

# Social Entrepreneurship and Citizenship in China: The Rise of NGOs in the PRC

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## Abstract:

This article examines and assesses the nature of civil society responses to the great Sichuan earthquake of May 12, 2008 which took the lives of 70,000, injured 375,000 and left five million homeless. The analysis is set against the rise of civil entrepreneurship of the preceding decade and considers its implications for democracy.

## The Earthquake

On the afternoon of May 12, 2008, I was sitting in my apartment in central Beijing when the building began to sway. I was not sure what was happening until the news reports began trickling in over the internet a half hour later – an earthquake had struck Wenchuan, Sichuan Province, just northwest of Chengdu. Chengdu? Chengdu is over 900 miles (1500 kilometers) away from Beijing. How could an earthquake near Chengdu shake buildings in Beijing? We know the answer to that question now. It was a huge earthquake, 8.0 on the Richter scale – one

that caused a devastating amount of damage in a densely populated region. The numbers were horrific to the point of being mind numbing: almost 70,000 people dead, 375,000 injured, and five million homeless. This enormous tragedy, broadcast all over the globe via television and internet, inspired an enormous response. Governments, NGOs (nongovernment organizations), and businesses from around the world donated over US\$450 million dollars of cash donations to China, accompanied by material aid and volunteers.

However, there was another source of funding and volunteers: China itself. Yao Ming, Jackie Chan, Jet Li and other glamorous celebrities organized high-profile fund-raising events, and contributed well-publicized donations.<sup>1</sup> Almost half of the companies listed on the Chinese stock exchange gave money to relief efforts. Yet a huge amount of the funding came not from the wealthy and powerful, but instead from ordinary Chinese citizens. A man named Yang Zhengsheng donated ¥10,000 (US\$1500), his entire annual salary. He had been born in a relief tent during the 1976 Tangshan Earthquake, the

deadliest quake of the twentieth century. “As a survivor of an earthquake, I must do something,” he explained.<sup>2</sup> Many of his fellow citizens agreed, whether they were earthquake survivors or not. Every person I knew in China, young or old, rich or poor, contributed. Schoolchildren donated the change from their pockets. China Unicom and China Mobile offered citizens a way to give money by texting on their cell phones. Netizens organized donation drives on online forums.<sup>3</sup> Within two weeks, domestic donations had topped ¥30 billion (US\$4.5 billion), ten times the amount of international funding.

The Chinese government explicitly welcomed foreign aid. International NGOs such as Médecins Sans Frontières, UNICEF, and AmeriCares did send in workers, but the numbers were relatively small. There are several reasons for this: first, relative to other developing nations, fewer international NGOs operated in China prior to the earthquake, both because of its authoritarian government and because its economic boom made it seem less needy. As a result, few international organizations had prior connections to the affected region, and the mountainous geography and earthquake damage made it difficult for newcomers to access disaster areas. Second, many international organizations were busy responding to the devastation of Cyclone Nargis which had struck neighboring Myanmar only ten days before the earthquake.<sup>4</sup>

The lack of international workers was more than

offset by a huge surge of Chinese volunteers who headed into the disaster zone. Hao Lin, a psychologist, hopped on a plane to Chengdu and then borrowed a bike to ride into the earthquake zone, seeking victims in need of counseling. To do so, he lied to his wife, who would have been appalled at his headlong plunge into danger. “I haven’t done this before,” he admitted. “Ordinary people now understand how to take action on their own.”<sup>5</sup> Acquaintances from my church in Beijing, who happened to own a truck, collected funds from everyone they knew, filled their vehicle with bottles of water, canned food, and blankets, and drove out to an earthquake-affected village where a friend had a distant relative. A shopkeeper from Guizhou and his friends drove for four hours in four cars filled with medical supplies, cucumbers, and cabbages. He told reporters that he had never volunteered for anything before.<sup>6</sup> The members of an automobile club in the city of Mianyang, Sichuan, drove 60 km into earthquake-damaged areas to transport injured people to Mianyang hospitals – and then turned around to do it again and again.<sup>7</sup> Online forums helped to inspire, mobilize, and organize individual and collective action.<sup>8</sup> On the popular Tianya discussion forum, for example, volunteers in the earthquake area would post lists of the items they needed. Eager readers in cities far away would buy and donate every item on the list and deliver them to individuals willing to travel out to Sichuan.<sup>9</sup>



Volunteers sorting donations after the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake. (Getty Images)

Although many volunteers were individuals working on their own, some came to Sichuan as members of organizations. Others joined or formed organizations after arrival. These included government-controlled organizations, such as the Chinese Red Cross and the Communist Youth League. But they also included indigenous Chinese NGOs, ranging from celebrity foundations (such as martial arts movie star Jet Li's One Foundation) to small grassroots groups. Members came from organizations based in Beijing and Shanghai, but also from provinces all over China. A survey team from Beijing Normal University counted at least 260 NGOs working in one area.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the earthquake relief efforts created a critical mass of social entrepreneurs and volunteers in one geographical space, a set of ideal conditions that led to the birth of many new NGOs.

For some Western news outlets and scholars, all this spontaneous action and organization was a sign that China was finally developing a civil society. The *Washington Post* quoted Guo Hong, a sociology professor in Chengdu: "From this disaster, the government has come to realize the

power of the grassroots. This power will be helpful in establishing and managing a real civil society."<sup>11</sup> Some dubbed 2008 the "Year of Civil Society" for the People's Republic of China (PRC).<sup>12</sup> The *New York Times* described the volunteering as "defiant" and quoted Bao Shuming of the University of Michigan: "This is a significant turning point for China. . . . People are becoming more educated and organized, and society is becoming more open."<sup>13</sup> The article also helpfully explained why the prospect of civil society in China is so significant: "Developing a robust civil society is considered a major step if China is to become more democratic." Was the 2008 Sichuan earthquake a major turning point for Chinese citizens?

Was it the moment in which they seized independence and discovered the power of organizing and activism? And if so, do these behaviors really signal the rise of Western-style civil society in China – the kind of civil society that leads to democracy?

In fact, all of these trends – donations, volunteering, non-governmental organizations – predated the earthquake. That is why I was in that swaying Beijing apartment on the afternoon of May 12, 2008: I was in China to study the rise of social entrepreneurship, a project that I had begun in 2004. What I found was that social entrepreneurship was transforming China, but not necessarily in the ways that Westerners would predict. I also discovered that the most

important term we need to know to understand China today is not “political oppression” or “civil society,” but “quality” (*suzhi*).

### Traditional donations, revolutionary social entrepreneurship

What was really new in the Chinese reaction to the earthquake, and what was not? Although the sheer scale of the domestic donations that poured in after the earthquake was impressive and moving, the Chinese citizens who gave money were engaging in behavior that was quite traditional. The vast majority of earthquake donations were channeled through the Chinese government, for example through the state-controlled Chinese Red Cross. This type of giving has a long history in China, stretching back at least 1000 years to the Song Dynasty (960–1279).<sup>14</sup> These charitable practices assume that the government holds the primary responsibility for dealing with social problems. However, in times of disaster, the state can call upon its people to donate resources to help it carry out its duties. In imperial China, usually only state officials and wealthy elites were expected to contribute.<sup>15</sup> However, this changed after the 1949 Communist Revolution with its ideology of egalitarianism and mass action. Now everyone was expected to reach into their pockets when catastrophe struck. By 2008, patriotic citizens were accustomed to donating money when earthquakes, floods, famines, or typhoons harmed any part of China.

The most obvious precursor to the 2008 Sichuan earthquake was the Tangshan earthquake, which struck on July 28, 1976, just a few weeks before the death of Mao Zedong. China has the unfortunate distinction of being the site of many of the deadliest earthquakes in recorded history. Tangshan is usually ranked number two on this list, with a death toll that probably exceeded 650,000 (although the Chinese state reported an official death toll of only 240,000).<sup>16</sup> The Chinese government rejected all offers of international aid and insisted on self-reliance. It deployed the People’s Liberation Army and called on citizens for donations. Almost every province and autonomous region in China sent rescue and medical teams to Tangshan. Chinese people all across the country responded with cash contributions. Afterward, these patriotic efforts were celebrated by the state-controlled media, for example with the not-so-subtly titled book: *After the Tangshan Earthquake: How the Chinese People Overcame a Major Natural Disaster*.<sup>17</sup> Hua Guofeng, Mao’s hand-picked successor, insisted that “socialist principles had been the key to handling the disaster.”<sup>18</sup>



Soldiers from the People's Liberation Army participate in rescue efforts after the 1976 Tangshan Earthquake. See [here](http://www.bestchinanews.com/History/1410.html) (<http://www.bestchinanews.com/History/1410.html>)

Therefore, when Chinese citizens gave money to earthquake relief efforts in 2008, they were following a familiar tradition – even if some of them were texting contributions over mobile phones rather than dropping cash into collection boxes. The biggest difference between 1976 and 2008 was the scale of the response, both emotionally and financially. In 1976, people read about the earthquake in newspapers or heard about it over state radio. They donated the equivalent of pennies and dimes because that was all they had to spare. In 2008, the nation sat riveted in front of televisions and computer screens for weeks, experiencing by video all the tragedy, heartbreak, and heroism in real time, 24/7. Office workers snuck online at work to stream videos of the latest rescue efforts. At banks, restaurants, and shops, TVs broadcast live coverage on touching human interest stories to customers. Online forums were constantly updated with news and commentary about the earthquake relief efforts. A good friend from Harbin said ruefully to me, “It’s getting ridiculous. For two weeks, all I’ve done is sit in front of a television or a computer and cry.” (This statement also accurately described my own life at the time.) When people wanted to channel these powerful emotions into donations, they had a lot more money available to give than they did in 1976. By 2008, China had been experiencing an economic boom for three decades, and it had one of the highest savings rates in the world.<sup>19</sup> The members of China’s new middle class could

contribute hundreds and even thousands of dollars and the wealthy could donate much, much more.

Yet, by 2008, China was experiencing something that had not existed in 1976: *social entrepreneurship*. Like business entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs are leaders who seek out opportunities to unleash potential through innovative action.<sup>20</sup> In 1976, Tangshan’s “volunteers” were soldiers and workers deployed by the state. But by 2008, there were many Chinese citizens who no longer believed that the state should be responsible for everything. Instead, they designed their own strategies of action. Among these self-directed citizens, some rose to leadership and took charge of organizing volunteers, coordinating donations, setting up online directories for those seeking survivors, and many other tasks. In contrast to the obedient volunteers of the Tangshan era, they were self-motivated, independent, and creative. In Sichuan, social entrepreneurs found ways to release the potential trapped in the national surge of goodwill and sympathy, converting it into action to the benefit of suffering victims. They worked with overwhelmed local governments and helped to develop networks to coordinate the efforts of domestic and foreign NGOs with state organizations, businesses, and informal volunteer groups.<sup>21</sup>

Chinese social entrepreneurship was not born in the rubble of the Sichuan earthquake – it had

been on the rise for over a decade. Even so, it was still a relatively new phenomenon. In the early 1990s, there were barely any Chinese nongovernmental organizations working on social problems.<sup>22</sup> After 2000, the number of social entrepreneurs starting NGOs rose precipitously.<sup>23</sup> By 2016 there were over 660,000 organizations registered with the government,<sup>24</sup> and researchers have estimated that there were two to eight million additional unregistered organizations.<sup>25</sup> Although the higher estimates no doubt included organizations such as student clubs or village committees, many NGOs were focused on alleviating social problems. For Chinese social entrepreneurs starting NGOs, the most popular areas have been the environment, education, the disabled, women's issues, community development, and healthcare.<sup>26</sup> The 2008 Sichuan earthquake had simply revealed to the rest of the world a social movement that had been growing at a rapid pace in China since the turn of the millennium. Instead of passively assuming that social problems were the responsibility of the state, a significant number of Chinese citizens were rising up and taking action. These social entrepreneurs insisted that it was their role to lead rather than to follow. They believed that their country required their ingenuity in order to come up with viable solutions to transform society for the better. Where did they come from? What does the rise of social entrepreneurship mean for China?

### The birth of civil society or pawns of the state?

I am not the only China scholar who has noticed the rise of social entrepreneurship in the PRC. Indeed, the growing numbers of Chinese NGOs has drawn the attention of researchers in sociology, political science, and anthropology. For many of them, the central research question has been "Will the rise of Chinese NGOs lead to *civil society* in the People's Republic of China?"<sup>27</sup>

The answer to this question depends on the definition of "civil society." The concept of civil society emerged in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe in the writings of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. However, when scholars first started analyzing the rise of Chinese NGOs, the version of "civil society" they used was based on the theories of Alexis de Tocqueville, which were rooted in his studies comparing the United States' robust democracy with France's descent into Napoleonic dictatorship.<sup>28</sup> Tocqueville assumed that "state" and "society" operate in opposition to each other. States, even in so-called democracies, naturally tend to increase their power at the expense of individuals, evolving toward tyranny. The only way that individual citizens can prevent this from happening is to organize collectively with people outside of their families. "Civil society" is the aggregate of this collective organization. The more robust the civil society is, the more successful the citizenry will be at maintaining a truly participatory democracy and resisting the potential tyranny of

the state. For Tocqueville, the sign of a healthy civil society was a critical mass of voluntary associations. These voluntary organizations could be anything from bird-watching clubs to religious organizations to charities, as long as they were independent of the state and included voluntary participation.

How do voluntary organizations contribute to civil society and serve as the foundation for democracy? First, in voluntary associations, people learn the practical skills of democratic citizenship by governing themselves outside the interference of the state. They learn how to be active political participants, rather than passive political subjects. Second, voluntary associations help develop social networks that can be mobilized for citizen political action. While watching birds or volunteering for an NGO, people can meet others who share their complaints about social issues or their desires for social change, and then work together to coordinate a political response. Third, voluntary organizations help citizens protect themselves against potential state tyranny. If the state attempts to take away people's rights or go against their will, these associations make it easier for them to organize action to challenge state behavior and conform it to their desires.<sup>29</sup>

Some scholars argued that if civil society and voluntary associations are a precondition for a robust democracy, then the opposite must also be true. In societies (such as China) where

democracy never developed, it must be due to a dearth of voluntary associations and a lack of civil society, leaving people vulnerable to state tyranny.<sup>30</sup> For these civil society proponents, the rise of NGOs is so exciting because the Chinese might finally be developing voluntary associations and learning how to organize independently of the state. At long last, a civil society may be emerging in the PRC, one that can resist the authoritarian Communist Party-controlled government. According to this argument, as Chinese citizens organize in autonomous voluntary organizations, they will surely develop democratic skills and views and begin demanding democratic reforms from the state.

Premodern Chinese conceptions of politics never assumed a division between state and society, so the concept of civil society did not emerge in indigenous Chinese political theories. The very term "civil society" is difficult to translate into Chinese.<sup>31</sup> Even so, after 1989 civil society became a popular topic for Chinese intellectuals as well as for Western researchers of China, for two reasons. First, the collapse of socialist regimes and emergence of democracy in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union was attributed to civil society. Second, there were signs of voluntary associations and political organization in the 1980s in China. These culminated in the 1989 Tiananmen Protests, which raised hopes among Westerners and Chinese dissidents that the

Chinese Communist Party would be overthrown.<sup>32</sup> If civil society could destroy communist regimes and engender democracy in the former Soviet bloc, why couldn't it do the same in China?

The term *social entrepreneur* takes the idea of entrepreneurship from the world of business, where it refers to the ability to see opportunities that others fail to notice combined with the willingness to take the risks to use those opportunities. Instead of using entrepreneurial innovation and risk-taking for the purpose of making profit, social entrepreneurs use the same technique in order to find novel solutions to solve social problems and meet social needs. The focus of this work is social entrepreneurs: men and women who were able to see an innovative way to help society and willing to take the risk to implement their ideas. Although Chinese NGOs and social entrepreneurs did not follow the script of state resistance that Westerners wrote for them, they still transformed the relationship between state and society by developing a model of active and mobilized citizenship. To understand this version of activist citizenship, we need to begin with two concepts that are key to understanding Chinese society today: populist democracy and *suzhi* (quality). Elizabeth Perry argues that when Westerners think of democracy, they tend to focus on competitive elections. In China, by contrast, both the regime and most citizens tend to hold a populist view of

democracy, whereby a "democratic" government is one that benefits the populace and reflects its will.<sup>33</sup> In a populist democracy, a good citizen is not one who organizes to limit state power or call for multiparty elections, but instead one who informs the state of the needs and concerns of the people and enables the state to address those needs and concerns effectively. The goal is not to restrain the government, but to empower it.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, the good society in China was defined as the paternalistic redistributive economy that took care of its citizens from cradle to grave. In the social order, to be a good democratic citizen was to contribute to the common good from a position within the party-state bureaucracy. After the market socialist reforms of the 1980s, however, the definition of a good society in China changed from one based on state paternalism to one based on the idea of *suzhi* or "quality." By the 1990's, there was a widespread belief that China would become a high-quality nation if it had high-quality citizens.<sup>34</sup> Rather than passive and obedient farmers, workers, and soldiers, the new ideal Chinese citizens were educated, entrepreneurial, ambitious, and competitive in the global market. But where do such citizens come from? The central tenet of *suzhi* ideology is that individuals are shaped by their environment. A person's character is not determined by genetics or fate, but instead is molded by external circumstances, such as family



and education. High-quality environments create high-quality people. Therefore, if you can improve the quality of external circumstances you can improve the quality of human beings. A critical mass of high-quality people results in high-quality communities and (on a large enough scale) a high-quality nation. The converse is also true – low quality conditions lead to low-quality people and low quality communities and nations.

For Chinese citizens who were both ambitious and socially concerned, *suzhi* ideology was a call to action. *Suzhi* ideology is a belief system that claims that by improving educational, environmental, and economic conditions, one can transform the lives of people and communities and the nation. In addition, *suzhi* ideology provided Chinese social entrepreneurs with the leverage to demand state action using the language of populist democracy. By bringing public attention to areas where the state was failing to provide good quality conditions (for the poor, for the disabled, for females, for minority nationalities), they could compel the party-state to increase investment in social welfare – or risk popular criticism and the loss of political legitimacy.

*Social Entrepreneurship and Citizenship in China* describes how this type of citizen activism arose in China through the stories of the men and women who became social entrepreneurs. It begins by examining the historical roots of today's NGOs in both the imperial era and under

Maoist socialism before analyzing in depth the first generation of Chinese social entrepreneurs as they carved out a new space for mobilization at the turn of the 21st century. The book provides an in-depth look at the complicated and multidimensional relationship between Chinese NGOs and the party-state. Chinese social entrepreneurs generally strive to build productive partnerships with state actors, helping party-state officials maintain power by doing their jobs better. These alliances help them gain protection, and even sometimes leverage, over other state actors. It also explores the influence of international NGOs and international money.

In recent years, the Western press has focused on the ways that the Xi Jinping regime has cracked down on civil society, for example with passage of the Overseas NGOs Management Law, which restricts the work of foreign NGOs in China. Yet at the same time, the Chinese leadership has passed a number of measures that have facilitated the work of domestic NGOs, such as the 2015 Environmental Protection Law and the 2016 Charity Law. If we see NGOs as a vanguard for resistance against an authoritarian state, these behaviors make no sense. However, if we understand Chinese NGOs and social entrepreneurship as a product of *suzhi* and populist democratic ideology, we can see that a very different game is being played. Chinese social entrepreneurs are attempting to mobilize

popular support to force the state to solve the social problems that matter most to them. The state, meanwhile, seeks to tame the productive powers of social entrepreneurship for its own ends.

This article draws on Carolyn L. Hsu, *Social Entrepreneurship and Citizenship in China: The Rise of NGOs in the PRC* (<https://www.routledge.com/Social-Entrepreneurship-and-Citizenship-in-China-The-rise-of-NGOs-in-the/Hsu/p/book/9781138684911>)

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Associated Press, "Yao to donate money, create foundation to aid earthquake victims. (<http://espn.go.com/nba/news/story?id=3435735>)" *ESPN*, June 10, 2008. Xinhua News, "Stars Swing into Action to Help China Quake Victims, ([http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-05/20/content\\_8211784.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-05/20/content_8211784.htm))" *China Daily* May 20,

2008.

<sup>2</sup> Xinhua News, "Humanitarian emotion glitters in China earthquake relief ([http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-05/15/content\\_8177232.html](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-05/15/content_8177232.html))," May 15, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Xinhua News, "Virtual community mobilizes, mourns for quake victims ([http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-05/17/content\\_8189895.html](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-05/17/content_8189895.html))," May 17, 2008. Qu Yan, Philip Wei Wu and Xiaoqing Wang, "Online community response to major disaster: A study of Tianya Forum in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake" (University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Brian Hoyer, "Lessons from the Sichuan earthquake," *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine* (2009): 14–17.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Yardley and David Barboza, "Many hands, not held by China, aid in quake (<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/20/world/asia/20citizens.html?ref=sichuanprovincechina>)," *New York Times* May 20, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Maureen Fan, "Citizens' groups step up in China ([http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2008-05-29/world/36793382\\_1\\_supplies-volunteersyingxiu](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2008-05-29/world/36793382_1_supplies-volunteersyingxiu))," *Washington Post* May 29, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Xinhua News, "Humanitarian emotion glitters in China earthquake relief ([http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-05/15/content\\_8177232.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-05/15/content_8177232.htm))," May 15, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Guobin Yang, "A civil society emerges from the earthquake rubble (<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/civil-society-emerges-earthquake-rubble>)," Yale Global Online, June 5, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Yan, Wu, and Wang, "Online community response to major disaster."

<sup>10</sup> Shawn Shieh and Guosheng Deng, "An emerging civil society: The impact of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake on grassroots associations in China," *The China Journal* no. 65 (2011): 181–194.

<sup>11</sup> Fan, "Citizens' Groups Step up in China."

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Yardley and Barboza, "Many hands, not held by China."

<sup>14</sup> Smith, *The Art of Doing Good*. H. Smith, "Chinese philanthropy as seen through a case of famine relief in the 1640's," in W. Ilchman, S. Katz, and E. Queen (Eds.), *Philanthropy in the World's Tradition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 133–168.

<sup>15</sup> Vivienne Shue, "State power and the philanthropic impulse in China today," in W. Ilchman, S. Katz, and E. Queen (Eds.), *Philanthropy in the World's Tradition* (Bloomington: Indiana University

Press, 1998), 332–354.

<sup>16</sup> The 1556 earthquake in Shaanxi, China, ranks as the deadliest in world history, with 830,000 casualties. The 1920 Haiyuan earthquake in Ningxia, China, killed about 200,000. An earthquake in Jili, China in 1290 killed around 100,000. “Earthquakes with 1,000 or more deaths ([http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/world/world\\_deaths.php](http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/world/world_deaths.php)),” US Geological Survey.

<sup>17</sup> *After the Tangshan Earthquake: How the Chinese People Overcame a Major Natural Disaster* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1976).

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), 650.

<sup>19</sup> In 2007, China’s national savings rate was 54 percent of gross national income. For comparison, the savings rate in the United States was under 15 percent. Juann H. Hung and Rong Qian, *Why is China Savings Rate so High? A Comparative Study of Cross-Country Panel Data* (Washington, DC: Congressional Budget Office, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Roger L. Martin and Sally Osberg, “Social entrepreneurship: The case for definition,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (2007): 28–39.

<sup>21</sup> Shieh and Deng, “An emerging civil society,” 188; Yang, “A civil society emerges from the earthquake rubble.”

<sup>22</sup> In 1988, there were 4,446 NGOs registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs. See Anthony J. Spires, Tao Lin Lin, and Kin-man Chan, “Societal support for China’s grassroots NGOs: Evidence from Yunnan, Guangdong, in Beijing,” *The China Journal*, no. 71 (2014): 65–90. However, in the political crackdown that followed the 1989 Tiananmen Protests, most organizations were suppressed or failed. Jude Howell, “NGO-state relations in post-Mao China,” in D. Hulme and M. Edwards (Eds.), *NGOs, States and Donors* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 202–215.

<sup>23</sup> Shieh and Deng, “An emerging civil society,” 185; Spires, Lin and Chan, “Societal support for China’s grassroots NGOs,” 74.

<sup>24</sup> In China, the term “NGO” (*fei zhenfu zuzhi*) does not have a clear or consistent definition, legally or popularly. It is used interchangeably with “social organization” (*shehui zuzhi*), “public benefit organization” (*gongyi zuzhi*), “charitable organization” (*cishan zuzhi*), and “popular organization” (*minjian zuzhi*). In 2016, the Ministry of Civil Affairs reported that there were over 660,000 organizations registered as *shehui zuzhi*, which included foundations (*jijinghui*) and non-profit service providers called “public non-enterprise institutions” (*minban fei qiye danwei*). See Xinhua News, “Over 660,000 social organizations registered in China

(<http://en.apdnews.com/xin-hua/393249.html>),” *Asia Pacific Daily* May 1, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Depending on the method of calculation, these numbers may or may not include mass organizations and GONGOs (government-organized NGOs), student clubs, community-based organizations, virtual organizations that exist only online, or neighborhood and village committees. Nor is it clear, given the lack of data, how many of these organizations have public interest missions. See Shawn Shieh *et al.*, *Chinese NGO Directory (251 NGO Profiles and Special Report): China’s Civil Society in the Making* (Beijing: China Development Brief, 2013), xii; Karla W. Simon, *Civil Society in China: The Legal Framework from Ancient Times to the “New Reform Era”* (Oxford University Press, 2013), xxxiv.

<sup>26</sup> Shieh *et al.*, *Chinese NGO Directory*, xvi.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Anthony Jerome Spires, *China’s Un-Official Society: The Development of Grassroots NGOs in an Authoritarian State* (Yale University, 2007); Jessica C. Teets, “Let many civil societies bloom: The rise of consultative authoritarianism in China,” *The China Quarterly* 173 (2013): 19–38; Qiusha Ma, *Non-Governmental Organizations in Contemporary China* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Yongnian Zheng and Joseph Fewsmith, *China’s Opening Society: The Non-State Sector and Governance* Vol. 2 (London, New York: Routledge, 2008), 244; Jude Howell, “New directions in civil society: Organizing around marginalized interests,” in J. Howell (Ed.), *Governance in China* (Oxford, UK: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 143–171.

<sup>28</sup> Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Perennial Library, 1988); Richard Madsen, “The public sphere, civil society and moral community: A research agenda for contemporary China studies,” *Modern China* 19, no. 2 (1993): 183–198; Carolyn L. Hsu, “Beyond civil society: An organizational perspective on state–NGO relations in the People’s Republic of China,” *Journal of Civil Society* 6, no. 3 (2010): 259–278.

<sup>29</sup> Jennifer Alexander, Renee Nank, and Camilla Stivers, “Implications of welfare reform: Do nonprofit survival strategies threaten civil society?” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (December 1, 1999): 452–475.

<sup>30</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: The Free Press, 1995); Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

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