

*An Emerging Group Name “Gongyi”: Ideational Collectivity in China’s Civil Society**

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Abstract

Contestation and mutual influence between the state and civil society go beyond formal institutional realms, and extend into the ideational spheres of social labeling, public speech, and collective consciousness building. Based on data from a three-year research project, this article analyzes Chinese activists and nongovernmental organization (NGO) practitioners’ preferences for group identity, and finds “gongyi zuzhi” (public interest organization) to be the most popular social label. The article thus argues that if there exists a collective sense of belonging among activists and NGO practitioners in China’s civil society, the discursive contour of this sense of belonging is most likely to be “for public interest.” The article further maps out possible associations between one’s NGO-related work experience and reflections on group identity. “Gongyi” as a shared social label may not be politically inspiring to some, but it carries a straightforward message of “working for the public good” and discursive potential for meaning making. This finding suggests not only society’s embeddedness and activists’ pragmatism, but also maturing collective consciousness and discursive autonomy in China’s civil society.

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On 15 December 2011, the first-of-its-kind National All-People Gongyi Conference took place in Guangzhou city, capital of Guangdong province and a hub of Chinese nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The Chinese term “gongyi” (公益) can be literally translated as “public interest” and is often used together with philanthropy (慈善 *cishan*) in Chinese context. Back then, “gongyi” was rather new to the vocabulary of Chinese activists and NGOs, compared with “shetuan” (社團 social organization, abbreviation of 社會團體 *shehui tuanti*) or “minjian zuzhi” (民間組織 folk organization). At the conference, participants from the NGO sector, governmental agencies, academic institutions, and other backgrounds expressed varied viewpoints on the development and challenges of social activism and NGOs in China.

On the one hand, one keynote speaker Wang Zhenyao (王振耀), the Dean of China Philanthropy Research Institute in Beijing and also a former official of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, spoke passionately about all social organizations embracing “gongyi cishan” (public-interest philanthropy) as a possible new common identity. Wang particularly criticized the usage of *caogen* by some NGOs as it implied “confrontation, mistrust, and self-claimed high moral ground [of some NGOs], distancing [NGOs] from governments and businesses.”¹

On the other hand, another group of speakers highlighted the “all-people” (全民 *quanmin*) aspect of the conference theme and the need of bottom-up public participation in the pursuit of “public interest.” These speakers included Zhu Jiangang (朱健剛), both a scholar and an influential practitioner of NGO incubation in China (his team based at the Sun Yat-sen University organized the conference); Liang Xiaoyan (梁曉燕), founder and former Director of the Friends of Nature (the largest environmental NGO in China); and activist-minded scholars from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Zhu stated in his speech: “*Quanmin gongyi* is different from state-led *cishan* or ‘rich-people-doing-good.’ The core of *quanmin gongyi* lies in ordinary people taking part in realizing public interest. In this sense, *gongyi* becomes a critical channel for public participation.”² Zhu instantly received loud applause from the audience, who had earlier shown only a lukewarm response to Wang’s speech.

Such an impassioned public exchange between retired officials, activist-minded scholars, and NGO participants reveals that contestation and mutual influence between the state and civil society extends beyond materialistic and formal institutional terms into ideational spheres of social labeling, public speech, and collective consciousness building. All

sides of the exchange at the Gongyi Conference were aware of the implications of any potential group names to be adopted by the fast-growing NGO sector, and therefore they carefully delivered their varied opinions and disagreements.

From 2010 to 2012, the author of this article conducted a research project on the ideational dimension of civil society in China, focusing on civil society actors' perceptions and articulations of their work, peers, profession, and roles in Chinese society and politics. In the decade prior to this project, the author like many peers, who also studied Chinese NGOs, emphasized NGOs' tangible work and interactions with state authorities. However, this article, one of a series of publications based on this recent project, recommends a new approach to understand civil society in China: a shift from the organizational level to the collective level, and from the institutional dimension to the ideational dimension.³ This epistemological move draws upon both the comparative political literature on civil society in the former communist bloc in Eastern and Central Europe and studies of strategic groups and group identities in China. This article on civil society actors echoes the call by Schubert and Heberer made in their article for this volume and focuses on collective identity to understand the overall strength and political relevance of social groups in China.

The main finding of this article returns to the very phrase of *gongyi*, which has appeared to be the most popular social label preferred by activists and NGO practitioners to define themselves and mentally locate themselves in the broad sociopolitical landscape in China. This article consists of a literature review (including the explanation of the research design), four sections of empirical analysis, and a conclusion. The first empirical part provides the background information of all the possible group names referring to activists, NGOs, and civil society actors. The second and third empirical analysis sections present the survey results of 255 Chinese activists and NGO practitioners, and map out and compare the associations between one's NGO work experience and choices of group name. The fourth empirical part further discusses the survey findings and uses fieldwork notes to explain the type of activist pragmatism that could have contributed to the converging preferences of the group name *gongyi*. The conclusion touches upon the potential impacts of policy shifts related to NGOs and the activism community after Xi Jinping took office in 2012.

1. Why Collective Identity and How to Examine It in the Context of China's Civil Society?

Civil society in contemporary China in a broad sense is entering an intensification phase, marked by a few evidently contradicting tendencies. On the one hand, the sociophysical presence of a “third sector” — after the state system and the corporate world — in China is certainly expanding, given the rising numbers and geographic spread of NGOs and voluntary associations, the financial asset of private philanthropic foundations, and the visibility of public policy campaigns organized by these actors.⁴ Particularly after the Sichuan earthquake in 2008, the state welcomed self-organized volunteering and donation campaigns for a limited period of time, which gave the NGO sector an unexpected boost, and bottom-up social activism mushroomed in various public policy issue areas such as disaster relief and reconstruction, rural community development, and public health.⁵

On the other hand, the rapid expansion of the third sector and grassroots volunteerism in the 2000s has prompted self-criticism, debates, and even serious friction within the main circles of NGOs and activists. Despite increasing public visibility and availability of funding, negative campaigning and personal attacking have become more common than before within some NGO communities.⁶ While private donors and foundations openly challenged Chinese NGOs about their self-governance and organizational transparency, NGOs in response questioned donors the appropriateness of applying the Western model of grant making in the Chinese context.⁷ Solidary across organizational boundaries in the civil society seem to remain feeble due to, among many other factors, leadership failure, political pressure, and diversification.⁸

Moreover, under Hu Jintao's leadership, policy reforms became more “people oriented” (以人為本 *yiren weiben*), and the new “mass line” was launched to enhance public input in policy making (see Korolev's article in the issue). Despite the anxiety over the contagious impact of the “color revolutions” and the Arab Spring on Chinese society, the state started to reform social management by developing the “social work” sector and encouraging local state agencies to engage with grassroots NGOs and subcontract social services in the late 2000s. During this (short-lived) period of social policy reform, some Civil Affairs offices at different localities became less hostile toward NGOs (particularly social service delivery groups), increased funds for NGOs (in the form of service outsourcing

contract), and pushed for “scaling up” of nongovernmental social welfare provision.¹⁰

In fact, ostensible and inconsistent “support” from different segments of the state has complicated the development of NGOs and social activism in China. For example, local state agencies have invented new ways to penetrate and collaborate with, instead of simply suppressing, the growing NGO sector in some cities. This is similar to the situation described by McCarthy’s article on faith-back charities in this volume. Thornton also found that local-level party organs in Shanghai experimented with establishing its own PONGOs (party-organized NGOs) to strengthen their direct connection with the mass rather than to generate political support to grassroots NGOs.¹¹

In the mist of all these complexities and contradictions, NGOs are getting more public visibility and social resources, and therefore some may argue that the NGO-state relationship has entered a new era. However, this article warns the problem of taking the unity of the NGO and civil society for granted. It scrutinizes the emergence and content of group identity and collective consciousness among activists and NGO practitioners. As the article will show civil society actors’ collective consciousness is shaped by the existing authoritarian structures, popular narratives, and specific professional experiences; and autonomy and solidarity in the ideational sphere are not directly associated with the sheer size of the social community but pending on many other relevant factors.

The ideational dimension of civil society is highlighted in the literature on dissident movements, social resistance, and political cultural change in the former communist bloc in Eastern and Central Europe before the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Prior to the mass protests in the late 1980s, movement leaders and dissident intellectuals in these former communist countries were able to “reinvent politics” by generating widely recognized new cultural symbols and popularizing alternative political ideals and discourses. The formation of new ideals, discourses, and symbols was crucial for various social groups and the mass to “make sense of” their actions as a whole, which eventually led to the collective demand of regime shift in their countries.¹²

In the China field, scholars of “strategic groups” and important social sectors have paid attention to the ideational dimension such as political orientations, opinions, and collective identity.¹³ For example, in their article in this volume Schubert and Heberer consider shared identity as a

main aspect of the emerging strategic group of private business owners in Chinese polity. Many China experts have examined political opinions and shared values of the middle class in China in order to probe the hypothesis that market economy would inevitably lead to the rise of democratic political culture and popular demand of regime change.¹⁴

Scholarship on civil society in China, however, tends to take the ideational collectivity and uniformity among various civil society actors for granted, neglecting the fact that these actors have adopted very diverse organizational structures and cultures such as one-man activism, loosely organized groups, registered NGO, and research centers embedded in universities. Often based on specific case studies, researchers in this field tend to cluster civic organizations together and project *all* of them as against the state in principle, yet dependent on the state for survival.¹⁵

Borrowing Migdal's analytical metaphor, in the "trenches" of the state apparatus, the lowest end of political hierarchies,¹⁶ as the institutional boundaries are blurred between the ruling and the ruled, and between the suppresser and the suppressed, the form of suppression and resistance changes and becomes hard to detect. What remains to be contested between state and social actors is often in the realms of mentality, knowledge, imagination, and ideas. Low-ranked technocrats (not law enforcement or national security personnel) who are in charge of particular policy implementation and/or social service delivery sometimes are often keen listeners, sympathizers, and even working partners of NGOs because of their shared local social connections and areas of expertise.¹⁷ When these technocrats face thorny social problems such as delivering relief goods, testing sexual minorities for HIV, negotiating with pollution victims, and communicating with followers of the church, they may even seek advice from veteran activists, experienced social workers, and NGOs.¹⁸

In terms of sociophysical size and financial and organizational capacity, the NGO sector and civil society in China remains too dispersed to be compared with state agencies. But, nonstate actors and NGOs may have a chance to take a lead in developing new knowledge, innovation, ideational principles, and management methods in emerging public policy areas, in addition to their skills (and sometimes instinct) to expose policy failure at local levels. McCarthy made a convincing argument on religious charities' capacity of "repurposing the state" in policy formation

by organizing believers' social activities incorporating the local contexts. Wu and Peng also found that professional expertise, capacity to use Web 2.0 technologies to manage information, and willingness to become transparent with public donations enabled nongovernmental relief organizations to surpass official relief agencies in recent years.²⁰

This article explores the dynamics between state agencies and civil society actors in ideational spheres by focusing on the content of the emerging group identity among NGO practitioners. As illustrated by the debates at the All-People Gongyi Conference, the Chinese state recognizes the importance of exerting control over not only the flow of funds and goods, but also the legitimate expression of the sprouting community of NGOs and activists. By actively promoting the usage of certain terms related to NGOs and voluntary groups and suppressing others, the state exercises its power in delineating the discursive boundaries and features of these groups. For civil society actors, who are increasingly aware of their peers and the community they socially belong to,²¹ it has become a critical task to search for and reinvent social labels and discursive contours to promote their causes and collective identities.

Most of the empirical data in this paper are based on a survey of 255 activists and NGO practitioners (including part-time and full-time staff and core volunteers) across regions and policy issue areas in China. The survey was conducted by a team of experienced researchers (including the author) and in various locations in mainland China and Hong Kong SAR from January 2010 to April 2012. All interviewees had prior working experiences with NGOs and activists, which helped to ensure a basic level of mutual trust between the interviewer and interviewee and to enhance the quality of the survey. Interviewees came from diverse professional backgrounds including yet not limited to environmental protection, health, women and gender, children's rights, ethnic minorities, education, disabled rights, labor, migrant labor, sexual rights, poverty relief, antidiscrimination, and religious freedom. They were based in 23 provinces and provincial-level municipalities, and most of them were between 22 and 33 years old (basic information about the interviewees can be found in Appendix A).

Before going into the empirical analysis, clarification of three key terms is needed. First, the article defines NGOs as voluntary-based, not-for-profit, and private organizations that exhibit a minimum level of institutionalization and self-governance,²² and differentiates them from

GONGOs, PONGO, and all other state-backed social organizations.²³ Second, NGO practitioners are hands-on “movers and shakers” of the society — professional policy advocates, social mobilizers, and core organizational staff, who struggle with political pressure and practical challenges in specific issue areas on a regular basis. Third, this article includes interview data from a wide range of activists, some of whom were well known, and others remained low profile. These activists are not literary dissidents, but are affiliated with one or more civic organizations. They are NGO practitioners with enhanced social leadership and visions.

2. Search for a Shared Group Name among Chinese NGO Practitioners

This part of the article explains a list of popular social labels, terms, and other types of expression used by the mainstream media and civil society actors to describe voluntary groups, NGOs, social organizations, and the people affiliated with them. These expressions include six ready-made terms — social organization (社會組織 *shehui zuzhi* or 社團 *shetuan*), minjian organization, gongyi organization, NGO, nonprofit organization (NPO, 非盈利組織 *feiyingli zuzhi*), and civil society (公民社會 *gongmin shehui*), and one other way of social identification — the actual content of one’s work such as environmental protection or rural poverty relief.

Social organization, the most generic term on the list, refers to the entire agglomeration of associations, nonprofit, voluntary groups, NGOs, private charities, and independent research institutions. In some of the earliest scholarly writings in Chinese, this was the only term used to refer to the diverse world of NGOs and the third sector.²⁴ It is important to note that when used in official documents, this term strictly excludes the eight “people’s organizations” (人民團體 *renmin tuanti*) that are formal governmental bodies designed to implement policies related to women, youth, the disabled, private business owners, and other main social sectors in China.

Minjian zuzhi (folk organization) is a more culturally endogenous term for “social organizations,” often used in contrast with “miaotang” (廟堂) — the authority. Besides *shetuan*, state agencies often also use *minjian* in official settings. For instance, the official bureaus in charge of social organization registration within the Ministry of Civil Affairs system in many localities are called “Bureau of Social Organization Management” (民間組織管理局 *minjian zuzhi guanli ju*).²⁵

However, it is necessary to highlight another side of this seemingly official and apolitical term “minjian.” Over the years, for many activists and NGO practitioners, the term “minjian” has actually been associated with very different sentiments, subjects, and meanings. The short history of a former independent magazine, *Minjian*, active between 2005 and 2007, is the best case in point.²⁶ Founded by a group of influential activists, *Minjian* was periodically published in Guangzhou and devoted to activists, human rights lawyers, social workers, and other NGO participants in China. This publication made the term “minjian” and the ideas related to civil society, social autonomy, civicness, associational life, and citizen journalism widely popular among its audience, until the editorial office was forced to close down in July 2007.²⁷ Therefore, beneath the apolitical and folk façade, the discourse on who constitutes “minjian” has been highly politicized.²⁸

Gongyi organization is another social label associated with NGOs and the third sector in China that has become quite common since the late 2000s.²⁹ Like the term *minjian*, it also evolved along two discursive trajectories. One is driven by the official propaganda. For example, the Ministry of Civil Affairs launched a national daily newspaper, *Gongyi Times*, in 2001 and started promoting the usage of the term as a name as well as a guideline for all social organizations. The other trajectory is constructed by NGO practitioners and activists who create various add-ons to the term to give it a revised flavor, such as “quanmin gongyi” — inclusive public interest — and “gongyi weiquan” (公益維權), rights advocacy for public interest.

Both acronyms NGO and NPO have gradually become familiar to the Chinese NGO communities and the public, and are now frequently used in mass media, popular writings, and sometimes even governmental publications.³⁰ The original Chinese translation of “nongovernmental organization” is the phrase “fei zhengfu,” which has a slightly negative flavor, because it reads as if the organization is by nature “against the government” (反政府 *fan zhengfu*). In a way, NGO and more so NPO are convenient replacements for and reduce the political flavor of the full term of “nongovernmental organization.”

Unlike all other group names examined in this research, the term “civil society” is a theoretical concept directly taken from academic writings. It is included for the obvious research interest. Scholarship on the topic of civil society in the China field emerged as early as the 1980s. Yet it was not until the late 1990s that the concept began to migrate to NGO circles,

media, and the broad general audience. Kinman Chan, a Hong Kong scholar and long-term advocate of the development of NGOs in southern China, aptly pointed out that “civil society” as a public rhetoric had been reconstructed and popularized by a group of leading scholars and activists in China to encourage the development of autonomous civil organizations.³¹ Since Xi Jinping came into power, a new wave of political campaigns has suppressed pro-liberal ideas in the public sphere and higher education institutions including the teaching of civil society. Such state action is, nevertheless, a strong indicator of the wide spread of the ideas related to the concept “civil society.” This research empirically tests how much the main actors of the supposed civil society in China know about and embrace this abstract notion.³²

The option of identifying with one’s work is included in the research mainly due to the observations from previous fieldwork. For the activists and NGO staff active at the very grassroots level and with marginalized populations, there are no suitable simple terms to use to describe what they do. Even if certain expressions are deemed suitable by scholars, activists themselves do not use them for self-identification. For example, many Chinese environmental activists prefer to call themselves “I do environmental things” (幹環保的 *gan huanbao de*), instead of saying “I am an environmentalist” (環保主義者 *huanbao zhuyi zhe*).³³

Even though the research has tried to include as many important terms as possible, a few interesting ones are not included mainly because they were not part of the significant discursive phenomenon when the survey was designed and conducted.³⁴ But, the survey gave the interviewees the option of using other terms for social identification beyond the above list, and detailed notes were taken to capture their reflections. Examples of such “other” expressions include philanthropy, private foundation, grassroots organization, volunteer group, enterprise, research institution, service organization, student organization, and Muslim charity. Private foundation (基金會 *jijinhui*, or 非公募基金會 *feigongmu jijinhui*) and philanthropy foundation (慈善基金會 *cishan jijinhui*) became officially recognized in China in 2004, when the State Council announced the Regulation on Foundation Administration.³⁵ As a social category, it received public recognition only in the 2010s after a group of such foundations (e.g., Narada Foundation, One Foundation, Alxa SEE Ecological Association, and YouChange Social Entrepreneur Foundation) came to the forefront of disaster relief and social welfare by openly advocating for and consistently supporting NGOs and independent activists. Similarly,

social entrepreneurship (社會企業 *shehui qiye*) has been becoming more popular among young and emerging Chinese activists in very recent years. Also, when the research survey was first designed, the author was aware of the term “caogen” and how it had migrated from English academic writings—to differentiate those independent yet poorly equipped NGOs from GONGOs—into the common vocabulary of Chinese NGO practitioners. But, at that time, the author considered the term too academic to be included in the main list of options. Discussion of the term “caogen” in this article is mainly based on interview notes and qualitative data.

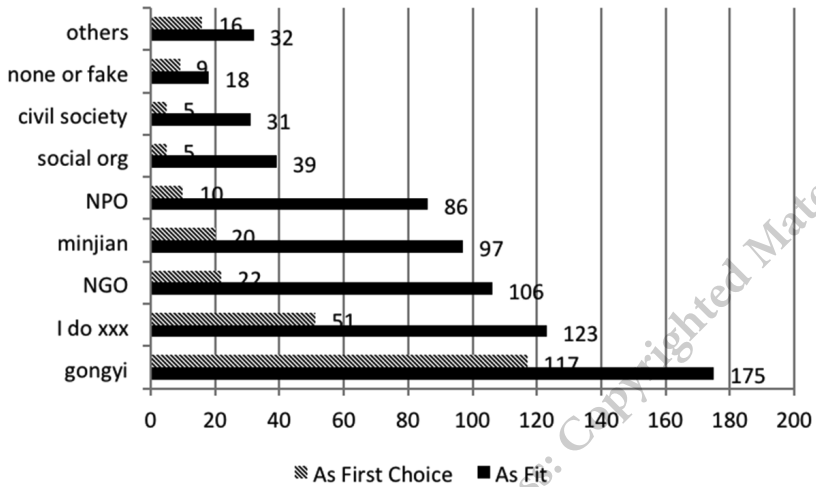
3. “Gongyi” as the Most Popular Group Name

In the Law on the Management of Foreign NGOs' Activities within Mainland China, which was recently adopted at the 20th meeting of the Standing Committee of the 12th National People's Congress on 28 April 2016, the terms “fei zhengfu,” “fei yingli,” “gongyi,” and “shehui zuzhi” are all used, but not “minjian zuzhi” or civil society.³⁶ This selective choice of wording in lawmaking reflects the state's deliberation on how to define the NGO community.

What about social actors' deliberation on the names designated to them? This research asked 255 interviewees a question in order to start understanding their reflections on this issue: “How do you introduce yourself and your work to other people?” The interviewees were first free to choose as many as they deemed fit from a list of possible answers (as explained above). Next, they were asked to pick one term that they used most frequently, and would in fact prefer to be known to others and the public by this term. Figure 1 shows the patterns of the two rounds of responses.

Three main observations can be drawn from Figure 1. First, “gongyi” appears to be the most popular social label and group name preferred by the NGO practitioners interviewed. When interviewees were free to choose as many social labels as they wished, two-thirds of them chose “gongyi” organization. When they were asked to think of the most frequently used and preferred way of self-introduction and social identification, their answers also accentuated the option of “gongyi”; in comparison, all other options, except identification by work content, shrunk down to almost insignificance (less than 10 percent of the total valid answers).

Figure 1: Preferred Group Names (Total: 255)



Note: “Others” includes philanthropy, private foundation, grassroots organization, volunteer group, enterprise, research institution, service organization, student organization, and Muslim charity.

Second, besides “gongyi,” it is also common, though not the first choice, for interviewees to identify with work content (half of the total) and all the terms related to “social organization” — particularly NGO, NPO, and “minjian” (each above one-third of the total). As the next section of the article will explain, particular NGO-related work experiences contribute to one’s preference for these two ways of social identification.

Third, the narrative related to civil society appears to be very marginal among the interviewees. During the interviews, most interviewees expressed that they had heard of and understood the basic meaning attached to the term “civil society.” However, only five claimed they would still use “civil society” as a first choice of self-introduction and social identification, which appears to be the least popular among all options, even less popular than “no introduction, or introducing by false information.”

The remaining part of this section further explores the finding of “gongyi” as the most popular group name, and section 5 will discuss the other main findings and compare the trends related to the name of “gongyi” with those about work content, NGO, and “minjian.”

Exemplified by the public discussions at the 2011 All-People Gongyi Conference described at the beginning of the article, “gongyi” could be a flexible enough discursive contour to be filled with multiple meanings acceptable to both the state and civil society. The popularity of “gongyi” shown by the survey could indicate the trickling-down effects of the official propaganda campaigns, the spread of the teachings by leading activists and activist-minded scholars, or both or neither of these trends. To get a better understanding of the finding of “gongyi” as a popular group name, this research employed statistical tools to sort out whether and how NGO-related activities are associated with one’s reflections on social belonging.

This part of the research focuses on three clusters of indicators that measure NGO-related experience to map out their associations with group-name preferences. The first two indicators are length of work experience and connections with other NGOs. The assumption related to these two factors is that accumulative experience in the NGO world (either over time or via social-professional connections) contributes to one’s recognition of social belonging. The third cluster of indicators—direct engagement, public and/or policy engagement, and professional engagement—probes the association between specific strategies to reach organizational goals and NGO practitioners’ reflections on social identity.

The indicator of NGO strategy is defined and coded based on existing literature on NGOs and activism in China and the author’s fieldwork in the past decade.³⁷ First, *direct engagement* refers to delivering assistance and social service directly to disadvantaged groups and policy victims at the grassroots level. This is usually considered the most common strategy for Chinese NGO and activism community. Second, *public and/or policy engagement* refers to public education, policy advocacy, public campaign, and/or public monitoring of policy implementation, or governmental behavior. This is comparatively the most challenging and politically sensitive strategy of the three. Nevertheless, more and more NGOs are experimenting with it across various issue areas. Third, *professional engagement* refers to legal assistance, scientific (and social scientific) research, technological development, and/or independent publishing of writings or artworks (definitions of all indicators can be found in Appendix B).

The analysis of whether and which work-related factors contribute to one’s preference of “gongyi” as a group name involves (1) mapping out all possible associations between work experience indicators and the

preference of “gongyi” (as both one suitable group name and the first choice) by correlation tests (three columns on the left in Table 1) and (2) testing the significantly correlated factors by regression analysis (Table 2).³⁸

Table 1: Work Experience and Preference for Group Name

Indicator of Work Experience	Preference for Group Name				
	Gongyi		Work	NGO	Minjian
	Suitable	First Choice	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable
1)Work length	—	-.138**	—	—	.126**
2)NGO connections	.131**	.122*	—	—	—
3)Strategy	—	—	—	—	—
Direct engagement	—	.106*	—	—	.150**
Public/policy engagement	—	—	.206***	—	—
Professional engagement	—	-.116*	.205***	—	—

Note: Only significant correlations are presented.

Pearson correlation coefficients (two-tailed): * $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

Table 2: “Gongyi” as One Suitable Group Name and the First Choice

Variables	Gongyi as One Suitable Group	Gongyi as the First Choice
	Name	
	OSL Test	OSL Test
	Unstandardized Coefficients	Unstandardized Coefficients
	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>B (SE)</i>
Control variables		
Age	-.005 (.003)*	-.007 (.004)*
Gender	-.092 (.061)	-.062 (.069)
Education	-.015 (.048)	.026 (.055)
Economic status	.035 (.022)	-.010 (.025)
Explanatory variables		
Work length	nil	-.001 (.001)
NGO connections	.091 (.043)**	.128 (.050)**
Direct engagement	nil	.181 (.090)**
Public/policy engagement	nil	nil
Professional engagement	nil	-.138 (.068)**
(Constant)	.785 (.166)***	.661 (.202)***
Regression model		
Sig.	.031	.005
R^2	5.3%	10.2%
<i>N</i>	230	208

Note: Only explanatory variables with significant Pearson correlation scores are included in the regression models.

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

As a possible way of self-introduction and group name, one's preference of "gongyi" is only significantly associated with NGO connections, and the association holds well in the regression tests. As the first choice and most preferred way of self-introduction and being known to others and/or the public, one's identification with "gongyi" is correlated with all NGO work-related factors focused on in this study except the strategy of public and/or policy engagement, which is also confirmed by the regression tests.

The article makes four interpretations of the statistical findings presented in Tables 1 and 2 about the "gongyi" narrative among NGO practitioners. First, in both scenarios, NGO connections show strong correlations with the choice of "gongyi." This means that the more one socializes with peer NGO practitioners and works with other NGOs, the more one would prefer to identify with the group name "gongyi." This statistical association suggests that the discursive phenomenon of "gongyi" has spread via interorganizational connections, and thus could have made an imprint on the NGO community's collective mind-set. The term "gongyi" has been internalized by the NGO community, and its popularity of narrative is nurtured by the factors from within the community and via interorganizational contacts.

Second, the length of NGO-related work has a significantly negative effect on one's choice of "gongyi" as the first choice of social identification (though not sustained in the regression model). This means that the longer one has been involved in NGO-related work, the less likely one would choose "gongyi" over other group names. This pattern, together with the negative effect of age in both regression models, suggests that "gongyi" is a relatively new narrative within the NGO community. Veteran NGO practitioners use other terms (such as "minjian") more often rather than "gongyi." Alternatively, the negative correlation implies the lack of sophistication of the "gongyi" narrative. It is plausible that the more work experiences one has acquired, the better one understands the NGO world, and the more likely one would use a different term from "gongyi" to express one's sense of social belonging.

The third interpretation is connected with the second one above. The strategy of applying professional skills in NGO work (e.g., legal assistance, research, and publishing) is also negatively associated with one's identification of "gongyi" as the first choice. Such a negative association holds in the regression model. This suggests that "gongyi" is probably deemed as too generic thus unsuitable as a group name for someone who

has been involved the type of NGO work that requires professional knowledge and skills.

Fourth, the significant and positive association between the strategy of direct engagement and the preference of “gongyi” as the first choice (sustained in the regression model) indicates that NGO practitioners who work with the marginalized and the disadvantaged firsthand have mostly adopted the notion of “gongyi.” According to the existing literature, this group of NGO practitioners and activists, unlike the ones who are more in touch with policy makers and state agencies, tend to be more sympathetic to social injustice and grievances, and therefore more critical of the authorities, official rhetoric, and policy languages. However, the positive association presented here suggests that “gongyi” is not viewed as a term promoted solely by the state among the possibly most critical segments of the NGO community. Similar to the first interpretation above, this correlation implies there are innate reasons for NGO practitioners’ wide acceptance of the “gongyi” narrative.

All these four patterns are relevant for understanding the “gongyi” narrative and possible discursive dynamics behind individuals’ preferences. The distinctiveness of the “gongyi” narrative is further demonstrated in the next section by comparing the patterns explained above with the associations between NGO work experiences and other preferred ways of expressing social belonging.

4. Compare *Gongyi* with Other Group Names

Besides “gongyi,” the article also finds that NGO practitioners often use “NGO,” “minjian,” and professional work content to articulate their social belonging. Different patterns of the association between NGO-related work experience and the preference of different group names help to further understand the “gongyi” narrative: what it is not and what it does not represent (three columns on the right in Table 1).

The work-content-focused narrative in a way differs from all other terms included in this study: the NGO practitioners who prefer to identify themselves with work content locate themselves in the society not merely by their organizational affiliations, but by their professional contributions to a public policy issue area. The correlational test results in Table 1 (middle column) suggest that the NGO practitioners who tend to identify with their work instead of the name of “gongyi” are more likely to be those who have the experience of engaging the general public

and advocating for policy change, and have obtained special professional skills (e.g., legal, research, or medical) in solving particular social problems.

Similarly, the nature and underlying reasons for the preference of “minjian” as a group name also differ from that for the “gongyi” narrative. The correlation data in Table 1 (column on the extreme right) suggest that the preference of “minjian” is positively associated with the length of one’s NGO experience, which sharply contrasts with the same aspect of the “gongyi” narrative. If one had started working with an NGO in the 1990s or early 2000s, one would have been familiar with the term “minjian” and the particular meanings attached to it (explained in section 3).

Although “NGO” is clearly not the first choice for most NGO practitioners to introduce themselves, it is still among the relatively popular ones. Despite its foreign origin, “NGO” has become part of the common lingo of Chinese activists, particularly among those who are based in cities.³⁹ However, all the statistical tests run by this research show nonsignificant correlations related to “NGO,” making it hard at this point to specify why some NGO practitioners prefer this label to express their social belonging.

In addition to work content, “NGO,” and “minjian,” the term “grassroots” was also used or mentioned at least a dozen times by the interviewees, most of whom worked in rural regions or with highly marginalized population (e.g., AIDS patients) according to the notes taken during survey interviews. For example, Mr. Liu, one NGO practitioner and social worker from Sichuan, who worked extensively with the victims of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, spoke at length about the terms “NGOs,” “civil society,” and “grassroots” during his interview:

They [people who work for NGOs based in Beijing or international NGOs’ China offices] are not “caogen.” We [people who work in rural areas, inland provinces and with marginalized populations] are real “caogen” volunteers. If you are a “caogen” volunteer [in the Chinese context], that means you have personally experienced [social] marginalization.⁴⁰

The strong preference for the term “caogen” — originally foreign, introduced into modern Chinese language only in recent years — among some Chinese activists such as Mr. Liu reflects the internal diversification of the NGO communities in China, the spread of the NGO phenomenon beyond large cities, and the rise of a new group of civic organizations

largely based in rural and less developed areas. The meanings attached to “grassroots” such as being locally rooted and poorly funded resonate with this new group of NGO practitioners. Their preference for “caogen” indicates their resistance to the state and official rhetoric on social activism (such as the speech by Wang Zhenyao), as well as their awareness of the disparities within the NGO community.

However, “caogen” is not a group name with broad appreciation among the interviewees. Many activists and NGO practitioners prefer “gongyi,” “minjian,” and “civil society” because they find these terms inclusive and can incorporate diverse types of social organizations. For example, Liang Xiaoyan has a well-known conceptualization about NGOs and social activism in China, which calls on all to contribute to a shared “ecological chain” (生態鏈 *shengtailian*): While political activists take the high risk to protest openly and push the boundary of liberty and resistance, professional NGOs supply expertise and knowledge; moreover, small and grassroots groups connect with the marginalized population and deliver social services. Different NGOs fulfill different roles in the broad domain of civil society, as if they were different species in a common bioecological system.⁴¹ This research has found this line of thinking about the NGO communities popular among the interviewees.

Finally, the last main finding in this article is the weakness of the civil society narrative as a potential framework of social identity for NGO practitioners. While there is an undeniable consensus among all the interviewees that they are part of a collective effort to make changes in China, the majority of them do not articulate such an effort as part of building a “civil society” or forging “independent social forces” in China.⁴² Most interviewed activists and NGO staff took pride in what they do, but they did not immediately associate it with political aspirations. “Gongmin shehui” for them is not something unheard of, but a bit “too political,” or overstretched. They sense a gap between their work and the narrative of “civil society,” and feel uncertain about how the public would respond to such a collective identity, which directly affects the outcome of their work.

For social leaders like Liang Xiaoyan and Zhu Jiangang, the terms such as “do something,” “caogen,” and NPO do not encompass the whole landscape of NGOs in today’s China. Thus they prefer narratives such as “minjian,” “gongyi,” and “civil society” to advocate for unity and solidarity among NGOs and activists. “Gongyi” for them is an acceptable discursive framework in that it promotes the shared aspiration of

contributing to the public good and offers room for meaning making. For many other NGO practitioners, who engage with the communities and people in need (including Mr. Liu), “gongyi” is also acceptable because it highlights “doing good” and helps these activists to communicate effectively with their intended audience. For those who have more NGO-related experiences and are better equipped with professional skills (particularly from the field of environmental protection), they are more eloquent about their social identity and often prefer to use the content of their work to locate themselves in the big picture of Chinese politics. But, even for this group of NGO practitioners, “gongyi” is not completely unfit or void of discursive possibilities. Therefore, all in all, “gongyi” emerges as the most popular group name preferred by NGO practitioners.

5. Activist Pragmatism and Discursive Autonomy

The convergence on “gongyi” as the name of a common social identity reflects a kind of pragmatism shared by Chinese activists and NGO practitioners. Such pragmatism is both epistemological and political. Activists and NGO staff are pragmatists in learning, deliberation, and action. When explaining why they think the way they do, the interviewees frequently referred to their work experience, the particular principles of their NGO, leading activists in their own field, and team members and partners. They rarely quoted from scholarship, propaganda, or thinkers from a different field.

With ideals, social concerns, and compassion, activists who decide to establish or join an NGO are, nevertheless, pragmatic and action-oriented. Compared with dissidents, intellectuals, and self-imposed exiles, they certainly are more moderate about political pursuits. Some NGO practitioners are more eloquent about their moderate political stance, and tend to advocate gradual reform (not radical revolution or regime collapse) as the right path for China’s future. Others, though firmly believing in the value of volunteering and reaching out to the marginalized population, are apolitical, or lack political understanding, in the eyes of political activists. What have rallied moderate activists and NGO practitioners with a large number of volunteers and ordinary citizens are often not their political aspirations but their commitment to take action, work hard, and search for practical solutions for social problems.

Such an activist pragmatism has gained traction within China's civil society thanks to particular discursive actions. For example, in 2008, Zhu Jiangang published his book *The Power of Action: The Practical Logic of Civic Voluntary Organizations*.⁴³ In the book, Zhu not only convincingly presented cases of small civic organizations making visible policy changes in China by taking direct yet nonconfrontational actions persistently, but also crystallized this pragmatic philosophy, or work ethics, for Chinese civil society actors. His ideas have spread widely among grassroots NGOs via his own lectures and numerous training sessions conducted by his colleagues and teammates.⁴⁴

Another important recent publication for civil society in China is *Workable Democracy: Complete Records of Applying Robert's Rules in a Village*, written by self-taught writer and activist Kou Yanding and social entrepreneur Yuan Tianpeng.⁴⁵ The book was based on their yearlong participatory-action research in a rural village in Anhui province to solve land-related disputes between village residents and local authorities. The book became an instant best seller among NGO practitioners and activism-oriented scholars in China, and made the two authors and "Robert's Rules" widely known in the NGO communities.⁴⁶

The main message shared by both of these two influential books among Chinese NGOs is that democratic decision making, self-governance, and policy advocacy are not abstract, impossible in China, or accessible only to social elites. Moreover, the principles substantiating democracy such as transparency of information, public participation, and public accountability ought to be experimented in different policy fields in China with NGOs as the avant-garde promoters of these principles. Popular writings on social activism by NGO practitioners like these two books manifest the pragmatic political philosophy shared by the majority of Chinese civil society actors.

Both fieldwork notes and quantitative analyses indicate that many dynamics and discursive processes including the type of activist pragmatism explained above have engendered the convergence on "gongyi" as a shared social identity among NGO practitioners from diverse backgrounds. The rise of the "gongyi" narrative shall not be narrowly interpreted as Chinese activists and NGO practitioners are constrained by both the authoritarian structures and their experiences in imagining their social identity. On the contrary, the article endeavors to show that they are conscious and highly selective of the ways to express what they aspire to and what they have achieved. As a discursive vessel, "gongyi" may

provide the very flexibility for activists to simultaneously circumvent political barriers and re-create meanings, without completely compromising their ideals.

6. Conclusion

In today's China, the Communist Party leaders continue to seek effective ways to secure state dominance in all aspects of social lives including how to identify oneself and how to speak of one's profession and peers to the public. During the Hu-Wen era, the state's effort to generate a one-size-fits-all official discourse on NGOs reflected nothing but its concerns over the growing social autonomy in the country. Such effort has been replaced by stronger repressive measures since 2012 under Xi Jinping's rule. For civil society and more specifically the NGO community, autonomy is not given but earned. What the state can give is only opportunity, but activists, NGOs, and civil society actors have to work hard to turn fleeting opportunities to lasting autonomy for self-capacity building and collective existence.

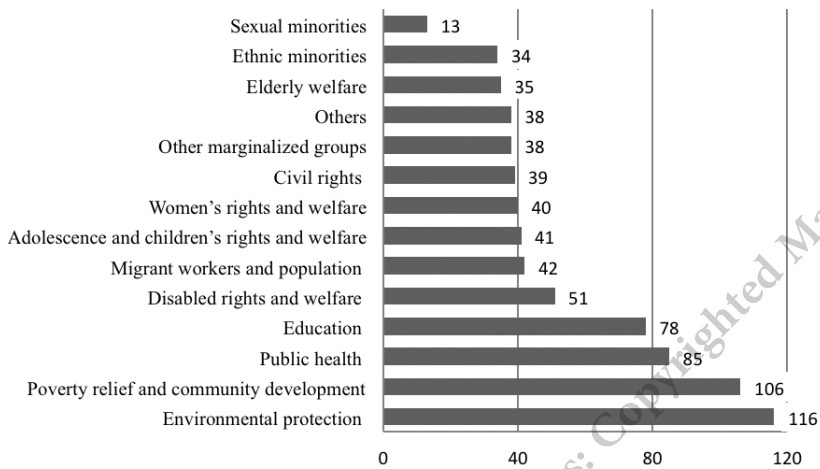
This research finds contestation and mutual influence between the state and civil society in the processes of articulating and shaping social identity. As the NGO community has grown substantially, both the state and leading social leaders are aware of the political relevance of the emergence of a shared social identity among all NGO practitioners. For most Chinese activists and NGO practitioners, their expressions of social identity are highly contingent on specific work experiences and peer relations, not lofty slogans, official rhetoric, or philosophic theories. In general, activists and NGO practitioners tend to identify themselves with three socially recognizable groups: (1) *gongyi* organizations, (2) specific sectors defined by professional activities, and (3) social organization in the generic sense. If one argues for the existence of a collective sense of belonging among Chinese activists and NGO staff, the actual repertoire of this collective social identity is most likely to be "gongyi organizations."

"Gongyi," as a shared social identity, may not be politically inspiring, but it is certainly not bland. It carries a clear message of working for the public good that most activists and NGO staff endorse. Beneath the overt consensus on "gongyi" are also signs of diversification of the articulation of collective identity (or identities) among civil society actors. Surely, some interviewed in this study chose to use "gongyi," "minjian," or "NGO"

as a way to introduce themselves purely for the sake of convenience, and were hesitant about getting engaged with political controversies. However, both survey data and fieldwork notes in this research suggest that NGO practitioners embrace “gongyi” for its substance and potential for meaning making, and interorganizational contacts with peers contribute to the dissemination and popularity of the “gongyi” narrative.

Using ostensibly neutral terms, taking moderate positions on political matters, and adopting pragmatism in NGO work shall not be interpreted as merely signs of the weakness of civil society in China. In the context of the clamping down on rights lawyers, international NGOs activities, and social activism in general in recent years, we have witnessed worsening discursive space for civil society development. Leading activists and scholars will have to be more creative in inventing new social codes that can convey independent political ideals, overcome censorship, and resonate with NGO practitioners and ordinary volunteers who are eager to help the disfranchised.

Appendix A: Scope of Work Self-Claimed by Interviewees



Appendix B: Definitions of the Variables Examined in Tables 1 and 2

Variable	Type	Values
Preference of group name (dependent variables)		
“Gongyi” as one suitable group name; “gongyi” as the first choice of group name; work content, NGO, and “minjian” as suitable group names	Dummy	1 = yes, 0 = no
Individual's general background (control variables)		
Age (by year)	Numerical	19–65
Gender	Dummy	1 = female, 2 = male
Education	Ordinal	0 = below college level, 1 = college, 2 = above college level
Economic status	Ordinal	1–10 (low to high), self-evaluation
Individual's work specific experience (explanatory variables)		
Work length (by month)	Numerical	1–300
NGO connections	Ordinal	0 = number of connected NGOs below 5, 1 = 5–20, 2 = above 20
Strategy		
1) Direct engagement	Dummy	1 = yes, direct service/assistance delivery, direct community engagement; 0 = no
2) Public/policy engagement	Dummy	1 = yes, public education, policy advocacy, public campaign, public monitoring of policy implementation; 0 = no
3) Professional engagement	Dummy	1 = yes, legal assistance, scientific research, technological development, independent publishing; 0 = no

Notes

- 1 For a full quotation of Wang's speech at the conference, see Fengshi Wu, "The Left, Right and Neutral among Social Activists in China," *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2012), p. 32. According to a commentary by Yu Fangqiang in the *China Development Brief* (No. 56) in the summer of 2012, Wang Zhenyao made another public speech and criticized the usage of "caogen" by NGOs in Shanghai in May. <http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/?p=1915>, accessed 11 April 2013. Wang is in fact recognized by many experts on the topic as one of the more supportive former governmental officials who also supported international scholars' research on village elections in the 1990s. The particular speech quoted here shall not be taken as the only or the most representative one to study his thoughts on NGO and civil society development in China.
- 2 Report of the conference by *Southern Daily*, <http://tieba.baidu.com/p/1662623820>, accessed 30 May 2016.
- 3 Another article of the series: Fengshi Wu, "Having Peers and Becoming One? Collective Consciousness among Civil Society Actors in China," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 26, No. 106 (2017) (online first: doi:10.1080/10670564.2017.1274820).
- 4 Shaoguang Wang and Jianyu He, "Associational Revolution in China: Mapping the Landscape," *Korea Observer*, Vol. 35 (2004), pp. 485–532; Qiusha Ma, *Non-governmental Organisations in Contemporary China: Paving the Way to Civil Society?* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Timothy Hildebrandt, *Social Organizations and the Authoritarian State in China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- 5 Yongguang Xu, "Starting Year of China's Civil Society," 3 June 2008, <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/1026/7336201>, accessed 25 June 2012 (in Chinese); Shawn Shieh and Guosheng Deng, "An Emerging Civil Society: The Impact of the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake on Grass-roots Associations in China," *The China Journal*, Vol. 65 (2011), pp. 181–194; Bin Xu, "Consensus Crisis and Civil Society: The Sichuan Earthquake Response and State-Society Relations," *The China Journal*, Vol. 71 (2014), pp. 91–108.
- 6 Timothy Hildebrandt, "Development and Division: The Effect of Transnational Linkages and Local Politics on LGBT Activism in China," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 21, No. 77 (2012), pp. 845–862.
- 7 Haiying Liu, "Different Views Emerge at the Second Private Foundation Forum," *China Development Brief*, No. 48 (2010), <http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/?p=316>, accessed 12 November 2014.
- 8 Ming Hu, Cao Guo, and Angela Bies, "Termination of Nonprofit Alliances: Evidence from China," *Voluntas*, Vol. 27, No. 5 (October 2016), pp. 2490–2513.

- 9 Fengshi Wu and Kinman Chan, "Graduated Control and Beyond: The Evolving Governance over Social Organizations in China," *China Perspectives* Vol. 2012/3, (September 2012), pp. 9–17.
- 10 For critical assessment of such attempts by the state, see Yijia Jing, "From Stewards to Agents? Intergovernmental Management of Public-Nonprofit Partnerships in China," *Public Performance & Management Review*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (2012), pp. 230–252; Elsa L. Fan, "HIV Testing as Prevention among MSM in China: The Business of Scaling-Up," *Global Public Health*, Vol. 9, Nos. 1–2 (2014), pp. 85–97.
- 11 Patricia Thornton, "The New Life of the Party: Party-Building and Social Engineering in Greater Shanghai," *China Journal*, Vol. 68 (2012), pp. 58–78.
- 12 Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1985); Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., *In Search of Civil Society: Independent Peace Movements in the Soviet Bloc* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland*. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); Elizabetha Matynia, "The Lost Treasure of Solidarity," *Social Research*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (2001), pp. 917–936; Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, "1989 and the Creativity of the Political," *Social Research*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (2001), pp. 993–1010; Costica Bradatan and Serguei A. Oushakine, eds., *In Marx's Shadow: Knowledge, Power, and Intellectuals in Eastern Europe and Russia* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010).
- 13 Bruce J. Dickson, *Red Capitalists in China: The Party, Private Entrepreneurs, and Prospects for Political Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- 14 Kellee S. Tsai, *Capitalism without Democracy: The Private Sector in Contemporary China* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007); Minglu Chen, "From Economic Elites to Political Elites: Private Entrepreneurs in the People's Political Consultative Conference," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 24, No. 94 (2015), pp. 613–627.
- 15 There are exceptions in this respect. For example, see Jessica C. Teets, "Let Many Civil Societies Bloom: The Rise of Consultative Authoritarianism in China," *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 202 (2013), pp. 19–38.
- 16 Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 4; Joel S. Migdal, "Mental Maps and Virtual Checkpoints," in *Boundaries and Belonging: States and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Local Practices*, edited by Joel S. Migdal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 3–23.
- 17 In fact, similar interactions between technocrats and NGO experts across official organizational lines are found at international levels in the processes

- of negotiating multilateral treaties and cooperation. See Peter Haas, *Saving the Mediterranean: The Politics of International Environmental Cooperation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Peter Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination." *International Organization*, Vol. 46 (1992), pp. 1–35; Oran R. Young, "Governing the Arctic: From Cold War Theater to Mosaic of Cooperation," *Global Governance*, Vol. 11 (2005), pp. 9–15.
- 18 For example, according to Anthony Spires's fieldwork, local state agencies and grassroots NGOs "symbiotically" coexisted in Guangdong province. "Contingent Symbiosis and Civil Society in an Authoritarian State: Understanding the Survival of China's Grassroots NGOs," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 117, No. 1 (2011), pp. 1–45.
 - 19 Susan K. McCarthy, "Serving Society, Repurposing the State: Religious Charity and Resistance in China," *China Journal*, Vol. 70 (2013), pp. 48–72.
 - 20 Fengshi Wu and Lin Peng, "The Rise of Non-governmental Disaster Relief," *China Quarterly* (forthcoming), draft available at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2916221>.
 - 21 Fengshi Wu, "Having Peers and Becoming One?"
 - 22 Lester M. Salamon and Helmut K. Anheier, *Defining the Nonprofit Sector* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 33–34.
 - 23 Three criteria are used to distinguish NGOs: (1) the organization is not initiated by a concurrent governmental official or party cadre as the sole legal person representative; (2) the initial funding for the organization is not from the government, or the whole entity is not part of a governmental project; and (3) there is no mandatory party organ within the organization.
 - 24 For example, see Ming Wang, *Zhongguo shetuan gaige* (Social Organization Reform in China) (Beijing: Social Science Press, 2000).
 - 25 Xiaoyong Huang, *Blue Book of Social Organizations in China* (2014 Annual Report) (Beijing: China Social Science Academic Press, 2014), p. 2.
 - 26 WikiLeaks provides an account on the background of this magazine, http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07GUANGZHOU176_a.html, accessed 10 March 2015.
 - 27 Zhai Minlei, the editor-in-chief of *Minjian*, documented the details of the closure of the magazine in his open letter "*Minjian*, She Dies with a Smile," which was later translated by David Bandurski and published online at <http://www.ihlo.org/LRC/W/051207.html>, accessed 10 March 2015.
 - 28 Eva Pils provided a brief discussion of the term "minjian" in her introduction to the Special Feature "Locating Civil Society: Communities Defending Basic Liberties" of *China Perspectives*, Vol. 2012/3, (September 2012), p. 3.
 - 29 Shawn Shieh and Amanda Brown-Inz, *Mapping China's Public Interest NGOs* (Beijing: China Development Brief, 2013).
 - 30 Among the officially defined categories of social organizations, one is called

- “private noncorporate enterprise” (*minban feiqiye*), abbreviated as *minfei*, which is similar to NPO. The interview notes show that, for the interviewees, these two terms are very similar and used interchangeably.
- 31 Kinman Chan, “The Rise of Civil Society in China” (paper, “China: State of the Art” Conference, Brussels, 3–4 December 2009). For a more detailed discussion on how action-oriented scholars and leading activists worked together and promoted the ideas on “civil society,” see Fengshi Wu, “Left, Right and Neutral,” pp. 25–34.
 - 32 The interviewers took notes on whether the interviewees were aware of the terms, and avoided affecting their views by giving too much information in advance.
 - 33 See a similar case of a GONGO leader accused of *gan zongjiao* in McCarthy’s paper in this volume.
 - 34 Informed by the author’s previous fieldwork experiences, this research also includes the option of “none or fake identification.” Activists and NGO staff who work directly with victims of discrimination and social stigma would sometimes conceal their real work and evade questions on self-identification, even during an interview for research purpose.
 - 35 For a complete English translation, please refer to <http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?lib=law&id=3463&CGid=>. Also see Cliff’s article in this volume for more discussions on the development of nonstate *jijinhui* in China.
 - 36 For bilingual versions of the law, see <http://www.chinalawtranslate.com/2016-foreign-ngo-law/?lang=en>, accessed 15 December 2016.
 - 37 Fengshi Wu, “Environmental Activism in Provincial China: Comparative Evidence from Guangdong and Guangxi,” *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2013), pp. 89–108; Fengshi Wu, “International Non-governmental Actors in HIV/AIDS Prevention in China,” *Cell Research*, Vol. 15 (2005), pp. 919–922; Fengshi Wu, “Environmental GONGO Autonomy: Unintended Consequences of State Strategies in China,” *Journal of the Good Society*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2004), pp. 35–45.
 - 38 The research ran various binary logit tests of the survey data by modifying the variables and changing the models. Although only one of the tests is displayed in Table 2, all tests produced similar findings.
 - 39 In this research the author has interviewed about 50 individuals who do not work in the capital or major cities, and most of them tend to use original Chinese terms.
 - 40 Interview in Hong Kong, 2 December 2009.
 - 41 Liang Xiaoyan’s opening speech at the National Non-governmental Education NGOs annual meeting, Guangzhou, 15 December 2010. The author also interviewed Liang in Hong Kong, 2 June 2012.
 - 42 In the original interviews, “independent social forces” was listed as a

separate option. However, during the survey process, it became clear that the interviewees saw this phrase closely linked with the notion “civil society.” In the final analysis, these results related to these two options were merged.

- 43 Zhu Jiangang, *Xingdong de Liliang* (The Power of Action: The Practical Logic of Civic Voluntary Organizations) (Beijing: China Commercial Press, 2008).
- 44 Fengshi Wu, “Left, Right and Neutral,” pp. 32–33.
- 45 Kou Yanding and Yuan Tianpeng, *Kecaozuo de Minzhu* (Workable Democracy: Complete Records of Applying Robert’s Rules in a Village) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang University Press, 2012).
- 46 If state monitoring could be used as one indicator of activist profile, Kou Yanding is certainly one of those activists whose reputation has risen rapidly in recent years. In October 2014, she was detained for over a month by the public security agency.