rural parts of China without a corresponding rise in numbers of citizen-organized ENGOS, and this is inconsistent with the idea that relationships exist between economic development, environmental degradation, and ENGO formation. In these instances, rural residents are evidently aware of environmental degradation and its adverse human health effects, but this increased awareness, as manifested by pollution protests, is not linked to the formation of ENGOs. In more general terms, social strains caused by environmental degradation may lead to protests, but those strains are not—by themselves—sufficient to yield formation of citizen-organized ENGOs at the provincial level.

What other factors may have facilitated or impeded formation of ENGOs at the provincial level? An analysis by Cooper (2006, p. 120) suggests that changes in political opportunity structure and the diffusion of international ENGO practices are likely to be significant. Cooper explains the large number of ENGOs in Yunnan by citing the following factors: a liberal, reform era provincial government; shared borders with South-East Asia, which makes it “more open and receptive to international exchange”; and, ethnic diversity and natural resource issues that have attracted international interest and funding. As noted, our face-to-face interview data covers only three provinces, and thus it does not allow us to probe whether the political process model and the world culture perspective provide the keys to explaining the distribution in Table 3. This spatial distribution issue is one worthy of future study.

Conclusions

Social movement theories provide a framework for investigating alternative explanations for the recent growth in the numbers of citizen-organized ENGOs in China. Doug McAdam’s political process model and the world society work of John Meyer and his colleagues offer ways of synthesizing the disparate factors contributing to ENGO growth.

The three main elements of the political process model that McAdam views as central to a social movement are all present for ENGOs in China: favorable political opportunities for ENGO formation; indigenous organizational strength; and “cognitive liberation” of ENGO leaders. All four elements in McAdam’s framework for analyzing the structure of political opportunities indicate favorable conditions for ENGO formation: (1) A relative openness of the institutionalized political system, as reflected in registration procedures enabling ENGOs to become legally recognized, and inclusion of ENGOs in policy making and implementation processes; (2) The instability of elite alliances, as illustrated by striking differences in positions taken between SEPA and the National Development and Reform Commission in the Nu River dam controversy; (3) The presence of elite allies, as demonstrated by explicit endorsements of ENGOs by top-level

government officials; and, (4) Relatively modest state propensity for repression, given that ENGOs have been willing to censor themselves to avoid provoking repression.

The indigenous organizational strength of Chinese ENGOs includes a network of educated leaders. Collectively, founders of five ENGOs had direct connections with creators of about 20 others, and represented key nodes in the network of ENGO founders. Moreover, nearly all of the 67 the founders we were able to get relatively detailed data for had high status based on education levels, occupations, or national prominence. In a number of cases, the relatively high status of ENGO founders together with their *guanxi* was instrumental in facilitating the work of their organizations. Moreover, the political opportunities that the state created allowed domestic ENGOs to take advantage of opportunities to obtain training on international environmental practices and financial support from a wide variety of international ENGOs.

Cognitive liberation of Chinese ENGO leaders was evident as those leaders recognized the political opportunities they faced and felt that, if they were careful about avoiding activities that would invite state repression, they could work effectively to meet their environmental protection objectives. In addition, the interactions among ENGOs—both domestic and international—contributed to diffusion of international ENGO practices, as well as the enhanced sense of efficacy and increased confidence that the Chinese ENGOs gained over time.

The world society perspectives of John Meyer and his associates helps explain why the Chinese government accepted the challenges of environmental protection and recognized citizen engagement as a legitimate element in the overall effort to enhance environmental quality. The government saw that having a robust environmental protection effort enhanced China's ability to demonstrate its status as a responsible member of the international community. The extensive diffusion of international ENGO practices that took place as a result of interaction between Chinese ENGOs and international organizations is also consistent with the world society perspective. Many of the Chinese ENGO founders made international contacts as a result of working for international ENGOs, participating in international study trips and environmental meetings, and attending training programs organized by international NGOs. In adopting practices employed by international ENGOs, the legitimacy of Chinese ENGOs was enhanced. More generally, the proliferation of domestic ENGOs and the extensive and typically positive media attention they have received is such that ENGOs are increasingly viewed as a comprehensible element of China's cultural landscape.

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