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**The Role of NGOs in China’s Public Diplomacy**

**——A Study of Chinese NGOs’ Engagement in Developing Area**

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**Abstract**

In the past three decades, Non-governmental organization (NGOs) in China experiences the rapid developments, many reasons could be found to explain this fast growth: China's economic rise has opened the necessary space for the creation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs); the development of civil society due to the failure of the market and the government. However, there is one thing we need to bear in mind when we talk about Chinese non-governmental organizations is that due to the country's particular characteristics, Chinese NGOs cannot be seen through the same lens as Western NGOs. They have relatively closer relationship with the government or under the western definition are GONGO, and have to face the complicated Chinese non-government organization regulations. Since the definition of non-governmental organization is vary from on country to another, there is no exception in China. The special social environment in China is like this , on one hand, the Chinese society needs NGOs, but on the other hand the governments concerns the NGOs especially the INGOs’ development in China have side effects on Security of China, which leads to many restriction on NGOs in China.

After the open and reform policy, China experiences a fast development process. There is no doubt that China wants a peaceful external environment for continuous development. But the rise of China worries its neighbors, which might leads to the increasing number of conflicts, pressuring the stable external environment. Additionally, the rise of China also challenges the regional order and the world order, pressuring the current world great powers. Internationally, China needs companies to support itself in international political society. Developing countries are the first choice since their past friendly relations with China. Beside the traditional government level diplomacy, there might be another solution---Public diplomacy. As a non-state actor, NGOs could contribute to promoting the public diplomacy and fostering soft power in developing countries.

In the background that Chinese NGOs have connections with government, they tend to share the similar goals of Chinese government, which means that in China, NGOs could play better role in Chinese public diplomacy in government’s eyes.

Though it is still in the beginning level of Chinese NGOs taking part in public diplomacy in developing countries, they have done much, especially in humanitarian and environment domains. Chinese Foundation of Poverty Alleviation and Global Environmental Institute’s case study present how Chinese NGOs contribute Chinese public diplomacy in these areas. Though NGOs have reached some achievements , we need to bear in mind is that for Chinese NGOs to meaningfully contribute to Chinese public diplomacy abroad on a national rather than local level, many more need to be involved.

GEI and CFPA actually share similar objectives to the Chinese state and greater cooperation with these organizations. Independent social organizations, even those with US funding like GEI, can serve the foreign policy aims of the Chinese state and contribute to a gain in soft power. It is not hard to draw a conclusion the reason why NGOs are doing projects overseas is not only because their own development and their mission, but also because that is the need of the nation, it is national interest. No matter whether they have noticed that they are playing an essential role in public diplomacy, fighting for national interests, they are doing it, which means that they might not operate their projects for public diplomacy, but their activities are promoting public diplomacy as by product. Instead of directly political and economic outcome, NGOs have more influence on Soft power gaining. In other word, the motivation of Chinese NGOs operating abroad is a combination of self-need of development, the humanitarian mission and the Chinese national interest.

# **Introduction**

China's economic rise has opened the necessary space for the creation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). However, due to the country's particular characteristics, these cannot be seen through the same lens as Western NGOs. They might have distinct processes, purposes and objectives. The most important thing to bear in mind when talking about Chinese NGOs is their comparatively close links to the state, whether through funding or restrictive registration procedures. Thus, Chinese NGOs and Government Organized NGOs (GONGOs) will continue to expand as long as they do not interfere with the Party's interests.

In post-reform China, the needs and demands of the people have expanded, as well as China's influence abroad, and this has changed the role of NGOs, both nationally and internationally. On a domestic level, social organizations serve to fill in the blanks left by both state and market forces, for example, in the areas of poverty alleviation and welfare; internationally, NGOs have served to establish China's new position in the world system, helping other developing countries and meanwhile building important ties.

The case of Africa is the most visible one since China has made a lot of investments, provided loans and assistance to countries in need, serving as an alternative funding resource to Western institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, whose conditionalities are hard to meet in developing countries. On the other hand, China has been making some regional investment in the Asian region, strengthening ties with potential trading partners. NGOs are a crucial factor in this aspect, since they could be operate as public diplomacy tools used by the state in an attempt to promote more mutual understanding and form an peaceful external environment for China’s continuous development. According to this perspective, NGOs work hand in hand with the Chinese government pursing national goals through recognition abroad, thus enhancing the country's sovereignty as an international player.

China attempts to make use of public diplomacy to establish itself in the international system as a "trustworthy, cooperative, peace-loving, developing country", building a "harmonious society at home and contributing to a peaceful and harmonious world as a responsible player in international affairs" (d'Hooghe, 2007, p. 3). Although China has been practicing public diplomacy for quite some time, the importance of the concept has been on the rise in official speeches and documents, illustrating the government's awareness of the relevance of these tools.

Additionally, cooperation with other developing countries is crucial for China. Despite China’s rapid economic growth in recent decades, it continues to be a developing nation dependent on other developing partners, especially local partners. Furthermore, long-lasting cooperation ties with other developing countries could further strengthen China's position in the international arena. China is reshaping Asia's regional order or even the new world order and it strives to be seen by its neighbors as a "constructive partner, a careful listener, and a nonthreatening regional power" (Shambaugh, 2005, p. 64), which contrasts with the fairly recent regional concerns voiced and the voice of Chinese threat theory. It is similar in global level that China is not willing to be seen as a threat, either. Although the relationship between NGOs and governments is not always peaceful, they have proven to be useful tools in shifting the international narrative, by filling the gaps left by Chinese enterprises and investments. Many countries are now either looking to China for regional leadership or increasingly taking into account China's interests, and this has reshaped both the countries' relationship with Beijing and the relationships to one another (Ibid., p. 65).

Although there have been studies regarding the topics of China’s public diplomacy, Chinese NGOs and GONGOs and China's NGO’s role in developing countries has not been much investigation. Thus, by approaching this topic I hope to fulfill an academic lacuna through our problem formulation: **What have Chinese NGOs have done as a public diplomacy tool? And why do they do it?**

This thesis will start with the introduction and the problem formulation and followed by methodology part. In methodology part, main research methods will be described. In this thesis, as major methods, literature study and case study will be used actively to approach problems formulation. In order to provide an objective view, both Chinese and foreign sources are used in this thesis. The next part is theory part. In this part, theories of NGO, public diplomacy and their relations, together with communication theories will be discussed to provide the common understanding of the concepts. In analysis, three case studies will be presented and analyzed to approach the problem formulation. The last part is conclusion part, where all the findings of analysis will be summarized.

# **Methodology**

In order to approach the problem formulation, public diplomacy and NGOs will be actively used. By analyzing how NGOs play a role in China’s public diplomacy, I hope to achieve an understanding about how the country is attempting to use public diplomacy to change negative perceptions of China and to foster a peaceful outside environment for rapid development of China.

In order to answer the problem formulation, I am going to analyze existing academic literature on public diplomacy and NGOs. I have sought to use both Chinese and Western sources in order to have a more comprehensive overview.

After introducing the theoretical background, three NGOs will be analyzed to present how Chinese NGOs are currently operating in developing countries including one non-Chinese NGO for comparison study. This analysis will be based on the organizations' own websites, promotional material and reports as well as third-party reports and interviews on the NGOs’ actions. The analyzed organizations are: the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA), which has worked in a number of developing countries on humanitarian aid, living standards, education and medical assistance; the Global Environmental Institute (GEI) which works in Laos and Myanmar and aims to making Chinese investment there more socially and environmentally responsible; and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) which is an America based NGO, which has various nature conservancy projects in developing country. The reason why I choose it is because that a case study of foreign NGO could to provide some experience of NGO operation, which might contribute to presenting a positive example for Chinese NGOs to learn how to survive and develop well and play a better role in public diplomacy.

The analysis of these organizations is done with the purpose of presenting Chinese NGOs engagement overseas and their contribution towards China’s public diplomacy. Only based on these descriptions, can we try to find the motivation behind why they are will to do these.

This thesis has many limitations. Firstly, since it is a quite new to connect NGOs and public diplomacy together, not many academic literatures could be found, which makes this research quite difficult. Hence, I tried to gather the academic study of NGOs, Chinese NGOs, public diplomacy to study, working on the connections between them. Secondly, It is relatively easy to present what Chinese NGOs have done, but it is hard to measure their influence. On one hand, it is difficult to do field research during thesis writing period to collect first hand material, due to the limited resource. On the other hand, there are few studies and reports related to the influence measurement in this domain, which means there are not enough second hand materials, either. What’s more, partly because Chinese NGOs are not developed as western ones, the news reports about their projects overseas from media are not well organized by official website. And because of the language barriers, it is almost impossible to gather the news in the target countries. Thirdly, public diplomacy is not a short-term project that has instant effect, but a mid-term to long-term project. Due to both the development of Chinese NGOs and they are seen as Chinese public diplomacy tool are quite recently, so it is hard to observe the influence and it is also difficult to measure the outcome.

This thesis intends to present the what Chinese NGOs have done through the lens of public diplomacy and summarize the their motivations, influences will not be the primary focus. Even it does not answer the question to how effective NGOs is as a public diplomacy, it provide one new approach to study Chinese public diplomacy and Chinese NGOs. Source from both Chinese studies and western studies, together with information from NGOs websites and research institutes are used to ensure the validity.

# **Theory**

## **Public diplomacy**

Former American diplomat and Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Edmund Gullion, coined the term public diplomacy. Since the study of public diplomacy is a new and expanding field, there is no single agreed-upon definition of the term. The Encyclopedia of United States National Security defines it as:

*“All official efforts to convince targeted sectors of foreign opinion to support or tolerate government's strategic objectives. Methods include statements by decision makers, purposeful campaigns conducted by government organizations dedicated to public diplomacy, and efforts to persuade international media to portray official policies favorably to foreign audiences.”* (United States National Security, 2005)

As Gullion said, the definition of public diplomacy is dynamic. In recent decades, the definition of this term has expanded. As Gullion said

*“By public diplomacy we understand the means by which governments, private groups and individuals influence the attitudes and opinions of other peoples and governments in such a way as to exercise influence on their foreign policy”* (Gullion, 2012)

Respected scholars such as Geoffrey Cowan and Nicholas J. Cull also claimed in “Public Diplomacy in A Changing World“ (Cowan & Cull, 2008) and UCS Center in “What is public diplomacy” (USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2013), nongovernmental actors also engage in public diplomacy.

Chinese scholar Zhao Qizhen also claim that the public diplomacy system will be more complete if people to people diplomacy is considered as a part of public diplomacy. Public diplomacy could be considered as a process of communication. Zhao claims that if non-state players, such as non-governmental organizations and individuals, get involved, it should be treated as public diplomacy, no matter it is the sender or the receiver. What is more, public diplomacy is an important component of diplomacy system as illustrated in the chart below. (Jinzi & Beiye, 2010).

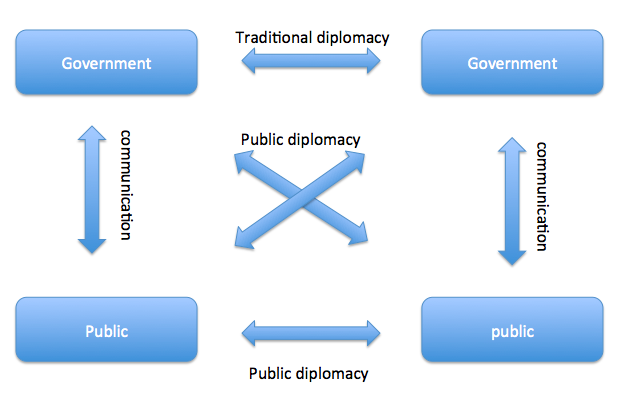


Chart 1: Public Diplomacy System

### The Importance of Public Diplomacy

Differing from the traditional government-government diplomatic activities that aim at authority, public diplomacy could get both economic and political outcomes by applying a bottom-up approach. As chart 2 illustrates, public diplomacy could achieve a hierarchy of impact. To be more specific, in the first phase, the aim is to make the foreign public know about the country, updating the image in their minds or even changing negative opinions of the country. In the second phase, it will contribute to creating positive perceptions. In the third phase, public diplomacy is supposed to strengthen ties with foreign publics, such as attracting them to travel or receive education in that country, or simply to buy their products; making them understand and accept the other country’s values. In the last phase, public diplomacy is supposed to attract investment and turn one country to a favorable partner both in the economic and political domains (Leonard , Stead , & Smewing , Public Diplomacy , 2002).

Chart 2 The hierarchy impact of public diplomacy

Though it is quite late since Pro, Gullion started to use this term, in fact, it has a long history to process activities targeting foreign publics to change foreign public opinion. United States is one of the countries that started to use public diplomacy quite early. During Second World War, US begin to use media and other means to impact overseas public opinion. In 1990s, United Kingdoms began to enhance nation image building, which drew worldwide attention. The importance of public diplomacy began to be an increasingly important topic. What happened in 911 made not only Americans but also many other countries’ government notice the importance of foreign public opinion and the importance of public diplomacy and soft power.

In fact, there are a few major reasons why public become more and more important. First of all, thanks to the development of democracy, individuals have access and ability to have influence on policy making by voting or protest, etc. Public began to have more power toward national policy making which makes them become more important than ever before in diplomacy. Secondly, thanks to the development of technology and globalization process, it has become much easier for communication and transportation. In this nature, information spreads faster, as well as ideas and opinion exchange, Additionally, opinion is much easier to gathers, too. All of these lead to the increasing power of public. Individuals could exchange their opinion and put pressure on governments. Thirdly, the growth and development of International non-government organization makes it possible to impact foreign countries’ decision making. Last but not the least, the understanding of power has changed. In the past, hard power such as military and economy are the only concern. But now due to the cooperation and dependency between nations and the over high expense for war, soft power begin to play an increasing important role. While according to Joseph Nye, public diplomacy is an instrument to manipulate resource to project soft power. (Nye, Soft Power and Public diplomacy, 2008) It is not hard to understand why public diplomacy becomes increasingly important.

### Goals of China’s Public Diplomacy

Japanese scholar Kitano claims that the goal of public diplomacy is to achieve national interests and diplomacy goals. (Jinzi & Beiye, 2010). Former British permanent representative to the European Union Michael Butler also proves this realism point of view. He claims that the purpose of British public diplomacy is to influence the opinion in target countries, so that the British government, British companies and other British organizations could achieve their goals easier. He also argues that the overall image of Britain is one of the major concerns. (Leonard , Stead , & Smewing , Public Diplomacy , 2002, 页 1) We could assume though public diplomacy appears with a public face, but from the realism lens, it still works for national interests. The goal of China’s public diplomacy is also related to national interest. As a part of China’s foreign policy, Public diplomacy of China shares one of the important goals of China’s foreign policy to maintain an peaceful external environment for continues development, especially when China is considered by many as a threat.

As we mentioned before, public diplomacy adopts a bottom-up approach, hence the goals of China’s public diplomacy are aimed at foreign publics. Ingrid d’Hooghe summarized four major goals of China’s public diplomacy: first of all, China wants to create an image of a country that fights for a better life for its people and seeks understanding for its political system and policies. Secondly, China wants to be seen as a favorable and reliable economic partner. Thirdly, China wants to be portrayed as a responsible member in the international community. Last but not least, China wants to be respected as a country with a long history and outstanding culture (d'Hooghe, 2005). Chinese scholar Gao Fei also implies that public diplomacy could contribute to forming positive public opinion and help China defend propaganda from the west, since the west holds the majority of media and information sources (Gao, 2005). Thus we could assume that China’s public diplomacy goals are not only promotional but also defensive. Beijing wants to create a positive image, remove the doubt of its neighbors, lead the public opinion, change the negative impression and use these to form a peaceful external environment for the rise of China.

Since China is still a developing country and it has a long history of friendly relationship with other third world country, developing countries, especially developing countries in Asia should be the priority for public diplomacy. In recent years, there are increasing territory conflicts happened between China and its neighbors, which make it even more necessary for Beijing to maintain good relations with these countries. There is no doubt that the external environment matters for the continuous and stable rise of China (Liu F. , 2013). When Wang Yi, the Foreign Minister, was asked about how to implement the China’s diplomacy in 2014 at a press conference, he answered, ”We are going to focus on two major aspects, and the first one is to serve the domestic reform. We are going to strengthen the friendly relations with other countries, especially the surrounding countries (…)” (The Ministry of Freign Affairs of PRC, 2014).

## **NGOs**

The concept of non-governmental organization (NGO) dates back from the founding of the United Nations in 1945, which defined them as organizations that were non-official and neutral in their execution of international duties (Ming & Liu, 2009, p. 5). Since then, the concept has broadened and is used to refer to organizations with a social purpose which exist independent of the government system (ibid., p. 6). Broadly speaking, NGOs have four basic functions: resource mobilization, public services, social governance and policy advocacy (Ibid., p. 17).

**The rise of Chinese NGOs**

When approaching Chinese social organizations some things have to be considered, since the term originated from the West and it is not directly applicable to the Chinese context. Firstly, NGO is a fuzzy concept without a strict academic definition or category; secondly, it is transitional concept, meaning that it has changed and adapted to different realities, and given China's current engagement in social transition, these organizations are experiencing drastic changes spanning from the confrontation between the old and the new (Ibid., p. 8).

As Professor Wang Min and Jia Xijin of Qinghua University said, there barely is Chinese NGO meet the western NGO criteria. But in In order to promote the development of Chinese NGOs, Chinese scholars tend to give a flexible definition to NGO. (Wang & Jia, 2002). When it comes to the definition of Chinese NGO, Wang and Jia adopt the definition from Professor Kang Xiaoguang, “ An organization could be called an ‘Chinese NGO’ if it registers legally, its activity is non-profit and altruistic, meet the requirements of voluntary and Charitable; and it possesses varying degrees of independent and self-governed.” (Kang, 2001) Hence we could assume that it is a definition of NGO with Chinese characteristics——without strict limitation on the independence and autonomy. When NGO was firstly introduced into China, it is a totally new concept. Chinese use it in the form of abbrrviation——NGO instead of Non-government organization（fei zheng fu zu zhi）. That leads to an interesting fact that normal Chinese don’t know that NGO has to be non-governmental, they match it with the concept of Charity organization. This could partly explain that why Chinese could accept that NGOs have connections and close relationship with government or even being GONGO. To some extent, there is a blur boundary of NGO and GONGO in China.

With China's Opening and Reform policy, the state gradually withdrew from some of its social responsibilities. The market, such as health care and culture, were transferred to the non-profit sector (Jin, 2007, p. 79). Meanwhile, the country's economic rise also led to inequalities and aggravated some problems, and because the government was aware that it could not respond alone to the growing demands from its population, it loosened the legislation regarding social organizations. Since 2004, when the Party actively encouraged the creation of these organizations - namely social welfare organizations, trade associations, farmer's technologies, and community-based NGOs - they have been growing in number and size, while at the same time diversifying their activities and exerting increasing influence (Ibid.).

The increasing number of NGOs in post-reform China is highly connected to economic opening, which has exacerbated the country's social challenges. On the other hand, the state does not possess the capacity to address all of them, which has compelled the Party to open space for the emergence of NGOs/GONGOs, which can approach the issues in an appropriate way (Knup, p. 9). This way, the government can delegate some important tasks to social organizations while at the same time exert control over them. Additionally, they are often more trusted by people than the Party itself (The Economist, 2014), even if the Party has traditionally used them to connect with the masses and control society (Ming & Liu, 2009, p. 11).

Although the emergence of NGOs is usually explained through market and government failures, it is also important to bear in mind the importance of the expansion of the public sphere as a social base for this kind of organizations (Ibid., p. 13). The public sphere is the space which is formed between the country/state and the society, where civic participation takes place (Ibid., p. 14). In China, since the Open Door Reforms, with the enhancement of material wealth, people have started to gain awareness and civic consciousness, which has been translated into an enthusiasm for social participation (Ibid., p. 16). Thus, NGOs’ emergence in China can be explained through a combination of government failure, market failures and population awareness (Ibid., p. 17).

### Chinese NGO and GONGO

In pre-reform China, social organizations were funded and staffed by the state, with the purpose of enforcing relevant state policies serving as bridge between the state and the population (Jin, 2007, p. 80). Since the reform, different kinds of organizations have emerged, some of which are self-denominated non-governmental organizations. Although they do not exactly meet Western NGO criteria - formal, private, non-profit-distributing, self-governed and voluntary (Ibid.) – Chinese NGOs still have considerable autonomy, if not independence, from the state (Lu, 2009, pp. 11-12).

On the other hand, GONGOs, an apparent oxymoron that describes non-government organizations sponsored by governments (Naím, 2007), differ from NGOs in several aspects. They are established, housed, staffed and mainly funded by the state and therefore the state has control over the organizations’ decision-making processes, functioning and activities. The purposes of GONGOs also differ from those of NGOs in the sense that they represent a more top-down approach, representing in practice the government's interests and not the population's needs, in contrast to NGOs’ bottom-up mechanisms (Jin, 2007, p. 81).

A lot of first-generation GONGOs, which started to appear as early as the 1950s, also served to promote international exchange. An example of this is the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) (Brenner, 2012, p. 135). However, most Chinese NGOs still operate at the local or national level for two main reasons. First, they often lack resources, experience, network and knowledge of foreign policy or international relations to engage outside of China. On the other hand, given the growing concerns inside the country about issues such as rising inequality and environmental degradations, people are more concerned about domestic issues than international or global problems, only paying attention to international issues when they have some kind of local implication for China (Ibid.).

With the economic opening there has been a change in social organizations in general, which now encompass more neoliberal values, participating in international forums under the NGO-consultant status granted by the United Nation's Economic and Social Council (Ibid., p. 136).

In China the proliferation of GONGOs is related to the downsizing reforms following the opening of the country, since many of them have been created to absorb offices that were considered redundant by the government (Ibid.). Thus, their purpose is to fulfill roles of Chinese policy-making that cannot be done by the state itself, often operating as a "transmission belt" between the Party and society (Brenner, 2012, p. 134). Currently, Chinese social organizations can be divided into five different categories: civil service, focusing on civic charity and social service; policy sponsoring, with a focus on marginalized groups and the representation of their interests; business economy, pursuing common market interests among interest groups; political participation; and common social areas, consisting of academic, professional, recreational or religious interest groups without entering directly into public service (Ming & Liu, 2009, pp. 9-10).

Chinese social organizations are expected to further expand as long as the CCP considers their purposes valid, i.e. as long as they meet the state’s needs (Knup, p. 9). In this sense, apolitical NGOs have a better chance to succeed since they do not challenge the Party, which explains the higher number of Chinese NGOs operating in the welfare, environmental and poverty alleviation fields (Brenner, 2012, p. 134), both nationally and internationally. The Chinese Red Cross and the China Charity Foundation - two large GONGOs - have raised a substantial amount of money to help other Asian regions following the 2004 tsunami and the 2005 Pakistani earthquake (Ibid., p. 136). Additionally, the expansion of Chinese NGOs and GONGOs internationally is also thought to promote a better image of the country abroad, meaning that it can be used a foreign policy tool to project soft power (Ibid.).

Social organizations in China have to be seen in their own specific context with their own specific Chinese characteristics (Knup, p. 9). Although Chinese organizations are usually treated with suspicion by the West，because of their ties to the government, this is actually what allows them to operate under the current Chinese system. In spite of the apparent contradictions and downsides, GONGOs in China possess some advantages in relation to NGOs. Because of their close relationship with the Party, they are more likely to participate in policy making, at the same time giving the government important inputs about the populations that otherwise would not get through. Additionally, they often have more funds than NGOs, since independent fundraising is not allowed, making it hard for the organizations to work, even if they make it to the registration phase (The Economist, 2014). Additionally, GONGOs are usually provided with more and better-trained staff, usually coming from official agencies with specialized fields (Jin, 2007, p. 82). If this was visible in the 1990, when resources were still scarce, it is also relevant now, since NGOs have trouble finding alternative funding because private elites, fearing political or fiscal repercussions are caution regarding non-governmental projects (Ibid., p. 86). In the Chinese case, the distinction between NGOs and GONGOs is not a clear one, since both are subject to some sort of influence by the government.

### Regulations

Following Opening and Reform, the government overlooked the proliferation and expansion of social organizations, which have reached their peak in the late 1990s. However, the Tiananmen incident was interpreted as a possible consequence of the rise of social organizations, leading the Party to tighten legislation via the Regulations for Registration and Management of Social organizations being introduced in October 1989. Over the past 25 years more than 500,000 NGOs have registered in China, and the number is expected to double during the next couple of years (The Economist, 2014). However, due to historical and institutional reasons and to the fact that the registration process is tight, it is difficult to estimate the real number of existing NGOs (Ming & Liu, 2009, p. 12), also because the bureaucratic registration process has led many organizations to operate formally as different legal entities, or even not to be registered at all (Brenner, 2012, p. 134). According to the law the organizations have to be under the supervision of the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Bureau of Civil Affairs, and they must fulfill two requirements in order to be registered: assign a governmental office or institution as a professional supervisor, and make sure that they do not face competition, meaning that there cannot be two organizations advocating the same cause in the same region (Jin, 2007, pp. 83-84). The new system came as a challenge to social organizations as some of them were prevented from functioning or even registering. On one hand, they often are not able to find a 'mother-in-law' (i.e. institution) willing to back them and on the other hand, because they have to re-apply for registration every year, their sponsorship could easily be denied (Ibid., p. 84).

### Public Diplomacy and NGOs

After the definition of public diplomacy got extended, nongovernmental actors have also begun to engage in public diplomacy. According to Ingrid’s classification, there are two different actors in public diplomacy: state actors and non-state actors. NGOs are the non-state actors. Though non-state actors including NGOs are not fully independent from the government, the NGO sector is playing an increasingly important role in public diplomacy in various fields (d'Hooghe, 2007).

In China, there are nearly 350,000 NGOs according to d’Hooghe’s research, and it is impossible for the Chinese government to control all of them. Most of the NGOs in China are not initiated or operated by the government but follow the regulations Authority and required to maintain a cooperative relationship with government. Also they have their own goals and do not fully serve government. To some extent, they are nearly autonomous. Lu Yiyi has made the point that although large-scale Chinese NGOs are not technically independent, in practice they wield considerable autonomy (Lu, 2009, pp. 11-12) This makes NGOs in China different from state actors.

As an important player, NGOs could contribute to public diplomacy in the following means: first of all, NGOs could internationalize themselves, operating projects overseas. Thus they have access to target audience which including foreign public, foreign organizations, even foreign governments. Second of all, NGOs could take a good use of its advantage of expertise, promoting policy making and standard setting. By doing these, NGOs could take part in helping choose which company or organization could get involved in public diplomacy by operating projects or doing business overseas. Last but not the least, NGOs could help building platforms for public to exchange information and ideas. By organizing academic seminars and funding students, academics or other foreign publics to study, visiting, NGOs could contribute public diplomacy by making ideas exchange happen..

### Soft Power and NGOs

In information age and the global village period, to some extent, credibility generates power. Thanks to the development of internet technology and education, large groups of people can be influenced by this power. At the same time, the public is overwhelmed by information, so it is hard for them to know what to focus on and what information should be trusted. Under these circumstances, information from a credible source is crucial to attract publics and persuade them. The one who has credibility has the power to gain soft power. As Nye has written, “credibility is the crucial resource and an important source of soft power” (Nye, 2008, p. 100). Generally speaking, publics mistrust authorities, but compared with governments, NGOs enjoy more trust from the public and enjoy more credibility since they are independent from the government. So to this extent, NGOs could contribute to the gaining of more soft power.

What’s more, good communication is the base to gain soft power. One direction message sending could be easily dismissed as mere propaganda, which will not generate soft power but could in fact reduce it. Just as Nye said, good public diplomacy is a two way street, it is not only talking but also listening (Nye, 2008, p. 103). Most NGOs have specific target audiences and working domains. So NGOs have advantages in mutual communication and that is the reason why they could contribute to gaining soft power.

### Public Diplomacy and Soft Power

Joseph Nye defined Soft Power in 2004 in his book Soft Power The Means to Success in World Politics as “…the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments” (Nye 2004, x). In other words if one country can use its attractiveness and seduction to achieve its goals in the international field rather than traditional hard-power means, then that country uses its soft power.

According to Nye, soft power rests on three major sources: “its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policy (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)” (Nye 2004, 11). Nye also claims “Public diplomacy is an instrument that governments use to mobilize these resources to communicate and attract the public of other countries” (Nye 2008, 95). We need to notice that there is a gap between the sources and the outcomes. Good sources do not always end with good outcomes. And that is why public diplomacy plays an important role in gaining more soft power. Thus we could assume that public diplomacy is used to gain soft power, whether public diplomacy is efficient depends on its contribution to mobilize sources well to gain more soft power and on the barriers it meets with.

## **Communication Theories**

NGOs provide credibility, expertise and networks that governments cannot (Leonard, Stead, & Smewing, Public Diplomacy, 2002, pp. 55-56) and are effective in long-term relationship building, such as building favorable conditions, cultural diplomacy, exchanges and branding (Gilboa, 2008, p. 73). They can influence a country’s Agenda Setting, Framing and Priming, which play a vital role in public diplomacy.

Agenda setting refers to the issues attracting most media attention and being treated by a recipient public as most important. Framing is the media selection, exclusion and emphasis on certain issues to promote one’s own narrative. Priming is influence exerted on media to select the criteria on which something is judged (Ibid., pp. 63-64).

NGOs enjoy more credibility and approachability than state and market actors, which means that they can influence media easier to promote their own narrative. This narrative could be influenced by an NGO’s own objectives such as the successful pressure applied by Global Witness and Human Rights Watch to media and government in the UK and Canada to push for global regulation on diamond trading (Leonard, Stead, & Smewing, Public Diplomacy, 2002, pp. 57-58). These objectives and hoped-for narratives may or may not be the same as those held by the state in an NGO’s home country.

For example, a human rights NGO in a developing country might want to influence foreign media to report negatively on the situation in that country in order to further their cause, but this act potentially damaged the image of that country overseas and against the state’s wishes. They could set the media agenda by consistently releasing information about human rights problems and making foreign media to focus on that issue. They can frame the issue by not reporting on positive developments in the sector and selectively choosing negative cases to report on. Additionally they can prime the media to assess leaders’ performances on a narrow set of criteria.

An environmental NGO from a developing country aim to make their country’s investment abroad more environmentally and socially sustainable, which could share similar public diplomacy goals with their home country’s government. So it could influence foreign media accordingly. They could shift media focus away from a purely negative agenda and promote positive stories. Agenda setting, framing and priming may be consciously fostered through NGOs’ relations with media sources or subconsciously fostered through reportage on their day-to-day work.

# **Analysis**

## **Case Study 1: China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation**

The Chinese government has made great efforts to alleviate poverty in China. Hundreds of projects have been implemented nationally to reduce the number of people living in poverty. The population of extreme poor people decreased 125 million from 1978 to 1985 (Lingzi, 2010). Beijing has faced massive financial difficulties to alleviate poverty in China. In this situation, some overseas foundations and companies wanted to donate to support China’s poverty alleviation efforts. However, according to international convention, NGOs, but not government should receive the donations. Hence, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA) was found in 1989 to receive donations and contribute to the cause of poverty alleviation. Currently, it is under the leadership of the State Council Leading Group of Poverty Alleviation and Development. After 25 years of development, it has become one of the largest and most well-funded NGOs in China (Deng, 2013). According to CFPA’s 2013 annual report, its total income was 2.41 billion Yuan, including 524.6 million in raised funds in 2013; 1.87 billion was spent to help 2.86 million people (China Poverty Alleviation Foudation , 2014).

### The Transformation of CFPA

There was a reform of CFPA in the late 1990s. It transformed from a typical GONGO to a NGO. CFPA was a typical GONGO before the late 1990s. Professor Hong Dayou of Renmin University summarized three reasons why CFPA was a GONGO. Firstly, the government authorized the foundation’s staff appointments. Secondly, the foundation seemed to be assigned responsibility by the state for poverty areas and population, taking care of economic and social development. Thirdly, the foundation’s administration was similar to that of national organs: CFPA received and approved applications, and then allocated money. The local government is the one who carried out and managed projects (Kang, 2001). Besides these, the governmental character of CFPA was easy to be noticed in its chairmen. The first honorary chairman was former Chinese president Li Xiannian, the second honorary chairman was vice president Rong Renyi and the first and second presidents of CFPA were former government officials.

But this role setting limited CFPA’s financial sources, leading to low efficiency and insufficient capacity to meet the expectations of people living in poverty. So in 1996, the foundation decided to undertake reform, it applied to cancel the authorized staff system (*shiye bianzhi*) and adopted a more professional system of management. After the reform, CFPA claims that it is now a pure NGO. In order to prove this new identity, Wang Xing, the general secretary said, “Now we enjoy independent financial power, personnel appointment and removal rights and the most important thing is that we don’t use administration rights to raise funds” (Lingzi, 2010).

As mentioned before, there is not internationally agreed definition of GONGO, and CFPA still has close cooperation and connections with authorities, hence, internationally, CFPA is still treated as GONGO sometimes. But it does not change the fact that CFPA is taking the responsibility of Public diplomacy. Due to the history of being GONGO, compared with other Chinese NGOs, it tends to share more common goals and interests with government. For instance, when CFPA describe the background of its internationalization projects’ background on its official website, it says that the China’s economy globalization and increasing overseas investment have met huge challenges, and the major reason is the image of the nation and companies have not transformed. (CFPA, 2015) It implies that CFPA in order to help China deal with the challenge, CFPA is willing to contribute to improving the image of the China and Chinese companies.

### Internationalization Strategy of CFPA

In 2007, CFPA decided to adopt an internationalization Strategy, aiming at going out and operating projects overseas to become an international foundation (Deng, 2013). In 2009, CFPA established the “International Development Project Department”, taking care of international aid and development projects.

Compared with other NGOs in China, CFPA has relatively broad engagement with other countries. Its international projects have reached Asia, Africa and America. The following map illustrates nations that CFPA has engaged with. Until June 2012, CFPA raised 63 million Yuan for international projects (CFPA, 2013).

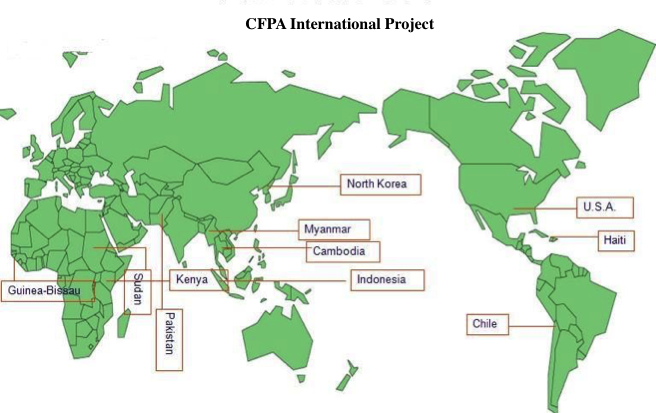


Chart 3: the Map of CFPA International Projects Locations (Source: CFPA official website[[1]](#footnote-1))

There are two major means of CFPA to assist other countries. One is donating money and material after disasters; another is operating projects in developing countries. CFPA has assisted some countries after crisis and started a few overseas projects, even before it adopted the internationalization strategy, (see chart 2). It is not hard to find out that a large portion of international project funding was spent on direct humanitarian aids.

**China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation Overseas Aid till 2011**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Time | Project | Value (10thousand RMB) |
| 2005.01 | Indonesia Tsunami aid | 4400 |
| 2005.1 | Pakistan earthquake aid | 30 |
| 2010.07 | Guinea poverty mother rescue project | 400 |
| 2008.05 | Myanmar Hurricane aid | 33 |
| 2010.01 | Haiti Earthquake aid | 256.6 |
| 2010.03 | Chile Earthquake aid | 40.5 |
| 2010.03 | Sudan Medical aid project | 38.8 |
| 2010.09 | Pakistan Flood | 0.08 |
| 2010.04 | Sudan NGO Training project | 56 |
| 2011.03 | Japan Tsunami aid | 11.2 |
| 2011.06 | Sudan Hospital Project | 718.2 |
| 2011.06 | Guinea poverty mother rescue project | 350 |
| 2011.06 | Aid the horn of Africa project | 10 |
| 2011.12 | Khartoum Orphan school project | 12 |
| Total |  | 6345.18 |

Chart 4: China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation Overseas Aid till 2011 (Source: CFPA website[[2]](#footnote-2))

According to the chart, from 2005 to 2012, CFPA has raising 5.5 million RMB for direct humanitarian aids. Though CFPA also donate money to Japan after Tsunami in 2011, most of the humanitarian aids or the direct aids are for developing countries, which is same with China’s public diplomacy target areas. To some extent, humanitarian aids are much easier and efficient to adopt. On one hand, since China is still a developing country, whether should China donate large amount of money overseas is still under discussion, but humanitarian aids is easier accepted domestically. One the other hand, direct humanitarian aids meet target publics’ need after disaster, which might leads to better desirable outcome for public diplomacy.

Direct aid from NGOs is different from government aid. First of all, the main motivations are different. Government aid places more emphasis on economic and political motivations, while the motivations behind NGO aid are more likely to be humanitarian. Moreover, sources of funds are different, free aid and low interest loans given by government are from national finances, but NGOs’ aid funds are from public donations. Moreover, recipients are different. The recipients of government aid are usually governments or financial organs, however the recipients of NGOs’ aid are mostly local NGOs; to some extent, the aid could be used more efficiently (Lai, 2013). So aid from CFPA comes without political intentions and targets publics but not governments. It could be considered as an instrument of Public Diplomacy, aimed at showing China trying to be a responsible nation.

CFPA has done many direct aids to developing countries, but it still has disadvantages. On one hand, it is lack of transparency. There is no information about the fund source and follow up of those funds, which also cause difficulties to measure whether aids are efficient. One the other hand, there is no standard to follow. From the chart, we could find that CFPA only donated 800 RMB to Pakistan after flood, but it donated 44 million RMB to Indonesia after Tsunami. If CFPA could not provide the standard or acceptable reasons for the huge difference, it might cause the opposite result, damaging the image of CFPA or even the nation.

Besides direct donation, another major way is to operate international projects, such as build up facilities instead of giving money or goods, to provide scholarship for students, etc. One milestone of CFPA’s internalization is assisting Sudan to build Abu Ushar friendship hospital, which is the first project that CFPA send staff overseas for a long-term project. (CFPA , 2011) This project is the China Foreign Ministry Model Project in 2011, which means it presents the highest level of Chinese NGOs international cooperation.

CFPA are running projects in Cambodia and Myanmar. In cooperation with the UN World Food Program (UNWFP) and the Tencent Foundation, CFPA raised money online in order to provide food for hungry children in September 2011. 2.47 million Yuan was raised. Part of it was used in the Cambodia program to provide breakfast for children from extremely poor families. CFPA and UNWFP are not only providing the food, but also training the local recipients to cook and promoting this program to others. This project aims at children from poor families, who will be the future important public.

In Myanmar, after field research of Myanmar college students’ study conditions, CFPA contacted the China-Myanmar Friendship institution and established the “Bob Fund” to assist college students who cannot afford to continue study (CFPA, 2014). This is also a project aimed at the foreign public. In this project, CFPA targets highly educated groups who might be the future public opinion leaders. Providing funds to support them finish their studies is an easy way to cultivate the appreciation of not only CFPA, but also China. Though CFPA might not aim at contributing to this specifically, it contributes to forming a good image of China objectively. In the hierarchy impact of Public Diplomacy, these two projects will reach the second and third level, increasing people’s appreciation and engaging local people with the donor country.

Among all these projects CFPA has done overseas, one type of projects deserve more attention, it is the capacity building project. Beside normal project, CFPA also hold study seminar for African NGOs’ leaders to broadcast the China’s successful experience. (CFPA, 2013) From the public diplomacy lens, this type of project is an accurate communication action. It is not only because it target at organizations instead of, traditional target, individuals, but also because it targets at NGOs management level staffs that are part of public opinion leaders. They could contribute to sending messages to local people in more acceptable ways, which will increase the effectiveness of Public diplomacy.

According to the background introduction of CFPA internationalization strategy on its official website, there are three major reasons why CFPA adopted an internationalization strategy. Firstly, China’s economic development and global expansion faces challenges due to Chinese companies’ lack of capacity and a negative image of China abroad. Thus, Chinese NGOs should go out and facilitate a better environment for China’s economic development and expansion. Second, it is the world’s requirement that China should take more responsibility for humanitarian aid, environmental protection and poverty alleviation in the international community. Thirdly, NGOs could achieve better results than government and companies since NGOs like CFPA have more experience and do not cause political suspicion due to their non-government character (China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation, 2011). In other words, the internationalization is not only for the development of NGOs, but also for national interests.

It is quite interesting that CFPA claims that it is a “pure” non-governmental organization while it claims that its international projects are in the national interest. We could assume that Chinese NGOs adopt internationalization strategies not only because of their own preferences and the need of other developing countries, but also because it is the requirements of Chinese international companies and governments. In other words, the motivations of operating projects overseas are both humanitarian and self-serving.

We also need to notice that in order to realize the internationalization of Chinese NGOs, policy support from the government and financial support from companies are also crucial. In 2000, Beijing adopted a “going out” strategy to encourage Chinese companies set up branches overseas and reach the overseas market. Moreover, the government encourages NGOs and other organization to work on the humanitarian and crisis aid (Lai, 2013)

### Challenges of CFPA

When it comes to public diplomacy, CFPA play a relatively active role in promoting China’s public diplomacy in developing areas. It has some achievements especially the Abu Ushar friendship hospital win the public diplomacy prize of China Foreign Ministry. However it still faces many challenges, not only from the inside but also from the outside.

First of all, the international projects are lacking of the support of laws or regulation, which leads to lack of legitimacy. According to the international convention, the International Non-government organizations need to follow the nation’s laws. However, so far, there is no law or regulation for NGOs to follow to operate overseas projects. If NGOs want to run projects in other countries, they need to apply for the special permission, which is definitely not good for Chinese NGOs to promote China’s public diplomacy. Though former GONGO such as CFPA could get the permission to run projects overseas, without standard rules, this kind of activity still cost a lot of time and labor, which have negative effects on promoting China’s public diplomacy.

Moreover, resources for operating overseas projects are limited. Compared with domestic projects, international projects are still facing the short of resource. On one hand, there is not enough funding for international projects compared with domestic projects. There is no governmental fund for CFPA to operate international projects and there are only limited number of Chinese companies want to donate money or cooperate international projects with CFPA. Cooperation with Chinese companies that have overseas business just started, the connection is not strong, and most of international Chinese companies do not have the awareness. Also, since there are still a lot of works to do in poverty alleviation inside of China, Chinese Public do not have strong willingness to spend limited funding to other countries. On the other hand, there is a shortage of capable labor.

Last but not the least, there is not enough experience of run international projects. Since it is still in the primary stage，when it comes to running international programs, CFPA still have a huge gap with other mature INGOs.

### Conclusion

CFPA’s case is quite interesting because of the transformation of its identity. It used to be similar to government organs, then experienced a system reform before then adopting an international strategy, working on facilitating economic expansion and development and forming a positive image of China overseas. The transformation might be one of the reasons why it still shares national goals and aims at pursuing national interests. To some extent, CFPA is a non- state actor in public diplomacy but under the leadership of the state

CFPA has various projects covering domains such as humanitarian aid, education, medical assistance and living standard improving. Besides the two projects we mentioned before, CFPA has a hospital building program and Mother Children safety program in Sudan and an African NGO Poverty Alleviation Training program (CFPA, 2013). In these projects, CFPA exports mature programs and experience to developing countries and explore cooperation with International NGOs and local NGOs, which expands the public diplomacy audience from local people to NGOs and international NGOs. Differing from government aid programs, CFPA has a narrow target audience such as potential future public opinion leaders, disadvantaged groups, and NGOs, which may lead to better communication influence. CFPA takes a bottom-up approach in public diplomacy by emphasizing on the ground publics. CFPA contributes to the public diplomacy in China’s public diplomacy in Asia, since it helps contribute to portraying China as a responsible neighbor in Asia, which chimes with the Chinese state’s own public diplomacy goals.

However, it needs to be noted that although CFPA has carried out many projects in developing areas, it remains difficult to measure their influence. As Joseph Nye has written, there are gaps between resources and power (Nye, 2008). We cannot assume that because CFPA has many resources overseas due to the projects it has done, that it will definitely lead to a positive image of China and promote China’s soft power in this area. What’s more, it is hard to measure the influence of these actions. Most of the reports of these actions are from the CFPA official website and Chinese “official” media and embassies’ websites. There is little news from the local areas. But doing this kind of international aid and development program is at least showing attitude and intention that CFPA wants to help and China wants to take responsibility in the international community.

## **Case Study 2: Global Environmental Institute**

The Global Environmental Institute (GEI) (*Guoji Huanqiu Yanjiu Suo*) is a Chinese non-profit organization founded in 2004 via funding from the US foundation Blue Moon Fund. It is a relatively mature and big NGO in China, to some extent, it presents the high level development of Chinese NGOs. GEI’s mission statement is, “to use market mechanisms and make policy recommendations to solve environmental problems, working towards mutual social, environmental and economic benefits.” (GEI, Global Environmental Institute 2013 Annual Report, 2013, p. 2)

GEI works with state, market and civil society actors on environmental issues within China, and focusing on build bridge among them. Additionally, GEI was the first Chinese NGO to operate abroad, working in Laos and Myanmar to make Chinese overseas investment more environmentally and socially sustainable. It contributes to China’s public diplomacy in developing areas especially Southeast Asia by promoting modern sustainable development concept.

The head of the organization is Jin Jiaman, a Chinese environmental expert with years of experience in Chinese government agencies, as well as in the NGO sector. Jin’s desire to work more directly and effectively on critical environmental issues led her to become involved with GEI (Zhang & Tsang, 2014) Though GEI is an NGO rather than a GONGO, Jin’s connections and experience working with government have meant that the organization is more credible and trustworthy in the eyes of Chinese officials.

### GEI’s Engagement in Developing Countries

GEI’s engagement in developing areas can help China’s public diplomacy in two main ways. Firstly it can help create more environmentally friendly Chinese investment overseas by improving the culture and behavior of Chinese firms and government. China’s environmental record has been identified by d’Hooghe as one of its key public diplomacy liabilities (d'Hooghe, 2007, p. 13). Education, training and cooperation with Chinese state and market actors can have long-term positive effects on China’s policies and actions at home and abroad.

Secondly, by cooperating with state, market and societal actors in recipient countries, GEI provides an approachable Chinese face to improve the image of a country by making it internationally accepted and make the actions of Chinese firms and government not too aggressive. (Ibid., p. 26). GEI’s unique position as an internationally minded Chinese NGO means it can act as a bridge, facilitating understanding among state, market and societal stakeholders involved in Chinese overseas investment.

China’s increasing investment abroad, especially with developing countries, is necessary for its continuing economic development and prosperity. Under the “Going Global” strategy, China’s FDI has expanded since 2001 to 178 countries and is now worth USD 68.8 billion (GEI, Environmental and Social Challenges of China's Going Global (Executive Summary), 2013, p. 1). Despite economic benefits, China’s 2,300 directly invested companies in South-East Asia have had a negative impact on local enterprises, generally have poor safety and sanitation standards, which leads to labor disputes and have damaged local environments (Ibid., p. 4). This has fostered a negative image of China’s investment abroad, both for publics in recipient nations and in international media discourse.

One of the major goals of China’s public diplomacy is to be seen as a favorable and responsible economic partner (d'Hooghe, 2007). Certainly China’s current level of investment in developing countries means that it is viewed favorably by recipient nation governments, but to be seen as responsible by foreign publics, as well as by media, a change is needed.

The Chinese state recognizes its image problem abroad and has worked hard to correct it through public diplomacy in the form of cultural and student exchanges, Confucius institutes, media, development aid and business deals (Ibid., p. 27). GEI can help the state use these public diplomacy tools more efficiently to provide mutual benefits. For example, GEI has used its expertise to provide an environmental curriculum for current and future Chinese leaders at the Central Party School in Beijing (Zhang & Tsang). In this way, the expertise of civil society actors can influence the future actions of the state, both in terms of state operations abroad and regulating the actions of Chinese firms.

GEI shares similar objectives to the Chinese state, “to contribute to the sustainability (both financial and environmental) of the Going Global Strategy and Chinese overseas investment in general” (GEI, Environmental and Social Challenges of China's Going Global (Executive Summary), 2013). After international criticism of China over timber imports from South-East Asia, GEI worked with the State Forestry Administration to publish new guidelines on the issue. GEI also worked with the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Environmental Protection to find ways to regulate the behavior of firms and reduce investment risks (Liu Q. , 2014). The Chinese state realizes that is in their best interests to work more closely with GEI as the two actors share objectives and GEI’s expertise can help public diplomacy goals become realized.

Besides the engagement with state players discussed before, GEI also has close cooperation non-state players. GEI influences the behavior of Chinese firms abroad by working with government to create a better regulatory environment for foreign investment. Additionally, global civil society actors with different founding principles and philosophies also want to positively influence the behavior of Chinese firms abroad. For instance, Earth Rights International, an INGO, aims to cooperate with Chinese media to encourage them to report on the negative news of Chinese energy projects abroad. This will raise awareness within China and pressure Chinese firms to be more accountable and responsible to affected communities and environments (Liu C. , 2014).

As Joseph Nye has written, good public diplomacy is a two-way street that involves not only talking but also listening (Nye, 2008, p. 103). Top-down models of diplomacy that view foreign publics as passive recipients have been proved unsuccessful whereas two-way communication models that engage civil society groups at home and abroad in policy consultation have had some success (Gilboa, 2008, p. 71). Chinese public diplomacy has traditionally followed the top-down model and emphasized on governmental level while neglecting grass-roots engagement (Wang Y. , 2008, p. 261). One of the major benefits of GEI to China’s public diplomacy push is that it is a credible member of global civil society and can therefore engage in communication with a wide range of actors, but one that also shares broadly similar goals to the Chinese state.

Therefore the workshops that GEI has held with state, market and civil society actors in Myanmar and China could be incredibly beneficial in fostering a positive image of China. In September 2013 GEI held a workshop in Myanmar on “Renewable Energy technology and Carbon Finance” with over 60 participants from government, local NGOs and renewable energy companies (GEI, Global Environmental Institute 2013 Annual Report, 2013, p. 32). In the same month, they hosted a workshop in Hangzhou, China on “Exploring Sustainable Methods of Rice Cultivation and Value Chain Development” in which 12 of the 38 participants came from Myanmar (Ibid.). NGOs’ engagement therefore goes beyond traditional State-State or Business-State ties and allows accordingly for a broader cultivation of links between nations, which can increase mutual understanding and trust.

GEI has also acted as a bridge between Chinese and foreign interests in achieving a memorandum of cooperation in 2010 among themselves, the Nam Ngum 5 Power Company (Laos) and Sinohydro (Kong, 2012). The aim of the memorandum was to promote biogas technology in Ban Chim Village, meet energy demands, improve villagers’ standard of living, reduce deforestation and protect forest ecosystems. These aims of NGO’s are most effective on building a long-term relationships and favorable conditions by public diplomacy (Gilboa, p. 73), in contrast to the short-termism of Chinese firms, especially SMEs. SMEs make up 50.2% of China’s total overseas investment, are usually limited companies so not obliged to make company information public and “do not have the same incentive as state-owned enterprises to present a good image of China to the world” (Meng, 2010). In 2001, the Chinese government has pushed for businesses to invest overseas without also encouraging other actors to engage (Liu Q. , 2014). The work of GEI corrects this imbalance and allows for more sustainable, long-term partnerships that foster mutual trust and help build an image of a more responsible China.

### Experience and Challenges of GEI

As one of the highest level NGOs in China, GEI have widely engagement in developing areas, especially in Southeast Asia countries and made some achievements. Some experience could be summarized to help other Chinese NGOs to improve their activities. One of them is the cooperation with International Non-government Organizations. Developed International NGOs have relatively better network and resources, by cooperating with them, on one hand, is a good chance to learn advanced experience, on the other hand, could reduce the uncertainty of operating aboard projects. Compared with other Chinese NGOs, GEI have close cooperation with INGOs. At the beginning phase, as we mentioned before, GEI was fund by US foundation Blue Moon Fund. According to the *Annual Report of GEI 2011*, 97% percent of funding is from International Foundation, such as Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, etc. (GEI, 2011) Another point, which deserves extra attention, is its cooperation with companies and authorities. By analyzing its project abroad, it is easy to find that most of its projects cooperated with overseas Chinese companies, and the project located in areas where attract a lot of Chinese investment yet the environment is fragile. By assisting Chinese companies to improve the company social responsibility there, it contributes to building the positive image of China. Additionally, GEI have relatively close cooperation with authority, which facilitates its actions both domestically and internationally. In China, it assists Chinese government to do research and educate Chinese companies, which win the development space for itself inside of China. Internationally, it cooperated with the local government, such as in Sri Lanka Biogas and Organic Farming Project, it cooperated with the Sir Lanka government and even raise fund from local government. Last but not the least, GEI focuses on promoting continuous projects, instead of simply direct donation. Its Biogas and Organic Farming Project in Sri Lanka is a good example to present the continuous concept. The project itself is an environmental friendly and continuous, and also GEI is not only focusing on finishing it, but also on training the local to learn how to run this kind of projects by themselves. By helping building up the “inside” strength, GEI shows its good will, which is good for responsible image of China.

There are three main reasons why GEI’s impact on China’s public diplomacy may not be particularly strong. Firstly, as *China Development Brief*’s Fu Tao points out, “with limited resources, energy, vision and opportunity, only a small number of [NGOs] can currently get involved in [working abroad]” (Meng, 2010). Therefore though GEI’s work is commendable and important, it appears to be the exception rather than the norm. However, GEI’s program of supporting and incubating new environmental NGOs (Zhang & Tsang) may lead this situation to change in the future. Secondly, there remains a limited awareness of environmental and social responsibility among Chinese firms, with GEI a lone voice in a comparatively weak NGO sector unable to exert strong influence (Kong, 2012). Thirdly, the more responsible foreign investment that GEI can create is just one aspect of public diplomacy. For China to make significant soft power gains in South-East Asia, it also needs to focus on better transmitting its culture, political values and foreign policy.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, GEI can help China make significant public diplomacy gains in developing countries mainly in South-East Asia. GEI is credible in the eyes of foreign publics, global civil society and the Chinese state. They engage with a broad range of state, market and civil society actors, build long-term relationships and positive environments and promote responsible, sustainable win-win Chinese investment. GEI can also help set global agendas and share its expertise with other Chinese actors. On the negative side, it is currently an exception rather than a norm and better Chinese public diplomacy needs a stronger role for non-state actors.

## **Case Study 3: The Nation Conservancy**

The Nature Conservancy is an American Charitable environmental organization, funded in 1951, headquartered in Arlington, Virginia. As an international non-government organization, The nature Conservancy now works in not only 50 states in US, but also in more than 35 countries, operating projects to protect more than 119 million acres of land and thousands of miles of rivers worldwide. Beside these, it also has more than 100 marine conservation projects globally. (The Nature Conservancy, 2015). It aims at protecting ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people.

Compared with relatively new Chinese NGOs, The nature Conservancy has mature concept and mode of operation. It wins positive reputation globally. It was named as “Top-Rated Charity ” by the American Institute of Philanthropy, and has been named one of the World’s Most Ethical Companies for 2013 by the Ethisphere Institute. It has more than 1 million members worldwide, which could also prove that TNC’s positive image and its influence globally（Ibid.）.

As we talked before, though TNC is a non-government organization, to some extent, it still share the same goal with the government in public diplomacy lens. By operating projects overseas, it contributes to connecting overseas publics to US. There is no clear evidence that one of TNC’s goals is to promote public diplomacy of US, but as a by-product, it builds up connections between US and China in non-governmental level, could been seen as public diplomacy activities. Thus, a case study of it is quite necessary, since it could help understand how overseas NGOs contribute to public diplomacy. And it might provide Chinese NGOs some useful experience.

### TNC’s Engagement abroad- taking China as example

TNC was invited into China in 1998, it run various nature conservancy projects inside China. By doing this, it has the chance to contacts with local publics, the government and other organizations. Additionally, it contributes to assisting Chinese government and other organization doing nature conservancy projects. Though promoting public diplomacy might not be one of the original goals of TNC, but as Professor Cai Tuo said, by operating project in American ways, NGOs are actually exporting American values and way of thinking and doing things and reflect the interest orientation of US. (Cai, 2004)

As we mentioned before, TNC actively cooperates with governments and other organizations. After entered China by invitation, TNC worked with Yunnan Government, drawing *the plan of Northwest of Yunan Province conservancy and development* [[3]](#footnote-3)，trying to combine nature conservancy with the economy development. Then followed TNC tradition, established Pudacuo, Meili Snow Mountain and Laojunshan, National Parks with local governments. (The Nature Conservancy, 2015) Those national parks are the first national parks of China, which means TNC helped China set a new model to protect the environment.

TNC also have cooperation with Chinese companies, helping them improve their company social responsibility. For instance, in order to deal with the environmental problems caused by the Three Gorges, TNC introduced the “water pulse” concept to China Three Gorges Corporation，cooperates with China Three Gorges Corporates to protect wild fish’s survive. Since there is increasing number of Chinese companies expend their business overseas, TNC also operates a project called No Boundary Protection, aiming at helping Chinese company bear continuous development in mind. Beside these, it also works with local NGOs to process nature conservancy project. For example in Inner Mongolia, TNC works with Laoniu Foundation to operate the ecological restoration project. By doing these project with local governments, Chinese companies and NGOs, TNC is processing public diplomacy objectively. By doing projects toward nature conservancy, it is also sending message to the local individuals that TNC or even US care about the environment and the development of those areas, and they are taking responsibility.

Besides operating projects with state players or non-state players, TNC also did some research projects to assisting Chinese government and other organizations to operate nature conservancy project. Back in 2006, worked with ministry of Environment Protection, TNC started the “Blue Print” project (China Biology Diversity Protection Long-range Plan[[4]](#footnote-4)), using CbD tool, TNC took three years to define the top priority areas to protect concerning the biology diversity. It also got involved in policy-making regarding protection of those areas. (The Nature Conservancy, 2015)

### Organization Strategy of TNC

As a premise to play a better role in public diplomacy, NGOs need to maintain themselves in a good condition, or at least survive. As an NGO with more than 400 offices in 35 countries, it is vital to have an efficient organization Strategy to guarantee not only the consistency inside the organization, but also the flexible of each office and the quality of projects. In the past decades, TNC has followed a few principles to maintain its development.

Firstly, TNC’s projects based on scientific principles. Third of TNC’s staffs are scientists and researchers of environment and species diversity domains. They play an important role in increasing TNC’s expertise and its authority. Benefit from professional teams, TNC enjoys more trust from publics and also the government, which is essential in public diplomacy. Besides its expert teams, TNC also has scientific tools to process its projects, Conservation by Design (CbD), Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation (OPPC), Eco-regional Assessment (ERA) and Conservation Action Plan are actively applied in TNC’s projects. (The Nature Conservancy, 2012) These scientific tools guarantee the success of its projects, which make TNC more reliable and trustworthy in communication with local publics.

Secondly, TNC has obeyed the “no antagonistic rule”. In every country and community, TNC tries to maintain good relationship with local government, other NGOs and publics. In a seminar of Renmin University, the chief representative MA Jian also summarized “no antagonistic rule” as one of the major rules TNC China has followed. (Renmin University Environment Department, 2015) We could take TNC China as an example to illustrate the no antagonistic rule. TNC was invited into China in 1998, after it entered China, and become one of the NGOs that closely with Chinese governments. In an interview, Ma Jian said, “TNC China’s experience is that in fact, Chinese government has a quite open mind, and the no antagonistic rule is suitable for TNC’s further development in China. And TNC’s professional teams could assist Chinese government to address some problems that they want to focus on. ” (Zhang Z. , 2014) Hence, we could presume that in order to have further development in different countries, TNC adopts a peaceful approach, trying to cooperate with local authorities, and meet their need to win growing space and get the chance to contact with locals.

Thirdly, TNC pays attention to not only internationalization, but also and localization. Currently, TNC has projects in more than 30 countries and all 50 states of US. There is no doubt that TNC have become an international non-government organization. While expanding internationally, TNC emphasizes on localization, too. Besides hiring the local staff to make the organization more local, TNC is good at localize through its local partner. During the interview, Ma Jian said, “You cannot copy and paste the experience, but you could learn from other’s failure. What other could learn from TNC is trust their local partners” (Ma, 2015)

Last but not the least, TNC adopts business method in operating NGO. In the interview, when Ma was asked what the major difference is between TNC and other Environmental NGOs, Ma Jian’s answer was the business mode. (Ma, 2015) Due to its business mode, the income of TNC is diverse, too. Diverse income makes the source of funding stable. It includes the donation and the income of gift selling, investment and land selling. Compared with Chinese NGOs, TNC’s land investment is quite special. Back in 1955, through land purchase, TNC fund the land conservancy foundation. They major idea is to purchase or rent land to protect then sell it use the income to invest land again. By doing this, TNC could have stable source of funding, and they could make sure that all the projects are processed as their will.

All the rules stated above that TNC follows guarantee the quality of TNC’s projects and help TNC win good reputation abroad. By doing outstanding projects, TNC takes its responsibility in public diplomacy and achieve better outcome.

### Conclusion

As an American INGO, TNC have made outstanding public diplomacy gain in China, which could be seen as a good example for Chinese NGOs, helping them play better role in public diplomacy in developing countries. By advanced organization strategy, especially the business model and no antagonistic rule and science based methods, TNC guarantees the good quality projects and win the good reputation not only inside China, but also internationally. And those projects and its professional teams, on one hand increased the credibility of TNC, on the other hand, provide chances for TNC to contact with governments, companies, other organizations and individuals, which are all the public diplomacy target. It objectively promotes US public diplomacy.

# **Conclusion**

The model of Chinese engagement abroad after the Going Out strategy begun has seen an overemphasis on market forces and a small role for civil society organizations. This model has begun to change and needs to continue to do so. Not only can greater engagement from NGOs create tangible economic benefits for Chinese firms overseas and provide a stable external environment for continuous growth; NGOs like GEI and CFPA can also build long-term relationships with recipient publics to create a more positive image of China.

GEI has shared its expertise with state and market actors to increase their environmental and social responsibility and awareness with marked success. CFPA’s focus is on humanitarian aid, living standards, education and medical assistance as opposed to engagement with market forces. However, CFPA can also have a positive influence on images of China abroad through direct contact with local people, local NGOs and future public opinion leaders.

The expansion of Public sphere and the failure of both government and market have led to the development of NGOs in China, which help fill gaps the state or market is unable to. Despite this, the Chinese government retains an uneasy relationship with social organizations. NGO-led public diplomacy has previously attempted to force pro-democracy reforms on China through external pressure (Gilboa, 2008, pp. 59-60). Additionally NGOs have attempted to sabotage China’s state-led high-profile public diplomacy events, such as the Olympic torch relay in the run-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games (Finlay & Xin, 2010, p. 879).

However, GEI and CFPA actually share similar objectives to the Chinese state and greater cooperation with these organizations. Independent social organizations, even those with US funding like GEI, can serve the foreign policy aims of the Chinese state and contribute to a gain in soft power. It is not hard to draw a conclusion the reason why NGOs are doing projects overseas is not only because their own development and their mission, but also because that is the need of the nation, it is national interest. No matter whether they have noticed that they are playing an essential role in public diplomacy, fighting for national interests, they are doing it, which means that they might not operate their projects for public diplomacy, but their activities are promoting public diplomacy as by product. Instead of directly political and economic outcome, NGOs have more influence on Soft power gaining. In other word, the motivation of Chinese NGOs operating abroad is a combination of self-need of development, the humanitarian mission and the Chinese national interest.

Soft power involves the ability to achieve goals via attraction as opposed to hard power, which achieves goals via military or economic coercion. Unlike state actors, NGOs possess soft power (Gilboa, 2008, p. 61) but can be more effective than state actors at using public diplomacy to gain it. GEI and CFPA’s interaction with state and market actors and ground-level engagement with foreign actors helps fulfil the national public diplomacy goals of portraying China as hard-working, reliable, responsible and worthy of respect, something state-led public diplomacy has struggled to do. However, these two organizations are exceptions rather than the rule. Finding examples of NGO engagement abroad has been a challenge. For Chinese NGOs to meaningfully contribute to Chinese public diplomacy abroad on a national rather than local level, many more need to be involved.

Additionally, though as non-state public diplomacy players, Chinese NGOs have some achievements in developing countries, we still need to notice that both the development of NGO and its internationalization process and Chinese public diplomacy are still in the beginning level, compared with mature INGOs such as TNC and western countries. For NGOs, the inside structure building, the organization strategy are still need to be refined to guarantee the finish and quality of their projects which might influence their performance regarding to public diplomacy. For Chinese government, forming a suitable environment for the development of NGOs and even the public sphere is quite important.

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