

**Xueyong Zhan**

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

**Shui-Yan Tang**

University of Southern California

## Understanding the Implications of Government Ties for Nonprofit Operations and Functions

**Abstract:** *This research explores the implications of nonprofit leaders' government ties for nonprofit operations and functions. Based on 81 survey questionnaires completed by civic environmental NGOs (eNGOs) in China and interviews with executives from 33 eNGOs, the authors examine the personal backgrounds of eNGO leaders and find that most Chinese civic eNGOs are connected with the government in one or more of three ways: political ties, service organization ties, or personal ties. Personal ties, or good guanxi with government officials, are positively associated with a higher level of funding stability and a more developed management system. Environmental NGOs with leaders who are current government officials or legislative body members are more likely to be engaged in policy advocacy. Service organization ties facilitate eNGOs' efforts to be engaged in legal services and to scale up to work on environmental issues at the national level. Moreover, an eNGO's policy advocacy engagement is associated with its ties with the nonprofit community.*

### Practitioner Points

- Most leaders of civic environmental nongovernmental organizations (eNGOs) in China are connected with the authoritarian government in one or more of three ways: political ties, service organization ties, or personal ties.
- Government ties of nonprofit leaders have aided the survival and development of civic NGOs in China's restrictive political environment.
- Government ties may create both opportunities and constraints for nonprofits' organizational operations and their functions in policy advocacy and service provision.
- Connections with other NGOs can help environmental NGOs engage in politically sensitive activities and generate tangible policy impacts.
- If NGOs in China can build a stronger nonprofit network and civic community, they may work together to change the nature of government–nonprofit relations in China.

Numerous models have been developed for understanding government–nonprofit relations in Western democratic societies, usually assuming a relatively independent nonprofit sector and a collaborative relationship between government and nonprofits (Lecy and Van Slyke 2013; Suárez 2011). Compared with their counterparts in the West, nonprofits and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the developing world may face fundamentally different institutional contexts in terms of political, economic, and social parameters (Kim and Kim 2015; Ma 2002). In China, for example, the authoritarian government used to restrict nonprofit organizations and civil society activities that might challenge the party-state regime; however, market-oriented economic reforms over the past three decades have triggered remarkable economic growth and made Chinese society more pluralistic. With the emergence of a large middle class and a vibrant civil society, public policy

and administration in China in recent years have been reshaped by the rise of NGOs in numerous policy fields (Hsu 2010; Kang and Han 2008; Michelson 2007; Teets 2009). On the one hand, the dominant role of government in public policy and management has been challenged by many civic NGOs with divergent preferences on many policy issues (Zhan and Tang 2013). On the other hand, the Chinese government has begun to collaborate with NGOs to deliver public services or even to seek support from civil society in formulating and implementing public policies (Jing and Gong 2012). A notable example is the development of environmental nongovernmental organizations (eNGOs), which have played an increasingly visible role in China's environmental governance by providing environmental education programs, promoting pollution information disclosure, influencing environmental policy making and implementation, and, more recently, supporting local environmental

**Xueyong Zhan** is assistant professor in the Department of Management and Marketing, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong. He received his PhD from the Price School of Public Policy at the University of Southern California. His research examines environmental policy implementation, environmental nongovernmental organizations, and public management. His recent work has been published in *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *Policy Studies Journal*, *Public Administration*, and *Public Administration Review*.

**E-mail:** xueyong.zhan@polyu.edu.hk

**Shui-Yan Tang** is the Frances R. and John J. Duggan Professor of Public Administration in the Price School of Public Policy at the University of Southern California. His research focuses on institutional analysis and design, common-pool resource governance, and collaborative governance. He is author of *Ten Principles for a Rule-Ordered Society: Enhancing China's Governing Capacity* (China Economic Publishing House, 2012) and *Institutions, Regulatory Styles, Society, and Environmental Governance in China* (with Carlos Lo; Routledge, 2014). He is a fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration.

**E-mail:** stang@usc.edu

*Public Administration Review*, Vol. 76, Iss. 4, pp. 589–600. © 2016 by The American Society for Public Administration. DOI: 10.1111/puar.12515.

movements against polluting sources (Ho 2001; Ho and Edmonds 2007; Johnson 2010; Martens 2006; Mol and Carter 2006; Ru and Ortolano 2009; Schwartz 2004; Tang and Zhan 2008; Yang 2005).

The development of NGOs in China and other authoritarian countries has raised many intriguing questions about government–nonprofit relations among students of public administration and nonprofit studies. The translation of Western models of government–nonprofit relations to these contexts, however, may be problematic if we do not have a good understanding of the organizational antecedents and institutional context of nonprofit development in these countries. In China, for example, the literature suggests that NGOs originated from two major sources. One source relates to the broader administrative reform undertaken during the past three decades, in which, as part of an effort to downsize the government bureaucracy, many government entities established quasi-public entities called service organizations to deliver public services (Tang and Lo 2009). Many of these service organizations—such as those involved in environmental protection, health care, higher education, scientific research, and other social services—are supported by a combination of government funding and income-generating activities. To further streamline the government bureaucracy, some of these service organizations have been converted to either for-profit enterprises or government-organized NGOs (Tang and Lo 2009). As a result, the leaders and executives of these government-initiated enterprises and NGOs are former government officials. Although not formally part of the government, these leaders and executives continue to maintain close ties to it. As a result of such ties—“political capital,” to use Nee and Opper’s (2010) term—these NGO leaders have preferential access to government funding and philanthropic donations, contracts, and sometimes policy-making processes related to their particular service areas (Johnson and Ni 2015; Zhan and Tang 2013). Some authors have indeed complained that many government-initiated NGOs in China have become recipients of major international funding and acted more like government agencies than typical NGOs in the West (Tang and Zhan 2008).

Some civic NGOs did originate from the grassroots; in such fields as environmental protection, labor protection, women’s rights, and HIV/AIDS prevention, most NGOs are initiated by private individuals, sometimes with support from international foundations (Kaufman 2011; Spires 2011b; Tang and Zhan 2008). Compared with government-organized NGOs, civic NGOs in China are more similar to NGOs in Western societies. Although many executives of these NGOs are not former government officials, most of them are social elites who have strong ties to the government (Ho 2001, 2007; Ru and Ortolano 2009; Tang and Zhan 2008). Thus, unlike their counterparts in the United States and other developed countries, who are likely to have professional backgrounds in the private sector or to have moved up the organizational ladder within the nonprofit sector (Suárez 2010), civic NGO leaders in China are more likely to have personal ties and professional backgrounds that connect them to the government. Although many scholars have documented the influences of political constraints on the development of nonprofit organizations in China (Ma

2002; Schwartz 2004; Sullivan and Xie 2009; Teets 2013), relatively little has been written on the role of nonprofit leadership in China (Pittinsky and Zhu 2005). For example, what are the educational and professional backgrounds of civic NGO leaders in China? In what ways are they connected to the government? How do their backgrounds and government connections affect the operations and functions of their nonprofits?

The literature has identified that civic NGOs in China have utilized their government ties to grow in China’s semiauthoritarian setting (Ho 2007; Ho and Edmonds 2007). These empirical studies can be connected to the broader literature on *guanxi*—an informal relationship with governmental officials—which is a core element of Chinese life based on a blending of exchanges and mutual affection that creates feelings of responsibility and obligation on the one hand and mutual indebtedness on the other (Ma and Ortolano 2000; Michelson 2007). In his study of private business enterprises during the late 1980s, Nee (1992) found that having political capital or connections was critical for the success of private business enterprises during a time when many basic commodities were still under government control. Yet in a more recent study, Nee and Opper (2010) found that political capital and connections have remained important only for private enterprises exposed to markets that are still heavily regulated by the government, such as the credit market, but have become unimportant for those exposed to global market forces. Based on a similar logic, government ties may matter in China’s NGO sector because this sector is at a very early stage of development. Given the significant role of government ties in China’s political and social transitions, the lack of understanding of Chinese nonprofit leaders’ connections with the government should not be overlooked.

Indeed, a major gap in the literature is not whether civic NGOs in China are connected to the government but in what ways and to what effects. This research aims to understand the complexity of government ties of civic NGOs and their implications for nonprofit operations and functions in China. In the following sections, we will first discuss government–NGO relations in China and develop our research propositions. Based on information obtained from interviewing and surveying civic eNGO leaders, we further examine how the various types of government ties of civic NGO leaders are related to nonprofit operations and two important functions of eNGOs: policy advocacy and service provision. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of this research for the development of the nonprofit sector in China and for the general literature on government–nonprofit relations.

## Literature Review and Research Propositions

To examine government–NGO relations in an authoritarian and transitional country such as China, one must pay careful attention to China’s fragmented but also resilient authoritarian regime (Lieberthal 1992; Nathan 2003; Teets 2013). In its effort to monopolize the management of public affairs, the Chinese government has been reluctant to engage civic NGOs in policy making or share resources with civic NGOs. Instead, for the purpose of avoiding potential political instability, the Chinese government

---

In its effort to monopolize the management of public affairs, the Chinese government has been reluctant to engage civic NGOs in policy making or share resources with civic NGOs.

---

has established stringent regulations that limit the registration and operations of civic organizations and cracked down on those that are deemed to be subversive (Hildebrandt 2011; Tang and Zhan 2008). However, the Chinese government does not have enough capacity to control all civic NGOs (Zhan and Tang 2013). In recent years, the Chinese government has adjusted its strategy in managing government–nonprofit relations by both containing and empowering nonprofits (Jing 2015). Heurlin (2010) argues that the Chinese government has moved from an exclusionary approach to a corporatist strategy in managing relations between government and civil society organizations. On the other hand, Hsu (2010) reports that Chinese civic NGOs are more interested in building alliances and collaborations with the government rather than maintaining their organizational autonomy.

Although China's political environment has been restrictive, it has provided some opportunities for civic NGOs' resource mobilization and policy advocacy, especially for those with leaders who are social, economic, and political elites (Ru and Ortolano 2009). In the field of environmental protection, it is widely known that China's environmental movement has been spearheaded by prominent individuals committed to environmental protection such as Liang Congjie (one of the cofounders of Friends of Nature) and Liao Xiaoyi (founder of Global Village Beijing). More recently, Jack Ma, founder of the Alibaba Group and one of the richest people in China, established an environmental protection foundation. Many civic eNGOs have grown from small groups consisting of a few committed environmentalists to well-established organizations with legal registration status, regular offices and staff, and well-managed operations (Ho 2001; Tang and Zhan 2008). Many social elites, including university professors, academic researchers, former government officials, and news reporters, have sought to address problems in ecological conservation, environmental protection, animal welfare, and so on. Many of them have established various ties with China's political institutions, and they have utilized these ties to develop and operate their NGOs. As argued by Ho (2007), China's semiauthoritarian political system both restricts and supports civil society organizations and activities, and such a path of civil society development has significantly reduced the possibility of social instability. Similarly, Spires (2011a) suggests that government and grassroots NGOs have been coexisting in some form of contingent symbiosis, with government officials willing to draw on support from grassroots NGOs to boost their annual performance rating when the NGOs are considered politically nonthreatening.

Indeed, an emerging consensus in the literature is that government ties have played a very important role in the development of NGOs in authoritarian China. That being said, it is less clear in what ways civic NGOs have utilized their government ties to deal with various opportunities or constraints set by the authoritarian government. Institutional theory argues that internal factors and organizational strategies matter, and different organizations may use different strategies to respond to external institutional pressures. For example, Meyer and Rowan argue that organizational success depends on organizational conformity, or "the ability of given organizations to conform to, and become legitimated by, environmental institutions"

---

Chinese civic NGOs are more interested in building alliances and collaborations with the government rather than maintaining their organizational autonomy.

---

(1977, 352). As argued by Ho, most eNGOs in China have adopted "self-imposed censorship and de-politicized politics" (2007, 20). As a result, pressures from eNGOs have yet to be a significant factor in promoting corporate compliance with environmental regulations (Liu et al. 2015; Zhan, Lo, and Tang 2014). Yet Oliver (1991) suggests that organizations may resist or conform to institutional pressures. Thus, divergent strategies rather than simple conformity will be used by organizations to respond to different institutional environments. Being embedded in different networks, organizations may develop divergent organizational strategies (Hung 2005). Personal connections may help civic NGO leaders gain resources from and establish partnerships with government entities, yet good *guanxi* with government may constrain a civic NGO's independence and willingness or ability to engage in politically sensitive activities, such as advocating for policy change, providing legal services, or tackling environmental issues at the national level. Thus, different types of government ties may have complex relations with nonprofit operations and functions.

Borrowing from the literature on government ties in China (Peng and Luo 2000; Sheng, Zhou, and Li 2011), we operationalize the concept of "government ties" by examining three types of ties: political, service organization, and personal ties. The term *political ties* is defined as an NGO leader being a current or former governmental official and/or legislative body member (either the People's Congress or the People's Political Consultative Committee). *Service organization ties* means that an NGO leader has current or former affiliations with public sector service organizations, such as universities, research institutes, and the state-owned media. In China, these public sector service organizations are directly controlled by the government; employees in these organizations usually have strong connections with various party and state entities (Tang and Lo 2009). *Personal ties* means that an NGO leader has maintained good personal relationships with governmental officials and agencies (Xin and Pearce 1996). While the three ties represent three distinctive dimensions of government ties, they are not mutually exclusive; an NGO leader may have one or more of the three ties. For example, a university professor may be a legislative body member and maintain good *guanxi* with government officials at the same time.

As extensively documented in the existing literature, government ties may help firms in China get more resources and perform better in the market (Peng and Luo 2000; Sheng, Zhou, and Li 2011). Similar observations have been made by nonprofit scholars in Europe, where there is a long tradition of the welfare state relying on NGOs to deliver many kinds of social services. Rumbul (2013), for example, finds that structurally embedded NGOs in Wales are more likely to get government funding because of their political connections with the government. In China, most civic eNGOs face resource constraints because they have limited opportunities for fund-raising, a limited membership base, and limited opportunities to provide pay for services (Tang and Zhan 2008; Zhan and Tang 2013). Leaders of some eNGOs have to fund their operations out of their own pockets. However, if its leaders have ties to the government, an eNGO may have a better chance of obtaining funds from multiple sources. For example, foundations still constitute

the primary source of funding for civic eNGOs in China; yet good guanxi with government can help NGOs obtain funding from donors (Johnson and Ni 2015). For example, some NGOs are established by government officials because of the existence of significant amounts of international funding that prefer government-supported NGOs (Hildebrandt 2011). While contracts and subsidies from government have been a limited source of funding for most civic eNGOs, government funding has become more important in recent years as governments at different levels have become more willing to draw on civic NGOs to help deliver various types of public and social services. Government funding is a potential source of funding for civic NGOs, and it is also a way of securing government recognition (Jing 2015).

Arguably, civic eNGOs whose leaders have government ties are more likely to receive stable and sustainable funding from multiple sources. Given the importance of resources for nonprofit organizations, if eNGOs with leaders having stronger government ties are more likely to obtain stable resources, they are also more likely to have a more developed management system, such as establishing a functioning board of directors, hiring accounting staff and lawyers, regularly recruiting full-time staff, and so on. Because it is difficult in this exploratory study to speculate on all possible scenarios, we adopt the following general proposition:

**Proposition 1:** Civic eNGOs with leaders having, and having more, government ties are more likely to maintain a higher level of funding stability and a more developed management system.

In the literature, multiple typologies have been developed to understand the major functions of nonprofits. In this research, we focus on policy advocacy and service provision, which are arguably the two most important functions of nonprofits (Salamon 2012). While policy advocacy may be a core mission of most environmental NGOs in Western countries, environmental policy advocacy faces a much more restrictive political environment in China. As noted earlier, it is still politically dangerous to be openly critical of government policies and projects. A civic eNGO fighting against a government-supported hydropower or nuclear power plant may find itself targeted by public security bureaus. Some empirical studies, for example, have identified that civic eNGOs in China have adopted a “nonconfrontational” strategy to engage the state in policy-making processes (Ho 2001; Stalley and Yang 2006). That being said, opportunities have opened up for civic eNGOs to advocate for policy positions in less controversial areas, such as recycling and energy saving. On the one hand, ENGO leaders’ government ties may facilitate policy advocacy; on the other hand, these ties may also constrain their willingness to do so because advocacy may antagonize government officials. Yet, on balance, one might argue that government ties make it more feasible for eNGOs to participate in policy advocacy and influence government policy.

**Proposition 2:** Civic eNGOs with leaders having, and having more, government ties are more likely to be active and effective in policy advocacy.

When performing their service function, civic eNGOs in China also face constraints set by the government. For many years, most civic eNGOs in China depoliticized their service activities by focusing on providing environmental education, a service that is less political (Tang and Zhan 2008). In recent years, there has been a trend for some eNGOs to be involved in environmental lawsuits and provide legal services to pollution victims. While such activities can be considered services that civic eNGOs provide to citizens, they also have the effect of raising societal awareness about environmental problems and exposing the shortcomings of current regulations and their enforcement by government agencies. Environmental NGOs engaging in such activities need to maintain a delicate balance. In some circumstances, government officials may not oppose, or indeed may support, such activities, seeing this as a way to go after companies that break the law. The Chinese government recently amended the Environment Protection Law and began to allow eNGOs to initiate environmental public interest litigation after January 2015. That being said, in some circumstances, government officials may

consider these activities unwelcome challenges to government authority, especially when such litigation directly targets local governments or firms connected to governments.

If civic eNGO leaders have political, service organization, or personal ties, they may better understand the types of activities that are politically acceptable and the proper channels for undertaking them. On the other hand, eNGO leaders’ government ties may constrain

their willingness to engage in these politically risky activities. Yet, on balance, one might argue that government ties make it more feasible for eNGOs to engage in environmental public interest litigation and provide legal services to pollution victims. Moreover, the Chinese government has set strict regulations on the geographic focus of NGO activities. A very important rule in social organization registration, for example, is that civil society organizations, including eNGOs, are usually registered with a specific government unit at a specific administrative level, and they are restricted to undertaking activities only within the jurisdiction in which they are registered. An eNGO may face possible police harassment or even legal prosecution if it is deemed to be involved in activities outside its permitted area of operations. For the vast majority of civic eNGOs, it is politically safer to deal with issues that are local in nature. Perhaps this is why civic eNGOs in China usually work at the community level (Hsu 2014). Legal restrictions may compel civic eNGOs to avoid having a national focus; yet those with stronger ties to the government may be better able to assess and cope with the risks associated with engaging in national-level issues and thus be more likely to scale up by focusing on environmental issues at that level.

**Proposition 3:** Civic eNGOs with leaders having, and having more, government ties are more likely to expand their service scope by engaging in environmental lawsuits and providing legal services to pollution victims; such civic eNGOs are also more likely to expand their service scale by focusing on environmental issues at the national level.

In addition to ties to the government, several other variables may influence NGO operations and activities. First, ties to other civil

society organizations may help an NGO obtain information, increase organizational capacity, pool resources, leverage influence, and gain recognition from the larger society (Provan, Huang, and Milward 2009; Zhan and Tang 2013). In the context of authoritarian China, eNGOs may have to work with other eNGOs to undertake certain types of activities, especially when activities such as policy advocacy and helping pollution victims may be considered by the authoritarian regime as political challenges to its rule. In China and elsewhere, NGOs often network and collaborate with one another in their service and advocacy activities. For example, Diamond argues that there are six types of NGO activities: “to express their interests, passions, and ideas; to exchange information; to achieve collective goals; to make demands on the state; to improve the structure and functioning of the state; to hold state officials accountable” (1999, 221). According to Diamond’s classification, the more NGOs are engaged in activities further down this list, the more they contribute to democratization. Using Diamond’s classification of government–NGO relations, Zhan and Tang (2013) suggest that political regime changes have created opportunities for those civic NGOs with better resources and political connections to engage in policy processes (i.e., activities related to, in Diamond’s words, making “demands on the state,” improving “the structure and functioning of the state,” and holding “state officials accountable”). Moreover, NGO ties can help a civic eNGO do better in developing its management system and engaging in service and advocacy activities. Sullivan and Xie (2009) also report that some Chinese NGOs are connected to one another through regional and nationwide social networks. This explains why some NGOs have access to institutional channels for negotiating with the state (Saich 2000).

Second, stringent registration requirements have been used by the Chinese government as a means of monitoring and controlling NGO development. As a result, many eNGOs operate without being formally registered as a social organization. Their activities are often tolerated by the government, but only as long as they are not perceived as creating political trouble. On the other hand, being registered gives NGOs some degree of independence, as they can open bank accounts, do public fund-raising, become more transparent in their operations (thus making them less likely to be suspected by government officials), and are less subject to the whims of government officials (Hildebrandt 2011). Thus, registered civic eNGOs may be able to develop better management systems, but they may be more circumscribed in their service and advocacy activities.

Third, it is a tough environment, both political and financial, for civic eNGOs in China to survive. Thus, the age of a civic eNGO matters; the longer it has been around, the more likely it is that it can build up its financial capacity, and thus the more likely it is to have a better developed management system and engage in service and advocacy activities.

## Research Methods

### Data Collection

To conduct our survey of civic eNGOs in China, we first identified three target regions in China and then adopted a rolling snowball approach to identify civic eNGOs located in those cities and provinces. The three target areas are Beijing, the coastal regions, and the

inland regions, representing the political capital, the rich regions, and the less developed regions in China. Beijing was singled out because, as China’s capital, it has traditionally been home to many NGOs. The inland regions are less developed areas that are known for ecological diversity, and they are home to many environmental protection and ecological conservation projects, with the presence of many domestic and international eNGOs. The coastal regions, such as Shanghai and Guangdong, are developed areas in China. Although not the traditional home of civic eNGOs, these locations have seen growth in recent years.

We consulted *China Development Brief*, a Web-based database that provides lists of civic NGOs in multiple policy arenas, to identify eNGOs in China. We also relied on personal contacts to approach civic eNGOs. Based on data and information from multiple online and personal sources, we estimated that there are around 300 active civic eNGOs in China. Between July 2010 and December 2014, we sent invitations to 214 civic eNGOs and asked each eNGO to complete a questionnaire survey. In all, 81 eNGOs completed and returned the surveys, a 37.9 percent response rate. Although the sample size is relatively small, we believe that this is a valuable data set given the difficulty of administering large-scale surveys with civic NGOs. While NGOs in China usually would prefer to have interviews with researchers, many of them would decline invitations to complete surveys because of time constraints or political risks, not to mention the fact that some NGOs have experienced fatigue as more and more researchers are approaching them for interviews and surveys. Given the political sensitivity of civil society in China, getting NGOs to respond to surveys has never been an easy task. Indeed, most of the previous studies on eNGOs in China have relied on the case study approach.

The survey collected information related to several aspects of these eNGOs: organizational characteristics and major activities, organizational leaders’ relationships with government agencies or legislative bodies and a few other stakeholders, organizational management practices, policy advocacy experiences, and the scope and scale of the services they provide. We also sent out invitations for face-to-face interviews in six cities in China (Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Kunming, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen). Eventually, 33 eNGOs accepted our invitation for face-to-face interviews. We made 10 field trips to these six cities and conducted semistructured interviews with leaders of the 33 eNGOs. Each interview lasted one to two hours. During the interviews, we focused on the career backgrounds and major duties of the civic eNGOs’ chief executives or leaders. Specifically, we asked the executives about their career and professional background in order to assess their ties to the government. The data enable us to identify (1) major types of professional profiles and career paths of the eNGO executives and (2) how different types are related to the growth of the eNGOs and their major activities and orientations. All of the 33 eNGOs were invited to finish the questionnaire survey, and eventually 20 returned completed questionnaires.

Table 1 provides a summary of all the civic eNGOs that returned questionnaires. The majority of the NGO leaders surveyed had educational backgrounds and professional experiences in either law or environmental protection, two fields that are highly relevant to the operation of eNGOs. Overall, 63 eNGOs reported one or more

**Table 1** Professional Backgrounds and Government Ties of eNGO Leaders

	Items	Beijing	Costal Provinces	Inland Provinces	Other	Total
Professional backgrounds of surveyed NGO leaders	College degree or above	17	29	29	1	76
	Background in law education or practices	7	10	10	0	27
	Experiences in environmental protection work	13	21	21	0	55
Government ties of eNGOs	Political ties	5	9	17	1	32
	Service organization ties	11	13	16	1	41
	Personal ties	8	16	21	1	46
	Current political ties	1	5	10	1	17
	At least one type of tie	14	20	28	1	63
Registration status	Registered	9	23	27	1	60
	Nonregistration or declined to report	8	7	6	0	21
Number of questionnaires returned		17	30	33	1	81

Notes: In this sample, the coastal provinces include Shanghai City, Liaoning Province, Jiangsu Province, Guangdong Province, Shandong Province; inland provinces refer to the jurisdictions other than Beijing and the coastal provinces. One eNGO whose leader had current political ties chose to submit a questionnaire anonymously without disclosing the organization's name, and thus we could not trace its location.

**Table 2** Summary of eNGO Leaders' Government Ties (sample size = 81)

Number of Cases	Political Ties	Service Organization Ties	Personal Ties	Notes
19	x	x	x	eNGOs with all three types of ties
4	x	x		eNGOs with two types of ties: political and service organization ties
4	x		x	eNGOs with two types of ties: political and personal ties
10		x	x	eNGOs with two types of ties: service organization and personal ties
5	x			eNGOs with only political ties
8		x		eNGOs with only service organization ties
13			x	eNGOs with only personal ties
18				eNGOs without any type of ties

types of ties with the government. We provide the locations and registration status of the survey respondents.

Table 2 shows a total of eight possible combinations of different types of ties with government. We found that a large number of eNGOs in our sample had double or triple ties with government. Nineteen eNGOs reported that their leaders had triple ties with government. Eighteen eNGOs reported double ties. Twenty-six eNGOs reported only one type of tie with government. Among the 81 eNGOs, only 18 reported that they had no government ties.

### Measurements

The questions used for measuring all of the independent and dependent variables are listed in the appendix. Some questions requested categorical responses of yes/no (1/0); some questions asked for degree of agreement with a statement on a 5-point Likert scale. Specifically, to measure ties with other NGOs (*NGO ties*), we adopted the classification introduced in Diamond (1999) and asked each eNGO about the extent to which they worked with other NGOs. To measure *NGO's funding stability*, we asked each eNGO whether its external grants were mainly long-term and multiple times. To measure *NGO's management system*, we asked each eNGO whether it had adopted certain management practices—for example, whether it had accounting staff, lawyers, annual financial statements, a board of directors/advisors, regular performance evaluation, and so on. To measure NGO engagement in *policy advocacy*, we asked each eNGO the extent to which it had engaged in specific dimensions of policy advocacy (*policy advocacy engagement*) and how they assessed their policy impact on government (*policy advocacy effectiveness*). To measure *NGO's service scope* and *service scale*, we asked each eNGO whether it was engaged in providing environmental law services and lawsuits and whether it focused on environmental issues at the national level. The measurements of *management system*, *policy advocacy engagement*, and *NGO*

*ties* are the means of answers to the questions used in the survey. The Cronbach's alpha for *management system* is 0.688 (11 items); that for *policy advocacy engagement* is 0.779 (5 items); and that for *NGO ties* is 0.836 (5 items). We obtained Cronbach's alphas ranging between 0.688 and 0.836, representing relatively reliable measurements (Nunnally 1967). For the other two control variables, *age* is the difference between the year when an eNGO was established and the year when it was surveyed; *registration* is coded as 1 if an eNGO was legally registered with a government body and 0 otherwise. The descriptive statistics of and correlations among the dependent, independent, and control variables are provided in table 3.

### Empirical Findings

We used three sets of models to test the hypotheses. The models focus on whether the different types of government ties—*political, service organization, personal, current political ties*, and *number of government ties*—are related to the six dependent variables: *nonprofit funding stability, nonprofit management system, policy advocacy engagement, policy advocacy effectiveness, service scope: legal services*, and *service scale: national focus*.<sup>1</sup> Each model includes a different combination of independent variables and the same set of control variables, including *NGO ties, registration*, and *age*. Tables 4 and 5 show the ordinary least squares regression results for the first two propositions, and table 6 shows the binary logistic regression results for the third proposition.

As shown in table 4, consistent with our prior expectations, *personal ties* are positively associated with *nonprofit funding stability* and *management system*. This result confirms the conventional wisdom that *guanxi* is important for dealing with foundations and government officials and obtaining funding from various sources. Unexpectedly, *political ties* are negatively and significantly associated with *funding stability*, while *service organization ties* and *current political ties* have no significant association with *funding stability*. Perhaps for

eNGOs with leaders who are current or former government officials or legislative body members, such ties may not help a civic eNGO get stable funding because of potential conflicts of interest. A more developed management system is associated with civic eNGOs that have larger numbers of ties with the government. *Registration* also matters to *management system* because without a legal status, it

is unlikely that an NGO in China could gradually build a formal management system.

As shown in table 5, we found that both *current political ties* and the *number of government ties* are positively and significantly associated with *policy advocacy engagement*. Perhaps an NGO leader being a

**Table 3** Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 Funding stability	1	5	3.19	1.27													
2 Management system	0	1	.59	.22	.315**												
3 Policy advocacy engagement	1	4.6	2.78	.86	.203	.185											
4 Policy advocacy effectiveness	1	5	3.37	.91	-.142	.236*	.462**										
5 Legal services	0	1	.25	.44	-.066	.210	.139	.248*									
6 National focus	0	1	.33	.47	.025	.104	.175	.127	.296**								
7 Political ties	0	1	.40	.49	-.120	.181	.228	.236*	.133	.019							
8 Service organization ties	0	1	.51	.50	-.002	.121	.099	.132	.231*	.290**	.344**						
9 Personal ties	0	1	.57	.50	.263*	.336**	.131	-.015	.102	-.018	.246*	.285**					
10 Current political ties	0	1	.21	.41	.104	.225*	.376**	.254*	.144	-.022	.638**	.206	.266*				
11 Number of government ties	0	3	1.47	1.09	.066	.287*	.209	.161	.216	.137	.726**	.750**	.703**	.507**			
12 NGO ties	1.6	5	3.61	.762	.113	.115	.555**	.342**	.191	.092	.158	.055	-.064	.264*	.067		
13 Registration	0	1	.74	.44	-.053	.473**	.044	.044	-.049	-.083	.190	-.134	.053	.097	.048	.008	
14 Age	0	18	6.06	5.21	.153	.048	-.094	.105	.169	.068	.064	.012	-.172	-.076	-.045	-.018	-.058

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed).

\*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

**Table 4** Government Ties and Nonprofit Operations

Variable	Model 1-A: <i>Funding Stability</i> as Dependent Variable			Model 1-B: <i>Management System</i> as Dependent Variable		
	Model 1-A-1	Model 1-A-2	Model 1-A-3	Model 1-B-1	Model 1-B-2	Model 1-B-3
Political ties	-.638 (.328)*			-.029 (.053)		
Service organization ties	-.041 (.308)	-.241 (.304)		.052 (.050)	.039 (.047)	
Personal ties	.978 (.306)***	.838 (.315)**		.151 (.049)***	.136 (.050)***	
Current political ties		.079 (.383)			.032 (.064)	
Number of government ties			.092 (.140)			.057 (.021)***
NGO ties	.281 (.193)	.223 (.207)	.202 (.204)	.04 (.029)	.032 (.030)	.027 (.029)
Registration	-.042 (.333)	-.227 (.330)	-.136 (.338)	.243 (.005)***	.234 (.050)***	.232 (.050)***
Age	.057 (.028)*	.050 (.029)*	.038 (.030)	.006 (.005)	.006 (.005)	.004 (.005)
Sample size	81	81	81	81	81	81
R <sup>2</sup>	.186	.140	.045	.363	.363	.315
F (sig.)	2.510 (.030)	1.785 (.116)	.798 (.530)	6.366 (.000)	6.355 (.000)	7.914 (.000)

Notes: Models were tested using ordinary least squares regression. Coefficients are listed with standard errors included in parentheses.

\* $p < .1$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table 5** Government Ties and Nonprofit Functions: Policy Advocacy

Variable	Model 2-A: <i>Policy Advocacy Engagement</i> as Dependent Variable			Model 2-B: <i>Policy Advocacy Effectiveness</i> as Dependent Variable		
	Model 2-A-1	Model 2-A-2	Model 2-A-3	Model 2-B-1	Model 2-B-2	Model 2-B-3
Political ties	.213 (.197)			.259 (.238)		
Service organization ties	.006 (.189)	.025 (.175)		.127 (.226)	.176 (.213)	
Personal ties	.231 (.187)	.197 (.182)		-.059 (.222)	-.077 (.222)	
Current political ties		.473 (.220)**			.357 (.268)	
Number of government ties			.146 (.079)*			.112 (.093)
NGO ties	.625 (.115)***	.581 (.114)***	.623 (.112)***	.378 (.135)***	.351 (.138)**	.402 (.132)***
Registration	.057 (.199)	.067 (.190)	.094 (.189)	.050 (.239)	.083 (.232)	.076 (.228)
Age	-.006 (.017)	-.002 (.017)	-.006 (.017)	.014 (.020)	.018 (.020)	.019 (.019)
Sample size	81	81	81	81	81	81
R <sup>2</sup>	.355	.387	.348	.155	.162	.145
F (sig.)	6.049 (.000)	6.930 (.000)	9.075 (.000)	2.117 (.062)	2.229 (.050)	3.016 (.023)

Notes: Models were tested using ordinary least squares regression. Coefficients are listed with standard errors included in parentheses.

\* $p < .1$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

current government official may help the organization's involvement in policy advocacy. Most types of *government ties*, however, do not help a civic eNGO's self-assessment of *policy advocacy effectiveness*. *NGO ties* is the only variable that is positively associated with both *policy advocacy engagement* and *policy advocacy effectiveness*. Ties with other NGOs are more important for this type of work, as such activities are potentially political and require careful strategizing on the part of the NGO.

One may only speculate on why *political, service organization, and personal ties* have no statistically significant association with *policy advocacy engagement* and *effectiveness*. As we learned from our interviews, this may be because government ties have both positive and negative effects on a civic eNGO's motivation to engage in politically sensitive activities. On the positive side, many interviewees acknowledged the advantage of government ties in facilitating policy-related activities. For example, one eNGO staff (NGO ID: 42) indicated that as former insiders, eNGO leaders with government backgrounds had more accesses to the policy process. Another eNGO staff (NGO ID: 15) mentioned that her NGO leader was a Communist Party member and a former government official:

"She wanted to do something for environmental protection, but as a Communist-Party member, she could not do this within the government system; thus she chose to leave the government and become a bridge between government and society." This leader's political ties had helped recruit some retired government officials from the local Environmental Protection Bureau and City Water Department who provided this eNGO with knowledge and experience. One research report submitted by this eNGO helped convince the city and provincial governments to postpone and eventually cancel the construction of a local hydropower station because of potential ecological risks (NGO ID: 15).

We found that civic eNGOs with leaders holding current positions in the government were more likely to be engaged in policy advocacy. This makes sense because such leaders can still use formal procedures within the government or legislative system to deliver policy proposals to relevant government bodies. For example, one eNGO leader (NGO ID: 48) was a research scientist at a local institution and had occupied multiple positions over her career, including being a member of both the District Political Consultative Committee and the District People's Congress. When she made policy proposals for environmental protection, she usually used her titles within the system rather than her title as a civic NGO leader (NGO ID: 48).

Policy advocacy work may also make the NGO leaders more politically cautious. One interviewee, for example, indicated that being confrontational and raising too many criticisms may push governmental officials to treat civic eNGOs as enemies. When government officials believe that an eNGO is not a protesting group, they are more likely to accept its policy suggestions and proposals (NGO ID: 46). Another interviewee suggested that if the local government did not understand an eNGO's work, it was unlikely that the eNGO could accomplish much (NGO ID: 40). Another eNGO leader

simply indicated that her *guanxi* gave her opportunities to influence government policy if she wanted to, but she did not treat policy advocacy as one of her NGO's core work areas; she would rather focus her work on environmental research, education, and ecological conservation (NGO ID: 48). Finally, one other interviewee simply said that policy advocacy, no matter how subtly done, still carries some political risks (NGO ID: 31), which would probably make any civic eNGO leader with government ties doubly cautious.

When assessing the overall influence of civic eNGOs on government policy, our interviewees had diverse opinions. One eNGO leader (NGO ID: 05) said that "Chinese eNGOs are irresponsible to the reality, and they do not dare to address pollution and ecological degradation issues; thus many eNGOs are simply disappointing for us." Yet another eNGO leader (NGO ID: 45) said that eNGOs do not need to focus primarily on monitoring the government; instead, they should utilize their expertise to work on specific issues, such as environmental education. As reported by a local eNGO leader (NGO ID: 42), after successfully initiating a local anti-dam movement, he was forced to resign from his research fellow position at a government-owned research institute. A few

eNGO leaders were quite pessimistic about the possibility of changing the government by policy advocacy. One eNGO leader explicitly indicated that his NGO would not collaborate with government in environmental protection (NGO ID: 5). Although several eNGOs had experiences in collaborating with government or reaching out to governmental officials, they did not believe that they had the capacity to exert a real impact on government policy.

As shown in table 6, *service organization ties* is the only independent variable that has significant and positive correlation with both *legal services* and *national focus*, meaning that NGO leaders who are former or current researchers, academics, and journalists are more likely to engage in the provision of legal services and environmental issues at the national level. This makes sense given that providing legal services and tackling environmental issues at the national level usually require extensive professional knowledge and a more independent position, and it is reasonable that those leaders with service organization ties are more capable of dealing with this kind of work. The dual identities held by many eNGO leaders have helped their eNGOs survive and develop. On the one hand, they are leaders of civil society organizations, representing a relatively independent sector and expressing their voices on behalf of the general public; on the other hand, they are affiliated with the government through their positions as university professors, news reporters, and research scientists, which may help them "scale up" the organizational focus of their eNGOs. For example, Chai Jing, an environmentalist and a former journalist associated with state-owned China Central Television, released an environmental documentary called *Under the Dome* in March 2015, which ignited national and global concerns on the possible public health effects of air pollution in China.

When carefully examining the results shown in tables 4–6, one can see that different types of government ties vary systematically in their relationships with different dimensions of nonprofit operations and

---

Although several eNGOs had experiences in collaborating with government or reaching out to governmental officials, they did not believe that they had the capacity to exert a real impact on government policy.

---

**Table 6** Government Ties and Nonprofit Functions: Service Provision

Variable	Model 3-A: <i>Service Scope: Legal Services</i> as Dependent Variable			Model 3-B: <i>Service Scale: National Focus</i> as Dependent Variable		
	Model 3-A-1	Model 3-A-2	Model 3-A-3	Model 3-B-1	Model 3-B-2	Model 3-B-3
Political ties	-.008 (.650)			-.423 (.607)		
Service organization ties	1.109 (.664)*	1.099 (.644)*		1.540 (.590) *	1.479 (.567)*	
Personal ties	.640 (.679)	.623 (.675)		-.268 (.567)	-.244 (.573)	
Current political ties		.072 (.738)			-.526 (.720)	
Number of government ties			.563 (.283)**			.310 (.239)
NGO ties	.714 (.436)	.702 (.446)	.663 (.428)	.297 (.366)	.363 (.385)	.270 (.346)
Registration	-.161 (.661)	-.166 (.647)	-.370 (.631)	.083 (.612)	-.016 (.587)	-.314 (.558)
Age	.101 (.058)*	.101 (.058)	.093 (.055)*	.041 (.052)	.033 (.051)	.041 (.048)
Sample size	81	81	81	81	81	81
-2 Log likelihood	71.955	71.946	73.122	86.757	86.702	92.548
Cox & Snell R <sup>2</sup>	.138	.138	.124	.117	.117	.045
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.207	.207	.187	.161	.162	.062
Percentage correctly predicated	78.9%	78.9%	80.3%	71.6%	71.6%	64.9%

Notes: Models were tested by using binary logistic analysis regression. Coefficients are listed with standard errors included in parentheses.

\* $p < .1$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

functions. Unexpectedly, *political ties* have no significant relationship with most of the dependent variables. One possible explanation is that *political ties* may be a mixed bag for NGO leaders. Political titles offer NGO leaders some degrees of protection from political prosecution, but they may also dampen their motivation to undertake politically sensitive activities, as these NGO leaders have vested interests in maintaining cordial relationships with government officials. *Personal ties* matter for *nonprofit funding stability* and *management system*. This is compatible with other studies about the importance of personal ties in various types of business and social activities. Nee (1992) suggests that many private corporations during the early reform era benefited from having close relationships with government officials, as these relationships would help them gain priority access to discounted credit and basic commodities. Apparently, in today's China, civic NGOs are in a similar situation, in which *guanxi* with government officials increases resources and opportunities, suggesting that the survival and development of the NGO sector are still highly dependent on *guanxi* with the government. *Personal ties*, however, are not significantly related to other dependent variables in service and advocacy, probably reflecting the result of counteracting effects: while facilitating access to government, personal ties also circumscribe NGO leaders' willingness to potentially upset government officials by crossing the boundaries set by government, such as engaging in advocacy and providing legal services to pollution victims.

Overall, the results suggest the need to sort out the contingent value of different government ties, which have been neglected to a large extent in previous research on government–NGO relations in China. Specifically, *personal ties* with government officials may help seek stable funding and develop the management system for the civic eNGO, but these ties may discourage the NGO leaders from engaging in politically risky activities, such as providing legal services and advocating for policy changes. *Service organization ties* facilitate eNGOs' effort to provide legal services or to scale up to work on environmental issues at the national level. *Current political ties* and *number of government ties* may help eNGOs engage in policy advocacy, but, surprisingly, government ties do not seem to matter much in terms of generating impacts on government policy.

We also found some interesting results regarding the control variables. *NGO ties* are positively and significantly related to *policy advocacy engagement* and *policy advocacy effectiveness*. This result suggests

that collaboration with one another helps eNGOs engage in politically sensitive activities and to generate tangible impacts. It suggests that the NGO sector in China has evolved toward stronger interorganizational collaboration despite various restrictions imposed by the government to limit the extent to which NGOs may network with one another and potentially form alliances against the regime; endogenous developments within the NGO sector are beginning to make a difference.

*Registration* status only matters for *management system*, and it is not related to the other dependent variables, possibly showing that the current registration requirements may not have systematic effects on other dimensions of eNGOs' operations and functions. This result may also partly explain why the Chinese government has recently decided to lessen the registration requirements for social organizations in China by eliminating the requirement for obtaining the sponsorship of a government organization as the precondition for registration for some types of NGOs.

Finally, *age* is positively and significantly related to *funding stability* and *legal services*, showing that organizational age may matter to an eNGO's financial capacity and service role. Interestingly, *age* is not related to *policy advocacy engagement* and *effectiveness*, possibly showing that more established eNGOs are not necessarily more likely to participate in advocacy.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The existing literature on government–nonprofit relations has been mainly focused on interorganizational interactions, with limited attention paid to how such organizational relationships are embodied at the level of individuals and organizational leaders. In this exploratory research, we have decomposed the concept of “government ties” and identified several interesting findings on the complex relationships between government ties and nonprofit operations and functions in China. First, most civic eNGOs reported connections with the government through their leaders' political, service organization, or personal ties, suggesting that a large portion of civic eNGOs in China did not emerge from the grassroots of society; many instead emerged from within the government. While this research focuses on civic NGOs in the field of environmental protection, similar government ties can be observed in many other types of nonprofits in China, including private universities, private

hospitals, and private philanthropic foundations. Leaders in these nonprofits are connected with the party-state in multiple and complex ways.

While government ties of nonprofit leaders may have helped or even protected the survival and development of civic NGOs in such a restrictive political environment (Michelson 2007), the ties between government and NGOs have also put in doubt the so-called civic nature of Chinese eNGOs. This is especially the case given the fact that personal ties of civic eNGOs are not significantly related to their engagement in services and activities that can be regarded as politically sensitive in the authoritarian context of China: advocating policy changes, providing legal services to pollution victims, and tackling environmental issues at the national level, all of which can be regarded as core activities among eNGOs in Western societies. Guo (2007) argues that heavy reliance on government resources may decrease the representational capacities of nonprofit organizations in the United States. Similarly, our findings suggest that maintaining good *guanxi* with government may also constrain the capacities of eNGOs to deliver what they are supposed to do.

Given the importance of *guanxi* in China's social and political life, one may expect that good personal relationships with government officials may help civic eNGOs in policy advocacy. While our statistical analysis does not support this proposition, our interviews show that some civic eNGOs used their personal ties with government officials to build collaboration with government or influence policies. That being said, when using such personal relationships, eNGOs have to be very careful, and this may not enhance their willingness to advocate for policy change and hold government accountable. On the other hand, given the limited fiscal resources and an increasing use of public purchase of social services provided by NGOs, it is quite likely that NGOs, especially those with good personal *guanxi* with the government, are more likely to receive government funding. This trend will likely continue when contracting out becomes a standard practice in China's public policy and social service delivery (Jing and Gong 2012; Jing and Savas 2009). Our research provides partial support for the projection that government–NGO relations in China may move toward a *corporatist* regime.

Our research findings echo the arguments raised by a few scholars who have used a state-centered perspective to explain the rise of civil society in China. Although the development of civil society has been made possible by major changes in government policies regarding registration, service delivery, and so on (Spire 2011b; Teets 2013), NGO development so far has never gone beyond the constraints set by the authoritarian regime, and most NGOs have so far been in service, or in support, of continuing authoritarianism. Yet we have also found that many of the new arrangements in government–NGO relations have actually been initiated by social elite entrepreneurs, especially those with ties to the government. These eNGO leaders have tried to overcome difficulties and tested the boundaries of state toleration in spite of the restrictions imposed by unreasonable formal institutions. If NGOs in China can build a much stronger nonprofit network and civic community, they may

---

While this research focuses on civic NGOs in the field of environmental protection, similar government ties can be observed in many other types of nonprofits in China, including private universities, private hospitals, and private philanthropic foundations.

---

work together to be more successful in taking collective action to push for policy change. After they have demonstrated success, government leaders may eventually, sometimes reluctantly, grant the new practices legitimacy by building true collaborative relationships with civil society.

These results add insights to the current literature on government–nonprofit relations by offering a more nuanced view of the contingent value of government ties to nonprofit operations and functions. Our study of the

government ties of civic eNGOs in China provides a window for understanding the nature of government–nonprofit relations in authoritarian regimes, shedding light on the political fragmentation and the resilience of China's authoritarian system, and the possible political continuity of the party-state in the long run. Using a relatively small sample and a mixed-methods approach, our research has also identified signs of emerging collaborations between NGOs and government in environmental governance. While Chinese civic eNGOs' close ties to the government may help move the landscape of environmental governance in China toward a more collaborative one, such a path may also lead to a *corporatist* regime, given the fiscal capacity of the Chinese government. Indeed, NGOs in many fields, especially those focusing on service provision, may find it difficult to resist government imposed political constraints when receiving government subsidies and contracts. One possible direction for future research is to explore how government ties of nonprofit leaders may impact the revenue portfolios and advocacy strategies of NGOs. Future studies should also explore the dynamics of government–nonprofit relations in other authoritarian countries and in what ways civic NGOs can contribute to the formation, operations, and outcomes of government–NGO collaborations in such settings.

### Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments. Research for the article was supported in part by a Central Research Grant (Project no. G-YN60) of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. An earlier version of this article was presented at the seminar "Improving Chinese Public Service: Theories and Empirical Evidence" at the City University of Hong Kong in 2013. The seminar was supported by grants from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation (no. CS002-P-12) and City University of Hong Kong (no. 1860403).

### Note

1. We thank the reviewers for suggesting that we include two variables, *current political ties* and *number of government ties*, in our models.

### References

- Diamond, Larry. 1999. *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Guo, Chao. 2007. When Government Becomes the Principal Philanthropist: The Effects of Public Funding on Patterns of Nonprofit Governance. *Public Administration Review* 67(3): 458–73.
- Heurlin, Christopher. 2010. Governing Civil Society: The Political Logic of NGO–State Relations under Dictatorship. *Voluntas* 21(2): 220–39.

- Hildebrandt, Timothy. 2011. The Political Economy of Social Organization Registration in China. *China Quarterly* 208: 970–89.
- Ho, Peter. 2001. Greening without Conflict? Environmentalism, NGOs and Civil Society in China. *Development and Change* 32(5): 893–921.
- . 2007. Embedded Activism and Political Change in a Semiauthoritarian Context. *China Information* 21(2): 187–209.
- Ho, Peter, and Richard Louis Edmonds. 2007. Perspectives of Time and Change Rethinking Embedded Environmental Activism in China. *China Information* 21(2): 331–44.
- Hsu, Carolyn. 2010. Beyond Civil Society: An Organizational Perspective on State–NGO Relations in the People’s Republic of China. *Journal of Civil Society* 6(3): 259–77.
- Hsu, Jennifer Y. J. 2014. Chinese Non–Governmental Organisations and Civil Society: A Review of the Literature. *Geography Compass* 8(2): 98–110.
- Hung, Shih-Chang. 2005. The Plurality of Institutional Embeddedness as a Source of Organizational Attention Differences. *Journal of Business Research* 58(11): 1543–51.
- Jing, Yijia. 2015. Between Control and Empowerment: Governmental Strategies towards the Development of the Non-Profit Sector in China. *Asian Studies Review* 39(4): 589–608.
- Jing, Yijia, and Ting Gong. 2012. Managed Social Innovation: The Case of Government-Sponsored Venture Philanthropy in Shanghai. *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 71(2): 233–45.
- Jing, Yijia, and E. S. Savas. 2009. Managing Collaborative Service Delivery: Comparing China and the United States. Special issue, *Public Administration Review* 69: 101–7.
- Johnson, Jasmine McGinnis, and Na Ni. 2015. The Impact of Political Connections on Donations to Chinese NGOs. *International Public Management Journal* 18(4): 514–35.
- Johnson, Thomas. 2010. Environmentalism and NIMBYism in China: Promoting a Rules-Based Approach to Public Participation. *Environmental Politics* 19(3): 430–48.
- Kang, Xiaoguang, and Heng Han. 2008. Graduated Controls: The State–Society Relationship in Contemporary China. *Modern China* 34(1): 36–55.
- Kaufman, Joan. 2011. HIV, Sex Work, and Civil Society in China. *Journal of Infectious Diseases* 204: S1218–22.
- Kim, Seok Eun, and You Hyun Kim. 2015. Measuring the Growth of the Nonprofit Sector: A Longitudinal Analysis. *Public Administration Review* 75(2): 242–51.
- Lecy, Jesse D., and David M. Van Slyke. 2013. Nonprofit Sector Growth and Density: Testing Theories of Government Support. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 23(1): 189–214.
- Lieberthal, Kenneth G. 1992. Introduction: The “Fragmented Authoritarianism” Model and Its Limitations. In *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China*, edited by Kenneth G. Lieberthal and David M. Lampton, 1–30. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Liu, Nicole Ning, Carlos Wing-Hung Lo, Xueyong Zhan, and Wei Wang. 2015. Campaign-Style Enforcement and Regulatory Compliance. *Public Administration Review* 75(1): 85–95.
- Ma, Qiusha. 2002. The Governance of NGOs in China Since 1978: How Much Autonomy? *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 31(3): 305–28.
- Ma, Xiaoying, and Leonard Ortolano. 2000. *Environmental Regulation in China: Institutions, Enforcement and Compliance*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Martens, Susan. 2006. Public Participation with Chinese Characteristics: Citizen Consumers in China’s Environmental Management. *Environmental Politics* 15(2): 211–30.
- Meyer, John W., and Brian Rowan. 1977. Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology* 83(2): 340–63.
- Michelson, Ethan. 2007. Lawyers, Political Embeddedness, and Institutional Continuity in China’s Transition from Socialism. *American Journal of Sociology* 113(2): 352–414.
- Mol, Arthur P. J., and Neil T. Carter. 2006. China’s Environmental Governance in Transition. *Environmental Politics* 15(2): 149–70.
- Nathan, Andrew J. 2003. Authoritarian Resilience. *Journal of Democracy* 14(1): 6–17.
- Nee, Victor. 1992. Organizational Dynamics of Market Transition: Hybrid Forms, Property Rights, and Mixed Economy in China. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 37(1): 1–27.
- Nee, Victor, and Sonja Opper. 2010. Political Capital in a Market Economy. *Social Forces* 88(5): 2105–32.
- Nunnally, Jum C. 1967. *Psychometric Methods*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Oliver, Christine. 1991. Strategic Responses to Institutional Processes. *Academy of Management Review* 16(1): 145–79.
- Peng, Mike W., and Yadong Luo. 2000. Managerial Ties and Firm Performance in a Transition Economy: The Nature of a Micro-Macro Link. *Academy of Management Journal* 43(3): 486–501.
- Pittinsky, Todd L., and Cheng Zhu. 2005. Contemporary Public Leadership in China: A Research Review and Consideration. *Leadership Quarterly* 16(6): 921–39.
- Provan, Keith G., Kun Huang, and H. Brinton Milward. 2009. The Evolution of Structural Embeddedness and Organizational Social Outcomes in a Centrally Governed Health and Human Services Network. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 19(4): 873–93.
- Ru, Jiang, and Leonard Ortolano. 2009. Development of Citizen-Organized Environmental NGOs in China. *Voluntas* 20(2): 141–68.
- Rumbul, Rebecca. 2013. Structurally Excluded? Structural Embeddedness and Civil Society Competition for Funding. *Journal of Civil Society* 9(4): 341–60.
- Saich, Tony. 2000. Negotiating the State: The Development of Social Organizations in China. *China Quarterly* 161: 124–41.
- Salamon, Lester M., ed. 2012. *The State of Nonprofit America*. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Schwartz, Jonathan. 2004. Environmental NGOs in China: Roles and Limits. *Pacific Affairs* 77(1): 28–49.
- Sheng, Sheng, Kevin Zheng Zhou, and Julie Juan Li. 2011. The Effects of Business and Political Ties on Firm Performance: Evidence from China. *Journal of Marketing* 75(1): 1–15.
- Spires, Anthony J. 2011a. Contingent Symbiosis and Civil Society in an Authoritarian State: Understanding the Survival of China’s Grassroots NGOs. *American Journal of Sociology* 117(1): 1–45.
- . 2011b. Organizational Homophily in International Grantmaking: U.S.-Based Foundations and Their Grantees in China. *Journal of Civil Society* 7(3): 305–31.
- Stalley, Phillip, and Dongning Yang. 2006. An Emerging Environmental Movement in China? *China Quarterly* 186: 333–56.
- Suárez, David F. 2010. Street Credentials and Management Backgrounds: Careers of Nonprofit Executives in an Evolving Sector. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 39(4): 696–716.
- . 2011. Collaboration and Professionalization: The Contours of Public Sector Funding for Nonprofit Organizations. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 21(2): 307–26.
- Sullivan, Jonathan, and Lei Xie. 2009. Environmental Activism, Social Networks and the Internet. *China Quarterly* 198: 422–32.
- Tang, Shui-Yan, and Carlos Wing-Hung Lo. 2009. The Political Economy of Service Organizational Reform in China: An Institutional Choice Analysis. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 19(4): 731–67.
- Tang, Shui-Yan, and Xueyong Zhan. 2008. Civic Environmental NGOs, Civil Society, and Democratisation in China. *Journal of Development Studies* 44(3): 425–48.

- Teets, Jessica C. 2009. Post-Earthquake Relief and Reconstruction Efforts: The Emergence of Civil Society in China? *China Quarterly* 198: 330–47.
- . 2013. Let Many Civil Societies Bloom: The Rise of Consultative Authoritarianism in China. *China Quarterly* 213: 19–38.
- Xin, Katherine K., and Jone L. Pearce. 1996. Guanxi: Connections as Substitutes for Formal Institutional Support. *Academy of Management Journal* 39(6): 1641–58.
- Yang, Guobin. 2005. Environmental NGOs and Institutional Dynamics in China. *China Quarterly* 181: 46–66.
- Zhan, Xueyong, Carlos Wing-Hung Lo, and Shui-Yan Tang. 2014. Contextual Changes and Environmental Policy Implementation: A Longitudinal Study of Street-Level Bureaucrats in Guangzhou, China. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 24(4): 1005–35.
- Zhan, Xueyong, and Shui-Yan Tang. 2013. Political Opportunities, Resource Constraints, and Policy Advocacy of Environmental NGOs in China. *Public Administration* 91(2): 381–99.

## Appendix Survey Measures

### **Nonprofit Operations: Funding Stability**

Question: To what extent do you agree that external grants of your NGO are mainly long-term and multiple times? (5-point Likert response)

### **Nonprofit Operations: Management System, Cronbach's alpha = .688 (11 items)**

Question: Does your NGO meet any of the following conditions? (yes/no)

1. Our organization has accounting staff (full time or part time).
2. Our organization has lawyers (full time or part time).
3. Our organization will prepare a financial statement every year.
4. Our financial statement is available to public every year.
5. Our organization has established a board of advisors.
6. Our organization has established a board of directors.
7. Our organization has a team of full time leaders and managers.
8. Our organization provides internships for college students.
9. Our organization regularly recruits full-time staff.
10. Our organization regularly raises money from public and donors.
11. Our organization regularly conducts performance evaluation for our work and completed projects.

### **Nonprofit Policy Advocacy Engagement, Cronbach's alpha = .779 (5 items)**

Question: To what extent do you agree that the descriptions below are consistent with your NGO? (5-point Likert response).

1. We are often invited to participate in the development of environmental regulations and policies.
2. We often co-work with other NGOs to provide suggestions for environmental protection policy.
3. We often criticize corporate environmental pollution behavior/incident jointly with other NGOs.
4. We often release policy research report to raise attention of the government and public.
5. We often do public interest advertisements to raise public concerns on environmental issues.

### **Nonprofit Policy Advocacy Effectiveness**

Question: To what extent do you agree that your NGO has policy influence on government? (5-point Likert response)

### **Nonprofit Service Scope: Legal Services (coded 1 if the answer is yes, otherwise 0)**

Question: Is your NGO engaged in providing environmental law services and lawsuits? (yes/no)

### **Nonprofit Service Scale: National Focus (coded 1 if the answer is yes, otherwise 0)**

Question: Is your NGO focusing on environmental issues at the national level? (yes/no)

### **Political Ties (coded 1 if the answer to any one of the following questions is yes, otherwise 0)**

#### **Current Political Ties (coded 1 if the answer to question 1 or question 3 is yes, otherwise 0)**

Question: Do leaders of your NGO meet any of the four conditions? (yes/no)

1. Currently working in government
2. Formerly working in government
3. Current members of the People's Congress or Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
4. Former members of the People's Congress or Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference

### **Service Organization Ties (coded 1 if the answer to any one of the following questions is yes, otherwise 0)**

Questions: Do leaders of your NGO meet any of the four conditions? (yes/no)

1. Currently working in universities/research institutes
2. Formerly working in universities/research institutes
3. Currently working in media
4. Formerly working in media

### **Personal Ties (coded 1 if the answer is yes, otherwise 0)**

Question: Do leaders of your NGO have good personal relationships with government officials? (yes/no)

### **NGO Ties, Cronbach's alpha = .836 (5 items)**

Questions: To what extent do you agree that the descriptions below are consistent with your NGO? (5-point Likert response)

1. We often share environmental protection information with other NGOs.
2. We often cooperate with other NGOs to protect the environment.
3. We often co-work with other NGOs to put forward request to the government.
4. We often co-work with other NGOs to strive to improve environmental governance.
5. We often work with other NGOs to hold officials accountable for environmental protection.