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NGO Strategies in an Authoritarian Context, and their Implications for Citizenship: The Case of the People's Republic of China

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NGO Strategies in an Authoritarian Context, and Their Implications for Citizenship: The Case of the People's Republic of China

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Abstract This study argues that different cities in China have different resource environments available for NGOs. Organizations react to these resource environments by constructing appropriate resource strategies, which in turn shape the characteristics and structures of the NGOs of that city. It further examines how these characteristics and structures influence the construction and performance of citizenship in an authoritarian environment. Specifically, some types of NGOs encourage Chinese citizens to be passive, while others offer a model for people to actively engage with social issues. This is aptly demonstrated in an analysis of NGOs operating across four cities—Beijing, Shanghai, Kunming, and Nanjing—which reveals three different types of resource environments and behavioral models for NGOs. We subsequently discuss the implications of each model for citizen engagement.

Résumé La présente étude avance que diverses villes de Chine mettent à disposition des ONG différents environnements de ressources. Les organisations réagissent à ces derniers en mettant sur pied des stratégies de ressource appropriées qui, en retour, définissent les caractéristiques et structures des ONG de la ville donnée. Elle examine de plus la façon dont ces caractéristiques et structures influencent le développement et le rendement de la citoyenneté dans un environnement autoritaire. De façon plus précise,

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certain types of NGOs encourage Chinese citizens to be passive, while others offer to the population an active engagement model within the social issues framework. This situation is justly demonstrated in the analysis of NGOs exploited in four cities, Beijing, Shanghai, Kunming and Nanjing. This one reveals three different types of environments of resources and behavioral models at the disposal of NGOs. We discuss further the implications of each model for citizen engagement.

Zusammenfassung In dieser Studie wird behauptet, dass NROs in verschiedenen Städten Chinas unterschiedliche Ressourcenumgebungen vorfinden. Die Organisationen reagieren auf diese Ressourcenumgebungen, indem sie angemessene Ressourcenstrategien entwickeln, die wiederum die Merkmale und Strukturen der NROs in der jeweiligen Stadt prägen. Es wird weiter untersucht, wie sich diese Merkmale und Strukturen auf die Entwicklung und Leistungsfähigkeit der Bürgerschaft in einem autoritären Umfeld auswirken. Einige Arten von NROs fordern die chinesischen Bürger zur Passivität auf, während andere den Menschen ein Modell für eine aktive Auseinandersetzung mit sozialen Problemen anbieten. Dies wird in einer Analyse von NROs in den vier Städten Peking, Shanghai, Kunming und Nanjing angemessen demonstriert, wobei drei unterschiedliche Arten von Ressourcenumgebungen und Verhaltensmodellen für NROs herausgestellt werden. Anschließend werden die Implikationen der einzelnen Modelle für das Bürgerengagement diskutiert.

Resumen El presente estudio argumenta que diferentes ciudades en China tienen diferentes entornos de recursos disponibles para las ONG. Las organizaciones reaccionan a estos entornos de recursos construyendo estrategias de recursos apropiadas, que a su vez dan forma a las características y estructuras de las ONG de dicha ciudad. Asimismo, examina cómo estas características y estructuras influyen en la construcción y en la actuación de la ciudadanía en un entorno autoritario. Específicamente, algunos tipos de ONG alientan a los ciudadanos chinos a que sean pasivos, mientras que otros ofrecen un modelo para que las personas se impliquen de manera activa en cuestiones sociales. Esto queda ampliamente demostrado en un análisis de ONG que operan en cuatro ciudades - Beijing, Shanghai, Kunming y Nanjing - que revela tres tipos diferentes de entornos de recursos y modelos comportamentales para las ONG. Tratamos posteriormente las implicaciones de cada modelo con respecto al compromiso de los ciudadanos.

Keywords NGO · Volunteers · Citizenship · Authoritarian · China

Introduction

In the past two decades, NGOs and voluntary social organizations¹ have risen substantially in the People's Republic of China, with the latest figures indicating there are approximately 546,000 registered social organizations (MoCA 2013).

¹ In China, the term NGO (*fei zhenfu zuzhi*) does not have a particularly clear or consistent definition, legally or popularly. It is regularly used interchangeably with “social organization” (*shehui zuzhi*),

Theorists from Alexis de Tocqueville (1988) to Robert Putnam (1993, 2000) have argued that increased individual-level participation in social organizations leads to a healthy civil society with the social capital necessary to produce active, engaged citizens and vibrant democratic societies. This begs the question, how has the rise of NGOs and voluntary social organizations affected the practice of citizenship in China? Do they encourage citizens to actively engage with social issues and mobilize over areas of popular concern? Or, do they reinforce passive acquiescence to government authority?

Writing in 1840, Alexis de Tocqueville offered the proposition that free and voluntary organizations were integral to society since they were the site where people were socialized into becoming effective and engaged citizens (de Tocqueville 1988). By participating in voluntary organizations, people learn to apply their experiences and expertise to social issues. In addition, they gain skills in mobilizing individuals and resources to achieve citizenry goals. In other words, they learn active citizenship. This is a sentiment that resonates with scholars such as Gramsci (1980) who stressed the role of autonomous, voluntary social organizations in creating a free and antagonistic public space, and Putnam (1993) who suggested that high levels of “civic community” was a major determining factor in the effectiveness of state governance. In the Chinese context, empirical studies by White (1993) and White et al. (1996) of social organizations in Xiaoshan City in the early 1990s came to a similar conclusion, revealing that the growing sphere of associational life in China exhibited some of the defining qualities of civil society—autonomy, separation from the state, and voluntariness. If this is true, the rise of voluntary social organizations could have serious implications for citizenship in China in the near future.

Yet, this approach has been challenged on several grounds. One objection is that this perspective is too value-laden and historically specific to be applicable to authoritarian China. For instance, Tsou (1994) distinguishes between *minjian shehui* (non-governmental society) and *gongmin shehui* (civil society), the latter being a subset of the former. Tsou suggests that the voluntary retreat of the state has not altered the belief that there should be no limits to state power; therefore, the expansion of space for non-governmental society will not necessarily create anything more than “sprouts” of civil society. Yang and Calhoun (2007) take a different perspective. They argue that emerging environmental NGOs (ENGOs) in China have created a green public sphere. Writing after the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, Teets (2009, p. 330) claims that “participation in relief efforts strengthened civil society through increased capacity, publicity and interaction with local government,” which may have triggered an emergence of civil society in China. In both cases, the terminology utilized requires significant qualification. Yang and Calhoun (2007, p. 214) denote public sphere as “space for public discourse and communication,” while Teets conceives civil society as a voluntary action-oriented space.

Footnote 1 continued

“public benefit organization” (*gongyi zuzhi*), “charitable organization” (*cishan zuzhi*), and “popular organization” (*minjian zuzhi*).

Other critiques pose further difficulties to the de Tocquevillean approach. The Western liberal tradition usually identifies civil society as a realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, self-supporting, and autonomous from the state, but Chinese NGOs only enjoy limited degrees of autonomy. In fact, a large number of Chinese NGOs are initiated and at least partially operated by the state, blurring the boundary between state and society. He (1997) critiques the Gramscian model of “anti-statist” civil society and uses “semi-civil society” to describe a more mutually reliant relationship. Frolic (1997) advances the concept of “state-led civil society,” one that is created by the state to help it achieve better governance. Yu (2003) proposes a “government-led civil society” whose interests are similar with the state. While Frolic fails to take into account the rapid growth of grassroots organizations which have little state connection, Yu essentially denies agency to them. However, research reveals that cooperation with the state is often a strategic choice of Chinese NGOs whose survival depends on state leniency (see Hasmath and Hsu 2014; Hsu and Hasmath 2014). In any case, NGOs operating in close partnership with the government may actually promote state power in such a manner that it discourages their fellow citizens from actively mobilizing and organizing around social concerns. They may instead encourage passive citizenship and acquiescence to a paternalistic state. It is clear that all social organizations are not alike, and different types may lead to different manifestations of citizenship—hence, the analytical confusion in the various debates is highlighted. This article thus poses the following questions: (1) What factors shape the characteristics of Chinese social organizations? (2) How do the characteristics of Chinese social organization shape the citizenship practices of their participants?

This study analyzes 116 Chinese social organizations across four cities in mainland China—Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Kunming. Our analysis reveals that, on the one hand, Chinese social organizations are strongly shaped by an authoritarian political context, and, on the other hand, there are substantial variations that likely correlate with regional conditions. These differences are significant enough that it appears that each region may have its own organizational field with different organizational structures, practices, and cultures. We find there are three distinct resource strategies that have emerged among NGOs in China: the donor-dependency strategy, the state-dependency strategy, and the volunteer-dependency strategy. Each of these strategies facilitates a different type of citizenship orientation.

Social Organizations and Organizational Fields

Social organizations do not emerge and develop independently, but instead operate in a context of structural and cultural systems known as organizational fields (DiMaggio 1991; Hsu and Jiang 2015). The field determines the “rules of the game” by making certain practices normal and expected, while rendering alternatives difficult and even unimaginable. From the perspective of any given organization, the field contains its competitors, its role models, its potential partners, and its clients. Organizational fields interact and intersect with other organizational fields, shaping

those rules of engagement as well. For example, Chinese NGOs interact with the organizational fields of state agencies, the mass media, and international NGOs and foundations. This last point is key since one of the primary tasks of any organization is to maintain its own survival by procuring a constant source of necessary resources (Boies and Prechel 2002). Its organizational field shapes the strategies it uses to solve that problem. In turn, the content of the structures and strategies has implications for a NGO's level of effectiveness. Previous scholarship showed that a strategy of dependency on private donations, for instance, puts NGOs at higher risk of goal displacement as they are pressured to shift their orientation to please their donors. Meanwhile, dependency on state funding leads to the bureaucratization of internal organizational structures (Froelich 1999).

Organizational fields not only determine the structures and distribution of material resources, but also shape the cultural beliefs and norms of member organizations. Organizations are more likely to succeed when they align themselves with the dominant cultural assumptions of the field, since this is the best strategy for demonstrating legitimacy to salient audiences (Stryker 2000). For example, studies illustrate that in societies where people believe the state holds the ultimate responsibility for social problems, GONGOs (government-organized NGOs) flourish (see Hasmath et al. 2016); while in societies where people believe that the responsibility rests with individuals, independent NGOs attract more volunteers (Haddad 2006).

The culture, structures, and strategies of the organizational field do not exist only on an abstract, institutional level, but instead they become internalized within the people who work in the organizations. Or to turn it around, the people in the organization become socialized in the practices of the organizational field to the point that they carry those practices with them, even when they operate outside of the organization (Haveman 1992; Hsu 2006). This is the basis of de Tocquevillean argument about voluntary organizations and citizenship: the skills, norms, and tactics learned in voluntary organizations become transferred to citizen mobilization. For instance, political action takes the form of direct lobbying in the United States since citizens drew upon their particular experience of popular associations to determine their political desires and develop strategies to pressure the state (Clemens 1997).

De Tocqueville's argument was about the United States as a whole; yet, there is no reason to assume that organizational fields are necessarily coterminous with national borders. Even in the nineteenth century, de Tocqueville (1988) noticed there were regional differences between New England and the slave-owning southern states, for example. Twenty-first century China (and the United States) is significantly larger, more populous, and more heterogeneous than 1840s America. To account for the possibility of regional variations, it is important to look at the local ecology of opportunity as well as the national one.

To sum up our theoretical approach, we argue the following:

1. The collective rules of an emerging organizational field emerge out of the resource strategies of the individual organizations within that field.

2. Those resource strategies are created in response to the ecology of opportunity, both at the national level and the local level.
3. As an organizational field becomes more institutionalized and more visible, it provides a template for other people and organizations to copy, thereby shaping practices outside of the organizational field.

With the rapid increase in the number of NGOs in the PRC, many scholars have speculated that civil society and democratization could soon follow (Howell 2004; Shieh and Deng 2011). If Chinese NGOs created an organizational field that promoted practices of mobilization and resistance, citizens could learn a model of organizing to limit the power of the government. What the ensuing research has made clear is that Chinese NGOs are not fomenting direct political activism and protest, but instead tend to work cooperatively and collaboratively with state actors and agencies (Hsu and Hasmath 2013, 2014). At the same time, these organizations are increasing in number, size, and political impact, shaping, for areas such as educational policy, religious practices, and environmental law (Wubbeke 2014; Tam and Hasmath 2015). Suffice to say, Chinese NGOs are transforming the practice and power of citizenship in the People's Republic of China—but how?

We hypothesize that there are more than one organizational field for Chinese NGOs. To support our analysis, we examine our dataset for evidence of different organizational fields: different ecologies of opportunity and different NGO resource strategies. These organizational fields presumably operate by different rules and promote different kinds of citizenship practices. Some encourage citizens to passively accept the benefits of an authoritarian state, while others offer citizens a model for organizing and engaging with social issues.

National-Level Constraints: Political Authoritarianism and Cultural Unfamiliarity

Although our data revealed regional differences, there are certain constraints that all of the Chinese NGOs faced regardless of geography. First, they dealt with an authoritarian political context where the state was unsupportive and even hostile to NGOs. Second, they have to negotiate a cultural context that possessed neither a contemporary tradition of non-state voluntary organizations nor one of charitable giving. Both these factors are rooted in China's socialist history. When Mao Zedong's Communist Party of China (CPC) claimed victory in 1949, it saw providing social welfare services as a prerogative of the party-state and the basis of regime legitimacy (Lieberthal 1995, p. 81). Private charities were replaced by direct government benefits or by government-controlled welfare organizations like the China Welfare League or Red Cross Society of China (Dillon 2007). As a result, the legal and social welfare institutions of the PRC were designed with no place whatsoever for voluntary social organizations (Simon 2013). State actors and state agencies were socialized to treat NGOs as potential threats.

Deng Xiaoping's 1979 market reforms shifted the burden of social welfare from the central government to local governments, communities, and households, making

it possible for voluntary social organizations to emerge (Lieberthal 1995, p. 314ff). Citizen organizations flourished briefly in the 1980s, but the crackdown following the 1989 Tiananmen protests snuffed out that emerging movement (Whiting 1991). In the 1990s, Howell (1996) could find no evidence of any social welfare NGOs in the nation. Chinese laws seemed to hinder rather than facilitate NGO work. Under both the 1998 and 2004 regulations, all Chinese social organizations were required to register with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, but this process was confusing and often impossible to accomplish. To register, an NGO had to have a government agency or GONGO to act as its “supervisory agency.” Legally, all NGO funds were to be regularly audited, but there was no system set up to carry this out. According to regulations, there was a process by which “non-profit public welfare institutions” could be certified to fundraise domestically, but only a few state-connected organizations were ever granted permission (Simon 2013, pp. 255–7). Studies have shown that the majority of social organizations in China never properly registered with the government, choosing instead to either register incorrectly (for example, as a for-profit business) or not at all (Hildebrandt 2013; Yang and Alpermann 2014). Chinese legal regulations for social organizations were not only restrictive, but inconsistently and even arbitrarily applied. In certain times and places, state actors supported social organizations and even fostered the creation and growth of NGOs (Hasmath and Hsu 2015a). Legal regulations were revised in 2013 gave greater clarity and support for NGOs (Simon 2013). However, two years later, the state cracked down on a handful of organizations (Jacobs and Buckley 2015).

The tension between Chinese NGOs and the state has serious implications in the arena of resources. In many jurisdictions, the state is often a key source of funding for NGOs (Salamon 1994), but this is rare in the PRC. In general, the only exception to this rule are GONGOs, which can in some cases receive a great deal of support from the state, in the form of state grants, state contracts, and “private” donations from government officials and offices pressured to exhibit their generosity by supervisors (Lu 2009; Hsu et al. 2016).

Another problem faced by early twenty-first century Chinese NGOs is that the Chinese populace generally found the NGO concept unfamiliar and foreign (Hsu 2008). If they knew what NGOs were at all, they associated them with Western missionaries and imperialism, and insisted that “traditional Chinese culture” lacked anything resembling non-state voluntary organizations (see Hasmath and Hsu 2014; Tam and Hasmath 2015). In reality, there was a vibrant tradition of private, voluntary philanthropy in the late Imperial era (Smith 2009), but the collective memory of those practices had been effectively erased by three decades of state-monopolized social welfare under Mao. The very idea of a non-governmental social welfare organization was so alien to most Chinese that even the direct beneficiaries of Chinese NGOs often had no idea what an NGO was. They assumed that they were being served by a state agency or the Communist Party (Hsu and Hasmath 2014; Hsu and Jiang 2015).

The lack of cultural legitimacy hindered Chinese social organizations in a number of ways. In terms of finances, most Chinese citizens and businesses were not in the habit of giving charitable donations to private organizations. The domestic NGO sector was not seen as a locale for respectable careers, so it was challenging to

hire and keep staff members (Hsu and Hasmath, forthcoming). This problem was exacerbated by the fact that financial constraints made it difficult to offer good wages. In some cities, it has become popular for middle-class educated youths to volunteer at a Chinese NGO (a practice which became even trendier after the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake). However, they viewed their stints to be a temporary jaunt before getting a “real job.” Even those who took paid jobs at Chinese NGOs often viewed them as a stepping stone for a career at an international NGO or foundation. As a result, high staff turnover was an endemic problem for the organizations in our study.

A key indicator of the maturation of the NGO sector is the participation of NGOs in an epistemic community, where shared normative and causal beliefs are displayed (Haas 1992; Hasmath and Hsu 2015b). Being part of an epistemic community, an organization develops the expertise to inform on evidence-based policy matters (Hess 2009). Consulting government in setting standards is an important element of an epistemic community. To simultaneously convey the realities of local communities and affect the government’s policy-making process, NGOs play a valuable role in social learning, raising awareness, monitoring, and research to complement government policy deliberation and action. Suffice to say, NGOs have the capacity to identify issues, increase its salience, and to monitor a policy’s implementation. However, such developments are yet to take shape in the Chinese NGO sector (Hasmath and Hsu 2014). The ability of Chinese NGOs to participate in an epistemic community is, in part, stymied by the NGOs lack of interest and also the desire to focus on more immediate issues to service their constituents (Hsu and Hasmath, forthcoming).

Local Constraints

Beyond these national-level constraints, there is considerable variability in the ecologies of opportunity in which different Chinese NGOs find themselves. Studies demonstrate that social organizations in different sectors face variable conditions and engage in different strategies. For example, organizations that focus on high-priority problems (such as environmental protection) are more likely to develop profitable state partnerships, while NGOs focused on issues of interest to the international funding community (such as HIV/AIDS prevention) will have more access to foreign foundations (Hildebrandt 2013). An organization’s strategies are also shaped by the institutional experiences and skill set of its founders and leaders (Hasmath and Hsu 2008; Hsu and Jiang 2015).

Here, we will focus on a third axis of differentiation: geographic variations. NGOs that operate in a large city with connections to wealthy donors are operating in a different ecology of opportunity than those situated in regional urban centers. Local governments display a range of attitudes toward social organizations; NGOs in cities with friendlier political officials will develop different strategies than those in more hostile environments. Wu (2013) examined ENGOs operating in two different provinces and found that organizations in neither region were able to access the kind of international funding that their counterparts in Beijing received.

However, ENGOs in one province were able to work more productively with the local government than NGOs of the other province.

Methodology and Sample

A total of 116 NGOs interviewed and surveyed (face-to-face) across four cities—Beijing, Shanghai, Kunming and Nanjing—in China from end of 2012 to early 2014. The interviews probed into the organizational behavior of NGOs in terms of resource strategies, engagement with other organizational actors, and the delivery of services.

NGOs were selected based on a snowballing technique. Although we acknowledge some of the limitations of snowball sampling, such as selection bias, at this point in time, there is no viable alternative form of sampling available for these organizations. This is notably the case given there is nothing resembling a comprehensive list of Chinese NGOs available. The government does not publish such data, and even if it did, the result would be problematic for a number of reasons. First, over the past three decades, the Chinese government has used multiple categories for organizations that social scientists consider NGOs, yet until recently has not offered any clear definitions for these categories (Simon 2013). Second, there is evidence that a significant proportion of Chinese NGOs was not registered with the government, either because the requirements were too difficult to meet or because the organization deliberately wants to maintain a low profile (Atkinson and Flint 2001; Hildebrandt 2013; Simon 2013, p. 244ff). Third, because so many Chinese NGOs were operating in a legal gray zone, they were quite reasonably hesitant to be put on a comprehensive list collated even by a non-government surveyor. Due to these conditions, the only way to amass a sample of Chinese NGOs is through networks, and to compare one's own sample with the snowball samples assembled by other scholars.

Of the 116 NGOs interviewed and surveyed, 30 were from Beijing, 19 from Shanghai, 40 from Kunming, and 27 from Nanjing. The average organizational age of the NGOs across the four cities is 8.6 in Beijing, 10.3 in Shanghai, 8.4 in Nanjing, and 12.6 in Kunming. NGOs in our sample engage in a variety different issue areas, with the following being most common: health, welfare, education, and environment. Furthermore, there was some variability in each city sampled. In Beijing, NGOs engaged primarily in the areas of education and health. In Shanghai, among 19 NGOs, 5 engaged in welfare and 6 in education. In Nanjing, 13 out of 27 were in welfare. In Kunming, 5 NGOs out of 40 engaged in the health sector.

The semi-structured interviews covered a broad range of topics including organizational ecology, recruitment, engagement with government, and service delivery. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin, lasting between 60 and 90 min. Interviewees were those who represented the organization in an official capacity, oftentimes the founder or project officers. Prior to the interviews, a brief paper questionnaire was distributed to ascertain basic information on the NGO, including year of founding, number of employees, sources of funding, areas of work, among others. The combination of interview and a basic survey allowed us to

capture essential information, as well as to tease out pertinent issues through face-to-face conversation.

The majority of the NGOs work in the broad area of service delivery, but we have further divided this category to be more specific: welfare, health, education, and community development. While these four service delivery areas are equally broad, we have attempted to differentiate the type of work NGOs are engaged in. Welfare NGOs were engaged in the care of the elderly, orphans, disabled, or poverty alleviation. Health-focused NGOs generally addressed HIV/AIDS and other disease or illness. Education NGOs delivered education materials to rural villages, (re-)developed curriculum, and were often involved in educating migrant children. Community development NGOs include organizations that worked with local communities across different sub-groups, and addressed intersecting issues such as community participation of the elderly. Our sample resonates with the findings of Shieh and Brown-Inz (2013, p. xv) whereby they found in their survey that NGOs were predominantly engaged in the service delivery sector, with attention notably to education, disabilities, elderly care, and child welfare. Furthermore, as Shieh and Brown-Inz (2013, p. xvi) found in their survey, half of elderly care NGOs were located in Beijing, Shanghai, and Sichuan; their assessment of Jiangsu province indicated that approximately 50% of organizations surveyed in the region were engaged in service provision. Suffice to say, while we recognize the problems with snowball sampling—with the potential to lead to path dependence—our results confirm existing research, with the caveat that other surveys potentially experienced similar problems of snowball sampling in sites across China.

Results: Regional Variations in Resource Strategies

When comparing NGOs from our sample in the four cities, we find evidence that there are regional variations in sources of funding, state engagement, and organizational structure. In other words, Chinese NGOs in different cities are reacting to different ecologies of opportunity. Depending on the local jurisdiction, certain resources are easy to obtain, while others are difficult to access. Due to these different environments, NGOs develop distinct strategies.

In Table 1, NGOs' self-reported data outlining the source of major funding (defined as 40% of the NGO's total funding) are displayed. The survey provided eight options for the respondent: central government, provincial government, local government, international grants, domestic donations (individuals/private foundations), membership fees, fees from services, and other. Respondents had the option to tick as many options as pertinent to their organization. Thus, in Table 1, the results are the total counts from the 116 NGOs surveyed. A brief note on each category is in order before moving further. The "domestic" category encompasses funding from foundations, charities, fundraising, and other private sources. "International" funding represents support from international philanthropic groups, NGOs, foreign development assistance, and sources of a similar nature. Funding from government sources is separated into "local"—i.e., provincial level and below—and "central." The "fees" category represents fees charged for services

Table 1 Sources of funding

	Beijing (NGO <i>N</i> = 30)	Shanghai (NGO <i>N</i> = 19)	Kunming (NGO <i>N</i> = 40)	Nanjing (NGO <i>N</i> = 27)	Total (NGO <i>N</i> = 116)
Domestic	13	19	21	20	73
International	20	7	26	7	60
Local government	1	2	17	21	41
Fees (inc. membership & services)	9	1	4	11	25
Central government	1	0	1	0	2
Corporate	2	2	0	0	4
Not reported	1	0	0	0	1
Average annual budget (in RMB)	2.9 million	1.6 million	450,000	1.8 million	

The respondents were asked to identify their organizations' sources of funding. There were no restrictions in the number of sources they identified

provided, and/or membership fees. And finally, “corporate” indicates sponsorship from corporations and private enterprises.

Table 2 reveals relationships with the state, disaggregated by central, provincial, and local government interactions. Interestingly, some NGOs self-reported multiple interactions with various levels of the state over the course of the past year, and others reported interactions with all levels of the state. This question on interactions on the survey is intentionally broad as we sought to delve further into issues of engagement with the authorities during the interviews, asking them to describe any past, existing, or potential future relationships. We also asked our respondents to explain why their organizations engage with the different levels of authorities named.

Table 2 Interactions with the state

	Beijing	Shanghai	Kunming	Nanjing	Total
Local government	10	14	26	24	74
Provincial government	1	2	6	5	14
Central government	6	1	0	1	8
All levels of government	6	0	1	2	8
No state interaction	11	3	1	0	15
Unspecified	0	0	6	1	7
Total	34	20	40	33	127

The units denote the self-reported interactions respondents have with different levels of the state. There were no restrictions in the number of interactions they identified

Table 3 displays the average full- and part-time staff across all NGOs surveyed, as well as the number of volunteers.

Donor-Dependency Strategy: Beijing and Shanghai

Beijing and Shanghai are China's two largest cities, with total populations of over 20 million each (2010 census). Chinese NGOs in both Beijing and Shanghai have access to wealthier donor bases than regional cities like Kunming and Nanjing, but for different reasons. Consistent with previous research, we find that Beijing's NGOs are more likely to get contributions from foreign foundations than organizations in other cities (Spire et al. 2014, p. 82). Shanghai-based organizations can receive money from wealthy local businesses.

Beijing is China's political center while Shanghai is its business capital. Both cities enjoy a robust international presence. Yet, as we can see from Table 1, two-thirds of Beijing's NGOs receive international funding, while only about a third of Shanghai organizations do. Why? Potentially, the government still controls a great deal of access to international funders through the "filter model": foreign funds are received by the Chinese government, and officials then pass the funds on to the NGOs of their choosing (Economy 2010; Hildebrandt 2013). When an international organization comes into China, whether it is the World Bank, the Ford Foundation, or an international NGO, they need to work with and through the Chinese government. Chinese NGOs' members can benefit greatly if their leaders and members can meet these wealthy foreigners. However, that is only likely to happen if those leaders or members have some kind of relationship with a government official working with the international foundation. This is much less likely to happen outside of Beijing, where NGO members have spouses, relatives, friends, and former classmates in the central government, or who are themselves former central government cadres (Ru and Ortolano 2009). As we can see from Table 2, NGOs from all regions have connections with government officials. However, in other cities, these relationships can only be built with local-level cadres, or (more rarely) provincial-level ones. In Beijing, by contrast, it is possible to connect with central government officials and offices.

In comparison, NGOs in Shanghai, similarly international in orientation, have relied far more on domestic sources (61.2% of reported incidences) than on international sources (22.6%). Shanghai's business community, after all, is wealthier and more robust than the ones in Kunming or Nanjing. A 2015 list of

Table 3 Average number of permanent staff and volunteers

	Beijing	Shanghai	Kunming	Nanjing	Total
Permanent staff	13.5	8.0	19.9	17.4	58.8
Part-time staff	4.6	4.6	2.1	2.0	13.2
Volunteers	31.0	11.7	7.3	443.4	493.4

Chinese individuals with 10 million or more yuan found that almost 15% lived in Shanghai, while just over 1% lived in Nanjing. Kunming did not even merit a mention on the list (Cole 2015). At the same time, the Shanghai government is not known to be particularly supportive of NGOs (Xie 2009). Thus, our findings indicate that Shanghai NGOs are more likely to turn to their local business community for donations compared to their Beijing counterparts: 10.5% of interviewed Shanghai NGOs had funding from corporate sources compared to 6.7% in Beijing, and zero in Kunming and Nanjing.

The presence of wealthy donors meant that NGOs in Beijing and Shanghai can eschew other resource strategies. Beijing's NGOs were more likely to avoid all types of relationships with state officials than NGOs in other cities, a luxury that came from generous amounts of international funding. Even though most NGOs in both Beijing and Shanghai built connections with government officials, these relationships were informal rather than formal. These organizations rarely received any government funding, unlike NGOs in Kunming and Nanjing. They almost never had official government contracts. Nor were they dependent on volunteers. From Table 3, we can see that the average Beijing or Shanghai NGO had a very small number of volunteers compared to Nanjing. For these organizations, volunteers were there to augment the paid staff rather than to do the lion's share of the labor.

State-Dependency Strategy: Kunming

Kunming is the capital of Yunnan Province, bordering the Tibet Autonomous Region and Myanmar. With a population of 3.5 million people, it is much smaller than Beijing or Shanghai. Although the city is less well-known by Westerners than Beijing or Shanghai, it has been a hotbed of indigenous NGO development for the last two decades.

As we can see from Table 1, the majority of Kunming's NGOs were able to access international funding, at a rate second only to Beijing. Half of Kunming's NGOs received domestic donations akin to NGOs in Shanghai. However, the difference between Kunming and those larger cities is the amount of funding received from these sources. Although Kunming's NGOs were able to access funding from more sources than organizations anywhere else, they were on average the poorest NGOs in our sample. The average Kunming's NGO only had a fraction of the funding that NGOs enjoyed in Beijing, Shanghai, or Nanjing. They were underfunded even when we control for the fact that Kunming was a less wealthy city and presumably less expensive city than the others. Kunming's GDP per capita was between 50 and 60% that of Shanghai or Beijing (Brookings Institute 2015), but in our sample, its NGOs only had on average less than 30% of the budget of the average Shanghai NGO, and 16% of the budget of the average Beijing's NGO.

Kunming's NGOs may have been poor in terms of capital, but according to existing scholarship, organizations in Yunnan benefited from better relationships with local government than those located in other Chinese regions (Cooper 2006). Beginning in the mid-1990s, Yunnan government departments reacted to inadequate state funding for social services by building connections with local and international NGOs (Teets 2015). The "Yunnan model" relied on local state agencies and

grassroots groups collaborating on projects, with the resources for these projects procured by the government from international sources (Teets 2015, p. 163). In this way, Kunming's NGOs also gained access to international funding through the relationships with state officials, although the amounts were considerably smaller than that available to Beijing's NGOs.

Our own data confirms this. Like Beijing's NGOs, about two-thirds of the NGOs in Kunming received international funding, but they were much less wealthy than their Beijing counterparts.² Unlike organizations in Beijing and Shanghai, many Kunming's NGOs received funding from the government and had more interactions with the local government. For example, Jia Xin's representative—a child welfare NGO in Kunming—noted their extensive collaboration with the Street Neighborhood Committee: “If we need to put a program on, and we need to communicate with the Neighborhood committee, they will help us to communicate to the locals...” (Kunming, Interview April 1, 2013). As the Yunnan Natural and Cultural Heritage Conservation Council representative noted, organizations such as theirs have the ideas and research capacity to address environmental issues but without government support, namely the provincial Environmental Protection Bureau, both stakeholders would not be able to achieve their goals; interestingly, this was framed within the notion of trust: “We need each other, we need to trust each other” (Kunming, Interview May 15, 2013). Furthermore, this representative was blunt with regards to the division of labor: “The government gives the money and we do the research work” (Ibid). Strapped for funding, Kunming's NGOs were more likely to engage in a strategy of state dependency where NGOs partner closely with government organizations. When a NGO developed a method for solving the social problem, instead of implementing it on its own, it allowed its government partner to take the idea and implement it.

This strategy has seemingly worked for Kunming-based NGOs for the last decade. As Jin Jiaman, a head of an ENGO who conducted projects in Yunnan Province, explained:

I feel that what a Chinese NGO can do is come up with a new concept or a new idea, and you want to apply that locally. You first make a demonstration model. You do it on a small scale. When you have enough experience and get the model to work well, you can then inform the government, and provide the government with something to copy and paste. So eventually, when the government is copying your model and promoting it on a large scale, it will have a huge effect

In our sample, Kunming's NGOs—along with Nanjing NGOs—were more likely to have placed a bid for an official state contract than organizations in Beijing or Shanghai. Eighteen of the 40 surveyed NGOs in Kunming had put in a bid for a government contract, compared to zero in Beijing, one in Shanghai, and 19 in Nanjing. The state-dependency strategy permitted Kunming's NGOs to serve a lot

² While strictly speaking, Kunming NGOs are better funded based on a per capita basis, they are still less likely to receive international support than their Beijing or Shanghai counterparts due to their location and scale (which are factors, we contend, reduce their competitiveness)..

of individuals without requiring large amounts of funding. As we see from Table 3, on average, NGOs in Kunming had more staff members than organizations in other cities, although these organizations were still not very large. Their paid staff-to-volunteer ratio was also higher than their counterparts elsewhere.

Volunteer-Dependency Strategy: Nanjing

Nanjing is the second largest city in Eastern China with a population of approximately 7 million. Located not far from Shanghai, it is the capital of Jiangsu Province, one of the most economically developed areas in China. Nanjing's GDP per capita is higher than Beijing or Shanghai, and over twice as much as that of Kunming (Brookings Institute 2015). However, there are fewer extremely wealthy people in Nanjing: of all the individuals in China who had over 10 million or more yuan in wealth, less than 2% lived in Nanjing compared to 15% in Shanghai and 18% in Beijing (Cole 2015). There have been very few studies of NGOs in Nanjing (see Gaudreau and Cao 2015) compared to the amount of research conducted in Beijing, Shanghai, and Kunming.

According to our findings, NGOs in Nanjing, like the ones in Kunming, are more likely to build relationships with local officials and to receive funding from the local government than organizations in Beijing or Shanghai. As noted above, where 19 of the 27 surveyed Nanjing's NGOs had bid for government contracts. Nanjing's NGOs differ from Kunming organizations in that many of them also receive funding from member fees, as seen in Table 1. This could be a potentially lucrative source of funding since NGOs in Nanjing have more volunteers than organizations in any of the other three cities, and thus more able to conduct program delivery that rely on the labor of the volunteers. While NGOs in Beijing, Shanghai, and Kunming may have a handful or a few dozen volunteers, Nanjing organizations have hundreds, even thousands. Two organizations in Nanjing, Yun dele Ling and Sunny Home, self-reported having 3000 volunteers each. Other Nanjing organizations were unable to give a concrete number, simply explaining they had "hundreds of volunteers," many of which are project based.

We can potentially see that the volunteer-dependency strategy is a useful way to negotiate China's relatively unfriendly resource landscape. In the case of Nanjing, NGOs were able to access enormous human power, at little to no cost. Although like NGOs all over China, Nanjing organizations built useful relationships with government officials, the volunteer-dependency strategy was one way to avoid too many entanglements with the state. Adding volunteers was a means for an organization to grow without officially increasing in size, which might trigger unwanted government attention. NGOs could even claim that they were not NGOs, but instead just "clubs" or websites which did not have to abide by NGO regulations. This was the strategy adopted by a cancer patients' rehabilitation center. The founder of the center expressed a strong desire not to become a legally registered entity as she did not want the organization to be bogged down in bureaucracy (Interview, Nanjing, June 28, 2013). Such status would also allow her organization greater flexibility, enabling the center to provide "real personal services to members of the community" via the volunteer base, where all members

of the center are volunteers. The leveraging of such strategies, not to seek registration, reliance on volunteers and general flexibility, allows organizations such as the center, a possibility to navigate the environment where NGOs may not always be well-regarded by local authorities.

Discussion: Resource Strategies and Citizenship

In each of these cases, NGOs react to their specific local environment by taking advantage of the resources that are readily available—whether it was donor funding in Beijing and Shanghai, state partnerships in Kunming, or a volunteer-based strategy in Nanjing—and use it as the centerpiece of their organizational strategy. It is important to note that these are regional trends, not hard-and-fast rules. It would not be impossible to find a Beijing NGO that allows a state partner to “cut and paste” its models (Hsu 2012), or a Kunming NGO that receives a generous amount of foreign funding. However, through isomorphic pressures, NGOs in an organizational field will tend to imitate each other and end up with similar practices (see Hasmath and Hsu 2014).

These practices in turn have implications for citizenship. According to Perry (2015, p. 908), democracy in China has very little to do with multiparty elections, but instead focuses on whether the government “benefits the people and reflects the will of the people.” Perry reinforces this stance by pointing to a 2011 national survey conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, whereby 85% of respondents defined democracy as “a system in which government leaders reflect people’s interests, serve the people, and submit to supervision by the people.” In such a system, the key *modus operandi* is how ordinary citizens organize and mobilize around their interests in such a way to make their concerns visible both to state actors on one hand (so that the government can respond to their issues) and to their fellow citizens on the other hand (so the populace can judge whether the state is performing its democratic duties or not). Suffice to say, NGOs in each region offer a particular strategy for organization and mobilization, and each has implications for whose voices are amplified, and whose are suppressed.

Donor-Dependency Strategy

In both Beijing and Shanghai, NGOs had the possibility of accessing more generous donors than organizations elsewhere in China. This donor-dependency strategy has implications for citizenship since it offers a model of mobilization that successfully shapes state policy, but is much more accessible to elites than ordinary citizens. At the national policy level, there is some reason to believe that NGOs backed by significant amounts of donor money are in a better position to influence government policy, especially in Beijing where they have access to powerful government officials. We can see this in Beijing’s environmental movement, which has affected state policy both directly and indirectly. When NGOs and other environmental activists protested and asserted that the 2012 draft of China’s new Environmental Protection Law was too weak, the government subsequently strengthened the law.

Among other things, the new law, which went into effect in 2015, permitted NGOs to file environmental lawsuits against violators (Wubbeke 2014). In addition, well-funded NGOs could launch educational campaigns in order to foster concern among the populace about a particular social problem. If they were successful, popular pressures would force the state to react with better policies (Zhang and Barr 2013). For example, conversations with an environmental journalist working for a Beijing NGO (Interview, January 9, 2012) suggested that NGOs working on issues of climate change had relatively more sway than other ENGOs:

On the issue of climate change, the Chinese government has a *tampan daibiao tuan* (discussion representative delegation), and these people do trust in NGOs sometimes, because they participate in international debates and negotiations and understand international situations, including international NGOs and their effect. Also, sometimes government voices need NGOs to promote their interests

Thus, certain environmental issues, in this case transnational issues, such as climate change may garner greater government attention with the potential for NGOs to inform or participate in the policy dialogue.

However, donor-dependency strategies also have potentially negative outcomes for NGOs. For instance, funding is not equally available to all NGOs, nor to every person or group who want to start a NGO. Funding is generally available to those NGOs with leaders that have strong personal connections to donors. A significant portion of Beijing's best-funded ENGOs, for example, were all founded by an interconnected group of friends, former colleagues, and classmates, who all came from high-status backgrounds (Ru and Ortolano 2009).

Also, Chinese NGOs that require donor funding could experience pressure to change their structure and approach to please their donors. Froelich (1999) finds that donor-dependent non-profit organizations were more likely to suffer goal displacement than organizations dependent on government funding. Unfortunately, many of the characteristics favored by donors undermined active citizenship. This is reinforced by research suggesting that foundations favored organizations that were less radical and more supportive of the status quo (Brulle and Jenkins 2005). They also had a tendency to fund organizations that resembled their own in terms of organizational culture and structure. In China, Western foundations and international NGOs have routinely set up training sessions teaching local NGOs the way to attract more international funding was to become more professionalized, exhibiting legitimacy through elite expertise, with hierarchical, top-down organizational structures, rather than through participatory or democratic processes (see Hasmath and Hsu 2015b). Even though many of the donors in Beijing were organizations from the democratic West, their funding did not necessarily promote democratic practices or active citizenship within the organizations they fund. Instead, donor-dependency created a type of elite citizenship, where the well educated and well connected are able to influence state policy.

State-Dependency Strategy

In Kunming, NGOs did not enjoy the kind of generous funding available in other cities. However, Kunming's NGOs could build useful relationships with supportive state officials. To some extent, NGOs could act like an outsourced department of the government, developing solutions to social problems that would then be adopted and implemented on a wider scale by the state. State-dependency strategies allowed small, underfunded organizations to have a significant impact on potentially large populations. The culturally focused, Shanghai-based NGO, Hanweiyang, for example, noted that their funding came primarily from the local authorities with the potential that such support could alter the aims and objectives of the organization (Interview, Shanghai, July 21, 2013). The organization's affiliation with the Luwan District's cultural bureau office indicates that not only is there a close relationship between the two, but that financial support may engender a level of dependency, whereby financial support may shape the organization's programming that are more attuned to that of the local government.

The state-dependency strategy had some advantages over donor-dependency. Foremost, the state-dependency strategy is less elitist than the donor-dependency strategy. The party-state bureaucracy is so large in China that many urban citizens know someone who works for the government, especially at the local level. Of course, the more powerful the official, the more useful the connection is; therefore, NGOs with high-status members are still at an advantage over others.

However, there are costs to the state-dependency strategy. To foster state partnerships, NGOs had to operate by a set of unspoken rules. It was necessary to avoid politicized topics, and no one involved in the NGO could ever publicly criticize state officials in power. State-dependent NGOs could push for social transformation, but not for political change. This is certainly the case with Hanweiyang in Shanghai, where revival of cultural traditions is seen as transformative, bringing cultural well-being to the community. NGOs that failed to comply with these conditions would risk having their support cut, being denied access to their clients, or even being prematurely shut down. The only reason these constraints did not cause goal displacement was that many state-dependent NGOs were started by former bureaucrats who had internalized these rules so thoroughly that it never occurred to them to do anything else.

The state-dependency strategy was an effective method of citizen action in that it actually transformed state behavior. Notwithstanding, it required NGOs to be invisible so that other citizens do not have a reason to participate with the NGOs activities, to the extent that most citizens do not have a notion that a NGO was involved. It was common practice among state-dependent NGOs to allow their government partners to take full credit for their ideas. When interviewed, NGO leaders would claim that they had no issues with this outcome, as long as citizens' needs were served. According to the representative of the Hongwu Care Center, NGOs such as those working with the disabled in Nanjing are not able to provide the quality of care needed because such NGOs' are so focused on organizational survival, as demonstrated by the need to assure continuous funding (Interview, June 26, 2013). Moreover, as many disability-focused NGOs are staffed by disabled

people themselves, the need to seek government funding and ensure organizational survival indicates that the time available to promote community engagement and foster community citizenship is very limited:

NGOs are populated entirely by disabled people themselves, they get together to help each other, but there aren't that many professional staff members. There should be more training, more quality assurance, to ensure that NGOs can continue to develop and improve, and that this sector is sustainable" (Interview, Jiu Zhou Disability Center, July 3, 2013).

For NGOs in the disability sector to rely on government funding, noted repeatedly by interviewees as insufficient, means that these NGOs are ensuring sustained government attention and awareness on issues of disability, perhaps the expense of other types of NGOs, as suggested by Limei Xu of the Nanjing Zhongshan Arts Development Center (Interview, July 2, 2013). The strategy of state-dependency meant that NGOs helped to increase state power rather than reduce it, pushing the state to address increasing social problems and pass effective regulations. These NGOs have found a way to transform the Chinese government and to make it more competent and less corrupt. Citizens outside of the NGO would benefit, but they would learn nothing about active citizenship.

Volunteer-Dependency Strategy

Neither the donor-dependency strategy nor the state-dependency strategy involved promoting active participation by ordinary citizens. By contrast, the volunteer-dependency model popular in Nanjing pulled hundreds to thousands of individuals into social action, with the high possibility of giving the volunteers a taste of active citizenship. The strategy also gave many NGOs more autonomy—they were not beholden to donors or dependent on the state. However, as indicated in the previous section, Nanjing's disability-focused NGOs with their greater state-dependent strategies may be the exception. Suffice to say, these organizations were less at risk of goal displacement than donor-dependent or state-dependent NGOs.

Yet, this does not mean that volunteer-dependent NGOs were able to engage in controversial political advocacy. Instead, studies suggest that they avoided those topics because they did not want to draw unwanted attention from the government (Hsu and Jiang 2015; Tam and Hasmath 2015). Consequently, they were no more likely than state-dependent NGOs to criticize the government or advocate for political reform. In fact, compared to state-dependent or donor-dependent NGOs, volunteer-dependent organizations have had the least impact in shaping government policy. What they did do, however, was to teach ordinary citizens how to organize and advocate on their own behalf. While seemingly contradictory, as we suggest in the previous section—NGOs in Nanjing with focus on disability issues largely staffed by those with a disability may not have the luxury to engage in the community with regards to citizenship development; yet, for those involved and with disability, it offers an opportunity to build and solidify their community.

Conclusion

Alexis de Tocqueville (1988) argued that people learned the practices of democratic citizenship by participating in voluntary organizations. They would gain the behaviors of self-rule, organization, immobilization as members of voluntary organizations, and take those behaviors with them when they interacted with larger society. Here, we revise de Tocqueville's premise to apply to twenty-first century China. Instead of assuming that Chinese NGOs would look like de Tocqueville's American voluntary organizations, we looked at NGOs in four cities to see, empirically, the kinds of practices they used. What we found was that the practices of Chinese NGOs are not only strongly shaped by the national political context, but also by substantial regional variations. Since organizations need resources to survive, they adapted the practices to take advantage of the resource sources available to them. In some cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, that meant orienting the NGO to take advantage of wealthy donors, whether those were international foundations or rich entrepreneurs. In other places, such as Kunming, it made more sense to build alliances with state departments because government officials there were friendly toward NGOs. In Nanjing, where neither of these options were available, NGOs concluded that the best tactic was to scale up through volunteers.

Like de Tocqueville, institutional scholars argue that when people participate in an organization, they internalize its practices and return to those behaviors even after they walked out of the doors. However, if we cannot assume that Chinese NGO participants are learning the same practices that de Tocqueville subjects were learning in nineteenth century America, we also cannot assume that these practices are conducive to active and engaged democratic citizenship. Instead, we find that certain NGO practices, such as donor-dependency, may teach citizens that social engagement is only possible for elites with excellent educational credentials and enviable social networks. In contrast, state-dependency NGO practices hide the work of activist citizens even as it makes the state more powerful and effective. The people outside of the NGOs never get to see a model of mobilized citizen engagement, but instead are taught to be passive beneficiaries of the paternalistic state. However, organizations that engage in volunteer-dependent practices do offer a model of activist, organized engagement to their fellow citizens, teaching them a way to mobilize to respond to social problems and interact with the state. While the other two forms of NGO practices may be more effective in solving social problems, we argue that this last set of practices is the most potent for promoting democratic, engaged citizenship.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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