ngo advocacy in China

A special report from

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# Table of Contents

## 1 OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

1.1 Context, aim, and scope of the study 5

1.2 International approaches to advocacy 7

1.3 Advocacy in the Chinese context 9

### 1.4 MAIN FINDINGS:

- *All NGOs in the sample seek constructive engagement with Chinese government and society.* 11
- *Some NGOs spontaneously mention “advocacy” as part of their work.* 13
- *These “self-described advocates” are thoughtful, learning organisations.* 15
- *Most GONGOs and NGOs see themselves as addressing “the whole of society”.* 15
- *And many are preoccupied with moral improvement and behavioural change.* 17
- *But some also set out to influence government policy.* 18
- *Whereas few seem to have thought much about the corporate/private sector.* 20
- *The NGOs emphasise participation of project beneficiaries and society at large.* 20
- *But there is relatively little beneficiary ownership.* 22
- *And expert endorsement is usually regarded more highly.* 24
- *Communication strategies are varied but not, in most cases, clearly thought out.* 25
- *Many NGOs crave better relations with government.* 31
- *But most still value their independence.* 35
- *Most seem to be seeking moral renewal rather than political change.* 36

### 1.5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 37
2 POINTS OF DEPARTURE

2.1 Methodology
2.2 “With fearless energy”—Global paradigms of advocacy
2.3 What kind of advocacy is possible in China?
   The policy context is complex and unclear
   International versus local practice
   International NGO advocacy in China
   International influence on Chinese NGOs
   Chinese NGO advocacy: early signs
2.4 Language issues and glossary

3 INTERVIEW RESULTS

3.1 How many NGOs spontaneously talk about their work in terms of “advocacy”?
3.2 Who do they set out to influence?
3.3 What do they do to publicise (xuanchuan) their work and why?
3.4 Have the organisation’s mission or objectives changed since its founding?
3.5 Organisational structure and development
3.6 What is the role of the organisation’s constituency in shaping the organisation?
3.7 Relationships with government
3.8 To what extent do the organisations see themselves as promoting or contributing to “social progress” and “social change?”

4 QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY RESULTS

5 ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDIX I
Semi structured interview guidelines

APPENDIX II
NGO objectives and methods and their relation to advocacy
1 OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

1.1 Context, aim, and scope of the study

Over the last few years, as a local NGO community has begun to develop in China, many international observers have wondered what capacity or potential that community might have for “advocacy.” There appears to be a widespread assumption that advocacy is a good thing, and some international agencies with an interest in “NGO capacity building” have begun to ask how they might encourage and strengthen Chinese NGO advocacy. Indeed, several international organisations have sought China Development Brief’s advice on this.

This study departs from the thought that, before proceeding with any such programme, it would be worth talking to Chinese NGOs about their objectives and methods and about how they see their role in society. Such a conversation would serve, firstly, to explore the common ground (or lack of it) between their perceptions and practice, on the one hand, and international ideas about advocacy, on the other; secondly, to see if there is an “advocacy with Chinese characteristics” and, if so, what those characteristics are; thirdly, to discover if Chinese NGOs themselves recognise needs that international agencies might be able to help address without imposing a “foreign agenda.”

The study involved semi-structured, recorded interviews with forty Chinese organisations. These took place over six months in the second half of 2005. We found the great majority of interviewees to be frank, thoughtful and open. However, the results may be influenced to some extent by the prevailing political atmosphere; for concerns over the role of NGOs in “colour revolutions” in Central Asia and Eastern Europe had prompted the central government to launch an investigation of NGOs within its own borders, especially those in receipt of foreign funding, at the very time that this study was conducted.

Ten of the organisations we interviewed were what are commonly called “GONGOs” (“government organized NGOs“): public benefit organisations established by state or Communist Party agencies to raise funds for and/or implement charitable, social welfare, educational or “public awareness raising” programmes in a variety of fields. These were included in the study because we feel they are significant players in China’s emerging non-profit sector, and should not be overlooked through too fastidious a concern for NGO authenticity. Moreover, in
several respects the GONGOs provide a useful point of comparison with more independent organisations.\(^1\)

Another ten of the organisations interviewed were trade, industry or professional associations that were also originally established by government departments but that, in around half of the cases in our sample and as a direct result of government policy, seem to be becoming increasingly independent. These were included because they appear to manifest a deliberate, state effort to create quasi-independent intermediary organisations; and this model seems both to reflect and to influence the thinking of government officials about non-profit sector development in China. (Ministry of Civil Affairs officials, for example, have often referred to trade and industry associations in conferences and other public forums devoted to discussions of NGO registration and management.) Furthermore, we felt that these associations would, like the GONGOs, serve as a useful comparator with citizen-initiated organisations, notably with respect to issues such as media and government relations.

The remaining 20 organisations interviewed were among those that, in China, are commonly styled “grassroots” NGOs: groups established by ordinary citizens for a variety of purposes, ranging from self-help groups for parents of children with learning difficulties, through organisations providing educational services for children of migrants, to organisations dedicated to environment protection. Some of these groups are registered as businesses with the Industry and Commerce authorities; some are registered as social organisations (社会团体) or “people-run non-enterprise units” (民办非企业单位) with the Civil Affairs authorities; and some are not registered at all. We have followed common Chinese practice in referring to these groups as “grassroots” organisations even though, in our view, there is significant variation in their degree of “rootedness” in the communities they set out to represent, mobilise or serve; and in some cases those roots are not notable for their depth.

Efforts were made to construct a sample that was broadly representative in terms of geographical distribution (taking in Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and the provinces of Guangdong, Hubei, Jiangsu, Liaoning, Shaanxi, Qinghai, Yunnan and Zhejiang), administrative level, and types of activity in which the GONGOs and grassroots NGOs engage. (See Section 2.1 on methodology)

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\(^1\) This report assumes that readers are basically familiar with China’s NGO development. Those who require further information on the China context may consult the bibliography at the end of this document.
In the interviews with these forty organisations we did not explicitly ask them whether they engage in advocacy, or of what kind, or what kind of advocacy they think is possible in China. To ask this, we felt, would be too directive. It would certainly require time to be spent defining a common language and reference point for the discussion, and it might lead interviewees to “talk up” advocacy efforts at the expense of describing in their own words what they do, how and why. Therefore, we asked more general questions about the organisations’ goals, target constituencies, operational methods, communications strategies, relationship to their constituencies and relationship to government; leaving the organisations to characterise their own work in their own terms. In reporting what they say we discuss the extent to which their views and methods converge with or diverge from international advocacy discourse.

Interviewees were told that we might quote them but would not name them or their organisations (and they assented to this.) In addition to the interviews, we asked each group that we visited to complete a short, anonymous survey. The full results of this are presented in Section 4.

1.2 International approaches to advocacy

In order to make a systematic comparison between the state of advocacy in China and elsewhere, it would be necessary to identify and define international approaches to advocacy. Section 2.2 explores common themes and uses of the term. We find that there is no simple definition, global consensus or universal criterion of what counts as advocacy. Rather, like many other normative concepts, it is the kind of term that many users evidently feel to be rich and meaningful but that in practice tends to mean different things to different people. Published usages range from those that link advocacy to social movements for distributional justice and far-reaching social and economic change, to a US government department that helps American businesses access overseas markets and that describes this as “advocacy.” Nevertheless, despite the term’s plasticity—which is probably growing, as the concept becomes more fashionable—we were able to discern several fairly common threads to global advocacy discourse as employed, at least, by NGOs. These threads are summarised in Table I.1, where they are presented as distinct “approaches,” although in fact many NGOs employ a combination of several of these approaches in their work.
Table I.1  
Rough guide to NGO advocacy approaches worldwide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advocacy Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal advocacy</td>
<td>Using litigation to press for change in law and policy and/or to raise awareness of issues. Providing legal representation for specific constituencies, eg, (im)migrants, people with disabilities, to defend and extend their (legal) rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights Advocacy</td>
<td>Promoting human rights compliance through monitoring, reporting and raising awareness of International Conventions. Also reflected in &quot;rights-based programming&quot; that approaches development issues from the perspective of how to secure and protect the rights of particular constituencies (and/or the population at large), rather than, say, how to meet their ‘needs’ or promote their social and economic ‘interests.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy research advocacy</td>
<td>Usually this is ‘expert’ advocacy by specialists in a particular field who will assemble evidence and offer recommendations to influence policy decisions; NGOs will often use or commission research findings to advance their own case on social and environmental issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituency based advocacy</td>
<td>Speaking and acting on behalf of a particular (usually vulnerable or excluded) constituency, eg, people with disabilities. Often also seeks to ‘empower’ people in that constituency to speak for themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaigning advocacy</td>
<td>Campaigning on single-issues that pressure people to take a ‘for’ or ‘against’ position. This strategy is often used by environmental organisations, but also by other kinds of pressure group (eg, anti-sweatshop, anti-WTO.) Usually identifies a clear target to oppose, eg, a company, or a government policy or decision. Techniques include use of mass media and mass mobilisation of supporters in, eg, letter-writing campaigns, petitions, symbolic protests or public demonstrations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social movement advocacy</td>
<td>Aims at broad change in existing power relations, either for the benefit of a specific social group or class or, in more libertarian forms, for the benefit of the whole of society. Uses various forms of mass mobilisation both to engender unity and to exert pressure on the powers that maintain the status quo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobbying/direct communication</td>
<td>Attempting to advance the interests of a particular constituency, or to advance a particular cause, by directly accessing people in a position of political or corporate power. Some NGOs do use this strategy: for example, seeking direct meetings with political or corporate leaders to put their case. (Usually, the NGO will need visible popular support or public respect in order to obtain such meetings.) However, private corporations and entrepreneurs also make use of lobbying techniques to advance their personal interests, and many people regard lobbying with distaste as being undemocratic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.3 Advocacy in the Chinese context

Section 2.3 provides an initial overview of efforts to apply some of these advocacy approaches in China. It draws on discussions with Chinese researchers and includes brief examples of relevant project work in China by three international NGOs (Marie Stopes International, Save the Children UK and Greenpeace.) This section also considers several fields in which Chinese NGOs themselves appear already to be working in ways that are consistent with “international” advocacy approaches. For example, several Chinese NGOs provide legal advice and representation to disadvantaged groups, and some explicitly endeavour to publicise these efforts widely in order both to raise public awareness of underlying social issues—such as violence against women, or gross exploitation of migrant workers—and to influence relevant policy and substantive law. Numerous environmental NGOs also work to “raise awareness” and appear adept at obtaining mass media coverage of their concerns.

Such examples may seem themselves to constitute evidence that advocacy has indeed arrived in China, and so to obviate any need for further enquiry. On the face of it, yes, some Chinese NGOs are certainly “doing advocacy” in ways that are entirely consistent with international discourse.

However, Section 2.3 also suggests good reasons for examining this more closely. NGO advocacy in Western (and many non-Western) societies occurs in a context where political, legal and social institutions are themselves largely adversarial. Political parties vie for election; the courtroom prosecutor and defender advocate rival interpretations of evidence; and in the marketplace companies compete to survive and thrive, with the failure and bankruptcy of some being the invariable corollary of others’ success. In this context, it feels quite natural to find NGO advocacy that is very often defined by what it is against: activism, for example, that is anti-war; anti-nuclear power; anti-exploitation; anti-globalisation, etc. In “developed countries” even environmental advocacy—which can claim to stand for a clean, green, harmonious and sustainable world—very often assumes the form of rallying opposition to specific government or corporate projects, programmes or policies. But it is not clear how this adversarial and oppositional streak might sit with China’s rather different traditions (whether these are seen as primarily “political” or “cultural”) of a strong state—arguably the most successful and enduring in global history—administering a large and diverse society
with a strong, rhetorical commitment to social order, stability and “harmony.”

At the same time, in international (and especially Western) usage, NGO advocacy is often explicitly contrasted to “service delivery.” It is not uncommon, for example, to hear international development organisations state emphatically that “We don’t do service delivery,” as if this were a kind of lower-order activity, inherently and obviously inferior to rights-promotion, policy influence, advocacy, etc. And yet in China, where the state has long played so prominent a role in social service delivery—the first state-run orphanages and other social assistance programmes, for example, were established more than 2,000 years ago—the efforts of private citizens to develop new kinds of social service are worthy of special note; and it would be churlish to write off such citizen groups as “mere” service providers. In the early 1990s, the first attempts to establish, eg, non-profit kindergartens and facilities for young people with learning difficulties, met with outright, bureaucratic hostility; and this in itself suggests that the social significance of such activities is quite different from the significance of apparently similar “service delivery” in countries with a better-established non-profit sector.

None of this is to suggest that China is immutable, locked in some kind of cultural template that cannot change. It does, however, underline the importance of listening to how Chinese NGOs themselves describe and understand what they are doing, in order to assess the nature of the changes that are taking place.

It is also important to beware speaking of at cross-purposes because of too confident a reliance on translation of key terms. Section 2.4 explores the most commonly used Chinese translations for “advocacy” and offers a glossary of several related terms. This section finds that the Chinese expressions most frequently used to translate “advocacy” (changdao [倡导] and tichang [提倡]) are in fact rather unsatisfactory, for they both tend to connote guidance by moral, political and intellectual authorities. This may of course change, as NGO usage becomes more common; but for the present, the linguistic difference captures and reflects the social and political reality that advocacy (construed as changdao) is not something in which ordinary Chinese citizens are expected to engage.
1.4 MAIN FINDINGS

The points highlighted below are abstracted from Sections 3.1 to 3.8, which report and discuss key interview themes. Many of the points summarised here refer mainly (although not exclusively) to the “grassroots” NGOs. Section 3 gives more space to discussing the situation of GONGOs and trade, industrial and professional associations, and also includes a great deal of additional detail, which is not summarised here, on the grassroots organisations.

All NGOs in the sample seek constructive engagement with Chinese government and society . . .

At no point did any interviewee express any anti-state or “dissident” sentiment. This may appear a facile conclusion: one would hardly expect NGOs to unveil plans to overthrow the state. However, given evident fears in some quarters that an NGO sector may shelter undesirable and “unpatriotic” elements, it is worth emphasising that we found absolutely nothing that could in any way substantiate such fears. On the contrary, the grassroots NGOs (on whom suspicion most often falls), overwhelmingly expressed a positive desire to work constructively with government partners, for the benefit of the whole of society, and in many cases argued that their work directly reduces social conflict and promotes a “harmonious society.”

Several grassroots NGOs explicitly repudiated confrontational tactics. The representative of one, for example, said:

“We prefer to communicate with government in a positive way even if we can’t see eye to eye with them. Parades and other radical forms of protest can’t work in China for they don’t fit in with China’s general situation and political traditions.” (我们总是通过正面渠道同政府进行沟通。即使同政府的看法不完全一致，也应该尽量正面沟通。游行之类的过激方式不符合中国的国情和政治传统。)

Another clearly echoed the government of China’s position on human rights and development:

“I’ve received trainings on social development many times abroad and I find that the so-called human rights stressed by Westerners can’t work with the current development in China. My view is that we should attach more importance to the rights to survival and development.” (我多次在国外参加有关发展的培训。我感觉
The representative of an environmental organisation underlined the need not just to denounce, but to look for practical solutions:

“We don’t just wave flags and shout battle cries: we don’t just ‘guide the nation with inflammatory prose’\(^2\) . . . Environmental organisations like ours can’t just stop there . . . We also need to practice what we preach to change the situation, to constructively put what we preach into practice.” (我们不光是摇旗呐喊, 我们不光是 “指点江山激扬文字” . . . 我们环保组织不仅仅要停留在这一块儿 . . . 我们还要身体力行的去改变这个现状, 去建设性的身体力行的去做。)

In general, the grassroots NGOs appeared inclined to seek legitimacy for their work in national policy slogans (although many also emphasised that they have, and seek to spread, their own working methods and “concepts”). One explicitly stated, “We mainly convey our concepts in mainstream discourse” (我们运用主流话语来表述和传达我们的理念。) Many referred to the current national leadership’s appeal to “build a harmonious society.” One organisation said that they were planning to revise their mission statement to include a reference to harmonious society, adding:

“Government officials are talking about a harmonious society; we have the same goal: the first sector, the second sector, the third sector should all work together so that we can build a harmonious society. If NGOs’ hard and active work isn’t matched by GOs’ hard and active work, it will be useless; if GOs’ hard and active work is not matched by businesses’ hard and active work, it will be useless. So we need a kind of interaction.”

Other organisations emphasised their role as intermediaries. This was an especially important theme for the trade and industry associations, but also occurred sometimes in conversations with the grassroots NGOs. One of the latter, for example, said:

“Government really does not understand what ordinary people need. When we interact with ordinary people it’s more direct, and they can understand us better, or they are more willing to communicate with us. So we can take their feelings, thoughts and information and express it to the government.” (政府并不了解老

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\(^2\)“Guide the nation with inflammatory prose” (指点江山激扬文字) is a phrase from a poem by Mao Zedong
Some NGOs spontaneously mention “advocacy” as part of their work . . .

Without prompting, eight of the twenty grassroots NGOs, and one “local” GONGO (registered at sub-provincial level) mentioned advocacy (changdao, tichang or, in two cases, the English word “advocacy”) when talking about their work and objectives. For ease of reference, we term these “self-described advocates” (SDAs.)

One national level GONGO also used the word tichang when talking not about its own work, but about development of the non-profit sector as a whole.3

All of the grassroots SDAs were local organisations (working at provincial, city or county level), and none were based in Beijing or Shanghai. Two are generic, environmental organisations and two concentrate on a specific environmental issue. (This amounts to four out of a total of five grassroots environmental NGOs in the survey.) One works on women’s development and gender issues; one works on labour rights, health and safety; one is a generic, development organisation that works on a wide range of projects, both urban and rural; one is a gay and lesbian organisation. The local level GONGO works to alleviate rural poverty.

These self-described advocates were invited to say what they meant by advocacy when they introduced the term. One defined it as:

“Going out to disseminate our ideals. This is our definition. Advocating the basic ideals we stand for, to guide society’s progress” (把我们的理念传播出去。这是我们的定义。提倡我们主张的这些基本的理念，引导着社会的进步。)

Advocacy, this organisation’s representative said, is “not the same as direct public education” (不是直接的去教育公众), and nor was it the same as “offering suggestions” (提供意见) to government. However, the representative of another organisation said that advocacy:

3 “Speaking of NGOs’ functions, I think that we should advocate smaller government and bigger society so that NGOs can further bring their advantages into full play.” (从 NGO 的作用来看，我觉得应该大力提倡小政府大社会，使得 NGO 能够进一步发挥自身作用。)
“Means something like to popularise or to spread. You go and let everyone know. But it’s not just letting everyone know, you also want to point them in a certain direction . . . ‘advocacy’ has the connotation, a bit, of ‘public awareness’ or ‘public education.’”

(有点象推广的意思，你去让大家知道了，不光是让大家知道了而是想引导这么一个趋势 . . . ‘advocacy’ 有点相当于 ‘public awareness’ 或者 ‘public education’ 这一方面。[English words used in original])

Another organisation explained their view of advocacy by contrasting their position with business enterprises:

“For us, we are dealing with ideals, it’s a kind of xuan chuan [宣传: ‘publicity, propaganda’—see Section 3.3]. This is certainly advocacy. Advocacy is like ‘green consumption’, or green whatever, this is advocacy. As an NGO we mainly do [work on] ideals because we are not a business.”

(作为我们，我们在做理念，就是一种宣传。无疑这就是倡导。倡导就象绿色消费或者绿色什么什么，就是倡导。作为 NGO 我们主要的在做理念因为你不是企业。)

Included in the survey, but largely missing from the list of SDAs, were NGOs that work mainly in social service provision and/or groups that aim to (self-)help specific communities. (The gay and lesbian SDA, and generic development organisation SDA are, to some extent, exceptions to this rule.) This is consistent with much international usage that contrasts advocacy with service provision. The word “advocacy” is evidently not being used randomly by the Chinese organisations included in this study, or in ways that have no connection to international advocacy discourse.

Strikingly, in the questionnaire survey a large majority of organisations of all kinds affirmed advocacy to be a part of their work. Asked whether their organisations were mainly “Operational” or “Advocacy” or “Both,” eight of ten GONGOs, seven out of ten trade industry and professional associations and 16 out of 20 grassroots NGOs selected “Both.” Given the consistently high vote, it may just have been that some felt “both” sounded best, doing most justice to the “richness” of their work. But two other inferences seem possible.

1. That nearly all interviewees feel their work has a wider application, significance or value than simply serving their immediate beneficiaries.
2. That some of the organisations less accustomed to the idea of NGO advocacy associated it with the “public education” or “moral leadership” connotations of the Chinese expression, *changdao*, which they were quite happy to endorse and associate with.

*And these “self-described advocates” are thoughtful, learning organisations . . .*

Many (but not all) of the SDAs had significant international exposure, through conferences and networking, international funding partnerships and joint projects. The design of the study did not include a way of measuring this, but it is probably fair to say that the SDAs had more than median international links (although they were by no means the only organisations in the sample to have trans-national relationships of some sort.)

This might seem to justify the inference that the idea of advocacy is being “imported” to China via grassroots NGOs. Against this it might also be said, however, that it is perfectly natural for Chinese NGOs to attempt to locate themselves in a global context and to iterate what they do in an international discourse: this is, indeed, no more than what Chinese government and business agencies do as a matter of routine in a rapidly "globalising" world.

It is abundantly clear, at any rate, that the SDAs are by no means imitators or stooges of foreign organisations. On the whole, they appeared to be among the most thoughtful of the interviewees: they tended to have more than average to say about who they were trying to reach and why, tended to use a wider variety of communications tools and approaches, gave more indication of having reviewed and revised their mission, and more sign of having experimented with organisational structure and development.

It is important to stress, however, that representatives of many other organisations were equally thoughtful; and there were some that did not refer to advocacy directly, but that appeared to operate in ways and for ends that are very similar to those of the SDAs.

*Most GONGOs and NGOs see themselves as addressing “the whole of society” . . .*

The trade and industry associations were, in the main, clearly focused on serving their members. As one put it, “We respond to our members’
wishes; we do whatever the members want.” (我们反映会员的意愿，会员说什么就做什么。)

Many of the GONGOs and NGOs also aim to serve, or promote the interests of, specific constituencies; but very many also talked in broad terms about directing messages to “the whole of society” (全社会) or “the masses” (公众) As one NGO robustly declared: “Of course we want to influence society. If we don’t influence society then what are we doing?” (我们当然要影响社会，不社会要我们干吗？) During the interviews, all of the national level GONGOs and 15 out of the 20 grassroots NGOs identified the general public as important targets for information, education and communication efforts. Further, as Table I.2 shows, “raising public awareness” figured highest in assessments by groups of all kinds as to the “most important aspect of social progress.” Even grassroots NGOs, taken together, accorded this much more importance than “changing government policy.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table I.2 (Questionnaire-Survey, Q18): What aspects of social progress do you consider to be most important at this stage in China? (您认为哪方面的社会进步在现阶段的中国是最重要的?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National GONGOs (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Improved status for target constituency 提高目标群体的地位</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expanded access to social services 拓宽获得社会服务的渠道</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Changes in government policy 改善政府政策</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Raising public awareness 提高公众意识</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In some cases, the wish to reach the general public appeared to be related to fundraising. This was, in particular, a frequent concern of GONGOs. Grassroots NGOs are not supposed to fundraise publicly so perhaps have less cause to think about this; but several did mention wanting to be known by institutional donors or “rich people” in order to attract funding support. Two or three organisations also spoke of encouraging the recipients of their assistance to themselves “give back,” promoting virtuous circles of giving.
Many organisations expressed the wish to raise the public profile of particular issues and/or constituencies. For example, one NGO noted with gratification that ten years ago far fewer people knew there were so many autistic children in China, this being the group’s particular area of concern. Another, which offers legal services to disadvantaged citizens, said their larger purpose is to educate the public about legal aid, adding that their advisory service to clients helps to “reduce societal stress and avoid conflicts” (缓解社会压力，避免矛盾。)

And many are preoccupied with moral improvement and behavioural change. . . . .

Many organisations were also concerned with educating and exhorting people to change their attitudes and behaviour in various ways—from adopting more healthy lifestyles to having more social compassion. Whilst a didactic approach might be expected of GONGOs (and was indeed evidenced by several of them), it was also prominent in many grassroots organisations. For example, one group working in the field of disability said:

“I think our society is badly in need of volunteering spirit and love. To tell you the truth, I am surprised to see the lack of them even within our organisation. The parents of better-off families lack this spirit.” (我觉得我们社会现在最需要的是一种广泛的志愿精神和爱心激励。甚至让我觉得吃惊的是，在我们这个组织内部，一些经济实力很强的家长在这方面也是欠缺的。)

A grassroots NGO that serves children of migrants noted that:

“Together we share concern for the children of rural workers, because they are also the flowers of the motherland. They long for equality, justice and good care.” (我们共同关注农民工子弟，因为他们也是祖国的花朵，他们渴望平等，公正，关爱。)

This group said that mobilising compassion (爱心) is part of its work and spoke of ways in which it tried to “arouse people’s enthusiasm” (调动人的积极性) and move people emotionally (打动人).

Several of the eight NGOs that described themselves as advocates referred to spreading “ideals” (理念), and two explicitly linked the idea of advocacy to the idea of “civilisation” (文明). One of these was a gay and lesbian group. The other said that it was devoted to advocating “green civilisation, green consumption” (绿色文明，绿色消费), and that this implied:
“... changing [people’s] way of thinking, including changing their concept of consumption and their sense of social responsibility; because they have changed from not understanding their responsibility to society to paying more attention to society and having a sense of responsibility to society. This is different from before. (...改变他们的一种想法，包括改变他们的消费概念，改变他们对社会的一种责任感，因为他们从不懂得对社会的一种责任改变到让他们更多的关注社会，让他们对社会有责任感，这就不一样了。)

Another generic environmental NGO (not an SDA) said:

“We now hope to be able to go beyond working on issues of lifestyle to the level of people’s life values and spirituality. Because many problems arise from problems in people’s values. So now we would like to get into initiating what we call ‘spiritual environment protection’... so that we re-acquaint ourselves with nature, re-acquaint ourselves with people and the human heart, and re-acquaint ourselves with our bodies. Once you re-acquaint yourself with these three things your behaviour will change.” (我们现在希望能超越生活方式，介入到人民的生活价值和 spirituality 的层面。因为很多问题是由于在这个价值这个领域出了问题。所以我们现在想发起‘心灵环保’...这样你重新来认识自然，重新来认识人，人的心，重新来认识我们的身体。当你重新认识这三个方面时，你的行为会改变。[English in original])

Many GONGOs and NGOs, including some who speak of advocacy, thus appear to see moral suasion and the spread of enlightened values and ideas as an important task.

But some also set out to influence government policy. . .

For some groups, addressing the whole of society evidently did not preclude addressing government. As one of the environmental NGOs (an SDA) put it:

“Advocating sustainable development or scientific development should not be targeted just at ordinary people or just at government departments, because it includes government departments and individual people in government and ordinary people and scholars, they are all part of the general public.” (倡导可持续发展或者科学发展针对的我想不只是老百姓，也不仅是政府部门，因为包括政府部门，在政府里工作的个人以及老百姓和学者都是公众的一部分。)
The generic environmental NGOs were in fact among those most inclined to claim that they already do exert influence on government policy.

In general, the “self described advocates” in all fields were among the most likely to talk of targeting government administrators and policymakers with their findings and messages. One, for example (an SDA but not an environmental NGO) said that its public education efforts target:

“The general public and society at large. Of course we definitely have hopes to slowly include government so that they can hear our voice” (社会公众，整个社会， 当然我们肯定也希望慢慢地包括政府方面也能够听到我们的一些声音。)

Another grassroots NGO (and SDA) said:

“Through research and practice we draw some theoretical conclusions, and then we encourage the government to enact and enhance relevant law . . . that is, we make policy suggestions to the government” (我们通过研究和实践提炼出相关的理论总结，之后敦促 . . . 相关的各项立法，即为政府决策提供建议。

Several other grassroots SDAs described a similar approach, as evidenced in their use of conferences, publications and research reports as communications tools. (See 3.3) They invariably spoke of these efforts to influence in terms that were not merely critiquing government policy but seeking constructive ways of developing and improving it.

Some of the GONGOs also mentioned influencing government, at least to the extent of encouraging state and Party agencies to give more attention (and allocate more resources) to the sectors in which they work. For example, one county-level GONGO that is devoted to promoting local charitable activity said that:

“Now we demand to be incorporated into some of government’s work reports . . . to make charitable activities become the government’s work. This is one channel. And also to introduce charitable activities into the recommendations of the Party system” (现在我们要求介入政府的一些工作报告。把慈善事业. . .作为政府的一些工作来布置。 这是一个渠道。 到党系统也把慈善事业介入到建议。)
Many of the trade and industry associations also spoke of representing members’ interests to government departments, both generically and in taking up individual cases. Invariably, they described this in polite, non-confrontational terms, emphasising collaboration and partnership. The broadest trade and industry critique of government policy came from an association in an inland province, which said that the industry in their area would benefit from the government taking a more “opening up” (开放) and “Western” (西方) approach. Another association said that is was working to dissuade local authorities from imposing an environmental tax—of a kind recently adopted in Hong Kong—on the industry’s products. A third, a fisheries association, had commissioned a survey of a lake to assess the fish stocks, and had submitted its findings to government.

Whereas few seem to have thought much about the corporate or private sector . . .

Apart from the trade and industry associations, very few organisations appeared to have thought deeply about the private business sector that now plays so fundamental a role in China’s economy. Several organisations, notably GONGOs, mentioned the corporate sector as a target of fundraising efforts. But only two of the GONGOs and NGOs—both grassroots NGOs and “self described advocates”—mentioned business enterprises as an important sector for other kinds of influence. Both were among those that also clearly aim to inform and influence government policy.

The NGOs emphasise participation of project beneficiaries and society at large . . .

Five of the trade, industry and professional associations reported themselves as being highly responsive to membership demand—often pointing out that they depend on membership fees and therefore on providing satisfactory services—whereas three appeared more pre-occupied with passing on information and policies emanating from government, and in two cases it was hard to make any clear judgment.

Three out of five national level GONGOs were at pains to emphasise “participatory” approaches in a variety of projects they had implemented (emergency relief, micro-finance, women’s development, AIDS prevention); and a county-level GONGO said that its projects were decided by selecting from “pleas for help that we receive from society” (从社会各界各种寻求帮助的信息中). However, in general the local
GONGOs showed less familiarity with participatory discourse, and appeared to regard themselves primarily as doing good for others.

Participatory discourse was best established among grassroots NGOs and for several, participation is canonical. We found that eight out of 20 NGOs (five of them SDAs) had a strong, rhetorical commitment to “participatory methods” and several appear to view participation not merely as a method but as an end in itself. For example, one (not an SDA) said:

“Our aim is to enable more people to participate in—our government doesn’t like to talk this way, but we still very much like the phrase—civil society, to make more people care about this concept.”

Another (not an SDA either) counted fostering community environmental action and participation as a major task and strategy:

“People’s organisations (minjian zuzhi) like us, which are few and far between and also very small, must go and train and educate communities to make them face environmental problems. It’s not about people’s organisations solving big environmental problems. It’s difficult, but you have the ability to go and help communities, get them to go and find solutions.”

And a third (an SDA) contrasted “participatory methods” (参与式方法) with “participatory community development thinking” (参与式的社区发展思想), saying of the latter that it is “a basic way of thinking, not a method” (它是一个基本的思想，而不是一个方法). The representative of this organisation went on to explain that:

“The reason we say participation shouldn’t be seen as a method but above all as a way of thinking is, firstly, that the people are the main actors in our society. Actually if we take it a little deeper the people are the main actors in our historical development . . . This is a modern, democratic way of thinking, right? . . . We should all act on behalf of the whole society, have opportunities in common, a common share in society’s benefits; but we need to come forward together to build this society. What we want to stress is that everyone is equal in this
participatory way of thinking. This includes our relationships; it’s not that there are givers and receivers, it’s not like that. We are completely equal, developing together.” (为什么不能提方法(而强调是一种思想)? 首先是因为我们的社会主体是群众, 甚至我们再引申一点, 我们历史发展的主体也是群众。 这就是一个现代的民主思想, 对不对 . . . 我们都应该为整个社会来行动, 大家有共同的机会, 共同来分享社会的成果, 但要共同出面建设这个社会。我们要更强调的是, 参与式思想是大家是平等的。包括我们的关系也不是给予者和受益者。不是这样, 我们完全是平等的, 一起来共同的发展。)

A further five organisations, including long-term, direct providers of social services, spoke of beneficiary participation less than organisations which mainly run discrete, fixed-term “projects,” but nonetheless demonstrated evidence of consultative approaches in the services they provide. For example, a group working for older citizens reported, “attentively listening to the suggestions put forward by the elderly and organising activities that they like.” (认真倾听周边老年人的建议并组织他们喜欢的活动) Groups providing schooling gave credible examples of responsiveness to the demands of the community they were serving (over and above the fact that, like most of the trade, industry and professional associations, they were essentially dependent on fees for services.) One had created a complaints box for messages from parents and students, and an on-line version of the same. It was planning to add to this an email advisory service whereby parents could write to selected teachers about schooling and family problems, with the promise of a reply. The Principal of the second school related how parents told her that they were embarrassed by the school’s name (which included reference to “migrant workers’ children”). The parents feel loss of face whenever they tell people which school their children attend. The Principal was therefore considering a name change, to avoid stigma and to promote social inclusion of migrant children as “new citizens” (新移民).

But there is relatively little beneficiary ownership . . .

However, despite widespread enthusiasm for the idea of participation, we found that in the great majority of cases where this was applauded as an ideal (and applied, to a greater or lesser extent, to the delivery of “projects” and services), it was largely absent from the governance of the organisations themselves.

Most of the grassroots NGOs started out in life rather informally and small, often owing their existence to one or two determined individuals. Many had grown significantly in their scope and scale of operations, and some had clearly tried to evolve structures to match this growth;
but the policy and regulatory framework makes such organisational development extremely difficult, as does the sheer pressure of work. As the leader of one SDA frankly admitted, “Our development always outstrips our planning” (我们的发展总是超出我们的计划).

Thus, the accountability of most grassroots organisations appeared, at best, only hazily defined. Where they described a structure, it was invariably corporate (ie, organised on departmental lines, reporting to a chief executive/leader), but there was little sense of much that was tangible lying beyond that: accountability to boards of directors, where they existed, or to other stakeholders, seemed only nominal. Rather, the organisations seemed primarily accountable to the values or ideals of its founder(s) who, in many cases, remained in charge.

When the interviews explored organisational structure and development (see section 3.5), numerous NGO representatives—who, in many cases, were the founders of the organisations—talked about the difficulties they had with staff recruitment and retention, and described a variety of staff and volunteer development and training initiatives, some of which emphasised the broad involvement of staff in strategic planning. One group—an SDA—was experimenting with a “rotating leadership” scheme, and another (also an SDA) mentioned its efforts to put in place a properly functioning board.

Often missing, however, was any sense that they were accountable to their members, constituents or beneficiaries. In no single case, for example, were office holders elected to their positions. And in no single case did an organisation mention having a representative of the service users, project beneficiaries or target constituencies on its board of directors or otherwise formally incorporated into the decision-making apparatus of the organisation.

Three of the grassroots NGOs interviewed were of a largely “self-help” nature and thus, at least ostensibly, have a more community based character; but these were among the most informal groups in the sample and did not appear to have any established structures to guarantee community ownership or governance.

In what seemed like the clearest case of an authentically community-based NGO at work, one sub-provincial level NGO from Qinghai Province noted that:

“We have over 120 members, all capable, local people who are highly regarded in their communities and who are eager to make
contributions to public welfare undertakings. They are the ones who take the main responsibility for local projects. Since they are local people, they know the constituency well and their design and operation of the projects are based on the fundamental needs of the local people.” (我们有120名左右的会员，都是比较有威望同时热心公益事业而且有能力的当地人。他们也是当地项目的主要负责人。因为对目标群体的情况十分了解，他们能够根据当地群众的基本需求进行项目策划和运作。

Some of the other NGOs expressed awareness of the limitations of their embrace of participation as a guiding precept. In addition to the representative quoted above, who argued against participation being seen as a “method,” we heard (from the leader of another SDA) this reflection on passive versus “active” participation:

“We are presently making a plan for volunteers; once it is done we should have an interactive relationship. I’ve also demanded that [staff] transform the workers’ current passive participation into active participation, so they have ownership over these things . . . They do help with many participatory trainings and activities, but I feel that we have not yet mobilised their awareness of being in charge of their own affairs.” (我们目前在做一个志愿者的计划，志愿者的计划做出来以后我们应该是一个互动的关系。我也要求他们把目前工人被动的参与变成主动的参与，变成他们自己的事情…他们也有很多参与式的活动和培训，他们帮着做；但是我觉得没有把他们主人公的意识调动起来。

These cases suggest that at least some of the grassroots NGOs have thought about (or intuitively appreciate) the desirability of community roots, and of putting participatory rhetoric into organisational practice. Nevertheless, the great majority appeared to be mainly devoted to doing things for others, as opposed to being owned and run by beneficiaries or constituents.

*And expert endorsement is usually regarded more highly . . .*

Thus, unlike social movements in some parts of the world, where NGOs may vie for recognition as authentic representatives of their constituencies (and legitimate themselves in these terms), Chinese NGOs are more inclined to emphasise the moral worth of their contribution (as caring, compassionate, self-evidently engaged in good works, etc) and/or, to differing extents, their specialist knowledge, or access to specialist knowledge.
As the following section (on communication) shows, research papers and other reports play a significant role in some groups’ efforts to influence policy, and some “self declared advocates” are quite explicit in linking intellectual authority to advocacy. One, for example, sketched his organisation’s plans for developing stronger links with academic researchers, saying:

“[If] Experts, scholars or intellectuals can join in our activities we can simultaneously improve our projects with the benefit of their theoretical level. In this way we can do advocacy from this basis . . .”

Interestingly, an industry association in Jiangsu described similar plans to establish links with research institutions in order to work more effectively on policy analysis and recommendations.

A generic, environmental NGO also echoed the need for intellectual authority to support its case when, speaking of its relationships with media, it asserted that, “They (media) need to communicate with experts.”

Nevertheless, although the NGOs appear to be carried in a strong and broad current of respect for moral and intellectual authority—which is entirely consistent with China’s past—the widespread use of participatory discourse suggests that this is in some cases blended with appreciation of the value of ordinary people’s understanding of their own situation.

Only one interviewee, however, went so far as to suggest that there are natural limits to the reach of scholarship, saying that “although scholars and experts can be useful, it’s very hard for them to really understand what the mass of people at lower levels want.”

Communication strategies are varied but not, in most cases, clearly thought out . . .

In discussing with the organisations how and why they publicise (xuanchuan) their work, we were able to discern several different approaches. Yet very few, if any, groups articulated a coherent and carefully thought out communications strategy, specifying what it was they wanted to communicate, to whom and why. Groups took the
discussion in different ways, variously emphasising public education (information, education and communication), communication with their own constituency, general brand promotion and fundraising, and, in some cases, efforts to reach and engage with policy and decision makers; but, on the whole, the organisations did not distinguish clearly between these kinds of activities. A key factor in this may well be a general ambiguity in the (widely used) concept of *xuanchuan*, which can connote both “propaganda” in a command economy sense and “publicity” in a market economy sense. Indeed, it might be said that the whole field of communication and information in China is in flux, as old style propaganda techniques give way to modern advertising and branding methods, without it being clear to what extent the state is ready to relinquish its monopoly of national development narratives, and at the same time that information technologies are themselves changing profoundly. It is hardly surprising that NGOs should have difficulty in positioning themselves in this shifting and uncertain terrain.

Organisations mentioned a fairly wide range of communications tools in connection with their *xuanchuan* activities: mass media reports (32 out of 40 organisations); their own websites (28); their own regular publications such as magazines or newsletters (24); public events such as exhibitions (9); conferences or seminars (4); personal contact or project work (4); research reports or policy studies (3); school-based education or outreach (3.)

One of the most striking findings was that several grassroots NGOs (and SDAs in particular), but none of the GONGOs or trade, industry and professional associations, mentioned conferences, seminars, research reports and policy studies as relating to *xuanchuan*; and grassroots NGOs were also uniquely inclined to see personal contact and/or project work as relating to *xuanchuan*. (A full breakdown is given in Table III.4, of Section 3.) This suggests that at least some of the grassroots NGOs are more inclined than organisations initiated by government to see their work as geared to influencing policy and decision makers.

Organisations of all kinds were alert to the impact of the mass media and saw this as a major means of *xuanchuan*, although there was considerable variation in what they wanted to *xuanchuan* and why.

Several of the GONGOs, whose official position gives them relatively easy access to media, saw coverage as valuable for supporting their fundraising efforts. Several also saw media coverage as a major way
to get across public education messages. Examples of cooperation with media included contributing regular columns to newspapers and working on TV documentaries. Two of the national GONGOs also mentioned public events as a way of publicising their concerns, and one mentioned reaching out to youngsters through both school-based and informal education programmes.

Two of the trade, industry and professional associations said that they barely engage in *xuanchuan*. The remainder were fairly evenly divided between those primarily concerned to *xuanchuan* government policies and regulations and those more concerned, as one put it, to “promote the image of the industry.” (推动工业的形象) This was just one of the ways in which the associations appeared to be in transit between command economy and market economy attitudes and behaviour. All of them publish regular magazines (and in most cases websites), aimed primarily at their own membership; and this, rather than mass media coverage, appeared to be where their *xuanchuan* efforts were mainly concentrated. However, most had at least some dealings with media and two or three seemed particularly active in this respect. One related how their local industry had been damaged by fake products in international markets, and how a TV report on this had helped to restore the reputation of the association’s member companies. Two associations mentioned special events (expos and a “festival”) that they had held as a form of *xuanchuan*.

The grassroots NGOs showed a wide range of attitudes and approaches to *xuanchuan*.

Groups that were primarily concerned with self-help were the least geared to external communications, concentrating their resources instead on information exchange between the membership or core constituency. This internal sharing was evidently itself an important part of their work, with the Internet and email cited as important tools for communication and exchange between members and with similar groups in other parts of China.

Groups providing specific services talked mainly of communication with service users. Some had received a fair amount of media coverage and acknowledged that this could help increase public trust (信任) and profile (知名度) but, in at least one case, coverage had been somewhat negative. The group in question stressed that they frequently invite government officials to visit their work as this helps to let the officials know how things are going while also serving to motivate staff.
Personal contact and discussion appeared here to be the most important communications tool.

Some NGOs providing services also feared being overwhelmed by too much publicity. For example, one that works with mentally handicapped children and their families reported that:

The two of us who are mainly in charge here have over the years already spent all of our resources to serve mentally handicapped children and parents, and we simply don’t have extra money to put into xuanchuan. Besides, after we received media coverage, more and more parents came to us for advice, this took up a lot of time, and diverted energy from running the organisation. To tell the truth, I am dog tired.” (为了给智障儿童和家长提供服务,我们两个主要负责人这些年已经倾囊而出,我们再没有什么余钱投入到宣传上了。而媒体对我们宣传之后,越来越多的家长找到我们进行咨询,我要分出大量的时间做这些工作,这样我对目前机构运作的精力投入就会受到影响。实在是太累了。)

An NGO providing legal advisory services also said that publicity could unduly increase their workload. Noting that the media had recently been visiting frequently to find stories that reflect the idea of “harmonious society,” the spokesperson said emphatically, “We don’t want to be reported too widely.” (不要过多的报道)

Others also expressed reservations about the value of media coverage. An NGO serving the gay and lesbian community said:

“We were once reported by the Huashang Mornings News and China Daily and we helped CCTV News Watch with a report on Chinese gays’ life. But we still feel a bit confused about our relationship with the media. And to some extent we don’t believe that media may help our xuanchuan.” (我们曾经被《华商晨报》和《中国日报》报道过,也曾协助中央电视台《新闻观察》栏目对中国男同性恋进行相关报道。但我们对于同媒体的关系仍然感觉有些困惑。某种程度上说,我们感觉媒体可能无法帮助我们进行宣传。）

Another group feared media misrepresentation:

“Recently, The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times wanted to report on our organisation. I told them that if they just want to stay here for a day or two and then fabricate something biased they’d better not come. As to some of the Chinese media, the unpleasant truth is that they dare not cover something sharp and what they do report is sometimes not in line with the facts.”
This organisation, which was one of the “self described advocates,” appeared to see its *xuanchuan* efforts as consisting more in demonstration projects, in communication with government, and in policy research studies. Another SDA, working in the field of women’s rights and development, emphasised the need to protect the privacy of project beneficiaries, and so did not encourage mass media reporting of their work, but did pay for public service messages in media outlets. They also referred to holding symposiums, lectures and training workshops as a kind of *xuanchuan*.

The two faith-based NGOs interviewed both reported difficulties in obtaining media coverage because of their religious background. Both attached more importance to the quality of their interaction and communication with people and agencies they work with directly, notably project partners, than to the quantity of their exposure to a wider audience. One, however, suggested a possible change of direction:

“We are not seeking wide expansion of our organisation, rather we are searching for the extension of our organisation’s ideals. I think this clearly defines our positioning. Moreover we are now emphasising extending our ideals out to the public, letting more and more people accept our values. I believe this is an important aspect of creating a harmonious society.”

An organisation working on labour rights (an SDA) also felt that the media provides an outlet to “spread our values and beliefs” (传播我们的理念). Yet the representative of this organisation said that the group had not gone out of its way to attract coverage, but “attract the media because we work on issues that are of interest to them.” (因为我们做一些媒体感兴趣的话题，所以吸引他们。) Moreover, the representative cautioned that: “Interacting with the media is quite difficult: you need to be able to get a good handle on them, without being taken advantage of.” (因为跟媒体打交道是比较困难的事情：能够很好的把握他们，不要被他们把握。) This group did not rely exclusively, or even primarily on media coverage to advance their cause. Rather, the NGO publishes its own, bi-monthly magazine that is intended, the representative said, to influence policy
makers, and also organises conferences and seminars and produces research reports.

An NGO devoted to the prevention of child abuse listed publishing a book and holding conferences and trainings as its main xuanchuan activities, and made no mention of media coverage.

Thus, although 17 of the 20 grassroots NGOs mentioned media reports as a form of xuanchuan, 12 of them were relatively passive in this respect, and concentrated on other forms of xuanchuan. Only five actively sought out media coverage.

Generic, environmental organisations were much the most inclined to see media coverage as an indispensable part of their work. One, based in Beijing, said:

“About xuanchuan, I think that the media is the most crucial thing. The media is our best friend. And we have in fact mobilised the media. We have attracted our best allies, the media. . . .

“It is fair to say that our very first office building came to us as the result of a media report. Eighty percent of our staff came to us after learning about us through the media. We also have many corporations who have come to us because of media coverage. The most extreme case of this was when the Beijing mayor, after learning about me in the media, called on me to go to his office for a discussion. So these cases, [our] growth and development are inseparable from the media . . . And our xuanchuan work to inform the general public is also because of the media.”

(关于这个宣传，我觉得媒体是最关键的东西。媒体是我们最好的朋友。其实我们动员了媒体。我们吸引了我们最好的同盟军就是媒体 . . .

可以说，我们的当初最早的办公室就是媒体报道了以后有人给我们提供的。我们的工作人员 80%是看了媒体的报道后找来的。我们还有很多企业找来也是因为媒体。最夸张的是，北京市市长看到媒体对我的报道后，找到我去他的办公室谈话。所以这些事情表明，NGO 的成长和发展离开媒体是不可以想象的 . . . 那么我们的宣传为大众知道也是因为媒体。)

Provincial (and sub-provincial) environmental NGOs largely echoed these thoughts. One (an SDA) said that “Most of our activities couldn’t happen without the help of media” (大多数活动是离不开媒体的帮助), and felt that this would itself promote “public participation,” since:
"We mainly want to let everyone know what we are doing, and to spread its significance, to let everybody know that there are people doing this kind of thing, and the significance of what we are doing. Central to our work is promoting, and this comes down to our hope that the public will come to participate." （我们主要想让我们做的这件事情和这个事情的意义传播给大家，让大家知道有人在做这个事情，还有这个事情的意义...我们工作的核心就是推动，推动就是希望公众来参与。）

In summary, some grassroots NGOs, especially generic environmental organisations, appear primarily concerned to reach the public with education messages, and see mass media as playing a critical part in this. Others, concerned to 襲撓 their “ideals” (理念), see mass media as having some role in this, but also feel that there are other, often more personal, means of reaching people. Some more specialist organisations are intent on reaching decision makers, and again see the media as having some role, but also deploy other means. Yet others appear more focused on informing their own community or constituency. On the whole, however, these approaches are not clearly differentiated, but frequently blend into each other.

Many NGOs crave better relations with government . . .

Organisations of all kinds showed a keen interest in the topic of NGO-government relations, which repeatedly surfaced in the interviews. More than forty, discrete comments are quoted in Section 3, Tables III.7 to III.9.

Trade, industry and professional associations were divided between those that saw themselves as primarily serving their membership (and that were on the whole satisfied with this arrangement) and those that saw themselves as still, basically, government-controlled organisations (and that, in some cases, expressed frustration at enduring government control of their staffing and operations.) This appeared not to be a difference in perception so much as in fact. In many respects, associations in areas where the private economy is more developed were themselves better developed, more independent, and functioning more to the satisfaction of their staff (and, reportedly, members); whereas in areas where the private economy is less developed, government remained involved in allocating staff and resources and the associations were relatively inactive.

The GONGOs, despite that appellation—to which one vigorously objected—did not on the whole regard themselves as being mere
creatures of government. Although in many cases government appointed their leaders and staff, they generally described themselves as institutionally separate from government, while still belonging to the same team, with the same objectives, and under the same (Communist Party) leadership. Some spoke of how government had assigned or entrusted certain tasks to them, while others spoke of how they complemented government programmes by working with hard-to-reach constituencies, by sharing burdens that are too large for government to assume alone, or by “substituting for government in the areas where they can’t make achievements.” (Several grassroots NGOs expressed themselves in very similar terms.) All emphasised “close and harmonious” working relationships with relevant government departments.

Several GONGOs also appeared alert and open to the possibility of an expanded and more autonomous role. One, national-level organisation said:

“Speaking of NGOs’ functions, I think that we should advocate smaller government and bigger society so that NGOs can further bring their advantages into full play.” (从 NGO 的作用来看，我觉得应该大力提倡小政府大社会，使得 NGO 能够进一步发挥自身作用。)

And another:

“What China needs most is the construction of civil society. In this process, NGOs should try their best to awaken more people’s citizenship awareness so that they can make a greater contribution to the construction of a harmonious society.” (现阶段在中国最需要的是公民社会建设。在促进社会进步的过程中，NGOs 应该做的是有针对性的，尽可能唤醒更多人的公民意识，从而在构建和谐社会的过程中发挥自身的作用。)

One GONGO registered at county level expressed both the need for and at the same time the difficulty of achieving greater independence:

“The correct direction is to become a bit more independent of government. This is right for the development of all people’s organisations. But up to now this is still not the case. We are still dependent on government in taking forward our work and we are taking on a lot of work passed on from government, because [our association] is not like other people’s organisations, its relationship and contact with government is very close . . . So to
separate from government completely is still not okay” (但是正确的方向应该是和政府相对独立一点，整个民间组织的发展这样是对的。但是目前还不行。还在依赖政府开展工作，本身来承担政府很多交办的工作，因为[我们的]会不象别的民间组织，他跟政府的关系联系非常密切，所以离了政府还不行。)

Government relations were evidently a major issue for the great majority of the 20 “grassroots NGOs” interviewed. In the written questionnaire-survey, 17 out of 20 grassroots NGOs agreed with the proposition “Close relationships with government can help you to achieve your goals.” Yet, also in the survey, only eight organisations claimed “cooperative and close relationships” with government. Simple arithmetic suggests that nine of the grassroots NGOs are disposed to improve their relations with government.

Responding to another question in the questionnaire-survey, 11 out 20 grassroots NGOs selected “communication with government departments” as one of their main channels for xuanchuan, but three organisations also identified this as one of the hardest channels to use.

In some cases, the desire to win government trust seemed mainly a matter of, firstly, smoothing the NGO’s own operations and, secondly, accessing government resources. (Examples were given where “reaching out to government” had resulted in material support.) The relationships that mattered were often local for, as one group (which works in several cities) pointed out:

“The concepts and attitude of local governments towards NGOs are different. Therefore, our relations with different local governments are not the same. Basically, we long to pursue our further development in cities whose leaders are more open-minded, and which can provide more preferential policies.” (由于各地区发展不平衡，地方政府有关 NGOs 方面的理念和态度也不尽相同，因此我们同各地方政府的关系还是有所区别，我们渴望去观念更开放，政策更优惠的省市发展。)

The most basic need for small NGOs that cannot shop around for sympathetic city governments is to obtain government endorsement for registration purposes. At least one of the grassroots NGOs had failed to achieve this and expressed considerable frustration at the fact, but also determination to proceed:

“We are very keen to register as a legal, grassroots people’s organisation, but so far it’s not promising at all, although we’ve devoted a lot of time and energy to this. Still, we’ll stick with it.
Yet many of the grassroots NGOs did have significant experience of cooperation with government. For example, two (which were not SDAs) had reached agreements to operate quite large-scale social service facilities, in one case, with government providing substantial resources. Another (an SDA) was mobilising quite substantial international funding for poverty alleviation and development projects that are largely implemented by local government partners.

These groups were able to offer some insight into how to communicate satisfactorily with government. They frequently mentioned the need to emphasise commonalities not differences—“finding common ground on big issues, while agreeing to differ on others” (求打通存小异)—as one put it. This organisation emphasised its business-like and relatively formal approach to project agreements, which were specified in a contract with government. The group provided detailed annual accounts to show there were no “hidden secrets” (偷偷摸摸的东西), and each year conducted interview surveys of beneficiaries to let government “understand ordinary peoples’ needs” (了解老百姓有什么需求). All of these, the group felt, served as “small ways to create an equal relationship with government” (小方法去建立跟政府平等的关系).

Some groups also saw government backing as a route to wider influence. For example, the representative of an environmental NGO (not an SDA) said government endorsement strengthened its environmental education efforts:

“If we say this ourselves, probably its impact is not as great. If we say it through the government department perhaps it gains greater recognition and acceptance.” (如果我们自己说出来可能不是很 大，如果通过政府部门说出来，他的认可性就比较大。)

Finally, as already noted, some of the NGOs wanted improved access to and communication with government in order to influence its policy and behaviour. Two of the generic, environmental NGOs were adamant that they have already had significant impact on government, although the same claim was not made by “self declared advocates” working on more specific issues or with specific constituencies.
But most still value their independence . . .

In the questionnaire-survey, eight of the 20 grassroots organisations assented to the proposition that “independence from government is very important to achieve your goals,” and another five said that it was “fairly important.” This is less than the total number of organisations (17) who recognised the value of “close and cooperative relations with government,” but it nevertheless suggests that many wish to improve government relationships without sacrificing their independence.

One generic environmental NGO (not an SDA), said:

“Of course we want to be independent: our voice, our perspectives are certainly not exactly the same as government, there would be no point in that. On the other hand, being recognised by government, being able to pull together with government, or being able to influence government, so to speak, that’s the other half of being effective . . . So we have to work hard at going out to establish this cooperative partnership, maintaining independence within this partnership.” (当然要独立，我们的声音，我们的视点肯定跟政府不完全一样，要不然我们就是政府了。何必需要我们。另一方面，得到政府的认可，能够和政府形成合力，或者说能够影响政府那是一个事半功倍的事情。. . . 所以要努力的去建立这个合作伙伴关系，并在这个合作关系中保持自己的独立性。)

A second environmental NGO (and SDA) reported that it had refrained from registering officially because it was being offered sponsorship by two, different government departments, and preferred not to choose between them because it wanted to work with both.

A strong call for independence came from one SDA which, in the interview context, was referring not just to independence from government but also independence from international donors:

“We believe there should be capacity for independent development, we should continue to develop an independent voice, it should be independent, our people should have independent working capacity, that’s to say, independent development capacity, not needing to stick to other people’s development. We cannot accept other people’s control.” (我们相信应该有独立发展的能力，我们应该保持发展独立的声音；应该有独立的，我们的人应该有独立工作的能力。就是说有独立发展的能力，不需要靠别人发展，不能受别人的人支配。)
Most seem to be seeking moral renewal rather than political change . . .

As asked about their views on, and role in promoting, social progress and social change in China, no NGO gave any indication that it was, consciously or otherwise, working for political change in the status quo.

Several emphasised the importance of the sector they addressed—eg, poverty alleviation, disability, children and young people, etc. Several NGOs (and GONGOs) also talked about civil society and the growth of the non-profit sector as itself a form of progress or change to which they are contributing.

One of the strongest forms of this argument came from a “self declared advocate” who saw “people’s force” and civil society as having the capacity to “change Chinese traditions”:

“I feel the most important thing is how to make civil society develop. So I feel that fostering a people’s force is extremely important. We shouldn’t think of this force as being just NGOs; it should be the whole citizenry together . . . NGOs are just a small part of that force, yet in China at present, NGOs are still immature . . . But I feel it is the same as with business organisations. In the 1980s, business organisations had many shortcomings . . . Well, I feel NGOs also have many weaknesses but altogether they are certainly on a path of continuous development . . . We have many very good ideals but we don’t implement them; we are used to dependency, used to top-down approaches, we are not used to bottom-up working . . . I believe this is one way to change Chinese traditions, one that proves that the civil sector is a force.”

This was perhaps the most adventurous assessment in terms of suggesting a vision for a new kind of society, based on “bottom up working.” But even this analysis contains nothing overtly oppositional but offers, rather, a cultural revolution that would be made by piecemeal progress and “continuous development.”
The leader of another grassroots “self declared advocate” said the organisation had “assumed an extremely important mission, the creation of a new moral order,” and argued that “in this way we can really enter a more harmonious society” (承担了一个非常重要的使命，那就是新的道德的创建...这样我们才能真正的进入一个更加和谐的社会。)

On this person’s analysis—which was broadly representative of what many others appeared to be expressing—the most important missing ingredient in China’s society is civic virtue and generosity of spirit:

“For the most part, there has been great improvement in economic development and in ordinary people’s development in the past 20 years. [But] these have not been strengthened for some social groups... In these circumstances, we talk of three distributions. When we talk about harmonious society the concept of harmony is a negotiation of interests, through which balance is reached. Achieving this depends on distribution. Market distribution emphasizes efficiency, efficacy. Government collection of taxes, the second distribution, emphasizes justice. But in reality no government has successfully resolved the third distribution. This is more dependent on people’s hearts and spirits. (经济发展老百姓的发展这20年得到很大的改善。一般来说,有一些群体没有达到现在强调的这些...在这种情况下我们叫做三次分配。讲和谐社会这个和谐就是一个利益的调整，利益的调整达到平衡...这个利益的调整要靠分配来实现。市场的分配强调的就是效率，效益，政府的税收；第二次分配强调是公正。但是事实上哪个政府都没有好好的解决第三次分配，这个更多的是依靠心，精神。)

1.5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data generated by this exercise is too rich to be easily interpreted and its presentation (in a form that respects the anonymity of the interviewees) is inevitably somewhat schematic. Nonetheless, some simple conclusions do seem to be valid:

- A significant number of grassroots NGOs—notably, but not exclusively, those concerned with different aspects of environment protection—see “advocacy” as part of their work, in ways that do have some clear connection with international usage. However, translation and adaptation of the English term “advocacy” appears to have involved a degree of de-politicisation. In international usage, “advocacy” can connote oppositional, adversarial approaches, and social movements for change in economic, social and political relations at local, national or global level. Chinese
NGO usage, by contrast, tends to emphasise changes in attitudes and behaviour, and cooperative, cross-sectoral partnerships with the whole of society working together. Even “self-described advocates” are in general neither oppositional in their thinking nor adversarial in their conduct. Many seem on the whole to be concerned mainly with public education and/or moral renewal rather than with political change. For some, indeed, there is perhaps a tendency to see themselves as natural partners with government in educating society.

Most Chinese NGOs seek close and cooperative working relationships with government—either to obtain operational space and material support to provide services for their constituencies, and/or to influence the development and implementation of government policy. In some cases NGOs have achieved constructive engagement with (usually local) authorities, but there is considerable variation in this and very many organisations desire improved relations with government.

By contrast, very few Chinese NGOs appear to have thought about seeking to influence or otherwise engage with the private business sector (other than for fundraising purposes.)

Although many Chinese NGOs are interested and well versed in participatory discourse, their governance—which is generally hazy—does not include mechanisms to include target or beneficiary constituencies in decision making processes. Despite the widespread use of the phrase “grassroots NGO,” very few organisations can demonstrate a strong community base or formal mechanisms of accountability to the community they serve.

Although Chinese NGOs use a wide variety of communications tools, in many cases this does not seem to result from clearly thought-out communications strategies to address target audiences with specific messages.

Trade, industry and professional associations are, evidently, in transit from command economy to market economy ways of working. Although there are no obvious “lessons” that “grassroots NGOs” can learn from the associations, the growth and development of this sector is worthy of attention both as indicator of changing state-society relations, and as a state-led model for creating loyal intermediary organisations.
Public interest GONGOs, ("government-organised NGOs"), although still closely tied to government, nonetheless see themselves as comprising a distinct, non-governmental sector and, in several cases, appear keen to see the growth of a broader and more independent non-profit sector. However, most are engaged primarily in mobilising funds for charitable assistance and on public education, and there is little sign that they use their position to dialogue with government on substantive policy issues.

**Recommendations**

Although the purpose of this report was to explore the terrain, not to make specific recommendations, we nonetheless feel that several, key points should be made:

- We strongly discourage international organisations from providing off-the-peg “advocacy trainings” in China. Differences in understanding of the term are themselves liable to create confusion; and, moreover, this kind of training could be experienced by the NGOs as directive and interfering.

- International organisations that wish to assist the development and “capacity building” of China’s non profit sector would do better to support initiatives that enhance Chinese NGO communications skills, techniques and strategies. There is plenty of scope for peer learning and exchange as well as for expert assistance in areas ranging from presentation skills, through preparation of quality IEC materials, to developing integrated external communications policies and strategies. A focus on communications would be the least normative and least interfering option for international organisations, allowing Chinese NGOs to formulate and stick to their own agendas while improving their communication with government, media, the private sector, their own target, beneficiary or supporter constituencies and the public at large.

- There is also room for engagement with government agencies to help them understand the value of NGO work, for example by showcasing (through study visits etc) examples where local governments are working well with NGOs, giving them space and allowing them to work with communities.

- Chinese NGOs themselves are, understandably, often preoccupied with their role vis à vis government. For longer
term development they may find it useful also to reflect on how they locate themselves in society, and what implications this has for accountability to the communities with which they engage.

- Given the enormous impact of private business (both domestic and international) on China’s development, Chinese NGOs would also do well to think about the role of business in society, and to engage with businesses in ways other than merely soliciting funds.
2 POINTS OF DEPARTURE

2.1 Methodology

This research project explored the question: does advocacy play a part in how Chinese NGOs conceptualise their work? And, if so, how does advocacy from a Chinese NGO perspective relate to international views of advocacy? This was investigated through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 40 Chinese organisations. The interviews took place over a period of 3 months in 2005 (with one in 2006.)

Efforts were made to construct a sample that was both random and representative, finding a balance between organisations of different type, sector and geographic location. Factors such as the organisation’s operational budget, length of operation and level of international exposure were considered in the analysis of the findings, but were not criteria for selection.

The following two clusters of organisations were defined for the sample:

Cluster 1: 20 *prima facie* close-to-government organisations, including:

- 5 national level foundations
- 5 provincial or sub-provincial foundations
- 5 business or industrial associations (of which at least two are provincial or sub-provincial)
- 5 professional associations

Cluster 2: 20 *prima facie* autonomous, citizen-initiated, “grassroots” organisations, of which:

- 10 are based in relatively developed areas (Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Tianjin)
- 10 are based in western provinces, of which at least 2 operate at sub-provincial level
- 8 appear to be mainly social service delivery organisations
- 8 appear to be geared towards influencing policy and/or public opinion (environmental groups, labor rights, etc)
- 4 are not obviously, at first sight, either one thing or the other
- At least 2 are faith-based organisations

To economise on travel time and costs, most of the interviewed organisations were based in five provinces—Hubei, Jiangsu, Liaoning, Shaanxi and Yunnan. These provinces were selected as together
providing a fairly representative socio-economic range and geographical distribution.

For Cluster 2 (“grassroots”) organisations, we interviewed three NGOs per province and, in order to meet our sectoral criteria, an additional four organisations in relatively developed areas (Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Tianjin.) One group in Qinghai was also included because we felt that the community of fairly distinctive (relatively rural community based) NGOs in Qinghai and some other ‘remote’ areas (eg Western Sichuan, Inner Mongolia) should be represented in the sample (in which urban NGOs were bound to predominate.)

However, all of the organisations included in the study were selected at random, literally by pulling names out of a bag for each sub-group in the clusters (including a bagful of Qinghai NGOs) from a short-list compiled on the basis of two, main documents: the Directory of China’s People’s Organisations, Provincial- level and Above, published by the NGO Management Department of the China Ministry of Civil Affairs\(^4\) and China Development Brief's 2001 directory, 250 Chinese NGOs: Civil Society in the Making.

The sample did not include academic research centres, institutes or think-tanks affiliated to Chinese universities or academies. Some such centres and institutes appear to have NGO-like qualities and, in some cases, to be significant advocates, engaging in a variety of action research projects. However, it was decided to exclude them because this was, pre-eminently, a survey of NGO advocacy, and as such it was natural to focus on groups that had chosen an NGO identity.\(^5\)

A fundamental criterion for inclusion was that the groups should be actively working to accomplish their mission. In most cases we were able, before the interview, to determine whether a group was sufficiently active to be included. However, two organisations were eliminated from the sample after the interview because they were

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\(^4\) 《中国省级以上民间组织名录》，民政部民间组织管理局，民政部民间组织服务中心编，2004 年 1 月出版。

\(^5\) 5. When is an NGO not an NGO? Ten years ago, when an NGO sector was just beginning to emerge in China, there were numerous groups attached to academic institutions that seemed to be hybrids of think-tanks, development project implementers and consultancy groups. To some extent this remains the case, and NGO taxonomy remains a vexed issue. However, we feel that enough time has elapsed (and it is now possible) for such groups to have chosen either an NGO identity and developmental path (as in the case of the Centre for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge—which grew out of the Kunming Botany Institute—or the Pesticides Eco-Alternatives Center, also in Yunnan, which grew out of the Yunnan Entomological Society) or else clearly to retain an academic research and teaching identity (as in the case, eg, of the Centre for Integrated Agricultural Development at the China Agricultural University, which has progressed to become the College of Rural Development and finally, in its present incarnation, the University’s College of Humanities and Development.)
clearly moribund. Having foreseen this possibility we were able to switch to substitute organisations that had been identified in each province.

The guidelines we devised for the semi-structured interview are included in Appendix I. These were intended to create a framework for discussion that would allow us to distil useful information without being too directive. Our questions, therefore, sought to illuminate the processes and strategies the organisations have employed to build their own capacity and to achieve their goals, rather than asking them explicitly if and how they “do advocacy.” The interviews were recorded, and interviewees were told that we might quote them but would not name them or their organisations. They assented to this arrangement.6

The interviews were structured based on the following five themes:

1. The principles guiding how the organisations choose what they do and who they works to serve or reach, including the role of the mission statement (if any) in this process, and whether these have changed over time.
2. The organisation’s governance structure, planning and decision making processes.
3. Whether and how the organisation works to influence others to affect change related to their area of work; who they feel it is important to influence and how they go about affecting that influence.
4. How they understand the political space in which their organisation operates, including the relative importance of independence for them to realise their objectives, as well as ‘cooperation’.
5. If the interviewees spontaneously talked about “advocacy”, (or related words), they were asked to elaborate on their understanding of what those terms mean.

It was left to the organisations to decide who would receive the interview. As we expected, in most (but not all) cases, they chose the head of the organisation as spokesperson. We initially considered the possibility of interviewing several people at different levels within each organisation, which might have provided interesting, additional insights into the extent to which staff were united (or otherwise) by a common vision and understanding of the organisation. However, this

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6 One of the national foundations (Cluster 1) expressed disappointment that we would not be “publicising” them.
would have added considerably to the complexity of the process and may also have distracted attention from the main point of the study, so we abandoned the idea.

Following each interview, the interviewees were asked to complete a questionnaire that re-visited some of the topics discussed in the interview. (Full results from this are presented in Section 4.) Despite the limitations of this kind of exercise, it was intended to provide a means for anonymous, confidential and direct comment that was not subject to interpretation by the researchers. Also, we hoped the questionnaire would provide some measurable, comparative data. Although the questionnaires were anonymous, the researchers did note the type of organisation (national GONGO, local GONGO, Trade, Industry or Professional association, Grassroots NGO) on the questionnaire sheets for purposes of comparison.

The interviews were carried out by two researchers, one Chinese, one American (a fluent Chinese speaker.) They conducted two trial interviews together (not included in the results presented here), modified the interview structure in the light of that experience, and then divided the 40 organisations between them. Obviously, there was a significant risk that interviewees might respond differently to the two interviewers. To reduce this risk, the researchers worked closely together to define common terms and approaches for the interviews and then met regularly to discuss the results from each individual interview. In the event, in our view, there was clear, broad convergence—and, certainly, no pattern of divergence—in the responses given to both interviewers.

This final report was drafted in a collaborative process that involved a series of meetings to discuss the topics covered in Section 3 (Interview Results.) At a relatively early stage in the design process, we designed a framework document intended to serve as a basis for classifying organisations according to their objectives and methods, and also, implicitly, to determine whether they could reasonably described as engaging in advocacy. (See Appendix II) However, as the study proceeded, we abandoned the thought of making this kind of classification or presenting the interview results in this way. To do so, we felt, would involve making judgments that, in the absence of clear benchmarks, could not be made fairly or responsibly on the basis of single interviews. Therefore, while organising the interview data around specific themes, this report largely concentrates on summarising and transmitting the different thoughts and opinions articulated by the organisations interviewed.
2.2 “With fearless energy”—global paradigms of advocacy

Over the last twenty years, many NGOs across the world have begun to describe their work in terms of “advocacy.” Indeed, the word has been used so frequently that it has become somewhat plastic, applied to an array of distinct activities. This section will briefly sketch some of the main strands in international advocacy discourse before we go on to ask whether these have any meaningful parallel or application in China.

In English, the verb “advocate” occurred quite early in connection with movements for social and political reform. For example, a monument in South London’s Nunhead Cemetery, erected in 1851 with funds raised at a public rally, commemorates five “Scottish Martyrs” who were “condemned in Scotland A.D. MDCCXCIII-IV [1793-4 CE] for advocating, with fearless energy, the principles of parliamentary reform.” Those advocates were sent to an Australian penal colony for their pains.

In 1855, just four years after that memorial was erected in London, an early black American reformer, Frederick Douglass, described in his autobiography how he had spent fourteen years travelling the United States with the Massachusetts anti-Slavery Society, writing articles and addressing meetings as “a public advocate of the cause of my enslaved brothers and sisters.”

These examples usefully alert us to the fact that, in at least some contexts, advocacy is a rather weighty matter, with high stakes for the advocates.

It is also worth noting that, although most countries have their own traditions of social radicalism, it is the English word “advocacy” that has become particularly prominent in global NGO discourse. German NGOs, for example, frequently employ the English term rather than any variant in their own language.

The Collins English Dictionary defines the verb “advocate” as “to support or recommend publicly,” but the word is also strongly associated in English usage with the legal profession, having derived from the Latin advocare, meaning to summon a witness. (Black’s Law

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7 Douglass, a runaway slave from Maryland, published his autobiography, My Bondage and My Freedom, in 1855. The passage quoted is from an excerpt that appears in Early Black Reformers, edited by James Tackach, Greenhaven Press, Minnesota.

8 Our thanks to Ms. Dorit Lehrack, an adviser to the China Association of NGOs, for pointing this out.
Dictionary defines the noun “advocate” as “One who assists, defends, or pleads for another . . . renders legal advice and aid and pleads the cause of another before a court or a tribunal.”

The connection between NGO advocacy and legal advocacy is especially strong in the USA, where there is a well-established pattern of individuals and organisations advancing social causes through legal challenges. An important, indeed seminal, example was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s campaign against racially segregated schooling in the United States. This led in 1954 to a landmark ruling by the Supreme Court (Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas) that effectively outlawed educational segregation, and proved a powerful stimulus for a wider, civil rights campaign. Other, more recent examples of US NGO advocacy through legal means include class actions against tobacco companies, and environmental litigation spearheaded by NGOs such as the Natural Resources Defence Council.

In many countries, NGOs also provide legal assistance and representation for people who would otherwise find it difficult to access justice. For example, in both Europe and the United States, there are organisations that offer legal assistance to immigrants and asylum seekers.

Some organisations see advocacy in terms of promoting universal human rights. In the West, the closing decades of the 20th century saw a revival of intellectual interest in the idea of rights. As Cold War hostilities ceased, some rights advocates hoped that political ideologies would be displaced by international accords on human rights standards. Certainly, the number of international human rights agreements has steadily increased, as has the number of human rights NGOs. Even among NGOs that do not describe themselves as “human rights

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9 Ronald Dworkin’s influential book, Taking Rights Seriously (1977, Harvard University Press) is an example of growing intellectual interest in the concept of rights at this time, when the human rights movement was also beginning to gather strength. The idea of universal rights does, of course, have a much longer history, taking in the French and American revolutions, Tom Paine’s The Rights of Man, (1791) etc. But it is probably fair to say that from the mid nineteenth to the mid twentieth centuries rights discourse was somewhat eclipsed by arguments about distributional justice—arguments put on the intellectual agenda by socialists and, pre-eminently, Marxists. They tended to suppose that a concern for human rights was naturally compatible with, and indeed subsumed by, socialism. For example, the English writer George Orwell said, in an essay written during an air-raid on London, that "Socialism aims, ultimately, at a world-state of free and equal human beings. It takes the equality of human rights for granted.” (The Lion and the Unicorn, republished in Why I Write, Penguin books, 2004, p. 49) Alas, the experiences of ‘actually existing socialism’ in the post-war period demonstrated that that socialism by no means automatically respects human rights. Resurgence of interest in the idea of rights is thus naturally linked to the decline of socialism.
organisations” there are many who now lay claim to “rights-based” programmes.

The idea of advocacy is also often connected with civic or social movements that appeal to considerations of distributonal and social justice and/or self-determination rather than to human rights. Such considerations resonate both with 19th and 20th century traditions of class-based politics in Europe and with anti-colonial movements (including international solidarity campaigns.) This kind of advocacy is particularly strong in Latin America, where marked economic inequality is mixed with (and indeed largely the outcome of) long colonial processes, which also left a heritage of European organisational forms, such as labour unions. (This is also true to an extent of South Asia and The Philippines.) Advocacy of this kind is often overtly political, and in some cases implicitly aims at “regime change.” The current, worldwide movement of “anti-globalisation activists” can also be seen in this light. Advocacy in this sense generally aims at change in existing power structures, and its techniques often include mass mobilisation of supporters, in activities ranging from letter-writing campaigns to mass protest rallies.

There is significant rhetorical convergence between “developed” and “developing” country advocacy of this kind. For example, the Advocacy Institute in Washington D.C. describes its aim as being to “strengthen social movements” and “advance their public agendas,” such that “all people are able to participate fully in shaping public values and policies” and become “social change advocates.”10 In India, the National Centre For Advocacy Studies describes itself in similar terms as “a membership based social change resource centre that aims at strengthening rights based and people centred advocacy, so as to empower people who are struggling for the creation of a just and humane society.”11 The Centre notes that “public advocacy uses a number of tools, usually in tandem, to mobilise public support and influence policy makers.” Among the available “tools” the Centre enumerates: “[influencing] the mass media, the judiciary, lobbying, networking, raising questions in parliament, struggling to gain access to information, coalitions with like-minded groups, door-to-door awareness campaigns and mass mobilisation for demonstrations and civil disobedience.”

Environmental campaigners have a similar, advocacy toolbox, and there is a great deal of coalition building between environmental and

10 www.advocacy.org
11 www.ncasindia.org
social causes, both on specific issues (such as opposition to particular infrastructure projects) and in the more generic quest for “sustainable development.” In the West, environmental campaigning organisations almost certainly deserve much of the credit for “mainstreaming” environmental issues over the last 30 or so years—compelling mainstream media, politicians and businesses to at least acknowledge the problems—and so this area merits particular attention as an example of apparently successful advocacy.

Some environmental groups in the 1970s began to elaborate radical and libertarian (but essentially minority) visions of low-growth or no-growth “alternative societies.” Others, such as Greenpeace, soon developed a “single-issue campaigning” approach—against, eg, whaling, nuclear testing, rainforest destruction or genetically modified organisms—that was implicitly confrontational, urging ordinary citizens to “take sides” while avoiding deeper ideological waters. The driving idea was that it is extremely difficult to “convert” the majority of people to an entirely new and “ecological” way of life that might well involve reducing their levels of personal consumption; whilst it is relatively easy to grab public attention—via well thought out media strategies and photo-opportunities—and to gain public support for campaigns against flagrant, and very specific, environmental abuses.

Single-issue campaigning has also been adopted by groups with other concerns: for example, opponents of labour exploitation in developing countries often target campaigns at specific industries and even specific corporations—again, without necessarily embarking on a wider ‘ideological’ debate.

A notable feature of single-issue campaigning is that it is nearly always “negative” in the sense that it mobilises public opposition to wrongdoing: it is mainly against things—whether highways, pornography, or racism—rather than for things. Of course, the campaigners will respond that they are for, respectively, an unblemished environment, respectful human relationships, racial harmony etc; but, nevertheless, there appears to be a working assumption that it is easier for people to say what they are against rather than to iterate what they are for. This is not a stupid

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12 This kind of environmentally-inspired utopian movement was stimulated by contemporary writings such as a landmark report, *Blueprint for Survival*, prepared by *The Ecologist* magazine (UK) in January 1972 and subsequently reprinted as a best-selling book. It has continued to resonate to some extent in mainstream “lifestyle” politics (eg, the organic food movement), while the more socially radical and experimental forms continue to have some adherents. See, for example, the annotated bibliography at: to http://socialwork.arts.unsw.edu.au/tsw/DocsALTERNATIVES.html
assumption but it begs the question whether the assumption is only valid in a Western context.

Whilst nearly all forms of advocacy claim broadly to secure “the public interest,” advocacy also very frequently implies speaking—whether to plead or to demand—on behalf of more specific constituencies. There is, for example, a rich seam of global advocacy and activism around issues of disability. In one such case, Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia, which concerns itself with the one in ten Australian children who have some form of autism, distinguishes between “systemic advocacy” and “individual advocacy.” 13 The former “focuses on influencing and changing the system so that people with a disability as a whole will benefit” and includes “policy and law reform activities, representations to politicians, media releases, publications and disability awareness training.” The latter “assists [individual] families to resolve issues.” In the UK, Choices Advocacy tries to improve the lives of adults with learning difficulties and older people through networks where “ordinary citizens volunteer and are trained with advocacy skills” 14 while Leeds Advocacy sees its task as “speaking out for people with learning disabilities.” 15 Similarly, Advocacy Service Aberdeen, which helps people with special social and health care needs to access relevant services, describes its work as “speaking up for and with people who are not being heard, helping them to express their own views and make their own decisions.” 16 To this end, the Service offers interpretation in Urdu, Bengali, Chinese and Arabic for its clients. Here, advocacy appears in the guise of combating social exclusion. A wide range of NGOs apply this kind of approach not only to people with disabilities, but to ethnic and sexual minorities, and many other constituencies.

Whilst many organisations attempt to project the voices of socially disadvantaged and politically weak groups into policy debate, others attempt to influence policy makers by conducting their own social and scientific research, often highlighting the impact of existing policy on social groups and/or the environment. This approach is often referred to as “policy advocacy.” The UK’s Child Poverty Action Group, established in the 1930s by an émigré German sociology professor, is a typical example. Such organisations may be sympathetic to social

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13 www.a4.org.au
14 www.choices-advocacy.org.uk/
15 www.leedsadvocacy.org.uk
16 www.advocacy.org.uk/
movements, but the more specialist (and “scientific”) they are the more they tend to be distanced from the field of “mass mobilisation.”

As well as publishing their own reports and attempting to impact on public opinion through mass media or other forums, NGO advocates may also communicate directly, in correspondence and meetings, with public office holders, international financial institution staff and, increasingly, private corporations. In democracies, NGOs with a substantial supporter base are able to obtain such meetings because their influence and public reach are recognised: the NGOs are an important constituency for both politicians and corporate executives. Organisations with less public profile may also get a seat at the policy consultation roundtable (or in the corporate “social responsibility” forum) because of their demonstrated, specialist knowledge—as is the case with organisations like the Child Poverty Action Group.

NGO advocacy in this direct form can be described as “lobbying”—a historical reference to waiting in the lobby adjacent to the legislative chamber. Yet this is a pejorative term for many NGOs because it is also associated with corporations and individuals pursuing purely private interests through representations to legislators. Such lobbying generally lacks transparency and in some cases—such as Enron’s lobbying to deregulate California’s electrical power industry—can be spectacularly successful for the lobbyists but of highly dubious benefit to society at large.17

In many parts of the world there have long existed business associations whose purpose is precisely to advance the interests of their members, much as some NGOs seek to serve and speak for particular constituencies. Pressure groups like the US labour rights monitoring organisation, Sweatshop Watch, would almost certainly not regard, say, the American Apparel Manufacturers Association as an “NGO.” However, NGO taxonomy is increasingly complicated by the recent creation of numerous business organisations—such as Business Councils for Sustainable Development—that espouse a broader, public benefit agenda. Without being too diverted by these issues, it is relevant to the present study to note that the term “advocacy” is beginning to enter corporate discourse, both insofar as businesses come to embrace “social” goals, and in clear the ground for them to achieve business goals. In one striking example, the US federal government maintains an “Advocacy Center” whose stated purpose is “to coordinate U.S. Government resources and authority in order to

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level the playing field [original emphasis] on behalf of U.S. business interests as they compete against foreign firms for specific international contracts or other U.S. export opportunities.”

National governments have of course long helped their business sectors make profits overseas, but it seems new—as well as odd—to hear this described as advocacy.

Seasoned NGO activists may expostulate that this is an appropriation and perversion of the word “advocacy.” But language is essentially public, daily reshaped by millions of tongues and computer keyboards, and no-one has sole proprietorship over meaning. As concepts become fashionable they invariably also become plastic, sometimes giving rise to fiercely contested disputes—for example, about what “sustainable development” or “civil society” really is, or should be. Advocacy appears set to join this realm of contested concepts, with a range of different inflexions and meanings in different contexts. Our purpose here has been to describe the field—not to legislate on meaning.

Table II.1 attempts to capture the present spectrum of activities commonly associated with advocacy in countries other than China. None of the suggested categories are mutually exclusive. On the contrary, many NGOs engage simultaneously in several different kinds of advocacy, and for some it may indeed be expedient to do so. For example, some international relief and development NGOs arrived at advocacy (on issues like international terms of trade, third world debt, and the role of international financial institutions) because their field experience led them to believe that “development” could not be delivered by charity, or by an external agency providing services, but must, rather, involve local and global social and political change. However, if such organisations’ campaigning appears too “political” they may alienate supporters and even risk the loss of charitable status in their country of registration. The more unifying language of human rights and “rights-based programming”, by contrast, appeals more broadly and less contentiously to values that relatively few people openly repudiate.

This is not to imply, however, that advocacy is always tantamount to political activity, or of any consistent, political colour. For some people, no doubt, it is the torch that illuminates the darkness left by the eclipse of socialism; while for others it is an enriching extension of (or, in undemocratic societies, a step in the direction of) free market liberal democracy. Indeed, the breadth of the notion’s political appeal

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18 http://www.export.gov/advocacy/
doubtless helps explain how it has become so globally fashionable. (Exactly the same may be said of the idea of “civil society.”)

It should be clear from this that there is in fact no clear, single global advocacy paradigm. What we find, rather, is more like a soup with different flavours and ingredients. And thus our study is in part an attempt to discern which, if any, of those ingredients and flavours can be found in China.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table II.1</th>
<th>Rough guide to NGO advocacy approaches worldwide</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legal advocacy</strong></td>
<td>Using litigation to press for change in law and policy and/or to raise awareness of issues. Providing legal representation for specific constituencies, eg, (im)migrants, people with disabilities, to defend and extend their (legal) rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human rights advocacy</strong></td>
<td>Promoting human rights compliance through monitoring, reporting and raising awareness of international Conventions. Also reflected in “rights-based programming” that approaches development issues from the perspective of how to secure and protect the rights of particular constituencies (and/or the population at large), rather than, say, how to meet their ‘needs’ or promote their social and economic ‘interests.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy research advocacy</strong></td>
<td>Usually this is ‘expert’ advocacy by specialists in a particular field who will assemble evidence and offer recommendations to influence policy decisions; NGOs will often use or commission research findings to advance their own case on social and environmental issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constituency based advocacy</strong></td>
<td>Speaking and acting on behalf of a particular (usually vulnerable or excluded) constituency, eg, people with disabilities. Often also seeks to ‘empower’ people in that constituency to speak for themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Campaigning advocacy</strong></td>
<td>Campaigning on single-issues that pressure people to take a ‘for’ or ‘against’ position. This strategy is often used by environmental organisations, but also by other kinds of pressure group (eg, anti-sweatshop, ant-WTO.) Usually identifies a clear target to oppose, eg, a company, or a government policy or decision. Techniques include use of mass media and mass mobilisation of supporters in, eg, letter-writing campaigns, petitions, symbolic protests or public demonstrations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social movement advocacy</strong></td>
<td>Aims at broad change in existing power relations, either for the benefit of a specific social group or class or, in more libertarian forms, for the benefit of the whole of society. Uses various forms of mass mobilisation both to engender unity and to exert pressure on the powers that maintain the status quo.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Lobbying/direct communication

Attempting to advance the interests of a particular constituency, or to advance a particular cause, by directly accessing people in a position of political or corporate power. Some NGOs do use this strategy: for example, seeking direct meetings with political or corporate leaders to put their case (Usually, the NGO will need visible popular support or public respect in order to obtain such meetings.) However, private corporations and entrepreneurs also make use of lobbying techniques to advance their personal interests, and many people regard lobbying with distaste as being undemocratic.

Text Box II.2
Other taxonomies: a “weave of people, power and politics”

A substantial amount has been written about advocacy by people who assume it to be a good thing and are keen to promote it. One example is the primer-handbook *A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation* (Lisa Veneklasen and Valerie Miller, World’s Neighbors, 2002) This defines “citizen-centred advocacy” as “an organised political process that involves the coordinated efforts of people to change policies, practices, ideas and values that perpetuate inequality, prejudice, and exclusion. It strengthens citizens’ capacity as decision makers and builds more accountable and equitable institutions of power.”

The book goes on to offer definitions of six other types of advocacy: “public interest advocacy;” “policy advocacy;” “social justice advocacy;” “people-centred advocacy;” “participatory advocacy;” “feminist advocacy” and “rights-based advocacy.”

2.3 What kind of advocacy is possible in China?

The policy context is complex and unclear

At first sight, there are major political constraints on the kind of advocacy that can be pursued in China. Because the Communist Party exercises a formal, constitutionally enshrined monopoly of political power, it is unlikely to welcome forms of advocacy that might challenge its authority, undermine “stability” or otherwise promote political change. Indeed, the last two years have seen a political campaign to “preserve the leading role of Communist Party members.”

(保持共产党员先进性)

But the complexity of the actual situation is not captured by the bare outlines of political power in a single party state. “Reform and opening” policies that have now spanned nearly 30 years—roughly half of the total period of communist rule in China—have reduced direct state and Party control not only over the economy, but over many aspects of social life (an important exception being the strict birth control policies that largely belong to the “reform” era.) This has created space for an increasingly diverse NGO community to develop over the last ten years, receiving occasional encouragement from Party and government leaders at some levels, but also encountering occasional hostility and bureaucratic resistance. The NGOs have had to navigate uncharted waters in which different policy currents contend. Relevant cross-currents include:

- The Party and government frequently call on “social forces” (社会力量) to engage in social service and charitable work.\(^1^9\) This is one aspect of a retreating state, associated with a general rhetoric of “reducing government burdens” and “big society, small government.” Yet the regulatory framework for non-profit organisations in fact remains far from enabling.\(^2^0\)

- The central leadership has recently espoused a “scientific development concept” (科学发展观)\(^2^1\). This appears to imply a

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19 The 1992 Law of Protection of Disabled Persons, for example, contains a specific injunction requiring "social forces" to assist with the special education of people with disabilities; and when the 2003 Law on Legal Aid was enacted, the Ministry of Justice issued numerous statements encouraging "social forces" (and international organisations) to support legal aid services. The Ministry also established a Legal Aid Foundation to collect funds for legal aid services.

20 In addition to a basic "dual administration" policy that requires all legally registered organisations to be overseen by a state or Communist Party "leading and management unit" (主管单位), the great majority of organisations are hampered in fundraising by the absence of clear rights and procedures, including the lack of preferential tax policies.
rejection of ideological dogmatism; and as such may further improve the status of empirical research and academic disciplines that were rejected or sidelined during the Maoist heyday. In the reform and opening era the academic community has become increasingly independent, and academic authorities now appear to make a significant contribution to policy debate. Nevertheless, the central leadership has also fired warning shots across the bows of “public intellectuals” who depart too far from the Party line.

- Government in China appears in several ways to be becoming more consultative and responsive to public opinion. Examples include the near-universalisation of village committee elections and the beginning of elections to urban district committees; ventures into e-government (including both a greater volume of published information, and some local experiments with email enquiry and complaint facilities); framework legislation for public enquiries on environmental impacts; a trend towards wider consultation on draft legislation; and the adoption, at least in theory, of “village level participatory planning” processes in state funded poverty alleviation projects. However, in many of these areas there are also counter-tendencies. For instance, the Communist Party looms large in election processes, which appear designed in part to strengthen Party control over the grassroots. And there is little or no accountability of governments at township level and above in the disposal of public assets and the quest for revenue from land conversion and property development. These market

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21 This concept first appeared in October 2003 in a resolution of the Third Plenary Session of the CPC’s Sixteenth Central Committee.

22 Policy research think tanks, attached to academic institutions, have proliferated in China over the last decade. Some of these, reflecting the commercialisation of higher education, are ventures that appear to be designed to create research funding opportunities. A few started as proxy activist organisations, quasi NGOs nested with universities and providing operational shelter for intellectuals engaged in action research around particular causes. Prominent examples of groups that have grown, flourished, are now regularly cited in China’s media and appear to have significant input into policy debate include: the Center for Chinese Agricultural Policy Research attached to the Chinese Academy of Sciences and led by Dr. Huang Jikun (established in 1995), the China Centre for Economic Research as Beijing University, led by Dr. Lin Yifu (established in 1994) and the College of Humanities and Development at the China Agriculture University, led by Dr. Li Xiaoyun (originally established as the Centre of Integrated Agricultural Development in the early 1990s.) The government’s own think-tank, the State Development Research Centre, is itself no poodle, and has recently published forthright studies of China’s health services (see www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com/node/25), and a searching critique of rural development penned by the director of the rural economics research department, Han Jun, (see www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com/node/684)

23 In late 2004 numerous well-known “public intellectuals” were warned not to voice their opinions in public (or publish articles); and some were subjected to house arrest. International media gave wide coverage to this “crackdown,” which was also discussed on some Chinese web forums, but was not reported in domestic media.
incentives often bring local governments into sharp conflict with local people.

- The mass media has become more lively and adventurous under the pressure of market competition, which strengthens demand for interesting, as opposed to merely politically correct, coverage. At the same time a growing proportion of the urban elite has access to international media (the Hong Kong-based Phoenix TV probably being the single most influential), and this creates pressure for mainland media to emulate international standards. Mainland reporting in some fields has thus become more in-depth, with a broader range of opinion represented via interviews with academic, business, and professional specialists. Mass media are also often willing to cover NGO stories and activities. However, the state continues to invest considerable effort in “managing” information that is available via the Internet; and the occasional, selective closure or disciplining of some publications preserves a basic structure of self-censorship.

Overall, then, in various ways there appears to be growing space for individuals and social groups to express their views (or to demonstrate them through practical actions) and perhaps thereby to exert influence on policy and public opinion. Yet there are few clear lines to mark out that space or show what is and what is not permissible.

Moreover, the general atmosphere is susceptible not only to contending policy currents but also to occasional, distinct chills. One such chill occurred in the late 1990s as a result of government concerns about, and its subsequent campaign against, the quasi-Buddhist Falun Gong sect. This episode undoubtedly acted as a brake on NGO development in China, although its effects appeared to be only temporary.24

From early 2005, Party concerns over the alleged role of NGOs in “colour revolutions” in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, occurring at a time when Zhongnanhai must have been receiving almost daily reports of rural unrest in China, has caused another cooling of the political atmosphere.

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24 China Development Brief was researching its landmark 250 Chinese NGOs directory in 2000, in the wake of the political campaign against Falun Gong, and was on numerous occasions told by local Civil Affairs officials that NGO registration was extremely sensitive at that time because of concerns over Falun Gong. Yet the newly created NGO Research Centre at Tsinghua University had been given permission in 1998 to hold a major international conference on the role of non-profit organisations in social development, and the following year the China Youth Development Foundation convened a similar, international meeting to mark its tenth anniversary. In short, policy seemed again to be flowing in two, contrary directions. On the one hand, the authorities seemed to be cautiously acknowledging a valid role for an NGO sector; but, on the other, and in practice, bureaucratic control was tightened.
atmosphere, and has resulted in increased state scrutiny of international and local NGOs.\textsuperscript{25} China’s situation is of course extremely different from that of Georgia or Kyrgyzstan, as China’s leaders no doubt fully understand. Nevertheless, at this conjuncture—other aspects of which are, on the one hand, the US Department of State’s publicly stated policy of support for NGOs as part of diplomatic efforts to encourage “democratisation” in Iran; and, on the other, moves by the Putin government in Russia to clamp down on NGOs there—it is natural enough for China’s senior leadership to order a close look at a sector that has been growing, with overseas funding, for some years.

If our own study is anything to go by the leadership in fact has very little to worry about; and if the state’s investigators reach a similar conclusion the present episode could conceivably in time even serve to improve state-NGO relations. But in the short term the nature of NGO advocacy and its connection to international advocacy trends is a somewhat sensitive issue in China.

\textit{International versus local practice}

Given both this stop-start policy atmosphere and continuing sensitivity about international influence over the NGO sector, it is worth briefly mentioning two generic objections to the concept of NGO advocacy to China:

(A) NGO advocacy originated in Western societies that are largely based on adversarial legal and political systems. The very different history of China’s political and legal institutions creates a context in which advocacy is intrinsically foreign and unlikely to take root.

(B) Late 20\textsuperscript{th} century growth of NGO activity has been hailed as a global “associational revolution.”\textsuperscript{26} However, it could also be argued that, at least in Western countries, in proportion as NGOs have blossomed and advocated, so the elected political

\textsuperscript{25} As reported in \textit{China Development Brief} (Volume IX No. 7, September 2005), during the summer of 2005 state security agents and social science academies carried out investigations of international NGOs and Chinese NGOs receiving funds from international organisations. According to numerous reports from international and Chinese sources, these investigations were only preliminary and have been followed by ongoing, in-depth scrutiny of NGO activity generally. Effects of these investigations, and the general chill in the policy atmosphere, have included delays in the implementation of regulations for the registration and management of foundations (adopted in 2004), delays in the drafting of new regulations for “social organisations” (社会团体), and the cancellation or postponement of internationally sponsored conferences.

\textsuperscript{26} The idea of a “global associational revolution” was posited in the late 1990s by Lester M. Salamon, Director of the Center for Civil Society Studies at Johns Hopkins University. Salamon and colleagues have undertaken a series of studies of the non-profit sector worldwide, quantifying its contribution to GDP, employment, etc.
mainstream has become more narrow. The range of opinion in elected assemblies, it might be said, has increasingly congregated around a set of economic orthodoxies, narrowing electoral choice and leaving NGOs to advocate their causes through means other than the ballot box. As such, the growth of NGOs and advocacy could be viewed as at best an equivocal democratic gain.

With respect to (A), historical and cultural differences should certainly deter too uncritical a supposition that advocacy can or will take on the same form in China as elsewhere. However, this kind of objection is too often deployed as a knock-down argument against any kind of cultural import that is considered undesirable. The mere fact that something originates elsewhere does not necessarily prevent it being absorbed or adapted in other places. Neither maize nor potatoes nor Marxism-Leninism nor television nor the Internet originated in China, but this has not prevented them thriving there. Thus, additional evidence would be needed to show that advocacy cannot play a role in China. But in fact this kind of issue is unlikely to be settled by a priori arguments about cultural authenticity and appropriateness. Hence the relevance of our modest effort to examine what is going on, rather than to assert what might or should be happening.

If objection (A) challenges the universalistic assumptions of advocacy discourse, objection (B) challenges its normative assumptions. Very many people who talk of “advocacy” (and “civil society”) appear to take it for granted that these are good things. We have tried to take a more impartial and sceptical approach, acknowledging that there are grounds for scepticism about advocacy even in Western societies.

It may of course be retorted that there is little chance of advocacy and civil society narrowing or undermining electoral democracy in China because there is little or no electoral democracy to undermine in the first place. Whereas, it might be said, even in a one-Party state advocacy and civil society may broaden the range of voices and opinions that influence decision making; this would itself constitute a democratic gain and might conceivably be a staging post en route to political pluralism.

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27 It is interesting, for example, to note how many foreigners ask the question “Is China developing a civil society?” or “What kind of civil society is likely to develop in China?” yet how few pause to ask, eg, “Does China need a civil society?” “Might it not end by making the country ungovernable?” Those who go looking for civil society are no doubt acting under a humane and generous assumption that it is a good thing; but it does perhaps distance them from the perspective of the place studied, because the latter two questions are far more natural questions for China’s intellectual, political and business elites to ask.
However, it is fairly clear that the Communist Party, which itself is rhetorically committed to “deepening democracy,” means to manage this process, shape any new institutions that emerge and make sure that they do not undermine the Party’s leadership. Nor should this be seen a simple determination to cling to power at all costs. Almost certainly, Party leaders have a strong sense of their historic duty, after a turbulent century, to provide the political stability that is necessary to enable economic growth and development and to restore China to great power status; and almost certainly they fear that too much liberalisation of social forces might unleash factionalism and social divisions that could make the country ungovernable. Of course it may be argued that a thriving civil society would help, rather than hinder, the process of making China a great nation at ease with itself; but the concerns and the caution of the political leadership should not be regarded as merely irrational or stupid.

Party determination to manage change does not in itself rule out any role for civil society or make advocacy impossible. For although the Party declares that it represents the interests of the whole of Chinese society, balancing the interests of different social groups is not easy in the more complex society that China has become since the Maoist experiment with social levelling. Therefore, the Party and state may themselves stand to gain from the emergence of loyal intermediary organisations to relay the voices and views of distinct constituencies. This, indeed, appears to have been the Party’s intention in encouraging the formation of trade and industry associations, which we have included in this survey.  

28 The claim that the Party represents the whole of society is implicit in former President Jiang Zemin’s “Three Represents” (三个代表) theory. This theory is now acknowledged in the Constitution (through a 2004 Amendment) as “important thought.”

29 In an influential article written a decade ago, Jonathan Unger and Anita Chan cited the industrial associations that had recently been formed to take over functions of industrial ministries—including associations of self employed people that all small entrepreneurs were obliged to join on gaining a business license—as evidence that China was pursuing a “state corporatist” strategy that “represents a shift from a Party command system that dominated directly . . . to one that operates partly through surrogates . . . In this early stage, the main actors in these associations often are bureaucracies that stake out claims to represent assigned constituencies. That is, in many cases what is being witnessed is a gradual devolution of power from the centre that widens the operational space of some of the existing bureaucracies and so-called mass organisations, rather than the rise of independent associations.” (China, Corporatism, and the East Asian Model in The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs, No. 33 [January 1995], p. 39;

Unger and Chan felt that it would be too grandiose to describe this as the rise of a civil society, but argued that the new associations and the old, Leninist “mass organisations” such as the Women’s Federation and Confederation of Trade Unions,

“ . . . are gradually coming under the influence of and beginning to speak on behalf of their designated constituencies. Some of them are, in fact, shifting gradually but perceptibly in a ‘societal corporatist’ direction. To the extent that China comes to
In short, (and whilst recognising that even among Communist Party thinkers there is a diversity of opinions on state-society relations), the general strategy appears to be one of a state-led, gradualist (and, in practice, stop-start) approach to increasing the role of society vis-à-vis the state. Whilst neither irrational nor stupid, such a strategy is by no means straightforward. The idea of “state-led civil society” is paradoxical, arguably a contradiction in terms; and restraining the development of independent organisations, independent social commentary and independent social initiative also risks a kind of pressure-cooker effect: if the lid is kept on too long, it may eventually explode. But, having laid out these issues, the purpose of this study is not to speculate further on them, but to shed some light on where the NGOs themselves currently stand.

At the same time, in an entirely different vein, it is worth noting that actions and statements that may not look much like advocacy in an international arena may, in China, have a potency that is lost on outsiders. For example, it is quite common to find Chinese NGOs emphasising their “care” or “compassion” for marginalised groups. This can strike foreigners as anodyne or even mawkish. Yet it is important to remember how closely entwined moral and political authority have been under Communist rule (just as they were in earlier, imperial China.) It is still relatively novel for non-government individuals or groups to take the initiative in asserting the moral importance and claims of, eg, HIV positive people, children with disabilities or communities affected by pollution. Actions that seem primarily

loosen up politically, it is far more likely to involve such incremental shifts into societal corporatism rather than the introduction of any form of political democracy.” (p. 52)

This analysis proved to be something of an opinion leader among China watchers in the late 1990s. At least as far as trade and industry associations are concerned, the strategy of state-fostered intermediary organisations appears to have worked rather well. (It is, of course, worthy of note that such effort has gone into the creation or revitalisation of organisations for entrepreneurs rather than, say, for farmers, blue-collar workers or socially disadvantaged groups.) In a 2003 study of political attitudes and opinions of private entrepreneurs living in county seats in selected provinces, Bruce Dickson found that most were generally satisfied with the performance of the trade and industry associations to which they belonged, finding them helpful in sorting out individual problems and disputes, despite the associations limited independence. Red Capitalists in China: The Party, Private Entrepreneurs, and Prospects for Political Change Cambridge University Press, 2003)

Our own study, as will be seen, does not gainsay this finding, but appears to show that the capacity of the associations to function to the satisfaction of their own representatives is highly variable—the most important variables being geographical area (those in the most economically developed zones, where the private sector accounts for the largest slice of the local economy, appear most satisfied); and the degree of independence from local government control (the least satisfied complained frequently of bureaucratic interference.) The two factors are clearly related: the most economically developed areas have the most active and independent associations, having evidently traveled much further down the road towards what Unger and Chan call “societal corporatism.”
charitable in intent, and limited to a distinct constituency of beneficiaries, may thus have a wider social significance. This makes it difficult to draw a sharp distinction between, say, “charitable” or “service provider” organisations and “advocacy” groups in China, and hard to decide what counts as “doing advocacy.” Once again, the point of this study is not to adjudicate, but to shed some light on how the Chinese NGOs themselves see these issues.

International NGO advocacy in China

Since the early 1990s, numerous international NGOs (INGOs) have tussled with the question of how to do advocacy in China.30 Not all INGOs in China think of advocacy as pertaining to their work, but many of the larger, better-known and better-established certainly do. However, they are generally careful to avoid confrontational positions or approaches.

Typically, INGOs work with Chinese government and non-government partners on training and capacity-building initiatives and on pilot projects that introduce new concepts and demonstrate new ways of working. This often boils down to encouraging more participatory, multi-stakeholder and/or cross-departmental responses to social and environmental challenges. INGOs apply this overall approach to many fields in China, from biodiversity conservation to health care, legal reform and the development of social protections for vulnerable groups. Such an approach relies on developing constructive relationships with government agencies in the hope of sensitising them to new issues, problems and voices in a way that is solution-oriented: showing how changes in practice can produce better outcomes. Text Box II.3 offers a case study of this kind, in the work of Marie Stopes International. This kind of hands-on, constructive engagement can be described as a form of advocacy, and it is probably the most common form in China, practiced by numerous NGOs and also echoed in the approach and discourse of some Official Development Assistance agencies (bilateral donors, UN agencies and development banks.)

Other international agencies work by providing support for local NGO initiatives and/or for policy research. This can also be described as a

30 China Development Brief’s online Directory of International NGOs in China is much the most comprehensive, existing account of international activity in this sector. A 2005 print edition of the directory (200 International NGOs in China, includes an introductory essay by Nick Young, International NGOs: the Diverse Origins, Changing Nature and Growing Internationalisation of the Species, that describes the field and discusses the way in which international NGO engagement with China is changing. This essay can be downloaded from www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com/node/297.
form of advocacy on behalf of particular constituencies—such as migrant labourers, rural women, people with disabilities, etc—by means of broadening policy debate and projecting the voices of marginalised groups into that debate. This approach is relatively common among grant-making organisations, but is also reflected in the work of some operational NGOs, such as Save the Children, profiled in Text Box II.4.

Text Box II.5 profiles the work of Greenpeace International, which has brought to China a more campaigning style. This kind of approach is still rare, if not unique, among international organisations in China. However, as China becomes more prominent and influential in the world, more and more international organisations, especially in the environmental field, are keen to recruit Chinese partners in global causes and networks, and to support their work or establish joint programmes. It may be that pressure group and campaigning tactics will become more common as INGO engagement with China comes to be characterised not only by outsiders who come to “help” but also by organisations that come because they recognise China’s global importance.

Text box II.3

Marie Stopes:
Advocacy through constructive engagement

In 1921 Dr. Marie Stopes opened a private clinic providing safe abortions for young women clients in London, UK. In 2004 the global organisation named after her, Marie Stopes International (MSI), opened a clinic in China’s east coast city of Qingdao, also offering safe termination of unwanted pregnancies, along with reproductive health checks, contraceptive advice and counselling services. For, despite China’s draconian family planning policies, the powerful and relatively well-resourced State Family Planning system normally concerns itself only with married women, leaving a large, sexually active population of young people, including migrant workers, without access to appropriate services.

Sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies are reportedly rising steeply among these groups. According to MSI, around 5% of high school students and 10-20% of university students are sexually active. Surveys have shown that only 30% of young Chinese people oppose pre-marital sex, but at least 50% have serious gaps in their knowledge and understanding of reproductive health.

The Qingdao clinic set out not only to reach this un-served population but also to demonstrate high standards of client care, confidentiality and contraceptive choice and, moreover, to show the financial sustainability of such a model.
Numerous delegations of family planning officials from other parts of China visited the Qingdao clinic. Following one such visit, the Jiangsu Family Planning Commission invited MSI to work with them to improve the delivery and reach of family planning services in Jiangsu Province, starting in 2005. This has greatly increased the potential impact of the NGO’s work—Jiangsu has a population of 74 million—and if the provincial collaboration is successful it may influence national practice.

MSI’s work, then, is a clear example of promoting change in a highly controversial field through constructive engagement and intervention—rather than by merely condemning the status quo.

This case is also interesting because it shows that the distinction between “service provider” and “advocate” is somewhat artificial in China. MSI is ostensibly a reproductive health service provider, yet the main point of its service provision is not to expand its own operations but to demonstrate that needy populations can be reached effectively and sustainably.

It is also worth noting that MSI, which began working on UNFPA funded programmes in China more than ten years ago, has a largely Chinese identity on the mainland, where its projects are managed by a staff of Chinese nationals.

Text Box II.4

Save the Children:
Projecting young voices into policy debate

Save the Children UK has worked continuously in China for nearly 20 years on a series of programmes—many of them large by international NGO standards—in fields ranging from child nutrition to juvenile justice.

Close relationships with government partners, built in the course of jointly implemented projects, have led government agencies such as the Ministry of Civil Affairs to seek Save the Children’s advice and support in policy development and in the creation of national standards for, eg, fostering, residential care, and protection of street children.

Although it commissions Chinese and international specialists to provide research and consultancy inputs, the NGO also works assiduously to make policymakers aware of the perspective of children and young people themselves. “Child-led research,” in which youngsters are trained to research and analyse their own situation, plays a prominent role both in project development and in policy studies.

For example, in 2004, Save the Children mobilised street children in cities across China to carry out their own investigation of how children become separated from their families. In March 2005 the young researchers presented their findings to senior government officials at a national forum. The forum heard that family violence and child abuse were, overwhelmingly, the main reasons why an estimated 200,000
Chinese children had left their homes for a precarious existence on city streets. This finding, which overturned the conventional view that the phenomenon was caused by “poverty,” has led the Ministry to shift its management response towards working to reconcile families or, where that is not possible, exploring foster places and, as a last resort, creating family-style small group residential homes.

Child-led research has similarly informed Save the Children’s project interventions and policy recommendations in basic education, prevention of child trafficking, and responses to the impact of AIDS.

The organisation’s commitment to making vulnerable youngsters both visible and audible is further illustrated by its work to foster local NGOs. For example, in Hefei (the capital of Anhui Province), Save the Children helped to establish and build the capacity of Rights into Action, a group of young disabled people and their families. As well as enabling peer learning and support, this group has played an important role in encouraging local policy experiments, such as the recent decision of local authorities to integrate children with disabilities into 100 mainstream state schools.

Save the Children is now hoping to incubate a network of similar organisations in other cities across the country, as part of a wider “children in communities” project. To improve the sustainability and autonomy of these fledgling NGOs, Save the Children has facilitated a local fundraising relationship with the Intercontinental Hotels Group.

Like MSI, Save the Children’s professional staff are overwhelmingly Chinese, with more than 150 national staff closely involved in all aspects of project design and delivery.

Text box II.5
Greenpeace:
Introducing campaigning approaches

In 1995, Greenpeace International activists briefly unfurled banners in Tiananmen Square protesting at China’s resumption of nuclear tests in northwestern Xinjiang Province. The protest lasted only seconds before police detained the activists, who were then deported.

Over the following decade, however, Greenpeace has introduced a modified form of its global campaigning tactics to China, through a combination of strategic alliances with government agencies and effective use of mass media.

Beginning in the late 1990s, Greenpeace worked on the issue of food safety and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The Ministry of Agriculture was keen to promote a biotech industry in China, whereas the State Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) was more sceptical. Greenpeace sponsored a series of “awareness raising” activities and studies conducted by local researchers, and had some success in taking the debate into the mass media. The respected Southern Weekend newspaper carried a series of reports that relayed Greenpeace critiques of the multinational seed and biotech giant, Monsanto, and highlighted...
anti-GMO protests in European countries.

In 2004, Greenpeace scored a much bigger media hit with a widely publicised report claiming that an Indonesian company, Asian Pulp and Paper Co. Ltd (APP), was illegally logging primary forest in Yunnan Province with the connivance of the provincial government. Following the publicity, the Zhejiang Hotels Association announced a boycott of APP products. The company responded by taking legal action against the Hotels Association for damage to its reputation—thus keeping the story on the front pages. APP dropped the suit at the eleventh hour, as environmentalists from across China prepared to converge on Zhejiang to lend the Hotels Association moral support. But it was by then too late to kill the story, which was further stoked by reports in official media that State Forestry Administration researchers had investigated, and largely corroborated, Greenpeace’s claims. Greenpeace then fanned the embers by turning the spotlight on APP’s activities in the island province of Hainan.

In 2005, Greenpeace hit Chinese headlines again with a report describing the highly toxic electronic waste salvage industry in Guangzhou Province, where many of the world’s junked computers are sent for recycling. This made a much bigger mark than a previous campaign that Greenpeace had initiated in the late 1990s to highlight the damage of the (also highly toxic) ship-breaking industry in China.

Greenpeace in China has not, since 1995, attempted the kind of attention-seeking stunts that mark its campaigns elsewhere, but it now certainly seems able to stir up debate about the issues it chooses to highlight. How has it managed to do this? Likely factors include: strategic partnerships with Chinese government agencies (notably SEPA) that welcome help in fighting their own battles; astute courtship of mass media, and selecting issues where foreigners loom large among the culprits. The recipe may be more effective for the fact that it has been largely prepared by ethnic Chinese campaigners from Greenpeace Hong Kong.

It is worth noting that, whilst it certainly makes sense to describe the first of these approaches—constructive engagement and demonstration—as comprising a form of advocacy, it can also be described in quite different terms: for example, as “participatory development.” Advocacy, in these cases, is largely implicit. The language of advocacy does seem to apply less ambiguously to efforts to raise the visibility and audibility of marginalised groups (as in the second case.) And the notion of advocacy is particularly useful in the case of a campaigning organisation such as Greenpeace.

This is not to adjudicate on what counts as “real” advocacy (or, for that matter, on what is really worthwhile), but to distinguish the different ways that the concept is applied, and the different kinds of
activity with which it is associated. This, we feel, is a more useful exercise than legislating, powerlessly, on meaning.

*International influence on Chinese NGOs*

It is extremely hard (and nor was it our purpose) to determine the extent to which international organisations have influenced the development of Chinese NGOs. Certainly, international agencies (including private foundations and Official Development Assistance donors) have hitherto been a major source of funding for Chinese NGOs, ranging from the large, state-backed charitable foundations to much smaller, independent groups; and international agencies have certainly been the major entry point for international development discourse, including the hallowed concept of “participation.” However, our prior experience suggests that Chinese NGOs are by no means the mere stooges of foreign influence. On the contrary, most have a strong sense of their own uniqueness and, whilst accepting overseas funding, are generally determined to set their own agendas and create their own programmes. (In this they mirror the attitude of the government of China, which has also accepted two decades worth of foreign aid, presumably without feeling that this compromised its independence or control over internationally funded programmes.)

Moreover, whilst they are ever alert to funding opportunities, Chinese NGOs at first showed relatively little interest in those INGOs that, rather than making grants, implement their own projects (and which, in turn, have tended to concentrate on working with the Chinese government and directly with beneficiary communities, rather than with local NGOs.) Many Chinese NGOs were in the past inclined to treat these operational INGOs as competitors rather than allies, and to eschew relationships with them if there were no sign of funding in sight, concentrating their efforts instead on courting grant-making organisations.³¹

There are some signs that this is now changing. In the 1990s, when INGOs first started to develop programmes in China, there was extremely little in the way of a local NGO community with which to engage, so it was natural for the INGOs to concentrate on working with government. But as China’s fledgling NGO sector has become more established, a growing number of INGOs (and ODA donors) have, like Save the Children, seen the potential for fostering and supporting local NGOs in the fields where they work and in showing Chinese

³¹ This bald assertion, and those in the following paragraphs, are made on the basis of years spent reporting on both international and Chinese NGO activity in China.
government partners the role that these local organisations can play, within an overarching logic of “participation.” This has led to international efforts to promote local NGO involvement in fields such as disability, women’s rights, rural poverty reduction, environment protection and, perhaps pre-eminently, HIV/AIDS, where international agencies have invested great efforts in persuading the government of China that NGOs established by members of affected or vulnerable communities have an irreplaceable role to play in the response to the epidemic.

At the same time, many of the best-known INGOs—such as ActionAid, Oxfam, Plan, Save the Children, World Vision, WWF—have by now created professional staff teams that are predominantly, and in some cases entirely, ethnic Chinese. This move towards localisation generally improves communication with local agencies of all kinds, making Chinese NGOs less likely to conclude “They’re just a bunch of foreigners with their own agenda and not interested in what we are doing.”

Meanwhile, many Chinese NGOs have rapidly adapted to working within a community of organisations rather than as lone agents, becoming more open to peer learning and exchange that is not tied to funding relationships.

These factors suggest an overall trend from a phase of parallel development towards greater convergence of international and local NGO efforts in China (notwithstanding considerable, continuing diversity in the nature and methods of different organisations.) This is evident not just in increased exchange in conferences, meetings and workshops on poverty reduction, environment, AIDS, etc, both in China and overseas, but also in a number of joint platforms that have been established. 32 Also, as already noted, INGOs attempting to develop global coalitions on various issues now often prefer to develop partnerships with like-minded Chinese counterparts rather than trying to establish their own China programmes.

32 For example, in 2005 a Global Call to Action Against Poverty (aka the ‘Make Poverty History’ campaign) saw international NGOs in China collaborate with Chinese counterparts on a series of events to discuss progress towards meeting of the Millenium Development Goals. ActionAid acted as secretariat to a steering committee coordinating these. Also in 2005, Plan initiated a series of round-table “peer learning” discussions with Chinese NGOs on experiences in rural development work.
Chinese NGO advocacy: early signs

At first sight there are numerous fields in which, as they have emerged over the last decade, Chinese NGOs have begun to engage in advocacy.

A notable example is the field of legal reform. At least half a dozen groups, in several cases nested within university law schools, provide free legal aid services to marginalised constituencies. At least two of them—a Women’s Legal Services Centre at Beijing University (now ten years old) and a Centre for Legal Advice to the Victims of Pollution at the University of Politics and Law (now in its eighth year)—expressly aim, rather than serving as many clients as possible, to select and represent cases with maximum potential impact, where people have suffered particularly flagrant abuse of their rights and/or where the case reveals gaps in existing rights protections. This has resulted in media coverage and discussion of the rights of women, migrant workers, peasants dispossessed of their land and people with disabilities.

The environment is another fertile area of NGO activism. At the time of writing, a Chinese language environmental NGO database created by China Development Brief (www.greengo.cn) includes entries on more than 80 independent Chinese organisations, and is on track to add at least 30 more. These groups count many journalists among their members and are on the whole successful at obtaining media coverage for their concerns. They vigorously promote the concept of public participation in environmental decision making (which, naturally, helps to legitimate their own role), sometimes describing this in terms of “public supervision” (公共监督). Some collaborate on joint, or at least overlapping, campaigns, such as protection of the Tibetan Antelope, preservation of Beijing’s historic waterways, a ”26 degree” campaign for air conditioning and, most famously, what might best be described as concerted skepticism over the development of large-scale hydropower generation, especially in Yunnan Province.

HIV/AIDS is another field where activists exerted considerable pressure on central government, mainly via domestic and international media, to recognise and respond to the threat of a major epidemic, and especially to accept responsibility for paid blood plasma donors who had become infected by the notorious collection stations in Henan and other central provinces.33 The last two years have seen a sea-

33 AIDS activism is one of three case studies discussed in Nick Young’s paper Does This Cat Catch Mice? Human Rights and Civil Society in China, pp. 53-107 of Revisiting the Role of Civil Society in the Promotion of Human Rights, Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2004
change in official attitudes, certainly at central level. Chinese AIDS activists may deserve some credit for this, and for opening up the associational space now occupied by dozens of NGOs serving, and in some cases rooted in, communities that are vulnerable to or affected by AIDS.  

Finally, in response to government appeals to “social forces” to assist in rural poverty reduction, numerous NGOs have carried out rural development projects. In some cases, these have gone beyond charitable assistance to embrace beneficiary participation as a guiding principle, adopting tools such as PRA (participatory rural appraisal) to advance that principle, and encouraging local government agencies to adopt participatory approaches to rural development, biodiversity conservation, and natural resource management. Concern with rural poverty has, in some cases, extended to concern for rural migrant populations in urban areas, leading to NGO work in migrant communities.

Putting all of these examples together, it would be very easy to write a bullish article arguing that NGO advocacy, in a sense that is broadly consistent with international understanding of the term, is alive and well in China. This may indeed be a valid conclusion, but it might also be facile. For China is a mirror that all too often reflects what the beholder wishes to see, and anyone who sets out to look for advocacy will certainly find it. Yet there are at least two ways in which such a finding might obscure more than it clarifies. Firstly, the organisations that seem most adventurous naturally tend to receive most attention from the international development aid industry and media (including China Development Brief), and this may lead to exaggerated emphasis upon them. Secondly, the great majority of work undertaken by Chinese NGOs is to some extent mandated within the broad parameters of government policy (as the NGOs themselves are often quick to point out.) That is, they are, arguably, mainly engaged in interpreting, refining and implementing, rather than setting, the social development agenda—acting as state auxiliaries, whether in helping to build a legal system, or reducing poverty, or carrying out environmental education.

Once again, it is important to stress that this is not to invite a debate about whether Chinese NGOs are or are not “real” advocates. Rather,

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34 A directory of Chinese HIV/AIDS NGOs, published in 2005 by the Zhi’Aixing Health Institute (北京爱知行健康教育研究所), lists 95 Chinese NGOs working in this field, including gay and lesbian groups, haemophiliacs’ associations, organisations providing services for AIDS orphans, and groups of HIV positive people.
it is to underline the relevance of understanding how the NGOs themselves understand what they are doing and why.

| Text box II.6
| Scholars and GONGOs are best positioned to advocate, say Chinese researchers |

Space for advocacy does exist in China, but well-known intellectuals and GONGOs (government-organised NGOs) are best positioned to take advantage of that space, and it falls mainly to individuals rather than organisations to advance advocacy causes, according to expert Chinese and international observers consulted in the course of this study.

Advocacy in China at present “exists only in an individual dimension and aspect, not in an organisational aspect,” according to Kang Xiaogang (康晓光), a Chinese Academy of Sciences scholar who has led several research studies of China’s non-profit sector.

Kang stresses the role of “famous scholars” as the main “voice from society” in China, and argues that scholars close to the China Youth Development Foundation have already exerted influence on government via the foundation.

GONGOs like the Youth Development Foundation, he says, have most advocacy potential because they are “inside the system” and so can make use of its resources, including access to national leaders. He adds that GONGOs also know how to make use of mass media, which neither government nor the business sector can afford to ignore.

However, Kang sees a major constraint in this scholar-GONGO-media advocacy channel: the relatively “low quality” of many GONGO staff, who often have low motivation and little sense of responsibility.

Similar problems affect “grassroots” NGOs, in Kang’s view. He adds that “Grassroots NGOs appear to be very capable in terms of advocacy, but in fact they only work in spheres where they do not contradict government ideas, for example poverty alleviation and environment protection. Grassroots NGOs may receive more international support, but they do not pose any threat to the political interests of government.”

Deng Guosheng (邓国胜), Director of Tsinghua University’s NGO Research Centre, agrees that GONGOs have more access to advocacy channels, but says that many of them lack initiative or are otherwise unwilling to engage in advocacy. Grassroots NGOs, he feels, are more temperamentally inclined to advocacy but lack the platform to communicate with government at different levels. “Lots of organisations have the desire and potential to advocate, but what is missing is a channel for communication,” he concludes.
However, according to Deng national government is willing to listen to NGO suggestions and has begun establishing communication platforms through shiye danwei: state funded but quasi-independent institutions such as research centres, universities and the secretariat of Leading Group for Poverty Reduction. More upbeat than Kang, Deng argues that grassroots NGOs working in some sectors have already scored significant advocacy successes. (Several specialists working for international development agencies echo this opinion.) By way of example, Deng cites NGO campaigns against the building of hydro-electric dams on Yunnan’s Nu River, pointing out that the NGOs succeeded in mobilising considerable media coverage of the proposals.

Kang Xiaoguang argues, by contrast, that the NGOs were adroitly used by the Environment Protection authorities to gain leverage over investors in the project.

International specialists echoed the thought that GONGOs are better positioned than grassroots NGOs to influence government policy. One also noted that research groups “with a scholarly edge” are “pushing and innovative,” while another gave examples of how Internet chat rooms are being used as a new “arena in which Chinese people are discussions and advocating for their own interests . . . particularly among property owners.”
2.4 Language issues and glossary

The English word “advocacy,” as currently used by international development agencies and NGOs, has over the last few years generally been rendered in Chinese as *changdao* (倡导)\(^{35}\). But this translation is far from exact and may easily give rise to misunderstandings. For there is no easy and satisfactory way to translate “advocacy” into Chinese.

On China’s mainland, although it is beginning to be used in NGO and development agency circles, *changdao* comes with a very different set of connotations than those that underpin most international advocacy discourse. Nor is it widely used in ordinary language. Somewhat more common is the closely related expression, *tichang* （提倡）. Both expressions involve the idea of “calling for” something. However they are normally used in contexts where the call comes from a person or body in a position of intellectual, social or political authority or expertise.

The Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press *Chinese-English Dictionary*\(^{36}\) gives the following example for *tichang*:

提婚和计划生育
advocate late marriage and family planning (p.1,211)

Foremost among those who “advocate late marriage and family planning” in China are, of course, the state family planning authorities.

*Changdao* is especially associated with the idea of moral or intellectual leadership through its use of the character *dao* (导, meaning to lead or guide.) The dictionary cited above renders the single character *chang* as “initiate, advocate” and *changdao* as “initiate, propose.” (It also renders the closely related expression, *chang yi* [倡议], as "propose, initiate.") The entry for *changdao* gives the following example:

倡导和平共处五项原则
initiate the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (p.139)

Those Five Principles were, famously, enunciated in 1954 by then Premier, Zhou Enlai, during discussions with his counterpart in India.

\(^{35}\) In Chinese, the same characters can signify both verbs and nouns; *changdao* can thus signify both ‘advocacy’ and ‘to advocate’.

\(^{36}\) 主编：危东亚, 非外语教学与研究出版社. 1997.
(They later became the official basis for Communist China’s foreign policy.)

Changdao and tichang are thus activities in which Chinese leaders routinely engage, as they create and then promulgate their policies. It is not, however, an activity in which ordinary people are commonly said to engage. Suppose a foreign speaker of Chinese were to say:

这个乡的农民倡导土地改革
The peasants in this township changdao land reform.

Mainland Chinese speakers might find this unnatural, and propose the following correction:

这个乡的农民呼吁土地改革
The peasants in this township hu yu (呼吁, “appeal for”) land reform.

In short, for ordinary Chinese speakers—not those who move in NGO circles—changdao is something that is naturally associated with leaders, not ordinary people, who are more likely to be described as appealing to their leaders.

Living languages are of course not immutable, any more than the social universes that they describe and reflect. The use and significance of many phrases are adapted and modified over time by new communities of speakers. The dictionary we have cited already appears out of date, to the extent that there is now a small community of Chinese people beginning to use the expression changdao in modified ways. It is possible that these new ways will eventually predominate.

For the time being, however, there are serious, potential ambiguities in translation. Moreover, it cannot be assumed that people in Chinese NGO circles are making a complete break with past usage. Leastwise, those new to the idea of NGOs engaging in changdao may well be inclined to understand it largely in terms of something that experts or otherwise “qualified” people do, perhaps on behalf of others. This captures some, but omits other, strands of international advocacy discourse.
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<th><strong>Table II.7: Glossary of Advocacy-related Terms</strong></th>
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3 INTERVIEW RESULTS

3.1 How many NGOs spontaneously talk about their work in terms of “advocacy”?

One of the “local” GONGOs (registered at sub-provincial level) spontaneously used the Chinese phrase, changdao (倡导), that is most commonly used to translate “advocacy.” This organisation described its mission as “to advocate social forces’ engagement in poverty alleviation” (倡导社会力量开展扶贫)\(^{37}\). It added that it set out to “spread and eulogise” (弘扬) the principle that “If there’s trouble on one side, people from all sides come to help” (一方有难，八方支援).

One national level GONGO also used the expression tichang (提倡) when talking not about its own work, but about development of the non-profit sector as a whole:

“Speaking of NGOs’ functions, I think that we should advocate smaller government and bigger society so that NGOs can further bring their advantages into full play.” (从 NGO 的作用来看，我觉得应该大力提倡小政府大社会，使得 NGO 能够进一步发挥自身作用。)

Eight of the 20 grassroots NGOs also used the term changdao without prompting, (or the closely related phrase, tichang [提倡]) at some point as they explained their work and objectives. Two also used the English word “advocacy” at least once during the interviews.\(^{38}\) For ease of future reference, we will term those organisations that spontaneously spoke of “changdao,” “tichang” or “advocacy” as part of their work “self-described advocates” (SDAs.)

All of the grassroots SDAs were local organisations (working at provincial or city level), and none of them were based in Beijing or Shanghai. Two are generic, environmental organisations and two concentrate on a specific environmental issue. (This amounts to four out of a total of five grassroots environmental NGOs in the survey.) One works on women’s development and gender issues; one works on

\(^{37}\) The phrase ‘social forces’ (社会力量) is widely used in China, especially in official parlance, to refer to non-state actors, including both private businesses and non-profit organisations.

\(^{38}\) Indeed, these and one other grassroots group peppered their responses, during the interview, with English phrases drawn from international development and NGO discourse. This demonstrates growing familiarity with that discourse in grassroots NGO circles, but could also be interpreted as showing that many concepts are still relatively specialist and foreign, such that they are not conveyed readily or naturally in Chinese.
labour rights, health and safety; one is a generic, development organisation that works on a wide range of projects, both urban and rural; one is a gay and lesbian organisation. The local level GONGO works to alleviate rural poverty.

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<th>Table III.1: Organisations that spontaneously used the terms ‘changdao,’ ‘tichang,’ ‘advocacy’ during the interviews</th>
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<td>National ‘GONGOs’ (Total = 5)</td>
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A much higher proportion of organisations of all kinds—indeed, a large majority—affirmed advocacy to be a part of their work when, at the end of the interview, they completed a questionnaire that suggested this a possible description of their organisation’s nature (Table III.2.)

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<th>Table III.2 (Survey Question 3): ‘Which description best fits your organisation?’</th>
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<td>Operational GONGOs (5)</td>
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<td>Operational &amp; advocacy 操作与倡导并重</td>
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This to some extent validates the decision not to directly raise the subject of advocacy during the interviews—for it shows the impact of leading questions—but it is hard to interpret the result. Perhaps the safest inferences are that: i) nearly all of the organisations we interviewed feel that what they do has a wider application, significance or value than simply serving their immediate, beneficiary constituency (and so selected the answer that best reflected this) but, ii) most do not, however, normally think about their work in terms of advocacy, or do not regard this as sufficiently fundamental to mention it spontaneously, and/or that: iii) that some of the organisations less
accustomed to the NGO advocacy associated it with the “public education” or “moral leadership” connotations of the Chinese expression, changdao.

Issues on which the self-described advocates said they advocate include: “green civilisation, green consumption” (绿色文明，绿色消费); “civilised health lifestyles, safe sexual behaviour and harmonious family relations” (健康文明的生活方式，安全的性行为及和谐的家庭关系); “ecological and organic agriculture” (生态农业和有机农业); “workers’ rights” (劳工的权利); “poverty-alleviation through social forces” (社会力量扶贫), and “resolving women’s problems during the transitional period” (转型时期妇女问题的解决).

These SDAs were invited to say what they meant by advocacy when they introduced the term. One said it was a matter of:

“Going out to disseminate our ideals. That is our definition. Advocating the basic ideals we stand for, to guide society’s progress.” (把我们的理念传播出去。这是我们的定义。提倡我们主张的这些基本的理念，引导着社会的进步。)

The organisation’s representative said that advocacy was “not the same as direct public education” (不是直接的去教育公众), and nor was it the same as “offering suggestions” (提供意见) to government. Rather:

“Advocacy should be very purposefully going out to promote our ideals, to try and make other people accept these ideals. It’s a bit like ‘lobbying’, but not entirely the same.” (倡导应该是我非常有意识的去推动我的一个理念。要别人接受我这个理念。有点象‘lobby’ [English word used in original] 游说，有点象，但是它不是游说。)

The representative of another organisation said that advocacy:

“Means something like to popularise or to spread. You go and let everyone know. But it’s not just letting everyone know, you also want to point them in a certain direction . . . ‘advocacy’ has the connotation, a bit, of ‘public awareness’ or ‘public education.’” (有点象推广的意思。你去让大家知道了。不光是让大家知道了而是想引导这么一个趋势 . . . ‘advocacy’ 有点相当于‘public awareness’ 或者 ‘public education’ 这一方面。[English words used in original].)

This representative emphasised the role of demonstration project work as a vehicle for “promoting and introducing: introducing meaningful
things to everyone and of course spreading them” (推介：有意思的事情，介绍给大家，推广当然也可以的。)

Another organisation explained their view of advocacy in terms of *xuanchuan* (宣传：‘publicity, propaganda’—see Section 3.3.)

“For us, we are dealing with ideals, it’s a kind of *xuanchuan* This is certainly advocacy. Advocacy is like ‘green consumption’, or green whatever, this is advocacy. As an NGO we mainly do [work on] ideals because we are not a business.” (作为我们，我们在做理念，就是一种宣传。无疑这就是倡导。倡导就象绿色消费或者绿色什么什么，就是倡导。作为 NGO 我们主要的在做理念因为你不是企业。)

However, one of the NGO SDAs made an emphatic distinction between *xuanchuan* and advocacy: “We don’t do *xuanchuan*; what we do is advocacy” (我们不搞宣传, 我们所作的就是倡导。)

The explicit link that two of the grassroots SDAs made between advocacy and “civilisation” (文明) suggests that these groups are inclined to see the task at least partly in terms of public education and moral suasion or enlightenment.

The founder of a (grassroots NGO) school for migrant children made no spontaneous reference to advocacy during the interview (and so is not counted here as an SDA); but, when filling in the questionnaire-survey distributed by the interviewers, checked the “operational and advocacy” box. As she did so, she explained this by saying that they set out to teach students how to be good people (and thus, by implication, to advocate to them.) This is a fairly orthodox educational philosophy in China, summarised in the common slogan 先做人—roughly, “attend first to the making of the person.”

These examples suggest that at least some Chinese NGOs are inclined to interpret the concept of advocacy as largely pertaining to public or moral education. This interpretation is consistent with ordinary (non-specialist) Chinese use of the term *changdao*; but does not quite capture the way that many international organisations think of advocacy.

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39 The survey-questionnaire was intended to be anonymous and confidential. However, relatively few of the NGOs showed much concern for confidentiality and the group in question here completed the questionnaire while the interview was still in progress.
Also noteworthy is that one grassroots NGO (not an SDA) applied the word *changdao* to positions taken by government, in a way that is consistent with the word connoting authority:

“The work that we are doing is completely in line with what government advocates and what society needs.” (我们现在所做的跟政府倡导的和社会需要的是完全一致的)

It is worth briefly considering other, characteristic language and terms used by the interviewees.

Talk of changing concepts, ideas or viewpoints was quite common among all types of organisation interviewed, including trade, industry and professional associations. For example, one association spoke of the need “to tell society about government policies, regulations and management requirements, disseminate these extensively to society . . . to change people’s viewpoint.” (你要把政府的政策、法规、管理要求告诉社会, 广泛传播到社会 . . .转变人们的观点。) Another spoke of the need to develop more international linkages and exchange in order to change the industry’s viewpoint, to make it more “open and Western” (开放的和西化的).

Several grassroots NGOs emphasised their role in stimulating civic participation (discussed in more detail in section 3.6.) Very often, they described this in affective language of moving, inspiring, or “arousing people’s enthusiasm” (调动人的积极性). One, for example, spoke of how media reports helped “affect people” (感染人) and encourage them to participate in activities. A non-profit school for migrant children spoke of how they moved people (打动人) by writing letters about students’ situations in order to encourage donations, and also said they regarded stimulating other people’s compassion (爱心) to be part of their work. An organisation dedicated to species protection also spoke of wanting to move (打动) the business leaders to encourage donations.

The phrase *huyu* (呼吁, appeal to, urge) was also sometimes used in connection with causes that groups wanted to advance. For example, an industry association in Shenzhen said that one of their functions is to *huyu* authorities on issues such as tax and relations with Hong Kong.

Various organisations spoke of reaching policy makers with their “voices” (*shengyin* [声音] or, somewhat more emotively, *husheng* [呼声], suggesting voices raised in appeal.) For example, discussing who they set out to influence (discussed in the following section), one grassroots SDA said:
“Of course we definitely hope slowly to include government so that they can hear our voice” (社会公众，整个社会，当然我们肯定也希望慢慢地包括政府方面也能够听到我们的一些声音。)

An industry association in Wenzhou reported that:

“When we encounter issues regarding electricity supply we hope that government is receptive to our voices so that they can make rapid improvements to the environment [for the industry]” (碰到电的问题我们希望政府能够看到我们这方面的呼声在电力方面能够尽快的改善这个环境。)

The simple word “hope,” (希望) which appears in both the above examples, was frequently used by organisations of all kinds, in ways that perhaps suggest an effort to present aims and objectives in language that is non-confrontational. For example, a national level GONGO said:

“Our government has done a lot in this regard, but we still hope that the pace of ‘small government, big society’ could be faster.” (在促进社会进步这个方面，政府做了很多，但我们仍然希望‘小政府、大社会’的步子能够进一步加快。)

A grassroots SDA said:

“We hope that by pushing forward labour development we can achieve harmonious development for society.” (我们希望通过推动工人的发展来达到社会的和谐发展。)

And an industry association said:

“We hope that government will issue more perfected policies and regulations, so that we can act in accordance with policy or regulations when delegating to lower levels” (希望政府制定出更加完善的政策法规，这样子权利下放的时候我们可以按照政策法规来。)

**Interpretation, notes and conclusions:**

China’s grassroots NGOs—and especially those working in the field of environment protection —are much likelier than others spontaneously to discuss their work in terms of advocacy (changdao, tichang.) Organisations of all kinds, however, are willing to embrace the concept as relevant to their work when it appears on a menu of options.
Spontaneous mention of “changdao,” “tichang” and “advocacy” seems strongly correlated with exposure to international NGOs and/or aid donors. In designing the interview and survey we did not define formal criteria to measure organisations’ degree of internationalisation or amount of contact with overseas groups. Nevertheless, it is fair to say—based on what we learned about the NGOs during the interviews and also on prior knowledge of some of them—that at least six out of nine “self-described advocates” have had significantly more than average (relative to the total sample of forty) international contact and exposure. The extent to which advocacy is or is not a “foreign concept” is likely to be a somewhat contentious issue in a country with so strong a sense as China’s of its historical and cultural uniqueness; and this sharpens the question whether and how advocacy approaches are being indigenised and adapted to the local context.

In our view, nearly all the “self-described advocates” have a coherent—if not always smoothly articulated—notion of advocacy that relates more or less clearly to their activities and objectives. Moreover, this seems to be the result of serious reflection and debate rather than mere adoption of a fashionable phrase. However, the focus on spreading “civilisation” and “ideals” is significantly less assertive than at least some strands of international advocacy discourse.

Moreover, the SDAs use of the language of advocacy did not, in most cases, appear to be a defining feature of the organisations. They could easily have explained their work without reference to advocacy; and, as a corollary, several groups that did not refer to advocacy appeared to operate in very similar ways, and for similar ends, to the self-described advocates.

Nonetheless, as later sections will show, several of the SDAs were among the groups who had most to say about who they were trying to reach and why, who tended to use a relatively wide variety of communications tools and approaches, who appeared to have reviewed and revised their mission, to have experimented with organisational structure and development, and to have reflected seriously on the meaning of “participation.”

40 In addition, the sub-provincial GONGO that used the term changdao is located in Yunnan Province, which has been a relative hotbed of international NGO and donor activity; so it is at least possible that this group was also influenced by exposure to international discourse.
3.2 Who do they set out to influence?

In most cases, this question was not put directly because it was considered too leading. Rather, the interviewers assessed what target groups the NGOs were attempting to influence—not just to help or to serve—based on the respondents’ descriptions of their working objectives and practices, and on specific examples the respondents gave. For example, if they stated that their mission or purpose was “to promote x,” they were asked who they promoted x to, and how. The resulting assessments are presented in Table III.3 (Where organisations mentioned more than one target group, all of these are included in the table.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table III.3: Whom do the NGOs appear to be trying to influence?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National ‘GONGOs’ (Total = 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Society’, ‘the general public,’ ‘the masses’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantaged people (generic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specified beneficiary or target groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership (aiming to serve, not influence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Government’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Local) government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Policy makers’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(National) government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Local People’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Communities’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist Party members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/enterprises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better-off or rich people (to gain funds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government and donor agencies (to gain funds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media and reporters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other NPOs/NGOs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Very many organisations talked in broad terms about directing their messages to “the whole of society” (全社会) or “the masses” (公众). This tendency was most marked among national level GONGOs, but three quarters of the grassroots NGOs also appeared to feel themselves to be addressing the whole of society. As one grassroots NGO robustly declared: “Of course we want to influence society. If we don’t influence society then what are we doing?” (我们当然要影响社会, 不影响社会要我们干吗? )

Three purposes—often interwoven—were frequently mentioned in connection with targeting the whole of society:

i) Raising general awareness of particular issues and/or of the needs of a particular constituency. For example, one grassroots NGO noted with gratification that ten years ago far fewer people knew there were so many autistic children in China—this being the group’s particular area of concern. Another, which offers legal aid services, said that they work to educate the public about legal aid, adding that this helps to “reduce societal stress and avoid conflicts” (缓解社会压力，避免矛盾。)

ii) Educating/exhorting people to change their attitudes and behaviour in various ways. This ranged from encouraging target groups to develop more healthy (and/or sustainable) lifestyles, through encouraging more public sympathy for specific groups (women, migrant workers, etc), to encouraging more generalised, social compassion and morality. In some cases, this went beyond mere outward behavioural change. One grassroots environmental group (not an SDA) said:

“We now hope to be able to go beyond working on issues of lifestyle to the level of people’s life values and spirituality. Because many problems arise from problems in people’s values. So now we would like to dive into initiating what we call ‘spiritual environment protection ’... So that you re-acquaint yourselves with nature, re-acquaint yourselves with people and the human heart, and re-acquaint yourselves with our bodies. Once you re-acquaint yourself with these three things your behaviour will change.” (我们现在希望能超越生活方式，介到人民的生活价值 value 和 spirituality 的层面。因为很多问题是由于在价值这个领域出了问题，所以我们现在想发起 ‘心灵环保’...这样你重新来认识自然，重新来认识人，人的心，重新来认识我们的身体。当你重新认识这三个方面时，你的行为会去改变。

[English in original]
iii) Encouraging charitable donations from society. This was mainly a preoccupation of GONGOs. (Grassroots NGOs are not supposed to fundraise publicly so perhaps have less cause to think about this; but several did mention wanting to influence institutional donors or “rich people” in order to attract funding support.) Two or three organisations also spoke of encouraging the recipients of their assistance to themselves “give back,” promoting virtuous circles of giving.

For some groups, addressing the whole of society evidently did not preclude addressing government. As one grassroots SDA put it:

“In my opinion, advocating sustainable development or scientific development should not be targeted just at ordinary people or just at city government departments, because it includes government departments and individual people in government and ordinary people and scholars; they are all part of the general public.” (倡导可持续发展或者科学发展针对的我想不仅是老百姓，也不仅是政府部门，因为它包括政府部门，包括在政府部门工作的个人，老百姓和学者，他们都是公众的一部分。)

Another grassroots SDA echoed the thought, when asked to say who was the target of their “public education” efforts:

“The general public and society at large. Of course we definitely have hopes to slowly include government so that they can hear our voice” (社会公众，整个社会，当然我们肯定也希望慢慢地包括政府方面也能够听到我们的一些声音。)

And a third grassroots NGO (not an SDA), asked about the target of its campaigns, also said: “Generally speaking it is the general public. [They] are the audience. The audience includes experts, as well as officials.” (总的说起来是大众，受众，受众里头也包括专家，也包括官员。)

National GONGOs and grassroots NGOs also frequently specified particular audiences or targets. Often, these were the same target groups who they were trying to assist, or whose behaviour they were trying to change (“consumers,” “high risk groups,” “farmers” etc.)

Some of the GONGOs also mentioned influencing government, at least to the extent of encouraging state and Party agencies to give more attention (and allocate more resources) to the sectors in which they
work. For example, one county-level GONGO that is devoted to promoting local charitable activity said that:

Now we demand to be incorporated into some of government’s work reports. To make charitable activities become the government’s work. This is one channel. And also to introduce charitable activities into the Party system’s recommendations. (现在我们要求介入政府的一些工作报告。把慈善事业...作为政府的一些工作来布置。这是一个渠道。到党系统也把慈善事业介入到建议。)

However, grassroots NGOs were the likeliest to see themselves as trying to influence government (often, local government.) In some cases, this appeared to be largely a matter of wanting government recognition, endorsement or cooperation. For example, a non-profit school for children of migrants spoke of reaching out to local government officials, inviting them to events etc., to show them that their work is “legitimate and effective.” Most organisations took pains to emphasise that they were not hostile to government. In a typical example, one grassroots NGO said they aim to “act as complement to government, not to replace it” (作为政府的补充, 不是要替代政府). Another echoed that they feel able to “make suggestions” (建议) to government, but see their role as being to “supplement” (辅助), not “lead” (指导) government. (Relations with government are considered in more detail in Section 3.7)

It was not possible to distinguish sharply or systematically between organisations that wanted good government relations mainly as a matter of operational necessity, in order to work effectively with/for their target communities, and those that wanted access to government in order to highlight causes, advance the claims of particular constituencies or present specific policy messages. These approaches more often appeared to overlap and blend into each other, rather than resting on a neat division (between, say, “service provider” and “advocacy group”).

Nevertheless, several of the grassroots NGOs did clearly and without prompting articulate objectives of influencing government policy and behaviour and/or of making government “pay more attention” to particular constituencies. One (not an SDA) went so far as to state that:

“All NGO wants to influence policy makers; it doesn’t matter which NGO we all want to influence policies and influence policy makers we see this as very much a priority” (Any NGO都想
influence policy maker. 不管哪个 NGO 都把对于政策的影响和对政策制定者的影响力，看成是非常非常 priority 的事情。)

The SDAs were prominent among those grassroots NGOs that wanted to influence government. One, for example, said:

“We often propose policy suggestions to the government to promote the construction of relevant law and reform of . . . policy.” (经常向政府提出政策建议，推动相关法律法规的建设和. . .政策的改革)

Another, in very similar terms, said:

“Through research and practice we draw some theoretical conclusions, and then we encourage the government to enact and enhance relevant law . . . that is, we make policy suggestions to the government” (我们通过研究和实践提炼出相关的理论总结，之后敦促. . .相关的各项立法，即为政府决策提供建议。)

In terms of reflecting the needs and opinion of specific constituencies, a third grassroots SDA said: “Through our research we are able to express [their] voices” (通过我们的研究使[他们] 的声音可以表达出来。) The organisation also implied this is a process of refining and presentation, as much as amplification of voices: “[what we pass on] are not necessarily their original voices, because we modify them.” (这个声音不一定是他们的原声，因为我们改转过。)

A fourth grassroots SDA said they aimed to help government understand what the public’s needs are, and what ordinary people think:

“Government also feels that ordinary people don’t do much—just eat all day until they’re full and then cause trouble or whatever. Government really does not understand what the public needs. So when we interact with the public it’s more direct, and the public can better understand us, or they are more willing to communicate with us. So we can take their feelings, thoughts and information and express it to the government.” (政府也感觉到老百姓是没有事干，吃饱了撑着，一天到晚闹事或者怎么样。[政府]并不了解老百姓需要什么。所以当我们跟老百姓打交道就比较直接，老百姓更能理解或者愿意跟你去交流。所以把他们的内心、想法或信息传达给政府。)

Only two grassroots NGOs (and no GONGOs) mentioned business enterprises as an important sector to influence. Both NGOs were
among those SDAs quoted above that also clearly aim to inform and influence government policy.

GONGOS (and the majority of grassroots NGOs) did not seem to be particularly interested in businesses (except, in some cases, as a source of funding.)

The trade, industry and professional associations appeared to have a clear sense of their role as service-oriented intermediary organisations. One said that it wanted to address “the whole of society” to improve public understanding and recognition of its profession, and to improve recruitment; and some said they arranged “trainings” or exhibitions to publicise their industries, since part of their job is to “promote” the industries by helping to develop markets and/or attract investment. But most stressed their nature as service organisations, whose agenda is set by the needs of their members. One, for example, said the existed “to respond to the members’ wishes; we do whatever the members want us to do.” (反映会员的意愿，会员说要做什么就做什么。)

The trade and industry associations also speak of representing members’ interests to government departments, both generically and in taking up individual cases. Invariably, they described this in polite, non-confrontational terms, emphasising collaboration and partnership.

In some cases, in pursuit of their members’ interests, associations had gone beyond merely private consultations with government. One, for example, said they had contrived to arrange sympathetic coverage, by a Hong Kong cable TV company that broadcasts globally, for members whose brands were suffering in European markets as a result of cheap “fakes” purveyed by cut-price (Chinese) competitors.

A fisheries association had commissioned a survey of a lake to assess the fish stocks, and had submitted its findings to government.

An association from an inland province said they felt the industry in their area would benefit from the government taking a more “opening up” (开放) and “Western” (西方) approach. (Implicit here is a contrast with the more dynamic and privatised market economy in Zhejiang and other coastal areas.)

These examples suggest that, in a quiet and cooperative way, the trade and industry associations are advancing the interests of their members through discussion and dialogue with government, and are supporting their case with research and publicity. It cannot necessarily
be inferred, though, that they are any kind of ‘model’ for grassroots NGOs, since the nature of the relationship with government is entirely different, the associations having been set up with government encouragement and support.

**Interpretation, notes and conclusions:**

In terms of influencing opinion, GONGOs appear in the main to see themselves as public informants and educators, wanting both to reach specific, target constituencies and also to speak to the public at large. None of them reported setting out to influence government policy, although some did mention ways in which they had an impact on government. None of them reported setting out to influence the business sector either, other than by encouraging donations.

Many grassroots NGOs position themselves similarly, hoping to foster attitudinal and behavioural change through public information and education. But some (including, notably, SDAs) also to want to “make policy suggestions” to government, to help government understand what the public needs, and/or to make the voices of their constituencies more audible to both government and society. Very few, however, set out to influence or advocate to businesses.

The trade, industry and professional associations were in the main focused on serving their own membership but in some cases this did not preclude working to secure more favourable government policies for their industry.

3.3 **What do they do to publicise (xuanchuan) their work and why?**

The phrase *xuanchuan* (宣传) was in the past strongly associated with (and, in translation, generally rendered as) “propaganda,” connoting dissemination of the Party line. In the reform and opening period, it has become more widely and rather more neutrally used to mean “publicity.” (Indicative of this shift, the Communist Party’s Propaganda Department now describes itself in English as the “Publicity Department,” although in Chinese it remains the *xuanchuan* Department [宣传部].)

We engaged the surveyed organisations in a discussion about *xuanchuan* because we thought their approach to external communications might serve as an indicator of their actual or potential orientation and capacity as advocates. We hoped to discover what
communications tools are commonly used, and whether they are used strategically. We chose to centre the discussion on *xuanchuan*, despite its somewhat ambiguous connotations, because it is at least a very familiar term to all Chinese organisations, whereas a phrase such as “external communications” might appear specialist and cause confusion to some.

In designing the interviews, we anticipated several different approaches to *xuanchuan*:

A. Reflex without reflection: *xuanchuan* automatically, using accessible channels, without much evidence of strategic thinking

B. Corporate: relatively aggressive quest for “fame” and reputation, promoting the organisation’s brand (or perhaps, in some cases, relatively aggressive pursuit of fame for the organisation’s founder)

C. Inward: mainly geared to nurturing and serving a specific constituency

D. IEC (“Information, education and communication”): Primarily geared to getting out messages to the general public

E. Policy oriented: primarily geared to reaching decision makers

Within this framework, an advocacy approach would certainly not involve A nor, almost certainly, B, but may well involve some combination of D and E (and, possibly, C.)

In the event, quite a complex picture emerged—especially among the grassroots NGOs—and, although there were visible instances of all the above approaches, it is not really possible or fair, on the basis of the interviews, to categorise the surveyed organisations systematically along these lines, or in any other hard and fast way.

A more basic summary of communications tools that were mentioned is given in Table III.4 (Note: these were not suggested as a checklist: all were unprompted, mentioned in answer to the question “How do you *xuanchuan* . . .?”) Discussions about why the organisations sought publicity were quite varied. Some interviewees barely addressed the question (as if the answer were self-evident); others
discussed it in detail. It was not possible systematically to categorise the responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table III.4</th>
<th>Most frequently mentioned xuanchuan (publicity) techniques</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GONGOs (National) (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own, regular magazine or newsletter</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research reports, policy studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences, seminars, symposia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public events, Exhibitions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive use of mass media</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive use of media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal contact, project work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School education, outreach</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first of our anticipated categories (A) was created with the GONGOs in mind. Based on (not insubstantial) previous experience, our working hypothesis was that many GONGOs would routinely xuanchuan through official channels as a kind of bureaucratic reflex, with relatively little forethought, to demonstrate that they were doing their job; and that they would receive mass media attention largely because of their official status rather than because of the vigour of their efforts. There was indeed some evidence of this, especially among the “local” GONGOs (registered at provincial level or below); and several GONGO interviewees confirmed the impression that it is relatively easy for them to get (uncritical) media coverage. (One,
however, representing a local GONGO in Shaanxi, said that he had previously worked as a reporter and therefore “usually takes a very cautious attitude towards the media” (我本身出身媒体,但正因为我自己了解媒体,所以在接受采访这方面我非常谨慎。) A national-level organisation also stressed its role as being to *xuanchuan* “guidelines, policy, rules and law” in its sector of operation. This did indeed sound like a reflex, parastatal response (although the organisation in question in fact clearly does much more than providing a policy “transmission belt”.)

But this was by no means universal. Four GONGOs (three of which were national-level organisations) noted that *xuanchuan* supports their fundraising efforts. This might appear to suggest elements of a “corporate” or, at least, a market-driven approach. Yet two of those national-level organisations (and one local organisation, which did not mention fundraising) also responded to the question about *xuanchuan* by describing in detail their efforts to reach their target constituencies with information or educational messages. Cooperation with mass media was mentioned as a key part of this, by means such as contributing regular columns to newspapers and working on TV documentaries. Two national GONGOs and one local GONGO also mentioned public events as a way of publicising their concerns.

In summary, many of the GONGOs—especially, but not exclusively, the national organisations—appeared to see *xuanchuan* not merely as a way to gain face (and funds) or to promote their brands by advertising their own achievements, but as an important means of realising their educational objectives. One local GONGO even described its mission as being to *xuanchuan* the issue on which it worked.

Responses from the trade, industrial and professional associations on this topic suggested a division into two, broad groups of equal size: those that seemed mainly government oriented, and those that seemed significantly market oriented. On the “government oriented” side, three associations appeared (like a couple of the GONGOs) to see their role as “transmission belts” for government policy. One (in Liaoning) said:

“The purpose for us to *xuanchuan* is to fulfil our mission, that is, to publicise and carry out national policies, rules and regulations so as to promote the application and service quality of Internet technology and make relevant enterprises and units [事业单位] run the Internet appropriately and legally.” (我们进行宣传是要实践我们的宗旨, 即: 宣传贯彻国家政策、法规, 提高省互联网技术的应用水平和服务质量, 加强互联网正面队伍的建设。)
A professional association in Shaanxi echoed this:

“Xuanchuan and education are the Association’s top priority. Only through xuanchuan and education can we publicise relevant national laws and regulations so as to improve our members’ [professional] quality and . . . virtue.”

A professional association in Jiangsu also said that they “xuanchuan government policies and regulations, the Industry and Commerce Bureau’s regulations to manage local government, Jiangsu Province regulations, Nanjing City regulations, and regulations for business people.”

Two other associations (in, respectively, Yunnan and Shaanxi) also appeared to remain closely tied to government, but relatively inactive; both said that they do not really engage in any form of xuanchuan.

In Shenzhen, Wenzhou and Jiangsu, where the private economy is much more developed, trade and industry associations had a more market-oriented approach (while still emphasising their role in explaining government regulations and policy to their members.) This is not to say that they were “corporate” in the sense of attempting to promote their own brands or “fame” as associations. Rather, they stressed service to their members, and spoke of xuanchuan primarily in terms of getting favourable publicity for their industries and “promoting the image of the industry.”

All of these associations publish regular magazines (and in most cases websites), aimed primarily at their own membership. These serve, as one organisation said, to advertise “activities within the industry, international and domestic activities,” but also to convey “the spirit of what government wants to do—we act as a bridge.”

The associations also work to differing extents at external communication via mass media. Two associations seemed particularly pro-active in this respect—the one mentioned above, which had secured cable TV coverage of how their industry had been damaged by fake products in international markets, and another, whose chief also worked as a correspondent for the local business paper.
Two others associations seemed more passive, but did respond to media enquiries and received coverage as a result. One said that they were regularly contacted by media because their (automobile) industry itself receives a lot of profile, and is the subject of regular columns in some publications.

Two associations also mentioned special exhibitions and events in relation to *xuanchuan*. A fisheries association had organised a “Seafood Festival” to promote its members’ produce; and a leather association organises one or two expos each year to promote goods introduce materials from outside and “to *xuanchuan* team spirit” (宣传团队精神).

The grassroots NGOs showed a wide range of attitudes and approaches to *xuanchuan*. There was considerable discussion of mainstream media coverage, which was frequently seen (especially by environmental NGOs) as an effective way to reach and inform a wider public; but several organisations discussed the risks as well as the opportunities of media coverage, and several emphasised other channels for reaching target audiences.

Not surprisingly, groups that were primarily concerned with self-help were the least geared to external communications or *xuanchuan*, concentrating their resources instead on developing their services and on information exchange between the membership or core constituency. (This conformed more or less to our expectations of *xuanchuan* approach C.) In two such cases the Internet and email were cited as important media for communication and exchange between members and with similar groups in other parts of China. This internal sharing was evidently itself an important part of the groups’ work.

One of the non-profit schools for children of migrants included in the survey described several methods they use to improve teacher-parent communication: a school newspaper, a “feedback” function on the website, and a message box in the school that parents could use to leave comments. Both of the schools, which are now well established and apparently stable, had received a fair amount of local press coverage, and acknowledged that this could help increase public trust (信任) and profile (知名度); but neither school appeared actively to seek this coverage. One said that some of the coverage they had received was negative (owing, it was said, to the malign influence of a disgruntled, former teacher.) Both schools placed more emphasis on cultivating relationships with local government and local government...
leaders. One of them stressed that they frequently invite officials to visit the school as this helps to let the officials know how things are going while also serving to motivate the schoolteachers. Personal contact and discussion appeared here to be the most important communications tool.

A grassroots NGOs serving the gay and lesbian community also relied largely on electronic media and on personal contact to disseminate information and advice. This group was wary of media coverage that might misrepresent them. They said that

“We were once reported by the media, such as Huashang Mornings News and China Daily and we helped CCTV News Watch with a report on Chinese gays’ life. But we still feel a bit confused about our relationship with the media. And to some degree, we don’t believe that media may help our publicity.”

Another group, based in Shaanxi and primarily geared to providing services for families of autistic children, reported that:

“We’ve put all the money we have into building the organisation and we simply don’t have extra money to afford publicity. Besides, the more publicity we carry out, the more time I need to spare for the reception of other autistic children’s parents, which is a great challenge to the energy I have to devote to the organisation. I don’t mean that I am not willing to help. But, to tell the truth, I am dog-tired.”

An NGO providing legal advisory services also mentioned that publicity could unduly increase their workload. When the centre was new, the interviewee said, media reports were of great use in helping to educate the public about legal aid and legal protections; and the media could also be helpful in highlighting specific cases. (An example was given of a case where a client had been cheated in a fraudulent real estate sale.) However, the interviewee went on to say that the media had recently been coming frequently to the NGO, looking for stories to reflect the idea of “harmonious society,” and this had become problematic. For example, a TV report on the group had resulted in its
telephone switchboard being jammed the next day. Thus, although one might at first sight conclude that this group was engaging in “rule of law advocacy,” (it was not, however, an SDA), the representative nonetheless stated quite clearly that “We don’t want to be reported too widely.” (不要过多的报道)

An NGO (and SDA) that promotes environmentally benign agriculture appeared to see its advocacy efforts as consisting more in demonstration projects and in communication with government rather than in widespread media publicity. Whereas the group publishes policy research studies, and works closely with government departments to influence the way they work, its representative said that:

“Recently, The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times wanted to report on our organisation. I told them that if they just want to stay here for a day or two and then fabricate something biased they’d better not come. As to some of the Chinese media, the unpleasant truth is that they dare not cover something sharp and what they do report is sometimes not in line with the facts.” (前些时候，《华尔街日报》、《纽约时报》都想来采访我，但我明确告诉他们，如果你只停留一两天，那就干脆不要来了。而中国的某些媒体也是有弊病的，即尖锐的东西不敢报，而对某些问题的报道又是失实的。)

The interviewee appeared to feel that mass media might misunderstand the technical and scientific basis of the organisation’s work, which was better presented through the NGO’s own publications, including reports, a website, and a quarterly newsletter. (The latter, the representative said, was targeted mainly at international NGOs.)

Another SDA, working in the field of women’s development, emphasised the need to protect the privacy of project beneficiaries, and so did not encourage mass media reporting on their work, but saw media as useful mainly for communicating public service messages (for which the group paid.) They also referred to holding symposiums, lectures and training workshops as a kind of xuanchuan; and, like many other NGOs publish their own materials, including a website and quarterly magazine.

An NGO that works on ethnic minority culture and livelihoods said:

"We kept a low profile in front of the media at first. But little by little, we got to feel the importance of media to xuanchuan our ideals. So we began to attach importance to cooperation with

china development brief  95  ngo advocacy in china
The websites of all three of these (last-mentioned) NGOs were relatively rich in information, and all three groups publish relatively detailed research reports and newsletters/magazines. They appeared on the whole to attach more priority to serving as a source of authoritative information and expertise in their fields, rather than trying to achieve broad public impact via mass media.

The two faith-based (Christian) NGOs interviewed both reported difficulties in obtaining media coverage. One cited an example where CCTV filmed a large first aid training event that the group had staged with local government authorities, but the film was never aired. According to the interviewee, the TV staff told later the NGO that there was no problem with either the content of the activity or with a speech that was made during it (about the role of social work in society—the TV staff appeared to approve of this.) It was simply decided not to air the report, the TV staff said, because of the NGO's name and religious affiliation. On other occasions, the interviewee said, the group's activities had been reported but without mention of the NGO's name. The second faith-based NGO reported similar experiences, but added that they did receive significant coverage in one province where they had done a lot of work and developed very good relationships with the local government.

Both organisations seemed reconciled to getting along without much media coverage. One was at pains to emphasise that they saw the quality of their work as being the main instrument of publicity for the organisation itself (but also mentioned the challenge of fundraising with a relatively low public profile.) Both NGOs also emphasised that they were more interested in publicising and spreading values and ideals as opposed to simply promoting their organisation's image and reputation. One said, for example:

“We are not seeking wide expansion of our organisation, rather we are searching for the extension of our organisation’s ideals. I think this clearly defines our positioning. Moreover we are now emphasising extending our ideals out to the public, letting more and more people accept our values. I believe this is an important aspect of creating a harmonious society.”

(我们不要追求团体的扩张，而要追求团体理念的延伸。我认为这也是对我们自己的定位定的非常清楚... 而我们现在是强调把我
Both faith-based organisations communicated directly with their supporters and partners through newsletters, and also emphasised the impact that they have on people they work with, including project partners, volunteers and members of beneficiary communities. One spoke of the importance of coining slogans that accurately and meaningfully convey their ideas. Both organisations appeared to attach more importance to the quality of their interaction and communication with people and agencies with whom they are in regular contact than to the quantity of their exposure to a wider audience. (Although this may also reflect acceptance of the reality that wider exposure is especially difficult for them to achieve.)

Generic, environmental NGOs were much the most inclined to associate *xuanchuan* with mass media coverage, and to see this as an indispensable part of their work. The leader of an environmental NGO based in Beijing (not, in our survey, an SDA) said that their group had been mentioned in almost 2,000 media reports, and offered the following reflection:

"About *xuanchuan*, I think that the media is the most crucial thing. The media is our best friend. And we have in fact mobilised the media. We have attracted our best allies, the media.

"We connect with the media through three channels. One is, I originally was in the TV industry so it’s very convenient for me. Second, we have a journalists’ salon, so we have a stable platform of this kind. Now, why are we able to attract the media to stay by our sides for so many years? I think the main reason is the journalists’ salon is able to give the media sources of news coverage. This provides the unique perspective of our NGO, and it also enables them to find experts to speak with. They need to communicate with experts. This is the second component. The third is we are often with those media who are interested in me, or interested in [the organisation]. How do you become of interest to them? Firstly, your perspective needs to be unique. A grassroots perspective is what they are interested in from you. Also your activities need to be interesting so they are willing to come and report on them. Your approach and way of thinking in how you speak, the perspective with which you look at issues and problems, they need to feel is interesting."
“It is fair to say that our very first office building came to us as the result of a media report. Eighty percent of our staff came to us after learning about us through the media. We also have many corporations who have come to us because of media coverage. The most extreme case of this was when the Beijing mayor, after learning about me in the media, called on me to go to his office for a discussion. So these cases, [our] growth and development are inseparable from the media . . . And our xuananchuan work to inform the general public is also because of the media.”

(关于这个宣传,我觉得媒体是最关键的东西。媒体是我们最好的朋友。其实我们动员了媒体。我们吸引了我们最好的同盟军就是媒体。)

We from three aspects to develop a good relationship with the media. First, I originally worked in the TV field, which makes it easy for us to maintain relationships. Second, we have a regular platform for journalists, the so-called press forum. This is why we can maintain good relationships with the media over the years. We attract the media because we can provide them with exclusive news sources. We can also offer them expert opinions and interviews. Media need expert opinions. This is the second reason. Third, we often work closely with journalists and media professionals. Media need unique perspectives. This is the third reason.

Provincial (and sub-provincial) environmental NGOs largely echoed these thoughts. One (an SDA) said that “Most of our activities couldn’t happen without the help of media” (大多数活动是离不开媒体的帮助), and their activities appeared clearly designed to attract media profile. The representative of this group felt that media attention helped to encourage the participation of local officials: “The department heads will only show up if there is going to be publicity” (只要搞宣传的这些局长都会到场). At the same time, this representative implied that media coverage would in itself promote “public participation,” since:

“We mainly want to let everyone know what we are doing, and to spread its significance, to let everybody know that there are people doing this kind of thing, and the significance of what we are doing. Central to our work is promoting, and this comes down to our hope that the public will come to participate.” (我们主要想让我们做的这件事情和这个事情的意义传播给大家，让大家知道有人在做这个
事情，还有这个事情的意义。我们工作的核心就是推动，推动就是希望公众来参与。

A third environmental NGO (from a different province) saw its environmental education work in local schools as a form of *xuanchuan*, but also felt that media coverage was important to let the public know what they were doing, "to move people" and to influence the government. This group also stated that they did not think it was enough just to publicise problems through the media, but stressed the importance of constructive action to find solutions.

A provincial organisation devoted to species protection also claimed a close relationship with the media, and regular coverage. Led by a senior journalist on a local newspaper, it claimed "abundant media resources" and frequent coverage.

An organisation working on labour rights (an SDA) felt that "The media’s greatest use is to influence the public, and to influence policy decision makers" (媒体最重要的作用是影响公众，影响政策制定者),” and added that the media provides an outlet to "spread our values and beliefs" (传播我们的理念) . But, while recognising the value of media coverage, the representative of this organisation said that the group had not gone out of its way to attract coverage. "Because we work on issues that are of interest to the media we attract them. Up to now, we have not actively sought out the media.” (因为我们做一些媒体感兴趣的话题，所以吸引他们。我们并没有主动的寻求报道，到目前为止我没有主动的找过媒体。) Moreover, the representative added: "Interacting with the media is quite difficult: you need to be able to get a good handle on them, without being taken advantage of." (因为跟媒体打交道是比较困难的事情：能够很好的把握他们，不要被他们把握。) This group did not rely exclusively, or even primarily on media coverage to advance their cause. Rather, the NGO publishes its own, bi-monthly magazine that is intended, the representative said, to influence policy makers, (as opposed to just publicising the NGO’s own work), and the group also organises conferences and seminars and produce research reports.

Three other SDAs also mentioned, in the discussion of *xuanchuan*, a similar range of external communication techniques—their own publications, research reports, public exhibitions, seminars—and in two out of three cases also expressed some reservations about media coverage. A fifth SDA, one of the faith-based organisations, had stressed the importance of maintaining the quality of their work, and interacting directly with partners and communities, as a way to promote their values and approach. There are therefore some grounds
for suggesting that the SDAs take a relatively broad and sophisticated approach to *xuanchuan*, and certainly do not associate it with merely running their own website or seeking mainstream media coverage.

But none of the *xuanchuan* methods mentioned by the SDAs were unique to them. For example, an NGO devoted to the prevention of child abuse listed publishing a book and holding conferences and trainings as its main *xuanchuan* activities, and made no mention of media coverage.

**Interpretation, notes and conclusions:**

Thinking about *xuanchuan* appears to vary significantly across different organisations and types of organisations. Some see it as raising their visibility, public reputation and fundraising potential, while others fear visibility for the increase in workload it may entail. Some see it as a way of reaching the public with information, education and knowledge; some as a way of inspiring others to act; some as a way of spreading ideals. Some see *xuanchuan* more in terms of depth than breadth—aiming to influence policy or opinion makers with informed, expert research or analysis; or to increase knowledge and awareness in a specific community; or, in other cases, to maintain good relationships with those who matter to the organisation’s survival and growth. In pursuit of different purposes, organisations use a variety of *xuanchuan* techniques, from mass media coverage to cultivation of personal relationships.

The grassroots NGOs, and especially the SDAs, use a relatively broad range of communication tools and techniques, reflecting both a diversity of purposes and approaches and, perhaps, the youth of many of the organisations, which are still finding their voices and deciding how and where to project them.

At present, however, we were left with the impression that many of the organisations did not have a clear or consistent strategic vision of which audiences they wanted to communicate with, how best this could be done or where to invest their energies. Rather, their *xuanchuan* often appeared to be largely *ad hoc* and relatively unfocused, with considerable uncertainty surrounding key questions such as how (and whether) to deal with mass media and, in the case of organisations which did declare a wish to influence policy, little discussion of exactly how they tried to feed into policy making processes.
3.4 Have the organisation’s mission or objectives changed since its founding?

This question was put (explicitly) in order a) to get a sense of how strategically the organisations are thinking and developing and b) to test the hypothesis that charitable or service-oriented organisation might “evolve” towards a more explicit, advocacy role.

The great majority of organisations reported that there had been no major change, but several said that their original goals had become defined more sharply and/or enriched.

One national level GONGO said that their core mission remains the same but the mission statement has been clarified. They explained this by saying “This is closely related to the (marketing) repositioning of our organisation which can be attributed to our general director.” (这同基金会的重新定位有直接关系，促成基金会重新定位的关键人物是我们的秘书长。)

A trade association in Wenzhou said they had refined their goals and objectives to focus more on small and medium enterprises. They said that this change was in response to the expressed needs of their membership. Initially, their services consisted mainly in organising overseas study tours and local meetings for their members, but as their member businesses grew the members demanded more, with greater differentiation of demands according to their size. (我们发觉企业的要求提高了。随着企业规模的变化也有不同的要求。) The association therefore chose to concentrate on serving the (more numerous) small and medium sized companies. (总体而言还是集中在为中小企业服务，中小企业为主。)

Several of the grassroots organisations said that their basic objectives have not changed but that they have expanded the scale of their operations and number of beneficiaries and/or partners. For example, one (which is also an SDA) said that their mission has not changed “but the content has been enriched through the continual increase in their work which had brought greater and deeper understanding.” (但是内容丰富了。丰富化通过我们工作不断增加，对我们工作的理解越来越大越深入。)

An NGO which provides legal services (but was not an SDA), said it had expanded the scope of its work “in response to demand from society.” This was broadly echoed by another grassroots (and non-SDA) group which said “The mission has not changed [but] we adjust the content of our services according to different social environments, thereby expanding our service counterparts.” (宗旨是不变的，他的服务是按照不同的社会环境我们来调整内容，来扩大我们的服务对象。)
Another grassroots SDA described in some detail its progression from small, practical aid projects (such as water supply) to more comprehensive or integrated projects and said it was now entering a third stage of development with more emphasis on “participatory thinking, development thinking—that is, human development” (参与式思想，发展思想，那就是人的发展。) In this new phase, the organisation expects to promote “self-development groups” among project beneficiaries, so as to develop “autonomous capability” of, eg, farmers’ associations, women’s groups, etc. The organisation noted that ten years ago “autonomous organising could not be done, and it was very sensitive” (机构的自治组织是办不到的，而且会 very sensitive [English phrase used in original]); but suggested that this was now becoming more possible, emphasising nonetheless that it is still important to act “in accordance with China’s national situation” (还要跟中国的国情结合起来). 

This organisation felt that their evolving approach did not amount to a change of mission or objectives. Their mission statement, in its shortest formulation, has always been “to serve society and benefit the people” (服务社会造福人群), and they have no plans to change that. However, they said that longer versions of the mission statement (for example, on their website) had in the past also referred to “developing international friendships” (开展海外的友谊) and “promoting opening and reform” (促进我国的改革开放). The organisation is now considering adding a reference to supporting or promoting “harmonious society” (和谐社会) but at the time of our interview this had not yet been finalised by the board. This suggests that, even as the organisation’s working practices evolve, it seeks to reconcile its published statements with the current, rhetorical position of China’s national leadership.

Another grassroots SDA working on environmental issues said that its original mission statement had been ambitious, aiming “to do great things,” but not very clear. This group described how, in 2004, it went through a revision process that involved all members, board members, local government representatives and scholars.

“Everyone discussed it together, for the future development of this organisation, and also what the organisation is actually doing. Then when we defined [the mission] there were some changes. At the start we made [the mission] very grandiose, we wanted to do everything, and felt able to do it all. We actually did do all of these things, but the results were not that great.”
A second grassroots environmental NGO and SDA echoed the thought that their original mission was “too big, too empty,” ascribing this to inadequate experience. The group had since revised their mission to “stimulating the whole people to care for water resources and protect the mother river,” although the person interviewed said she still felt this was too broad.

Three other grassroots NGOs (none of them SDAs) described changes that, to some extent, support the notion that organisations might evolve from service provision to advocacy.

The first said:

“The original mission was to provide service to mentally handicapped children and their parents. But our mission now includes, firstly, to xuan to the whole society in order to improve the social environment the handicapped face; secondly, to build a platform for parents of the handicapped children to communicate with experts and thirdly, to provide opportunities for the handicapped to receive education.”

The second group said:

“At the very beginning, our mission was ‘to take over the responsibility of tending the elderly from their children and to relieve families of their troubles,’ which is obviously a simple response to social demand. After several years of operation, our mission was changed to ‘enabling the elderly confined to beds to stand up and those confined to chairs to walk.’ After learning from similar organisations at home and abroad, our mission now is ‘to improve the quality of life of the elderly and to enable them to keep their human dignity’ and ‘serve society and bring blessings to communities.’”

(大家在一起商讨，这个组织将来的发展，包括这个组织到底在做什么。然后定位的时候有一些变动。开始的时候做的很大，什么都想做。任何一件事情都能做。我们确实能做，但是做出的成效不会那么大。

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The third group, which provides schooling for children of migrants, said that they had started simply by wanting to provide a place for the children to study, but once the school’s management was stable and standardised (规范管理) they raised their own sights. Now they see their objective as being to see their students learn well, but also to gain the same social status as students in the public school system:

“Together we share concern for the children of rural workers, because they are also the flowers of the motherland. They long for equality, justice and good care.” (我们共同关注农民工子弟，因为他们也是祖国的花朵，他们渴望平等，公正，关爱。)

However, it would be misleading to suggest that there is a wholesale shift towards advocacy—or, at any rate, toward advocacy with international characteristics; for several groups expressed reservations about what is possible in, and appropriate for, China. For example, a representative of one of NGO (not an SDA) said:

“I’ve received trainings on social development many times abroad and I find that the so-called human rights stressed by Westerners can’t work with the current development in China. My view is that we should attach more importance to the rights to survival and development.” (我多次在国外参加有关发展的培训。我感觉西方人所强调的所谓人权不大适用于中国现阶段的发展。我觉得我们现阶段应该关注的是生存权和发展权)

Another NGO, which was an SDA, said “We will never get involved with human rights.” (我们决不涉及人权)

**Interpretation, notes and conclusions:**

Examples of change were relatively few, and most were offered by grassroots NGOs. It is tempting to infer from this that they are generally more thoughtful about their role and positioning. However they are also the groups that one would expect to be most engaged in this kind of thinking because they are occupy the least well-defined space. GONGOS, by comparison, with their governmental background, might be expected to have a clearer idea of what is expected of them; while the trade, industrial and professional associations have a clear mandate to serve the needs and interests of their members, even if some lack the resources or freedom to do so.
The younger grassroots in the sample (some have been operational for no more than 2-3 years, although the median age was around 6-7 years, with a couple that have been operational for 20 years or more) might also be expected still to be in the process of refining and focusing their mission. This process is complicated by the need to articulate a mission that is true to the organisation’s values while also reflecting (or at least not contradicting) official rhetoric.

There is, arguably, some evidence here to support the view that, once established as direct service providers, some organisation may progress to wider social advocacy. However, the shift that some organisations have registered, towards a slightly more assertive and universal language, might also be understood partly in terms of their growing confidence as they accumulate experience of working with target groups.

3.5 Organisational structure and development

Organisations were invited to describe their structure (and any notable changes in this over time), in an effort to discern a) what areas of activity their structures prioritise, and b) whether they are functioning in a way that enables them to play an advocacy role, or developing their structures in order to do so.

GONGO staff, boards and leadership were very often drawn from government departments. For example, one national level GONGO said:

“The choice of our chairman involves the following process: we put forward the general specifications to the Ministry in charge of our organisation. For example, candidates should be in good health, knowledgeable and have high prestige in society. And then the Ministry will try to find someone through their access to the National People’s Congress and China Peoples Political Consultative Conference. Then, the Board of Directors will hold discussions to decide.”

Another national GONGO with extensive reach down to rural areas also emphasised that “Chairmen of the organisation are national leaders” and representatives in rural branches are typically drawn from “five
olds” (五老): old cadres, Communist Party members, workers, model citizens and older people. (老干部，老党员，老工人，老模范，老长辈。)

One of the five national organisations that we had designated as ‘GONGOs’ was evidently growing and expected to continue doing so, saying that they are considering setting up city or provincial level branches. This organisation said that it had four, distinct administrative departments: Human Resources, Finance, Resource Mobilisation and Supervision. The Resource Mobilisation department had been set up in 2005, to replace what was previously a Public Relations department. Its function was described as being “to carry out comprehensive management of the whole organisation so that the competition due to the rectangular management can be coordinated.” (其主要职能是进行综合管理，协调各部门因矩阵管理而产生的竞争。) The organisation now has 40 full time staff and 20 volunteers.

One of the local (sub-provincial level) GONGOs said that their staff were all employed and paid by a local government department, adding that “We prefer the current arrangement for we are financially secure in this way.” (我们是事业编制，这样对我们个人来说比较有保障。)

A county-level charitable GONGO described an organisational structure that includes an Executive Board (常务理事单位), headed by the chief of the local Civil Affairs Department and with no less than fifty board members representing other work units, including business enterprises. This board oversees a total of just three full time staff, all of whom previously worked in the Civil Affairs Department, and six volunteers.

This organisation’s representative complained of staff shortages, saying: “We don’t have enough people. Now we need to learn from [the head of a local grassroots NGO], how to mobilize volunteers from society.” (现在人不够。现在要向[x]老师 学习，动员社会上的志愿者。)

Finance was also a problem for this local GONGO. According to their charter and provincial regulations, they may spend only 15% of their income on project management overheads but this, they said, was not enough. They received CNY 200,000 in the last financial year in support from provincial government, but had requested an increased allocation in future.

Several of the trade and industry associations said they were in the process of becoming more independent of government. One, based in Shenzhen, noted that from 2004 the local government had been...
encouraging minjianhua (民间化—literally, "becoming people-run"). This, the representative we spoke to said:

“... can encourage the association to develop independently; independent development means we rely on the businesses for funding sources. How do we achieve this funding? It’s dependent on serving the businesses, giving businesses better service. You have to provide services to business in order to survive.” (民间化能鼓励协会独立发展，独立发展就是说资金来源就是靠企业。怎么能得到这个资金呢?就是靠给企业服务，就是能更好的给企业服务...这样你必须给企业服务你才能生存。)

The interviewed representative also said that, in terms of planning and decision making, the organisation had become less dependent on the General Secretary’s office, and more “reliant on everyone’s opinion” (靠大家决策); activities were now decided by an Executive Council (理事会) and implemented by the General Secretary’s office.

A city-level association based in Nanjing said that since 2004 they, with 140 other local associations, have been following a government directive that called for “three separations’ [from government]: separation of staff, funds and office space.” (三脱离:人员,经费,办公地。) Previously, this association’s President had been the Deputy Director of the Nanjing city government Bureau of Industry and Commerce. The reform of the Association, its representative said, had brought a “change of viewpoint” (转变观点) but that “although [government appointees] have left and the association has become financially independent, its tasks and responsibilities have not changed.” (人是走了，财务独立了，但是任务不变。) Beginning in 2005, moreover, the association had expanded its operations, setting up branch offices in each of Nanjing’s urban districts and in each county under the city’s administrative jurisdiction; and it had also established “expert committees” (专业委员会), specialising in different areas of work.

A provincial-level association in Jiangsu had also established three branch organisations dealing with different aspects of the industry, together with liaison offices in each of the province’s 13 cities, and was also developing partnerships with academic institutions in order to inform research and policymaking.

An association in Wenzhou was now also entirely reliant on membership fees ranging from CNY 800 to 2,000 per year. This only covers one full-time salary (for the General Secretary) and several part-time salaries; but nonetheless the association had established a
legal department, an exhibition department and an editorial department, together with expert committees to advise on design and on exports.

The reform, independence and growth of trade and industry associations appeared to have progressed much further in the eastern, coastal provinces—Guangdong, Jiangsu and Zhejiang—where the private economy is relatively highly developed. Associations in inland and western provinces were, in general, less upbeat about their role. For example, one Association in Hubei Province complained that they lack clearly defined legal space and that government still manages and controls some areas that should be the association’s responsibility. This, according to the spokesperson we met, has hindered the association from demonstrating its worth, and also from acquiring the skills and experience it needs. Much the same situation appeared to prevail in Shaanxi Province, where all ten staff of an association we interviewed were directly employed by the provincial government; while an association in Liaoning was run by two retired government cadres.

As already noted, many of the grassroots NGOs appeared to be growing fast; but in diverse—and sometimes chaotic—ways, with no uniform pattern or direction. Several of the organisations talked quite openly about the growing pains and challenges they face, and about uncertainty over their future direction. One, for example frankly admitted that, although they make annual work plans for the organisation, “our development always outstrips our planning” (我们的发展总是超出我们的计划。)

A common theme was the difficulty of establishing a stable, core staff. Many grassroots groups saw this mainly as a matter of money, finding it hard to cover salaries for essential posts, or pay rates that are “competitive” enough to retain skilled staff. Indeed, as staff become more experienced and qualified, they also become more attractive to other organisations, and this can act as a deterrent to investments in training.

Nevertheless, several organisations discussed human resource development in terms other than simply lamenting the lack of cash. For example, many of the grassroots NGOs rely largely on volunteers and in several cases seemed to see this not just as a way of using affordable resources to make ends meet but as a constructive means
to expand their work and spread their message. A legal services NGO, which has four full time staff and which frankly admitted that it was struggling to find a workable organisational model, described the use of student volunteers as a process for developing human resources with a sense of social responsibility. A provincial-level environmental NGO that has a full-time staff team of six and claims 2,000 members said that it tries to foster active volunteer groups in different parts of the province; but, rather than establishing such groups as branches, or closely directing their growth, it encourages them to create their own local organisations and activities:

“Regarding volunteers, we should use an open approach. That’s to say that you [a volunteer] do what you interested in, or what will be of value to society. It’s fair to say that this mission has never been clearly defined as to which sector it is targeting. We left it rather open in this respect. As long as what you are doing fits with your mission, then it is okay.”

Several organisations also described internal training and staff development initiatives aimed at increasing staff (and volunteer) participation in decision making processes, with an implicit recognition that active involvement and ownership are important motivators.

The ‘spirit of volunteerism’ has, over the last 2-3 years, become quite a ‘hot topic’ in Chinese NGO (and GONGO) circles but involves some complex issues, such that the idea of volunteering retains a wide range of connotations and inflections. In the first place, China has an immense history of corvée labour. It was only in 2005 that the state finally relieved peasants of a formal obligation—which had lasted for more than 2,000 years—to contribute a certain number of days labour each year to state projects such as engineering works, from Grand Canals and Great Walls to rural road maintenance.) The Maoist period also saw sustained efforts to mobilise the masses not only in public works but also in political campaigns; and, at the same time, state propaganda popularised models of Communist virtue—personified in the legendary, common soldier, Lei Feng—much as earlier epochs had glorified and memorialised filial piety, virtuous widowhood, etc.

This heritage continues to resonate in present day, official efforts to promote volunteerism and civic virtue. Parastatal ‘organisations of the masses’ such as the Youth League and Women’s Federation, and organisations established under them, continue to serve in part as instruments of mass mobilisation. (For example, the Youth League is responsible for recruiting and organising tens of thousands of young volunteers to provide ancillary support for the 2008 Olympic games.) Government departments also often mobilise young graduates as teachers and medical staff for rural areas, and this is often described as ‘voluntary’ service although in practice it is a requirement of qualification or post-qualification probation. Very many GONGOs (and some grassroots NGOs) rely largely on retired cadres to serve as core staff.

Meanwhile, citizen-initiated grassroots NGOs also mobilise volunteers for social service, (as do urban district and neighbourhood committees.) Activists in independent NGOs that are not primarily social service providers—for example, environmental activists—very often also regard and refer to themselves as ‘volunteers’.

Thus, the notion of ‘volunteer’ (zhiyuanzhe, 志愿者) is now applied to a broad range of activities, from those that are clearly state initiated and state led to those that are clearly private and personal. Chinese mass media, in the quest for new models of civic virtue, frequently reports upon and applauds the various present instances of volunteering.
group gave the example of including all staff in a five year planning exercise, so that they would really understand the organisation’s direction and “mobilise its comprehensive strength.” Another organisation said they encourage new staff to see their work as a profession (职业) not just a job, stressing that “It’s not just about filling the rice bowl but about spreading love” (更重要它不是你吃饭的饭碗，而是一个推广爱的事业。) A third group said that, after encountering problems with their staff, they started an extensive staff training programme, with 36 training days in 2004 alone. This was the first venture into staff development, the organisation said; prior to that, staff had effectively been considered disciples of the head of the organisation.

A fourth organisation introduced, in 2004, a rotating leadership scheme by which the four full-time professional staff took it in turns to serve as Chief Project Director for a term of four months. The group explained this innovation as an effort to improve the personal capacity and commitment of young staff and to build team-work.

Whilst many of the grassroots organisations were quite clearly grappling with issues of staff development, they appeared on the whole to be much less preoccupied with broader issues of organisational governance. Several referred at some point to a governing board, but often only in passing, and it appeared in some cases that the board’s role was rather minimal. For example, one group said that its board had “dozens” (几十个) of members, but that they “don’t do much” (他也不管事) . Large boards appear to be relatively common—another group mentioned a 19-member board—and their size alone, relative to the size of the organisations, tends to suggest that their actual role is largely honorific. Only one group specified ways in which the board was of practical use, saying “When we have financial difficulties our board members help fundraise, and borrow money . . . [they also help by] introducing good management models.” (我们财务有困难，我们理事也会帮我们筹款。) In this case, the board comprised a more manageable number of people: just seven, although the organisation was considering expanding this to nine, partly in order to achieve a better gender balance by appointing more women. The representative we interviewed said that they “hoped to increase the usefulness of the board not just add names to it.” (希望理事会是真正的发挥作用的，不是只是挂名的。)

Many of the grassroots NGOs appeared too small and/or too young to have divided their operational tasks and responsibilities between clearly defined departments or sections, and continued to work in a fairly informal and unstructured way. Several of the larger and better-
established NGOs, however, had divided responsibility for their operational work between functional departments: research, publicity, monitoring and evaluation, etc.

Of these, two organisations—both SDAs—have departments with a notional responsibility for advocacy. One has a “research and advocacy” division (alongside “consultancy and training” and “education” divisions.) A second has a “fundraising and advocacy” section but was actively thinking about separating fundraising from advocacy. The representative we spoke to said that the organisation was exploring ways to involve scholars and intellectuals in more rigorous reflection, analysis and assessment of their project experiences in order to increase the policy impact of their work, as well as contributing to the development of civil society and “public supervision”:

“[If] Experts, scholars or intellectuals can join in our activities; we can simultaneously improve our projects with the benefit of their theoretical level. In this way we can do advocacy from this basis . . .”

Interpretation, notes and conclusions:

The grassroots NGOs—and, again, SDAs in particular—gave most signs of change and innovation in organisational structure, with some thought evidently given to issues such as leadership style, the role of staff and volunteers, and human resource development generally. It was to be expected that grassroots groups should have reflected on issues of organisational development, since they are operating without a government-created template, and in a context where there is no clear model or “road map” for organisations of their kind to follow. Indeed, given this, many of the grassroots organisations in fact had rather little to say about their organisational development and governance (especially when compared with the large amount they had to say about their relations to the government.) Little was said to contradict the impression that many of the smaller organisations are still largely the creatures of their founder(s), having relatively informal operational procedures and still being personally guided by the founder(s.) Where there had been some progress towards more formal organisational structures, a corporate organisational model (with a board of directors, CEO and professional staff) was the only model visible. Some interviewees expressed concerns about the
challenges of keeping an effective staff (and volunteer) team in place, but none raised wider issues of accountability.

3.6 What is the role of the organisation’s constituency in shaping the organisation?

The aim of enquiring into this area was to explore the extent to which the organisations reflect and address the expressed needs of their constituencies. That is, do the organisations mainly a) devise their own agendas for “serving others” or b) take into account the views of the served to modify and refine those agendas? Or, c), do the served in fact control and decide the agenda?

By constituency we mean here the individuals or social group(s) that the organisations set out to reach or serve. (The target was, in fact, seldom clear-cut, given that many of the groups surveyed saw themselves, as shown in Section 3.2, as addressing “the general public” or “the whole of society.” This is a particularly difficult question for environmental NGOs to respond to, since “the environment,” “nature,” “the eco-system,” “the earth,” etc, do not, in any simple sense, comprise a “constituency.”)

The question was explored in various ways during the interviews. Organisations that appeared to have a more or less clearly defined constituency (or membership) were asked directly what role this constituency played in the organisation. In other cases, we relied more on inference and interpretation.

The trade, industry and professional associations might be expected, as membership service organisations, to be responsive to the needs and demands of their members. Five of the ten associations we interviewed asserted firmly that this is indeed the case. (Four out of these five were located in more developed, coastal regions where the private sector economy is thriving—Wenzhou, Shenzhen and Jiangsu.) The representative of one group said:

“We always remind ourselves that we are a professional organisation and we should have a keen awareness to serve our members. Therefore, we never lose our temper when we talk with our members and show our humility when listening to their demands.”

Another illustrated their dependence on satisfying members by saying:
“When [the members] feel that they need the association’s help, they pay their membership dues promptly, but when they don’t feel there is anything at the time that they need doing for them they may be late paying up.” (他们感觉我这一段时间需要协会的帮助他们会交会费；他们感觉最近我不需要什么事情他们会退出。)

This was echoed by a third group, which said:

“Our association’s development is dependent on our members’ support . . . The association needs to be of use to the members. Only if it is useful will they provide financial support, and pay their membership fees. So the association thinks up ways to do things for the businesses.” (我们协会的发展是靠我们会员的支持 . . . 协会对会员要有作用。有用他才能给你提供赞助，他才能交会费，所以协会想一些办法给企业多做一些事。)

As an example of this demand-driven approach in action, the latter group cited the fact that, in response to appeals from members, they were working to dissuade local authorities from imposing an environmental tax—of a kind recently adopted in Hong Kong—on the industry’s products.

Three associations, however, appeared from the accounts of their representatives not to be significantly shaped by member demands but, rather, to be delivering information, expertise and service packages that were essentially defined by government authorities and geared to the smooth implementation of government policy. One of these groups was a professional association with a statutory role in training and licensing members, and appeared to have an entirely supply-driven approach. The other two described themselves as having taken over certain administrative functions from government departments, and showed no sign of having achieved, or yet wishing to achieve, any substantive change in working style or ethos. One of the two said, for example:

“The role that we play derives from the great importance attached to our work by the Provincial Party Committee and relevant departments, especially the Provincial Department of Organisations and the Agriculture Department. Our office is provided by them and the electricity and water is free here in our office.” (我们能够发挥作用，很大程度上得益于省委各部门对我们工作的高度重视。特别是省委组织部以及相关农业部门的大力支持。我们的办公地点，用水用电等都是依托省委。)
In the two remaining cases it was hard to determine how responsive the associations were to membership demand. One representative, for example, lamented his association’s inability to address members’ demands, or respond adequately to members’ complaints about the association’s work, because of the lack of experience, resources and qualified staff. (Existing staff, the representative explained, were generally hired not for their ability but because of their connections [guanxi].)

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<tr>
<th>Table III.5 Trade, Industry &amp; Professional Associations (10)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Responsiveness to Membership Demand</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Report themselves as being highly responsive, membership-driven</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appear preoccupied only with handing down information/policies</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not clear/hard to say</td>
<td>2</td>
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Three out of five national level GONGOs were at pains to emphasise “participatory” approaches in a variety of projects they had implemented (emergency relief, micro-finance, women’s development, AIDS prevention.) No mention of beneficiary participation was made by the other two, national-level GONGOs.

A county-level GONGO, said:

“Every year we select from all of the various kinds of pleas for help that we received from society, those that stand out and those that appear more often, to decide our assistance projects.”

(每年，我们从社会各界各种寻求帮助的信息中挑选突出的和有普遍性的一些问题来决定我们的求助项目。)

However, in general the local GONGOs showed little familiarity with participatory discourse, and appeared to regard themselves primarily as doing good for others.

The “grassroots” NGOs were, on the whole, much better versed in the language of beneficiary participation. Crudely judged on the basis of what the representatives said during the interview—and in full recognition that this kind of judgement cannot be vigorously defended as “scientific”—we found that eight of the “grassroots” NGOs had a strong, rhetorical commitment to “participatory methods.” (Five of these eight were also “self-described advocates.”)
Five more NGOs made reference to participation and consultation, but emphasised it somewhat less.

In the case of four organisations it was simply too hard, on the basis of the interview, to make any kind of judgement as to how much they favoured “participatory approaches”—not because their responses were incoherent but, in most cases, because the nature of their activities did not lend itself easily to this kind of analysis. (For example, one of these groups was devoted to species protection, and found it hard to define a “constituency,” and two others were also environmental groups.)

Finally, three of the NGOs were essentially self-help groups (one for families of autistic children, two arising from the gay and lesbian community.) Of all the organisations interviewed, these three, perhaps not surprisingly, appeared most clearly to be run by and for people in the community they sought to serve.

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<th>Table III.6: Twenty ‘grassroots’ NGOs: How are they shaped by their constituencies?</th>
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<td>(No. in brackets indicates ‘self-described advocates’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong rhetorical commitment to participatory approaches 8 (5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some, but less, emphasis on participation/consultation 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not clear/hard to say 4 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-help groups—constituency creates its own agenda 3 (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Typical of those with an apparently strong commitment to participation—was the following remark (made by a group that was not an SDA):

“We adopt a participatory method, disseminating concepts of sustainable development and the protection of indigenous knowledge among farmers, enabling them to participate in the projects actively. During project implementation officials engage actively with farmers, and this will inspire future project design.”

(在项目进行过程当中，项目执行人员同农民之间实现了充分的互动，这也为组织未来的项目策划提供了很多灵感。)
As in many cases, the emphasis appeared here to be on demonstrating to government partners more participatory and consultative ways of working with communities, rather than merely imposing policy and decisions upon them.

Another of the groups strongly committed to participation (not an SDA either) counted fostering community environmental action and participation as a major task and strategy:

"NGOs (minjian zuzhi) like us, who are few and far between and also very small, must go and train & educate communities to make them face environmental problems. It's not about NGOs solving big environmental problems. It's difficult, but you have the ability to go and help communities, get them to go and find solutions." (像我们这样的数量非常少的非常小的民间组织，应该去培训社区，教育社区去面对环境问题。我们不是作为民间组织解决多大的环境问题。很难但是你有能力去帮助社区，发动社区去解决。)

A third “strongly committed to participation” group (once again, not an SDA), explained its participatory approach in terms of the fact that its active members and associates were drawn from the local community:

“We have over 120 members, all capable people who are highly regarded in their communities. They are eager to make contributions to public welfare undertakings. Since they are local people, they know the constituency well and their design and operation of the projects are based on the fundamental needs of the local people.” (我们有 120 名左右的会员，都是比较有威望的在地人。他们是当地项目的主要负责人。因为他们对当地的情况十分了解，他们能够根据当地群众的基本需求进行项目策划和运作。)

This organisation is based in Qinghai Province and, like several other Qinghai groups, does indeed appear more of a community-based organisation than the great majority of “grassroots” organisations based in major cities.

Five of the six “self-described advocates” also expressed strong commitment to the idea of beneficiary participation, in terms that were very similar to those expressed above by the first two “strongly committed to participation” NGOs. Two of the SDAs went somewhat further. One acknowledged that target beneficiaries had so far participated mainly in a “passive” way, as the recipients of projects or services. This group expressed the hope that this participation would
become active as more beneficiaries start to work for the organisation, increasing beneficiary ownership of it:

“We are presently making a plan for volunteers; once the plan for the volunteers is done we should have an interactive relationship. I’ve also demanded that [staff] transform the workers’ current passive participation into active participation, so they have ownership over these things... They also do have many participatory trainings and activities that they help with, but I feel that we have not yet mobilised their awareness of being in charge of their own affairs.” (我们目前在做一个志愿者的计划，志愿者的计划做出来以后我们应该是一个互动的关系。我也要求他们把目前工人被动的参与变成主动的参与，变成他们自己的事情... 他们也有很多参与式的活动和培训，他们帮着做；但是我觉得没有把他们的主人公的意识调动起来。)

A second SDA also noted the inadequacy of much participatory discourse:

“When people talk about participatory methods, I’ve always disagreed with this idea. I’ve always talked about participatory community development thinking... I think this is a basic way of thinking, it’s not a method, as if to say today we can use this method but tomorrow we can communicate by phone... If it were like that I would still be free to abandon it [participation].” (When people talk about 参与式方法 I’ve always disagreed with this idea; I’ve always talked about 参与式的社区发展思想法... 我认为这是一个基本的思想，它不是一个方法就是说今天我们可以利用这个，明天用电话沟通... 如果这样我还可以把他扔掉 English in original)

The representative of this organisation went on to explain that:

“The reason we say that participation shouldn’t be seen as a method but above all as a way of thinking is firstly that the people are the main actors in our society. Actually if we take it a little deeper the people are the main actors in our historical development, this is a fundamental way of thinking. This is a modern, democratic way of thinking, right? Not [that there are] saviours. Everything is equal. Everyone is human. We should all act on behalf of the whole society, have opportunities in common, a common share in society’s benefits, but we need to come forward together to build this society. What we want to stress that everyone is equal in this participatory way of thinking. This includes our relationships; it’s not that there are givers and receivers, it’s not like that. We are completely equal, developing
together." (为什么不能提方法，应该首先要提思想，是首先代表着我们社会的主体是群众。甚至我们在引申一点，我们历史发展的主体也是群众，这么一个基本思想。这就是一个现代的民主思想，对不对，没有救命主。都是平等的，都是人。都应该为整个社会。大家有一个共同的机会，共同来分享社会的成果，但要共同出面建设这个社会。我们要更强调的是参与式思想是大家是平等的。包括我们的关系也不是给予者和受益者。不是这样，我们完全的是平等的，一起来共同的发展[我们]这样的一个机构。)

For this group, the general conclusion was that “participatory thinking, development thinking, is what human development is about” (参与式思想，发展思想，那就是人的发展。) and this was leading the organisation towards project approaches that emphasise “self-development” (自我成长), leading to “autonomous ability” (自治能力)

The representative of this organisation further noted that:

"This idea of 'participatory methods' is an imported word. Of course we also had our own concepts before, for example Mao Zedong used to say 'From the masses, to the masses.'" (参与式这个说法是一个外来词。当然以前我们也有一些说法，例如毛泽东曾说过“从群众中来，到群众中去。)

This organisation, in addition to being an SDA, was also one of the two faith-based organisations interviewed; and its representative suggested that its position on equality was rooted in a theological perspective:

"We have always stressed that we are not giving out charity. From the perspective of our Christianity, we are not charity givers. Actually we are equal to our beneficiaries. When we help them, we also receive a kind of help from them—a kind of mutual gratification. When their life is enriched, our spirit also yields great harvest. So this is a type of mutual, favorable relationship.” (我们一直强调的是我们不是施舍者。从我们的Christianity来讲我们不是施舍者。我们实际上是跟我们的受助者是平等的。当我们在帮助他们时，我们也得到了他们的一种帮助，一种互相的满足。当他们生活上能够丰富的时候，我们的精神也会很丰收。所以这是一种互相的，一种良性关系，English word in the original.)

The second faith-based (also Christian) organisation in the survey cited its faith as a source of motivation:

"From our actions you can very clearly tell that we are a highly compassionate group. Why do we have compassion? If you
research that you’ll see it is because we are Christian, so we have compassion.” (我的行为可以明确地告诉你，我们是一个非常有爱心的团体。为什么有爱心？你去研究就会发现因为我们是基督徒，所以有爱心。)

However, this organisation’s representative also emphasised that it was not simply compassion but, rather, cost-effectiveness and capability that legitimated its work:

“As an NPO or NGO, compared to the government, it should be clear to the government . . . your [the NPO/NGO’s] costs are the lowest, your capacity for mobilising society is the strongest, your sense of mission is the strongest. . . .” (你作为NPO或者NGO，跟政府来比较，他应该知道的，你的成本最低，你的社会动员能力最强，使命感最强。)

This was among the four groups that, in the interviews, “emphasised participation/consultation somewhat less.” All five of these are organisations that directly engage in social service provision of some kind—and at least four out of five do so on a long-term, routine basis, rather than as a part of shorter term “projects.” Many sector specialists would immediately classify them as “service provider organisations.”

The fact that these organisations talked about participation less does not of course mean that they are non-participatory in their thinking or practice. One of the groups spoke of “attentively listening to the suggestions made by the elderly living in the neighbourhood and organising activities that they like.” (认真倾听周边老年人的建议并组织他们喜欢的活动) Two schools for migrant children both gave credible examples of responsiveness to the demands of the community they were serving (over and above the fact that, like most of the trade and professional associations, they were essentially dependent on fees for services.) One of the schools had created a complaints box for messages from parents and students, and an on-line version of the same. It was planning to add to this an email advisory service whereby parents could write to selected teachers about schooling and family problems, with the promise of a reply. The Principal of the second school related how parents told her that they were embarrassed by the school’s name (which included reference to “migrant workers’ children”). The parents feel loss of face whenever they tell people which school their children go to. The Principal was therefore considering a name change, to avoid stigma and to promote social inclusion of migrant children as “new citizens” (新移民).
In summary, these service-providers were clearly not entirely aloof from their constituencies, and certainly had some at least some participatory instincts—but their practices appeared much less theorised than those of some of the other NGOs, and they did not give the impression that they thought and talked much about participation. Four out of the five groups in question have had relatively little exposure to international organisations, so it may be that they were less familiar with participatory discourse and “tools.” But it might also be that people involved in the day-to-day business of running institutions and services, and with a long-term commitment to keep running them, are simply less likely to get, or to remain, passionate about abstract ideas.

**Interpretation, notes and conclusions:**

Participatory discourse is well established among grassroots NGOs, especially among “self-described advocates.” For several, participation is canonical, and for one or two it appears to be viewed not merely as a method but as an end in itself. Long term, direct providers of social services speak of beneficiary participation less than organisations which mainly run discrete, fixed-term “projects,” but nonetheless demonstrate evidence of consultative approaches in the services they provide.

Yet participation seemed mainly to be viewed as an appropriate technique for delivering what the organisation has to deliver, and there was little sign of organisations having taken this thinking further, to apply the concepts of participation and “ownership” not just to projects but to the organisations themselves. The great majority of GONGOs and grassroots NGOs appear devoted to doing things for others, as opposed to becoming organisations owned and run by beneficiaries or constituents. This seemed, naturally enough, less true of the three “self help” groups in the survey; and, in quite different ways, the Qinghai NGO and the two faith-based organisations also appeared to have stronger community roots than most organisations. Most other NGOs interviewed were not, in any obvious sense, “community based” organisations, even when they espoused the benefits of community participation and action. (The trade, industry and professional associations were on the whole much clearer about being responsive to the demands of their membership.)

As in the issue of organisational development and governance, the NGOs seem in general to have given relatively little thought to issues of accountability and legitimacy in so far as their relations with society
are concerned. Very likely this is because they are much more preoccupied—as the following sections suggests—with their relations with government.

3.7 Relations with government

Nearly all of the organisations interviewed had plenty to say about their relationships with government—a topic that, clearly, has greatly exercised them, both on a theoretical level, in thinking through their own identity, and on a very practical, operational level. A selection of their comments appears in Tables III.7—III.9.

The organisations we have called “GONGOs”—a description that one of them vigorously objected to 42—appeared in all cases to regard themselves as being institutionally separate from government, while still belonging to the same team, with the same objectives, and under the same (Communist Party) leadership. Some spoke of how government had assigned or entrusted (weitou) certain tasks to them, while others spoke of how they complemented government programmes by working with hard-to-reach constituencies, by sharing burdens that are too large for government to assume alone, or by “substituting for government in the areas where they can’t make achievements” (是替代政府部门做不到的事情). (Several grassroots NGOs expressed themselves in very similar terms.) All emphasised “close and harmonious” working relationships with relevant government departments. This appeared to work in two ways. On the one hand, the GONGOs are able to take advantage of existing government channels and resources—for example, in order to reach their target constituencies. On the other, the GONGOs enjoy relatively easy access to government departments when reporting back or “making suggestions.”

It is worth remarking that glib reference to “government-organised NGOs” tends to conjure a picture of an all-encompassing and all-controlling central state bureaucracy that assigns tasks, permissions, and duties. (To some extent, this is indeed the Chinese Communist Party’s own narrative about itself as the vanguard and protector of the people.) Yet most thinking people with any working experience of China—including, of course, countless millions of Chinese people—know that China’s institutional politics are much more complicated than that, with a relatively high degree of government fragmentation.

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42 We did not, during the interview process, refer to organisations as ‘GONGOs.’ The remark quoted in Table III.7 was made spontaneously.
and sometimes quite sharp rivalries and conflicts of interest between the multiple tiers and departments of government.

The evidence suggests that Chinese GONGOs are not “government-organised” in a strict sense—such as, for example, their annual work plans being dictated by government and Party leaders. Rather, they appear to enjoy a certain degree of operational autonomy, (while nonetheless depending largely on government’s supporting structures in order to exercise that autonomy), but within parameters that are defined by the government and Party.

As many commentators have noted, the GONGOs’ place “inside the system” enables them, in theory, to influence the system—and thus, perhaps, positions them to “advocate.” For example, a GONGO can submit a report, request a meeting or convene a round-table discussion with government agencies, and officials from those agencies will not feel “What right do they have they to summon us in this way?” (Grassroots NGOs, alas, definitely do not enjoy this advantage.)

However, being inside the (notoriously “top-down”) system may also tend to dull the GONGOs’ initiative, as they wait for signals from “top leaders.” At the same time, because “the system” is not entirely orderly and cohesive, being inside it does not necessarily guarantee a route to influence. Government officials invited to a GONGO meeting may simply decline to show up, or show up just for the lunch and not really listen to the discussion. Therefore, how much the GONGOs make of their relatively privileged position must depend to a large extent on their own motivation, determination and skill at managing relations with their parent agency and other government departments. This study was not detailed enough to pass comment on the capacities in this respect of any individual agency, but our impression was that there is certainly a range of abilities and aptitudes, from rather weak and lethargic to relatively dynamic and committed. A relevant, if not conclusive factor appears to be whether staff are hired for their abilities, skills and interests, or merely assigned by government, for example in honorary retirement posts.

A large and important question is: will the parameters shift, and will GONGO autonomy increase? Our interviews showed that at least some of the national GONGOs, based in Beijing, appear alert to this possibility and ready to assume enlarged responsibilities; and so too at lower administrative levels despite the close working relationships that usually exist in city or county-level administrations. One “local” GONGO, for example, said:
“The correct direction is to become a bit more independent of government. This is right for the development of all people’s organisations. But up to now this is still not the case. We are still dependent on government in taking forward our work and we are taking on a lot of work passed on from government, because [our association] is not like other people’s organisations, its relationship and contact with government is very close . . . So to separate from government completely is still not okay”（但是正确的方向应该是和政府相对独立一点。整个民间组织的发展这样是对的。但是还不行。还在依赖政府开展工作，本身来承担政府很多交办的工作，因为[我们协会]不像别的民间组织，他跟政府的关系联系非常密切 . . . 所以离了政府还不行。）

A mixed picture emerged from the interviews with the ten Trade, Industry and Professional Associations. Several described themselves as having become genuinely independent of government (with government’s blessing), becoming financially dependent instead on members’ fees, and correspondingly responsive to the needs and wishes of their members. At the same time, they claimed still to have good contacts and working relationships with relevant government departments, enabling them to take up specific cases on behalf of members while also encouraging policies to favour the development of their sector. (These groups were mainly concentrated in economically developed areas with a thriving private sector economy, notably Shenzhen, Wenzhou and Jiangsu.) It would be easy to see this as a “success story” for Chinese state-led gradualism and the phased transfer of command economy “administrative” tasks to carefully crafted, but increasingly independent organisations representing different industrial and professional constituencies. However, this transition had not yet been achieved in less economically developed areas where the associations appeared still to be government proxies—in at least one case “yearning for more autonomy.” Their activities appeared to be largely confined to disseminating government policies and information and reporting back to government, and they appeared, as yet, to have relatively little capacity for representing the interests of their members.

Government relations were evidently a major issue for the great majority of the 20 “grassroots NGOs” interviewed. In the survey-questionnaire, 17 out of 20 agreed that “close relationships with government can help you to accomplish your goals,” yet only 8 out of 20 saw themselves as already having a “close and cooperative” relationship.” This would appear to mean that at least nine of the NGOs in the survey hope to improve their government relations.
Equally revealingly, in responding to the questionnaire survey 11 organizations selected ‘communication with government departments’ as one of their main channels for xuanchuan; but three organisations selected it as also one of most difficult channels. (Questions 5-6 in section 4.)

None of the NGOs—even those eight that spontaneously mentioned “advocacy” (chandao) in describing their activities—expressed anything during the interviews that could be construed as hostility to, or a challenge to the legitimacy of, the government of China. On the contrary, many of them plainly craved a better relationship with government but often seemed at a loss how to achieve this. The overall picture was of essentially loyal and patriotic people who want to make a contribution to social development but whose effectiveness in doing so is limited by government agencies’ relative lack of willingness to cooperate, and/or inexperience in non-governmental and cross-sectoral partnerships.

Several, echoing a common GONGO refrain, described their role as “complementing, not replacing, government.”

At least six alluded obliquely or directly to the current national leadership’s appeal for “building a harmonious society.” One organisation (an SDA) even said that they were considering revising their mission statement to include a reference to harmonious society. Another (also an SDA) noted that “we mainly convey our concepts in mainstream discourse” (我们运用主流话语来表述和传达我们的理念), meaning that they explain their programmes to local government leaders in terms of slogans pronounced or endorsed by national leaders (“harmonious society,” “xiaokang,” “scientific development,” “new socialist countryside” etc.) Several organisations noted that NGOs can contribute to building a harmonious society, and two (one SDA, one not) suggested that government needs NGO support to achieve a harmonious society.

Overall, whereas the parameters for GONGO engagement are defined quite specifically (with the GONGOs being entrusted—weituo—with various tasks), it appeared that the grassroots NGOs feel they need to persuade government authorities of their legitimacy, and see appeal to general policy pronouncements and slogans as a way of trying to gain the trust of local officials. Some suggested that government’s blessing would bring more influence with general public, and that government trust and approval would bring more resources and influence. But
others were explicit about not wanting to be associated with government for fear that it would negatively influence their reputation.

In very many cases, the relationships that mattered were local. As one group pointed out:

“The concepts and attitude of local governments towards NGOs are different. Therefore, our relations with different local governments are not the same. Basically, we long to pursue our further development in cities whose leaders are more open-minded, and which can provide more preferential policies.” (由于各地区发展不平衡，地方政府有关NGOs方面的理念和态度也不尽相同，因此我们同各地方政府的关系还是有所区别，我们渴望去观念更开放，政策更优惠的省市发展)

For small, local NGOs that cannot shop around for sympathetic city governments, a basic need is to obtain government approval for registration purposes. At least one of the grassroots NGOs had failed to achieve this, and expressed considerable frustration at the fact, but also determination to proceed:

“We are very keen to register as a legal, grassroots people’s organisation (minjian zuzhi), but so far it’s not promising at all, although we’ve devoted a lot of time and energy to this. Still, we’ll stick with it until we get there.” (我们特别希望能够注册成为一个合法的、有身份的民间组织，我们为这件事情跑了好长时间，时间精力都付出了不少，但仍然希望渺茫。但我们还是要继续跑下去，争取注册成功。)

However, another NGO (and SDA), working in the environmental field, said that they remained unregistered not for lack of opportunity, but in order to preserve their independence. The local Environment Protection and Education departments, the group explained, were both willing to serve as official sponsors, but the NGO did not wish to have to chose between them because it wanted to continue cooperating with both:

“We haven’t registered up to now because we hope to stay independent. Originally, they controlled [ie, wouldn’t allow] our registration, now they want us to register . . . Our present position is that we are registered with the Department of Industry and Commerce [as a business]. If we don’t register [as a ‘social organisation’], we can be relatively independent. If we’re with the Environment protection Department, it won’t be good for cooperation with the Education Department, if we’re
with the Education Department it won’t be good for cooperation with the Environment protection system... China’s makeup is like that. If you’re from this family you can’t go to that other family. Only if you’re family can you talk about more things, if you’re not family it will be more difficult.”

In the questionnaire-survey, eight of the 20 organisations assented to the proposition that “independence from government is very important to achieve your goals,” and another five said that it was “fairly important.”

The strongest call for independence came from an SDA that, in the context, was equally preoccupied with independence from the expectations and pressure of international donors:

“We believe there should be capacity for independent development, we should continue to develop an independent voice, it should be independent, our people should have independent working capacity, that’s to say, independent development capacity, not needing to stick to other people’s development. We cannot accept other people’s control.”

The representative of this organisation went on to say that they saw no contradiction between independence from and cooperation with government authorities (whilst admitting that it had relatively little formal contact and cooperation with government agencies.)

Several other NGOs appeared determined to invent the wheel cooperation from a position of independence. One, for example (not an SDA), said:

“Of course we want to be independent: our voice, our experiments are certainly not exactly the same as government, there would be no point in that. On the other hand, being recognised by government, being able to pull together with government, or being able to influence government, so to speak, that’s the other half of being effective... So we have to work
hard at going out to establish this cooperative partnership, maintaining independence within this partnership.” (当然要独立，我们的声音，试验肯定跟政府不完全一样，要不然我们就是政府了。而必须需要我们。另一方面，得到政府的认可，能够和政府形成合力，或者说能够影响政府那是一个事半功倍的事情。所以要努力的去建立这个合作伙伴关系，并在这个合作关系中保持自己的独立性。)

However, the environmental NGO mentioned above (as being courted for partnership by both education and environment protection authorities), felt that government connections could help to legitimate and reinforce the NGO’s message. In public education, the representative said, it is helpful to have government deliver key messages:

“It’s the same as us: through these presentations they can tell the people the importance and the goal [of environment protection]. If we say this ourselves, probably its impact is not as great. If we say it through the government department perhaps it gains greater recognition and acceptance.” (像我们一样，通过这些讲演的方式他们会告诉大家...他的意义性，包括他的目的性。如果是我们自己说出来，可能不是很大。如果通过政府部门说出来，他的认可性就比较大。)

One of the sub-national GONGOs had, similarly, remarked that “We take full advantage of government resources to be entitled to issue a government circular on environment protection.” (在实施环保项目的时候，我们就充分利用政府优势，向全省发布政府公告。) In both cases, government channels are evidently seen as an asset in getting a message out, and government endorsement as an asset in making the message "official."

This helps to explain why, in addition to needing government approval to operate legally, many of the NGOs were keen to improve their relations with government.

For several emphasised that government can be a resource—both materially, and in terms of enabling reach and influence—as well as a target for efforts to achieve changes in policy and practice.

In some cases, accessing government resources seemed primarily a matter of smoothing the NGO’s own operations. For example, one of the schools for migrant children spoke of having “reached out to government” and how the relationship had improved as a result. The other migrant school included in the survey noted that local authorities helped both by providing material support (such as donation of goods
and reduction in utility bills) and also, through this visible support, helping to enhance the school’s status and reputation.

In other cases, cooperation with government was seen as a route to wider influence. Two of the environmental NGOs, for example (neither of them SDAs) were adamant that they have already had significant impact on government policy and behaviour, and had been invited to participate in strategic planning exercises.

Many of the grassroots NGOs did have significant experience of cooperation with government (and presumably number among those eight that claimed “close and cooperative” links in the questionnaire survey.) The SDA working on women’s development issues noted that, especially in its early days, the local Women’s Federation had been an important source of support. Two other NGOs (neither of them SDAs) had reached agreements to operate quite large scale social service facilities (in one case, with government providing substantial resources.) Another (an SDA) was mobilising quite substantial international funding for poverty alleviation and development projects that are largely implemented by local government partners. These groups were able to offer some insight into how to communicate satisfactorily with government.

A frequently mentioned point was the need to emphasise commonalities not differences, agreeing where possible, or else agreeing to differ. One of the relatively large organisations providing services said they had adopted the rule of “finding common ground on big issues, while agreeing to differ on others.” (求打通存小异) Another of the NGOs (an SDA) said:

“We prefer to communicate with government in a positive way even if we can’t see eye to eye with them. Parades and other radical ways to protest can’t work in China for they don’t fit in with China’s general situation and political traditions.” (我们总是通过正面渠道同政府进行沟通。即使同政府的看法不完全一致，也应该尽量正面沟通。游行之类的过激方式不符合中国的国情和政治传统。)

One of the organisations providing social services emphasised that it took a business-like and relatively formal approach to project agreements. For example, the terms of the agreement were specified in a contract; the group provided detailed annual accounts to show there were no “hidden secrets” (偷偷摸摸的东西), and each year conducted interview surveys of beneficiaries to let government “understand ordinary peoples’ needs” (了解老百姓有什么需求). All of
these, the group felt, served as “small ways to create an equal relationship with government” (小方法去建立跟政府平等的关系).

The representative of the NGO engaged in relatively large scale funding of poverty alleviation gave an example of how he coped with a situation where local government partners had performed disappointingly. Giving feedback, he said:

“I extremely calmly, and without making any criticism, just very candidly said I had found some things to tell them. You don’t want to criticise them a lot. From that time, our cooperation in that county was very successful, interactive. There had been no criticism of government, so afterwards the cooperation was successful. Another thing is, because you want to cooperate, you have to exchange and communicate, that way you can learn things together.” (我非常平静的,我没有任何批评的,我就很坦率的告诉他我发现了什东西告诉他们。不要更多的批评他们...从这个之后在这个县我们合作非常顺利,这是一个互动。你并没有批评政府所以这后面的合作顺利多。另外, 因为你要合作你要交流你要沟通,这样一来才能相互学到东西。)

**Interpretation, notes and conclusions:**

The great majority of GONGOs and NGOs are at pains to present themselves as loyal auxiliaries to government, complementing its work, especially in fields where government does not want to venture or is not well equipped to do so, without challenging the government’s leadership role. The grassroots organisations do their utmost to cultivate good relationships in order to gain operational space, resources and access to government systems and channels to disseminate their own views and ideals. The grassroots NGOs that do have close working relationships with government agencies evidently believe that this positions them to have a useful impact on government—whether in terms of demonstrating good service delivery, or improving officials’ understanding of ordinary citizens’ perspectives and needs—but fastidiously avoid anything that could be construed as criticism or hostility, bending over backwards to achieve constructive engagement on terms that officials feel comfortable with. In short, there is a widespread feeling that government needs to be treated with kid gloves; and the great majority of organisations are prepared to go a long way to accommodate this need. Many organisations value their independence, and many clearly wish to expand their role; but there is no evidence that any of the organisations interviewed are ready to seek expanded influence and space in ways that are oppositional or confrontational.
### TABLE III.7 ‘GONGO’ VIEWS ON RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National level GONGOs (5)</th>
<th>GONGOS at or below provincial level (5)</th>
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<tr>
<td>“I strongly object to our being described as a GONGO. I’ve answered similar questions on a formal occasion. Firstly, none of our working staff is a civil servant and we earn a living through the application and operation of projects. Secondly, we conduct project applications with other NGOs on an equal footing. Thirdly, we are registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs as an NGO. It is unfair to call us a GONGO, because we are doing things which government cannot do or which it is not convenient for government to do.”</td>
<td>“The salary of our working staff and our working expenditures are granted by the provincial government . . . Many of our activities and projects have been smoothly implemented through our close cooperation with the provincial committee of the Youth League and the Civil Affairs Department and the Department of Propaganda.”</td>
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<td>“I think we should call for smaller government and bigger society so that NGOs can bring their advantages into full play.”</td>
<td>“Our work is greatly supported by the prefecture government which grants us funds. The prefecture government attaches great importance to our work and often listen to our chairman’s work report. . . As a matter of fact, it is governments that play the leading role in poverty alleviation. But due to its limited financial capability, government needs foundations like us to play a supplementary and participatory role to mobilise the social resources in poverty alleviation.”</td>
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<td>“We’ve invited several ministries to participate in our activities and have received huge support from government agencies . . . Every time we go to rural areas, we contact local Women’s Federations and health departments. We usually submit relevant reports to the ministries and commissions after we finish our projects.”</td>
<td>“The department in charge of us doesn’t give any financial support. But both our Executive Director and General Secretary are retired officials who have tremendous government resources. Take environmental protection projects as an example, we take full advantage of government resources to issue a government circular on environment protection .”</td>
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<td>Associations to take over more responsibilities, with government departments only needing to purchase such services.”</td>
<td>“The leading role of government is very important because it is the government that has built the main framework for the legal aid system. However, legal aid is not only the government’s duty, but also the duty of the whole society. And the main thing that NGOs should take into consideration is how to mobilise the whole society to support legal aid and call for the society’s participation in the cause of legal aid . . . Although we are dependent on the government, we need to be prepared at any time to raise fund totally by ourselves, without government support.”</td>
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<td>“Party committees at different levels have strongly supported our work and we have close and harmonious cooperation with relevant government institutions since our goals are the same . . . At present, discussions are being carried out on the way in which they can cede certain space for”</td>
<td>“You know in China we can’t do anything without government support.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Our relationship with the national ministry in charge of us is that of the leader and the led. They provide great support to us. Our general goals are the same, so we have mutual understanding and a harmonious relationship. [The organisation’s leaders] are often invited to meetings and symposiums held by relevant government agencies and we have close cooperation with various departments under local governments”</td>
<td>“It is government that ensures citizens’ basic livelihood . . . Our charitable association, ensures a further step towards improvements based on this basic livelihood . . . “The government’s supporting policies and regulations are inadequate. For example, donations should be tax-free or have preferential policies. We do have laws and policies for international donations, but it’s very difficult to achieve implementation of these by relevant government departments.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Our main function is to coordinate the relationship between the sector and the government department in charge of the sector, so we have close cooperation with the relevant government department.”</td>
<td>“Our work depends on support from the government and we have access to government resources, but government support actually is a double-edged sword. You take advantages while you have to suffer its restraint. We long for more autonomy and more leeway from the government department in charge of us.”</td>
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<td>“The relationship between the Health Department at the provincial level and us is that of the director and the directed. Whenever we have any questions or want to hold some activities, we must ask the Department for its permission.”</td>
<td>“Starting from last year, the Shenzhen government has been [requiring] complete de-linking from government (minjianhua) . . . This can encourage the associations’ independent development. Developing independently means having funding coming from businesses. How can we achieve that funding? By providing better services to businesses. So the way it is, you can only survive by providing services.”</td>
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<td>“Government only provides our organisation with macro-suggestions on sector development and it doesn’t put forward any specific requirements or regulations. We are entrusted by the government to set up sector development plans and provide the government with relevant data concerning the sector.”</td>
<td>“Owing to China’s situation, there is a big difference between industrial associations here and in other countries. Our cooperation with government is a basic premise, and under these conditions we try our best to help businesses”</td>
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**TABLE III.8: TRADE, INDUSTRY AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS’ VIEWS ON RELATIONS WITH GOVERNMENT**

- "Our main function is to coordinate the relationship between the sector and the government department in charge of the sector, so we have close cooperation with the relevant government department.”
- "The relationship between the Health Department at the provincial level and us is that of the director and the directed. Whenever we have any questions or want to hold some activities, we must ask the Department for its permission.”
- "Government only provides our organisation with macro-suggestions on sector development and it doesn’t put forward any specific requirements or regulations. We are entrusted by the government to set up sector development plans and provide the government with relevant data concerning the sector.”
- "Our work depends on support from the government and we have access to government resources, but government support actually is a double-edged sword. You take advantages while you have to suffer its restraint. We long for more autonomy and more leeway from the government department in charge of us.”
- "If government has a need, we will serve government accordingly; if businesses have a need, we will serve businesses accordingly. If government wants us to do something we will cooperate with government.”
- "We are a newly established sector, so the relevant laws, rules and regulations remain immature. Meanwhile, the provincial government doesn’t know much out the local situation, therefore we are needed to constitute a bridge between government and enterprises . . . the government department in charge of us attaches great importance to our work and supports us a lot. In addition, we also communicate with other government institutions.”
- "The role we play can be attributed to the great importance attached to our work by the provincial Party Committee and the relevant departments, especially the Provincial Department of Organisation and the Agricultural Department. Our office is provided by them and the electricity and water is free here in our office.”
- “Owing to China’s situation, there is a big difference between industrial associations here and in other countries. Our cooperation with government is a basic premise, and under these conditions we try our best to help businesses”
- "Starting from last year, the Shenzhen government has been [requiring] complete de-linking from government (minjianhua) . . . This can encourage the associations’ independent development. Developing independently means having funding coming from businesses. How can we achieve that funding? By providing better services to businesses. So the way it is, you can only survive by providing services.”
- "Our relationship with the provincial Tourism Bureau is that of the leader and the led. The Director of the provincial Tourism Commission is also our association’s Chair.”
- “Until now we have not managed to achieve a distinctive voice and impartial perspective. We are supporting each other, doing our best to let government know our situation and work out favourable policies that can enhance our industry’s position . . . We need support from government and want more space to be given, but now there are still some things that are not clear enough, so we don’t know what we must or mustn’t do.”
- “We still hope that the pace of ‘small government, big society’ could be faster.”
### TABLE III.9: ‘GRASSROOTS’ NGO VIEWS ON RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENT

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<tr>
<th>‘Grassroots’ NGOS, (non-SDAs, 12)</th>
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<tr>
<td>“We constantly pursue the support of local government in the implementation of our projects, especially in terms of community development. We absorb some government officials to participate in certain projects and invite the staff of relevant government departments to ceremonies or activities we organise, such as symposiums or promotions for newly released books. All these will be conducive to their understanding of our organisation and our work so that they can support us.”</td>
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<td>“Our relationship with [local] government has improved in recent years as we have reached out to let the government know what we are doing, and what our needs are. The government is now supportive and the relationship is harmonious.”</td>
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<td>“First, we are clear that we conduct projects not for the government but for the benefit of local people. During project implementation, we generally maintain a cooperative relationship with the local government. Sometimes cooperation encounters difficulties, but on the whole, most cooperation is harmonious since our goals are the same. At present, we are cooperating well with the county government and Education Bureau”</td>
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<td>“We are very keen to register as a legal, grassroots NGOs, but so far it’s not promising at all, although we’ve spent a lot of time and energy. Still, we’ll stick with it until we get there.”</td>
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<td>Government is very supportive, both in attitudes and policies, placing importance on education for children of migrants . . . [local] government provides a lot of support, they do not give money but do provide goods . . . Support from government leaders has helped our reputation to grow”</td>
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<td>“Due to unbalanced development, local governments’ concepts and attitude towards NGOs are different. Therefore, our relations with different local governments are not the same. Basically, we long to pursue our further development in cities whose leaders are more open-minded, cities which can provide more preferential policies.”</td>
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<td>“In the legal field, NGOs play an auxiliary role to government . . . Legal aid is the government’s responsibility, so they created legal funds, but in terms of money and staff etc), but government’s resources are insufficient so NGOs can help in areas where the areas where government doesn’t reach (覆盖而. 覆盖不到的地方) . . . The [NGO] is independent; government does not tell us what to do; we are not limited to serving the populations that government is limited to serving . . . [We] can make suggestions to government about legislative processes . . . can help to explore problems and help government to think about improvements, but do not lead/guide (指导) government . . . To create a harmonious society, government needs NGOs”</td>
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<td>“[Government relations] are very important . . . When we encounter problems, we need to mobilise all of society’s resources to serve us. We shouldn’t put government aside, or think of government as antagonistic (对抗); rather, we should think of government as someone who we can cooperate or partner with. You don’t want to miss out on government resources. So we’ve kept very good relations with government. But in the process we are sure to stick to two points: don’t forget who we are—you don’t want to just do whatever government tells you to do—and you need to find common ground on big issues, while agreeing to differ on others.”</td>
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<td>‘Grassroots’ NGOS (8 “self-described advocates”)</td>
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<td>“In the Chinese context you certainly have to cooperate with government . . . Because it’s like this, you are greatly influenced by government, that’s for sure. But if you use this situation well, why shouldn’t it turn out well? Of course you have to pay attention to some disadvantages. [But] I think our cooperation with government places more emphasis on complementary aspects. Government officials are talking about a harmonious society, we have the same goal: the first sector, the second sector, the third sector should all work together so that we can build a harmonious society. If NGOs’ hard and active work (积极性) isn’t matched by GOs’ hard and active work, it will be useless; if GOs’ hard and active work is not matched by businesses’ hard and active work, it will be useless. So we need a kind of interaction.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“We are not doing anything wrong. On the contrary, we are doing something significant for our society. Does our government understand it?”</td>
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</table>
3.8 To what extent do the organisations see themselves as promoting or contributing to “social progress” and “social change?”

There was a variation in the way that this question was put: in some cases, organisations were asked how they saw the role of NGOs in promoting “social progress” (社会进步); in others, whether they saw themselves as contributing to “social change” (社会变化).

Some interviewees either skirted the issue or rejected the question outright. For example, one of the industrial associations said the question (in this case, about change) was simply “too big,” affirming that their efforts were confined to the industry in which they work.

Also quite typical, however, was the response of another business association which answered in general terms that they are helping to accelerate development, “bringing domestic businesses out [into global markets], letting ordinary people live better lives . . . improving their standard of living.”

A third business association affirmed their own contribution but emphasised (as did several others) the leading role of government:

“We are sort of promoting China’s social progress since our organisation is exerting efforts in enriching the scientific and technological content of rural economy. In this process, our government should play a leading role. Take our organisation as an example, we simply can’t give full play to our functions without support from the provincial government.”

A professional association in the medical field appeared, by contrast, to want less government intervention:

“Since we’ve been exerting efforts to promote medical skills and virtues of medical workers in privately owned hospitals, we are in a way promoting social progress. Of course our government has done a lot in this regard, but we still hope that the pace of 'small government, big society' could be faster.”
Two of the national level GONGOs took up the theme of the role of the non-profit sector or civil society as a whole in promoting social progress. One representative said:

“Speaking of NGOs’ functions, I think that we should call for smaller government and bigger society so that NGOs can further bring their advantages into full play.”

And another:

“What China needs most is the construction of civil society. In this process, NGOs should try their best to awaken more peoples’ citizenship awareness so that they can make a greater contribution to the construction of a harmonious society.”

A third national GONGO spoke in similar terms, but suggested that the NGO sector at present remains weak:

“What we need in China now is to enhance people’s right to know the truth. We should make people aware of their legal rights and interests and how to protect their rights and interests. In this way we can win their supports and understanding, which is one of the prerequisites for the construction of a harmonious and accountable society. In the process of promoting social progress, NGOs should carry out activities according to their characteristics and spread their influence gradually. I think Chinese NGOs remain in a low position in that their autonomy and consciousness are not strong.”

A fourth national GONGO representative spoke mainly of the organisation’s own sector of operations, emphasising that: “We can play an irreplaceable role in things which is not convenient for our
Two of the local GONGOs responded to the enquiry about social progress by emphasising the importance of poverty alleviation. One said:

“I think the problem of survival for people in poverty-stricken areas should be our top priority since the discrepancy between the rich and the poor is widening. What NGOs should do are the things that governments have no time or lack the ability to attend to or even those that they ignore.”

And the other:

“Poverty alleviation is the social progress that we should achieve first. As we all know, there is a great income discrepancy between urban areas and rural areas and the poor population has increased a lot, which poses a serious threat to social stability. For example, we all know that drugs smuggling is rampant in Yunnan Province, but it is basically related to poor living conditions. Those smugglers’ logic is ‘You will be killed if you are caught, but if you get away with it you will be rich overnight.’ So they risk their lives to make money. My view is that we should try to eliminate poverty and diminish the income discrepancy between rural areas and urban areas. Only in so doing can we fulfill social justice and fairness and construct a harmonious society. We are playing a supporting role in mobilising the whole of society to participate in poverty alleviation.”

A third local GONGO, however, affirmed the leading role of government:

“At present, I think we must mainly depend on our government to reach the goal of promoting social change. You know in China...
we can’t do anything without government support.”

Like the GONGOs, many of the grassroots NGOs took up the theme of the relative roles and contributions of NGOs and government, usually with an emphasis on their own sector of work. The following seven statements were made by different grassroots organisations in response to the question “What is your view on the promotion of China’s social progress at present and NGOs’ role in this?” (SDAs are identified in brackets)

“NGOs need the support from governments at different levels if we want to play our role in the promotion of social progress. I should say that our government has done a lot in this regard because at least the social reality of homosexuals can be talked about publicly, which was impossible in the past. But if our government were more lenient in NGOs’ registration, it would be easier for us to give full play to our advantages and do what governments can’t do due to their limitations in capacity.” (SDA) (NGOs 要发挥作用，促进社会进步，特别需要政府的支持和鼓励。应该说政府在这方面已经做了很多，像同性恋这个社会现实至少今天我们公开谈了，过去这是根本不可能的。但政府如果能够在 NGOs 的注册方面放得更开，就有利于 NGOs 去做那些政府力所不能及，而 NGOs 又非常有优势去做的事情了。)

“I think we should centre our attention on people living below the poverty line and help rid them of poverty. NGOs should promote poor people to be open-minded and set themselves free. At the same time, NGOs should help improve their legal awareness in safeguarding their own rights and interests. Moreover, we should also attach importance to women’s health and social position.” (我觉得目前最关注的应该是挣扎在贫困线的人们，要帮助他们尽快的摆脱贫困。就 NGOs 自身而言，应该促进贫困人群的开放意识，让他们解放自己；同时应该促进他们维护自身权利的法律意识（但目前更应该关注的是生存权和发展权）；还应广泛关注妇女的健康和社会地位问题。)

“Social progress in China can’t be achieved without NGOs. But due to the limitations in government administration, the government remains sceptical and takes a wait-and-see attitude that doesn’t do justice to NGOs. Meanwhile, NGOs have their own problems, for example some NGOs have accountability problems that make the general public lose trust in them. I suggest that NGOs should enhance communications and cooperation with each other and establish a kind of appraisal mechanism. Then NGOs could join it on a voluntary basis. That
way we could tell the good ones from bad ones through this appraisal mechanism.” (中国的社会进步从根本上说离不开NGOs作用的发挥。但由于政府行政管理能力的限制，目前政府对NGOs还是不太支持，持一种怀疑和观望的态度，这对于NGOs来说是不公正的。当然，NGOs本身也存在着这样的问题。比如说某些NGOs因为操作不规范而出现了公信问题，从而使公众对他们产生了怀疑。我建议NGOs之间能够加强交流与合作，自发建立评估机制。NGOs可以采取自愿的方式参与评估。所谓浊者自浊，清者自清。)

“The social progress we should promote most urgently is civic awareness of the grassroots. That is, the awareness and initiative to strive for their own rights and interests. Actually, the [political] centre also wants to make [local] governments honest and efficient, but very often it’s really hard to stop the inertia. Although scholars and experts can be useful, it’s very hard for them to really understand what the mass of people at lower levels want; Therefore, grassroots’ awareness of their rights and interest urgently needs cultivating . . . NGOs should firstly consider how to find out the overlapping interests of NGOs themselves, the general public and other stakeholders. In this way NGOs can become enablers to make their constituency have a certain capacity. Besides, NGOs should also be a ‘watchdog’ to guarantee their constituency’s basic interests especially after the implementation of their projects. Last but not least, NGOs should sustainably develop inherent qualities by introducing something powerful—as opposed to mounting cultural invasions of their constituency.” (SDA) （现阶段在中国最迫切需要的社会进步就是培养底层民众的公民意识，为自己的权益去争取的意识。其实中央也想让政府廉洁高效，但很多时候惯性难为。专家学者虽然也能起到作用，但他们很难真正了解底层民众的呼声；因此迫切需要培养底层民众的权利意识。. . . NGOs首先应该考虑如何将自身、民众及其他利益相关者的利益结合点找到，之后成为‘使能者’，使其服务的目标群体具备相应的能力。NGOs还应该成为‘守门人’，要保证它所服务的人群达到基本的底线（项目成功实施之后的最低要求）；其次，注意不能对所服务的对象进行价值侵略，而应通过注入外部力量的方式使某些内源性的东西能够持续发展下去。）

“The establishment of democratic politics needs the great development of the third sector, but the point is there are not many NGOs with a strong sense of responsibility and mission. Furthermore, NGOs need more space to development and they need to focus their attentions on more social problems. Lastly, NGOs should improve their accountability and broaden their fund-raising channels.” (SDA) （民主政治的建立需要第三部门的大力发展，但问题是目前真正有着强烈使命感和责任感的NGOs并不多；NGOs需要更大的发展空间，同时他们也需要关注更多的社会问题；就NGOs自身而言，应该努力
提高自己的社会公信力，拓展自己的募款渠道；从本机构自身来说，则应该尽力促进妇女参政、加强妇女权益的服务，尽量减少妇女贫困的程度和幅度。

“The social progress that should be promoted most urgently is the care and aid for the disadvantaged, especially children because they are the future and hope of our society. The key to social stability is to promote healthy development on the basis of law in a scientific way and with an appropriate attitude. NGOs should encourage governments at different levels to establish a set of comprehensive, sound and systematic mechanisms in the social development domain. Shall we learn more from the experiences in Hong Kong in this regard?”（现阶段中国最迫切需要推动的社会进步是对弱势群体的关注和救助，特别是对儿童的关爱和重视，因为儿童是向上的群体，是社会的希望。用正确的态度、科学的方法、以法律为依据，促进儿童的健康发展对社会安定至关重要；NGOs 的作用应该是促进政府在社会发展领域建立一套更为完善和系统的体制，在这方面能否多学习一些香港的经验？）

“I think grassroots NGOs should encourage governments to issue relevant policies, so that there will be comprehensive and sound legal guarantees for the survival of disabled people. What we can do is to improve the awareness of the general public through our actions.”（我觉得 NGOs 应该努力促进政府出台相关的政策，以便为智障人士的生存提供更为完善的法律保障；而我们能做的就是通过我们自身的行动来提高全社会的公众意识）

Organisations that were asked whether they are contributing to social change often treated the question as an enquiry about whether they are having an impact, and they generally answered in the affirmative. For example, one of the schools for the children of migrants stressed that the students had previously been very cut off from wider society, and how starting school was a fundamental change not only for them but also for their parents. The representative of the second migrant school said that they are solving social problems before they arise, providing social stability, helping students and teachers (who otherwise would be without work) and so, in sum, “eliminating worries and overcoming difficulties”（排忧解难）。The NGO that provides legal services also saw their work as a way of dispelling conflicts before they arise, contributing to a “harmonious society”（和谐社会）by “resolving social contradictions”（缓解社会矛盾）and/or “avoiding contradictions.”（避免矛盾）

Taking up the issue of social conflict and harmony, the representative of one NGO (an SDA) said that they had “assumed an extremely important mission, the creation of a new moral order,” and argued
that "in this way can we really enter a more harmonious society" (承担了一个非常重要的使命，那就是新的道德的创建...这样我们才能真正的进入一个更加和谐的社会。） The representative of this organisation went on to ask rhetorically: "Where is the real significance in talking about 'harmony' Justice. Peace . . . Because harmony is peace, isn’t it?" （一说和谐的真实意义在哪里？公正，和平...因为和谐就是和平，对不对？） This interviewee proceeded to suggest that social equity and harmony rely largely not on market mechanisms or government intervention but on private morality:

“For the most part, there has been great improvement in economic development and in ordinary people’s development in the past 20 years. [But] these have not been strengthened for some social groups . . . In these circumstances, we talk of three distributions. When we talk about harmonious society the concept of harmony is a negotiation of interests, through which balance is reached. Achieving this depends on distribution. Market distribution emphasizes efficiency, efficacy. Government collection of taxes, the second distribution, emphasizes justice. But in reality no government has successfully resolved the third distribution. This is more dependent on people’s hearts and spirits. （经济发展老百姓的发展这20年得到很大的改善。一般来说，有一些群体没有达到现在强调的这些...在这种情况下我们叫做三次分配。讲和谐社会这个和谐就是一种利益的调整，利益的调整达到平衡...这个利益的调整要靠分配来实现。市场的分配强调的就是效率，效益，政府的税收：第二次分配强调是公正。但是事实上哪个政府都没有好好的解决第三次分配，这个更多的是依靠心，精神。）

A similar note was struck by another grassroots NGO (not an SDA) representative who said: "I think our society is badly in need of volunteering spirit and love. To tell you the truth, I am surprised to see the lack of them even within our organisation. The parents of better-off families lack this spirit." （我觉得我们现在最需要的是，一种广泛的志愿精神和爱心激励。甚至让我觉得吃惊的是，在我们这个组织内部，一些经济实力很强的家长在这方面也是欠缺的。） To illustrate the point, the interviewee here mentioned that, owing to lack of funds, the group had to abandon a training programme for teachers of autistic children. He recalled "I remember saying in front of a very rich parent of an autistic child: 'I could keep it going for at least another year if only I had 10,000 yuan. But he kept silent all the time." （当时我当着一个非常有经济实力的家长说：‘只要我还有一万元钱，我就能把这个培训班再坚持一年’，但这个家长始终没有一点反应。）

The three generic environmental NGOs all expressed, in terms that were very similar to each other, both the objective of changing social
attitudes and the belief that they are already succeeding in doing so. One, for example, (an SDA) claimed success in:

“... changing [people’s] way of thinking, including changing their concept of consumption and their sense of social responsibility; because they have changed from not understanding their responsibility to society to paying more attention to society and having a sense of responsibility to society. This is different from before. (...改变他们的一种想法，包括改变他们的消费概念，改变他们对社会的一种责任感，因为他们从不懂得对社会的一种责任改变到让他们更多的关注社会，让他们对社会有责任感，这就不一样了。)

Resuming the theme of state-society relations, one NGO (not an SDA), made a general (but cautious) case for gradual development of a non-profit sector, also taking the “harmonious society” theme as a starting point:

“Of course we are doing a lot of work that is meaningful for the development of a harmonious society... We should first grow [the organisation], expand [its] influence in society, and the let it influence surrounding, smaller [organisations] to help them to grow... I have great confidence that NPOs can play a greater role in China’s process of social transformation.

“...We are not mainstream society, but we will influence society’s development... I don’t want to define China as not being able to develop without NPOs; [but] I believe that as an NPO my position is to pick up what is neglected. This means taking on the areas that government does not want and to make up for the areas that government does not have time to work on. With this role there are many things to do... [We can] do the things that government wants to do but has not done, and what society needs but government does not have the time for...

“...There are many organisations in China that are doing trainings, especially in Beijing and Shanghai. Perhaps these types of trainings are needed; but what is most needed is how to analyse and evaluate the environment for NPO growth within China’s society. I think it is fine to use NPO management concepts and models from western, developed countries as a framework or a way of understanding information. But if you want to apply them directly to China, I personally feel that it will not work. With our strong government in place, I think this approach will definitely fail.

“NPOs in China today can have an impact, but you don’t want to exaggerate them as being the main force for building...
harmonious society or civil society. I believe that is not realistic, especially in China... Having a strong government is not necessarily a bad thing. Government can maintain its strength and power. But how do I make use of its strength to do my work as an NPO. I believe that the value of NPOs lies in our ability to serve those groups that need help. [But we can also] let more people know about the concept of civil society, and draw them into the building of civil society. When we do, many social structures will change; perhaps people’s rights will be achieved. That is what I think.”

A second NGO (an SDA) made a similar case in somewhat stronger terms. After noting that “Changes in knowledge can already be seen... I feel that there has already been great change of every kind,” the representative of this group went on to describe a young but increasingly robust NGO sector that would follow in the footsteps of commercial and industrial organisations to become an important social force:

"I feel the most important thing is how to make civil society develop. So I feel that fostering a people’s (minjian) force is extremely important. We shouldn’t think of this force as being just NGOs; it should be the whole citizenry together. NGOs are just a small part of that force, yet in China at present, NGOs are still immature... But I feel it is the same as with business organisations. In the 1980s, business organisations had many
shortcomings. Well, I feel NGOs also have many weaknesses but altogether they are certainly on a path of continuous development. We are a non-governmental force, if we can advance enough then it will prove to people that we are a force. We have many very good ideals but we don’t implement them, we are used to dependency, used to top-down approaches, we are not used to bottom-up working. I believe this is one way to change Chinese traditions, one that proves that the civil sector is a force.”

This analysis naturally led this organisation to see itself as an agent of social change and one, moreover, that emphasises the need to think strategically about how to achieve a new society:

I feel that everything we do is bringing about and pushing forward changes in the social and political environment. Because everything we talk about involves these issues, for example workers’ rights implies these issues. If workers’ rights are protected then people’s basic rights will be protected. I think fairness, equality, freedom all call for a new society. It will definitely come. So our objective must be clear. So what is important is how to build public awareness, to build these characteristics, to create a path. I think we often do things that cause social and political changes. We talk about workers’ rights problems. If workers’ rights are protected, then people’s basic rights will be protected. I think fairness, equality, freedom all call for a new society. It will definitely come. So our objective must be clear. So what is important is how to build public awareness, to build these characteristics, to create a path. I think we often do things that cause social and political changes. We talk about workers’ rights problems. If workers’ rights are protected, then people’s basic rights will be protected. I think fairness, equality, freedom all call for a new society. It will definitely come. So our objective must be clear. So what is important is how to build public awareness, to build these characteristics, to create a path.

**Interpretation, notes and conclusions:**

In the global context, it is quite common for NGOs that talk in terms of advocacy to see and describe themselves as being “change agents.” The last-quoted organisation appears close to this view and position; and so, at times, do one or two other grassroots NGOs (especially SDAs)—such as the group that spoke about enabling “grassroots civic awareness” as the most important facet of social progress.
However, these appear to be exceptions rather than the rule in our sample of 40 organisations. Whilst aware of large processes of social change unfolding around them—how, in China, could they not be?—the organisations seemed in the main to see themselves as making constructive contributions to “social progress” and development, rather than working to bring about social change.

The NGOs are not necessarily complacent about “progress,” for many do voice concerns about issues of equity, social disadvantage, etc; and a common refrain—not just among the NGOs but among the GONGOs too—is the need for a larger, more vigorous and more enabled non-profit sector.

Yet, on the whole, the NGOs give the general impression of believing that things are going in the right direction and that their role is to help make necessary adjustments or provide needed palliatives in order to preserve social harmony and balance in a changing context.

Where the NGOs show urgency and passion it is, on the whole, a moral, rather than a political urgency and passion, concerned with moral renewal and improvement. Some certainly appear to see this in terms of necessary and desirable change: but the main desiderata, on this view, are making people—including, tacitly, government officials—better, more responsible and more caring. This, arguably, is consistent with traditional Chinese moralism, and it may to some extent represent an “advocacy with Chinese characteristics.” Be that as it may, it is certainly rather different from the kind of “social change” which many international advocacy organisations espouse.
### Survey Question 1 组织的工作是否服务于特定的目标群体?
**Does your organisation’s work serve a specific target constituency?**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National GONGOs (5)</th>
<th>Local GONGOs (6)</th>
<th>Trade, Industry, Professional Associations (10)</th>
<th>Grassroots NGOs (20)</th>
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<td>Comments</td>
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** = “Act as a bridge/link, to serve the development and the industry and to serve government departments.” (发挥桥梁纽带作用。一是为行业发展服务，一是需要政府部门做好服务。)

### Survey Question 2 您组织主要的活动领域是:
**In which sector is your organisation mainly active?**

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<th>National GONGOs (5)</th>
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<th>Trade, Industry, Professional Associations (10)</th>
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<td>Religion 宗教</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial &amp; Professional Associations 企业与专业学会、协会</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other 其它</td>
<td>“扶贫” Poverty Alleviation (1)</td>
<td>Education (教育) (1)</td>
<td>Corporate social behaviour (企业社会表现) (1)</td>
<td>Psychological Support (心理支持) (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Survey Question 3 您组织的类型是：
**Your organization is of which type?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National GONGOs (5)</th>
<th>Local GONGOs (6)</th>
<th>Trade, Industry, Professional Associations (10)</th>
<th>Grassroots NGOs (20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operational 偏重具体实践的操作类</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy 偏重理念传播的倡导类</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operation &amp; Advocacy 操作与倡导并重</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>“Professional social organisation” (专业社会团体) (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Survey Question 4 宣传自身的活动是您组织工作中的重要一环吗？
**Is publicising (xuanchuan) your organisation’s activities an important part of your work?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National GONGOs (5)</th>
<th>Local GONGOs (6)</th>
<th>Trade, Industry, Professional Associations (10)</th>
<th>Grassroots NGOs (20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided, no comment 不确定、没有意见</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Survey Questions 5-6** 您组织宣传自身理念的主要渠道有哪些 (最多选三个)? 对您组织而言,上述哪一种渠道最畅通? 哪一种渠道最困难? (写上述序号即可)

*What are the main channels for your organisation to publicise its ideas and beliefs? (Choose no more than three). Of these, which is the most accessible, and which is the most difficult?*

*(First column = main channel; second = most accessible; third = hardest)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National GONGOs (5)</th>
<th>Local GONGOs (6)</th>
<th>Trade, Industry, Professional Associations (10)</th>
<th>Grassroots NGOs (20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MAIN</td>
<td>EASY</td>
<td>HARD</td>
<td>MAIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>组织会议 Organising meetings/conferences</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>通过学术界 Through academic circles</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>与政府部门沟通 Communication with government depts.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>借助媒体 With the help of media</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>直接进入社会 Direct engagement with society</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>网络 Internet</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Survey Question 7** 公众对您组织的概况及其工作的了解对您的组织重要吗?

*Is it important to your organisation for the public to know about your work?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National GONGOs (5)</th>
<th>Local GONGOs (6)</th>
<th>Trade, Industry, Professional Associations (10)</th>
<th>Grassroots NGOs (20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average (一般)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Survey Question 8** 政府知道您组织的存在及其工作情况对您组织而言重要吗?

*Is it important to your organisation for the government to know about your work?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National GONGOs (5)</th>
<th>Local GONGOs (6)</th>
<th>Trade, Industry, Professional Associations (10)</th>
<th>Grassroots NGOs (20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average (一般)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Survey Question 9 您组织同政府部门的关系是:
*Your organization’s relationship with the government is:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National GONGOs (5)</th>
<th>Local GONGOs (6)</th>
<th>Trade, Industry, Professional Associations (10)</th>
<th>Grassroots NGOs (20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Close and cooperative</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not much contact</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No contact</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* "Actively strive for government’s support“ (积极争取政府的支持” (1)

** “Have contact & cooperation” (1); “Equal contact” (1); “A lot of contact” (1); “A lot of contact but not enough support” (1); “A lot of contact but different degree of mixing” (1); “Sometimes combative sometimes cooperative” (1)

### Survey Question 10 与政府关系紧密可以帮助你们完成你们的组织目标吗?
*Can close relations with government help your organisation accomplish its goals?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National GONGOs (5)</th>
<th>Local GONGOs (6)</th>
<th>Trade, Industry, Professional Associations (10)</th>
<th>Grassroots NGOs (20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided, no comment</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Survey Question 11 独立于政府之外对你们组织达成自己的目标重要吗?
*Is independence from government important for your organisation to achieve its goals?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National GONGOs (5)</th>
<th>Local GONGOs (6)</th>
<th>Trade, Industry, Professional Associations (10)</th>
<th>Grassroots NGOs (20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided, no comment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Survey Question 12
What is the main medium for publicising your organisation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>National GONGOs (5)</th>
<th>Local GONGOs (6)</th>
<th>Trade, Industry, Professional Associations (10)</th>
<th>Grassroots NGOs (20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Print media</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GONGOs (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade, Industry,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GONGOs (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GONGOs (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GONGOs (10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GONGOs (20)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Survey Question 13
Does your organization view the media as an important method/way to achieve your goals?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>National GONGOs (5)</th>
<th>Local GONGOs (6)</th>
<th>Trade, Industry, Professional Associations (10)</th>
<th>Grassroots NGOs (20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>undetermin ed, no comment</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“It’s the main channel” (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Survey Question 14
Your organisation’s relationship with the media is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>National GONGOs (5)</th>
<th>Local GONGOs (6)</th>
<th>Trade, Industry, Professional Associations (10)</th>
<th>Grassroots NGOs (20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Close</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not much contact</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No contact</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Survey Question 15 您组织的主要资金来源是:
**Your organisation’s main funding source is:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National GONGOs (5)</th>
<th>Local GONGOs (6)</th>
<th>Trade, Industry, Professional Associations (10)</th>
<th>Grassroots NGOs (20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign agencies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Depts.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprises/businesses</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>&quot;All walks of society&quot; (社会各界) (1)</td>
<td>&quot;Donations from society&quot; (社会捐赠) (2)</td>
<td>&quot;Vocational training&quot; (职业培训) (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Survey Question 16 您组织当中志愿者的工作量占全部工作量的比重是:
**What proportion of your organisation’s total workload is contributed by volunteers?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National GONGOs (5)</th>
<th>Local GONGOs (6)</th>
<th>Trade, Industry, Professional Associations (10)</th>
<th>Grassroots NGOs (20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10—30%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30—50%</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50—80%</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 80%</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>&quot;Unable to determine&quot; (不确定) (1)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Survey Question 17 您组织自己有评价自身工作绩效的明确标准吗?
**Does your organisation have clear criteria for evaluating the success of its work?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National GONGOs (5)</th>
<th>Local GONGOs (6)</th>
<th>Trade, Industry, Professional Associations (10)</th>
<th>Grassroots NGOs (20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to determine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*china development brief  150  ngo advocacy in china*
**Survey Question 18** 您认为哪方面的社会进步在现阶段的中国是最重要的？
**What aspects of social progress do you consider to be most important at this stage in China?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National GONGOs (5)</th>
<th>Local GONGOs (6)</th>
<th>Trade, Industry, Professional Associations (10)</th>
<th>Grassroots NGOs (20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved status for target constituency</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanded access to social services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in government policy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising public awareness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ANOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY & SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

On advocacy

Veneklasen L and Miller V
*A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*
World’s Neighbors, 2002

Cohen D, De la Vega R, Watson G
Kumarian Press 2001

As the word “guide” in both titles makes clear, these are designed as tools for activism. They give a good flavour of the way that the global NGO community thinks and talks about advocacy.

On civil society and state-society relations in China

Chan A, Unger J
*China, Corporatism, and the East Asian Model*


These Australian National University scholars are seasoned writers on China’s politics and society who earlier collaborated on the classic book, *Chen Village*, outlining the changes in one village of Guangdong Province during the Cultural Revolution and the early “reform and opening” period. This article was an early and influential contribution to the 1990s debate about changing state-society relations in China. Anita Chan has also written books and numerous articles on factory conditions and the prospects for a labour movement in reform-era China.

Howell J, White G
*In Search of Civil Society: Market Reform and Social Change in Contemporary China*
Clarendon Press, 1996

This is perhaps the most comprehensive look at sociological and political change in reform era of China from the perspective of an interest in the idea of civil society, understood as an autonomous sphere of voluntary associations capable of organising the interests of socio-economic groups. Jude Howell has also written several articles on women and trade union organising in China, as well as the book on civil society and development listed below.
Brook T and Frolic B M (eds.)
*Civil Society in China*
M. E. Sharpe, 1997

Brooks’ *Auto-Organisation in Chinese Society* in this collection (pp. 19-45) brings some useful historical depth, while Frolic’s *State-led Civil Society* (pp. 46-67) is also a good, clear exposition.

Saich T
*Governance and Politics of China* [2nd Edition]
Palgrave Macmillan, 2004

Chapter 8, *The Chinese State and Society* (p. 213—232), offers an accessible overview and summary of international academic approaches

**On NGOs and the non-profit sector in China**

Saich T
*Negotiating the State: The Development of Social Organisations in China*
In *China Quarterly* (March 2000):124-41

This article is grounded in Saich’s experience during the late 1990s as Beijing Representative of the Ford Foundation. It looks at the strategies that emerging Chinese social organisations adopt for operating in a highly restrictive legal and policy environment.

Young N
*Searching for Civil Society*
Introduction to *250 Chinese NGOs: Civil Society in the Making*
China Development Brief, 2001

250 *Chinese NGOs: Civil Society in the Making* was a groundbreaking report that, somewhat against the prevailing wisdom of the time, demonstrated that an independent NGO sector was developing in China and likely to grow fast. Inevitably, the organisational profiles are now out of date, and they are not available electronically, but Nick Young’s essay, mapping the terrain can be downloaded from the *China Development Brief* website.

Young N
*Richesse Oblige and So Does the State: Philanthropy and Equity in China*
In Geithner P F, Johnson P D, Chen LC (eds) *Diaspora Philanthropy and Equitable Development in China and India* (pp. 29-78), , Harvard University Press 2004
An accessible, descriptive account of non-profit sector development in China, from the late Ming dynasty to the Jiang Zemin reform era.

Young N

*Does This Cat Catch Mice? Human Rights and Civil Society in China*

In *Revisiting the Role of Civil Society in the Promotion of Human Rights*, Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2004 pp. 53-107

This essay uses three short case studies to discuss the extent to which China’s nascent civil society might be strengthening human rights protection: a ‘charitable’ effort to provide care and protection to children whose parents have been executed or imprisoned; a coalition of groups working to prevent domestic violence, and the case of individual ‘AIDS activists’

Young N

*NGOs: the Diverse Origins, Changing Nature and Growing Internationalisation of the Species*

Introduction to *200 International NGOs in China*


This was written for translation into Chinese, to preface a Chinese language directory of international NGOs supporting work in China, with a view to helping Chinese researchers, officials and NGOs locate China’s non-profit sector in a historical and global context. As such it offers an accessible and broad-brush picture of international NGO engagement with China.

**On civil society and development**

Howell J. and Pearce J.

*Civil Society and Development: A Critical Exploration*

Lynne Rienner 2001

This is a rare attempt not just to contribute to academic debates but to explore how these are actually interpreted and applied by governments and international aid agencies such as USAID, the EU, international financial institutions, and UN agencies, with reference to programmes in many parts of the world and chapter-length case studies of China and Central America. The book also shows how within an apparently shared discourse of civil society different people have quite different visions of what it is and/or should be.
APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

1) What is the aim/objective/purpose/mission of your organisation?

1.2) If they happen to quote or refer to a ‘mission statement’: What was the process by which you developed/formulated the mission statement?

1.3) If not already iterated: Are you a membership organisation?

1.4) If YES to 1.3: What role do the members have in shaping the programmes and activities of the organisation?

1.5) If NO to 1.3: Does your organisation set out to assist a particular social constituency (eg, women, migrant labourers, disabled children, dog owners)?

1.6) If YES to 1.5: What role do people in this constituency have in shaping the programmes and activities of the organisation?

2) Have your aims/objectives/. . . evolved or changed over time?

2.2) If yes, ask them to identify the events or processes that led to this change

3) How do you set about achieving your objectives?

3.2) If they express this in very general terms: Can you give us some concrete examples of how you work?

3.3) If answer to 3.2 is still rather vague: Can you give us some examples of successes and/or failures in your work?

4) How is your organisation structured? Do you have different departments with different responsibilities?

4.2) For larger organisations only? Do you have a Board? If so, what is its role, and what is its relationship to the organisation?

5) If they have used any of the ‘advocacy key words’: You mentioned ‘key word’. Can you tell us what you understand by this?

5.2) If they give a general definition: Can you give us some examples of how this is manifested in your work?

6) If they have talked almost exclusively in terms serving a constituency (eg, members, project beneficiaries): Apart from the
work that your organisation itself does directly for ‘constituency,’ do you do anything to encourage others – society, state, parents, teachers, etc – to provide services for ‘constituency’ and/or to change the way that they treat ‘constituency’?

6.2) **If not self evident/already iterated:** Who do you think it is most important to influence?

6.3) **If not self evident/already iterated:** How do you set about influencing x?

7) **As an alternative to 6, if they have mentioned ‘compassion,’ ‘love,’ ‘care,’ etc more than services:** You have mentioned your ‘compassion, love, etc’. Do you do anything to encourage other people to share/promote this compassion, love?

7.2) Who is it most important to encourage to show compassion, love?

7.3) How do you set about encouraging them to do so?

8) **What do you do to xuanchuan your work?**

8.2 (If specific examples have not yet been given): Do you have a *jianjie*?

8.3 How is the *jianjie* distributed? Who gets to see it?

8.4 – 7.5 **Ditto for newsletter**

8.5 Do you have a website?

8.6 What do people use the website for?

9) **Why do you xuanchuan your work?** How important is this for you, and how much time/attention do you give to it?

9.2 **If not already covered in answer to Q.4:** Is there a specific person/department in your organisation with responsibility for external communications/xuanchuan?

10) **If this has not already emerged:** Has your organisation received any newspaper/radio/TV coverage?

10.2) **If not already iterated:** How important is media coverage to you?

10.3) **If not already iterated:** How does media coverage help you to achieve your mission?

10.4) **If not already iterated, or covered in 9.2, and only if it seems possible, ie, if the group seems relatively sophisticated in terms of communications:** Does your

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*china development brief* 156 *ngo advocacy in china*
organisation have a fixed policy on media coverage, with, eg, guidelines for contacting the media or for responding to media enquiries?

11) **Open question:** How important is it to you to be independent of the government?

11.2) **'Forced question:'** If you had to choose between the following two statements, which would you most agree with?:

a) Being closely connected with government is good because it enables us to influence government behaviour and policy:

b) It is important to be independent of government ......

**Questions 12 – 13 only for interviewees who appear able to reflect at this level:**

12) Is your organisation trying to promote change in China?

12.2) **If so:** What kinds of change do you think most important:

- Improved wealth/poverty alleviation/services/access to services
- Improved status for you members
- Improved status for the constituency/beneficiaries you are trying to assist
- Improved government policy
- Improved public awareness, education.
- Other?

12.3) Could you give examples of successes and/or failures in your attempts to promote change in the areas you have identified?

13) What is your understanding of how change happens in societies, and what role do you think that NGOs could or should have in this process?

采访提问

1) 你们组织的目标和宗旨是什么？
1.2) 如果采访对象引述了特定的“组织宗旨”——进一步追问：该宗旨是怎样形成的？
1.3) 如果回答不够明确，追问：你们是一个会员组织吗？
1.4) 如果得到肯定回答，问：你们的会员在组织活动和项目形成方面发挥怎样的作用？
1.5) If the answer is negative: Do your organization help a specific social group (e.g., women, migrant workers, disabled children, dog owners)?

1.6) If the answer is positive, ask: What role does this group play in your organization’s activities and projects?

2) From the beginning, has the purpose or goal of your organization changed?

2.2) If the answer is positive, ask: What led to this change, and how did it happen?

3) How do you achieve your purpose and goals?

3.2) If the answer is vague, ask: Can you give specific examples of how you work?

3.3) If the answer is still vague, ask: Can you give examples of successful and unsuccessful cases?

4) What is the structure of your organization? Do you have specific departments?

4.2) For larger organizations, do you have something similar to a board of directors? If so, what is its function, and how is it related to your organization?

5) If they use any “initiative keywords,” you can use this to further your conversation.

5.2) If they give a vague concept, ask: Can you explain how it manifests in your work?

6) If they talk about social services (e.g., members, project beneficiaries), ask: In addition to direct services, do you encourage the community, the state, parents, teachers, etc., to also offer services or change their views?

6.2) If the answer is not clear, ask: What is the most important thing to impact society, the state, or individuals?

6.3) If the answer is still not clear, ask: How do you impact (society, the state, or individuals)?

7) If they talk about “feelings,” “love,” “care,” etc., ask: You mentioned “feelings,” “love,” “care,” etc., how do you encourage others to share these ideas, and promote their dissemination?

7.2) Who needs to be encouraged to show love?

7.3) How do you encourage them?

8) How do you promote your work?

8.2) If there are no specific examples, ask: Do you have a brochure?

8.3) How is the brochure distributed? Who can access it?

8.4) How is your newsletter distributed? Who can access it?

8.5) Do you have a website?

8.6) Who is the target audience of your website? What is the purpose of accessing your website?

9) Why do you promote your work? Do you think this is important? How much do you emphasize this?

9.2) If your answer to question 4 is not clear, ask: Does your organization have专人负责对外宣传?

10) If there is no such person, ask: Have you been interviewed by newspapers, radio, or television?

10.2) If not, ask: Do you think media interviews are important?
10.3) If not answered, ask: Can media reports help you fulfill your mission?
10.4) If 9.2's question is not clearly answered, if necessary (e.g., when the organization's宣传方面的情况相对复杂), you can ask: Do you have a fixed policy on public relations? For example, when you contact the media or respond to media inquiries, do you have any guidelines?

11) Open-ended question: For you, is it important to be independent of the government? How do you position yourself in relation to the government?
11.2) "Forced-choice" question: Which option do you prefer?
a. A close relationship with the government is a good thing, because this can facilitate our influence on government behavior and policies
b. Independence outside the government is very important.

12) and 13) Limited to respondents at this level:
13) Your organization is promoting the changes in China?
12.2) If so, which changes do you think are the most important?
- Improve income
- Poverty alleviation
- Promote services
- Broaden access to social services
- Improve the social status of the beneficiaries
- Improve policy for the government
- Improve public awareness,起到教育作用
12.3) Can you give examples of the successes and failures in your organization's efforts to promote changes?
13) How do you understand the process of social change? In this process, NGOs may or should play what role?
APPENDIX II

NGO objectives and methods and their relation to advocacy

This short document was produced in the early stages of the research process, as we thought in detail about criteria for determining whether the organisations surveyed could be said to be engaging in advocacy.

It seeks i) to show basic, necessary conditions for something counting as an advocacy organisation; ii) to anticipate the range of vision and objectives that the surveyed organisations might have (noting which would and which would not be consistent with an advocacy orientation), and iii) to anticipate the range of activities and methods by which the surveyed organisations might set out to achieve their objectives and vision. (These predictions were based on our previous knowledge and experience of China’s non profit sector.)

At first we considered using this analytical framework for classifying each of the surveyed organisations. For example, an organisation for disabled children and their parents might be said to have objectives 1, 4 and 5 (as listed in ii) and to employ methods a), b), e) and g) (as listed in iii.) In the event, however, we found this analytical framework too hard to apply. Given the difficulty of finding robust indicators or benchmarks to establish any of the criteria, this kind of classification would require sweeping, and unavoidably subjective, judgements that we felt could not be justified on the basis of a single interview. Moreover, too much emphasis on classification would risk distracting attention from the interviewees’ own perspectives, which the study was intended to highlight.

Nevertheless, we felt that:

■ Virtually all of the forty organisations interviewed, including the “GONGOS,” met the four basic, necessary conditions outlined in i)

■ None of the forty organisations appeared limited to objective 3 (outlined in ii) of supporting government policy merely because it is government policy. Not just the grassroots NGOs, but also the GONGOs and trade, industry and professional associations, appeared to have at least some more far-reaching purpose.

■ The range of methods a to n inclusive (as outlined in iii) were all visible to some extent in the organisations interviewed, whereas none of the organisations interviewed appeared to have any inclination towards
methods o and p (mass mobilisation and building a citizen’s movement respectively)

The text of the original document follows:

\textit{i) Necessary conditions for advocacy}

In order to qualify as advocates, Chinese NGOs will almost certainly need, minimally:

A. Raison d’être: a clear mission (not necessarily articulated as a “mission statement”.) We would expect the mission to have a high degree of primacy – that is, it may be refined in the light of organisational learning and experience, but it should not be abandoned opportunistically (eg, for the sake of institutional survival or expansion.)

B. Some sense of the constituency (even if it is “the whole of society”) whose interests the organisation is attempting to advance.

C. Some degree of independence: at least to the extent that “the mission” has primacy and is not simply abandoned or altered at the bidding of others.

D. Aims broader than simply providing services to a particular constituency.

An organisation that lacks these characteristics (for example, an organisation that was established by government, that has no clear sense of [or ownership over] its raison d’être, and that appears to exist only to do the bidding of higher levels) may perhaps, by good luck or by good direction from above, achieve commendable social outcomes; but it would be hard to regard this as an example of “advocacy” at work.

Direct service provision might be construed as a weak or protean form of advocacy in that the service providers presumably believe that “Constituency x deserves and should be provided with service y.” However, this would mean describing \textit{all} NGO activity in terms of advocacy (because the organisations implicitly “advocate that . . .”). This would considerably weaken the term “advocacy” and even render it redundant as a descriptive or analytical tool, because it would no longer help us to distinguish between organisations, or to characterise a distinctive type of activity and approach.

\textit{ii) Anticipated range of Chinese NGO objectives and scope of vision:}

1) To directly provide services/assistance to a specific constituency (eg, dog owners; parents of children with autism; older people; migrant workers; ethnic minority communities.)
2) To directly provide services/assistance to “the needy,” “the disadvantaged,” “the poor,” or “the vulnerable” more generally.

3) To support the implementation of government policy (because it is government policy, rather than because the group happens to believe in this policy.)

4) To represent or advance the interests of a specific constituency through means other than (or additional to) direct service provision.

5) "Mutual aid:" to support, empower or serve a particular constituency by encouraging mutual assistance and exchange between its members.

6) To promote the concepts and practice of more or less clearly articulated principles of governance: eg, human rights, the rule of law, transparency, accountability, democracy, etc.

7) To promote economic, social or political change, in the name of social justice, equity, sustainable development, etc, in ways that imply significant change in the formulation of policy and/or the distribution of power, wealth and environmental amenity.

8) To change public behaviour, beliefs or attitudes, in order to increase public morality and virtue, in ways that are consistent with “perfecting” the status quo rather than significantly altering the distribution of power, wealth, etc.

9) To build a stronger China.

The blue line serves as a crude, advocacy threshold. By international accounts, objectives listed above the blue line are not advocacy objectives, whereas those listed below the blue line are consistent with international advocacy discourse.

The objectives listed below the red line may also use the language and methods associated with advocacy in the international discourse. However, many international users of the term “advocacy” would probably feel uncomfortable with the idea that, eg, spreading “spiritual civilisation” or “Asian values” might qualify as examples of advocacy.

It is likely that many groups will be multi-dimensional in the sense that they pursue more than one of the objectives listed. (Eg, organisations that primarily provide services may engage in some forms of advocacy, and groups that appear primarily to be advocacy organisations may engage in some forms of service provision.) It is also possible that some groups may be “in transition” from being primarily charitable service providers to having some advocacy role.
Moreover, it is likely in many cases to be hard to say whether an organisation’s objectives are type 6, type 7 or type 8. This classification difficulty would arise not just because of the limits of observation but because, in all likelihood, many groups will not be clear in their own minds where they stand.

**iii) Methods of achieving objectives**

a) Service provision (e.g., running non-profit tea houses for older people, kindergartens for disabled children.)

b) Training others to provide, extend and improve services, and/or stimulating the formation of other service-providers, whether governmental or non-governmental.

c) Civic leadership training and formation.

d) Encouraging the development of new organisations (or strengthening existing organisations) that share values, mission.

e) Developing a supporter/sympathiser base through publication of newsletters, reports, etc., where the purpose of these appears to be more than merely to “publicise” (xuanchuan) the organisation.

f) Attempting to promote community participation in decision-making processes that affect them, by, e.g., creating opportunities for community “voices” to reach decision makers.

g) Attempting to sensitise “society” to the needs of particular constituencies.

h) Intermediation – where the organisation has some formal, institutional or administrative connection with government, and serves to inform government of the views of its constituency, and to inform its constituency of the views of government. (As in, e.g., a trade or professional association.) This may involve pursuing particular cases with the authorities on behalf of the organisation’s members.

i) Formal and public appeal to policy makers—e.g., by producing policy research papers and recommendations.

j) Informal, private appeal to policy/decision makers, e.g., through personal, social or business connections.

k) Legal advocacy: using the legislative process to extend legal rights (e.g., law on domestic violence), and the judicial process to enforce (and also advance) those rights.

l) Generic public education/awareness raising—through Information, Education and Communication materials, media, etc., on a particular topic (AIDS, drug abuse, labour rights, etc.)
m) Using mass media and other public outreach methods to highlight specific cases/events – eg, a polluting factory, a case of sexual harassment at work, or an example of local corruption.

n) Coalition building—developing strategic links with other groups and individuals that share similar objectives and/or whose objectives would advance the interests of the constituency concerned.

o) Mass mobilisation around specific, single-issue campaigns (eg, mass protests)

p) Building a citizens’ movement—a large-scale with shared political objectives.