Engaging the government in contemporary China

Case studies on NGOs' approaches to form an effective partnership with the government

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Abstract

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including charitable foundations, domestic grassroots NGOs and overseas NGOs, have increased considerably in China since the market reform in 1978 and have played an essential role in relieving social problems such as poverty, pollution and educational inequality. Partnerships between NGOs and the government have been seen to address social challenges together, but these NGO–government partnerships vary considerably both in the forms they take and in their effectiveness. An effective partnership with the government, which is one of the critical stakeholders of NGOs, is essential for NGOs to attain their goals in addressing social issues. Therefore, this study aims to examine the variations in the NGO–government partnerships and the approaches NGOs can actively adapt to form an effective partnership with the government in China. Potential factors associated with different partnerships are mainly distilled from two streams of theories: 1) the theories focus on the micro level individual organisation's behaviours, such as resource dependence theory and institutionalism, which explore how resources or external environment affect an individual origination's behaviours, and 2) macro level theories such as civil society and corporatism which analyses the state–society dynamics as a whole. Through the case study of 13 NGOs covering six issue areas and thematic analysis, this study identifies the features of an effective partnership as joint efforts from both NGOs and the government aiming to alleviate social problems and to meet people's needs, while keeping NGOs' autonomy. The key findings of this study are four themes as main approaches NGOs can adopt: professionalisation, participation, formal networks and informal interpersonal relationships (*guanxi*). These themes are elaborated in detail by describing and analysing NGOs' practice in China. This thesis concludes by discussing the power difference between NGOs and the government and how to avoid the negative consequences of partnering with the government.

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Although this study of Chinese NGOs officially began in 2017, the starting point of my engagement with Chinese NGOs dates back to 2012, when I decided to join a grassroots NGO in Beijing after I completed my master degree in social work. That job allowed me to travel around the countryside of China and to connect with reality. It also gave me the opportunity to understand and grow with the civil society in China. Those years of working with my dear NGO comrades and learning from experienced NGO mentors had great influence not only in my later research but also in my life. Most of them are still working in the NGO sector and making contributions to a better society. My fieldwork of this study is also thanks to my NGO friends. I am indebted to all the participants who generously helped me and frankly shared their stories and opinions. My heartfelt appreciation and respect towards those people who devoted themselves to this career.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Full description
ADB	Asian Development Bank
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
CYDF	China Youth Development Foundation
ENGO	Environmental NGO
EPB	Environmental Protection Bureau
GONGO	Government-organised NGO
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
LGOPAD	(State Council) Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development
MBCA	Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs
MOCA	Ministry of Civil Affairs
NAO	Network administrative organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPC	National People's Congress
NPFF	Non-public fundraising foundations
PFF	Public fundraising foundations
PMSC	Party–Mass Service Centres" (PMSC)
PNCE	Private non-commercial enterprises
SEE	Chinese Society of Entrepreneurs and Ecology Conservation Group
SOGI	Sexual orientation/gender identity
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Chapter 1　Introduction and Literature Review

1.1　Introduction

1.1.1　The Puzzle: How Do NGOs Form an Effective Partnership With the Government in China?

This thesis identifies, using case studies, the approaches non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can adopt to form a partnership with the government to address social challenges effectively. The reason I chose this topic originates from my experience of working for an NGO in China. From 2012, I spent a few years working for a Chinese educational NGO. Working in a grassroots NGO, which was underfinanced and understaffed, presented a lot of challenges. Constrained by resources, we needed to multitask: from recruiting volunteers in universities to site visits in remote rural schools, from communicating with big foundations for funding to interacting with local governments, who tend to feel suspicious about "non-governmental organisations," for co-operation. Also, we needed to deal with people's confusion and misunderstandings about NGOs.

I remember once talking with a secretary of a county-level government in west China who was supportive of our programme and friendly to me. At the end of our conversation about the programme, she asked curiously: "so can I ask what you do?" I felt a little confused and replied: "this is what I do. I am working for the organisation that runs this programme." She tried to explain herself: "no, I mean, what do you do for a living, like a job? This is just volunteering, right?" I had to convince her that this was my fulltime job, but she still looked doubtful as she struggled to understand: "what is your workplace if it is neither a government department nor a company?"

This memory stands out because it reminds me of the variance among government workers—their understanding of and attitude towards NGOs are different: although a few years of collaboration showed a reasonable amount of knowledge about NGOs from most of our government partners, this conversation illustrated the other end of the variance and showed the lack of knowledge about NGOs from some government workers.

Nevertheless, it was hardly new for me to see a confused face after saying that I worked for an NGO. After receiving many responses of "what is NGO?" I started to use other terms which may sound less distant, such as public-interest/charity organisation (公益组织). But it did not stop questions. When they knew the "public interest" I was working to achieve was better education quality in rural elementary schools, they would say: "why do you do this? It is the government's duty." Sometimes, they would assume it is part of the government's agenda and make a comment like "ah, it is like you are 'learning from *Leifeng* and doing good deeds' (学雷锋做好事)"—Lei Feng was established as a socialistic ethical icon of helping others through the government's propaganda machinery to mobilise people to volunteer (Landsberger, 2001); but this is not how NGOs would frame their work. The lack of knowledge of Chinese NGOs extended outside the country. After I came to New Zealand, knowing my research topic, people would look surprised and say: "does the Chinese government allow NGOs to exist?" even when more than 800,000 NGOs (the term "social organisations" is used by the Chinese government to refer to NGOs, and the differences between the terms will be discussed in the next part of this chapter) were registered with the civil affairs department in 2017.

Years of effort in the NGO sector gave me first-hand experience of social ills and convinced me about NGOs' value in solving these social problems. Yet, the questions I met drove me to do thorough research for NGOs to thrive in this adverse environment. Choosing the aspect of

the governmental relationship is because the government is one of the most important stakeholders of NGOs. The government can affect NGOs by making and implementing certain policies, by sharing resources and by granting legitimacy. Other stakeholders, such as foundations and public donors, are also important to NGOs, and they may be the subject of my future study. This thesis focuses on the NGO–government relationship and aims to find out the best way for NGOs to work with the government to address social challenges effectively. Reviewing the literature, I found that some of the questions I met have been answered, such as whether independent NGOs exist in China's non-democratic regime and how they survive. The existing research has also paid attention to the relationships between the government and NGOs.

Despite the abundance of Chinese NGO studies, this thesis still has its significance due to the research gaps: firstly, because the existing literature tends to view both the state and the NGO sector as a monolithic entity and neglects the heterogeneity within each sector. For example, from the corporatist perspective, scholars generalise that the government's attitude towards NGOs is to co-opt NGOs. However, cases indicate that some NGOs can find space to grow independently and form an equal partnership with the government. Some models developed by scholars in Chinese NGOs, such as the graduated control model (X. Kang & Han, 2008), see the variance in the state–society relationship in contemporary China to some extent but still fail to sufficiently explain all the different cases observed in practice. Furthermore, the NGO–government relationship is not static but continually changes, but existing literature does not pay enough attention to these changes. The causes of the change can be attributed to policy change or, more importantly, the growth of NGOs. This brings us to the last point of the existing research gap: the existing literature focuses more on the government's angle to explore how the government co-opts or collaborates with NGOs but neglects NGOs' activeness. In fact, NGOs do not merely passively receive what governments do towards

them; they can take actions to influence the government's attitudes and behaviours, too. Therefore, this research aims to view NGOs as active actors and explore what NGOs can do to engage the government in addressing social challenges.

Overall, this research is designed in a way to address the gaps above and contributes to the theory and practice of Chinese NGOs. This study contributes to the theory by incorporating various theories and models to propose a more comprehensive framework to examine the variance in China's NGO–government partnerships and to explain what factors affect the partnerships. It contributes to the practice by focusing on the NGOs' perspective and explores the approach NGOs can adopt to form a partnership with the government to address social challenges effectively.

Moreover, this research of NGO–government partnerships also has value in understanding the social and political arrangements in China because the NGO sector is inseparable from the political context. In China, the development of NGOs and their partnerships with the government take place against the backdrop of market reform and social transition, which is a result of relaxed total government control (Wang & Sun, 2010). Changes in government activities, such as the way the government carries out policies or organizes the economy (e.g., centrally planned or competitive market), have a significant influence on the NGO sector and state–society relations (Smith & Gronbjerg, 2006). In turn, the nature of NGO–government partnerships also bear implications for the political environment. For instance, the partnership in favour of citizens' participation may imply a growing civil society or a more responsive government, while the partnership primarily serving the government's interest is an indication of the state's control over the society. Studying the partnerships will provide a window to understand the nature of political regimes, the structure of power and social changes in contemporary China.

1.1.2   Research Design

This research uses the qualitative method of case studies (Gerring, 2007). Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the real world to investigate social processes of society, and the case study is one type of qualitative research (Given, 2008). A case study means the intensive study of a few cases which aims to shed light on a larger scale, and "case" indicates "a spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time or over some period of time" (Gerring, 2007, p. 19). In this study, the case is the selected Chinese NGOs. Yin (2018) suggests that the case study method is preferable, compared with other methods, when (a) the main research aims to answer "how" or "why" questions with an in-depth description of some social phenomenon, (b) the study focuses on a real-world contemporary (instead of entirely historical) phenomenon, and (c) the researcher has little or no control over behavioural events, and the phenomenon and context are not always sharply distinguishable (as opposed to experimental research which separates a phenomenon from its context by "controlling" it in a laboratory environment and attends only to the phenomenon of interests which is usually represented by a few variables). As the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear, case studies need to cope with the various situations in the real world full of variables. As a consequence, case studies need to apply multiple sources of evidence and can benefit from the prior established theories and literature to guide research design, data collection and analysis.

Therefore, choosing the method of case study is determined by the goal of this research. This research aims at explaining the factors affecting NGO partnerships with the government in contemporary China. The phenomenon of NGO–government partnerships is embedded in the social context and can result from a range of factors and complex procedures. The method of case study is best to provide in-depth data to answer the research question. In contrast, quantitative analysis, such as a survey study, may find correlations, but will find it hard to

provide a deep understanding of the reasons and mechanics embedded in the phenomenon examined (Woodside, 2010). So, the goal of this research can be better achieved through a case study. Besides, regarding the data collection, due to resource constraints, it is more realistic to access a small number of participants and to collect data by interviews, compared with accessing a large sample to conduct a survey. This study aims to examine what factors affect NGOs' partnerships with the government and identify what approaches NGOs can use to form effective partnerships with the government. Accordingly, this case study compares cases from two aspects: 1) comparing across different NGO–government partnerships to identify the reasons for this difference: for example, Chapter 3 compares an NGO which has a successful governmental partnership with one which does not, and Chapter 7 compares an NGO which is much co-opted by the government with one which keeps its autonomy in its partnership with the government; 2) comparing within the approaches to identify the best practice: this study compares how different NGOs adopt a similar approach, to examine details in their practice. For example, Chapter 5 compares the approach of using networks initiated by the government and the networks initiated by private foundations and points out the advantages of using the latter; Chapter 6 compares the approach of *guanxi* used by NGOs with or without a legal registration and suggests that the approach of *guanxi* can be expanded from person-to-person favour exchanges to abstract interpersonal influence, and this approach can be used even by politically sensitive NGOs. The method of data analysis will be further elaborated in "1.1.2.2 Data Analysis".

1.1.2.1   Data Collection. In-depth interviews and documentation analysis have been used to collect data in this research. The initial research contacts were made through my personal networks built when I was working in an educational NGO in China. Then I employed the snowball method to expand my respondents on the recommendation of the people I had contacted. Although the snowball method has some potential weaknesses, such as lack of

randomness and community bias, it was the most realistic way I could rely on due to the time and resource limits, and also because personal relationships (*guanxi*) are vital in China to gain people's trust and encourage them to frankly share what they know on (sometimes) "sensitive" topics. The interviews were semi-structured around the NGOs' registration and operation, as well as the formation, implementation, and outcomes of their interaction/partnership with the government (interview questions are listed in Appendix A). Before the interview, I read as much information as possible about each NGO, such as the organisation website, newsletters, annual reports, and media reports. Then I developed a list of questions for each NGO. The basic questions were the same, but I would delete the questions to which I had already acquired the answer from other sources (or double-check what I had read with the interviewees) and add the questions related to more detail about what I had learnt about them. For example, a programme report of an NGO mentioned, "our urban livelihood projects would apply constructive methods to raise the government's attention to migrant workers' rights and securities of living." Based on this, one of my questions for this NGO's leader was, "could you explain more about these 'constructive methods'?" I would send the list of questions to the interviewees if they required it. During the interviews, I normally did not just ask the questions on the list one by one as I found it too rigid and to create distance between the interviewer and interviewees. I let the conversation flow and stayed open to unforeseen ideas.

Prior to the commencement of the fieldwork, I obtained ethical approval from the University of Auckland to guarantee my research conformed to the ethical standards of Human Participants Ethics Committee. The interview participants were treated with respect and with the protection of their privacy, safety, and personal, social and cultural sensitivities. To protect privacy, the organisations involved in this research are referred to by a code, although most of the interviewees gave consent to disclose the organisation's name. Considering some

of the NGOs could be more sensitive than others, the thesis will keep everyone confidential for reasons of consistency. However, it is noted that some NGOs can be identified through the information disclosed in this thesis. It is acceptable as long as it does not jeopardise the sensitive NGOs.

Yin (2018) points out one of the principles of case study data collection is to use multiple, rather than just single, sources of evidence. Besides interviews, documentation is another useful source in doing social science research in China (Thøgersen, 2006). This research uses documentation as a supplement for interviews. The first set of documents is official governmental documents, such as legislation, regulations, guidelines, reports, statistics and other relevant information on governments' official websites from the central to local levels. Governmental policies highly affect NGOs' registration, funds and their relationship with the government and therefore are important in this research. The second set is the information from the sources within the NGO sector, such as an NGO's profile, annual/programme report or stories from their official websites and social media account, as well as information on industrial platforms such as the China Development Brief, and the China Foundation Forum. The last set is the NGO-related contents from third-party sources such as media or research.

The reason for using these as a supplement to interviews is mainly due to the limited time frame and scope of interviews. Because an interview may only take 1 or 2 hours, I would prioritise the questions for which answers were not available elsewhere. It meant that I normally did not ask about public information, such as the content of a policy or which year the NGO was established, as I could get this information from other sources. Besides, some NGOs or NGOs' leaders had been interviewed a number of times by media or researchers. In this case, I read the existing documents on these interviews in advance. As their responses may not have stayed the same as what had been reported, I would summarise what I had read and ask the interviewees to confirm the parts which I found relevant to my study. But I tried

to avoid letting them repeat what they had already said so that I could use the time wisely. What's more, due to the limitation of my network, I did not have access to government agencies or some influential figures in the NGO sector for interviews. So I referred to open-access reports, records and public speeches and articles that contained information relevant to my study.

1.1.2.2   Data Analysis. An overarching method to analyse the data is thematic analysis. It is applied to identify the keywords and the meaning inside the text gathered from interviews and documents. In addition to reporting what is in the data, thematic analysis identifies patterns of meaning across qualitative data and forms an interpretative narrative in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It involves a six-phase process: 1) familiarising yourself with the data and identifying items of potential interest, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing potential themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was used to identify NGOs' main approaches (as the "themes") in engaging the government, such as professionalisation, building networks, and using informal interpersonal connections (*guanxi* 关系). These themes will be elaborated on from Chapter 3 to Chapter 7.

Process tracing was used to study the organisational growth path and partnership-forming process in each case. Process tracing is a method that attempts to identify the causal mechanism between independent variables/explanatory factors and the outcome (Given, 2008). Process tracing is often employed in social sciences case studies to describe political or social phenomena and to assess the mechanisms and sequences of events connecting possible causes to observed outcomes in light of the research question (Collier, 2011; George & Bennett, 2005). In Chapter 2, each case description will trace the NGO's history of development and operation, which consists of a set of variables. It also traces the process of

partnership formation and outcomes. In this way, it uncovers the mechanisms at play in the success of governmental partnerships.

The thesis also employs qualitative comparative analysis in describing and explaining NGOs' approaches. Comparison is at the heart of most social sciences research and can take place between different individuals, groups, cases, or at different points in time so that prominent similarities and differences can be isolated (Given, 2008). In this thesis, under each theme of approaches, different NGOs or different groups of NGOs (such as social work agencies and development-oriented NGOs in Chapter 3, and government-initiated and NGO-initiated networks in Chapter 5) are described and compared to demonstrate how to use this approach to build a successful governmental partnership.

1.1.3 Mapping the Thesis

Following this introduction is a thorough literature review. The purpose of the literature review is to provide the background of this study, to reveal the research gap and to generate an analytical framework based on existing studies. The first part of the literature review is the concept of the NGO and the development of the Chinese NGOs and their governmental relationships since the market reform in 1978. Secondly, it reviews the typologies on NGO–government relationships, followed by the motivations to form partnerships. Then it introduces the definition, categories of NGO–government partnerships and the process of forming a partnership. The third part of the literature review presents several prevailing theoretical streams regarding the NGO–government relationship. Finally, the analytical framework of this research is developed based on the existing literature. The framework includes variables of NGOs as potential explanatory factors, the variance of NGO–government partnerships as the outcome, the partnership process and the institutional background in which partnerships are built.

Chapter 2 is an overview of 13 cases of NGOs in 6 issue areas. Based on the framework, each NGO's variables and its government partnerships are depicted. Chapter 2 ends with an initial analysis of the association between an NGO's variables and its government partnerships and also identifies the approaches NGOs can actively adapt to engage the government. Chapters 3–6 elaborate on these main approaches as themes, including professionalisation, participation, formal networks and informal interpersonal relationships (*guanxi*). Each chapter follows a general sequence in which the literature on this theme is reviewed first, followed by the case studies on how NGOs use this approach to build partnerships with the government, using detailed case descriptions and comparisons. Chapter 7 explores, by case studies, the issue of power in NGO–government partnerships and how to deal with the negative outcomes of NGO–government partnerships. Finally, the conclusion recaps the findings of NGOs' approaches and implications for practice within the political climate of China.

1.2   The Literature on Chinese NGOs

1.2.1   *The Concept of NGOs*

Regarding the subject of this thesis, a range of terminologies has been used by the government and scholars of Chinese NGOs with different implications. Among many, there are "social organisation," "non-profit organisation" and "charitable organisation." The term *social organisation* (社会组织) is the official terminology used by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) of China to indicate the entire agglomeration of associations, non-profit, NGOs and government-organised NGOs (GONGOs). Compared to NGO, the term "non-profit organisation" (NPO) is preferred by the government because the term NGO may imply anarchism (无政府) or anti-government (反政府) in Chinese language (Saich, 2000). The website of the bureau in charge of social organisations is named *ChinaNPO*

(http://www.chinanpo.gov.cn/). The term *charitable organisation* (公益组织) emphasises their goal of public interests and is politically neutral. The first legislation related to NGOs in China is called the "Charity Law" issued in 2016. The term *civil society organisation* (公民社会组织) emphasises social action and interaction in a space separate from the state, and this term has become more politically sensitive than other terms (Kuhn, 2018).

In this research, NGO is defined as a formal, not-for-profit, private and self-governed organisation whose primary aim is to promote common goals at the national or the international level (Martens, 2002; Salamon & Anheier, 1992; M. Wang, 2009). In addition to NGO, the terms social organisation and NPO are also used interchangeably as these terms commonly appear in government documents. The next part will review the history and development of Chinese NGOs and NGO-related policies.

1.2.2 Development of NGOs in China and Related Policies

Before 1949, China had a long history of charitable organisations addressing social needs, such as poverty alleviation, education and mutual help (M. Wang, 2009). The literature on the topic of charity in pre-modern China covers the origin and growth of charitable organisations and the social, economic background. For example, Simon's (2013) book provides a historical analysis of the social, economic, and legal system from ancient times to the present day and examines the way in which citizens have played a part in the social and economic development of China through the associations they have participated in. It is noted that the charitable societies in Ming-Qing China were usually supported by both the gentry and the merchants, especially when a large amount of money was required for carrying out their purposes. Handlin Smith's (2009) research portrays the picture of charity work and the state–society relationship in China in the late Ming dynasty (16th–17th century), using a bottom-up, society-centred approach. She points out that government officials not only

tolerated the development of charitable societies but also supported it. Liang (1997) traces the origin and function of charitable associations in Qing China (17th–18th century), depicting the relationship between economic development and social value. The study of ancient China provides insights into the following interruption of economic development and associations under strict government control and the revival of associations in post-reform China as the influence of the market on the existence of associational life is applicable in both imperial and modern China.

Between 1949 and 1978, the authoritarian control of the Chinese Communist Party eliminated nearly all privately funded organisations, for-profit or nonprofit. Several international organisations, such as the Red Cross, and so-called mass organisations, such as Chinese Women's Federations, still existed during that time. "Mass organisation" (群众组织) is not a legal term but has been used officially on many occasions. Mass organisations have been used by the Party as a means to penetrate the society, to mobilise the masses, and to integrate them into political life (Simon, 2013). In name, they are non-governmental, but they were headed by and permeated with the Party (Q. Ma, 2002b; Simon, 2013). The Cultural Revolution further paralysed the entire society, leaving no space for associational freedom.

After ending the Cultural Revolution in 1976, NGOs gradually revived. The Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Central Committee in 1978 set China's course toward "socialist modernisation" (社会主义现代化). It set national objectives to advance economic, cultural, social, political and ecological progress and to ensure that development is for the people, by the people and with the people sharing in its fruits (Backer, 2017). This Reform and Opening Policy led by Deng Xiaoping symbolised Chinese society entering a new transformative period. Before that, the totalitarian government weakened society's ability to meet people's

needs. After 1978, the themes of separating state and society, government and associations have been raised in every Central Committee meeting (Jia, 2011). Social welfare burdens, such as the provision of housing, employment, health, and education, have been shifted away from the state or state-run enterprises. Individuals are increasingly responsible for their own welfare and security, and therefore they tend to develop new ways to fulfil their desires and interests. This transformation has led to an expansion of NGOs as a supplement to the government and business sectors for social needs (Saich, 2000).

Despite the necessity of an NGO sector outside the government and market to meet social needs in the postreform era, the government hesitated to grant space to social organisations as an authoritarian government tends to fear potential social unrest brought about by social organisations that are out of the state's control (Fulda et al., 2012; X. Zhan & Tang, 2016). It led to tight regulations on NGOs' registration and operation to avoid NGOs going beyond control. An "Interim Regulation" on the registration of NGOs, initiated in 1989, amended in 1998 and still in use in 2020, attempts to incorporate social organisations more closely with existing state structures (Z. Liu & Van de Walle, 2020; Q. Ma, 2002a). Under this regulation, one condition of registration as an NGO is to find a governmental or a state-related professional agency to be its "supervisory agency" (主管单位) (State Council, 1998a). For example, if someone wants to start an organisation to recruit volunteers to teach English in rural schools, in order to register as an NGO with the Department of Civil Affairs, the founder first needs to find an officially recognised organisation, such as the local educational bureau, to be the supervisory agency. This agency is similar to a referrer, but it should also take the obligation of monitoring the organisation's compliance or performance, making sure the NGO will behave well. This "dual" registration system prevents many NGOs from having legal status because it is difficult for grassroots groups without strong government ties to find a sponsor who is willing to take such responsibilities, and it leaves around 1.5 million

unregistered NGOs (G. Deng, 2010). The regulation also forbids organisations with similar functions to co-exist (Article 11). For example, it does not allow two NGOs both aiming to place volunteer teachers in rural schools to be registered in the same civil affairs department. Moreover, NGOs are not allowed to establish any regional branch (Article 13) in order to limit the scope and linkages of the NGO sector (Saich, 2000).

Despite the strict regulation, NGOs in China still find ways to evade the rules and to survive, even to thrive. Regarding the registration rule, many NGOs register as a business with a commercial bureau, as a supervisor is not required; some choose to embed themselves as a project into another legal entity like a university; some simply make no attempt to get a legal form (J. Y. Hsu & Hasmath, 2014). The government lacks the necessary resources to control all these social activities. There is a significant gap between the expressed intention of the authorities and what can truly be enforced (Q. Ma, 2002b). As Brook and Frolic (1997) noted, many new social organisations without legal registration were flourishing in the 1990s. For example, migrants from rural areas to the city self-organised into communities by their origins and even set up their own governing and welfare structures outside the state (Brook, 1997).

Although the interim regulation has not been abolished, the government has issued other administrative regulations attempting to open more space for NGOs in some pilot areas. Since 2008, restrictions on NGO registration started to be relaxed in several provinces such as Guangdong, Beijing, Yunnan, and Shanghai (Yin, 2018). Under the new local regulation, some types of NGOs can be directly registered with the Civil Affairs Department without getting a supervisor in these pilot provinces. On the national level, in 2013, the General Office of the State Council (2013b) announced that social organisations in the fields of charity, community service, industrial and technology associations could be registered directly (sec. 1.23).

During these years, social organisations have played an essential role in meeting social needs and relieving human suffering. They have taken part in disaster relief after earthquakes, bringing education opportunities to rural children, and humanitarian aid to impoverished regions (Brandsen & Simsa, 2016; Peng & Wu, 2018; Samuel Wang, 1999). Research in the past 20 years shows NGOs in China have been able to meet their organisational goals and have become effective advocates as well as service providers in the nondemocratic country (Hasmath & Hsu, 2014; Tai, 2012). Especially in 2008, the disaster relief and reconstruction activities of NGOs following the Sichuan earthquake led to widespread participation of voluntary organisations and marked the year as the "year of civil society" (Shieh & Deng, 2011). The NGOs' function in bridging service gaps and the limited capacity of government for social service provision paved the way for collaboration between the two sectors. The government started to co-operate with NGOs in ways of alleviating the welfare burden or handling environmental problems. As the market reform has taken the burden of public goods provision away from the government, contracting to social organisations to deliver social service is a new attempt of the government to meet social meet (C. Hsu, 2010). In 2007, the city of Shenzhen issued the first local policy in China regarding the purchase of services from social work agencies (People's Government of Shenzhen, 2006). In 2013, the central government enacted a set of guidelines to encourage governments to purchase services from social organisations(General Office of the State Council, 2013). Such collaboration is seen as a way to improve the state's performance and reputation (Brandsen & Simsa, 2016). It has been observed that local governments and contracting NGOs started to make decisions together as well as set rules, and it has improved community governance (Jing & Hu, 2017). More recently, in 2016, the release of the first Charity Law in China was another step to integrating NGOs into the effort to pursue the national objectives which were raised after the Reform and Opening (Backer, 2017). The Charity Law aims to promote charity, regulate

charitable activities and protect the rights and interests of donors, volunteers and other participants in charitable activities (The NPC of China, 2015). The Charity Law was considered a move by the government to ease restrictions on social organisations' fundraising and operations and even to grant favourable tax policies (Han, 2018).

However, in 2017, the release of the Overseas NGO Management Law seemed to tighten restrictions on international NGOs as it puts international NGOs under the monitoring of Public Security offices and requires international NGOs to have a Chinese supervisory agency (The NPC of China, 2016). The enactment of the Overseas NGO Management Law is seen as a move to create a clearer legal status for these organisations, assert more government scrutiny over the sector, and reduce international organizations' influence on domestic NGOs (Hsu & Teets, 2016). On the other hand, the government has sought to increase its influence on domestic NGOs by requiring NGOs to incorporate Party-building activities into their organisations (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2018a). Nevertheless, recent studies have identified different strategies NGOs use to cope with this attempt to penetrate their organisations, from passive compliance to resistance, and these findings suggested diversities in NGOs' relationships with the government (Nie & Wu, 2022; Xin & Huang, 2022).

NGOs in China and their relationship with the government have appeared and been studied mostly against such a backdrop in the years since the Reform and Opening in 1978, and the next section will move to the review of research on NGOs' relationships with the government.

1.2.3   NGO–Government Relationships in Post-Reform China

The paradox of "how NGOs survive under a non-democratic regime" (Spires, 2011a) leads to scholars' discussion about the state–society relationship in contemporary China. To understand this relationship, it is necessary to understand the basic characteristics of each

side. The main features of the Chinese state are framed as "semi-authoritarian" and "fragmented authoritarianism."

The regime of China is considered to be semi-authoritarian or hybrid because it combines some authoritarian and democratic elements (Hale, 2011). It has the features of an authoritarian state as power is concentrated in a single party that is not subject to a democratic election; also, it has a monitored civil society, controlled media, a weak rule of law and restricted civil and political rights (Brooker, 2000; Howell & Pringle, 2019). However, China has also adapted some democratic features such as quasi-constitutional mechanisms (such as the National People's Congress [NPC] and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference [CPPCC]) to allow certain space for civil society, to consult broader opinions, to delegate power, and to fight against corruption at local and provincial levels (Diamond, 2002). Such adaptation, along with economic growth and public goods provision, has contributed to the durability and resilience of the regime (Cassani, 2017; Dickson et al., 2016; Heilmann & Perry, 2011). One character of China's semiauthoritarian regime is framed as "fragmented authoritarianism" because different localities and governmental departments differ in interests and power, and the fragmentation allows space for NGOs to participate in the policy process (Mertha, 2009). This fragmentation can be seen in the power dynamics between central and local level governments. The authoritarian government largely concentrated power in the hands of top-level leaders: the decision making was centralised, and the formal rules were essentially made by the central government (Nathan, 2003; Ran, 2013). However, this inevitably resulted in decision overloading for top leaders and a decision delay. Especially when dealing with unprecedented situations and uncertainty in the era of market reform, decision making was inefficient because even trivial matters, such as increasing the price of a box of matches from two cents to three, needed to be permitted by top leaders in the 1980s (Chung, 2001). This decision overloading for top

leaders led to demands for bureaucratic reform at all levels of the government. Therefore, along with marketisation, another transition with the reform is decentralisation, which is a delegation of power in decision making from the central to local governments. Over the past decades, the decentralisation reached the point that localities are powerful enough to defy Beijing on some occasions (Shambaugh, 1993). Generally, the power balance between central and local governments is still tilted toward the former, but the localities can selectively listen to Beijing's orders. The localities tend to comply with those issues about which the superiors care, although some may drag their feet in the hope of getting a special exemption (Chung, 1995). Besides, due to conflicting objectives and the interests of different layers of government, local leaders may choose to circumvent certain central policies for their own interests on the issues for which they have crucial interests at stake while Beijing does not seem to require universal compliance and does not punish deviations (Chung, 2011). Local governments may use hidden knowledge and secret actions to strategically benefit their position in relation to their superiors (Laffont & Martimort, 2002). Zhou (2010) pointed out differences between local governments' symbolic compliance and actual implementation in which the local government transferred government funds from another policy arena to deal with an imminent crisis; and in some other cases different localities even collude to displace the original goal of the central policies (Zhou, 2010). On the other side of the central–local-level tension, the top government may also hold critical information back from their subordinates about policy goals and working methods to decrease their own accountabilities, and so that local governments have to guess the true intention of the central government (Zhan & Qin, 2017). This policy ambiguity/implementation gap and its implication for NGOs will be further discussed in Chapter 6 using the example related to the policy of NGO registration.

Regarding NGOs in this regime, Whiting's (1991) work is among the earliest to study the NGO sector in China. It examines the competing theories regarding the political impact of the NGO sector, which are civil society and corporatism. It concludes that Chinese NGOs exist in the stage between complete dependence on the state and some level of autonomy. Though their living space is limited by the state, they represent the first step to a functional civil society.

Civil society and corporatism are the two main streams to investigate NGOs in China in the 1990s. From the civil society perspective, scholars have attempted to explore whether NGOs in China have the potential to check the government and promote democracy. However, the findings are usually not promising (Howell, 1998; C. L. Hsu & Jiang, 2015; Q. Ma, 2005). Another group of civil society scholars consider that civil society is based on social members' self-interest rather than the desire to democratise the regime (White et al., 1996). Brook (1997) considers that Chinese society has not been fully separated from the state, and Chinese NGOs have no tradition of confronting the state. Frolic (1997) suggests that civil society in China is a "state-led" civil society.

On the other hand, corporatism is used by others to study Chinese NGOs, especially the GONGOs. It indicates that the government chooses certain associations to form a specific collaboration and uses these selected associations as bridges to extend state power into society (Fulda, Li, & Song, 2012). In this way, the state controls the whole NGO sector by selectively authorising legitimacy to certain organisations (Unger & Chan, 1996). The "graduated-control model," developed by Kang and Han (2008), fits into this theory. The graduated-control model argues that the government adopts different strategies to control different organisations according to each NGO's ability to create political threats and to deliver social services (Kang & Han, 2008). However, the dichotomy of civil society and corporatism is criticised as too simple to reveal the complex state–society dynamics in China.

Chinese NGOs can neither pursue the democratisation of the authoritarian regime nor be puppets of the government (C. L. Hsu & Jiang, 2015). Similar to the government, diversity also exists in the NGO sector as NGOs differ in goals, approaches, size, background, culture, and capacities (C. L. Hsu & Jiang, 2015; J. Y. Hsu, 2014).

To understand the complex dynamics, a range of models and theories have been adapted. For example, Jessica Teets (2013) develops the model of "consultative authoritarianism," which argues that Chinese NGOs and the government can interact positively for mutual benefits. Compared to the corporatism theory, the consultative authoritarianism model points out that the state permits more operational autonomy for some social organisations; while compared to civil society theory, it also stresses the indirect tools of the state's control of NGOs (Teets, 2013). This model acknowledges NGOs' ability to influence the state but does not promise the potential for democratisation (Qiaoan, 2018). Other models to understand the NGO–government dynamics include resource dependence theory and new institutionalism. These models focus more attention on the organisational level, such as NGOs' resources, strategies and the influence of other NGOs. For example, NGOs' strategy of alliance building with the government may not be a result of state domination as implied by corporatism, but because they could acquire more resources from the government in this way (J. Y. Hsu et al., 2015); the reasons for an NGO's strategy to co-operate or to avoid the state can be a result of founder's previous experience, organisational culture, or the isomorphic pressures existing in the NGO sector and its community (Hasmath & Hsu, 2014; C. L. Hsu & Jiang, 2015). The review of the existing research on Chinese NGOs shows the lack of a comprehensive framework incorporating different theories to analyse the variances existing in the NGO–government relationships in China. This framework will be developed at the end of the literature review.

1.3 Literature on NGO–Government Relationships/Partnerships

The existing literature on Chinese NGOs lacks the analysis of the variance existing in NGO–government relationships, and the research on the practical process of relationship forming is also underdeveloped. The following section will review literature mainly from western scholars on 1) the typology of NGO–government relationships, 2) the motivation behind NGO–government partnerships, and 3) the process of forming partnerships.

1.3.1 Typology of NGO–Government Relationships

Various scholars have classified NGO–government relationships from different angles. Economic theories of the NGO sector suggest three ways to view the relationship between NGOs and governments: supplementary, complementary, or adversarial to the government (D. Young, 2000). NGOs substitute for the government because NGOs can independently offer a solution to meet the demand for public goods which are undersupplied by the government (Weisbrod, 1988). Salamon (1995) indicates that NGOs are typically the first line of addressing emerging social problems. However, resource insufficiencies of NGOs require government funding to compensate. The complementary view sees NGOs as partners to the government, helping to deliver social service. Different from being supplementary, being complementary means NGOs are largely financed by the government (D. Young, 2000). NGOs and governments can be adversaries because NGOs tend to exert pressure on the government for policy change or more accountability to the public by advocacy, and the government may try to defend its perspective and to influence NGOs' behaviours by regulations (Anheierh, 2005). These types are not mutually exclusive; instead, they can coexist at any time or emerge sequentially over time (D. Young, 2000).

Najam (2000) develops four types of relationships: co-operation, confrontation, complementarity, and co-optation. The determinants are the goals and means of both

governments and NGOs. Najam's model is modified by Brainard and Siplon (2002) with two additional factors in defining NGO–government relationships: the changing composition of the NGOs and the internet revolution. They point out that traditional NGOs tend to form co-operative relations with the government, while radical NGOs maintain an adversarial one.

A framework presented by J. M. Brinkerhoff (2002) defines NGO–government relationship types by two dimensions: mutuality and organisation identity. The identity can be indicated by core constituents and comparative advantages. Relation types encompass partnership, contracting, extension and co-optation or gradual absorption. A model developed by Coston (1998) assesses eight types of relationships across different nations: repression, rivalry, competition, contracting, third-party government, co-operation, complementarity, and collaboration. Different types of relationships imply different political space and NGOs' varied roles. For example, the relation of repression leaves limited opportunity for NGOs' advocacy for marginalised groups. This framework can be used to assess the current NGO–government relations and to promote more productive relationships to maximise the effectiveness in service delivery as well as advocacy. Based on these typologies, the variance of the NGO–government relationship in this thesis will be described at the end of the literature review.

1.3.2   The Motivation for NGO–Government Partnerships

Out of different relationships, forming a partnership is vital for the efficiency of both NGOs and the government in addressing today's complicated social challenges. The existing literature has discussed the necessity and motivations behind such partnerships, which are for meeting organisational needs and social needs.

The first reason is for the self-preservation of organisations themselves. As organisations, the governmental agencies and NGOs both have the motivation to collaborate for their own

development. Collaboration is one way for organisations to acquire expertise and needed resources to cope with turbulence in the environment (Selsky & Parker, 2005). NGOs, especially grassroots ones, usually suffer from funding shortages due to the limited scale of private philanthropy and constraints from public fundraising (R. Zhao et al., 2016). The government is seen as an alternative funding source. Legitimacy is another resource central to NGOs' survival which can be established by partnering with the state. Studies show NGOs with more connections to state agencies or which receive more government funding tend to appear more legitimate and are more likely to gain donations both from the public or private donors and also find it easier to access beneficiaries (Johnson & Ni, 2015).

On the other side, governmental agencies also need to secure a constant stream of resources to remain viable and to achieve organisational goals. NGOs can be a source to meet their goals, such as in the aspect of providing public goods (C. Hsu, 2010). Especially when local governments experience financial constraints and thus decrease their ability to deliver social service in post-reform China (Saich, 2000), collaborating with NGOs leads to cost savings, expanding capacities without expanding staff (Shaw, 2003).

In addition to meeting organisational development needs, meeting social needs is another motivation for NGO–government partnerships. Social problems today are seen as structural and have exceeded the scope of single organisations, and thus partnerships between two sectors can address social challenges more effectively (D. W. Brinkerhoff, 2002; Selsky & Parker, 2005).

Social problems today are not seen as a problem of an individual agency but of the whole social system. For instance, poverty relief in the past tended to only involve giving money to the poor. Alleviating poverty today usually means not only giving money to individuals but also increasing economic growth and job opportunities. Therefore, addressing complex social

challenges will most likely come from cross-sector collaboration, and each individual organisation provides only a part of the solution from its own angle (J. M. Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2002; Bryson et al., 2006; Selsky & Parker, 2005).

In the specific case of China, despite being the second-largest economy in the world, China still has fast-emerging social problems underaddressed, such as environmental pollution, inequality in educational opportunities, marginalised groups and so on. The state's incapacity to respond to these overarching and complex challenges leads to co-operation with the NGO sector (Jing & Hu, 2017). NGOs have missions to solve social problems, alleviate human suffering and promote development, and the engagement with the government is seen as an approach to further advance their work (J. Y. Hsu & Hasmath, 2014).

1.3.3 Definition, Potential Categories and Process of Partnership

The partnership is defined as an exchanging interaction, including resources or information, material or symbolic contributions, between the state agencies and NGOs to achieve a shared goal, without joint ownership involved (Barringer & Harrison, 2000; Kapucu, 2006). The formalities of the partnership include purchase-of-service contracting, non-purchasing partnerships and policy-level collaboration (Selsky & Parker, 2005; Suárez & Esparza, 2017):

Purchase-of-service contracts involve a formal contract under which a state agency enlists a private organisation to deliver specific services in exchange for money (Yuanfeng Zhang, 2015). It is a way in which governments privatise their service delivery and a substantial funding source for some NGOs (Gazley, 2008). The purchasing behaviour is regulated by government rules, such as the Government Procurement Law enacted in 2002 in China. It can take the form of competitive or noncompetitive contracting out. The competitive one indicates that there are a number of social organisations capable of taking over the service provision which is to be contracted out by the government. Then the NGOs need to compete

for the government tender via an open process predesigned by the government. Noncompetitive one means there are few NGOs qualified to provide a certain service, and thus it is not necessary for an open competition, or/and when the value of the contract does not reach a threshold, such as RMB 500,000, the government can simply assign the job to an NGO based on certain rules (Ministry of Finance, 2014). The NGO which gets the government's contract will be getting funding from the government to provide a certain service according to the requirement of the government, and the government has the responsibility to monitor the quality of the service.

NGO–government partnerships also develop into nonpurchasing/agreement-based partnerships which do not involve formal contracts. Nonpurchasing/agreement-based partnerships are formed through various informal linkages, such as interagency communication (information exchange), shared resources (shared volunteers/workspace), joint operations (joint service delivery, programme development, recruitment, case management) or resource provision from both sides without the contractual arena (funding, equipment, volunteers) (Brecher & Wise, 2008; Gazley, 2008).

The policy-level collaboration represents NGOs' involvement in policymaking by advocacy or policy implementation. NGOs or NGO practitioners can act as "policy entrepreneurs" to urge the government to take certain actions (Najam, 2000). NGOs can also be part of policy implementation by putting the law or policy into effect through their practice. Although the Chinese political environment seems to be relatively hostile to advocacy activities, it has been observed that NGOs can still find a way toward policy advocacy (Qiaoan, 2018). Participation in policymaking can be achieved by joining the People's Congress and the Political Consultative Conference at multiple levels, lobbying the legislature or providing suggestions to the government at policy consultation meetings (Yuanfeng Zhang, 2015). NGOs can even reach "collaborative governance" which engages the state agencies and

NGOs into a consensus-based process of decision making and policy implementation (Jing & Hu, 2017).

Next, the practice of forming these partnerships is worth reviewing as it provides guidance on organising interview questions in data collection and on building an analytical framework on the partnership forming process. The partnership is usually described as developing in stages. For example, Gray (1989) identifies three steps: 1) problem setting, 2) direction setting, and 3) implementation. Edelenbos's (2005) description includes preparation, policy development, and decision making, with each step having several stages. Chrislip (2002) provides a guide to the practices of a successful partnership, which has four phases: getting started, setting up for success, working together and moving to action. In practice, the partnership process is sometimes cyclical rather than linear, and it may not cover every stage. It is not precise, but such a stage model can be used as an orienting framework to understand the changing priorities of the collaboration process as context changes. This research will adopt the stages identified by Selsky and Parker (2005) to guide the empirical study, and the stages in the partnership-forming process will be used to guide the design of the interview questions as shown in Appendix B. This process includes three stages: designing, implementation activities and outcomes (Selsky & Parker, 2005). Key points of each stage are discussed as follows.

1.3.3.1 **Designing Partnerships.** Designing activities means the design of partnerships, such as identifying problems, finding common goals, generating necessary information, making commitments to collaboration, and identifying the initial resource and power balance. In the stage of partnership formation, variables related to successful partnership need to be considered before deciding on a strategy of partnership. As starting conditions, the variables which may facilitate or discourage successful partnerships include power and resources

imbalances, the incentives for stakeholders to participate, and the history of conflict or co-operation among stakeholders (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

Attributes for successful partnerships include commitment, trust, and interdependence (Mohr & Spekman, 1994). Commitment means the willingness of partners to exert effort for their relationship. In the face of challenges, the high commitment will lead to more possibility of long-term shared-goal achievement (Angle et al., 1981). Trust is the belief that a party's word is reliable and that a partner will fulfil its obligation in an exchange relationship (Pruitt, 2013). Trust is related to an organisation's desire to co-operate with a specific partner. The establishment of trust will enable both parties to achieve an outcome that exceeds what they would achieve on their own (Anderson & Narus, 1990). Partnerships begin with trust, and trust-building is a continuous requirement for partnerships to be successful (Huxham & Vangen, 2013). Trust can be built through information sharing, competency demonstration and good intentions (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006). Interdependence happens when the partners intend to achieve mutually beneficial goals. Both parties recognise that the interdependence will provide benefits that are greater than they could get separately (Levine & White, 1961). Interdependence could bring about a commitment to meaningful collaboration and build trust (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

Based on the resource dependence theory, Graddy and Chin (2008) regard a good strategy of partner selection as another factor promoting well-functioning collaborations. They categorise the purpose of collaboration into resource/programme needs, organisational legitimacy, and reducing transactions costs. Different purposes lead to different partner-selection strategies. For example, if the partnership is out of the need for resources, the organisation may choose partners which can prove their ability to provide necessary resources; for organisations seeking to enhance their own growth via such partnerships, they may pay more attention to partners with a shared vision.

1.3.3.2 Partnership Implementation. Implementation includes setting up a structure, choosing working methods and leadership characteristics, addressing conflicts and challenges, communication, and connection development. The literature on this stage covers the topics of attributes of a successful implementation, overcoming conflicts and leadership. Himmelman (1996) considers a successful process to be a representative process, representing not only the organisational partners but also the people who will be affected by the partnership outcomes. The process should be inclusive, impartial, dedicated to reconciling differences, deliberative, and lawful. Effective communication is essential to the partnership process (Mohr & Nevin, 1990). It can be assessed from three aspects: communication quality, the extent of information sharing between partners, and participation in planning and goal setting (Mohr & Spekman, 1994).

Conflicts are inevitable in partnerships, and one of the major challenges of managing partnerships is the management of conflict (O'Leary & Bingham, 2008). Conflict may arise when different parties have different priorities or differ in power; conflicts may also come from varied viewpoints on strategies or from either partner's intention to increase control over the partnership (Bryson et al., 2006). Trust is key to overcoming conflicts. As trust increases, conflicts will be resolved through dialogue and other informal dispute resolution mechanisms (Van Slyke, 2008). A good interpersonal relationship is another factor promoting conflict solving (Kispert, 2013). The attitudinal characteristics of partners needed to overcome conflicts and challenges are dedication to achieving shared goals and respect for others' autonomy (L. K. Brown & Troutt, 2004). The conflict resolution techniques include joint problem solving, and persuasion; outside arbitration or avoiding issues are seen as destructive ways of conflict resolution attempts (Mohr & Spekman, 1994). Overall, partners should use resources and strategies to equalise power and manage conflicts in order to maintain an effective partnership (Bryson et al., 2006).

Leadership is the task of leaders of collaboration. It facilitates the partnership process. Ospina and Foldy (2010) identify five leadership practices which facilitate diverse actors' ongoing ability for partnership: prompting cognitive shifts from self-interest to the collaborative purpose, acknowledging identity differences among parties, engaging dialogues facing conflicts, creating equitable governance mechanisms, and bringing diverse actors together through interpersonal relationships. Crosby and Bryson (2005) identify two key leadership roles as sponsors and champions. Sponsors are those with authority and access to resources they can use on behalf of the partnership, and champions are individuals who keep the partnership going and ensure it reaches the goals. A successful partnership requires committed sponsors and effective champions (Crosby & Bryson, 2005).

1.3.3.3 Partnership Outcome. Outcomes indicate the effects and values of partnerships, such as the changes that have been made, the influence on clients, potential changes in power balance and trust. Partnerships produce public value which cannot be created by a single actor alone. The public value is understood as a regime of mutual gain. The regime means sets of implicit or explicit norms, principles or decision-making procedures actors can expect in a given area; and the mutual gain is "widespread, lasting benefits at a reasonable cost," (Crosby & Bryson, 2005, p. 19). serving people's needs, making positive changes and achieving a better world (Crosby & Bryson, 2005).

The outcome includes achieving goals, generating social capital and shifting the power distribution (Bryson et al., 2006). Innes and Booher (1999) categorise the outcomes of partnership into first, second, third benefits. The first benefits include social capital such as trust and relationship, mutual understanding, ability to work together, innovative strategies; the second benefits are further learning, changes in practices and perceptions. The third benefit may take more time to be evident. These are more coevolution and less destructive

conflicts, new norms and discourse and so on. These outcomes will lead to the bettering of communities and society.

1.4   Prevailing Theories on NGO–Government Partnerships

This section is to summarise prevailing theories on NGO–government partnerships in order to generate potential variables and an analytical framework used in this research.

NGO–government partnerships or cross-sector collaborations have been studied by scholars in multiple disciplines such as management, economics, sociology, and politics. There are a considerable number of theories that could be adopted to understand this topic. For example, Anheierh (2005) uses social movement theory and transaction cost theory to explain state–NGO relations; Smith (2006) uses three models to analyse government–nonprofit relations:

1) Demand/supply model (including a market niche model and a transaction model) which focuses on how government and nonprofits compensate for each other's weaknesses in meeting the social needs;

2) Civil society/social movement model which focuses on how social–political context together creates complex dynamics in the state–NGO relations; and

3) Neo-institutional model which reflects processes by which NGOs become institutionalised over time.

Other theories of understanding NGO–government partnerships include:

1) Social network perspective which sees actors as embedded within networks of relationships that provide opportunities for and constraints on each one's behaviour (Kenis & Oerlemans, 2009);

2) Evolutionary perspective which considers organisations as continuously growing and developing as aggregate entities (Lomi et al., 2009);

3) Critical perspective which emphasises understanding the use of power for each partner's own interests and the complex webs of power in which the collaborating actors are situated (Lotia & Hardy, 2009).

Focusing on the political ecology of NGOs in China, this research mainly consists of two streams of theories:

1) Theories which focus on the microlevel individual organisation's behaviours, such as resource dependence theory and institutionalism, which explore how resources or external environment affect individual organisation's behaviours; and

2) Macrolevel theories such as civil society and corporatism which analyse the state–society dynamics as a whole. These theories will give rise to potential factors which could be associated with different partnerships.

1.4.1 Resource Dependence Theory

The resource dependence theory, developed by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), suggests the context or ecology is important for understanding organisational behaviours. This theory indicates that organisations need to acquire resources from the external environment, mainly from other organisations, in order to ensure operational efficiency and continued survival (Toepler & Anheier, 2013). As an organisation, an NGO's primary task is to secure a constant supply of necessary resources to secure its survival and to meet its goal (C. Hsu, 2010). Interorganisational relationships are necessary to acquire resources (Gray & Wood, 1991). Therefore, NGOs look for an exchanging relationship with the government to get support such as money or access to beneficiaries. For the same reason, governmental agencies, also organisations with a mission to serve the public, tend to use NGOs for service delivery (Q. Wang & Yao, 2016). The resource provided by NGOs includes material resources or expertise to compensate for government failure in providing sufficient public services (Kispert, 2013; Salamon, 1987).

This leads attention to the expertise of an NGO as a variable in NGO–government partnerships. Studies in China show that the state's desire for professional expertise to solve social problems is one of the reasons for involving NGOs in their decision making (Dai & Spires, 2018; F. Wu, 2013; Yep, 2000), and the government has trust in and expectations of NGOs' expertise in their relationship (Warin, 2002). When NGOs' experience and knowledge are developed to become crucial in addressing social issues, this capacity will affect their relationship with the state (Hasmath & Hsu, 2014). In the authoritarian system, NGOs should keep ahead of the state to gain the trust of authorities by setting up a best practice or working models (Qi, 2011). It means the NGOs should be able to produce new knowledge or to plan for addressing social issues in a visionary way (Hasmath & Hsu, 2014). An NGO's expertise can be demonstrated by its working methods to address social issues. In Najam's (2000) Four-C framework, co-operation between the state and NGOs happens in the case of similar goals and also similar means. However, NGOs applying the same working methods as the state might not be able to add new knowledge to this area. If NGOs' ability to add new knowledge is crucial for the state's intention to collaborate, as discussed in the last paragraph, it is possible that only the means which are different to the traditional state ones can contribute to their partnership. Overall, this theory leads to the analysis of NGOs' expertise and working methods.

The working methods an NGO adopts can be reflected by its mission, and this leads to the possibility that an NGO's mission statement can imply its relationship with the government. The mission statement usually articulates the reason why an organisation exists and what it is set to do. It can carry its culture, stress its values and principles and describe strategic plans (McDonald, 2007; Swales & Rogers, 1995). The written mission statement can be analysed through the specific words used. Statements which involve words with implications of citizenship awareness or institutional changes are more likely to indicate a non-co-operative

strategy toward the authoritarian state and may even be suppressed by the government, while the ones with non-political, non-ideological and "better public relations" type of wording may be closer to the government (J. M. Brinkerhoff, 2002). For example, in the issue area of education, the organisation with the mission of "expanding educational opportunity across China" has a high level of partnership with the government (Lam, 2017); while the one expressing its mission as "cultivating rural kids to be functional 'citizens'" was categorised as a "challenge to the government" and was shut down by the government (Xia, 2016).

1.4.2   Institutionalism

Institution refers to the order produced by written laws, regulations or unwritten rules in a given society, and institutionalism points out that individual or organisational behaviours can be influenced by institutional factors such as formal government policies and formal or informal institutional environment influences (Berman, 2001).

The fragmented government and its policies are part of the institution and have an influence on NGOs' behaviours. As it was discussed before, the Chinese state is not a monolithic entity, rather a conglomeration of agencies with power differences and potential competing agendas (Hsu, 2010). This fragmented government can be seen in a matrix of *tiao* (vertical bureaucracies such as central or local level government) and *kuai* (horizontal functional bodies such as education or environment bureau) sections (Yuen, 2020). Different sections have different attitudes towards and influence on NGOs (C. L. Hsu & Jiang, 2015; Teets, 2014). Some governmental agencies have more knowledge about NGOs and spend more money on purchasing social services from NGOs, and these governmental agencies are willing to use "strategic ignorance," which means being purposely ignorant of NGOs' potential threat to the government's power as they desire to utilise NGOs' expertise (Hasmath & Hsu, 2014). The organisational capacity of a particular governmental agency is also a predictor of the possibility of the partnership. For example, after a city-level environment

protection bureau established a system for managing complaints, such as setting up a telephone hotline and assigning specialised personnel, it became more responsive to suggestions from the people and social organisations to improve their work (Brettell, 2007).

In addition to the government as part of the institution, this theory also pays attention to NGOs' personal ties with the institution. It suggests that interpersonal relationships with government agencies could be vital for any social action to achieve its end in China (Ho & Edmonds, 2007). Through their interpersonal connections with the government, NGOs can even achieve policy changes in China (Qiaoan, 2015). The main leader of an organisation is often the factor to determine whether the NGO can form a relationship with authorities in a formal or informal way (Tai, 2012). The NGOs' founders' institutional experience usually has an impact on the organisational strategies: the ones with a founder who used to work in the government tend to form a co-operative relationship with the government (C. L. Hsu & Jiang, 2015). Studies outside China also show that connections with the political elite or government officials are one indicator for an NGO–government partnership (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2002; Morse, 2010) and for better programme outcomes (O'Rourke, 2002; Tendler, 1997).

Another key element in this theory is "isomorphism." Isomorphism means that institutional expectations and constraints will lead organisations to employ similar practices and become homogeneous over time (Kostova & Roth, 2002). The isomorphic pressure shapes NGOs' behaviours and structure by coercing them to conform to certain norms or implicitly encouraging them to take on particular forms or approaches (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). By imitating other organisations perceived as successful, NGOs will be efficient in establishing legitimacy, which is understood as conformity with institutional expectations (Toepler & Anheier, 2013). For example, when more and more NGOs are legally registered or get government contracts, it will pose pressure on other NGOs to do the same in order to gain

legitimacy. Overall, this theory leads attention to the fragmented regime, NGOs'
governmental ties, and isomorphism (institutional pressure).

1.4.3 Civil Society

Civil society and corporatism theories are two sides of one coin in understanding the state–
society dynamics in China. They can be used to analyse whether the NGO sector in China is
independent or embedded into the state. Civil society refers to the independent domain of free
social life, consisting of the network of organisations or informal activities that exists apart
from the state, the market and families (Dionne, 1998). Civil society has certain values
crucial to democracy and good government (Smith & Gronbjerg, 2006). This concept
develops from Alexis de Tocqueville, who views voluntary groups as an intermediate body
between the individual and the state. It draws attention to the importance of both formal and
informal collective activities within the NGO sector and promotes the idea of citizens'
participation in social life, putting aside the question of whether they can solve any social
problems successfully. Some hobby groups may not serve traditional public good in the
beginning, but they provide a ground for likeminded members to address mutual concerns or
social issues jointly. To name an example, a grassroots NGO called "1KG" (多背一公斤),
aiming to build libraries in rural schools in China, was established by a group of hikers who
had trips to remote areas and witnessed the harsh conditions of the isolated rural schools. The
hobby group of hikers turned into an NGO for helping rural children (Peng & Wu, 2018).

As a variant of the civil society perspective, social capital theory describes social capital as
vertical and horizontal linkages among members of society. The linkages bring more
opportunities and information, which will improve people's life quality. Social capital
increases trust in society and promotes collective action for the common good. Collective
action leads to more demands on the government concerning its way of taking responsibility

(Putnam, 1993). The network of an NGO could influence its ability to form collective action or its relationship with the government. Networks can help organisations achieve a more central and influential position in relation to other organisations (Hardy et al., 2003). In China, an NGO's growing network leads to more opportunities and the capacity to interact with the state (Peng & Wu, 2018; F. Wu, 2013). In practice, the connection with corporate or foundation donors may also bring opportunities to form a collaboration with the state (e.g., being referred to the government by a donor with high socioeconomic status). However, being too close to foreign, sensitive organisations may make the NGO look suspicious to the government, resulting in their avoidance or even confrontation with each other.

This perspective does not exclude the role of government. The independence of social organisations does not necessarily contradict their collaborative relationship with the government. Instead, civil society recognises the government's supportive role to promote community organisations and to strengthen individual responsibilities. The central government of China implemented community-driven development pilot projects in 2006, collaborating with NGOs to increase individual and public welfare as well as improving community development and public governance (K. Zhang, 2012) and started to encourage the local government to foster community organisations in 2016 (State Council, 2016c). However, the implementation varies in different regions.

On the other hand, civil society theory also contains potential conflicts between the independent associations and the government. According to social movement theory, private concerns and private action may evolve into formal organisations connecting with other individuals and organisations. Ultimately, it may be able to influence government policy by turning private concerns into public issues. Social movements with the intention to change government policy tend to have a deliberately conflictual relationship with the government. As political activity, social movements also have the potential for an ongoing politicisation of

NGO–government relations. When private actions translate into public concerns, they influence government policy and government response. The government needs to either address the issue directly or support NGOs to address these public concerns. Then, NGOs tend to adjust their behaviour and work according to public policy and the government's focus of interests (Anheierh, 2005). The conflicts created by social activism may not always lead to policy improvement or NGO–government collaboration. Instead, they may worsen their relationships and even undermine the NGO's own survival (Smith & Gronbjerg, 2006).

However, scholars studying civil society in China tend to conclude that NGOs in China are not entirely independent and would avoid any confrontation with the state (Brook & Frolic, 1997). Two indicators are used to analyse the independence of NGOs: legal status and funding source. Before 2010, when registration regulation was strict, getting registered usually indicated a strong governmental tie and was associated with governmental embeddedness (K. M. Yang & Alpermann, 2014). But the correlation between registration and embeddedness may weaken with the relaxation of registration regulations, meaning more grassroots NGOs become able to register. Therefore, the role of registration needs more exploration. Regarding the funding source, being fully funded by the government could be a sign of an NGO's dependency on the state. The more diverse the funding source is, the less chance there is of the NGO being manipulated by one major donor or granter. Fear of losing independence is identified as one reason for NGOs not to take the government's money and avoid collaborating with the state (C. L. Hsu & Jiang, 2015). However, research shows that even highly government-dependent NGOs may also have a high level of autonomy in making decisions on operations or projects, and they may be free from the obligation of serving the government's interest or running projects with the government. (Q. Wang & Yao, 2016). The correlation between the funding source and the partnership with the state is yet to be tested.

1.4.4   Corporatism

Corporatism refers to an integrative relationship between the government and NGOs with a shared goal. In western society, it indicates a balanced and integrative relationship between the government and interest groups in societies where civil society has evolved fully (Taylor, 1991). It presents an institutional arrangement for linking civil society organisations with the decisional structures of the state (Schmitter, 1974). In corporatism, the government and NGOs join in a co-operative and mutually beneficial relationship. The government recognises the authority of certain associations in their respective categories, and in return, the associations serve as intermediate mechanisms between the government and the citizens (Q. Ma, 2005).

However, in China, where civil society is not fully developed, corporatism highlights the state's attempt to dominate NGO–government co-operation for its own purposes. The Chinese government tends to see social organisations as bridges to reach out to society and extend state power. The government usually develops a special relationship with selected associations for its own purposes (Fulda et al., 2012). This is referred to as a "state-led civil society" by Frolic (1997). For example, the Chinese government supported the development of trade associations in an attempt to manage the increasingly market-oriented economy through these associations. It demonstrates that social organisations can be used by the government as a crucial part of administrative and industrial management (Q. Ma, 2005).

From this angle, the issue area in which an NGO is working could be correlated with its relationship with the government. The partnership may be explained by the specific issues which an NGO is addressing, depending on whether it coincides with the government's stated current goals (Spires, 2011a). De Corte and Verschuere (2014), in Belgium, observe that stronger relations are built by NGOs in certain areas such as fighting poverty, or in the integration of ethnic minorities, compared to NGOs in elderly care or youth care. In China,

the central government is undertaking a strategy called "targeted poverty alleviation" with the goal of "ending poverty by 2020," which could give opportunities to poverty-relief NGOs.

1.5   Literature Gaps and the Analytical Framework of This Research

The gaps in the existing literature on NGO–government partnerships in China include the variances in partnerships, and analysis of the partnership forming process outcomes from the perspective of NGOs.

First, the literature on NGO–government relationships uses different cases and arrives at different conclusions. Some studies show that NGOs can pass people's opinions to the government, and the government will co-operate with NGOs to improve governance (Fulda et al., 2012). However, other research shows that NGOs are not independent, and they are dominated by the government for the government's purpose. For example, some trade unions do not speak for the interests of the members but work as a management unit of government to manage the market (J. Y. Hsu & Hasmath, 2014; Ru & Ortolano, 2007). There is also research stating that the government co-operates with NGOs in order to use NGOs' resource and tends to deliberately ignore the potential threats that might be brought by NGOs (Hasmath & Hsu, 2014). This gap calls for a comprehensive framework combining potential factors to address these variances.

The literature lacks exploration of how NGOs can actively form a partnership with the government. The actual process and outcome of partnerships have not been studied sufficiently in China, though there is substantial literature on this issue in western societies. Understanding the process of NGOs' forming partnerships with the government will improve the chance for and quality of such partnerships in practice. Besides, although collaboration literature generally considers a partnership to be positive, such as being able to compensate for the weakness of a single party, it overlooks the possibility that collaboration may not

always produce social value. There might be direct or unintended negative results from collaboration that do not benefit social-problem solving. Empirical studies need to be done in China to understand the outcome of the partnership to ensure it benefits people in need.

The framework is developed to integrate existing literature and to address the literature gap. The framework includes four elements: 1) the characteristics/variables of NGOs, 2) the variance in NGO–government partnerships, 3) the partnership process, and 4) the institutional background.

First, a set of variables of NGOs are distilled from the theories reviewed above and summarised in the Table 1 as below. These variables will be adapted in the case description in the next chapter. To be noted, although each theory leads to several variables, the relation between a theory and a variable is not exclusive. It means more than one theory can lead attention to the same variable. For example, looking at an NGO's expertise can be derived from the resource-dependent theory, which suggests expertise is a type of resource to exchange in a partnership. At the same time, institutionalism also suggests NGOs' expertise is important because institutional pressure made expertise a precondition for NGOs to work with the government. These variables are integrated into the interview question, and the list of interview questions in Appendix A points out the theoretical foundation of each question.

Table 1

Variables of NGOs

Variable of NGOs	Value/Indicator
Legal status	Legally registered as a social organisation/registered as business/no legal status at all
Funding source	The percentage of government funding
Issue area	Education/poverty relief/environment protection, etc

Mission	Focusing on tangible service provision/quality improvement or containing political/ideology implications, etc
Expertise	Education background of staff; Work experience of staff; The organisational capacity in terms of organisational management, technique skills, innovative approaches, knowledge generating, experience sharing, etc
Working methods	Material giving; infrastructure construction; skill training; network building; legal assistance; social activity; education programme; advocacy, etc
Network	Collaborating with other organisations, such as sharing information and resources which are otherwise not accessible, conducting projects jointly, and participating in network-building events
Interpersonal connection	Previous experience of key leaders: sector (business, government, etc) and position (founder, CEO, senior manager, etc)

The potential variances in NGO–government partnerships have been pointed out in the literature. These variances derived from literature provided guidance at the starting stage of developing this framework, and the later empirical study will provide more insights into the variances in NGO–government partnerships. In addition to the variances of NGOs and partnerships, this research will explore important themes in the partnership process as approaches NGOs can actively use to engage the government. Therefore, the framework incorporates the three stages of the partnership-forming process: partnership design, implementation and outcome, to guide the analysis. Finally, as the partnerships occur in a certain political and social context, the framework also pays attention to the institutional background, such as the fragmented authoritarianism feature of the government, informal rules and isomorphism (institutional pressure) existing in the context. To sum up, the framework has four parts: 1) the variables/potential explanatory factors of NGOs, 2) the variances in NGO–government partnerships as the outcome, 3) the institutional background

in which the partnership occurs, and 4) the partnership-forming process in which a range of

approaches can be actively used by NGOs. This framework can be demonstrated by the chart

in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Analytical Framework
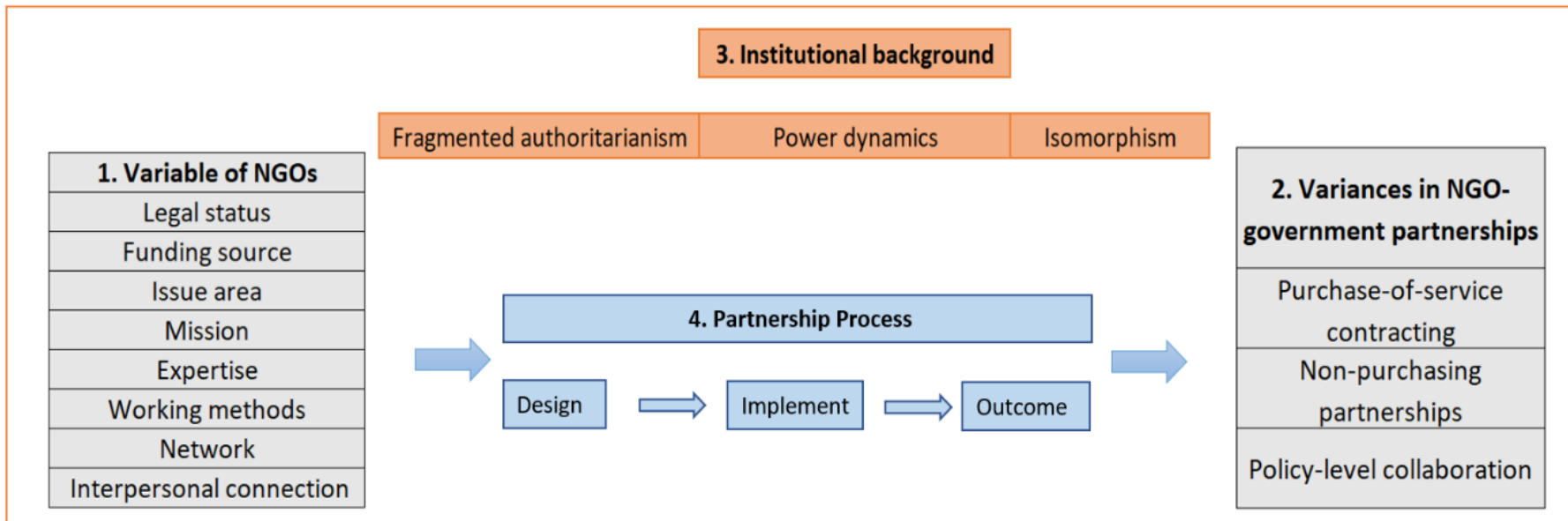
Chapter 2   Case Description and Analysis

Following the four-part analytical framework proposed above, this chapter focuses on the first and second parts of the framework, which are the variables of NGOs and different outcomes in NGOs' partnerships with the government. After a case overview, each NGO will be described by the way of integrating the independent and dependent variables in the framework, including the characteristics of the NGO and its relationship with the government. By comparing the cases, the important factors and possible explanations for different outcomes in NGO–government partnerships will be discussed.

2.1   Case Descriptions

2.1.1   Case Overview

The 13 NGOs in this research are selected for balance in respect of issue area, geographic location, age, type and governmental relationships. According to the number of NGOs in each issue area, the cases cover three of the top third of issue areas (education, capacity building and social work), two of the middle third (environment and poverty alleviation) and one of the last third (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender [LGBT] rights). It is worth mentioning that in practice, these issue areas are not always mutually exclusive. An NGO that works to help students in improvised regions may fall into the category of education as well as poverty alleviation.

The statistics are from China Development Brief, a database that has been used by international scholars studying China's civil society or NGOs (Noakes, 2017; Noakes & Teets, 2018; G. Yang, 2005; X. Zhan & Tang, 2016). The distribution of NGOs in each issue area is also listed in Appendix C. Regarding geographic regions, the NGOs in the case studies mainly work in the provinces of Beijing, Anhui, Guangdong and Qinghai, which are in the north, central, south and west China, respectively. Nine NGOs out of 13 started their work in

or after the year 2007 when supportive policies and relaxed restrictions on NGOs began to be seen.

The type (legal status) of these NGOs can be categorised into registered domestic social organisations, unregistered NGOs and overseas NGOs (Chinafile, 2020b). According to MoCA, registered domestic social organisations include three subcategories: foundation (基金会), private noncommercial enterprises (民办非企业单位) and social group (社会团体). Among the three subcategories, the term *private noncommercial enterprises* (民办非企业单位) has been translated in different ways by different scholars, such as "civic nonenterprise units" (J. Wang & Wang, 2018), "private nonenterprise units" (Shieh & Deng, 2011), "nongovernmental/private noncommercial enterprises" (Q. Ma, 2002b; Spires, 2011b), "nongovernmental/private nonprofit unit" (G. Yang, 2005; C. Zhang, 2018). The translation "private noncommercial enterprises" or "PNCE" will be used in this study.

The formalities of their relationships with the state range from purchasing-of-service contract, nonpurchasing agreement based, collaborative governance and no partnership. To be noted, due to the small number of cases, the selection in different categories does not intend to claim statistic representativeness of this category; instead, the cases are purposely selected because the category each case falls into, such as the issue area, can be an explanatory factor that influences their relationship with the government.

Following an overview of all NGOs in terms of each one's basic information (see Table 2), this chapter will describe variables of the NGOs, such as issue areas, founders' background, source of funding, mission, working methods (demonstrated by main programmes), relationship with other social/political actors and the relationship with the government. Some of the variables are important in the partnership process and are pointed out as "themes" and

will be further discussed in later chapters. After the case description, the association between NGOs' features and their relationship with the government will be initially analysed. The NGOs will be referred to by assigned codes to keep confidentiality. The case description will be organised by their issue areas. In each area, relevant social problems and policies will be examined to provide the context of NGOs working in the area. The description of each case is mainly based on open information about the NGO, such as the "about us" section on their own official websites, as well as interviews in my fieldwork.

Table 2

List of Cases

Code	Provinces of work	Issue area	Year of starting work in China	Year of registration	Legal status	Government relationship
EN1	Anhui	Environment	2003	2015	PNCE	Policy-level collaboration
EN2	Guangdong	Environment	2014	2014	PNCE	From policy-level collaboration to no partnership
EN3	Guangdong	Environment	2012	2012	Foundation	Purchase-of-service
EDU1	Nationwide	Education	2008	2014	PNCE	Non-purchasing partnerships
EDU2	Qinghai	Education	2005	2009	PNCE	Non-purchasing partnerships
PA1	Guangdong	Poverty alleviation	2009	2009	Foundation	Non-purchasing partnerships
PA2	Nationwide	Poverty alleviation	1987	2017	Overseas NGO	Non-purchasing partnerships
PA3	Qinghai	Poverty alleviation	1998	2017	Overseas NGO	Non-purchasing partnerships
SW1	Guangdong	Social work	2007	2007	PNCE	Purchase-of-service
SW2	Beijing	Social work	2014	2014	PNCE	Purchase-of-service
CB1	Guangdong	Capacity building	2014	2014	PNCE	Purchase-of-service
CB2	Anhui	Capacity building	2009	2011	PNCE	Policy-level collaboration
PF	Nationwide	LGBT	2008	NA	Not registered	No partnership

2.1.2 Environmental Protection

Environmental protection is an important issue area of NGO research in China as it is one of the areas entered earliest by NGOs. Globally, environmental challenges and climate change have become pressing topics. As China produces more than a quarter of the global total carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions (ourworldindata, 2018), its environmental protection efforts made by the government and civil society attract significant attention.

Besides air pollution, water pollution is another environmental challenge in China. It is estimated that more than 90% of China's groundwater has been polluted, and it has caused millions of pollution-related diseases and death and thousands of incidents of social unrest every year since 2010 (Han et al., 2016). Worried by the social unrest, the government has built various channels to work with social actors and to encourage them to monitor and report pollution so that the government can respond and enforce the regulations (J. Xu & Byrne, 2020).

The work of NGOs EN1 and EN2 mainly focuses on water-quality monitoring and water protection in the provinces of Anhui and Guangdong, respectively. EN1 was started in 2003 as the first environmental protection NGO in Anhui Province. It received a small donation from the US-based Global Greengrants Fund to kick off and later mostly applied for funding by writing proposals to foundations, companies and local governments. Its main funding source is grant-making foundations. The founder/leader has an educational background in chemical engineering and was trained by and worked for international environmental protection projects, such as the Wildlife Conservation Society (https://www.wcs.org/) and Leadership for Environment and Development (https://www.lead.org/). EN1 was first registered as a business and was registered with the civil affairs department as a PNCE in 2015. Its registration was a result of its personal connection (*guanxi*) with key government members, and this will be elaborated in Chapter 6.

EN1's mission is "to promote the sustainable development of the people and environment in Anhui." It mainly focuses on the water pollution of the Huai River and Chaohu Lake, the main water bodies in this region, and also pays attention to the prevention and control of chemical pollution and the health of residents. It is committed to building an environmental information platform to help the public obtain environmental information and participate in environmental protection actions and is also involved in environmental lawsuits and policy advocacy. EN1 and its founder have won awards for their work in the NGO sector. It has won Ford Conservation & Environmental Grants, one of the world's largest grants in the environmental protection area, a number of times, and the founder has been selected as a member of the network of Ginkgo Fellow Plan, one of the most influential networks of social entrepreneurs in China's NGO sector (see Chapter 5). Such recognition brought the NGO more resources to build networks and work for their cause. Its main projects are as follows.

1. Huai River Protection and Collaboration Project: Initiated in 2006, it aims to reduce the pollution in the Huai River Basin. A network of individual actors, the government and social organisations have been established to jointly protect the ecological environment of the region. This campaign gave birth to the documentary *The Warriors of Qiugang (仇岗卫士)*, which was the Academy Award Nominee for Best Documentary Short Subject in 2011. It depicts how NGOs and local residents won their fight against a chemical factory which caused fish die-offs, crop failure, and a higher rate of cancer. Establishing an environment protection network and using media were two important strategies. After two unsuccessful lawsuits against the factory, EN1 supported a stand-out local community leader and connected local residents with environmental activists across China. After the community leader travelled to Beijing for a big conference on environmental law, the factory, which had been violating environmental regulations for years, began to feel afraid (Napolitano, 2011). With external support, the community leader and local residents were more empowered to

negotiate with the factory. In addition, local and provincial media reported that 40 elementary school students sent letters about environmental pollution in their hometown to the environmental protection bureau. The local activists, national environmental networks and the media put pressure on the government, and the factory was closed in 2010 by the local government (Geall, 2011; R. Yang, 2020). Despite their success in shutting down the factory, there were problems left unsolved, such as accumulated soil pollution and challenges in using the legal system to resolve disputes (Geall, 2011; Lincoln & Sakhuja, 2011), and this encouraged EN1 to expand its working areas.

2. Chemical waste prevention and control project: EN1 was one of the first environmental protection NGOs in China to focus on the issue of chemical waste. It started to address the problem of pesticide pollution in the Chaohu Lake Basin in 2007 and established a demonstration community of zero pesticide waste in that region. In order to reduce hazardous chemical wastes, it established a network of actors to intervene in the illegal dumping of hazardous waste. It also carries out training sessions for enterprises on the management of hazardous waste to increase their environmental awareness and enhance their capabilities in waste management. It also works with universities to conduct research and publish books and reports which it uses for policy advocacy for legislation on the management of hazardous waste (Narada Foundation, 2012; Xiang Zhou, 2017).

3. Environmental Law Project: In 2010, it started work on environmental laws and became one of the earliest local environmental protection agencies in China to use environmental laws to promote environmental governance. It has built a network of environmental volunteer lawyers, provides environmental legal aid to pollution victims, and conducts environmental public interest litigations. In addition to lawyers' direct participation in environmental litigation, it also empowers people in the community by educating them about environment-related policies and legislation. Further, in response to the government's weakness in

environmental protection (see Chapter 7), it organises law enforcement training sessions for government workers, covering the environmental protection departments of 112 districts and counties in Anhui Province (Narada Foundation, 2012; Xiang Zhou, 2017).

Furthermore, it has established a database of pollution in Anhui and hazardous waste disposal companies in China and promotes the disclosure of information on hazardous waste disposal companies across the country. It has been involved in monitoring and evaluating local governments' (13 cities in Anhui Province) performance in disclosing environment information since 2009 and publishes the PITI (Pollution Information Transparency Index) report every year. The index covers the aspects of governmental monitoring data, enterprises' self-reports, government responsiveness, enterprises' emission statistics and public information on environment evaluation (Natural Resources Defence Council, 2020).

In the relationship with the government, EN1 plays the role of a pressure group to advocate for policy change and to urge the government to implement the law strictly. Its work has been recognised by the government. In 2012 and 2013, it was awarded the title of "Top Ten Environmental Protection Guards" by the city-level and province-level governments, respectively.

EN2 also mainly focuses on river protection but through a different working approach. It was established in 2015 in Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong. Similar to EN1, the founder of EN2 also has an educational background in chemical engineering. He used to work in an environmental protection bureau (EPB) as well as environmental NGOs (ENGOs) before establishing his own ENGO. EN2 focuses on the LX River, which is the "mother river" of Guangzhou. It is situated in the northeast corner of the Pearl River Delta region, which has seen extremely rapid economic growth and urbanisation since the Reform and Opening Policy. LX River serves as the source of drinking water on top of its agricultural,

industrial and recreational use. However, the source-water intakes located at the lower and middle stream of the river have been gradually abandoned during the past 20 years due to the water-quality degradation, leaving only the ones located at the upper stream of the river still in use (Jiang et al., 2014; Huaiyu Liu, 2015). In 2014, the city government of Guangzhou announced it would carry out comprehensive actions to improve water quality in the LX River, and encouraged citizens to monitor and participate in the scheme of water protection (People's Government of Guangzhou, 2015). EN2 started to operate in this context for the vision of "a forever clean LX River". EN2's office is located in a village in the downstream area of the river, where the pollution is relatively worse. After a couple of years' exploration, it formed a working pattern with a water eco-village as its core business and policy advocacy and network construction as two supplements.

In 2015, its initial research on pollution found that untreated industrial wastewater is the main cause. Although the local EPB was making efforts to monitor and punish the illegal discharge of wastewater, the authority could not identify all the violators due to its shortage of manpower. In addition to industrial pollution, EN2's research also found that the expansion of industry led to population increase. Without an adequate waste processing system or people's awareness of environmental protection, the river was also polluted by general domestic waste (Liuxi, 2017). After the initial research, EN2 participated in advocacy and environmental protection policy implementation with local government: they made research-based suggestions to the government in public hearings and proposals to the People's Congress through personal ties, and monitored and reported factories discharging wastewater to the government. EN2's reports led to the shut-down of a few factories, which in turn resulted in job and income loss in the community where it is based. This consequence caused tension between the NGO and the local community. After thinking and discussion, EN2 changed its approach from working with the government to working with the community.

Now it aims to build an ecological waterside village and to promote ecological tourism to increase local incomes. This transformation will be further discussed in Chapter 7.

Joint efforts with other ENGOs are important to EN2's work. To increase people's awareness of the value of a good environment, it organised environmental protection activities in collaboration with other ENGOs. For example, a number of volunteers have been organised to clean the general rubbish out of the river, and an education project was established to assess water quality by observing the presence of benthic invertebrates (Interview 19). EN2's network with other NGOs and research institutions does not only provide it with human resources and knowledge for these activities but also funds for its operation. EN2 does not have government funds but mainly relies on granting-making foundations such as the Ford Foundation and the Chinese Society of Entrepreneurs and Ecology Conservation Group (SEE).

EN3 is another NGO which is connected with SEE, the largest domestic environmental protection organisation in China. It has been committed to the protection and education of coastal wetlands represented by mangroves since 2012 as the first privately established public-fundraising foundation in the area of environmental protection. The bar for establishing a public-fundraising foundation is high and public-fundraising foundations used to be mainly owned by the government rather than privately (the concept of the public-fundraising foundation will be further discussed in Chapter 5). EN3 was founded by a group of high-profile entrepreneurs, such as Wang Shi, the chairman of Vanke, and Ma Weihua, the former president of the China Merchants Bank. It describes its vision as "People and wetlands, life and growth" and its mission as "take root in wetland protection, let people and wetlands have a prosperous future." To do that, it has established a professional team covering conservation, education, and scientific research. It is networked with SEE as well as international organisations like the World Wildlife Foundation (Gao & Tyson, 2017).

With the support of partners such as governments at all levels, experts and scholars, enterprises, and NGOs, it has launched a nature conservation model with the participation of the public and society in Shenzhen. Its work includes 1) coastal wetland conservation—the foundation manages a public ecological park, and it was the first case in China of the government contracting out the management of a public municipal facility to a private foundation; 2) public environmental education—as conservation needs public participation and support, and education is important for public participation, the foundation has built natural education centres in six public parks in Shenzhen to carry out nature education activities; 3) industrial network building—the foundation has introduced international expertise to increase the domestic capacities in conservation. It has built a network of public wetland parks, ENGOs, experts and scholars and carries out international collaborations on conservation; 4) scientific research—it supports studies on wetland conservation to provide specific and effective data support for mangrove protection, and has published a number of research reports.

Its partnership with the government is based on the government's purchase of its service. Apart from the government contract, EN3's strong connection with entrepreneurs and corporates also secures the NGO sufficient funds from a wide range of sources (Gao & Tyson, 2017).

2.1.3 Education

Along with the environment, education is another early area of Chinese NGOs. Among all the issue areas in Chinese's NGOs' work, education could be the one best known to the general public, thanks to the Project Hope run by China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF). CYDF was the first postsocialist charitable foundation to operate on public funds rather than government money. CYDF started Project Hope in 1989. It builds schools in the countryside and sponsors rural children to go to school, and has become the most influential

NGO public welfare programme (C. L. Hsu, 2008; Y. Xu, 1999). The issue area of education is generally viewed as politically safe, compared with potentially sensitive issues which are associated with social concern or contention, such as migrant workers or gender/LGBT issues. Therefore, organisations in education are more likely to be recognised by the government and to attract funds from domestic and overseas donors (Spires, 2011a; Spires et al., 2014).

Both of the two educational NGOs in this research mainly focus on improving educational opportunities and quality in rural areas. It is noticeable that there has been tremendous improvement in China's education over the past 4 decades. For example, the national gross enrolment ratio of junior secondary schools (for students aged 12 to 14 years old) reached 100% in the year 2018 compared with 66.4% in 1978, and the tertiary education gross enrolment ratio grew from 2.7% in 1978 to 48.1% in 2018 (Ministry of Education, 2018). However, the urban–rural divide in education quality is still evident. The dropout rate within the 9-year compulsory education system is much higher in rural schools than in the city, even though compulsory education has been made free by the government (Ayoroa et al., 2010). Reasons for drop-outs include poor-quality teaching, irrelevant curriculum, the shortage of labour for their household and the far distance to school (Postiglione, 1999). One important part of education quality is the quality of teachers, which affects students' learning experiences and outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Harris & Sass, 2011). Nevertheless, it is a global issue that qualified teachers are unevenly distributed across schools (Akiba et al., 2007), and underresourced regions are less likely to be staffed with sufficient teachers (Raudenbush & Bhumirat, 1992). In China, rural schools often struggle with a significant lack of qualified teachers compared with their urban counterparts (Ayoroa, Bailey, Crossen, & A. Geo-JaJa, 2010; Postiglione & Mak, 1997).

Although there have been government policies and programmes to address urban–rural educational inequality, the effort is not sufficient. One policy to address the teacher shortage in rural schools is the Free Teacher Education Policy initiated in 2007. It was also a response to increased university tuition fees (H. Qian et al., 2020). This policy offers free teacher education in top-ranked universities to high school graduates from rural provinces and requires them to teach in their province of origin for 10 years (the requirement was changed to 6 years with at least 1 year in rural villages in 2018) after graduation (State Council, 2018). However, studies show that the policy needs to be improved as graduates prefer to work in more affluent city schools where they have a better chance to achieve their personal and professional development, as opposed to rural schools (Liao & Yuan, 2017; H. Qian, Youngs, Hu, & Prawat, 2020). In 2015, the State Council further issued a policy to support the development of rural teachers. It plans to expand the channels to recruit rural teachers, to increase the hardship allowance for rural teachers, to encourage teachers to move from urban to rural areas and improve the capacity of rural teachers (State Council, 2015b). In addition to the State Council initiatives, the Communist Youth League has been organising volunteer teachers on a large scale, since the 1990s, recruiting over 15,000 volunteers every year. It co-operates with universities to recruit university graduates and work with local authorities in underresourced areas to place the volunteers. In return, volunteers receive extra scores in their civil servant recruitment exams or graduate school entrance exams. This initiative also has some weaknesses. For example, the term of volunteering is only 1 year, which does not provide sufficient stability in teaching; and training/support is inadequate for the large number of volunteers from various backgrounds. Despite the problems, these governmental policies and initiatives have educated the public on the issue of rural–urban disparity and paved the way for the passionate citizens to take action to address the issue, and also

provided the basis for the NGOs which work on this issue to build a partnership with the government.

Of the two NGOs working in the rural education area, EDU1 started its volunteer teaching programme in 2008 and later expanded its scope to provide long-term training and support to rural teachers. Its mission is to cultivate future leaders who promote educational equality. The founder is a retired successful business manager and a board member of a grant-making charitable foundation in Hong Kong. The first phase of its development was from 2008 to 2013. It operated as a programme affiliated with a department of rural education in a top-ranked normal university and mostly relied on overseas donors, mainly from the US and Hong Kong. In 2013, based on its fundraising strategy, it began to receive funds from domestic foundations and gradually decreased the percentage of overseas funds. In 2014, it was registered with the Beijing civil affairs department. In 2016 and 2017, it won the award in the Charity Festival which was jointly initiated by a number of influential media organisations.

In order to place volunteers in rural public schools, it has built a partnership with local governments, often via an introducer such as a university or grant-making charitable foundation. EDU1's partnership with the government is based on an agreement in which EDU1 recruits and trains volunteers, and the local governments provide on-site support and a basic living allowance to the volunteers. As a grassroots NGO that did not begin with a strong governmental tie, it has grown from a volunteer group to a formal organisation and has successfully maintained partnerships with a number of governments. Its professionalism, participatory approach (engages local governments in programme design and financing), and network with other social actors (especially with foundations) are some factors contributing to its successful governmental partnership, and this will be discussed in Chapters 3–5, respectively.

EDU2 is a foundation established by a group of grassroots volunteers in 2004 and mainly works in Qinghai province. Qinghai is located in the high-altitude Tibetan Plateau and is populated by ethnic minorities. Its mission is to improve the educational environment in western China, to help children in western China grow up with a healthy body and mind, and to promote their future development and progress. Running for 15 years, EDU2 has won many awards from the government and media. Different from EDU1, which was introduced to local governments by charitable foundations, EDU2 forms governmental partnerships in a bottom-up manner. As a grassroots organisation, EDU2 did not have a connection with any governmental agency in the beginning. Therefore, EDU2 first built partnerships with individual rural schools, and gradually expand their partners from schools to local government. It first provided financial support to rural children, their families, and schools. By the personal connections it built, it was gradually introduced to the government, won the recognition of local governments and eventually built partnerships with governments. With the support of local officers, the implementation of EDU2's programmes has been written into local policies and accessed by more beneficiaries. Maintaining partnerships with governments, EDU2 emphasises the participation of local people and government in their work, which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

2.1.4 Poverty Alleviation

Poverty is one of the major social problems faced by China, especially in rural areas. In 1978, when the Reform and Opening Policy was launched, there were 250 million people (30.7% of the population) living in absolute poverty based on the corresponding national poverty line, which was an annual per capita net income of 100 yuan (Park & Wang, 2001). Over the years, poverty alleviation has been a key element of the government's policies and efforts, and China has made some achievements in poverty reduction (Y. Liu et al., 2018; L. Zhang et al., 2003). Based on the World Bank's international poverty line, which is US$1.90 a day (at

2011 purchasing power parity prices),[1] the global population in extreme poverty has fallen

from nearly 1.9 billion in 1990 to about 731 million in 2015, and the number of China in the

same period dropped from 751.72 million to 10.01 million, which means that China has

contributed to 63% of the decrease in population in poverty (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2013).[2]

In 2015, the Chinese government pledged to end extreme poverty by the end of 2020 (State

Council, 2015a), and in late 2020, the government announced the victory in achieving this

goal (Xinhua, 2020). The achievement is demonstrated by all 832 counties on the poverty list

having "taken off the hat of impoverished" (People's Daily, 2020), which means less than 2%

of the population in each county are making under 4,000 yuan per year (ChinaNews, 2019).

The government has engaged social organisations in poverty alleviation since the 1990s. The

state started to implement "targeted poverty alleviation" (定点扶贫) in 1994, which paired

wealthy regions with developing regions, as well as governmental agencies/state-related

enterprises with specific poorest counties to lift poverty-stricken areas out of poverty (Sangui

Wang et al., 2004). It also channelled international organisations and NGOs, such as the UN,

Ford Foundation and Oxfam, to set up poverty-relieving programmes in impoverished

regions (Qi Zhang & Feng, 2016). In 2014, the State Council (2014c) required local

governments to support social organisations' participation in poverty alleviation with

information and guidance and encouraged social organisations to be part of social resource

mobilisation, allocation and use. In 2017, the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty

Alleviation and Development (LGOPAD) issued a notice specifically on "guiding and

mobilising" social organisations to join in the efforts to end poverty (State Council, 2017).

Though these policies revealed the government's intention to work with social organisations,

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1 Based on the monetary value of a person's consumption. For more information on setting international
poverty line, refer to https://ourworldindata.org/extreme-poverty#setting-the-international-poverty-line
2 For more information on global poverty, visit the World Bank's online analysis tool for global poverty
monitoring: http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/povDuplicateWB.aspx

not all social organisations are equally welcomed by the government. As the measurement of poverty is household income, social organisations which are able to bring in investment and job opportunities are welcomed by the government. Therefore, compared with grassroots NGOs, state-related NGOs and international/overseas NGOs are more common in poverty alleviation due to their financial capability to increase incomes in improvised areas. The following three cases in this category are either state-related or overseas NGOs. Nevertheless, as the causes of poverty are multilayered rather than simply being a lack of money, grassroots NGOs can also contribute to poverty reduction by programmes aiming for improving rural education and such (see Chapter 4).

PA1 is a charitable foundation established by a state-owned enterprise in the city of Shenzhen in 2009. It describes its mission as being to "stimulate the value of the people, gather the strength of the community and promote social participation." It has been involved in poverty reduction due to the "targeted poverty alleviation" policy to assist poverty-stricken regions to get rid of poverty (State Council, 2010a). PA1 was assigned the task of targeted poverty alleviation in the provinces of Guizhou, Xinjiang and Hubei. Funded by one of the most profitable enterprises owned by the central government, it was in a privileged financial position. Since 2012, PA1 has invested 14.35 million yuan in the poverty-stricken county Qichen in Hubei province to build five new modern villages and helped relocate 522 households from remote mountain areas to the plain areas with a more favourable living environment. In the county of Yecheng and Shache in Xinjiang, it has supported 2,400 households to grow family businesses, to build local industries and to ensure the families in poverty have a job without leaving the village, and helped 5,400 people get out of poverty. In addition to its material investment, PA1 also emphasises education and human development, promotes a participatory approach and supports the development of the NGO sector. It plays the role of a hub to bring in programmes run by other grassroots or overseas NGOs to the

poor areas where it is paired with, and usually forms an agreement-based partnership with, the local government. As PA1's poverty alleviation task was assigned by the central government, PA1 is seen as the delegate of higher level government, which represents authority and power in relation to local people and local government. In this case, a participatory approach, which involves the less powerful parties in the decision-making process, improved its relationship with local government (see Chapter 4). In addition, it participated in building one of the most influential industrial capacity-building networks, the China Foundation Forum (CFF). The efforts of NGOs' network building and its association with NGOs' partnership with the government will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

PA2 and PA3 are both overseas NGOs. PA2 was established in Hong Kong in 1976 as part of a global organisation with affiliates in 20 countries fighting poverty. Its vision is "a world free of poverty and injustices, where everyone enjoys wellbeing and rights." It sees the root cause of poverty as injustice and structural exploitation and aims to "work with poor and vulnerable communities and local partners to fight the injustices of poverty and inequality" through its "advocacy, research, education, development and humanitarian relief programmes." Its funding is mainly from public fundraising in Hong Kong. It started to work in mainland China in 1987 as the first overseas NGO which built a partnership with the central government. Starting from signing a co-operative agreement with the central government (the Poverty Alleviation Offices of the State Council), it gradually extended its partnerships with local governments in the places where they implement development programmes. After the implementation of the Overseas NGO Management Law in 2017, it registered with the central government as well as in the provinces of Gansu, Guangdong and Yunnan. Its partnerships take the form of signing agreements. Similar to PA1, it also emphasises the approach of participation, which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

PA3 was started in the 1980s by a group of Christians in Hong Kong. Its mission is to serve those who are disadvantaged, marginalised, displaced or abandoned, with the aim to give them hope, dignity and self-reliance. After a series of pilot works and initial contacts in a few provinces in mainland China, it chose the province of Qinghai to start the poverty alleviation programmes in 1998 and has been working there since then. It mainly focuses on children's welfare, providing social services and grants to underprivileged children and teenagers, such as orphans, children with disabilities/special needs and underprivileged ethnic minority students. They also support Qinghai Charity Hospital to provide medical services to underprivileged residents and construct houses for the poor.

It has built a partnership with the local government since the beginning of its programmes in mainland China. Back in 1998, they co-founded and co-managed Xining Children's Home (orphanage), the first one in Qinghai, with the Civil Affairs Department of Qinghai. In 2008, The Xining Children's Home was awarded as one of the National Ten Best Children's Welfare Organisations by MoCA. In 2015, it established a strategic partnership with the local government by signing a 10-year agreement with the Qinghai Civil Affairs Department. In recent years, it is participating in the management of five children's homes, assisting the provincial government in looking after nearly 36,000 underprivileged children and working on enhancing the professionalism in children's welfare in Qinghai by bringing in experts and resources.

In 2017, this NGO was registered in Qinghai. It is not only the first but also still the only overseas NGO registered in Qinghai, and it is the only overseas NGO that has the word *Christian* in the registered name. It is unusual because: 1) Qinghai is part of the Tibetan Plateau and is largely populated by ethnic minorities such as Tibetan. The (potential) ethnic and political conflicts in this region made the government extremely cautious about the activities of "foreign forces." While Qinghai only has one registered overseas NGO, Tibet

also has only one, and the other sensitive province, Xinjiang, has none so far. 2) Religion is also a sensitive issue in China (Xia, 2016).

The success of this NGO may be due to its CEO, who has been in this position since 1992. The CEO has built a strong relationship with the Chinese government and won the government's trust. She was selected as a member of CPPCC in 2005 and was appointed by the government as the province's Charity Ambassador in 2015. In Hong Kong, she was a member of the Election Committee which functioned to select the Chief Executive in 2006 and 2011 (Electoral Affairs Commission, 2017), and she belongs to the pro-Beijing camp. The political position of the leader enables the NGO to participate in policy advocacy on the issue of child protection and welfare through the People's Congress and the Political Consultative Conference.

Another factor important to the governmental partnership, mentioned by the interviewee of this NGO, is shared goals with the government, such as to improve the service quality of the children's homes. Children's welfare is part of the government's responsibility, and therefore a good performance in children's homes shows the government's achievement and meets the government's interests. The NGO brings in expertise, money, and other material resources to support the government to carry out its duty, and thus it is welcomed by the government. For the NGO, the endorsement of the government provides it with legitimacy and access to local institutions, schools, and people and thus facilitates the NGO to attain its organisational goal. Also, it understands religion is sensitive to the government, so it focuses on service provision and avoids religious issues (Interview 11).

It is also necessary to keep up with policy changes, to understand the policy goals and to make adjustments in NGO's working methods accordingly. For example, PA3's programme of students' grants has decreased in scale as the government increased the investment in

poverty alleviation and offered various subsidies to students in need. This made subsidies from NGOs unnecessary, and PA3 put more effort into intangible aid to support the government to fulfil its goal. On the other hand, contradicting the policy goal could threaten NGOs' survival. The interviewee pointed out that a few NGOs in that region had been banned because what the NGO aimed for contradicted the government's policy or interests. One example is that the government was attempting to settle nomads from grasslands to townships as it would improve their access to education, health care and higher income (Xinhua News, 2014). But this policy faced some resistance from the nomads who were not accustomed to the lifestyle of a township. NGOs attempting to support nomads to improve the nomads' life quality while keeping their lifestyle were welcomed by the residents. However, as they contradicted the government's goal, they were banned shortly afterwards (Interview 11).

2.1.5   Social Work Agency

The term "social work agency" is a literal translation of the Chinese term for such organisations: *shehui gongzuo shiwusuo* (社会工作事务所). The term "agency" here is different from the "agency" in "state agency". Same as other NGOs, social work agencies provide social services and register with civil affairs departments. According to the registration regulation, NGOs under the category of community service provision can be registered directly without a supervisory agency (State Council, 2013b). Social work agencies usually fall into this category and thus are directly registered with civil affairs offices. Different from NGOs in the areas of education, environment and such, social work agency is a special type of NGO as it is staffed with professionals who have been educated by a relatively standardised curriculum and usually hold the social worker qualification registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

The subject of social work emerged into the curriculum of sociology training in 1985 and has proliferated in universities since then; in 1991, the National Association of Social Workers was set up, and indigenisation of western social work knowledge started to be promoted (Leung et al., 2012). In the 2000s, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security recognised social work as a profession and established occupational standards, followed by qualification examinations and a registration system in 2006 (T. K. Chan et al., 2009). After that, the governments, from local to central level, issued a range of policies to encourage the creation of social work agencies and the government purchase-of-service from these social work agencies (CPC Central Committee, 2006; People's Government of Shenzhen, 2007). Up to the end of 2018, there were more than 9,500 social work organisations and more than 450,000 registered social workers nationwide to deliver social services (Philanthropy Times, 2019).

The social work agency SW1 has the mission to "support vulnerable people and build a harmonious neighbourhood." It is one of the earliest social work agencies in Shenzhen. It was founded by a local businessman in 2007, right after the Shenzhen government issued a series of policies, which are referred to as "1+7" documents, including one main and seven supplementary ones, to support the development of social work. Shenzhen's policy echoed the spirit of the 17th Party Congress, in which the central government set the paramount goal as "building a harmonious society" (CPC Central Committee, 2006). Acknowledging social work's role in solving social problems and ameliorating social conflicts, the government considers social workers can be useful in achieving the goal of a "harmonious society." Therefore, this set of documents made a range of suggestions on the education, professionalisation and regulation of the social worker occupation, as well as the methods by which the government can financially support and make use of the social work industry.

After more than 10 years of growth, SW1 has become one of the largest social work agencies in Shenzhen, with more than 200 employees. It mainly acts as the contractor and manpower referrer of the government, taking governmental contracts and placing social workers in a range of governmental offices. The governmental units SW1's referred social workers are placed in include Veterans Service Centre, Petition Offices and the office for "maintaining stability and comprehensive governance" (维稳综治办). Over 70% are placed in more than 40 community "Party-Mass Service Centres" (PMSC) all over the city.

The PMSC (党群服务中心) are built inside communities to deliver a range of public services and Party activities. Their functions include connecting the people to the Party representatives; providing services to people in need; organising volunteer activities; guiding Party-building activities in enterprises, social organisations and communities; providing administrative services; and listening to people's voices (H. Wu, 2020). The dramatic growth in the number of PMSCs can be dated back to the 18th Party Congress in 2012 when President Xi assumed his position and announced the CCP Central Committee's emphasis on "governing the Party with strict discipline" (从严治党) (BBC, 2012; Xinhua News, 2012).

One of the strategies is to strengthen the building of service-oriented Party organisations at the community level, highlighting their political functions and stressing their service functions (People's Daily, 2015). Accordingly, PMSC started to be built nationwide to deliver local services under the Party's leadership to reinforce the Party's image of serving the people. By the end of 2018, Shenzhen had built 1,050 PMSCs, one in every square kilometre; these centres operate with unified standards and the same features, each one is more than 650 square metres in size (People's Daily, 2018). As specified in Shenzhen's policy on the standardisation of community Party-building:

Each community shall set up at least one PMSC, which shall integrate all forces to carry out community services under the leadership of the community Party committee, highlight the role of the Party organisation in serving the masses, and establish the image of the Party. Service centres shall use a unified name and identification … set up different function areas for Party representatives' receptions, Party member remote education, 4:30 pm schools [after-school child care], elderly daycare, libraries, psychological counselling and recreational/sports activities … strengthen the construction of a comprehensive grass-roots public service platform, and effectively integrate the service functions of communities and the administrative affairs of workstations … Each centre shall be equipped with at least three social workers and a number of assistants. The dress of social workers' uniform should reflect the characteristics of the Party organisation serving the masses, and Party members should wear the Party emblem. (People's Government of Shenzhen, 2016, pt. 13)

It was not uncommon for the PMSCs to be barely visited by the residents in the early days due to the lack of staff and actual service provision (X. Zhang, 2018). Hiring social workers to manage the services is the way to fix the problem. The government expects social workers to follow policy instructions and use their professional expertise to deliver a range of services in various communities based on different needs. In a community full of factories and migrant workers, the PMSC provides legal service and mediation to resolve labour disputes; and in the CBD and high-tech business areas consisting of educated young people, the PMSCs organise activities fit for urban young people's preferences, such as talks with successful entrepreneurs, social baking, and wine tasting, to attract their participation (People's Daily, 2018; Interview 9). Over the years, SW1 has won a number of awards for the organisation, its programmes and its individual social workers.

Established in 2014, SW2 is relatively younger than SW1. It was built by a group of social worker graduates in their 20s with the mission to "make everyone who sleeps on the street gain the power to be respected." It uses social work expertise, such as outreach and case management, to intervene with homeless people. The homeless intervention used to be mainly conducted by the government via relatively administrative and forceful ways, such as forceful detention and repatriation (Qianfan Zhang, 2010). In 2014, the State Council issued an order to encourage the government to purchase services from social work agencies to provide people in need with professional services in terms of social integration, capacity building and psychological counselling. SW2 has acquired a number of governmental service-purchasing contracts and accordingly runs a series of service programmes, such as job-seeking support and employment-law training for homeless immigrant workers, health and safety support to female homeless people who do not want to move to a government-run shelter, and advocacy to destigmatise the homeless and increase the social inclusion. Rather than forcefully taking homeless people to the transfer station and repatriating them back to their hometown, which the government used to do, the social workers' approach is to outreach and to build rapport with their clients over the long term. The social workers do not aim to make homeless people disappear from the street in the short term; instead, social workers take time to conduct counselling with their clients, to meet clients' personal needs, to increase their expectations of life and then gradually leave the street. The professional knowledge and expertise SW2 used in their intervention with homeless people was one of the factors to secure the contract with the government (see Chapter 3), and local governments recognised its performance by granting some awards. However, being aware of the difference between social workers and the government, SW2 is also making efforts to avoid the government's interference with its work and to keep its operational autonomy, especially when almost all of its funds are from the government (see Chapter 7).

Although both SW1 and SW2 are highly reliant on government funds, with more than 96% of their income from the government, their levels of autonomy in practice are different. Though both of them are contracted to the government, their contracts are different. The governmental purchasing contract mainly takes the form of purchasing social work programmes or social worker posts. SW2 sells the government their homeless intervention programmes, while SW2 mainly places social workers on the posts within the governmental institutions. The governmental purchasing of social worker posts leaves relatively less freedom to the social work agency as it requires the referred social workers to physically work and report to a manager inside the government. As their manager within the government tends to know little about the profession of social work nor what service delivery means, the social workers usually find themselves assigned administrative tasks irrelevant to their profession. It is also hard for the social work agency to arrange supervisions and training for the social workers sent out as they need to coordinate with each social worker's work place (Interviews 2 and 9). These may negatively affect social work organisations' autonomy and professionalisation, which will be discussed in Chapter 7.

2.1.6 *Support Organisations for NGOs' Capacity Building*

Support organisations are the type of social organisations which support other social organisations, especially grassroots NGOs, to enhance their capacities and to achieve their goals. Nascent NGOs usually face challenges from outside, such as legitimacy, governmental relationship and relations with other stakeholders, and from inside, such as the lack of professionalism and the shortage of resources; and support organisations aim to address these challenges by capacity-building training, fundraising, networking and sharing information/intellectual resources (L. D. Brown & Kalegaonkar, 2002).

One type of supportive organisation is NGO incubators. NGO incubators are primarily physical spaces that provide start-up NGOs with offices, meeting rooms and even cafeterias.

With a nurturing environment, incubators also offer necessary services and help to connect start-up NGOs with a wide range of other stakeholders, such as other NGOs, grant-making foundations, businesses, and the government; and when the NGOs in the incubator grow up, they move out of the incubator and become more independent (L. D. Brown & Hu, 2012; A. Yang & Cheong, 2018) (Further discussion on NGO incubators in China is in Chapter 5). CB1 is one of this type of support organisations located in the Luohu district of the city of Shenzhen. It was initiated in 2014 by experienced NGO leaders and a local public officer who was working in the district civil affairs department. Although most government-initiated incubators tend to be incorporated by the government, CB1 is considered as having a certain level of autonomy, thanks to the governmental ties of the co-founders (see Chapter 6). Focusing on community building, CB1 is committed to integrating cross-sector resources and expertise to support the creation and sustainable growth of social organisations, to improve social organisations' capacity in implementing programmes and serving the residents (Southern Daily, 2014). Its mission is to "support the start-up social organisations to grow so that they can effectively serve the communities." It operates fully on the government's funds and has a contract-based partnership with the district government, in which the government offers space and funding for an NGO incubator and purchases the professional services of CB1 to operate this incubator. CB1 frames its working model as "government support, professional management, social coordination, public benefit." The services provided to the start-up NGOs in the incubator cover registration, fundraising, building internal regulations, programme and finance management, and connecting with the government (Luohu Social Innovation Space, 2018).

An incubator is centred by a physical space in which a number of inchoate social organisations can operate and grow. In comparison, other types of support organisations do not necessarily have a physical space; instead, they mainly provide software support such as

capacity building and other professional services. Not confined by physical space, this type of organisation is more likely to support NGOs on a larger scale. CB2 is this type of social organisation which aims to support NGOs in the province of Anhui and to promote the growth of the NGO sector. CB2 was initiated in 2010 and registered in 2011. The founder of EN1 is one of the co-founders of CB2. Its mission is to "discover and foster social entrepreneurs and to promote the growth of grassroots NGOs in Anhui." It selects local start-up NGOs which have potential but lack resources and supports them with findings and other intangible resources. It provides incipient NGOs with microfinance; enhances NGO practitioners' capacity by supervision, training and workshops; promotes cross-sector collaboration via forums, networking and online platforms; participates in policy advocacy and implementation by communicating with the government; increases the recognition of the general public by media exposure; and builds NGO databases to promote the development of the sector. As a hub that connects a number of NGOs, it plays a complementary role in the implementation of NGO-related policies such as the NGO registration regulations, the Charity Law and the Overseas NGO Management Law. For example, it acts as a broker to help nascent NGOs to get registration and organises seminars in collaboration with governmental agencies to explain new policies to NGOs and to answer NGOs' questions. Different from CB1, which relies on government funding, CB2's funding is mainly from domestic or overseas grant-making foundations, one of which is PA2. As with EN1, CB2's co-founder/leader is also a member of the Ginkgo Fellow network (Ginkgo Foundation, 2017), and networks with other NGOs are important to its development (see Chapter 5).

2.1.7 LGBT

Some of the above issue areas, such as education, poverty alleviation and social work, are considered non-political and non-sensitive (H. Zhou, 2016). In contrast, issues of gender and sexuality are highly contested in China. The emergence of nascent LGBT movements and

NGOs has raised legal, policy and social challenges that need to be faced because of their sexual orientation or gender identity (SOGI). These challenges come from the lack of social awareness as well as the negative attitude of the government. Although China decriminalised homosexuality in 1997 and removed homosexuality from the official list of mental disorders in 2001, legal recognition or protection of LGBT people against discrimination still does not exist in China (Mountford, 2010). LGBT people are not identified as targets of social protection in laws and policies, such as the Anti-Domestic Violence Law and Employment Protection Law, and therefore they are not able to seek legal protection in the face of discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity (Chia, 2019). Domestically, the government is silent on LGBT issues, which is revealed by its "three no's (三不) policy": "no approval, no disapproval, no promotion" (不支持，不反对，不提倡).

Internationally, at both the Human Rights Council and the United Nations General Assembly, China has voted against the inclusion of SOGI protections under international human rights mechanisms and against establishing a mandate for protection from SOGI-based violence and discrimination (Grindley, 2011; UN Human Rights Council, 2016). In addition to the oppression by the government, traditional Chinese culture also leads to stigma and social pressures on LGBT people. Traditional Chinese culture highly values an individual's responsibility to get married and carry on the family line, and thus same-sex relationships are regarded as undermining Chinese families and society (Cao & Lu, 2014; Cheng, 2018). China's one-child policy adds even more family pressure on LGBT people as their sexual orientation usually deprives their parents of their only opportunity to have biological grandchildren. In the face of such social and family pressure, most LGBT people in China choose not to come "out of the closet." According to a UNDP survey in China, 58% agreed that LGBT people were rejected by their families, less than 15% are fully open to their families, and only 5% have chosen to completely disclose their sexual orientation openly

(UNDP, 2016). Pressure and stigma also hinder LGBT people from building meaningful interpersonal relationships and lead to a higher risk of anxiety, depression and other mental health issues (Yuekang Li & Fabbre, 2020).

To address the challenges faced by LGBT people and to increase their family support and social acceptance, PF was founded in Guangzhou in 2008. The founders are an LGBT individual and the parent of an LGBT person. With the motto "Love, Courage, Duty," its mission is to "increase the acceptance of LGBT people by their families and friends, to encourage LGBT people to come out and to improve their visibility as well as living space." One of its main programmes is to hold meetings of LGBT people and their families and friends, which creates a platform for communication, understanding and support. In addition, it runs a range of programmes, such as the LGBT hotline, collaboration camp, art group, and self-development training, to support LGBT people and to build meaningful interpersonal connections within the community.

Working in a sensitive area, PF has not been able to acquire registration, and it does not have any partnership with the government. However, it has been working for more than 10 years and has grown into an influential organisation working in more than 60 cities with 10,000 participants. Because of its wide member base and public influence, the funding mainly comes from public donations. Its success has made the founder/leader part of the Ginkgo Fellow network. Understanding its interaction with the government is useful for sensitive NGOs to attempt to survive and grow. The details of this case will be discussed in Chapter 6, emphasising the factor of interpersonal *guanxi*.

2.2 Discussion of Different Partnerships and NGOs' Variables

2.2.1 The NGO–Government Partnerships in These Cases

Although the framework has provided a category of partnership formality based on the literature to guide the fieldwork, the case study found that formality alone, such as with or without a formal contract, cannot tell the whole story about the relationship. For example, both SW1 and SW2 have a service-purchasing contract in their partnership with the government, but the partnerships differ in the level of autonomy the NGO enjoys in the interaction with the government. Based on the existing literature as well as my empirical study, the partnerships in this research can be further classified by their nature into four types: supplement, collaboration, complementarity, and co-optation.

When the government fails to fulfil its responsibility to provide sufficient public services due to its financial or capacity limitations, NGOs can use their professional expertise and resources to fill the gap in the government's service provision. The service provided by NGOs can be an "improvement of" or "increment to" the government's service. The first one, "improvement of", means that NGOs participate in improving the quality of some social services provided by the government. It leads to the collaborative type of partnership where NGOs operate independently to share the government's responsibilities in addressing social problems and meeting social needs. For example, to ensure the universal 9-year elementary education system meets a certain quality is the government's responsibility. However, poverty and the shortage of teachers and teaching resources still curb the teaching quality and students' development in rural China. EDU1 and EDU2 are among many educational NGOs to address this challenge to share the government's social burden, as do the NGOs in the poverty alleviation area. Besides, when the government is under pressure to achieve certain policy goals but constrained by limited resources and capability, it is motivated to form collaborative relationships with NGOs which have sufficient resources and capability to share

with the government, to support the government to attain crucial goals. For example, as previously discussed, environmental protection and poverty alleviation have been two of the primary goals of the government during recent years. This made necessary the government's collaboration with green NGOs to monitor pollution (as in cases EN1 and EN2) or with well-resourced charitable foundations to invest in poor areas to lift people out of poverty (as in cases PA1, PA2 and PA3). In order to meet a common goal, the two parties would normally have more interactions and sharing of resources than the other types of partnership.

Besides, when NGOs provide service as an increment to the government's service, it means this service area is covered by the government. It leads to the supplement type of relationship. Supplement means the social organisations independently deliver social services using their professional expertise to fill the government's service gap. In this relationship, NGOs do not share any goal with the government in service provision and do not have government funding, and therefore do not have any formal partnership with the government. The case PF fits into this category as it provides LGBT people with support that is not available from the government.

Another type is the complementary partnership, where the government purchases service from NGOs to add to what the government can provide. In this type of relationship, the role of service providers is partly or largely handed over from the government to the social organisation, and the government becomes the monitor of service delivery. Therefore, the joint efforts between the two parties are not as high as the collaborative type. The complementary partnership is demonstrated by the examples of SW2, which helps civil affairs departments to serve homeless people' CB1, which runs the government-initiated incubator; and EN3, which manages a public park. Though these NGOs receive government funding to deliver service, they still enjoy a certain level of operational autonomy. In contrast, in the co-optation type of partnership, the NGOs receiving government funding are

more likely to become the government's "foot soldiers" (C. K. Chan & Lei, 2017). As the NGO executes the instructions of the government, the joint effort between them to address social needs is relatively low. It is shown in the case of SW1, where most of its staff are posted in government-owned workplaces. The four types are summarised in Table 3, and the association between different partnerships and NGOs' variables will be discussed next.

Table 3

Types of NGO–Government Partnerships

Types	Government funding	Joint efforts between NGOs and governments to address social issues	NGO's autonomy
Supplement	No	No	High
Collaboration	No	High	High
Complementarity	Yes	Middle	Middle
Co-optation	Yes	Low	Low

As addressing social issues and keeping autonomy are desirable for NGOs, the research question can be further specified as to how to reach a collaborative partnership with the government, or in the complementarity partnership, how to push the government to make more effort and maintain NGOs' autonomy. Some factors associated with the desirable partnership can be seen in the features of each NGO, as discussed next. However, to answer the "how" question, more details on the partnership process need to be explored. By initially analysing the association between variables of NGOs and different partnerships, the next section will identify some contributing factors and point out in which chapter each theme will be further elaborated.

2.2.2 Variables of NGOs

First of all, the issue area in which the NGO works can affect the NGO's relationship with the government, but only to some extent. The issue area can be analysed in terms of social problems and government (in)actions to address the problems. As demonstrated by NGOs in this research, in the areas where the government is under pressure to meet basic human needs or to achieve certain goals, the government is likely to be open to having joint effort with capable social organisations to share the burden, such as in the area of environmental protection where the environment degradation once reached an alarming point and caused global concern, and poverty alleviation where the Party pledged to end poverty in 2020. In the area of social work, the government is more likely to purchase social workers'

professional services and co-opt them, as social work is seen by the government as an instrument to maintain social stability (see Chapter 3). In the sensitive area of LGBT rights where no policy specifically addresses the issues, it is harder to have joint effort with the government. This sectoral difference can be seen in the registered overseas NGOs after the enactment of the 2017 Overseas NGO Management Law, as there are no representative offices working on LGBTQ issues up to 2020 (Chinafile, 2020a), although the government expenditure statement has not yet included the sectoral breakdown on social service purchasing (Ministry of Finance, 2021).

However, the issue area an NGO works in does not play a decisive role in determining its relationship with the government, as this research finds more than one type of partnership can be found in each issue area. For example, in the area of environmental protection, EN1 has a collaboration type of partnership with the government while EN3 has a complementary type.

Within each issue area, different mission statements could see signs of different partnerships. The NGOs whose mission focuses on a specific niche are more likely to get the government contract, such as EN3 on wetland protection and SW2 on homeless intervention. When governments are convinced about the NGO's expertise in meeting certain social needs, they may pay for the NGO to do so. Expertise is one of the themes reviewed from interviews as key to NGOs' performance and governmental relationships. One aspect of analysing expertise is by the level of professionalisation (see Chapter 3). The use of expertise can be demonstrated in NGOs' actual work, and themes identified in the working method using the approach of participation (see Chapter 4) and network building with other NGOs (see Chapter 5).

The different backgrounds of an NGO's founder or key leader (in most cases, they are the same person) can be associated with different partnerships. For example, PA3's politically

influential and well-connected leader could be the reason for PA3 gaining an unusual position in its interaction with the government as an overseas NGO with a religious background. The founders' business background may lead to an NGO's better awareness and strategy in financial sustainability and encourage the NGO to win government contracts as one way to guarantee financial resources, as in the case EN3 and SW1. The leader's knowledge and experience in the specific issue area could be associated with the NGO's knowledge and expertise which can be used in collaborating with the government in addressing pressing issues, as in the case EN1 and EN2. The interpersonal relationship (*guanxi*) of leaders is important for NGOs' government relationships, especially in a fragmented state with a policy implementation gap. This will be elaborated on in Chapter 6.

Regarding the description of NGOs' working methods, providing material aid implies an NGO's relatively strong financial capacity. The financial or material resources of NGOs can put them in a relatively more equal position with the government than those that lack such resources. The resource and power difference in the partnership process is also a theme which will be discussed in Chapter 7. However, for NGOs which do not have strong financial power, receiving government funding does not necessarily mean a complete loss of the NGO's autonomy, as shown in the indicators of the partnership typology, though it can be a possible outcome of partnering with the government. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the strategies NGOs can adopt to avoid this outcome. This will also be discussed in Chapter 7.

This initial assessment also finds some potential factors derived from the literature are not related to NGOs' relationships with the government, such as the mission statement and the main funding source, and the issue area only partially matters, as discussed at the beginning of this section. For example, SW1 and SW2 both work as a social work agency and rely on government funding, but their partnerships with the government are different (as shown in the summary below). In addition, this initial analysis of the association between two groups

of variables finds that it is hard to identify one decisive factor in the governmental

relationship. The interviews find that governmental partnership is the result of a series of

factors and a period of development. In addition, although the literature and interviews point

to some factors as important, such as expertise, these factors are not easily quantified and

compared. Instead of describing a static correlation between variables, it is more valuable for

real-world practice to explore the details and contents of the factors and how NGOs can adapt

the factor as a working approach, in practice, to achieve the desired outcome. From the next

chapter, each theme (as an approach) will be elaborated in detail to demonstrate NGOs'

practices. Chapter 3 Professionalisation will follow the summary of the NGOs in Table 4.

Table 4

Summary of Cases

Code	Type of partnership	Issue area	Mission	Main working methods	Relationship with other actors	Founders/leaders' background	Main funding source	Theme and further discussion (chapter)
EN1	Collaboration	Environment	Promote the sustainable development of the people and environment in Anhui	Social activities, legal actions, training, advocacy, online information sharing, working with media for publicity	The leader belongs to the Ginkgo Fellow network; collaborating with other NGOs, local residents and media	A social entrepreneur with an educational and working background in the environment	Foundations	Interpersonal relationship/ *guanxi* (6), networks (5)
EN2	Collaboration	Environment	Make the LX River forever clean	From advocacy to community work	Collaborating with other NGOs	A social entrepreneur with an educational and working background in the environment	Foundations	Negative partnership outcomes and strategies (7)
EN3	Complementary	Environment	Take root in wetland protection, let people and wetland have a prosperous future	Managing public parks, public education, research	Network with influential domestic and international ENGOs; strong connections with entrepreneurs and corporates	Influential entrepreneurs	Enterprises	Expertise/ professional (3)
EDU1	Collaboration	Education	Cultivate future leaders who promote educational equality	Volunteer programme, training	Network with influential domestic and international foundations; collaborating with universities	A retired businessman from Hong Kong	Foundations	Expertise/ professional-isation (3), participation (4), networks (5)

Code	Type of partnership	Issue area	Mission	Main working methods	Relationship with other actors	Founders/leaders' background	Main funding source	Theme and further discussion (chapter)
EDU2	Collaboration	Education	Help children in western China grow up with a healthy body and mind	Material giving, education programme	Engaging the local people and beneficiaries in programme design/ implementation	Grassroots volunteers	Public donation	Participation (4), Interpersonal relationship/ *guanxi* (6)
PA1	Collaboration	Poverty alleviation	Stimulate the value of the people, gather the strength of the community and promote social participation	Material giving, infrastructure construction	Financing and supporting other NGOs; organising industrial development networks	A state-owned enterprise	Enterprises	Participation (4), networks (5)
PA2	Collaboration	Poverty alleviation	Work with poor and vulnerable communities and local partners to fight the injustices of poverty and inequality	Advocacy, research, education, development and humanitarian relief programmes	Financing and supporting other NGOs	Started by the international organisation's headquarters in Hong Kong	Public donation	Participation (4), networks (5)
PA3	Collaboration	Poverty alleviation	Serve those who are disadvantaged, marginalised, displaced or abandoned	Material giving, social service provision	No collaboration with other NGOs	The leader was a member of CPPCC and the Election Committee in Hong Kong	Public donation	Interpersonal relationship/ *guanxi* (6)
SW1	Co-optation	Social work	Support vulnerable people and build a harmonious neighbourhood	Social service provision (mostly in PMSC) according to government requirements	No collaboration with other NGOs	Local businessmen	Government	Professionalisation (3), Negative partnership outcomes and strategies (7)

Code	Type of partnership	Issue area	Mission	Main working methods	Relationship with other actors	Founders/leaders' background	Main funding source	Theme and further discussion (chapter)
SW2	Complementary	Social work	Make everyone who sleeps on the street gain the power to be respected	Social service provision (focus on homelessness) different from the government	No collaboration with other NGOs	A young social work graduate	Government	Professionalisation (3), Negative partnership outcomes and strategies (7)
CB1	Complementary	Capacity building	Support the start-up social organisations to grow so that they can effectively serve the communities	Providing physical space and skill training	Support local start-up NGOs	Local government officers and experienced NGO practitioners	Government	Interpersonal relationship/ *guanxi* (6)
CB2	Collaboration	Capacity building	Discover and foster social entrepreneurs and promote the growth of grassroots NGOs in Anhui	Capacity building training, policy implementing, online information sharing, working with media for publicity	The leader belongs to the Ginkgo Fellow network; financing and supporting other NGOs	The founder of EN2 and other local grassroots volunteers	Foundations	Interpersonal relationship/ *guanxi* (6), networks (5)
PF	Substitute	LGBT	Increase the acceptance of LGBT people by their families and friends and their visibility	Mutual help groups and conferences	The leader belongs to the Ginkgo Fellow network	The mother of a gay son and a gay man	Public donation	Interpersonal relationship/ *guanxi* (6)

Chapter 3 Professionalisation

Professionalisation is one of the themes identified from the interviews with NGO practitioners. This chapter will first review the concepts and studies related to professionalisation in the literature and then describe the process of professionalisation in different NGOs to explain how professionalisation affects the partnerships with the government of the NGOs in the case study. In this study, professionalisation takes place on two levels: 1) the level of the industry, 2) the level of an individual organisation. On the industry level, professionalisation indicates the process by which an occupation becomes recognised as a profession, such as social work. On the level of individual organisations, professionalisation indicates the organisation has become formally run and is staffed by people who are professionals or have specific expertise. In China's NGO sector, social workers have been recognised as professionals by the government, and the government is intentionally using the profession of the social worker to share the burden of service provision. In other issue areas, no profession has been recognised by the government, but NGOs' expertise in providing public goods also contributes to NGOs' relationship with the government. This chapter will use the cases in the social work sector to illustrate professionalisation on the industry level and an education NGO to illustrate the process of professionalisation on the micro-organizational level. Both cases explain how professionalisation affects NGOs' governmental partnerships.

3.1 Professionalisation in Literature

Professionalisation on the industry level is a process in which occupations become recognised as professions. Studies have identified its definition, elements, stages and indicators.

Professional, as an occupational category, indicates individuals who have acquired legitimacy and authority from their formal education and have specialised expertise and who are thus authorised to act in specific domains (Hwang & Powell, 2009). Wilensky (1964) points out two criteria for being a professional: 1) the job of the professional is based on systematic knowledge gained through prescribed training; 2) the professional person complies with a set of professional rules.

Professionalisation is a process of labour acquiring professional status. For instance, engineering, certified public accounting and dentistry have been professionalised since the 1900s, whereas social work, and managerial jobs for nonprofit organisations, have been professionalised more recently or are still in the process (Wilensky, 1964). By tracing the history of professions since the 19th century, Larson (1977) and Abel (1979) point out that professionalisation is a process to produce special service and to control a market for specific expertise so that the professions attain market power. It is related to these elements: standardising the professional service, formalising entry conditions, convincing the public/target clients that they need services only professionals can provide, and state protection against unqualified services or competition. Thus professionalisation was associated with the growth of the state where professionals could seek state regulation or self-regulation approved by the state (Abel, 1979). Professionalisation was also amplified along with the expansion of higher education and the growth of organisational density (Brint, 1994; Meyer, 1977). The development of higher education provided the entrance for professionals, and a growing number of organisations offer positions for educated and credentialed professionals (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

The stages of professionalisation can be summarised as: 1) to start doing the job in a full-time manner; 2) to build training schools. They are usually linked to the universities to develop study, research and degrees and to expand the base of knowledge; 3) to form a professional

association and to ensure the quality of recruits. The name of the occupation may be changed at this point; 4) to win the support of the law to protect the job territory by state-sanctioned licensing; 5) to develop a formal code of ethics and to have formalised and standardised activities to ensure quality, protect clients and limit competition (Hwang & Powell, 2009; Wilensky, 1964).

Also, studies show that the stages of professionalisation can develop in different forms, especially regarding the role of the state. For example, in the UK, it has been "bottom-up" in which spontaneous activities led to the creation of professional bodies to secure professional status, while in Germany, it has been "top-down" where the state has played a vital role in creating and regulating the professions (Neal & Morgan, 2000).

On the level of individual organisations, the indicators of professionalisation have been discussed by different research. The professionalisation of an organisation can be seen when members of the organisation become professionals, define their working methods, control the production and establish legitimacy for their autonomy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; M. S. Larson, 1977). Other indicators include a division of labour and a specification of responsibilities and positions, the use of strategic planning, independent financial audits, quantitative programme evaluation, consultants and management training (Hwang & Powell, 2009). The success of leadership succession, which is the replacement of key leaders, is also related to professionalisation (H. Li, 2019). An organisation's focus on efficiency, effectiveness and accountability is associated with professionalisation (Hwang & Powell, 2009; Suárez, 2011).

3.2 Professionalisation in China

The process of professionalising occupations happened in China much later than in western countries. For example, the licensing requirement for lawyers started to appear in Europe in

the middle ages, but in China, the licensing examination was introduced in 1986 by the state (Lo & Snape, 2005). In recent decades, professionalisation has become a trend in China led by the state to formalise a range of occupations, to regulate practice in a variety of sectors and to improve the quality of these services/products. Taking social work as an example, the State Educational Committee listed social work as a major of three top universities in 1987, the China Association of Social Workers was established by the Ministry of Civil Affairs in 1991, and the MoCA and Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security issued regulations on social worker examinations in 2008 (N. Qian, 2011).

Influential literature explaining state–society relationships in China includes a consultative authoritarianism framework, which indicates the government uses social organisations as a tool to collect information and manage society (Teets, 2013; Truex, 2017); and a graduated control model, which claims the government tends to treat social organisations differently partly based on the social organisation's ability to provide suitable service or resources to ease the burden of the regime (X. Kang & Han, 2008). It means one factor influencing an NGO's relationship with the government can be the NGO's expertise in providing information for the government's decision making and services for sharing the social burden, and the use of specialised expertise is part of professionalism (L. J. Liu & Stern, 2020).

These models provide reasons why the authoritarian government collaborates and supports NGOs: because the government needs to use NGOs to provide social services. Therefore, these models pay attention to social organisations' professional expertise in service provision. The government's use of NGOs' expertise can be seen in the state's administrative reform in 2013. This round of reform aimed to streamline the administrative process and to delegate authority (State Council, 2015c). It was a correction of the governments' encroaching on private affairs and overclaiming of responsibilities which harmed the quality of public service provision due to the lack of expertise and effective quality control (Gao & Tyson, 2017). The

motivation of the government to delegate authority to NGOs was to improve governance and public service provision, and therefore NGOs' specialist skills and professionalism, which contribute to improving service delivery and effective operation, were essential (Gao & Tyson, 2017). The following sections will use the cases of organisations in the area of social work and education to describe the factor of professionalisation in China's NGO sector and to explain how it affects their partnerships with the government.

3.3 Professionalisation of Social Workers

In the social work sector, the partnership between state and social organisation mainly takes the form of government purchasing. This section will discuss the professionalisation of social work in China and how it affects social work agencies' partnerships with the governments. It will first describe the driving forces of professionalisation of the industry, which are government policies and higher education. Then it will portray two aspects of professionalisation of individual organisations: organisations' demographic characteristics and their expertise in working with clients, and explain how these aspects of professionalisation influence governmental partnerships, using two cases in Shenzhen and Beijing. It will also point out how collaborating with the government affects the professionalisation of social work.

3.3.1 Professionalisation of the Social Work Industry

As discussed, the professionalisation of an industry is associated with the state, higher education and formal organisations (Abel, 1979; Brint, 1994; Meyer, 1977). It holds true in the professionalisation of social work in China. The first aspect is state policy and higher education. Since the State Education Commission listed social work as a major for undergraduate studies in 1987, universities have been in the frontline of introducing western theories and practices in the social work area (N. Qian, 2011). The number of universities

teaching social work has grown from three to more than 300 during the past 3 decades. Then, in 1994, the China Association of Social Work Education was formed and has been promoting the professionalisation and localisation of social work education since. Due to the lack of local practice knowledge in this area, university professors are encouraged to go to the field and to be involved in frontline practice. As a result, the early social work organisations in China were mostly started by social work professors from universities (B. Shi, 2013).

The state plays an important role both in the growth of the social work profession and in the partnership between government and social organisations. Since 2007, the State Council and MoCA have issued a series of policies to increase the number of professional social workers to 3 million by 2020 (State Council, 2010), to open social worker positions in relevant government departments and to purchase social workers' services (N. Qian, 2011). In practice, there are four main approaches to implementing these policies to promote the professionalisation of social work and to advance the collaboration between government and social organisations:

1) Training on the job/position: the government identifies the positions in state-related social service agencies which involve working directly with individuals and communities as social worker posts and supports employees currently in these posts to gradually get qualifications and registration.

2) Purchasing by posts: the government contracts out the recruitment and management of social workers to privately established social work agencies. Social work agencies hire social workers and place them in the posts in state-related agencies and receive payments from the government.

3) Purchasing by projects: social work agencies apply for funds from government initiatives and implement social service projects.

4) Standardisation: led by government agencies, professional standards and evaluations are built in collaboration with professional associations and social organisations.

Shenzhen and Beijing are among the first cities to take these approaches to professionalise social work, mainly in the form of setting up an occupation registration system and creating formal organisations to place these professionals. In 2007, the People's Government of Shenzhen (2006) issued the first local policy in China regarding the education, evaluation, employment, and support of social work. Similarly, the Beijing government issued an opinion on the construction of the social work talents team in 2007 and started the system of registration and continuous professional development of social workers in 2009 (Shenzhen Civil Affairs Bureau & Beijing Civil Affairs Bureau, 2006).

Supported by government purchasing policy, more and more social work agencies have been set up and compete for government funding. Since Professor Yi from Shenzhen University built Pengxing, the first privately funded social work agency in China, in 2007, after a decade of development, there have been 161 social work agencies with around 7,000 social workers in Shenzhen (Shenzhen Civil Affairs Bureau, 2016), and 283 social work agencies with around 25,000 social workers in Beijing (Shenzhen Civil Affairs Bureau & Beijing Civil Affairs Bureau, 2006). However, the government has purchased only 1,700 posts in Shenzhen and 1,885 in Beijing, and competition for government contracts is getting intense.

3.3.2 Professionalisation of Individual Organisations and Governmental Partnership

The level of professionalisation of an organisation is one of the key factors to winning the government's financial support. As the CEO of SW1 said:

> It's getting hard to register a new social work organisation because the government does not encourage that anymore. There are more than 200 social work agencies, but only a few dozen of them have government contracts. Some of them are just a shell

with registration but no business. Now the government hopes to improve the quality

of the service and to support professional organisations with more experience.

(Interview 9)

Government purchasing mainly takes the form of tenders (Ministry of Civil Affairs &

Ministry of Finance, 2012). The organisations bidding for a tender will be evaluated usually

by standardised scoring assessment based on their personnel and internal control systems. For

example, one document of criteria shows that the candidates will be scored by the team

leader's work experience (i.e., 3 points for 5-year work experience) and qualifications (i.e., 3

points for medium-level social worker qualification); team members' educational

background, qualifications, and work experience; the organisation's past experience in

similar projects; and the organisation's internal policies and procedures (Shenzhen Civil

Affairs Bureau, 2020). SW1 considers they win tenders because they started earlier (in the

year 2007) and have occupied a share of the market; also, it is because their operational team

is stable, and the core management has been here for more than 10 years. They have also had

failures. They lost a contract in a community they had been working in for 10 years because

they did not get a higher score in a newly introduced standardised evaluation (Interview 9).

This standardised scoring system has the advantage of selecting a big experienced

organisation to undertake the project in a time-efficient way, and it avoids subjective personal

preferences or judgements. However, it is not likely to be a thorough evaluation of an

organisation, depending on how the assessment is designed. It does not benefit relatively

young organisations as it usually assigns a higher score to longer work experience. Also, the

professional expertise of the organisation may be overlooked, as the evaluators do not

necessarily know what and how these organisations are actually doing due to the lack of

qualitative assessment.

In addition to demonstrating their profession via standardised scoring, on some occasions, the social workers' professional expertise in service delivery could win them government co-operation. This road towards collaboration starts with government acknowledgment of social work expertise in addressing social challenges. One example is SW2 which provides homeless intervention. Compared with SW1, SW2 is a younger social work organisation founded in 2014 by a group of social worker graduates in their 20s. They win the government's collaboration by demonstrating their expertise in working with clients. Zhang, the founder and leader of SW2, told the story:

> In 2014, few social organisations were helping homeless people. At the beginning of our operation, we were not sure what project to run, so we did a pilot study first. We went on the street to build rapport with homeless people and gave them some packages with food or living essentials. When some of the homeless people we had contact with went to the transitional station under the civil affairs bureau of Xicheng District, one of the officers noticed the logo of us on the package they were having and then got to know us. That was the first year of Xicheng District started to purchase social services, and they did not know much about social work nor social work organisations. That officer saw our logo and then invited us to have a trial and to intervene with some cases in their district. There was a homeless family with a father and son living on the street for seven years in their community, and the government agency still had not succeeded in getting to know them or helping them to leave the street. It took us three days to build rapport with this family and proposed a case plan to the government agency. They said a social worker is like a magician. Then the government started to purchase our service. However, the relationship is subject to different government leaders. We have a good relationship with Xicheng authority as the leader of this area cares about what you actually do. In contrast, we do not have a

deep relationship with Dongcheng District authority because they only look at the score on the assessment. (Interview 2)

3.3.3 Keeping Professional in Interactions With the Government

While professionalisation contributes to the government's support, it is also worth noting that this relationship with the state can impede professionalisation because the state and professional social workers hold different values towards service delivery in China.

Although social work is a relatively new term in China, similar social services for people in need has existed since the pre-reform era. In the period of "planned economy" (计划经济) when the state dominated every aspect of the society, it was the state's responsibility to take care of its people and to help people in need, and the thought that "the government should solve problems for us" prevailed. Based on the collectivism ideology, governmental agencies, GONGOs, and state-owned enterprises took actions in a top-down manner to provide public goods and social services to the members, and this is taken as the administrative type of social work (Sibin Wang, 1995). In administrative social work, the service providers represent the state, which is superior and more powerful, to give the people what they need, and the relationship between the giver and receiver is not equal. Also, how and what to do to help the people is based on government policies or administration requirements, rather than scientific theories or methods of working with individuals. It takes the approach of political campaigns rather than active public participation (Sibin Wang, 1995). The purpose is to direct the recipients in a way which is consistent with or approved by the state and prevent them from causing trouble for the state (Sibin Wang & Yuen-Tsang, 2009). For example, to deal with group petitions, the administrative approach would be attempting to stop complainants from petitioning a higher authority rather than addressing the needs of the complainants (Wu & Chen, 2015).

Different from the administrative social work, current professional social work knowledge, which borrows from western society, embraces the liberal value of equality (Leung, Yip, Huang, & Wu, 2012). Compared with administrative social work, which overtly puts the state in the centre, professional social work has more emphasis on the dignity, self-determination and empowerment of individual persons. This is embedded in the social work code of ethics across countries (National Association of Social Workers, 2017; Social Workers Registration Board, 2016). These codes of ethics require social workers to empower clients and to improve their well-being, instead of simply giving them materials or changing them in a way to benefit the government. Therefore, professional social workers can have conflicts with the state when they are working together. Taking the homeless intervention as an example, the goal of the government agency is to erase the homeless from the street. They focus on locating demographic identities of the homeless migrants and to send them back to their home provinces. This attitude is reflected in the name of the government agency for homeless intervention. The agency, essentially providing temporary accommodation for homeless people, used to be called "Station of Detention and Repatriation" (收容遣送站) for keeping homeless migrants for a few days before deporting them back to their home province. In 2003, Sun Zhigang, a 27-year-old university graduate who worked in Guangzhou as a migrant, was taken forcefully to the Station of Detention and Repatriation by police who were checking people's IDs on the street. Sun was taken into custody because he did not have a temporary residence permit, which is required for migrants by government policies, with him at that moment. He died in the station 3 days later. After this tragedy, the custody regulation was revised, and the agency's name was changed to "Station of Rescue and Aid" (Hand, 2009; Qianfan Zhang, 2010). However, the goal of the social worker is to improve the living quality of homeless people even when they are still on the street, rather than simply

erasing them from the street in a coercive manner. Especially, homeless people who are not migrants may have no other place or "home province" to go to. As the leader of SW2 said:

> We [social work agencies and government agencies] have different ways of doing things. We consider it important to go to the street, to outreach, to build rapport with the clients. But when the government purchases social workers, they just want us to stay in the transitional accommodation to sit at the front desk and help with paperwork. If a client would like to stay on the street, we would respect their decision while keep supporting them in a way they can accept. But the government would evaluate our performance based on how many homeless people we have decreased. (Interview 2)

Despite the difference, governments and social organisations are still motivated to build a partnership. From the resource dependence perspective, this is because organisations need to acquire resources from the external environment, mainly from other organisations, to ensure their continued survival and operational efficiency and to attain organisational goals (C. Hsu, 2010; Toepler & Anheier, 2013). As SW2 described:

> Collaborating with us is good for the governments in several aspects: required by their superior agencies, they have targets to meet, like how many homeless individuals they need to intervene. As they prefer to stay in the office, we can go on the street to do these jobs that they do not want to do. They also have a lot of reports to do, and we help with records and reporting too. For us, we need government resources to meet clients' needs. For example, we need money to buy clients' tickets home, and we need the government to use their authority to contact another government agency to process things like the clients' low-income subsidy and so on. (Interview 2)

From the angle of social organisations, it is necessary to co-operate with governments to get resources. In addition to funds, the coordination of various government departments is

essential to address the clients' difficulties as certain services can only be administered by authorised government agencies. Therefore, social workers apply professional expertise to deal with the conflicts with the government in order to maintain a meaningful governmental partnership and to serve the clients effectively. As Zhang mentioned:

> The government staff would just label the homeless people as racketeers and cons. They tend to blame the disadvantaged for their situation, and it is hard to change their stereotype. But we try to encourage them to think about other reasons for them to be in a homeless situation. If they become open to seeing other factors, we would find a way to support clients collaboratively. We build a rapport to listen to clients' narratives and to understand why they don't want to or can't go back home. Some of them may be concerned that they don't have social insurance in their hometown, and some may have spent a long time in prison and have lost their household registration as well as family connections. Then we initiated cross-sector meetings with a range of government departments, such as the civil affairs department for the issue of social insurance, public security department for household registration to solve the problems together. We need these departments to work together to attend to clients' needs. Addressing these issues is a necessary step to support homeless people to return home or to get stable living conditions. (Interview 2)

State-led top-down administrative social work plays an important role in addressing social challenges, especially when dealing with large-scale crises and when a large number of resources need to be mobilised in a short time. Incorporated in the state apparatus, professional social work and administrative social work will develop in the process of completing and influencing each other.

As discussed above, the professionalisation of the social work industry is a top-down process where the state takes the lead. Regarding the process of partnership, guided by state policies,

government agencies take the initiative to select and identify their partners in the social work sector. Social work agencies demonstrate their professional expertise in service delivery to build the partnership, and they need to apply their expertise to deal with their differences and influence the state by their professional values in the stage of managing and maintaining the partnership.

In the dynamic between the profession of social worker and the government, the issue of power is worth noting. On the one hand, in the semiauthoritarian regime where the government traditionally holds more power than social actors, the knowledge and expertise of social workers can empower them to negotiate and influence the government's behaviours and to increase the government's responsiveness to social needs, as shown in the case of SW2. Nevertheless, it has been observed that the government supports the development of social work with the intention of co-opting social workers as allies to manage the people (Leung et al., 2012). At the same time, professionalisation sometimes leads to an increase in the interest of the occupation or the organisations, and the occupation/organisation's interests may even outweigh the interests of the clients being served. This happens when the interests of the government and the clients' conflict with each other, and the social worker agencies choose to become the government's allies to ensure the government's funding for the development of the organisation. Being aware of this and making efforts to keep autonomy is important for social work agencies who want to truly maintain their professional value.

3.4 Professionalisation in an Educational NGO

As the NGO sector in China is still working towards professionalisation (Sibin Wang & Yuen-Tsang, 2009), the following sections will use a case in the educational sector to illustrate how the professionalisation of an organisation affects its governmental partnership and what the implications are for the professionalisation of the NGO sector.

The educational NGO EDU1 uses the approach of voluntary teaching in rural schools to address the issue of rural–urban educational inequality. Before its establishment in 2008, the founder was involved in a volunteer-based rural school named FX and learnt a valuable lesson from its failure due to its unprofessional values and operation. For the past 10 years, EDU1 has been gradually professionalised mainly through a specification of positions, strategic planning, defining its working methods and building accountability. Now, EDU1 has established stable partnerships with local governments in these sites. This part traces the growth of EDU1. The material in this section is mainly based on the interviews with key participators of EDU1 and FX. As FX drew much media attention, the interviewees pointed out useful media reports, and thus some of the details in this section are drawn from the media reports. From the history of how EDU1 grew from FX, we can see EDU1's process of professionalisation from a loosely organised volunteer group to a formal organisation and how this affected the governmental relationship.

3.4.1   *Learning from the Failure of the First Volunteer-Run Rural School in China*

In 2000, FX school was established in the province of Anhui, an agricultural region where nearly half of the rural population was living under the poverty line (Y. Deng, 2018). One of the founders, Yin, graduated from Peking University, the top university in China. Yin participated in running a rural school with the ambition of exploring an alternative education made to fit the needs of rural students and bringing dropouts back to the classroom. Yin recruited a group of volunteers via the internet. These volunteers were from diverse backgrounds, such as white-collar workers, civil servants, education experts, and overseas graduates (Zhai, 2003).

Yin and his team gave up prosperous careers in cities and chose to teach voluntarily in a rural village; this type of selfless behaviour is consistent with the collectivist ideology, which is promoted in the socialist country. Socialist propaganda is inclined to create images of moral

icons, such as Lei Feng, who sacrifice themselves for the sake of others (Palmer & Ning, 2017; Reed, 1995). Accordingly, this school drew great attention from the media. In addition to media visibility, Yin's educational background also won him legitimacy. So, the local government decided to hand over a public school to Yin's team to run, even though there was no law to allow non-state actors to run public schools until 2002 when the "Law on Promoting Private Education" was issued. FX was regarded as the first charitable school run by volunteers and for rural children. It was a milestone in the growth of civil society in China when individuals actively and collectively stepped into the sector that used to be managed by the state. Analysing why it eventually failed provides an important lesson for the following NGOs to learn.

One of the main problems with FX school was the condescension of volunteers towards local residents. The givers tended to consider they had come to rescue people living in "need" and the way they were doing things was superior and correct and ought to be followed by the disadvantaged. This charity mentality is not uncommon throughout history and across countries and has led to colonial framing of thinking and injustice (Saunders-Hastings, 2014; Simpson, 2015). However, one aspect of being professional is to work respectfully and inclusively with diversity and difference and to build a dignified partnership, as mentioned before.

In this case, a media report depicted that the volunteers disrespected the culture of rural villages and considered that the rural culture equals ignorance. A volunteer even said that they came here to colonise the backward village by advanced urban culture because, in the future, most of the villagers will need to go to cities to become migrant workers anyway (Zhai, 2003).

In addition to being ethically problematic, this condescension led to conflicts in practice as local teachers and volunteers had different ways of teaching and living. Volunteers considered that the local teachers' way of teaching was inferior and wanted to change them, and the local teachers felt that the volunteers were patronising and arrogant. For example, local teachers still used to smack the students as correction, and volunteers would criticise local teachers openly and harshly, which led to their tension. In their free time, local teachers would mingle and chat, like people usually do in an acquaintance community, but volunteers would shut their doors and even put a "don't disturb" sign up. Local teachers said: "the volunteers don't bother to talk to us. They look down upon us and think we are stupid" (Zhai, 2003, sec. 4). The local teachers and volunteers did not support each other, and the conflicts between them gradually became irreconcilable.

Another problem with FX was the lack of standards and accountabilities. The volunteers came with a passion but were not equipped with skills in teaching or running a school. Although this non-mainstream school claimed to aim for a "quality-oriented education" (素质教育), there wasn't any agreed understanding of the objectives and methods of teaching in this school. Yin claimed that "I hoped every teacher would be creative and teach in a flexible way". But the lack of standards confused teachers. Most volunteers did not have an educational background in teaching, yet no training or support was provided for them. A new volunteer without any previous teaching experience would go to the classroom directly upon arriving. With a lack of guidance, volunteers came up with unrealistic ideas and then met setbacks shortly. It affected their morale. As the volunteers were not paid or bound to the school, they would just leave when they felt defeated. It led to a high turnover of teachers. In one class, there had been seven different English teachers in one semester.

In addition to the problems in teaching, the operation was ineffective. The volunteers could not do the accounts properly or disclose the financial report, which in turn affected the fundraising. The school principal was not able to make or implement decisions; the teachers were making their own rules. The situation was described as:

> The school principal himself has more than 30 lessons every week, and he does not have extra energy to manage the school … the loose management and the anarchy in the school are driving part of the volunteers passively standby, and the others simply do whatever they would like … the discussion among the volunteers usually would not have a result, or most of them would not follow the decision even there was one. There was no rule in the school, and the volunteers came and went as they liked.
>
> (Shen, 2005)

With a lack of funds and a stable team, this school only lasted for 1 and a half years. The partnership between the volunteer team and the local government ended when the last volunteer left the school, and the local government had to take back the school after that.

3.4.2   EDU1's Professionalisation and Governmental Partnerships

EDU1 was founded by Mr Shen, a retired business manager from Hong Kong. Mr Shen was also a board member of the CYS foundation in Hong Kong, which was a donor of FX School. He had field trips to the school and was an observer and a participant of the school. Despite its poor operation, Mr Shen considers that volunteer-based schools are important to rural children. In the poverty-stricken countryside, most adults go to cities to earn a living, leaving their children behind with grandparents or even alone. Also, the shortage of teachers makes it hard for teachers to pay sufficient attention to every child. In this situation, volunteers play an important role in bringing company and guidance to left-behind children. As he said in a media interview: "It is important to explore a way to educate these left-behind children whose parents have left home. Someone should be there to take care of these neglected

children. A special education model needs to be explored to fit for their needs so that they can grow up with a healthy body and mind" (Shen, 2005, sec. 5).

Learning from Teach for America, Mr Shen designed a programme to recruit volunteers from university graduates, to place the volunteers in rural schools and provide them with training and ongoing support. The programme was launched in 2008 and gradually grew into a formal organisation. There were three key elements around the professionalisation of EDU1: a specification of positions, defining its working methods and building accountability.

Different from FX school, which was run by a group of volunteers, EDU1 is staffed by paid full-time employees. This is the first step of professionalisation. Relevant educational background or experience are required to take these positions. For example, the role of recruiting and supporting volunteers is taken by a social worker, and the manager of training has a master's degree in education. In addition to the full-time operational team, EDU1 set up a board of experienced professionals in business, education and NGOs. The board is in charge of goal setting and strategic planning. The board made a strategic map to demonstrate the way to achieve the organisational goals and the stakeholders to which the organisation should be accountable. Government is identified as one important stakeholder which requires a specific position to manage because local governments can provide irreplaceable resources and support for implementing programmes (Interview 3). The specification of positions provides a foundation for attaining organisation goals with human resources.

Then, based on employees' skills and experience, EDU1 developed a model for training and supporting rural teachers, as well as manuals in recruitment, fundraising and governmental relations to guide practice. The manuals provide a framework and toolkits to work with different stakeholders such as foundations and government agencies. They are shared with other NGOs and considered useful for the emerging sector (Interview 3). Its training and

support model is also found useful by educational bureaus, and therefore EDU1 is welcomed by government agencies to run programmes not only for volunteer teachers but also for local rural teachers.

Accountability is another essential aspect of professionalisation. EDU1 describes its culture as being an accountable and responsible social organisation pursuing efficiency and professionality. A set of procedures are in place to ensure its accountability to a range of stakeholders. Being accountable to the donors, EDU1 has a transparent financial disclosure and independent programme evaluations conducted by third parties. Being accountable to local government, volunteers are required to complete at least a 2-year tenure and encouraged to participate in local communities (Interview 3). One government officer in Guizhou Province said, in the beginning, they could not dare to expect these volunteers who graduated from top universities to stay in the village for 2 years and they were happy to see the volunteers were adapting themselves to the community, learning local history and helping the village to thrive.

The elements of professionalisation discussed above, such as the strategic plan for organisational development and stakeholders, specific positions and working methods of governmental relations and fundraising, as well as accountabilities, enable EDU1 to seek out and identify potential partners and to successfully build governmental partnerships. Now, EDU1's programme covers almost every province of the country, and it has built stable partnerships with local governments in these provinces. EDU1's partnerships with the government agencies usually take the form of three-party agreements to specify the responsibilities and obligations of EDU1, local government and grant-making foundations: EDU1 recruits and volunteers and provides training and ongoing support; the local government provides local support such as food and accommodation, as well as minimum living subsidies; and the foundation provides funds for the programme operation and

introduces resources. However, if the government has a very tight budget and cannot afford volunteers' subsidies, the grant-making foundation will bear the cost. Even though the governments bear some costs, this partnership cannot be categorised as a government purchasing contract. The difference will be discussed next. Besides, the use of expertise can also be demonstrated by its working method, such as the approach of participation and networking with other NGOs, especially grant-making foundations, which will be discussed in Chapter 4 and 5.

3.5 Discussion and Chapter Summary

3.5.1 Discussion

Comparing the two social work agencies and EDU1, differences in the type of governmental partnerships can be seen. As summarised in Chapter 2, in terms of partnership formality, SW1 and SW2 take the form of government purchase-of-service contracts, and EDU1's partnership with the government is based on agreements without government purchasing. To understand the difference in the partnerships, it is necessary to trace their partnership-form process, which includes the stages of initiating, selecting/identifying, managing/maintaining and outcomes, to see the difference in each step.

The first stage of the partnership process focuses on the analysis of which sector initiates the idea of creating a partnership. The initiator can come from any sector, whether government, NGOs or sometimes the grant-making foundations who sponsor other NGOs. The initial energy for a partnership usually originates from one organisation or sector, even when it is an individual who takes the lead, such as in the case of SW2 as discussed above, that individual is operating in the name of an organisation (Tennyson et al., 2014). EDU1 takes the initiative to build partnerships with governments, and thus the partnerships are born at the grassroots level. Partnerships in the social work sector are top-down, in which the government takes the

initiative, and thus the government is more likely to pay for the service provided by social organisations.

After initiating, the next stage of the partnering process is selecting and identifying appropriate partners. In the social work sector, government plays an active role in offering platforms for social work agencies to demonstrate their expertise and compete for the contract. For other NGOs, they need to have their own strategic plan, to reach out to a wide range of possible partners, and to make initial contact with potential partners. More specifically, government-purchasing means that the government sets up goals in social services and contracts out the service delivery to social organisations (Jia & Su, 2009). This process is guided by government procurement policies and takes certain formalities such as tenders or grants under the principles of open competition. This type of government spending would be specifically listed in the budget and accounts. In today's China, government purchasing primarily takes place in social worker posts in governmental agencies and community services (Jia & Su, 2009; Ministry of Civil Affairs & Ministry of Finance, 2012). When the government's budget is approved, the government will initiate tenders or grants under certain goals for social work agencies to compete. In contrast, EDU1's partnership with governments started with EDU1's initiative. EDU1 set up the goal and secure governments as a partner to achieve the goal. The government's spending on supporting volunteers is put under the category of teachers' training or miscellaneous. Also, unlike the social work area, policy support is limited to EDU1. There is no policy to guide the educational departments to contract out the recruitment of teachers in public school to social organisations or to encourage educational departments to reach out to social organisations. For EDU1, getting in touch with the government does not require an open competitive formality but is a result of their professional expertise in teacher training and governmental relations.

In the stage of managing and maintaining the partnerships, NGOs need to keep professional and use their expertise. The differences in professionalisation are revealed in this stage: the professionalisation of social work agencies is more focused on the service delivery level, while other NGOs need to have a bigger scope in their professional expertise. As the government takes the initiative to select their partners, they provide an open platform for social work agencies to compete for government's funding, and social work agencies only need to demonstrate their expertise on the platform when they are competing to be selected by the government. The goals are set by the governments, and social work agencies deliver services according to the government's framework. In comparison, other NGOs need to set up their goals and take the initiative to reach out to their partners to achieve the goals. There are no platforms already set up for them to be seen, so they need to create their own ways to make contacts with potential partners, including the government. They need to have expertise in strategic planning to achieve their goals, scoping and identifying resources and partners, as well as managing and maintaining partnerships. Social work agencies are mainly accountable only to the government, from which they receive funds, while other NGOs like EDU1 have a larger group of stakeholders such as foundations, public donors and government. Therefore, the scope of NGOs' expertise is bigger than social work agencies as NGOs also need to be professional in public relations and fundraising in addition to service delivery.

Looking at the outcome of the partnership, the issue of autonomy arises from the analysis of partnerships in different sectors. As mentioned in Chapter 2, by the nature of the partnership, SW1, SW2, and EDU1's relationship with the government consists of co-optation, complementarity and collaboration, respectively, in which EDU 1 has more autonomy than SW2 and SW2 has more than SW1. Social work agencies mainly fully rely on government funds. In the cases discussed above, over 96% of SW1 and SW2's income is from the government. This reliance jeopardies their autonomy in independent decision making and

may turn them into an implementation institution for the state. It may also lead them to be incorporated by the state's value and compromise their professional values. Therefore, the social work agencies with government funding need to develop their strategies to avoid the government's co-optation and keep their autonomy. The funding sources of EDU1 are more diverse, and government funding is only part of their resources. NGOs which do not rely on government funding have alternative resources to achieve their goals. Therefore, they can be more autonomous and maintain their professionalism.

On the industry level, as professionalisation is associated with higher education, the differences discussed above have an implication for universities and training programmes. In China, subjects and courses taught in public universities are determined by the educational bureau. The professionalisation of social work started from policies aiming to cultivate social worker talent and make social work a subject taught in universities. But there is no subject related to NGOs or not-for-profits that has been authorised by the government. In 2012, the Zhuhai Branch of Beijing Normal University, which was an independent educational institution, started "philanthropic management" as an undergraduate subject. However, this subject was terminated in 2020 after the Ministry of Education's decision to integrate this institution into Beijing Normal University, a prestigious public university (City of Zhuhai, 2019; Yulin Li, 2020). It suggests that although the professionalisation of social work is encouraged by the state and meets milestones, the professionalisation of other NGOs still faces challenges and uncertainty. Forming a network for industrial capacity building is one way to enhance the professionalisation of the NGO sector, and this will also be discussed in Chapter 5.

The differences discussed above are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5

Case Comparison

Stage of partnership	Social work agencies	EDU1
Initiating	Government initiates policies, set up goals, and include the cost in the budget.	NGOs initiate by setting up their own goals. Policy support is limited.
Selecting and identifying	Government sets up procedures to select suitable partners.	NGOs apply professional expertise and make strategic plans to seek out appropriate partners.
Managing and maintaining	Social work agencies apply expertise to deliver service effectively to maintain the partnership. As the state is the dominant partner, social work agencies need to be aware of the potential loss of independence and to influence the state by professional expertise.	NGOs apply expertise in public relations or fundraising to manage the partnership with the government as one of many stakeholders. NGOs' scope of expertise is bigger and more than service delivery.
Outcome	Reliance on government funding and risk of autonomy loss	Using expertise as a source of power in relation to the government and free from government interference

3.5.2 Chapter summary

To sum up, this chapter has compared social work agencies and an educational NGO to describe the differences in their professionalisation and to explain how these differences affect their partnerships with the government. In short, the scope of professionalisation in the social work sector is smaller than in other NGOs, as social work agencies mostly only need to focus on their expertise in service delivery to win government contracts, while other NGOs need to be skilful not only in service delivery but also in public relations, fundraising and so on to create a partnership with the government.

In the social work sector, professionalisation is a top-down process which starts from the state's policies. The professionalisation of the social worker occupation is highly influenced by the government as the government intends to accumulate talents in this area to share the

burden of social service delivery. Accordingly, governments take the initiative to build partnerships with individual social work organisations, and for individual social organisations, a higher level of professionalism will give them more chances to build and maintain governmental partnerships. Compared with other NGOs, their expertise has a relatively smaller scope and focuses on the service delivery.

On the other hand, the professionalisation of other NGOs has a bigger scope which is demonstrated in service delivery as well as public relations and fundraising. NGOs need to apply their expertise to reach out for partnerships with the government. With a lack of government initiation, the process of partnering is a bottom-up process initiated by NGOs which aims for the necessary resources to achieve their goals. Also, with a lack of policy support, the professionalisation of the NGO sector is a bottom-up process filled with challenges. Most importantly, this chapter has identified the key elements of professionalisation, such as the specification of positions, defining of working methods and building accountability.

In addition, this chapter has pointed out that partnerships with the government may result in the loss of autonomy and professional value, especially for social work agencies that fully rely on government funding. It is important to develop strategies to avoid this negative consequence. How to keep autonomous and to influence the government by professional values will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Chapter 4   Participation

In the use of NGOs' expertise, adopting a participatory approach is a common theme revealed from the interviews. Reviewing the typology of partnership summarised in Chapter 2, the ideal type of partnership, collaboration, involves joint efforts with the government. To reach a joint effort, sometimes one side needs to take action to actively engage the other side to participate in achieving a common goal. This set of actions is referred to as a participatory approach by my interviewees. Although this participatory approach has been mentioned by my interviewees, the topic of participation has not been thoroughly studied in Chinese literature. Therefore, the literature review on participation is mostly based on western literature. Globally, participatory approaches have been adopted by governments, international organisations and NGOs in the past 3 decades. The studies of participation, as well as the related concepts such as power and empowerment, have been emerging in areas such as development, political science and public administration. This chapter will begin with the literature review of participation, followed by the background to the use of the participatory approach in poverty alleviation in China. Then it will describe the participatory approaches used by the NGOs related to poverty alleviation and explain how participation contributes to better governmental partnerships.

4.1   Participation in Literature

Generally, participation means that all the interested parties in a decision or a programme are involved in the decision making and implementation and have their voices heard (Carpentier, 2011; Hajdarowicz, 2018). Such decisions or programmes can take place on a range of levels from family to community to country, and the depth of involvement varies in different circumstances. The following section will explain participation in terms of different levels

and dimensions, drives and challenges of participation, and other concepts related to it, such as power and empowerment.

4.1.1 Definition

Participation can be defined on two levels, the macro- and microlevel. Macroparticipation indicates citizens' involvement in institutionalised politics. It is an "exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political power or as an elector of such a body"(Marshall, 1992, pp. 10–11). It indicates citizens' activities that intend to or result in influencing political outcomes in multiple levels, either indirectly by affecting the selection of governmental personnel or directly by affecting the actions they take. It is also referred to as political participation (Brady, 1997; Verba & Nie, 1987). Microparticipation takes place in the areas of school, family, workplace and community. It is also understood as civic participation, which indicates voluntary activities aiming to help others, achieve a public interest or solve a social/community problem either by working alone or in co-operation with a group of people to make a difference (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014). It means that citizen involvement is not restricted to institutionalised politics, but is embedded within everyday life, which can be identified in civil society, organisations or informal groups (Carpentier, 2011). In semiauthoritarian China, although the access of macroparticipation at the policymaking level is limited, it is not unusual for the public to participate on the microlevel. The case study in this chapter will talk about the participation of stakeholders in the scope of communities and organisations.

Adopting a participatory approach means involving interested parties in decision making or programme implementation. The drives to promote participation can be categorised from an instrumental perspective and a rights-based perspective. It means participation can be seen as a means/tool to an end. From the instrumental perspective, the participation of stakeholders

can provide useful information such as public preferences and local knowledge, so it can be a tool for better decision making or programme/initiative outcomes (Innes & Booher, 2004). Also, in democratic countries, this approach may be taken simply to fulfil the requirement of relevant policies or legislation (Innes & Booher, 2004). For example, in France, the Urban Solidarity and Renewal Act passed on 13 December 2000 requires residents' approval for any plan in their neighbourhood (Querrien, 2005). From the rights-based perspective, participation is the right of people because interested parties who will potentially be influenced by a decision or programme naturally have the right to have their voices heard. Therefore, participation itself is a goal which is an aspect of empowerment, equity and social justice (Groves & Hinton, 2004; Oakley, 1991) and NGOs/international organisations adopt this approach under their missions of human development or social justice. The following will first elaborate on the instrumental benefits of the participatory approach and potential challenges in adopting this approach, and then on the rights-based perspective of participation and its associations with power and empowerment.

4.1.2   Participation as an Instrument

As the means for better outcomes, the participation of service users is emphasised by service providers to improve the quality of social services (Simmons & Birchall, 2005). The service providers can be either government agencies or NGOs. Participation, usually in the form of consultation or public hearings, means using dialogue to enhance responsiveness and accountability in which recipients' views can be taken into consideration (Lane, 2005). The variety of ideas and suggestions from the service users can enhance informed decisions and ensure the limited resources will be used according to recipients' needs and priorities (Linder, 2001; Roberts, 2002). Drawing from citizens' first-hand knowledge and experience can lead to better local decision making (Fung & Wright, 2001). For the general public, participation is an educational opportunity to learn civic knowledge and increase capacity because

participants in local affairs can acquire skills through training, gain more chances of employment; and thus enhance their quality of life (Andrews et al., 2008). In addition, listening to public opinions grants legitimacy to public decisions. Communication between different stakeholders can improve trust building and help reduce conflict in the implementation of a policy or a plan (Simmons & Birchall, 2005). The public is more willing to trust the decision made by citizens (or a citizens' jury) even more than that of elected representatives (Lowndes et al., 2001).

Participation is often stressed in collaborative governance. Collaborative governance indicates collective decision making including both public and private actors, or can be seen as a type of problem solving that involves the collaborative effort of government agencies and the concerned public (Ansell & Gash, 2008). More specifically, participation is often used in the field of planning and budgeting. It indicates the coordination of practices and rules affecting the distribution of resources, and it often includes a set of steps such as goal setting, evaluation, analysing the environment and selecting from different options (Lane, 2005). Planning can be seen as a political activity rather than a neutral-technical decision as planners may serve the interest of specific groups at the expense of disadvantaged and marginalised groups (Kurzman, 2000). An effective system needs to be established to ensure choices remain in participation, and each stakeholder plays an active role in deciding (Davidoff, 1965). The concept of collaborative governance has been brought up by the Chinese government (Jing & Hu, 2017), but the best practice of collaborative governance is still to be explored. From this angle, the NGOs' use of a participatory approach, which is an important part of collaborative governance, can generate knowledge for the government to learn in collaborative governance.

4.1.3 Challenges of Participation

Despite the government's action to engage the public in decision making, the provision of access does not necessarily guarantee a genuine involvement of all stakeholders. Especially when some stakeholders do not have the capacity or resources to participate as equally as some others, this process may be manipulated by actors in a stronger position (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Studies have discussed the challenges in participation from a range of perspectives.

The egalitarianism perspective pays attention to the inequalities in society, such as class and gender. There is a tendency for participants to overrepresent high-status members of a society or community as the least well-off may lack the basic information, skills, time or money to participate (Nagel, 1987). The diversity and differences within a community, such as the gender and social status, may magnify the inequalities and possibilities of oppression. From the perspectives of feminist or cultural theorists, in the practice of participation, dominant parties may silence others by favouring certain ways of communicating, and different perspectives, or interests (Phillips, 1996; I. M. Young, 1990). Assertive, reason-giving kinds of argument may be favoured as the mode of communication, and this style may be predominantly possessed by culturally or educationally privileged people (Fraser, 1992; L. M. Sanders, 1997), and could exclude other groups in communications. DeLuca (1995) points out that political apathy is triggered by "structures, institutions, or elite manipulation over which one has little or no control" (p. 11). For instance, a public meeting is a participatory opportunity for people to voice their opinions on a particular issue. However, participants are concerned that although government officers come to these meetings, they actually have already made their decisions and will dominate the outcome (Lowndes et al., 2001; Michels & De Graaf, 2010). In addition, people from certain groups tend to have a general sense that participation "is not for people like us" or believe that "other people"

would dominate everything. This feeling of exclusion is based on who they are: young people, single mothers, or ethnic minorities (Lowndes et al., 1998, pp. 47–48).

Another challenge is related to the issue of competence rather than fairness. Although professionalism has positive effects regarding efficiency, it may exclude the public from participating as it suggests that ordinary people may lack the specialised knowledge and skills to participate in making effective decisions on complex issues; professionals with sufficient training and experience will be more appropriate than laypersons to make effective decisions (Fung, 2004). Studies from a public administration perspective mainly discuss the requirements for participation, such as certain capacities, social and technical skills, confidence and competence, and trust in government or decision makers (Cooper et al., 2006; Lowndes et al., 2006; Van Eijk & Steen, 2014). Scholars also suggest that the capacity of participants is based on their possession of resources such as time, money, knowledge and skills, and connecting with certain social networks can provide more opportunities to participate (J. Alford, 2002; Hafer & Ran, 2016). These imply a higher bar for ordinary people to participate, as shown in research where people don't participate, such as by voting or attending a consultation, because they do not understand what it is all about (Lowndes et al., 2001).

4.1.4   *Participation and Empowerment*

If the challenges are left unaddressed, they will deter participation or make participation a formality at best, rather than an authentic inclusion of all the stakeholders. It is necessary to view participation as a goal, a right across social groups, rather than merely an instrument for certain desirable outcomes of a plan/programme. The legitimation of participation is based on the principle that sovereignty originated from the people and cannot be alienated from them (Rousseau, 1968). Thus, participation is "the exercise of the inalienable and indivisible rights

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of citizens, which results in the generation of societal happiness and respect for the position of all citizens" (Carpentier, 2011, p. 25).

With the necessary information, resources, and properly designed methods, participants will be empowered in terms of strengthened knowledge and skills (Narayanan, 2003). Empowerment can be seen as a change that allows marginalised people to define and demand their rights, and it indicates the ability to make decisions which were previously restricted (Hajdarowicz, 2018; Kabeer, 1999); it is a process that brings people who are outside the decision-making process into it (Rowlands, 1997). On a personal level, empowerment is linked to a growing sense of confidence and capacity and overcoming external or internalised oppression (Rowlands, 1997). Empowerment and participation are means and ends to each other. Involving underprivileged groups in decision making empowers the participants in terms of increased confidence and capacity, and increased confidence and capacity will advance their participation; and furthermore, enhanced participation will, in turn, encourage them to acquire power, to act and to make positive changes on personal and community levels (Hajdarowicz, 2018; Narayanan, 2003).

The root concept of empowerment is power. Power is essential in empowerment and in participation. When using the participatory approach, if powerholders see participation as merely an instrument to fulfil the legal/policy requirement or to achieve better outcomes, they may be unwilling to release their power and control (Moe, 1990). If the existing power relation stays untouched, the disadvantaged groups will still be excluded even when they have physical participation. Pateman (1970) sees participation as activities to influence or (even) equal power relations in decision-making processes. It is a redistribution of power to enable different parties to be included in the decision-making process (Arnstein, 2019). At the macrolevel, the studies on participation usually look into the degree to which people could and should be empowered to (co)decide on political or national matters; and at the

microlevel, they deal with the power relations between privileged, such as community leaders, professionals, donors, and social elites, and non-privileged and marginalised actors, such as the poor, women and children (Carpentier, 2012). Participation protects individuals or organisations from the negative consequences of power imbalances, where the actors who make the rules retain too much control over the ways of doing things. Participation decreases the power imbalances to restrict the chance for rulers or decision makers to abuse their power. Thus it is essential, especially when there is a lack of trust towards rulers/decision makers (Carpentier, 2011).

Power relations are a key element in determining the depth of participation. When existing power relations are not dismantled, participation stays as an empty shell or partial participation at best (Narayanan, 2003). In partial participation, it seems that some of the parties influence each other, but the power to make the final decision rests with only one of the parties; while full or authentic participation means each stakeholder has equal power to make the final decision (Pateman, 1970). Similarly, Arnstein (2019) depicts a ladder of participation to categorise participation in terms of citizens' power in determining the plan/programme. This suggests that participation without redistribution of power is an empty ritual that allows the powerholders to claim that all parties were considered, but in fact, only some truly benefit. The extent of citizens' power indicates the level of (non)participation as a ladder. The lowest level is manipulation which describes a nonparticipation situation contrived to substitute for genuine participation. It does not enable the people but enables powerholders to impose their decisions. Climbing up the ladder, the have-nots will have chances to speak out through consultations or public meetings but may lack the power to ensure their opinions will be taken into account. Further up the ladder, the less powerful parties increase their power in decision making and enter into a partnership which enables

them to form an equal relationship and to negotiate with traditional powerholders. It means partnership between stakeholders with power differences can be built through participation.

The above points out that using the participatory approach can benefit the outcomes, but inadequate participation may risk oppressing the have-nots. The redistribution of power is essential to achieve authentic participation. It means the participatory approach needs to be designed in a way that enables the disadvantaged to gain power not only to have a voice but also to influence the decision making. Authentic participation will empower the participants and lead to a partnership. The following sections will use the cases in the poverty alleviation area to illustrate how the participatory approach is used in NGOs in China and how it is associated with NGOs' governmental partnerships.

4.2 Participatory Approach in Poverty Alleviation

Poverty is one of the major social problems faced by China, especially in rural areas. In the year 1978, when the Reform and Opening Policy was launched, there were 250 million people (30.7% of the population) living in absolute poverty, based on the corresponding national poverty line, which was an annual per capita net income of 100 yuan (Park & Wang, 2001). Traditionally, poverty is measured primarily by income. In China, individuals are classified as in poverty if their annual net income or consumption expenditure is below the official poverty line (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2004). However, poverty can be multidimensional and more than a lack of income to meet basic needs. Poverty is a deprivation of basic capabilities of individuals or families, including malnutrition, persistent disease and illiteracy (Sen, 2001), or a deprivation of basic human needs such as food and clean water, shelter and health, education and information (United Nations, 1995). The World Bank's (2000) empirical research finds that poverty is related to the shortage of a range of assets rather than just income. These assets include physical (land and material belongings),

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human (health, education, training, labour-power), social (social networks), and environmental (trees, forests, water) resources that individuals, households, and communities can use to cope with uncertainties. Of these assets, social capital, developed by Putnam (1993), suggests that interpersonal relationships are a form of resource which enhances the performance of a community to the desired outcome, such as poverty alleviation (Putnam, 1993). It includes bonding social capital, which is interpersonal relationships within the same social group; bridging social capital, which exists across social groups or classes; and linking social capital, which indicates relationships among people/institutions at various levels of the social power hierarchy (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 2001). It also points out that power relations within households, communities, and other social institutions are essential in shaping how different assets can be mobilised and used (Narayan et al., 2000). The experiences of the poor indicate the inequities in power among different social groups and a lack of bridging or linking social capitals between those with different levels of power (Narayan et al., 2000).

Accordingly, the mission of poverty reduction is not only to increase per capita incomes but also to enhance the assets and rights of the population and to empower the poor (Reid, 2005). Within this context, studies have emerged to discuss how beneficiaries, as well as stakeholders of development processes, can participate in the design and implementation of programmes, and how participation has become a central poverty reduction policy of international organisations since the 1990s (Speth, 1998; World Bank, 1996). Participation is associated with empowerment, as discussed in the previous paragraph. Participation can also enhance the social capital of the poor by connecting individuals and institutions across social groups and classes, and the increased social capital is, in turn, helpful for the poor in increasing skills and resources necessary for participation and protection of interests in the decision-making process (L. D. Brown & Ashman, 1996; Lister & Pia, 2008).

In the development areas, participatory approaches are adopted as UNDP (1990) promoted a rights-based perspective of human development. The international organisations that provide aid to developing countries moved from an external expert stance to a participatory stance in the 1990s. The World Bank developed a guide for participatory poverty intervention mechanisms that combined with local knowledge from the voices of the poor (Narayan et al., 2000). According to the World Bank (1996), participation is "a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them" (p. 3).

As participation is emphasised by international organisations or NGOs working in developing countries, it is gradually adopted by the governments in developing countries in poverty alleviation programmes, including in China. In 2015, there were 56 million people living in poverty, and the Chinese government announced the goal of eliminating absolute poverty by 2020 (C. Huang, 2016). To achieve it, a range of policies were issued to provide guidance. Chinese poverty alleviation is led by the state, but the participation of social forces has been encouraged since 2000. The 10-Year Poverty Alleviation Outline issued in 2011 points out the importance of involving social forces in poverty alleviation (State Council, 2011). In 2014, the State Council (2014a) released a policy on further mobilising social forces to participate in poverty alleviation and development which points out that local governments should support social organisations' participation in poverty alleviation with information and guidance and encourage social organisations to be part of social resource mobilisation, allocation and use.

Promoted by international organisations and supported by domestic policies, NGOs in China emphasise participation as one of the main approaches in their work in poverty alleviation. The following case study will analyse how international and domestic NGOs from more developed regions adopt the participatory approach in poverty-reduction programmes. The

targets are not only the beneficiaries but also local government officers as important stakeholders. This process offers an opportunity for local governments to learn to use this approach in poverty alleviation and has improved NGOs' partnerships with the government.

4.3 Participatory Approaches of Chinese NGOs in Poverty Alleviation

The section will describe a range of participatory approaches and methods adopted by NGOs in poverty alleviation, including those working in the area of rural education. It includes the cases of PA1, PA2, EDU1 and EDU2 (a brief description of each case is in Chapter 2). Participation indicates that not only the beneficiaries who are the targets of the programmes but also other stakeholders such as local government officers need to take part in the decision making regarding the goal setting, design and implementation of the programme (World Bank, 1996). The description will focus on 1) how the participants take part in the programme by inputting their time, knowledge, and actual work; 2) how the participants get empowered through the process. The strategies revealed by the empirical study include consultations, collective decision making, sharing the cost, involving the voiceless, involving diverse stakeholders, building trust, and building capacity.

4.3.1   Consultation

Public meetings and group discussions are common public participation techniques for stakeholders to express their opinions (Lowndes et al., 2001). PA1 used to hold meetings in launching their "Happy Village Programme" in 2012. The programme was to modernise the rural village by infrastructure construction such as roads, power, community centre and housing renovation. The topic of the meeting was "what is happiness?" and villagers were invited to express their views on happiness and visions for the village's future. They first had a discussion on their understandings of happiness, such as having a job, having a beautiful village, having a secured retirement life, being treated fairly. These were summarised as the

goals of building the Happy Village. Then they talked about what they could do to achieve these goals and made plans such as building new houses, planting trees and flowers, protecting the environment and so on. The plan of the villagers was consistent with the programme plan and was incorporated into the programme implementation.

A consultation is an important form of participation for the stakeholders, but it is not equal to participation. What might be missing in this formality is a genuine understanding of the experiences of other stakeholders, learning from them and transferring power to them to make decisions. Also, the voice of the most underprivileged might not be heard. For instance, due to the power imbalance between genders in the traditional village, there were few female participants in these meetings. There are other strategies identified in the empirical research which facilitate authentic participation.

4.3.2   Collective Decision Making

The NGOs being interviewed identified that the power of decision making is one key distinction of their participatory approach, which is associated with the empowerment of the participants. Regarding development programmes, making decisions means applying local knowledge and allowing the participants to influence the programme design and implementation, as outsiders may not understand what the beneficiaries really want and need. One example is that when EDU2's leader Hong visited rural schools, she saw a lot of donated school bags and stationery left unused in storage because the outsiders in developed regions take it for granted that these are what poor students need. However, by getting closer to them, Hong found out what they really needed: in some remote areas, children use rocks as toilet paper, and girls do not know what to do when they get their first period. Therefore, Hong considers the initiatives attempting to help the poor have to make sure that the targeted people will have a say about what they need:

In the past, they [the rural school administrations] only passively accepted what was given to them. They were reluctant to say no when too many school bags were being donated to them as they did not want to reject people's kindness. They were not empowered to speak out about what they really need. Now we encourage them to identify their needs and participate in designing how to satisfy the needs. We offer options and resource and create opportunities, but at the end of the day, they are the ones who make the decision and resolve their problems. We don't make decisions for them. Regarding the needs we noticed, such as the toilet paper, we reminded the school administration about the issue, and then they took actions to resolve the problem. We won't take the credit or make it sound like they're unable to address the simple toilet paper issue without us. That will be disempowering and even insulting. Letting them have the credit is one part of empowerment too. And when we run the programme on sex education, the teachers and school administrations also participate in designing and implementing. (Interview 14)

Participating in decision making is a process of empowerment, especially for people who have been used to receiving charity; as Hong describes:

The ultimate goal is to empower the people, to change from passively accepting what has been given to actively participating in making a difference. For rural school programmes, we invite teachers to design and implement. In this way, the teachers would feel they are the owners of the programme rather than merely passive recipients of a task. They can contribute their opinions rather than following the instructions of outsiders. They feel they are respected and more motivated to make positive changes. (Interview 14)

Besides, as pointed out by the interviewees, the NGOs' programme managers need to be aware of targeted people's decision-making abilities: underprivileged people may not be used

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to making decisions, so when they are asked to make decisions, they may not naturally know what to do. It is important for programme managers to use the language and methods that are suitable for the knowledge and capacities of the targeted people. Illustrated by Hong:

> You need to know where they are now. If they don't know how to make a decision, you can't just assume what they want or tell them what to do. You can only take time to communicate and work out with them slowly. (Interview 14)

Similarly, PA1 mentioned that when using participatory approaches such as voting, they would use pieces of corn, which are familiar to the villagers, as ballots. It would lower the barriers to adopting an approach which is new to the villagers.

4.3.3   Cost-Sharing

Traditionally, international organisations or NGOs would fund the programmes they initiated. But this has been gradually replaced by localised financing and resources as the economy grows in developing regions. Interviewees point out that in their programme, local governments would share the cost of the programme, and local people would also contribute through their labour. In this way, local people will gain ownership of the programme, and the implementation can be more autonomous and responsive to local needs. EDU1's co-operation agreement with local governments requires local governments to pay for the living subsidies of volunteer teachers so that "the local governments will truly participate in the programme and make efforts to make it work. If they don't put money in it, they may not pay attention to it" (Interview 3). In the early years of EDU2's operation, the organisation fully covered all the expenses such as sponsoring individual students, building libraries in rural schools, organising study tours for rural students. With economic and income growth, the government and families in Qinghai became more capable of investing more in education. The tuition fees and living costs for rural students are not the main issues anymore, and the infrastructures of rural schools have also been improved massively. So, it began to ask the

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local government to share the cost too. "When we initiated the reading programme, we invested in building a new library for schools, and local government spent money on putting on the heating equipment. Only when they put money in it, they would recognise it is *their* programme" (Interview 14).

PA2 also invites the local government to bear part of the programme cost. "For a development programme of one-million-yuan scale, we would offer half of the funds, and the government would be responsible for the other half" (Interview 12). In addition to local government, it also encourages the beneficiaries to participate by contributing their time and labour to the programme.

> In implementing the project, the NGOs' workers, government officers, and villages will all have a say in deciding how to use the funds and what to do if the funds are insufficient to attain the goal they agree on. They discuss to find out a solution. For example, the villagers can collect money in some way or contribute their labour in the project, such as building a road, or they can lower the original goal to some extent if they do not have enough resources to contribute. (Interview 12)

4.3.4   Empowering the Voiceless

As discussed before, one key element of participation is to bring people who are excluded from the decision-making into it. In rural China, women are likely to feel being excluded from public discussion or decision-making in the village. To address this kind of social exclusion, PA2 adopts the gender perspective in its participatory approach to make sure women will have a chance to express their ideas:

> We respect the voice of women. Women did not have a say in traditional villages. But we ask women to join in our public meetings. In the early stage of the programme, men and women may stand separately on each side of the room during the meeting,

and women tend not to say anything. We encourage women to at least talk with other women or to cast anonymous votes so that everyone gets a chance to express their opinions. It turns out that women and men do have different opinions, and men cannot represent women's viewpoints. For example, regarding where to invest the money, men would hope to build a road so they can go to the town more easily. But women, who take care of the family, prefer to dig a new well close to the village so that they can walk three miles less to get water. Regarding the use of the personal loan, men want to buy motorcycles while women would like to spend on children's education, crops and cattle. (Interview 12)

The process of involving the voiceless changes the awareness and attitudes of not only the women but also people around them:

In rural communities, people used to take it for granted that men, village heads, or funders are the decision makers. Men thought women were not capable of having their own opinions, and women thought they would not be heard and thus did not bother to speak out. The programme changed it. Now men realised that women have their opinions and can contribute to changing the community, and women can get the loan to spend on what they think is important, and they feel being respected by the community. (Interview 12)

In addition to women, EDU2 makes an effort to enable the children from poor areas to "stand up" rather than being downgraded merely as recipients of benefits. The children have been educated to express their "gratefulness" as they have been receiving aids from developed regions. In their communication with people from outside, the children often use a submissive tone saying, "we are from the poor villages; thank you very much for helping us." EDU2 encourages the children to change their language and discourages them from labelling their hometown as just "a poor village" (Interview 14).

Another factor preventing children from valuing their hometown and culture is the centralised education system. When the courses and textbooks are ratified by a higher level educational bureau, teaching is not localised to fit the different environment or cultures. As the volunteer teachers describe:

> The textbook of math uses the example of a subway to teach speed and distance, but my students do not know what a subway is. The first article of the literature textbook described a warm spring day in March, but when we teach this article in March, the plateau area where we are is still frozen. (Interview 3)

Under this education system, "the indigenous knowledge is overlooked, and the children do not even know the name of the special plants on their plateau grassland" (Interview 14). EDU2 considers that empowerment comes from seeing the uniqueness of the place they are living in and the value of themselves. So, they carry out programmes to promote local education, to enable children to know about the geology and history of their hometown and to understand their own culture. In the city tour programme, which takes rural children to explore the cities, children are encouraged to present their hometown with confidence.

> Now, during the city exploring tour, our children won't introduce themselves as "we are from the poor villages." Now they can talk about their hometown with pride and love for city kids. The city tour itself is not for "taking the poor kids from undeveloped places to see the modern city" but for cultural exchange as they're the little guardians of the three rivers source. (Interview 14)

EDU2 also encourages children to make their own decisions as enabling self-determination is one of its core values. Hong gives an example from their city tour programme:

> One session of the tour is a scavenger hunt in the city. The children need to design a route on a map and take various transportations to reach a destination. They may need to talk with strangers for direction during the process. It is their first time being in the

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city, and it is normal that some children feel stressed about this challenge and do not want to participate. It used to be compulsory, but now we give children the option to choose whether to participate or not. It is not abnormal to choose flight rather than fight in a difficult situation, even for adults. Deciding to escape is a decision. It's better to let them decide for themselves than be forced. The programme is for them to expand their experience, and escaping is a type of experience. (Interview 14)

4.3.5 *Involving Diverse Stakeholders*

Stakeholders indicate those who interact with and influence the operation of the organisation, and the organisation's strategy includes the values and expectations of stakeholders (Andriof & Waddock, 2002). EDU1 has a strategy map (Figure 2) that identifies a range of stakeholders and each one's expectations and links stakeholders with the organisation's mission, projects and methods.

Figure 2

EDU1's Strategy Map

The diagram shows:

- EDU1's strategy map
- Mission: Improving education quality in underdeveloped areas and promoting education justice
- Stakeholders:
  - Volunteers
  - Funders and donors
  - Rural schools and teachers
  - Local governments
  - Operation team
  - Alumni (former volunteers who finished 2 years teaching term)
- Approaches
  - Place and support teachers to change rural education
  - Organisation capacity building
  - Train and cultivate young change makers to promote educational justice
- A range of programmes

Source: Based on EDU1's document

The map in Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the organisation's mission, stakeholders and working approaches. The stakeholders have common concerns and interests in rural education, and this is the foundation of their participation. EDU1 considers the stakeholders are the participants who work collaboratively for the organisation mission and who affect the organisation's approaches. The approaches will be further demonstrated by a range of programmes that involve the stakeholders. EDU1 specifically involves local teachers as stakeholders, especially learning from the failure of the volunteer-run rural school, as discussed in the previous chapter. EDU1 designs programmes involving local teachers in training, and it organises workshops for volunteers and local teachers to communicate, to

learn from and support each other. The early stage of EDU1's programme was placing volunteers in rural schools. By involving more and more local teachers, EDU1 gradually expanded the targets of the programme to local rural teachers and built a network among rural teachers and people who care about rural education, such as volunteers, donors and education professionals (Interview 3).

In addition to building networks, EDU2's experience shows that stakeholder engagement can change outsiders' awareness and facilitate empowering the underprivileged. By participating in the programme and building relationships with the poor, the volunteers and donors are more likely to grow empathy towards them instead of merely seeing them as "targets of programmes," as the story told by Hong:

> Donors want evidence to prove the money has been used properly. Some suggest taking photos of children holding the money. Some business donors ask for a staged ceremony filming the children receiving the donation for branding purposes. I said no to them. I suggest we sit down together and work out another type of evidence. I understand a participatory intervention means different parties' voices would be heard and respected. It would change the donors' attitude as they would know the recipients are not happy to do what they suggested. (Interview 14)

Stakeholder engagement is a process for building social capital, which is embedded in relationships between individuals, communities, organisations, networks and societies (Burt, 1997; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). The relationships between volunteers and donors from the cities and rural teachers and children create "brokerage opportunities" by which individuals are able to connect with others who are otherwise disconnected, and this type of weak tie is essential for developing social capital (Burt, 1997; Granovetter, 1983).

4.3.6   Building Trust

In adopting a participatory approach, trust building is essential as trust is associated with stakeholder engagement and high levels of social capital (Andriof & Waddock, 2002). Trust is one condition for the stakeholders to participate, and participation can improve the trust among the participants.

The case of EUD2 shows that one way to build trust is through a reciprocal interpersonal relationship with empathy. Hong mentioned that to get the government to support their programme, they would try to understand and support local government officers first:

> It's not easy to be in the position of low-rank government officials. They are under pressure from their supervisors, and they have a lot of paperwork and administrative work to handle. Some NGO workers may complain that the local officials are not co-operative. But I think you need to know why the officials are not co-operative. Maybe they are just too busy. They have numerous reports to write and inspection teams to hosts. You need to know whether they have time to co-operate with you at this moment. You can't just think about your programme. We have built a good personal relationship with the local officials, and we would make a phone call with them constantly to know what they are busy with recently. Then we would know whether we can offer some help or whether we can get squeeze in a project to run with them. In order to support them, we run projects to provide capacity-building training to local officers. When we offer our support and help them to solve problems, they will trust us and be more responsive to our initiative. It's just human nature. (Interview 14)

Trust is also achieved by sharing information and respecting the views of the other party. When EUD2 runs the project of playing films in rural schools, they voluntarily submit the list of the movies to be played to the educational authority beforehand. It's a way to earn their trust and to build a long-term partnership. EUD2 also mention it is important to respect the

authority's opinions on the information shared. "For example, when we operated sex education in rural schools, the educational office suggested to change the project name to health education. We thought the suggestion made sense and took it" (Interview 14).

Participation also helps in improving the relationship and trust between local government and local people. At the rural level, the relationship between local governments and the people can be intense as the governments are used to being in a powerful position over the people. They have the power to make arbitrary decisions without sharing information or consulting with the people, and it sometimes leads to corruption (C. Deng & Wang, 2008). When NGOs enter and create a space for local officers and villagers to discuss with equal positions, the relationships can be improved, and the trust towards the government can be enhanced. For example, regarding some tough topics in development programmes like some houses that need to be demolished for building a new road, instead of letting the government use their authority to order the households to co-operate, PA2 organised meetings for them to talk about how to make compensations to these families affected in this situation. The villagers need to make a decision by themselves, rather than just obeying the decision of the local government. After equal and mutually respectful discussions, the relationship between the government officers and local villagers could be improved too. In the village called Shengli in Sichuan Province, the relationship between the local government and the villagers was tense in the beginning. But after the communications and collaborations in the project, the government officers felt accepted by the local people (Interview 12).

4.3.7 *Strengthen the Capacity of Local Governments*

In addition to donors and volunteers, the local government is another essential stakeholder for NGOs in poverty alleviation. As the NGOs which initiated the development programmes are outsiders, one of these NGO's goals is that these communities can develop the capacity of

self-sufficiency, and one of the approaches is to empower local governments. It provides training to prepare the local government to work in a collaborative manner in community-based programmes and enhance its knowledge and capacity so that the local government can apply the participatory approach in the future. EDU2 mentioned that they organise training for county- and village-level government officers as it will improve their partnership and also benefit the programme outcomes as mentioned above. PA1 also emphasises building the capacity of local government officers. They bring in resources, human capital and experience to facilitate local officers to learn about methods in poverty alleviation and participatory interventions. Twenty-one training programmes have been held, and more than 800 government officers had participated by 2019.

In addition to training, PA2 pointed out that the collaborative implementation of programmes is a learning process for local governments. If local governments consider it effective, they will adopt the approach in their administration in the future. As PA2's leader stated in a media interview:

> We promoted participatory programme management in Guangxi. The Poverty Alleviation Office in Guangxi Province learnt the approach and recognised that it is useful in solving their long-lasting problem, which was how to guide the villagers to monitor the use of poverty alleviation funds. By participation, we require the local level government to announce the total amount of funds and make a budget with the villagers. We hope this approach would be adopted by governments eventually. (Sohu, 2009)

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the participatory approach used in poverty alleviation by NGOs in China. The four cases in this chapter all have a collaborative type of partnership with the

government, in which the use of the participatory approach is a key part. In an authoritarian country that lacks the foundation of public participation, NGOs initiate development programmes and make efforts to promote authentic participation, which means using a participatory approach is not only for the better implementation of development programmes but also for bringing the voiceless into decision-making processes and for empowering the have-nots. Participation is associated with increased knowledge and capacity. The participation of the have-nots facilitates them to develop and to get rid of poverty. In addition to the people in need, NGOs' participatory approach also engages a range of stakeholders such as external volunteers and donors and creates social capital for the underprivileged. As poverty alleviation is a key working area of the Chinese government, local governments are key stakeholders of NGOs. NGOs build and maintain partnerships with local governments by engaging them in programme implementation, building trusts and capacities. More importantly, participation enables local governments to learn and adapt this participatory approach and to sustain the programme outcomes even after external NGOs leave the area.

Chapter 5   Formal Networks

This chapter looks into the networks NGOs connect with and how the networks affect NGOs' partnerships with the government. The network is part of the context in which the NGO–government partnerships take place. The network is worth looking at because the study of NGOs' partnership-building behaviours requires the examination of the environment or system in which the organisation is operating, and one important facet of the external environment is the organisation's network of contacts (Powell & Smith-Doerr, 1994). Apart from the literature, one theme stressed by interviewees is their collaboration and networks with other NGOs. The networks of NGOs can connect them with the government or support them in capacity building which, in turn, facilitates their partnership-building with the government. The networks discussed in this case study are categorised by the initiator of the network. The main initiators of important networks are the government and philanthropic foundations, which usually have a strong financial power to be the centre of NGO networks. In this chapter, following the literature review on networks, the development of China's philanthropic foundations will be described. Then, the networks initiated by the government and philanthropic foundations will be described to explain the networks' impact on NGOs' governmental partnerships.

5.1   Literature on Networks

Network research is abundant in management, organisation and many disciplines and has been a paradigm which encompasses a range of theories and perspectives (Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Gulati, 1998; Gulati et al., 2000; Jarillo & Ricart, 1987; Thorelli, 1986). It is essential to recognise that behaviours of individual organisations take place in a network of relationships, rather than a barren social context, and to understand the consequence of the networks. In contrast to the approaches which assume individuals are self-contained entities,

the network approach is based on the belief of "the primacy of relations" and attempts to understand individuals as evolving in a web of relations (Kirschbaum, 2019).

A network can be defined as "a set of nodes/actors (e.g., persons, organisations) linked by a set of social relationships or social ties (e.g., friendship, transfer of funds, overlapping membership) of a specified type" (Laumann et al., 1978, p. 458). Social relationships can take different forms, ranging from observable interorganisational links like shared personnel or tangible resource transfers, to nonobservable transactions of authority or intangible moral support, or interpersonal information exchanges or material transaction, or simply as friendship or an advice-giving relation (Laumann, Galaskiewicz, & Marsden, 1978). These connections can be formalised by a contract or informal and trust-based (Provan et al., 2007). Each relation defines a different network (e.g., the friendship network is different from the advice network, although in practice they may not be mutually exclusive), and various types of relations usually lead to different functions (Borgatti & Foster, 2003).

Networks can be associated with opportunities or constraints in achieving their goals (Guo & Acar, 2005). Networks offer opportunities by building trust and commitment among entities within the relationship (A. Larson, 1992). One of the important theories in network research is social capital which generally emphasises the value of connections. Social capital can be defined as broad, cross-cutting interconnections among individuals or members of a network, and can be associated with significant outcomes such as performance and power. From the resource-dependency perspective, the form of network is a response to uncertainties in the external environment and resource conditions (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), and resource scarcity, especially in smaller organisations or incipient industries, is likely to be an incentive for network forming (Singer & Yankey, 1991). Networks help individual actors in this relationship to reduce uncertainty because the interpersonal or interorganisational connections potentially provide the individual or organisation with information, resources

and opportunities (Gulati et al., 2000). Globally, NGOs often form networks to address social issues collaboratively through collective advocacy, joint programme operations and information/resource exchange. The sharing of human resources, expertise and knowledge within the network helps NGOs to reduce operational costs and risks, to better mobilise resources, to increase organisational capacities and to enhance service delivery (Paarlberg & Varda, 2009). Such networks are considered as a powerful way to solve pressing issues, influencing governments and reinforcing civil society (Guo & Acar, 2005; Varda, 2011), and preexisting networks can influence the creation of new ties and affect their design, path, and success (Gulati, 1998).

However, the network of relationships usually comes at a cost. Networks can influence each actor's actions and reduce their autonomy by exerting a variety of pressures (Gulati et al., 2000). The pressures from the environment reducing the actor's autonomy include mimetic isomorphism, which indicates the pressure on organisations to adopt similar behaviours or strategies in a shared space as a response to uncertainties, especially in an unstable environment or for inexperienced organisations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; M. Yang & Hyland, 2012). The other form of pressure is coercive isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism indicates the pressure on the organisation which results from expectations in the context within which the organisation operates (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hasmath & Hsu, 2014), for instance, when grassroots NGOs have to get a legal registration to prove their legitimacy in response to the government mandate.

There are two levels of network analysis. One is to study the network as a whole and to evaluate its performance. The other is to focus on a focal actor in the network and to explore how the network influences the focal actor (Robertson et al., 2020; Z. Yang & Nowell, 2020). The performance of a network, as a whole, can be demonstrated by gaining the support of key external stakeholders, bringing substantial resources to the network, setting clear goals

and accomplishing its goals (Z. Yang & Nowell, 2020). The network research on the individual actor level pays attention to how each actor draws on the resources, such as information, money and power, through social ties, and how social ties affect each actor's attitudes, beliefs and practices (Borgatti & Foster, 2003). Analysis can cut across these two levels, though. One example is the biggest growth area in network study, social capital (Borgatti & Foster, 2003). This concept is about the value of connections both at an individual and a group level. Individuals' social capital means that their connections or network positions can lead to positive outcomes such as power, leadership or better performance (Brass & Burkhardt, 1993; Mehra et al., 2001; Pastor et al., 2002; Tsai, 2001). On a group level, social capital can be defined as broad interconnections among all members which will enhance the prosperity of the whole group, and from this perspective, even recreational associations such as bowling leagues can knit together a society and contribute to the society's prosperity (Putnam, 2000).

Specifically, the network literature can be classified into four streams (Borgatti & Foster, 2003). The first one is referred to as "structural capital." The "structure" means the abstract pattern of ties, such as being positioned in a loose network or on the path between otherwise disconnected significant others (Burt et al., 2000). This group of studies takes place on two levels: the actor level and network level. At the actor level, it studies the structure rather than the content of a network, and it relates the structure to the actors' gain from the network. At the network level, scholars usually associate the network structure with its performance (Athanassiou & Nigh, 1999). The second group is called "resource access." It mainly focuses on the actor level and explores the correlation between an actor's success and their ability to extract resources from different types of networks (Borgatti & Cross, 2003). The next one is "convergence." It explains the similarity in attitudes and practices of various actors in the network, which is associated with the concept of isomorphism and institutional theory

(DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Structural equivalence is another concept that fits here, which suggests that actors can form a common attitude when they are connected to a common third party, even though they are not tied to each other (Lorrain & White, 1971). The last one is "contagion." It emphasises interactions between actors and attempts to explain common attitudes, practices and culture through interactions such as board interlocks, friendship and advice networks (Haunschild, 1993; Krackhardt & Kilduff, 2002; K. Sanders & Hoekstra, 1998). The interactions are preserved as channels along which information or influence flow. Through the interaction, the actors mutually affect one another in the process of increasing homogeneity in their network (Borgatti & Foster, 2003). From the literature, the following analysis will be organised from three angles: the role of NGO networks as a whole, how government/foundation-initiated networks affect NGOs' governmental relationships, and how isomorphism in networks affects NGOs. As charitable foundations play an important role in NGOs' network building, the analysis will start from the description of philanthropic foundations in China.

5.2   The Development Foundations in P. R. China since 1978

In China, a charitable foundation is defined as a "nonprofit entity that promotes charity development by using assets donated by natural men, juridical persons, and other organisations" (K.-M. Chan & Lai, 2018; State Council, 2004). The creation of such foundations started in the context of market reform which undermined the socialist welfare system and shifted the burden of social service provision from the government to individuals and non-state actors. At the beginning of the reform, charitable foundations were formed mostly by state-related agencies to take over some of the former government's responsibilities for social welfare (J. Y. Hsu & Hasmath, 2014). For instance, in 1981, the first charitable foundation in P. R. China, the China Children and Teenagers' Fund, was founded and governed by the All-China Women's Federation which is essentially a state
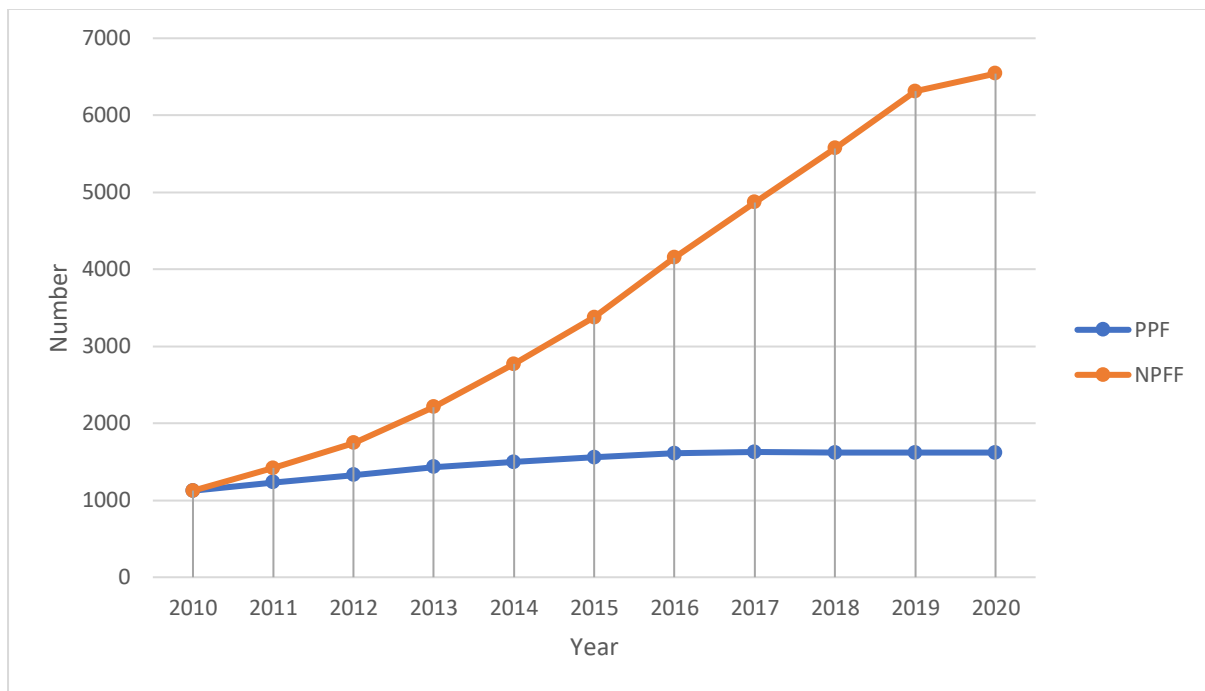
agency (C. Hsu, 2010). The following decades saw hundreds of foundations established, mostly by the state or state-related agencies, led by government-designated personnel and reliant on the government for resourcing (G. Deng, 2015).

In 2004, the release of the "Foundation Management Regulation" opened up the registration of charity foundations initiated by non-state actors such as individuals or enterprises. This regulation classifies the foundations as public fundraising foundations (PFF) and non-public fundraising foundations (NPFF). It requires the founders of the NPFFs to inject funds into the foundation rather than directly raising money from the general public (State Council, 2014b). The intention of setting up the type of NPFF was to encourage private foundations, especially those established by corporations and wealthy individuals, to bring their own capital into charity (K.-M. Chan & Lai, 2018). Therefore, in practice, the non-state-initiated foundations were mostly under the category of NPFF, and NPFF was a synonym for private charitable foundations.

The number of NPFF increased from 184 in 2004 to 846 in 2009 (H. Wang, 2016). During the last 10 years, the number of NPFFs has increased from 1,124 in 2010 to 6,541 in 2020, at nearly four times the speed of PFFs (see Figure 3; Jia Cao, 2020).

Figure 3

Numbers of PFFs and NPFFs From 2010 to 2020

The rise of private foundations signifies an important step in the development of civil society in China, first by increasing the amount of money used for charity or public welfare. The economic reform increased people's wealth and enabled them to make donations to charities. However, wealthy individuals were reluctant to donate to state-owned foundations as these foundations were considered as having low efficiency and low accountability (G. Deng, 2015). The 2004 regulation broke the institutional obstacle for registration of private foundations and offered a channel for wealth to flow into the area of philanthropy by allowing enterprises and individuals to start charitable foundations.

The development of private foundations has also changed resource allocation and expanded the funding sources of grassroots NGOs: before the rise of NPFFs, grassroots NGOs in China mainly relied on foreign organisations for funds. It was hard for grassroots NGOs to get funds from domestic state-controlled foundations as the allocation of the resources was based

on the interests and intentions of the government rather than those of the society or grassroots NGOs. In contrast, NPFFs set their goals and missions independently from the government. They choose where and how to use their resources, which can be different from the state's focus. NPFFs can direct resources to the areas that the government has not covered.

Besides, NPFFs build an organisational governance structure centred by the board of directors to increase public confidence towards charitable foundations. The PFFs are incorporated within the state apparatus and are considered inefficient, while NPFFs do not have financial involvement with the state nor are they staffed by government personnel. The Foundation Management Regulation ensures independent board governance of foundations and requires that the (deputy) chair of the board and the top leaders cannot be seated by current government officials (State Council, 2004). Last, NPFFs draw in talents to work in this sector to increase its capacity. The bureaucratic state-owned foundations do not have an effective mechanism to attract talent to work in the area. NPFFs are mostly founded by enterprises or successful business elites. The founders have accumulated knowledge and experience in modern organisation management and strategic planning which can be applied to the field of charity. NPFFs are able to attract more professionals with higher competitive salaries close to the market. This has had a major impact on improving the talent structure in the NGO sector (Y. Xu, 2009).

To boost the development of the incipient NGO sector, a number of networks have been formed around certain influential private foundations such as PA1, PA2 and Narada Foundation. For example, PA1, PA2 and Narada all belong to a foundation network called China Foundation Forum (CFF), the founders of EN1. CB2, and PF all belong to a talent network, Ginkgo Fellow Programme, created by the Narada Foundation; PA1 and PA2 have a network with a range of grassroots NGOs, such as EDU1 and CB2, through which information and resources can be shared. In the environmental area, EN1 and EN2 are both

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parts of the network with SEE. In addition to foundation-centred networks, governmental agencies also create various channels, such as the Charity Fair, for NGOs to form connections between NGOs. The following will first discuss the networks organised by governmental agencies, and then the network centred by foundations exemplified by Narada Foundation, whose important role was revealed by the NGOs interviewed. Last, it will discuss the impacts of these two types of networks on NGOs.

5.3 Government-Initiated Networks

Over the last 20 years, as the state's control over NGOs has been relaxed, the government has built a range of platforms to support and, at the same time, to oversee NGOs' growth. Charity fairs and incubators are two examples.

Similar to commercial trade fairs which provide the basis for wider trade flows and exchanges of goods between sectors and regions, charity fairs trade social service programmes or public interest products between operational NGOs and grant-making entities like governments, businesses, and foundations. Since 2012, the China Charity Fair has been held annually in Shenzhen directed by the MoCA, State Council LGOPAD, the governments of Guangdong Province/Shenzhen Municipal and a series of governmental agencies. It is a platform to showcase charity programmes and to connect resources. For the past 8 years, over 10,000 organisations and 1.3 million visitors from all over the country have participated, 2,384 programmes have been connected with resources, and 664 million RMB contracts have been initiated (China Charity Fair, 2019).

Charity fairs serve as a temporary market to trade public interest programmes/products and also as a platform for learning and networking. As a market, charity fairs allow NGOs to present their missions and programmes, to engage in negotiations with potential donors or buyers and to form initial contracts with them. As the fair brings relevant entities from all

over the country to one place, it extends market access and helps NGOs to acquire resources that are not accessible locally. EDU1, one of the interviewed NGOs, built its connection with PA1, which later became one of its main funders, at the 2012 China Charity Fair. As EDU1 is located in Beijing, and PA1 is in Shenzhen, the fair was the opportunity to bring them together. At that time, EDU1 was mainly financially relying on overseas foundations such as Ford, and it was expecting to expand the funding source. PA1, as a state-owned enterprise foundation, has the task of target poverty alleviation assigned by the government, and it was planning to transform traditional poverty-reduction methods, such as simply giving money to the poor, to a more innovative and holistic approach. When PA1 got to know EDU1, the programme of reducing educational inequality attracted its attention, and it created a partnership after negotiation. In addition to funding, PA1 also introduced EDU1 to the government of PA1's target region, and that led to EDU1's partnership with the local government in Guizhou (Interview 3).

Apart from being a market for programme/product exchange, trade fairs are also platforms for knowledge exchange and interactive learning as they foster intense interactions among actors across boundaries (Bathelt & Gibson, 2015). The observations and interactions between operational NGOs and funders facilitate vertical knowledge flows between service providers and their buyers and enable NGOs to learn about potential buyers' preferences, and also encourage horizontal knowledge exchange between different NGOs by providing opportunities to observe other organisations, to compare the programmes and to scan the industry development. When EDU1 participated in the Charity Fair, it did not only interact with foundations but also walked through the exhibits, made new friends with other grassroots NGOs, shared each other's experience and discussed the NGO sector (Interview 3). In addition to a learning platform, the fair can be considered as a relational space as it is a

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break for attendants away from their work routines and a chance to be refreshed and recharged by interacting with other NGO practitioners.

On top of horizontal and vertical knowledge exchange, collectively, through the observation and interactions during the fair, many information components can be exchanged by participants and promote interorganisation learning (Bathelt & Gibson, 2015; Bathelt & Zeng, 2015). Such a learning process can increase the knowledge of organisations, but it can also increase conformity. It has been pointed out that networks can promote behavioural conformity by serving as an information pipe for preferred organisational activities, which in turn affect how and to which extent the organisations adopt new approaches (Davis, 1991; Gulati, 1998). The Charity Fair is organised and monitored by the government and mainly reflects the government rhetoric on charity. For example, poverty alleviation has been a highly emphasised theme of the Charity Fair as the government was determined to end absolute poverty in 2020, and the approaches displayed at the fair were mainly economy-based such as building rural/community businesses, investing money in rural areas, creating jobs and selling local products to the outside world (China Charity Fair, 2019; State Council, 2016a). As NGOs uses more than just economy-based poverty alleviation approaches, such as rights-based approaches, the fair has been criticised as a tool for the government to set the tone, to brainwash and to co-opt NGOs to conform to government rhetoric. This is associated with isomorphism in the NGO sector, which leads NGOs to move in the direction of appealing to the state's preference and competing for government contracts. It is questioned as to whether it brings structural changes for addressing social problems and for supporting NGOs' growth or is just window dressing for the government, which essentially restricts the development of NGOs which are inconsistent with the state's tone (Cong, 2014; L. Lin, 2010).

Another shortcoming with the Charity Fair is that although it offers a platform for NGOs to display programmes and to connect with each other, it is a one-off event and is unable to maintain on-going support for NGOs. As many grassroots NGOs lack the capacity to sustain stable funds or to attract well-trained staff (Hasmath & Hsu, 2014), a range of intermediary organisations, such as incubators and "hub" organisations, are set by the government to provide office space, joint fundraising, registration support and training to NGOs and to connect NGOs with the state and business to help with the development of fledgling NGOs (J. Y. Hsu et al., 2015). These hub organisations are valuable for start-up NGOs in bringing in resources and building networks (A. Yang & Cheong, 2018), but they also serve as supervisors and are considered by NGOs as "deputy governments" (J. Y. Hsu et al., 2015; Hao Liu, 2014). Different from the government-designated hub organisations, in practice, a few charity foundations are revealed as hubs of the NGO sector networks, which promotes capacity and relation building on the organisational and industry level. The next section will introduce three influential networks initiated by charitable foundations.

5.4   Foundation-Initiated Networks

The networks to be introduced take place on three levels: collective advocacies and actions on the industry level, an industrial development forum on the organisational level and a capacity-building programme on the individual level.

5.4.1   Collective Advocacy (Industry Level)

As a growing power in society, foundations have participated in collective advocacy, attempting to influence the policies but not always succeeding. The failure of advocacies has revealed that the NGOs sector is not powerful or capable enough to negotiate with powerful governmental actors, and this makes it more essential for the industry to unite and grow. One example of NGOs' collective advocacy is on the issue of tax exemption. It started in 2008

when the new Enterprise Income Tax Law came into force, which required nonprofits to pay tax based on received donations unless their application for tax exemption is granted by the Departments of Civil Affairs, Finance and Taxation together. The tax exemption application took too long to proceed, and the charitable foundations needed to pay a large amount of income tax, especially as they received considerable donations due to the 2008 earthquake. The China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF) alone needed to pay 55 million in income tax that year. It was a big burden for nonprofits and compromised the use of donations in the designated areas. More than 20 foundations joined in a petition to the taxation authority to ask for an extension of the tax-paying due date until they got the result of the tax exemption application. The foundations in this collective advocacy were not limited to NPFFs. A number of PFFs, such as CYDF and the Red Cross, also participated in asking for a tax exemption. It was the first time that the state-owned foundations and private foundations stood in the same line (J. Chen, 2011). However, their petition did not affect the policy or the bureaucratic process of tax exemption at that time. The foundations did not receive any formal response from the government 1 year after the joint petition. CYDF, which originated from the Youth League of CCP, was the only exception. CYDF did get its 55-million income tax exempted after an individual communication with the finance and taxation authorities in Beijing. But most of the other foundations still paid the year 2008 income tax as they had not gotten their tax exemption granted (J. Chen, 2011).

In addition to the donation income, the foundations also had concerns about income tax based on charitable foundations' investment profits. The 2004 Foundation Management Regulation required foundations to pay tax based on investment returns and spend more than 70% (PFF) or 8% (NPFF) of the previous year's balance on charity (State Council, 2004). The requirement of expenditure, as well as taxation, was a big financial challenge for foundations. This issue had been discussed and raised jointly by charitable foundations to the policy

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makers a number of times, such as by making petitions to the State Council and proposals to the People's Political Consultative Conference (J. Chen, 2011). Xu Yongguang, the founder of CYDF, gave an example of such efforts: in 2010, the finance and taxation departments issued two notices on taxation, which did not favour nonprofits. Although the Enterprise Income Taxation Law requires the taxation authority to discuss with the civil affairs department when it comes to the issue of nonprofits, the taxation authority did not do that when issuing the notices. Twenty-four foundations jointly made a petition to the State Council asking for an investigation of the notices of finance and taxation authorities, but they did not receive any response (Y. Huang, 2011). According to Xu Yongguang, this revealed the power difference among government departments and the disadvantaged position of nonprofits and even the civil affairs branches of the government. It indicated that the whole industry of not-for-profits is in a marginalised position and is not understood or respected by the government. He considered

> the taxation authority does not really understand the correct way to tax nonprofits. We need to educate them through research and convincing reports. Also, the whole industry needs to grow, to increase our credibility and capability, and to show them our role in social reform and development. (Y. Xu, 2013, n.p.)

Since 2008, the network advocating for reforming tax policy has been extended from foundations to operational NGOs and universities through seminars, conferences and research. This common challenge for nonprofits also serves as an opportunity to unite different NGOs. EDU1 participated in a range of discussions on this issue, and it considered that, apart from the efforts on addressing the concern, such an occasion is also an opportunity to strengthen the relationship with grant-making foundations and government officials. Li said:

in our meeting with grant-making foundations, we were usually in a position of being challenged as they would question our programme design, budget, outcomes and such. We were in a less powerful position because they have the money we need. But on the tax issue, we were in equal positions because we have similar, if not more, experience to contribute to the discussion. Our accounts and finance could be more complicated than those of foundations, and our understanding and opinion on the tax issue may demonstrate our capacity and professionalism to them. (Interview 3)

Twelve years after the foundations' first petition on taxation, there were substantial updates on the tax regulations regarding deducting donations from taxable income in May 2020 (Ministry of Finance, 2020; Y. Wang, 2020). But the issue related to the tax on investment returns has not been addressed yet, and there is still a long way to go before China's nonprofits get a reasonable taxation policy. This history shows that the advocacy network of the foundations, at least in their early days, was loosely organised and did not have the capacity to achieve their goals. One reason is the power imbalance between NGOs and the government, and even the imbalance within the state apparatus, such as between the branches of civil affairs and the branches of finance/taxation. Another reason could be that the governments have not gained sufficient knowledge of and trust in NGOs' capacity to listen to their suggestions (Hasmath & Hsu, 2014). In this situation, it is more important for the industry to unite as a network and to build capacity and visibility, and the following initiatives are designed for this purpose.

5.4.2 *Inter-Organisation Development Forum (Organisational Level)*

Established in 2008 by seven foundations, including PA1, interested in pursuing institutional excellence, the CFF is now the most influential and best-known platform in the NGO sector. It is managed by a committee shaped by 25 main foundation members and serves around

8,200 foundations to promote NGOs' development in China (European Foundation Centre, 2020a). Originally it was under the name of "Non-Public Fundraising Foundation Forum." As mentioned above, the NPFFs were mainly started by non-state actors, and this name reflected the non-governmental nature of the forum. The name was changed to CFF in 2016 as the release of the Charity Law terminated the classifications of NPFF/PFF originated by the 2004 Foundation Management Regulation and made "foundation" the only legal term. In 2017, the secretariat of CFF formally registered with Beijing Civil Affairs Bureau as Beijing Evergreen Service Center for Non-Profit Organisations (China Foundation Forum, 2019).

Compared with the China Charity Fair, which is a one-off event organised by the government, the CFF represents the voice of the NGO sector and has had deeper and more lasting impact on network and capacity building in the NGO sector. Over the years, CFF has grown from an annual conference to an on-going platform consisting of knowledge hub and practice networks. It is a hub that brings together foundations and connects with operational NGOs and governments, which is elaborated as follows.

1) Creating (inter)national foundation networks for capacity building: in 2020, there are 25 foundations working collaboratively as an organising committee which is in charge of the annual forum and year-round industrial networking and learning events. Differentiated by founder type, the committee members range from state-related, and university-related to elite and corporate foundations. It includes some highly influential foundations which are important to the growth of Chinese NGOs and have been studied by scholars, such as Narada Foundation (corporate foundation) which is the first grant-making foundation and led by Xu Yongguang (Fulda, 2017; J. Y. Hsu et al., 2015), China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation which has state ties and plays an important role in China's foreign aid in Africa (Lai, 2013), and One Foundation which was started by celebrity Jet Li and represents elite philanthropy in China (Jeffreys, 2015; Shieh & Deng, 2011). Built on the collaboration of these influential

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foundations as centre actors, the network extends to relatively peripheral foundations and cities where the NGO sector is less developed. Since 2016, in addition to the annual forum, CFF has started to organise regular city summits all over the country, hosted by different foundations each time, to broaden and deepen the network with foundations in different regions. It has also built co-operation with the European Foundation Centre, introducing best practice in Europe to China and organising programmes to bring together NGO sector professionals from China and Europe to share their knowledge, experience, creativity and concerns (European Foundation Centre, 2020b). This broad connection maximises the resources and knowledge available to the network.

2) Connecting grant-making foundations with grassroots/operational NGOs and supporting their growth: In the early days, Chinese foundations mostly operated their own programmes rather than making grants to support other NGOs' work. Pioneered by Narada Foundation, some charity foundations started to transform into grant-making foundations after the 2008 earthquake as they recognised it is the way to promote civil society in China (K.-M. Chan & Lai, 2018; W. Lai et al., 2015). However, in 2018, only around 2% of foundations were making grants and operational NGOs usually had difficulties finding funds (B. Liu, 2018). This put grant-makers in a more powerful position which silenced the grassroots NGOs even when they had disagreements or discontents with their funders. Considering that the lack of feedback mechanism from grantees to grant-makers was damaging the trust and collaboration in the NGO sector, CFF set up a special award named the Golden Mandarin Award for the best foundations judged by grant-receiving NGOs. It conducts surveys and interviews to collect NGOs, opinions and suggestions towards foundations. It does not only reduce the power disparity but also provides suggestions for effective grant-making (CFF, 2015).

3) Increasing governments' knowledge of NGOs: in response to the government's lack of knowledge and trust of NGOs' potential capacity (Hasmath & Hsu, 2014), CFF provides a

platform to connect governments with practitioners as well as scholars in the NGO sector. A range of government officers have been invited to participate or organise the annual forum or city summits and get a chance to see the performance of this emerging area. For example, the 2019 city summit was held in Shandong, which is not a flourishing region for NGOs compared with Guangdong, Beijing and such. In 2020, the number of foundations registered in Shandong Province ranked 9 out of 33 regions in China. The top two are Guangdong and Beijing (Foundation Center, 2020). Coordinated by CFF, this summit was organised by the City of Xintai's government, which also participated, and it increased the government's awareness of the NGO sector's development (CFF, 2019a). Researchers in the NGO sector are regular participants in CFF, such as Zhenyao Wang, the head of China Philanthropy Research Institute, which is the first NGO sector research institute jointly established by private foundations; and Jinping Jin who is the head of Peking University NPOs Law Centre and has led a range of discussions on the NGO sector legislation and policymaking. As Wang said in one meeting of CFF:

> it is necessary to build platforms like CFF. In fact, many government officials also very care about conversations like today. I can tell you frankly that many government officials have not engaged in social organisations or charity work, and they do not understand this area. Social organisations can take the initiative to introduce some knowledge to them, and this will essentially become a kind of advocacy and guidance, allowing government officials to better understand the operation of social organisations" (CFF, 2020).

In this sense, CFF offers a channel to link NGO scholars with governments and facilitates scholars' proposals, such as on the issue of nonprofits' tax exemption, to be heard by the government.

4) Promoting learning and capacity building in the NGO sector: from the angle of the NGO–government relationship, one way to increase government awareness of NGOs' capacity is through the professionalisation of this sector (Hasmath & Hsu, 2014). As Wang said in one of the CFF (2019a) presentations, professionalisation and solidarity are the pivots for foundations to exert better leverage. Professionalisation means that the individual organisations, as well as the whole industry, need to learn knowledge and increase their capability. Networked learning is highly effective in knowledge adaptation and integration as distributed learners' networks, such as CFF, lead to the exchange of more types of information and an increased sense of belongingness (Haythornthwaite, 2002; Jackson & Temperley, 2007). CFF (2019c) is creating a learning community through training courses, workshops and an on-line knowledge hub, and also by connecting otherwise unconnected actors, which allows organisations to gain useful information from others to extend their connections and to improve their capacity (Granovetter, 1985). On top of individual organisations, networks are also valuable for the professionalisation of the whole industry as knowledge absorbed through social ties will be distributed through central actors and the entire network and contribute to the capacity building of the network (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1999). Many foundations in this network also have their own programmes to promote learning and capacity building in the NGO sector, which will be discussed next.

5.4.3   Talent Programmes (Individual Level)

Having relatively more resources and talents in the NGO sector, several foundations initiate programmes aiming to enhance the capability of the NGO sector. The Ginkgo Fellow Programme, started by Narada Foundation (later registered as an independent foundation) in 2010, is a distinguished one, and three leaders of the NGOs interviewed are members of the Ginkgo Fellow Programme. It aims to find and support "social entrepreneurs," to build their

"network leadership," and to achieve industrial "social impact." These are the three pillars of this programme:

5.4.3.1   Social Entrepreneurs. Narada's fundamental funding philosophy is to find a proper pivot to leverage a small investment into a large impact. This pivot is considered to be the human resources or talents in the NGO sector (Yuan, 2015). Therefore, the Ginkgo Fellow Programme aims to discover and support talents in the NGO sector as social entrepreneurs. This idea was adapted from a successful programme in the US, Ashoka Fellows Programme, which coined the term social entrepreneur as people who can alleviate social problems while stimulating social transformations (Alvord et al., 2004; P. Sen, 2007). Ginkgo defines social entrepreneurs as people who are eager to discover social problems and to alleviate them with self-motivation. It invests in young social entrepreneurs who have innovative ideas and certain achievements in solving social problems but who are stuck in a bottleneck due to economic, family, or social factors. The Ginkgo fellows receive a 3-year funding support without any constraint on how to use it, along with learning and capacity-building activities to enhance their personal and professional growth. This initiative is the first of its kind in China, and it was controversial in the beginning because, before that, donations usually went to the most vulnerable people and funding was mainly for specific programmes rather than persons. Ginkgo Foundation (2015, n.p.) believes that such a push will make the fellows future leaders of the NGO sector and change the ecosystem of the NGO sector. Ginkgo uses a metaphor to depict its strategy:

> Real social change originates from people's change. When the soil of the society is
>
> compacted, only the first seeds growing up from it and connecting together can loosen
>
> the clumped soil and allow more trees and flowers to grow and eventually extend into
>
> an oasis. The change-makers with social entrepreneurship are such seeds who are not
>
> walking away from social crisis or injustice but devoting themselves to addressing

these social challenges. Ginkgo aims to find these seeds, to support their activities and

to facilitate them to form self-organised supporting networks so that we can work

hand in hand for the vision of everyone living a life with choice and dignity.

Ginkgo's support mainly takes the form of funding and learning opportunities. It selects and funds distinguished NGO founders, leaders and specific talents such as fundraisers. As learning takes place in social relationships and knowledge can be understood as a socially constructed and shared resource (Kianto & Waajakoski, 2010), the programme organises learning and knowledge-sharing activities such as study tours, seminars, and workshops to encourage interactions and capacity building. It builds a network connecting otherwise unconnected actors who may have been working in their area alone and increases the richness of resource in the network for each one to access. For example, Liu and Ma were two fellows in 2011: Liu was a doctoral candidate in environmental science and involved in mangrove conservation in southeast China, while Ma is a high school drop-out and battling the encroaching desert in northwest China. This programme connected these two young people with different backgrounds but sharing the common goal of environmental protection. Ma said that getting to know other distinct people in this area is more important than funding (Zhu, 2012).

Similar to Ma and Liu and other environmental activists who form a subnetwork through their shared issue area, there is a range of informal subnetworks existing in the fellows' network. Studies show that clusters within a network can be created out of conveniences such as geographic location or service provision, and they can play an important role in improving network effectiveness (Owen-Smith & Powell, 2004; Provan & Sebastian, 1998). An evaluation report of the Ginkgo programme mentions that most members noticed that a range of subnetworks had been naturally formed based on commonalities such as working areas and

approaches, and the members mainly think highly of the support they acquired from these subnetworks (D. Lu, 2014).

Aside from the commonality, some also mentioned that there are segregations between these subnetworks as they may not communicate over disagreements or try to understand the other side but simply avoid them. Some pointed out that this may not benefit the learning of democracy and tolerance, and some suggested encouraging the sharing of each one's life experience apart from work experience to increase the empathy and mutual understanding among members (D. Lu, 2014). It leads to the attention of the interaction in the subnetworks as the performance of the whole network partly relies on the nature of relationships existing within subnetworks, and collective learning is built on commonality and also nurtured by diversity. A favourable environment with committed interest, trust, and shared language, along with actors' exploration and sharing of their tacit knowledge, will facilitate collective learning (Stata, 1989). Also, learning happens when members come to a consensus on the framing of certain issues as they debate the content, and members challenge taken-for-granted knowledge in open dialogues by their practice-informed diverse and novel information (Fiol, 1994). Later there were more collective learning activities based on commonality and, more importantly, on diversity, initiated within the Ginkgo network, such as the "co-operation fund" which supports fellows from different organisations to run a small project together. One fellow from the educational area had such a collaborative project with another fellow from an organisation for female migrant workers and reflected that

> from this co-operation, I had more understanding on the structural obstacles female migrant workers need to face. I learnt the experience of the organisation and its value towards their clients. Also, I got to know the true story of another Ginkgo fellow, and it made me feel more connected and prouder of belonging to this community. Such

collaboration is important as it encourages understanding and consensus and stimulates new ideas and actions. (Ginkgo Foundation, 2019, n.p.)

5.4.3.2 Network Leadership. When organising such learning activities, the fellows themselves play a vital role as they can learn and grow from such experience, and this leads to Ginkgo's second pillar: network leadership. To promote supportive networks among social entrepreneurs, it emphasises building fellows' network leadership which is defined by Ginkgo as the ability to connect with a range of stakeholders and work collaboratively to achieve a win-win situation (Ginkgo Foundation, 2019). It is different from traditional organisational leadership as it does not rely on a leader's authority, nor is it the case that the leader knows the answer and then leads everyone to follow; instead, it requires leaders to find a way to unite different stakeholders and seek resources and solutions together and to multiply their impact (Yuan, 2015). As the initiator and funder of this network, Narada/Ginkgo Foundation plays a strategic role to facilitate the network leadership of its fellows. Organisational scholars identify a type of network administrative organisation (NAO) that carries out planning and coordination in networks (Lorenzoni & Ornati, 1988). Such an NAO may have relatively more resources compared with other members of the networks and plays a role in building the network, managing its activities and providing a centralised location for key activities, supporting other organisations and network-level goals (Hanssen-Bauer & Snow, 1996). However, to facilitate the network's growth, the NAO does not act as the executor of the network even though most of the network activities and decisions are coordinated through the NAO. Instead, it plays the role of a supporter of network leadership (Provan, Fish, & Sydow, 2007). This role is especially important in networks of small organisations or in the inchoate industry which usually lacks the resources or the capability in forming and managing the networks (Human & Provan, 2000). Narada/Ginkgo is such an NAO which administrates the networks and encourages the

network leadership of the fellows in order to enhance their capacity. A "peer committee" was formed in the first fellows' meeting in 2012 to serve this network, and a committee leader is selected by vote. The committee is in charge of designing and implementing communication and learning activities in this network. As Xu said: these social entrepreneurs are full of ideas and energy, and no one can lead them but themselves (NGOCN, 2015).

5.4.3.3 Social Impact. The third pillar of Ginkgo, collective social impact, which aims to collaborate with all stakeholders to promote systemic social change, has a more direct connection with the governmental partnership as it encourages fellows' organisations to interact with stakeholders, including the government, and also being part of the Ginkgo network adds value to the organisations' brands and helps them to gain recognition and resources from the government. One example is Ma, who used to grow trees in the County of Minqin, a small town in northwest China, in an attempt to stop desertification basically on his own. Through Ginkgo's connections, he received wider support from the media, society and a partnership with the local government. His approach has been expanded from simply growing trees to a holistic community economic development approach which includes running a co-operative store, growing profitable plants and selling local products in order to sustain the antidesertification programme and at the same time to stimulate the local economy and increase people's income. The local government is part of implementing this approach and has taken action to shut down mines and to reduce farmland in order to curb desert expansion (D. Lu, 2014).

These three pillars support learning and capacity building on the level of personal (fellows), organisational (fellows' organisation) and also industrial. The programme evaluation finds that fellows working in environmental protection, social work, and migrant workers all have taken actions to support other NGOs outside the Ginkgo networks in the same sector in terms

of knowledge, working methods and technology (D. Lu, 2014). NGOs also join in collective action for a shared goal. Since the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, China has seen a significant rise in productive NGO networks and partnerships to make up for local governments' lack of ability in handling disasters and their aftermath (Hu & Sidel, 2020; Shieh & Deng, 2011). Recently, a number of foundations, such as the Ginkgo Foundation and One Foundation, initiated networks to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic (Ginkgo Foundation, 2020). These crises have energised a previously fragmented NGO sector to demonstrate its worth (Vikse et al., 2017). The rise of networked actions contributes to the growth of the NGO industry, and an increased industrial capacity is associated with the professionalisation of the NGO sector which will, in turn, contribute to governments' awareness of NGOs' potential and NGOs' governmental partnership as discussed in Chapter 3.

5.5 Chapter Summary

After reviewing the network literature and development of foundations in China, this chapter has introduced the NGO networks initiated by the government and foundations. Although government-led initiatives such as charity fairs and incubators provide NGOs with opportunities to connect with each other and with governmental agencies, they may also serve as a tool to co-opt NGOs, and their support is only short-term. In contrast, foundation-initiated networks are more comprehensive and lasting as they work on the multiple levels of the individual, organisational and industrial: of the networks described, the collective advocacy is on the industry level as it attempts to influence the NGO-related policy; the forums aim to build interorganisation networks and the talent programme targets individual changemakers in the NGO sector. These levels can be empirically overlapped, though: the talent programme which focuses on individual NGO leaders also influences their organisations and the whole industry. The impact of such networks on governmental partnerships is two-fold: directly, the networks serve as platforms to connect otherwise

unconnected actors, such as grassroots NGOs and governmental agencies; in an indirect but

more important way, the networks facilitate learning and capacity building on the personal,

organisational and industry level, and thus enhance professionalism which leads to

governments' awareness of NGOs' potentials and their collaboration. The structure and

influence of the foundation-initiated networks are illustrated by the chart in Figure 4. The

networks in this chapter are formal networks as actors are connected by being part of formal

activities such as conferences and signing a petition. The next chapter will focus on informal

networks or *guanxi* in the Chinese NGO sector.

Figure 4

Foundation-Initiated Networks

Foundations-initiated networks
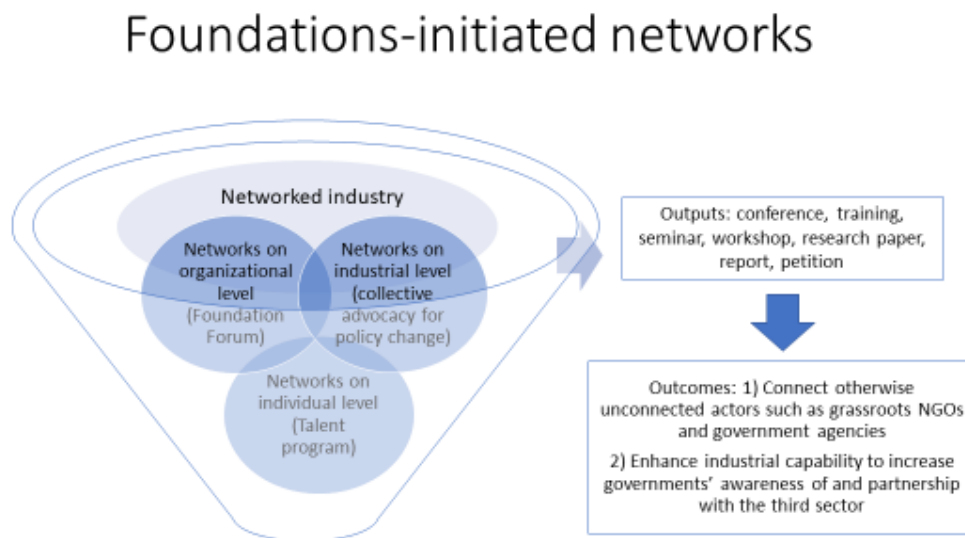
Chapter 6   Fragmented Authoritarianism and NGOs'

Interpersonal Connections (*Guanxi*)

This chapter will discuss the influence of informal interpersonal connections (*guanxi*) on NGOs' relationships with the government. With the background of fragmented authoritarianism, the central government is not powerful enough to ensure every governmental agency implements policies to the same degree, and the institution is not rigid enough to ensure that every civil servant working within it behaves the same, and therefore the behaviour of each political actor can be influenced by other factors, such as *guanxi*. After a literature review on *guanxi*, this chapter will discuss the fragmented institution and policy implementation gap in China and the effects of *guanxi* in this context. Then it will discuss how NGOs use *guanxi* in their interaction with the government via a series of strategies and in different scenarios.

6.1   Literature on *Guanxi*

The previous chapter has discussed formal networks, and this one will move to informal ones. From the literature, relationships in a network can be either formally maintained through contracts and regulations or informally maintained through the common values, norms of reciprocity and trust, which cannot be stated explicitly by formal institutions such as laws or written rules (Kogut, 2000; Provan et al., 2007; Yi Zhang & Zhang, 2006). A network of informal interpersonal relationships is understood as *guanxi* which includes exchanges of favours established for conducting formal activities. *Guanxi* does not only exist in Mainland China but also throughout East Asia, which has been influenced by Confucian cultures (Lovett et al., 1999; Yi Zhang & Zhang, 2006). As a form of social network, *guanxi* has long been identified as one of the major factors for business success as it provides individuals and organisations with the opportunity to acquire useful resources and to gain advantages over

competitors (Braendle et al., 2005; D. B. Hwang et al., 2008). Leaders' information-sharing, interpersonal relationships with key stakeholders, such as government officials and alliance partners, are a basis for the organisation's competitive advantage (Yi Zhang & Zhang, 2006). Of course, making use of social networks in business activities is not uncommon in other cultures; American country clubs, the institutions which create social networks as a solid basis for doing business, are an example in western cultures (Braendle, Gasser, & Noll, 2005). Studies on the western business sector also point out that preexisting relationships, such as information exchanges or friendships, are essential when building a formal partnership with government or other organisations because in successful interorganisation networks, the creation of friendship and information exchanges leads to trust-based business exchanges, and formally constructed networks which lack previous relationships are more likely to fail (Human & Provan, 2000; Provan et al., 2007).

In China, *guanxi* starts from a "*guanxi* base" on which each of the persons shares an important aspect of personal identification, either a blood relationship or social interconnections such as shared hometown, school, workplace, and so on (Tsang, 1998). On top of the *guanxi* base, individuals need to interact, such as through invitations to visit one's home or workplace, eating or having entertainment together, gift exchanges, and interactions on social media, so that they can exchange some favours, build trust and credibility, and thus develop and maintain the relationship (Dunfee & Warren, 2001). The core character of *guanxi* is that it is a relationship based implicitly (instead of explicitly) on mutual benefit (M. M. Yang, 1994). *Guanxi* indicates reciprocal obligations for a continual exchange of favours, especially when assistance is requested; and ideally, individuals in *guanxi* may find support through goodwill and personal affection (Braendle et al., 2005; Dunfee & Warren, 2001; Tsang, 1998). In a society that lacks a strong legal system, *guanxi* may serve as a glue to hold people together with credibility and trust (Lovett, Simmons, & Kali, 1999). This informal

network may also allow people to bypass the inefficient bureaucratic system (Xin & Pearce, 1996). It has long been observed that in China, a strong *guanxi* with government officers can accelerate the bureaucratic process, such as customs clearance, and the day-to-day policy/practice within the government can vary drastically as personnel change; therefore, it is highly recommended for people doing business in China to take time building *guanxi* and finding out who has strong *guanxi* with powerful officials (Alston, 1989). In the NGO sector, when the registration regulation was still strict, and NGOs mostly registered as a business, *guanxi* with tax officers could help them to get a tax exemption (Spires, 2011a). In the case of foundations' collective petition for tax exemption, discussed in the previous chapter, CYDF was the only one to successfully get a tax exemption due to its *guanxi* with the government officers.

Guanxi comprises a range of practices used in widely varying contexts to achieve different objectives and have distinct effects (Dunfee & Warren, 2001; Yi Zhang & Zhang, 2006). Although one result of using *guanxi* can lead to corruption, it is necessary to analyse different types of *guanxi* practice to understand the effect of each one and to determine whether it is ethically problematic, instead of viewing *guanxi* only as a source of corruption (Braendle et al., 2005; Dunfee & Warren, 2001). *Guanxi* in China can be classified in different ways. Based on the commonality of the individuals, *guanxi* can be categorised into 1) family, 2) relatives, 3) friends, and 4) acquaintances (K. S. Yang, 1995) or simplified as blood or social-based *guanxi* (Tsang, 1998). As the family is highly valued in traditional Chinese culture, this pattern of *guanxi* takes a form of a concentric circle with core family members positioned in the centre, and then relatives, friends and acquaintances located on each peripheral layer (M. M. Yang, 1994). Based on the nature of the relationship, *guanxi* can be divided into utilitarian, obligatory, and reciprocal (Yi Zhang & Zhang, 2006). 1) Utilitarian *guanxi* is usually temporary and comes with an immediate gain (Yeung & Tung, 1996). In this *guanxi*,

the favour providers usually have more power, and the recipients usually repay the favour with money or other materials. It is essentially a "fee-for-service" transaction, and little trust or commitment is involved (Fan, 2002). This type of *guanxi* may become extreme and be associated with corruption. But utilitarian *guanxi* is rare in the NGO sector as NGOs are not likely to provide as many material incentives as businesses do to the government. 2) Obligatory *guanxi*, which is based on the Confucianism values of order and harmony, indicates that people connected within a family or an organisation hold obligations to support each other. Those of higher rank have an obligation to help members with lower rank, and those of lower rank have an obligation to follow and support the higher ranks. The influence of obligation may continue even when people have left the organisation; 3) Reciprocal *guanxi* is the most common type; it denotes a reciprocal exchange of favours. It means the recipient of favour is expected to repay the favour with something roughly equivalent in value in the future (Lee et al., 2001). Through the repeated favour exchange, and with trust and commitment, the relationship will be maintained and developed (Su et al., 2003). The later discussion on *guanxi*'s influence on governmental relationships and the strategies to actively use *guanxi* are mainly around the obligatory and reciprocal *guanxi*.

6.2 The Effects of *Guanxi* in the Context of Fragmented Authoritarianism

Fragmented authoritarianism indicates the inconsistent interests and objectives of different governmental departments, and this leads to different attitudes and treatments from different governmental agencies towards NGOs (Fu, 2017). For example, PA2, an overseas NGO, has experienced conflicted attitudes from different governmental agencies. In 2010, it received an award from the Guangdong Communist Youth League but was prohibited from recruiting volunteers from universities by some universities in the same year. The universities which banned PA2 claimed they were ordered by the educational administration; however, it is not clear exactly which department issued this prohibition. The CEO attempted to communicate

with officials in the education branch but failed to get any meaningful answer. After that, PA2 stopped the project involving recruiting college students anyway. This happened before the issue of the relaxed NGO registration policy, and PA2 did not have a legal status at that time. Although the Overseas NGO Management Law issued in 2017 has provided relatively clear guidance on the registration of overseas NGOs, there has not been a law regulating the registration of domestic NGOs. The practice of domestic NGO registration has been based on administrative regulations, but the regulations have been vague and unstable. Although relaxed policies on NGO registration have been in place since 2008, policy ambiguity usually leads to a policy implementation gap, which indicates the difference between the written policy and the policy implemented (Mertha, 2009). When administrative departments lack the necessary guidance and knowledge to implement certain policies, they are reluctant to act unless they have other motivations. In this situation, *guanxi* serves as an alternative motivation to push the administration to act. This section first describes the context of a vague and unstable policy in China, and then uses cases to illustrate how *guanxi* benefits both NGOs and the government in such a context. Policy ambiguity still exists on the issue of NGO registration.

6.2.1   *Unstable and Ambiguous Policy on NGO Registration*

Fragmented authoritarianism leads to policy ambiguity and a gap in implementing registration policy (Mertha, 2009). This is especially the case in the policy of NGO registration. This section will discuss the policy on NGO registration and how *guanxi* influences NGO registration in the context of unstable and ambiguous policies.

Acquiring a registration is important as it indicates the government's recognition and acceptance of the NGO and also serves as the foundation for governmental purchase of social services and other forms of formal governmental support such as tax deductions and

subsidies (Yuanfeng Zhang, 2015). Operating without legal status means not only fewer chances for governmental support or partnership but also increased risk of being condemned as illegal and even facing criminal sanctions (G. Deng, 2010; International Center for NPO Law, 2020). Authoritarian states often view NGOs as a natural threat to state power and harshly suppress NGOs by setting demanding registration standards, such as approvals from multiple government actors (Clarke, 1998; Hu & Guo, 2016; Spires, 2011a). There has been abundant research on the challenges faced by NGOs in China when they attempt to register as a social organisation with civil affairs departments (G. Deng, 2010; Spires, 2011a; J. Wang & Wang, 2018; F. Wu & Chan, 2012; Yuanfeng Zhang, 2015). One of the main constraints discussed is the so-called "dual management system" which requires the NGO to have a government agency as its supervisory agency to get a registration (State Council, 1998b). Due to the importance of registration, it is necessary to look into the factors associated with the successful registration of NGOs.

On the one hand, there has been a policy shift towards easier registration for at least some NGOs since 2008. This relaxed control has been demonstrated in a series of central and local level policies. As there has not yet been any legislation on the issue of registration, the management of registration is mainly based on a range of administrative regulations from central to local levels. Although the central-level regulation has required a supervisory agency as a precondition for registration since 1989 (State Council, 1998a), a series of local-level pilot regulations have denoted a shift in NGO-related policies, as reform in China usually takes the model that progresses from local experiments to a nationwide adaptation (Florini et al., 2012; June Wang, 2018). In 2008, the city of Shenzhen, as the laboratory for experiments in the reform era (Zeng, 2010), started to allow certain types of NGOs to register directly (People's Government of Shenzhen, 2008). The permitted categories vary in different government agencies and change over time. Generally, the categories include public interest,

charity, social welfare and social service. This test was recognised by the central government. In 2009, the MoCA co-operated with the Shenzhen government and signed an agreement outlining reforms relating to the registration of NGOs, which indicates the intention to "explore establishing a system whereby social organisations can apply and register directly with civil affairs department. MoCA regards this as a point for observation, tracing, and research" (Ministry of Civil Affairs & People's Government of Shenzhen, 2009). On the central level, in 2013, the State Council (2013b, sec. 8) issued an agenda on legalising direct registration of social organisations which fit into the classifications of industrial/commerce association, technology, public interest and charity, community service.

Such policies paved the way for many NGOs to get direct registration; however, this did not terminate all the challenges faced by NGOs when they apply for registration due to the policy implementation gap and the unstable nature of the policy.

Firstly, the policy implementation gap indicates differences between the policies made by the central-level government and actual implementation outcomes generated at local levels (Ran, 2013). Such a gap could be hard to avoid when the task of implementing the policy is assigned to many agents whose bureaucratic interests may contradict the policy goal (Matland, 1995). Due to the limited financial and human resources of some local governments, especially after a series of tax reforms which significantly diminished local governments' fiscal income (L. C. Li, 2007; Zhan, 2009), local governments can only selectively implement certain policies (O'Brien & Li, 1999), and economic development and fiscal revenue are prioritised (Zhan & Qin, 2017). Besides, as gross domestic product (GDP) carries the most significance in the evaluation of local government performance, most of them would invest primary efforts in the quantifiable and presentable aspects of their duties, such as economic growth and infrastructure construction, while the intangible aspects such as democratic governance and social organisation development are less prioritised (Zhan & Qin,

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2017). Therefore, the policy related to social organisation registration may not be carried out as it is not cost effective, especially when the upper level government fails to encourage local governments to fully implement the policy by providing appropriate political, financial, and moral incentives (Ran, 2013).

Furthermore, policy ambiguity is another cause for the implementation gap as the written policies are not clear enough to guide the practice (Zhan & Qin, 2017). It has been observed that the policies often use vague words such as "shall" and "encourage" rather than more forceful and binding words such as "must" (Ran, 2013). The lack of articulated commands forces lower level governments to carefully guess the true intentions of their superiors and specific methods to carry out the "spirit" of the commands (Zhan & Qin, 2017). Regarding the policy of encouraging the development of social organisations, the policies from the higher level government only point out the direction of streamlining the government, which is to simplify the bureaucratic process and to transfer governmental functions to social organisations, yet the specific means to realising the intention are not clear (State Council, 2013a). The policy ambiguity, the withholding of important information of policy goals and means, can be a deliberate strategy to serve a range of purposes though, such as increasing flexible local implementation in the face of vast cross-regional variation, encouraging local innovation and reducing the upper level government's accountability for potential policy failures (Zhan & Qin, 2017).

As policies tend to have too many connotations and are subject to multiple interpretations, this ambiguity has essentially increased the degree of subjective judgement of administrative agencies in practice. For example, Article 11 of the regulation on registration stipulates that in any of the following circumstances, the administration for registration should reject the application and explain the reasons to the applicant: 1) there is evidence to show the organisation does not comply with the requirements of Article 4 of this Regulation (which

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includes "do no harm to the interests of the nation, society and citizens, do not violate social values") .... 3) There have already been similar organisations operating in the area and therefore it is not necessary to establish a new one (State Council, 1998a).

The words *national interests*, and *social value* are hard to define, and terms like *not necessary* are also subjective. Similarly, the definition of the categories of "public interest, charity, community service" is unclear, and the judgement on whether an NGO fits into one of these categories permitted for direct registration is subjective. Constrained by the ambiguous policy and limited resources, many local governments tend to do nothing, unless explicitly told otherwise, to avoid risk and cost. Therefore, although central and provincial levels of governments have issued "opinions" to allow direct registration, it is not uncommon that the registration application is rejected by the local civil affairs department as the government claims they "have not yet received any concrete practice guideline" (Ma, 2013; interviews in 2018).

PF is an example of failing to register as it seems to contradict "social value." PF is an organisation that serves and supports the LGBT group. In around 2012, when the signal of relaxed control was seen, PF went through all channels attempting to get registration under the Chinese name of "Families and Friends of Homosexuals Association." It eventually received an oral rejection from the government, saying: "there is no law saying homosexual is legal; therefore, this won't proceed for now" (H. Ma, 2013). The experience of another NGO, which is connected to the incubator CB1, shows different government officers could have different judgements on what is "necessary." This NGO is a group of young people who advocate for cycling and low carbon emissions. In 2012, when they first looked for a direct registration in Yuexiu District where their office was located, staff in the civil affairs bureau told them "an organisation consisting of university students like this can register as a volunteer group under the Youth League of CCP; it's not necessary to register as an

independent social organisation." Then, they turned to another district in the same city where the government officers are more open-minded, and their registration was soon approved in the second district (H. Ma, 2013, Interview 23).

Another challenge is the changing nature of policies. On the issue of registration, as there has never been formal legislation, and the central-level regulation has never been revised, local policies are based on higher level government "opinions," which release different signals across time. The 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party set the tone of streamlining the state institution and transforming government functions. In 2013, the State Council (2013b) made the plan to "*reduce* administrative examinations as the key to transforming government functions" (para. 17), but in 2018, the opinion of the central-level government became to "*strengthen* [social organisations'] registration examinations" (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2018b, sec. 2). These words denote the shifts in the state direction and affect local practice in the government and NGOs.

An experienced NGO leader in Anhui province described the experience under this changing policy during the past decade: in 2011, MoCA wanted to push forward direct registration and set Anhui as a pilot site. In May 2013, the People's Government of Anhui Province issued an opinion on social organisations to promote direct registration. Half a year later, the capital city of Anhui made a set of detailed working methods to guide the governmental practice in encouraging the development of social organisations and purchasing social services from the NGO sector (Hua, 2013). It led to a large number of direct registrations in 2014 and 2015. However, in 2016, in the meeting with governmental agencies, it was mentioned that the set of working methods should be downplayed, and the words "advance innovation" became "correct (规范)." Such signals indicated a trend of retightening control over NGOs (Interview 13).

The vagueness and inconsistency of policies on social organisations' registration can be particularly seen in the opinion issued by the MoCA in October 2018. It requires governmental agencies to

> strengthen the investigation on registration … until the release of Social Organisation Management Regulations and classification standards and specific measures for the direct registration by the MoCA, governments all over the country should strictly and tightly deal with the application for direct registration and explore cautiously. (sec. 2.2)

It essentially reveals that 10 years after the first experiment of direct registration in Shenzhen, the nationwide practice guidelines have still not been made, and the policy remains vague. This opinion further elaborates:

> regarding the areas which have already made specific working methods on direct registration, if they decide to suspend it, deal with the transition properly with explanations; if they decide to continue exploring, make sure to strictly investigate the application and not to expand the scope; for the areas which have not made such methods, the acceptance of direct registration application can be suspended. (sec. 2.2)

This opinion was interpreted as a discouraging attitude from the central government on the direct registration method of NGOs. Accordingly, around the same time this government opinion was released in 2018, it was widely observed and reported that in some areas the government suspended the direct registration application process and some required social organisations which had already been directly registered to get a supervising unit or to lose their legal status (X. Lu, 2019). This was also mentioned by some of the interviewees.

In addition, this opinion of the central government reveals the inconsistency in the management of NGO registration across the country. It also implies that in the environment of unstable policies, it is cost saving for administrative departments not to react immediately

after a new policy is released as this new policy could be changed soon and thus makes the effort of implementing it a waste of time. Overall, in the face of the vague and unstable policy environment, administrative departments tend to do nothing to avoid the risk of doing things wrong and to save the cost, unless there are other motivations nudging them to act. *Guanxi* serves as the alternative motivation, and it is to be discussed next.

6.2.2 The Importance of Guanxi for NGOs

The lack of coherent policy makes organisations turn to informal connections as substitutes (Xin & Pearce, 1996). Without sufficient institutional support, *guanxi* can play an important role in NGOs' registration whether or not the policy is relatively eased. When a supervisory agency is the prerequisite for registration, a strong *guanxi* with the state is essential for registration. The supervisory agency acts as a sponsor vouching for the NGO's behaviours, and *guanxi* means understanding and trust, which allows the government agency to trust the organisation they are sponsoring to not cause trouble. It has stopped many grassroots NGOs who lack governmental *guanxi* from getting registration as few state actors like to endorse an organisation that they barely know or trust. Besides, a formal registration brings tax obligations. Getting a tax exemption can be hard for grassroots NGOs without a governmental tie, and this also keeps some NGOs away from registration (J. Chen, 2011; Spires, 2011a; Yuanfeng Zhang, 2015).

Even after the policies are eased to some extent, the implementation of the new policies is subjective due to the lack of practice guidance and clear definition, as discussed before. Such uncertainty creates grey areas instead of a clear-cut *yes* or *no*. NGOs with a strong *guanxi* with certain people in charge may get a "yes" as a favour-exchange. However, the "yes" can suddenly turn to "no" along with a personnel change.

One example is EN1, an environmental protection organisation monitoring industrial pollution. It was started in 2003 and registered in 2015 with the environmental protection bureau as its sponsor (but not an official supervisory agency written in the document), and personnel change has now put it at risk of losing its legal status. In the beginning, several characters of EN1 posed challenges to its relationship with the government and left it unregistered for the first 10 years of its work: 1) it is a grassroots organisation without strong government ties; 2) EN1 monitors and exposes toxic waste from factories which bring tax income, and this put the government under pressure to deal with the issue; 3) EN1 mainly relied on foreign funds during its early years, and this may cause concern for the government. Actually, it is not uncommon for an authoritarian state, such as China, or Russia, to restrict domestic NGOs from receiving foreign funds (Hu & Guo, 2016); 4) EN1 is working in an inland province Anhui, which is less developed regarding the NGO sector. In 2014, the number of registered social organisations in Anhui was less than half of that of Guangdong (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2020), and in 2012 while there were 722 social organisations directly registered in Guangdong (Du, 2012), the number in Anhui was 154 (G. Wang, 2014).

Therefore, it was relatively hard to get a registration during the early years of EN1. As told by the project manager of EN1, in 2015, a person who had *guanxi* with the NGO's leader was made the chief of the district environmental protection bureau. Under the new chief's influence, the environmental protection bureau issued a supporting letter to the civil affairs bureau to get EN1 registered. But in their official registration documents, there is no supervisory agency listed. Later, as their contact transferred, the new person in charge did not recognise their endorsement for EN1 anymore. The annual review of registered NGOs requires written opinions from the supervisory agency (Anhui Civil Affairs Bureau, 2020), but EN1 has not been able to get that opinion since then. Interestingly, another grey area is that "the civil affairs bureau can let you pass the annual review even if you don't have the

sign-off from your supervisory agency" (Interview 15). However, its initial registration would only last for 4 years (until the end of 2019), and it has been warned that it may not be able to renew its registration if it fails to provide a governmental endorsement (Interview 15).

EN1's experience shows that personal *guanxi* with the person in charge can be decisive in attaining certain results. However, grassroots NGOs may not have *guanxi* from the beginning, and even if they have, in the context of unclear and unstable policies, the result may not last long as the person in charge could be transferred. Therefore, rather than passively waiting for *guanxi* to play a role or leaving *guanxi* informal and personal, NGOs need to actively take actions to build *guanxi* and to make the best use of *guanxi*. After describing the importance of guanxi for the government, the next part will discuss NGOs' actions regarding the creation and maintenance of *guanxi* with the government.

6.2.3   *The Importance of Guanxi for the Government*

Before moving to the discussion on NGOs' strategies in leveraging *guanxi* with people in the government, it is necessary to know that *guanxi* with people in the NGO sector sometimes can also be important to people in the government to attain the government's goal.

In the implementation of certain innovative policies which are advantageous to NGOs, *guanxi* can be important for both civil servants and NGOs. On the macrolevel, the whole Reform and Opening is considered as a learning process which is described as "crossing the river by feeling for the stones" (Florini, Lai, & Tan, 2012, p. 27). It means it is a process of doing while learning. At the beginning of implementing an innovative policy, the frontline civil servant may not have sufficient knowledge on how to do it, especially when detailed guidelines are not provided. In this situation, *guanxi* can essentially make up for the lack of information and knowledge and be a stepping stone for the civil servants to cross the river of reform. In administrative reforms, the policy on governmental function transformation

encourages the government to delegate responsibility for social service provision to social organisations. When frontline administrations are required to purchase social services from NGOs, the civil servants who may not know how to implement them will resort to *guanxi* as a substitute for the lack of knowledge.

Reform in China usually starts from a small-scale test and then gradually expands to the whole if it proves successful. Regarding separating the society from the state and delegating social service provision to social organisations, industrial associations were the first test ground. Industrial associations, which used to be incorporated in the state apparatus, have been gradually separated from the state and become independent social organisations since the 2000s. Inevitably, industrial associations keep strong interpersonal *guanxi* with the state even after this separation as long as they are staffed by the same people. So, when the government started to purchase social services from social organisations, this *guanxi* played an important role. One example happened in the city of S. When one of the governmental departments, D, had a budget to purchase a social service project from social organisations, it had little knowledge of the outsourcing and purchasing process. As the leaders in the SW association (an industrial association) and D had a good personal relationship, the SW association helped department D draft the requirements on the invitation to tender for D's contract and invited several agencies to bid together. Naturally, the SW association won the contract, and it then entrusted hundreds of community service centres with implementing the project as a hub organisation (Interview 21).

In the situation of insufficient information, *guanxi* makes up for knowledge and saves time and cost. At that time, the SW association may have been the only organisation which had the resources and capacity to design the project and to delegate community organisations to run the project so that the scope of the project could be maximised. With the development of other NGOs, the increasing knowledge of the government on purchasing social services and

the formalisation of the purchasing process, the influence of *guanxi* could be reduced. But SW association still has a strategic advantage compared with other NGOs entering in this competition for the governmental contract as they have already taken actions to make personal level *guanxi* into a formal networked relationship. This strategy will be discussed in the next section.

6.3   NGOs' Strategies in Leveraging *Guanxi* With People in the Government

NGOs' interaction with the government is essentially the interaction with people who work in the government. The behaviours of civil servants are situated by the macrolevel institution as well as by the microlevel individual cases. When the institution is not detailed and rigid enough to ensure the universal behaviour of different civil servants, it leaves space for individual NGOs to take actions to exert influence. Three aspects of their actions will be discussed next: being sensitive to and making the best use of fleeting opportunities, changing the informal personal-level *guanxi* to formal organisational-level relationships, and building mutual understanding.

6.3.1   *Seize the Political Opportunity*

The political environment in China poses uncertainties in the NGO–government relationship. A changing political opportunity can bring in either mobilisation or repression, as happened in China from the Hu administration (2003–2012) to the Xi administration (2012–present). As the policies are not stable, it is important to remain sensitive to the policy changes and react fast when seeing the signals of an advantageous political environment, especially for NGOs which do not have a strong personal *guanxi*. As an industrial supporting organisation, CB2 gained registration in 2011 and helped other grassroots organisations to get registration when the policy was relatively relaxed. The leader of CB2, Jiang, considers they took this opportunity by "being persistent" (Interview 13). Jiang said when they applied for

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registrations, they needed to go to government agencies almost every day. Sometimes the applications were returned by the government many times, each time with new feedback. So, they brought a laptop to the agency so they could talk with the government officers and revise their applications on site. She considers

> all these hassles might be a way for the government to screen. Some organisations may not really do anything even when they are registered. This is a test to show you really want to get things done. It actually takes an argument for people to know each other. After all these efforts, the staff in the government said they admired our resolution. (Interview 13)

Taking advantage of the policy means a thorough comprehension of the policy and being aware that rejection by the government may result from civil servants' lack of knowledge of the policy. As CB2 pointed out, sometimes the staff in the government did not know about the content of the policy, so the NGO workers would bring the printed policies with underlining, to show the civil servants to prove that what they were applying for was backed by the policy (Interview 13).

In addition to a favourable policy, the political opportunity can be having an open-minded government officer in charge. CB1 is an incubator for supporting community organisations initiated by the district-level government. As discussed in Chapter 5, the government-initiated incubators tend to be window dressing or a "deputy government" which interferes with the NGOs' development. But CB1 differs from other government-initiated incubators as the person in charge of this governmental agency is more open-minded and has a passion for NGOs' development (Interview 5). This government officer admits that: "this emerging area, such as charity or social organisations, is new to the government. We are actually the student, and we need to learn from these organisations" (Liu, 2014). The government agency involved in the initiation process positioned itself as a service-oriented government which provides

only working space and necessary resources, and the board of directors, which is independent of the government, has full autonomy for decision making. The staff of CB1 said: "I thought an incubator initiated by the government would be dominated by the government, but I do not feel this way in this organisation" (Liu, 2014). Taking the opportunity of a specific open-minded government officer is possible to bolster the independent development of NGOs.

6.3.2   *From an Informal Relationship to a Formal Partnership*

As discussed above, *guanxi* can be decisive in the system with a lack of clear and stable policies. However, the effects of interpersonal *guanxi* may not last long, as shown by the previous cases. Therefore, it is necessary to transfer interpersonal *guanxi* to interorganisational *guanxi* and transfer informal relationships to formal partnerships.

Transferring interpersonal to interorganisational *guanxi* means formally institutionalising the relationship between organisations. For example, in the previous cases, EN1 got its endorsement from the governmental agency via a personal *guanxi*, but it did not institutionalise this supporting relationship by making the governmental agency its supervisory agency on the legal document. This relationship stayed on a personal level rather than the organisational level and evaporated with personnel changes.

One way to the organisational-level relationship is by participation, as the case of EDU2 discussed in Chapter 5. In addition to building personal *guanxi* and trust with local officials by continuous communications, EDU2 also involves the local government in programme design and implementation. "NGO" used to be a strange concept to local governments; only through communication and participation can the local officials really understand what the NGO is doing. Seeing the changes the NGO has made and being involved as part of the effort, the local officers support the NGO because they recognise the organisation's work, rather than simply doing a friend a favour. As the leader of EDU2 said:

the local officers, like the mayor and chief of the education bureau, recognise our work, and they personally donate to our programme. The local governments issue official notice to introduce our programme to all schools in their area, and we have also been introduced by the educational bureau to schools and recommended by one mayor to another. (Interview 14)

This supporting relationship based on the organisation rather than an individual is less susceptible to personnel shift and more likely to expand.

Nevertheless, the challenges in transferring relationships from personal to organisational level are worth noting. The interpersonal *guanxi* can be essentially based on personal characteristics and, therefore, be hard to transfer. For example, the founder of EDU1 is a 70-year-old, well-resourced, well-connected businessman from Hong Kong. When he showed his care and passion for China's rural education, naturally, he moved and inspired many people to support his efforts in setting up an NGO working for education equality. But his age does not permit him to attend the day-to-day operation of the NGO. When he handed over the management and operation to staff who are much younger and inexperienced, it was difficult for the staff to copy the founder's influence and sophistication in relationship building. To the extreme, some local government officers' support of a project may come from a certain hidden agenda of favour exchange with a specific person. One incident was a leader of a governmental agency of J County in west China who once asked the project manager whether the founder of EDU1 can do him a favour, transferring him to work in Beijing, perhaps because the founder appeared to be a prestigious person to him. The inexperienced project manager was surprised and rejected the request. This project manager later told the founder about this "request" as an anecdote, and the founder responded that "for this type of person you may need to give him some 'sweets' (好处), like gifts." The project manager was surprised again and did not know how to "give sweets" to maintain the *guanxi*

with that government. One year later, when a signed agreement came to an end, the J County decided not to renew the agreement (Interview 3).

This shows that personal *guanxi* alone may not sustain a long-term output. Nevertheless, it is common for Chinese NGOs to rely on the founder's personal charisma and connection (H. Li, 2019). To ensure a lasting outcome without being interrupted by leadership or personnel changes, other aspects of organisational development, such as organisational professionalisation and capacity building, are also important, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 5.

6.3.3   Mutual Understanding and Trust

As Wang, the head of China Philanthropy Research Institute, once pointed out in a meeting of CFF,

> the best basis for trust is mutual understanding between the government and NGOs. You need to know what the government cares about and what it is doing, and at the same time, let the government know what you care about and what you are doing. Without this mutual understanding, trust does not exist. If you don't know what the performance indicators of government departments are, how do you coordinate with the government? (China Foundation Forum, 2020)

The mutual understanding between an NGO and a governmental agency can come from an intermediary which links the otherwise unconnected parties. It would be hard for an NGO, a stranger and outsider, to initiate a partnership with the local government, especially in areas with an unfledged NGO sector, because the government may neither understand the NGO's intention nor trust that they will not bring in risks. But if the NGO is introduced to the government by an actor who has legitimacy, it is more likely for the NGO to be accepted by the government too. EDU1 built partnerships with governments via the introduction of foundations run by the state-owned enterprise or prestigious public universities in a series of

provinces (as mentioned in Chapter 5). The legitimacy of these state-related actors is transferred to the NGO and makes the governments believe the NGO belongs to the same team instead of being an outsider.

After an initial interaction, continuous communication is also important to deepen understanding and nurture trust. As the leader of EDU2 mentioned (discussed in Chapter 4), they make sure they know what the government is busy with by regular communication and make efforts to support the government officers before expecting the government to support them in return. In fact, the lower level governments are usually under high pressure from the higher level authorities, such as regarding the target of poverty alleviation, and the task of "maintaining stability" (维稳).

Failing to understand their concern and pressure may lead to the government's reluctance to support the NGO's programme. Among the provinces EDU1 has programmes in, there have been a few counties where the partnership with the government did not last long. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, and the project manager considers part of the reason was the lack of maintenance of *guanxi* with government officers and thus the lack of mutual understanding. During the interaction with J County (where the partnership did not last long), there was one time when the project manager tried to impress the local officers about the volunteer teachers' accomplishments; she mentioned that the volunteers would do community research and get to know the local environment on top of the regular job of teaching. She did not expect this to actually concern the local officer. Her audience looked very concerned and said: "What do you mean by community research? What's the purpose of getting to know the community? What are they going to say to others about the community?" Later, the project manager learnt that this area is relatively closed, and the government officers were more worried about their "image" (形象) to the outside world. By telling this

incident, the project manager admits she should have had more knowledge of the local government's needs and concerns instead of simply focusing on selling what the NGO thought was good (Interview 3).

6.4 *Guanxi*-Related Strategies of an NGO Without a Formal Governmental Partnership

The previous cases are mostly about the NGOs that have a collaborative or complementary type of partnership with the government. For NGOs without a formal partnership with the government, *guanxi* can still be important for undertaking their mission. As stated by the graduated control model, the Chinese government tends to support the NGOs which can share the state burden but represses those potentially posing threats to the state power. NGOs serving LGBT groups, such as PF, belong to the latter category, and it faces more challenges in its interaction with the government.

First of all, it has not been registered, partly because it missed the advantageous policy window of relatively relaxed regulation. In around 2014, when PF was rejected from registration, it was informed that if it changed the word "homosexual" in its organisational name to a subtle one, like "rainbow," they could get a registration. In fact, there are other NGOs serving LGBT groups registered successfully using a subtle name. However, destigmatising the word homosexual and making it normal to use in China is one of the NGO's missions, and the founder considers the deliberate change of name would be against its own values (Interview 18). It gave up acquiring a registration and missed the opportunity of a relatively eased policy. The shrinking space for NGOs, especially those working on sensitive issues, has become more and more evident since 2014 and has been observed by many scholars (Fu, 2017). In the LGBT area, a high-profile event, Shanghai PRIDE Festival, was called to a halt after running for 12 years (ShanghaiPRIDE, 2020). It became less likely

for NGOs working for the LGBT people's rights to get a registration. According to the leader of PF, the government is reluctant to accept the NGOs supporting LGBT groups because: 1) it politicises homosexuality: the issue of homosexuality is linked to western political ideology such as human rights and freedom, which may pose threats to the ideology of the authoritarian government; 2) it treats homosexuality as a lifestyle: the lack of sex education, means homosexuality is considered a rotten lifestyle and homosexual people as simply morally lost; 3) diversity is feared: harmony, uniformity and conformity are valued over diversity which is associated with chaos (Interview 18).

Working in this sensitive area, PF has faced a lot of challenges from the government to its operation, and the absence of legal status causes difficulties in fundraising; but this NGO has found ways to survive and thrive. For example, to address the issue of the legal status of the organisation, it set up a programme affiliated with a state-related foundation to raise funds like many other unregistered NGOs (Shieh, 2017; Spires, 2011a); to evade potential interference from the government, it has moved the venue of its national seminar to cruise ships since 2017. Among its strategies in an adverse context, building *guanxi* and interpersonal influence are essential for its operation. The leader emphasised the importance of interacting with the government in nonviolent and nonantagonistic ways. Three aspects of the interaction with the government were discussed:

The first one is to influence policymakers by communicating within the policy frame, mainly by applying for registration. During 2011–2013, the founder had made efforts for registration. Although they failed due to the name, the leader still considered the communication in this process a positive experience. As he said:

> at least the chief of the civil affairs bureau did listen to my speech for 20 minutes. I
> was asked by the government why I have to stick to the name. I said whether the
> name is allowed to be used is exactly part of my work. The civil affairs bureau did

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have two formal discussions about our registration on their meetings and decided to "consult with MoCA first." They wrote a letter to MoCA and eventually got a reply as "put on hold." However, that was still a warm interaction between us. At least both sides listened to each other and tried to understand each other's appeal and difficulties. (Interview 18)

The second is to influence frontline low-rank civil servants, especially when controls became tighter in 2014 when it got more difficult to do any public advocacy. In fact, they used to organise big events in an attempt to expand the visibility of the LGBT group. In 2012, they even organised a "pride month" in south China in collaboration with the U.S. Consulate-General, Guangzhou, and it did not get them into any trouble with the authorities. But since 2014, there has been "national security" (国保) at nearly every session of their event. According to the founder, "it is necessary to change your own mindset in this environment." He explained:

I used to be more defensive and antagonistic as I thought: "why on earth do you come to pick on me?" However, being antagonistic only makes a zero-sum result; either I destroy you, or you destroy me. Instead of destroying the ones on the opposite side, we want to influence people. Frank communication and open conversation are the way to influence people, and by continuously influencing individual person one after another, we can gradually change the social environment. So, when the police come to our event, I'll show them our agenda and ask for their advice. We want to build trust with them rather than creating an enemy. The police are doing this by the command of their superiorities, and they're only doing their job. I would ensure them we won't cause trouble, and we welcome their suggestions. And they may suggest us, like "now it's close to the national labour day, you'd better push it a bit later." And

we would take the advice. We're doing something good, and we need to sit down and

talk to make them see it. (Interview 18)

Talking to the police is part of person-to-person influence, which is incorporated into their

working strategies. The relationship between NGOs and the government is essentially the

relationship between individuals working in an NGO and those in a government agency.

Having conversations with these individuals and building understanding and trust with them

are the precondition to influencing them.

The last aspect is to increase the visibility of the group it serves by using the language which

resonates with the state's values. It has been observed that the way an issue is framed is

important in the NGOs' interaction with the government (Mertha, 2009; Qiaoan, 2018). In

2017, China Netcasting Services Association, an industrial association supervised by the

National Radio and Television Administration, released a regulation banning the depiction of

vulgar content and "abnormal sexual behaviours," homosexuality included, in all online

audiovisual content (J. Qian, 2017). After that, PF China encouraged parents of LGBT people

to write letters to the association telling their own stories and true experiences, especially

those who work inside the state apparatus. According to PF, when the authority made the

regulation, the regulators only considered homosexuality as a label rather than in terms of

real human beings. The intention of the parents writing letters was to rip off the label and

show that homosexuals are real human beings with normal families. It aimed to raise the

resonance with people of authority by leveraging the stress on family connections and values.

The leader of PF said,

I heard people saying that they do not think homosexuality is something normal by

saying, "I don't know any gay people." That's why we need to increase the visibility,

to make them see normal people. When we speak out and make ourselves visible, we

are building *guanxi* with others and being influential.

As the letters are written by the parents, they usually frame the purpose of decreasing stigma and increasing visibility as for the "harmony of the family." As harmony is a keyword of both traditional Chinese values and government propaganda, this way of framing wins it a certain space to continue its work. It is also making efforts to increase its visibility to society apart from the government. One of its biggest annual events is a national "conversation seminar" (恳谈会), which is also a term used by the state to indicate its democratic consultation mechanism, which involves the public in governance and decision making on the local level (Lang, 2009). This event creates an inclusive and mutual support atmosphere for LGBT people and encourages understanding and acceptance inside families. Attended by thousands of LGBT people and their families, the scale of this event and its publicity on social media enhance the visibility of the group to society. The way PF interprets and leverages *guanxi* essentially expands the concept of *guanxi* from direct person-to-person exchange to a broader interpersonal/intergroup influence aiming to change people's existing viewpoints. This type of influence is created by raising the resonance for different people around shared values, such as the stress on the family.

6.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature on *guanxi* and then studied *guanxi*'s effects on NGO–government relationships. *Guanxi* can be decisive in a fragmented system which lacks clear and stable policies. However, personal *guanxi* alone is not sufficient to sustain a long-term effect. To make the best use of *guanxi*, NGOs need to seize the opportunity to build *guanxi* on an organisational level, and to create and maintain mutual understanding. To understand and collaborate with the government, it is necessary to understand people working in the government and what kind of institutional pressure they are under. Even for NGOs which do not have a formal partnership with the government, building personal *guanxi* and interpersonal influence are also essential to achieve the vision. This expands the concept of

guanxi from specific person-to-person favour exchanges to broader influences on people's awareness on certain issues. The strategies to build *guanxi* in terms of interpersonal influences include influencing policymakers by communicating within the policy frame, influencing frontline low-rank civil servants in day-to-day work and increasing the visibility by using the language which resonates with the state's values. For NGOs, the most important part of *guanxi* is to maintain a reciprocal type of *guanxi* and to build mutual understanding and trust. After all, the relationship between government and NGOs is essentially the relationship between people in the government and people in NGOs.

Chapter 7   Power and Partnership Outcomes—Other Themes in the Partnership Process

Before heading to the last empirical chapter, it is worth reviewing the analytical framework. At the end of Chapter 1, I proposed an analytical framework for understanding NGO–government partnerships (see Figure 5).

Apart from the variables/factors of NGOs and the variances in NGO–government partnerships, this framework incorporates a three-stage partnership-forming process: design, implementation and outcome. In the first stage of the process, designing the partnership, one step is to identify the initial resource and power balance. In the final stage, the outcome, it is necessary to evaluate the changes brought about by the partnership to the actors involved and to the power balance (Selsky & Parker, 2005). This chapter will elaborate on the issue of power and the partnership outcomes, especially how to deal with negative outcomes.

Figure 5

Analytical Framework
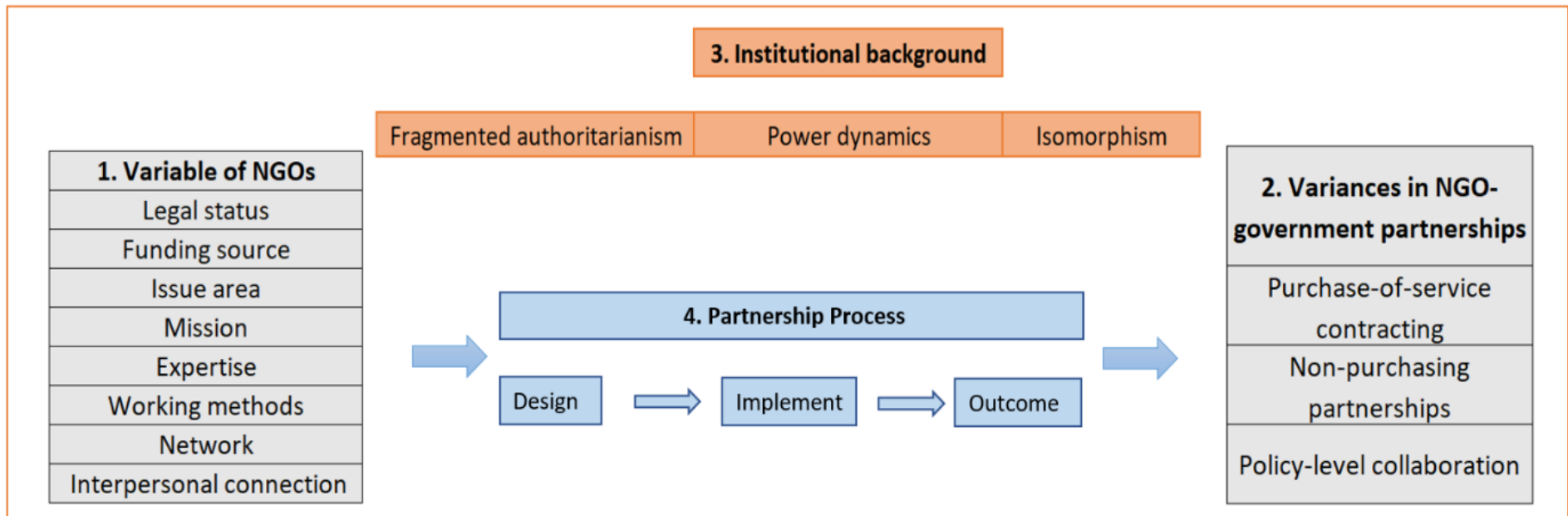
7.1 Power Dynamics Between NGOs and Governments

The issue of power has been mentioned in each of the previous themes. Although the authoritarian regime seems to make a powerful government, the fragmented system indicates power differences among various political actors. Based on the resource dependence theory, the resources NGOs can provide to share the governments' burden also potentially give NGOs more power in their interactions. Globally, the power of NGOs has increased in recent decades in relation to the government in developing countries (Haque, 2007), and in China, NGOs have also expanded their influence to the extent of sharing power with the government at the local level (Yuen, 2018). This trend draws attention to the analysis of the power balance between NGOs and the government, especially local governments, in order to understand NGO–government relationships in post-reform China.

7.1.1 Power and Resources of Local Governments

"Local government" is a relative term, depending on the scope of the discussion. In this thesis, it mainly means the lowest level at the county and village/street level, as they are the closest government apparatuses to the targets of the NGOs' service provision. Local governments' power is partly from their domination of access to local people, who are potential beneficiaries of NGOs. Local governments have power over and affect whether NGOs can attain their goals by influencing NGOs' contact with local people.

When NGOs enter into a new environment, they often look for local partners to help them attain their goals. Local governments are usually such partners who help NGOs to gain access to their programme targets by means of connecting them with local people and granting them legitimacy. The government officers can connect NGOs with people in the field to support programme implementation, and, in some cases, the endorsement of the government could

win NGOs the recognition and support of local people. As stated by the CEO of PA1, the overseas NGOs need local partners to access the beneficiaries and to implement projects:

> In the early days, we didn't have a lot of choices in local partners to implement projects. There were not many competent domestic NGOs during the 1990s, and we had few opportunities to collaborate with universities at that time. So, we chose to work with the governments as the government was making efforts to attract overseas investments and capitals as well. China has a "big" government, and things could be easier if consented to by the governments. When we entered Yunnan Province (in 1991), we worked with the former Foreign Trade Commission which later became part of the Department of Commerce. As we are working in the provinces with ethnic minorities, we also collaborate with Ethnic Affairs Commissions. On the issue of poverty alleviation, we partner with Poverty Alleviation Offices, and we co-operate with the educational department for educational projects. (Interview 12)

On the other hand, as local governments in less developed areas need external resources to help with service provision, the NGOs' tangible and intangible resources give them power over the governments in some ways. For example, the interviewee from an overseas NGO did not feel the government was in a powerful and authoritarian position in his interaction with the government. Instead, he described the government as friendly ("greeting us with Hada"), respectful ("did not ask us to do things we did not want to"), and even disadvantaged ("they seemed not sure what they want to do") (Interview 20). Bourdieu posits that there are four forms of capital: economic, social, symbolic and cultural (Bourdieu, 2018). Economic capital consists of money and other financially based possessions; social capital refers to the trust and reciprocity that exist in social relationships; symbolic capital indicates a person or an organisation's status or prestige; and cultural capital consists of values, characteristics, skills as a result of one's position in society or through cultivation (Fulda & Hsu, 2020). Drawn

from Bourdier's forms of capital, this research categorises NGOs' power into material, symbolic, and interpretive power. The source and use of power by different types of NGOs when interacting with local governments will be discussed next.

7.1.2 NGOs' Material Power (Tangible Resources)

Material power indicates the tangible resources NGOs can bring to benefit the development of the area, which range from money to infrastructures, such as roads and houses. Material aid is an approach more common to foundations and overseas NGOs which have stronger financial competency compared with grassroots NGOs. For example, PA1 is a state-owned enterprise foundation which is assigned the mission of targeted poverty alleviation. Since 2012, it has invested millions of dollars in poverty-stricken counties to build new modern villages. It has supported thousands of households to grow family businesses, built local industries to ensure the families in poverty have a job without leaving the village and helped thousands of people get out of poverty. Such an accomplishment is hard to achieve for grassroots NGOs.

Pushed by the pressure of removing the "the hat of poor county/village" which is mainly measured by poverty headcount, local governments in poverty-stricken areas welcome the organisations which bring material resources to increase local incomes or to improve living standards. This gives NGOs power over the local governments to some extent. As discussed before, EDU1 was introduced by PA1 to one of its targeted counties. The county was cautious about such volunteer teaching programmes because such programmes would hardly help with an immediate reduction of poverty headcount and would also cost it to accommodate these volunteers. However, it still accepted EDU1 because of the influence of PA1 (Interview 23). PA1's influence on the local government not only resulted from its financial strength but also from its connection with the state, which will be discussed next.

7.1.3 NGOs' Symbolic Power (Legitimacy)

Symbolic power means the legitimacy of the organisation, and it comes from closeness to the state. A good governmental relationship (*guanxi*) is significant to NGOs' legitimacy. For a private organisation, blurring the distinction between private and government and allowing people to assume that the organisation is a governmental agency could lend it some degree of legitimacy (C. L. Hsu, 2008).

State-related NGOs naturally have this symbolic power due to their connections with the government, and they could be seen as the delegates of the higher authority when they work at the local level. When state-enterprise foundations run poverty alleviation programmes, they are fulfilling their tasks designated by the higher level government. As they have legitimacy from the higher level government, they are accepted and welcomed by local authorities who are subordinate in the governmental chain of commands. The symbolic power of overseas NGOs as a whole comes from governmental policies. Opening up to the international world has been integrated with market reform, and foreign capital and technologies have been urgently needed by China (G. Deng, 2010). As Deng Xiaoping (1994), the architect of the market-economic reform and modern China, points out: "We should bring in advanced technologies and other things beneficial to us from the capitalist countries in a planned and selective way." Chinese governments have established institutional apparatuses in an effort to attract overseas investments and organisations which bring in capital, technologies or skills to stimulate economic development as well as social welfare. In the poverty alleviation area, "foreign capital/programme management centres" in charge of international aid are set up at multiple levels of government, from the State Council LGOPAD to county-level poverty alleviation offices, though the exact name of such centres differs across places and time. The creation of such apparatuses encourages and legitimises the collaboration with international organisations which bring in resource and aid.

Despite the need for foreign resources, the government may have conflicting attitudes towards overseas NGOs because the government is concerned that overseas NGOs may bring in western ideology or interfere with politics. Therefore, overseas NGOs operating in China need more than resources and technologies to demonstrate their legitimacy and power over lower level government. One source can be the overseas NGO's legal status as well as its tie to higher level governmental agencies, especially since the implementation of the Overseas NGOs Management Law in 2017. The new legislation requires any overseas organisations operating in China to get a governmental supervisory agency and then be registered with the Public Security Departments. They should register at the national or provincial level depending on the locations in which they work: the organisation that operates across the country ought to register with the national-level agency or in all the provinces they work in, respectively. Although getting one registration at the national level sounds more efficient than the other option, some NGOs register in all the provinces separately, even on top of a national-level registration. For example, PA2 has a national-level registration under the supervision of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and has also registered in the provinces of Yunnan, Gansu and Guangdong, respectively. The reason is that the process of inviting a local authority as their supervisory agency and acquiring a local registration would gain the foreign NGOs legitimacy locally and facilitate their work at the sites (Interview 12).

However, for the grassroots NGOs which have neither government ties nor strong financial strength to bring in a large amount of money (as discussed in "7.1.3 NGOs' Material Power"), one strategy to gain some symbolic power and to win the recognition of the government is to partner with a more powerful actor as a referrer. The partnership with a legitimate NGO will lend the grassroots NGO legitimacy too. For example, one of EDU1's sponsors is a state-owned bank. This bank appoints bank managers to be temporary vice

heads of their targeted counties to facilitate poverty alleviation. Introduced by the bank, EDU1 had the support of the "guest" vice head of the county (挂职县长) from the bank, which gave the NGO legitimacy to run its programme (Interview 3).

What's more, legitimacy can be especially important for governmental partnership in the area where the government holds a less open attitude towards outside organisations. PA1, a state-related NGO, had the poverty alleviation task in the province of Guizhou. Located in the west, inland area, Guizhou is in a less developed region compared to the east coast region of China. In 2014, Guizhou Province had the third-highest number of poverty-stricken counties in the whole country, while its neighbouring province Yunnan had the highest number (LGOPAD, 2014). However, Yunan hosts a large number of domestic and overseas NGOs and has been studied by a number of NGO researchers (J. Y. Hsu et al., 2015; Spires et al., 2014; Teets, 2015), while Guizhou is relatively conservative and does not open to NGOs that much. Some governments are cautious about volunteers because the volunteers tend to be critical about the situation of the area, and the outsiders' reports and criticism would affect the government's image (Interview 3). In 2020, there is only one overseas NGO registered in Guizhou Province while the number in Yunnan Province is 30 (Chinafile, 2020b); and the number of domestic NGOs which work in Yunnan is double that in Guizhou (China Development Brief, 2020). Although the governments in Guizhou generally did not hold an open attitude towards NGO programmes, the county in Guizhou accepted EDU1, which was introduced by PA1, and agreed to pay part of the volunteers' living allowance. In addition to EDU1, PA1 also introduced other domestic and overseas NGOs to this county, incorporated in PA1's poverty alleviation approaches (Interview 23). The legitimacy of PA1 was important for other NGOs to be accepted by local governments. In fact, up to 2018, this county banned all other NGOs except for the ones endorsed by PA1 and a state-owned poverty alleviation foundation (Interview 3).

7.1.4 NGOs' Interpretive Power (Expertise)

Interpretive power is the expertise the NGO can bring to the field to interpret social facts to be used as reference points by the state (Hasmath et al., 2019; J. Y. Hsu et al., 2015). Since the fourth plenary session of the 17th CCP Central Committee in 2009, the government has started to stress its aim to "build a learning governing party and government" to increase its capacity in administration and governance (People's Daily, 2009). As the government has the responsibility of providing social services and solving social problems, it needs a team of public officials with a wide range of knowledge and a high degree of professionalism. In the complex and rapidly changing social environment, a wide range of knowledge will enable the government to handle public affairs properly, while using professional skills will improve the performance of the government. The ways to a learning government include learning from developed organisations and training the leaders and public officers in the governmental agencies (Y. Shi, 2011). Therefore, the expertise NGOs have gained them interpretive power over the government, and NGOs usually conduct research and training to influence the government's policies or to improve the administration.

Taking the area of poverty alleviation, for example, research and support from international organisations, such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), has influenced the government's approaches. The ADB's research project in co-operation with State Council LGOPAD discussed the modification of the poverty line in accordance with international standards and suggested that on the basis of good natural-resource governance, the focus of poverty relief should be shifted to human resources; and it is necessary to establish an integrated poverty alleviation system focusing on sustainable development supplemented by targeted aid-based approaches (ADB, 2003). The main suggestions of this research were received by the central government as pointing out the direction for China's poverty alleviation policy for the next 2 decades (China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation, 2006). Another ADB (2001) project

provided suggestions on the overall national poverty reduction plan, the selection of key poverty alleviation villages, and the principle of participation in poverty alleviation in rural areas. This set of approaches, especially the participatory approach, was incorporated into governmental poverty-alleviation policies, as mentioned in Chapter 4. In addition, as discussed before, several NGOs in my fieldwork mentioned that they are using expertise to support the government, such as introducing advanced experience in their service areas (PA3 shares experience on the issue of children protection and welfare), carrying out training for civil servants in local-level authorities (EDU2 provides training on improving administrative capacity), and (co)managing public facilities (EN3 manages a public ecologic park under a governmental contract).

7.2   Coping With Negative Partnership Outcomes

Though forming a governmental partnership is helpful for NGOs to attain their goals in some situations, it could be harmful in some others, and the (potential) drawbacks of partnerships may prevent NGOs from choosing to collaborate with the government. Although the government is an important stakeholder for NGOs, the governmental relationship is only part of NGO operations and partnering with the government may not always be consistent with an NGO's mission. During my fieldwork, when asked questions on governmental relations, several NGO leaders emphasised that building a governmental partnership is not an end but simply an approach to attaining the NGO's goals. In the interview with EN3, I mentioned that the media reports say that there were government actors and funds involved in the initiation of EN3. The CEO stressed that: "This foundation was not established because the government provided money; it was more about the ideas of the founder who has the passion for ecological conservation and public engagement" (Interview 16). Similarly, the CEO of PA2 said:

although the governmental relationship is important, our strategy is not made entirely

in accordance with governmental relations; instead, it is according to what problem

our organisation aims to solve. Our main work is poverty alleviation, not a partnership

with the poverty alleviation office in the government. We have done some work to

which the government does not pay attention. (Interview 12)

Chapter 1 of this thesis has pointed out that part of the motivation to form the NGO–

government partnerships is that this collaboration is believed to benefit social service

delivery and social-problem solving. But in reality, it may not always be the case. Therefore,

it is necessary to explore the outcome of the partnership and strategies to deal with the

outcomes which are inconsistent with NGOs' missions.

7.2.1 *NGOs' Autonomy vs Governmental Partnerships*

The level of autonomy of NGOs in authoritarian China has long interested scholars. Some

studies suggest that social organisations are mostly embedded in the state, and this

embeddedness is helpful to social organisations because the governmental tie gives NGOs

resources (funding and other material resources), recognition and legitimacy; and these

resources offer NGOs institutional channels to use their professional knowledge and

experience in service delivery and to participate in policy making (C. Hsu, 2010; J. Y. Hsu &

Hasmath, 2014; Jing, 2018; Yuen, 2018). Some argue that the government's procurement of

social services is only to use social organisations and social workers as a governing

instrument to control society (Leung et al., 2012) and to achieve the goals of the Party-state

such as building an image of social service provider and to mobilise the masses (Kan & Ku,

2020). This government's co-optation disempowers social organisations, confines NGOs'

work (service provision rather than advocacy for rights) and disengages NGOs from external

sponsors (Howell, 2015). On the other hand, some studies show there are some highly

autonomous social welfare organisations existing in China, especially the small ones, which

are located in rural areas (Spires, 2007; Zhang & Baum, 2004). The consultative authoritarian model suggests that the state would allow NGOs to enjoy a certain degree of operational autonomy in pursuing their self-determined agendas while still keeping indirect state control of these NGOs (Teets, 2014). However, the indicators of autonomy in existing studies are usually the source of funding (whether or not relying on government funds) and the composition of staff (personal connections with the governmental agencies), but it overlooks the actual practice of NGOs. The NGOs which fully rely on government funds can still be autonomous as long as they work to serve the interests of people in need rather than the interests of the government or other funders. Losing sight of missions and uniqueness is more damaging for NGOs' autonomy than relying on governmental funds (Y. Kang, 2019).

Among different types of NGOs, social work agencies are especially susceptible to government co-optation and their work drifts from serving the people to serving the government. Research has observed that social work is seen by the government as an appropriate instrument of managing the population (C. K. Chan & Lei, 2017; Leung et al., 2012). In the era of market economic reform, the government put more stress on personal responsibilities, which echoes the emphasis on "individual achievement" that the market promotes in the economic realm (Bray, 2005). Similarly, personal failings and shortcomings are framed as causes of social problems by the government. Accordingly, the government promotes mutual help between people and the sense of social responsibility of individuals as the key to addressing social problems. One of the government's working objectives is described as:

> To promote the formation of a "me-for-everyone, everyone-for-me" (我为人人、人人为我) social atmosphere, to carry out in-depth urban and rural social volunteer service activities under the theme of mutual care and serving the society, to establish a voluntary service system connected to the government and the market. To promote

people's psychological harmony, strengthening humanistic care and psychological counselling, guiding people to have a correct attitude towards themselves, others and society, and to correctly deal with difficulties, setbacks and honours. To strengthen the education and care for mental health, improving the psychological counselling network, and to shape a rational, peaceful, positive attitude with self-respect and self-confidence. (State Council, 2006)

As the individual emerged as an essential target of government work, and psychological intervention was promoted as an important tactic for solving problems, the "person-centred" rhetoric has been employed in political discourse connected with social harmony. With its professional knowledge in individual psychology and expertise in boosting interpersonal relationships, social work is a suitable instrument for translating the "person-centredness" into government programmes to address the government's problematisation of personal failings and to echo the government's emphasis on personal responsibilities (Leung et al., 2012). Therefore, many nongovernmental social work agencies have been created to be contractors of the government and to provide social work services to the government via service-purchase schemes. Many of these social work agencies have no other business than being a manpower referral to the government (Leung et al., 2012). The efforts of these NGOs to win procurement contracts, as well as their financial dependence on the state, lead to their being embedded into the state. By fulfilling government requirements, they are shaped into acquiescent service providers and extended administrative arms rather than being autonomous organisations meeting people's needs, and they will avoid engaging with sensitive issues, even those essential for solving social problems (Yuen, 2020).

Although the governmental contract may undermine an NGO's autonomy, some social work agencies manage to keep their operational autonomy to some extent. They managed to serve the people, even at the risk of conflicting with the interests of some governmental agencies.

One condition to do that is to understand the different interests and objectives of the fragmented state. The fragmented structure of the Chinese government is usually described as a "*tiao-kuai*" matrix, in which *tiao* means the horizontal territorial authorities and *kuai* indicates the functional administrative units. The policy of procurement of NGOs is typically initiated and implemented by different units of government, which have misaligned interests and objectives. In Guangdong and Beijing, the procurement programme was made by the municipal-level government, such as the Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs (MBCA), aiming to utilise NGOs' professional expertise for better community services and reducing citizens' dependence on the state's welfare provision (Leung et al., 2012). However, the MBCA only provides the fund, and the day-to-day collaboration with NGOs is delegated to the street/community-level government units. The lowest level of government needs to specify their expectations on service providers, such as the size and characteristics of targeted people, the types of services, and the key performance indicators, and the NGO needs to propose a specialised service plan based on the government's requirements. It is hoped that this will encourage NGOs to tailor their service to meet the particular needs of local residents (Yuen, 2020).

However, the lowest level of government has different interests and, thus, different attitudes towards NGOs. Lacking "epistemic awareness" of NGOs (Hasmath & Hsu, 2014), the lower rank officials do not necessarily understand that the higher level government allocates money for purchasing NGOs' services rather than just financing their administrative tasks. In fact, the lowest level governments are usually assigned a heavy load of administrative tasks from different government units, and therefore, these civil servants tend to use NGOs to help with their administrative tasks and be their "foot soldiers" (C. K. Chan & Lei, 2017), even though this is not what the NGO is funded for. The lowest level of government can interfere with NGOs' operations and negatively affect NGOs' service delivery by asking social workers to

take administrative tasks or by dissuading them from dealing with certain issues (Yuen, 2020).

SW2, the social work agency helping homeless people, is paid by the district-level civil affairs department in Beijing and works with its transitional station staff. As the transitional station staff did not know what social workers were, they gave social workers a lot of administrative work to do. The social work agency accepted all the administrative workload in the beginning because they were trying to please the government so that their contract could be renewed. But gradually, they realised that it was essential to clarify the boundaries in their partnership with the government. They have adopted strategies to avoid government interference and to maintain their operational autonomy to some extent. The first strategy is to separate the management and operation team within the NGO in relation to their governmental partner, and the second is to exploit the *tiao–kuai* tension between different government agencies (Interview 2).

First, in the partnership with the government, they are clear about their own goal and how it differs from the government's goal, and they are aware of what the government wants from them:

> Our goal is to improve the life quality of homeless people. To attain this goal, we need the resource from the government, such as money to buy them a ticket back to their hometown or to send them to the hospital. On the other side, governmental agencies do not necessarily care about how homeless people are as long as these people do not make trouble. The governments can benefit from the partnership with us as 1) the governmental agencies have targets to meet, such as certain numbers of homeless people they need to help each year. They can rely on us to meet to target as they are reluctant to outreach on the street by themselves; 2) a lot of paperwork needs to be done for each one being assisted, and they also need us to fill up all the forms;

3) they need to make reports about the homeless situation in their constituency, and

we provide them with data and material to help them with these reports. (Interview 2)

Despite taking over the administrative work for the government, SW2 developed a strategy to keep a relatively independent operation. The leader describes the strategy as "separating the management and operation team":

We try to make sure only the management team is dealing with the government, not

the operating team. The government does not need to know the details of our daily

work to avoid the government's interference. But the management makes efforts to

get involved in the government's operation, to know what they are doing and to seize

the opportunity to push our ideas and to reinforce the relationship with the

government. For example, they are recently learning the "spirit of the 19th National

Congress of CCP" and it may be followed by "government sending warmth to the

vulnerable people" kinds of activities. We can take the chance to help the government

to organise it to strengthen our relationship, and also take the advantage to actually

acquire some resource for the people in need. (Interview 2)

In addition, addressing the issue of homeless people usually requires co-operation among a wide range of government units. SW2 is aware of the different interests and objectives of government agencies and is able to leverage the tension between them to attain their goal in social service. The pressure of solving the problem of homelessness is mainly on the civil affairs department which has to ensure the absence of homeless people during major events such as the National Congress conference or National Day parades. But the transitional station under the civil affairs department can only provide them with 10 days of accommodation and food. If clients need financial help, they need to apply to the street office (街道办), and if they have lost the document to prove their identity or residency, they need

help from the public security department (公安局). Clients may also need to apply for a pension, or health insurance, each of which involves a different governmental unit. Normally, social workers need to take each client to go through all these governmental units one by one, which is time consuming. Taking the opportunity of the 19th National Congress conference, SW2 collaborated with the civil affairs department to initiate regular cross-department meetings with street offices and public security departments. In the meeting, SW2 presented the profiles of their clients one by one, specified each client's needs and got government departments to provide the relevant service to solve each client's problem. In this way, SW2 got to help their clients more efficiently.

Noticing the tension between different governmental units is also important for NGOs when interacting with the government. In SW2's case, the cross-department meeting only lasted for 6 months in 2018. The pressure on the civil affairs department was reduced after the National Congress conference, and they did not continue meeting as it costs time and money. However, in the interaction with the street office, SW2 found that the street officials welcomed this meeting as it improved their output in service delivery and made the department look better when reporting to its superior. SW2 is also aware of the power imbalance between the street office and the civil affairs department: although these two departments are at the same level, the civil affairs department needs co-operation from the street office at some point. For example, the street office has the authority to collect public donations from people in its purview for causes like disaster relief and poverty alleviation, and the civil affairs department collects this money from the street office. If the civil affairs department turns down a proposal from the street office, it may cause trouble for itself when it wants to collect money from the street. Realising this tension, SW2 believes that the street office's speaking out on the cross-department meeting will be able to bring another round of such meetings (Interview 2).

7.2.2 *Community Support vs. Governmental Partnership*

Community and government are both important stakeholders of NGOs. NGOs' interaction with the community may benefit their relationships with the government and vice versa, as discussed in Chapter 4, but it is not always the case. In some situations, the interaction with the government is at the cost of the NGO's relationship with the community due to the conflict of interest. It is shown in the case of EN2, whose founder stressed the transformation of its working approach during the past years from collaborating with the government in campaign-style governance to working with local residents for community development.

EN2 is an ENGO focusing on river protection, the area which the government has emphasised in recent years. China used to be widely criticised for its reckless growth-at-all-costs pollution (Economy, 2010). Though environmental laws have long been established, the enforcement of environmental regulation remained weak and slow over a long time (Van Rooij, 2006). One cause of the policy implementation gap is the result of the fragmented structure of the authorities in which the responsibility for policy implementation is decentralised to various local actors without the co-operation and co-ordination that would be vital for a successful outcome (Ran, 2013). For example, the environmental protection bureau (EPB) is required to take responsibility for environmental policy implementation. However, in practice, the EPB is often in a weak position and lacks the power to enforce the law or policy. The environmental laws also allocate responsibilities for local environmental policy implementation to more than 10 different governmental actors piece by piece, such as the mayors, Development and Reform Committee, Planning and Construction (Urban Utility and Garden) Bureau, Agriculture (Forestry) Bureau, Water Resources Bureau (WRB), Oceanic and Fishery Bureau, Land Resources Bureau (Ran, 2013). Most of these actors are also assigned other tasks and have their own objectives which may contradict the goal of environmental protection (W. P. Alford & Shen, 1998). Taking the example of the WRB, it is

in charge of the protection of water resources, but its main job is to develop the use of these resources. Implementing the policies of water conservation and protection is at odds with its major interest of water resource development, such as the construction of hydropower plants and dams (Mertha, 2011). Therefore, it is not necessarily collaborative with the EPB on the environmental issue. Even if they are not against environmental protection actions, mobilising all these departments to work together is still time consuming. As complained by a mayor in a governmental conference on the environmental issue:

> in order to investigate the water pollution problem, a number of departments and even a number of mayors had to go together, because the bank area of the water is under the purview of the environmental protection department, the water itself was water resources bureau, and the groundwater was the land resources bureau department. So we could not process anything with one person missing. (China Youth Daily, 2018).

The central government has been making efforts to achieve a different global image regarding environmental issues (Kostka & Zhang, 2018; Mazzucato, 2015). One governmental action to address the problem is to resort to campaign-style environmental governance to enhance the state's capacity for environmental protection (Van Rooij, 2006). This style of governance has long been used by the Chinese government to achieve urgent policy goals in the face of the failure of regular government policies, such as the anti-corruption campaign since 2012 after Xi assumed office (T. Chen & Kung, 2019). It is especially applied in the area of environmental governance as, in the fragmented governmental system, the task of environmental protection tends to conflict with other governmental objectives and interests and is hard to enforce (Huaiyu Liu, 2015). Different from general environmental regulations, which usually lack execution, campaign-style environmental governance attains its goals through mobilisation of administrative resources on a large scale based on sufficient resources and power, and it tends to be highly

collaborative with other sectors, including governmental and non-governmental actors (Y. Zhao et al., 2020).

In a political campaign, the central government would put stress on local governments to attain the goal. In water governance, a system of "river chief" has been promoted nationally after years of local trials. It requires the government or Party leaders to be the person responsible for the river quality at the level of province (*sheng*), municipality (*shi*), county (*xian*) and township (*xiang*) (State Council, 2016b). To fulfil the responsibility of pollution control, governments collaborate with society and encourage citizens to report pollution from factories and other sources. For example, the government of Guangzhou's notice on the protection of LX River states:

> Encourage and support citizens, legal persons and other organisations to participate in the protection, management and supervision of the LX River… and [they] have the right to complain and report on the acts of pollution that damage the water environment in the LX River; Encourage and support radio, television, newspapers, Internet and other media to strengthen public monitoring and open report on the protection of the LX River. The people's governments and administrative departments at various levels in the city shall provide assistance to organisations and individuals participating in voluntary services in carrying out activities for the protection of the LX River. (People's Government of Guangzhou, 2015, pt. 15).

EN2 works to protect the LX River against this background. In the beginning, they made efforts to work with the government to implement the campaign-style environmental governance. To collaborate with the government in this campaign, EN2 not only participated in the public hearings but also actively took actions to monitor water quality, find the causes of pollution, report to the authority and follow up on the correction outcomes. However, later, EN2 found this approach problematic. In one aspect, EN2 realised what it was doing was, at

best, a duplicate of what the government was doing. When the government was running the campaign against river pollution, strong manpower was sent out to detect pollution and close the polluting factories. Besides, the government had been monitoring and publishing the water quality; and the government regulation forbade disclosing environmental statistics without government authorisation (Ministry of Environmental Protection, 2007, pt. 7). Therefore, EN2 didn't see any point in running water quality tests in a quantitative way.

More importantly, reporting to the government eventually damaged the organisation's relationship with the community in which it was working. When EN2 first settled in the village alongside the river, they received a warm welcome from local residents. The residents invited the staff for dinners and Karaoke and participated in the activities the NGO organised. A few months later, the organisation discovered that there were two concrete mixing stations close to the village, polluting the river. They reported to the authorities. It was just at the time when the central government sent a supervisory group to the city to check on the issue of environmental protection, so naturally, the government cracked down on the polluting units. One was suspended for rectification and punished with the highest possible fine, and the other one was completely shut down. However, the NGO did not foresee the consequences. The stations had hired more than 100 workers. Although these workers were not all local residents, they needed to rent a place to live in the village. This village did not have much income as most young people had gone to cities to work, so the rent was valuable to the residents. As the income had gone with the closure of the stations, most of the residents turned cold on the NGO. The village head said to the organisation: "We have actually fined the stations, and they will take measures to change. Why would you do this?"

The other unexpected turn was one of the concrete mixing stations, after a period of time, returned to work. The NGO admitted the station did make some corrections to decrease the pollution, but they still thought it was unfair because it was the one belonging to a state

enterprise and the one which caused more pollution, yet it came back to work while the other, which was a private company, was shut down permanently (this may benefit the NGO's relationship with the village though). After that, EN2 decided not to take this approach anymore. The government's reaction towards the polluting factories was simply shutting them down, especially regarding private enterprises. Though this is good for the environment, it may cause other problems such as job loss, low income, and population migration, especially when the economy was already declining. It also may not be accepted by or good for the local community. If EN2 kept reporting, it would not have been able to stay in the village.

It also used to take the approach of policy advocacy via making proposals to the NPC and CPPCC. Its proposals did get responses, and minor adjustments, according to the proposals, were seen. But the leader of the NGO considered it only had a face value because

> the government will make efforts to give you a reply and to make you "satisfied" because the public offices' performance will be measured by their supervisors in terms of response rate and satisfaction rate. But it does not mean there will be any real change (Interview 19).

Gradually, this NGO changed its approach from working with the government to working with the community. It realised the local residents are the main stakeholders of the local environment, and cultivating the local community with environmental ideas is more important than a temporary governmental campaign whose effect may not last long (Zhao, Zhang, & Wang, 2020). As stated by the leader of the EN2: "A campaign usually cannot last long. Soon, the government may turn to focus on economic growth and forget about the environment. At that time, the environment can only rely on the local people who have environmental protection concepts" (Interview 19).

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Instead of reporting or advocating to the government, EN2 set its strategy as 1) educating local residents; 2) promoting sustainable community economy; and 3) building *guanxi* with local leaders as the foundation of the strategies. The leader considered the external regulations of the government exerted on people are not able to change people's ideas or willingness on environmental protection; instead, people need to grow inner motivation to take action to protect the environment, and this NGO aims to support local residents to develop this kind of inner motivation. It works from the normative and instrumental aspects. On the one hand, the NGO organises educational activities, such as movies, seminars, billboards, attempting to tell the residents that it is the right thing to do to protect the environment. On the other hand, it takes the approach of community economic development to make the environmental protection suit the interests of the community. For example, the neighbouring village took action to expel a dyeing factory because that village grows crops, so they cannot tolerate the wastewater from that factory. The NGO has started to use the village's ecological assets to promote ecologic tourism and to increase the income of the community so that they can see a good environment actually worth money.

Besides, EN2 realised it is important to see the dynamic in this community and the key figures in making a change: "If you don't see the social dynamics, you won't understand why there is pollution" (Interview 19). In the example of the neighbouring village, the seniors forbade residents from leasing their house or land to anything related to the polluting factory. In the community, the requirement from the seniors has more weight than that of the administration, and therefore dealing with the powerful persons in the community can be more important than dealing with administrations (Interview 19).

In the village where the NGO is located, there was someone who told them about pollution privately and asked them to keep their identity confidential, as they did not want to confront someone more powerful in the community as the powerful figure was not against the

pollution factory. According to the leader, it is vital to find out who holds power in the community, to build *guanxi* with them, and to gradually make the community leaders be aware of educational problems. These problems do not have an immediate solution, and an environmental protection campaign will not have a lasting effect. EN2 considers the change of the mindset of the residents vital as the government may turn its focus to economic development anytime, and then it will only be able to rely on the local people to keep protecting the environment. This is similar to PF's strategy of increasing visibility as they both aim to change people's mindsets. It is a common rhythm of NGOs to focus on influencing and changing individuals in order to eventually achieve social change. The result may not be seen in the short-term, but the impact may expand beyond a temporary programme.

7.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter first explored the issue of power in NGO–government partnerships. It has categorised the three types of power NGOs hold in relation to the government as material (tangible resource), symbolic (legitimacy), and interpretive (expertise) power. NGOs' power is the foundation for NGOs to work with and influence the government. In order to build effective governmental partnerships, NGOs need to be aware of the power balance from the very beginning stage. Especially for grassroots NGOs, which are not as powerful as grant-making foundations, it is important to take actions to increase the power, such as to network with other NGOs and to enhance the level of professionalism.

This chapter has also examined the negative outcomes of government partnerships, such as losing autonomy and losing community support. The case of a social work agency points out that it separates the management and operation team to avoid the government's interference in the NGO's operation and leverages the tension between fragmented governmental

departments to attain the NGO's goal of serving people in need. The case of an ENGO shows a transformation of a working approach from partnering with the government to working with the community based on the belief that changing people is the key to changing the environment. Its strategies of working with the community, which include educating local residents, promoting a sustainable community economy and building *guanxi* with local leaders, have implications for NGOs that aim for gaining local supports.

Chapter 8   Conclusion

When I left my NGO job in 2016, the NGO I worked for had grown significantly from an informal university volunteer group to a formally registered organisation with more than 10 staff. I had witnessed a few good years for NGOs in China: control seemed to have been relaxed and the newly issued Charity Law showed the government's intention to support the development of the NGO sector (The NPC of China, 2015). When I was preparing to start PhD study on NGO partnerships with the government, it looked optimistic that the emerging collaboration of the two sides would have the potential to better address social and environmental problems. However, 1 year after the Charity Law, the Overseas NGO Management Law came into force. Different from the supportive attitude conveyed by the Charity Law, the Overseas NGO Management Law put a strict requirement on overseas NGOs. The strict requirement on overseas NGOs was understood as that the government intended to replace overseas NGOs, especially grant-making foundations, to support and influence domestic NGOs (Interview 3, Interview 6). Since then, tightened control over NGOs has gradually been observed. As described in Chapter 6, it has become more difficult for NGOs to get a direct registration since 2018, even though it had become relatively easier around 2014.

Despite this seemingly shrinking space for NGOs, there are still middle grounds between antagonistic resistance and passive acceptance of oppression for NGOs to proactively adopt coping strategies and to achieve improvisation. Therefore, the study of NGOs' relationship with the government is still of value, if not more important. This study is a combination of the perspective of an insider and an outsider with academic training outside mainland China. This thesis contributes to the theory with a comprehensive analytical framework based on existing literature from different streams and contributes to NGOs' practice by introducing a series of approaches NGOs actively adopt in engaging with the government to achieve their

goals in addressing social needs, such as professionalisation, participation, formal networks and *guanxi*. These suggested approaches are mainly drawn from extensive first-hand interviews with 24 NGOs in the field work (13 of these NGOs were included in the case study) and have implications for NGOs' governmental partnership-building in China.

Chapter 1 of this thesis introduced an analytical framework. This framework pays attention to a range of factors of an NGO, such as its level of expertise, working methods, networks, and the partnership forming process. As the partnerships take place in a certain social and political context, the framework also pays attention to the institutional context, such as the fragmented regime, power dynamics and institutional pressure (isomorphism), when analysing the partnership-forming process. This framework can be used in future studies analysing the relationships between NGOs and the government and is useful in understanding the changing social and political context in China.

The framework in Chapter 1 is followed by chapters of empirical study. The case description in Chapter 2 presented four types of NGO–government partnerships differentiated by the level of the joint effort in service provision and NGOs' autonomy, which are supplement, collaboration, complementarity, and co-optation. Among the four types, the type of collaboration has a relatively higher level of joint effort and NGO autonomy, and thus collaboration is the desired type of partnership. The initial analysis of variables suggests that some potential factors derived from the literature do not seem to have a decisive effect on NGOs' relationship with the government in the empirical study, such as the issue area or the funding source. Furthermore, the initial analysis suggests that the value of this study lies in elaborating how NGOs adopt these factors as working approaches in practice to achieve desired outcomes. These factors include professionalisation, participatory approach, networking and the use of interpersonal connections (*guanxi*), and they have been elaborated

from Chapter 3 to Chapter 6. Each of the chapters provided specific details on the best practice of this approach so that it can be useful to NGOs' work.

Chapter 3 described the approach of professionalisation. By comparing professionalisation in social work agencies and an educational NGO, this chapter suggests that professionalisation equips NGOs with expertise that is required by the government to share the social burden, and therefore contributes to partnerships with the government. However, in the social work sector, the process of professionalisation is highly dominated by the government, and the government intends to co-opt social work agencies to manage the population. It raised the question for social work agencies of how to remain autonomous, which was answered in Chapter 7. On the other hand, the experience of professionalisation of the educational NGO, which did not receive as sufficient support from the government as social work agencies, suggested that NGOs other than social work agencies need to have other ways to increase their expertise, such as building networks as discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 explored one aspect of NGO expertise, the use of the participatory approach, using cases in the area of poverty alleviation. As the desirable type of partnership involves a higher level of joint efforts for meeting people's needs, the participatory approach has value both in engaging with local governments and in empowering people to get rid of poverty. This chapter introduced a number of strategies used in the participatory approach, such as consultations, collective decision making, cost sharing, empowering the voiceless, involving diverse stakeholders, building trust, and building capacity. This approach is associated with NGOs' partnerships with local governments by involving local governments in designing and implementing development programmes, building trust with local governments and strengthening local governments' capacity. This chapter suggested that this approach would have long-term benefits on underprivileged communities beyond a short-term programme

implementation when local/grassroots level governments increase their knowledge and capacity in using the participatory approach in local governance.

Chapter 5 examined the roles of formal networks in NGOs' partnerships with the government. This chapter compared networks initiated by the government and by private charitable foundations. Government-initiated networks are useful for NGOs, especially start-up NGOs, to acquire resource, but, on the other hand, these networks could exert institutional pressure to co-opt the NGO. Followed by government-initiated networks, this chapter explored foundation-initiated networks on the levels of the industry, organisations and individuals. As networks help in knowledge creation and capacity building, the development of an industrial network can increase the professional level of the NGO sector and enhance the sector's power to negotiate and influence the government.

Chapter 6 explored the role of *guanxi* in the context of fragmented governments. This chapter suggests *guanxi* can make up for the policy implementation gap and facilitate NGOs to get the desired results. The specific actions NGOs can take include seizing the political opportunity, transferring personal level *guanxi* to the organisational level, and creating and maintaining mutual understanding. The experience of an LGBT NGO has expanded the concept of *guanxi* from direct person-to-person connections to a broader interpersonal/intergroup influence. This kind of broader influence is exerted through the intangible connection of common values, and it is important for NGOs who want to influence the government, even those who do not have a formal partnership with the government.

Chapter 7, the last part of the empirical study, discussed the issue of power. Reviewing the three stages (designing, implementing and outcome) of the NGO–government partnership-forming process, the issue of power needs to be analysed in the beginning stage and potentially exists throughout the whole process. This study also pays attention to the

outcomes of the partnerships. This chapter examines the negative outcomes of partnering with the government. The case in the social work sector illustrates how to avoid government interference and keep autonomy, and the ENGO case depicts the journey of finding an alternative way, such as better working with the community, to undertake the NGO's mission. This chapter also demonstrates that NGOs' primary goal is to undertake their mission in meeting social needs, rather than obtaining governments funding. As the quote of EN3's leader in 7.2, "This foundation was not established because the government provided money; it was more about the ideas of the founder who has the passion for ecological conservation and public engagement" (Interview 16). Although NGOs working in some issue areas seem to be more likely to get governments' approvals than rights-based NGOs (Chinafile, 2020a), NGOs can hardly adapt the sectoral differences into their strategies to win governments' partnerships. This is because when NGOs are set up to address a particular social issue, the sector they choose to work in became a precondition of their strategies.

To conclude, the key findings of this study of NGO–government partnerships are two-fold: on the one hand, this study finds that the desired outcome is a collaborative type of partnership which means that NGOs have joint efforts with the government while staying autonomous and avoid government interference. In this effective partnership, keeping NGOs' autonomy and making joint efforts with the government are eventually for the purpose of alleviating social problems and meeting people's needs.

On the other hand, to achieve this outcome, NGOs can actively take a series of approaches. NGOs need to build networks to unite and to enhance the level of professionalism. Networking and professionalisation both contribute to NGOs' capacity in meeting social needs and NGOs' power to avoid government co-optation. In addition, using the participatory approach is helpful for *guanxi* building, and both participation and *guanxi* promote building mutual understandings and trust with the government, which is essential for engaging the

government in joint efforts to serve the people. Participation and *guanxi* building also contain the potential to create long-term impacts on social change beyond a short-term programme, through the capacity enhancement of local governments and influence on the transformation of people's mindset. These key findings can be summarised in the chart in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Key Findings
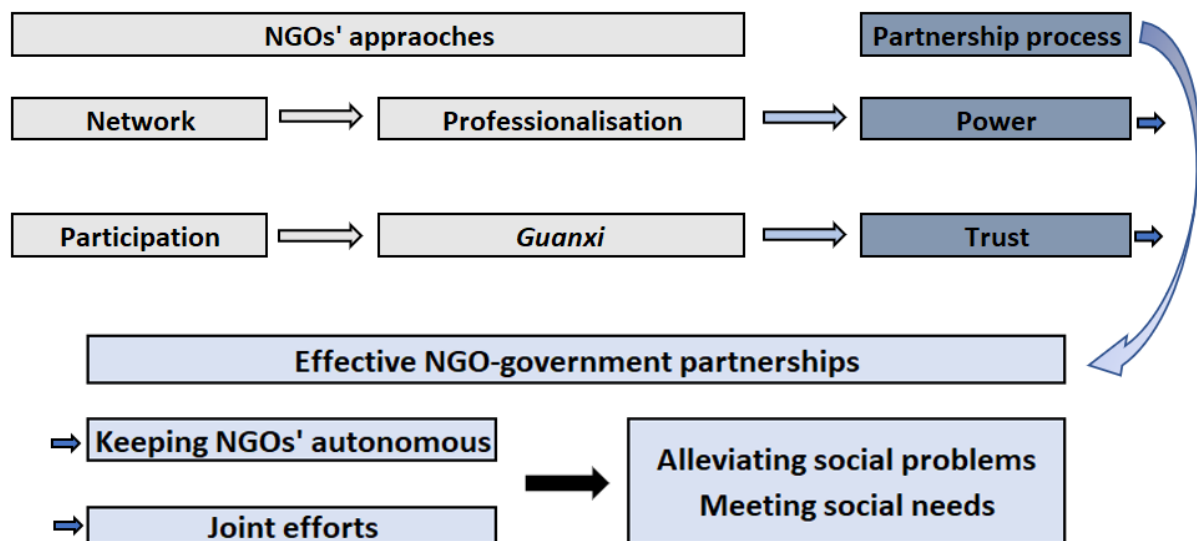
In the end, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this thesis. The first one is the scope of this research. As mentioned in the introduction, the belief in the value of NGOs in addressing social issues was the starting point which motivated me to do the research. Although there are arguments on whether the government or market is better than NGOs in social-problem solving, a comparison between different sectors is not in the scope of this thesis. The next limitation is related to the methodology. Case studies allow for great details, but they are not statistically representative of NGOs in China due to the small number. I used the snowball method to get access to the interviewees, introduced by the people I already knew. This may lead to a homogeneity of the interviewees and exclude people/organisations which are too different to have any connection with people I know. Besides, using qualitative

methods means that it is hard to quantify some of the variables. For example, the level of autonomy of an NGO can be difficult to measure in a standardised way.

Apart from the methodology, another limitation is that the study, which took a long time to finish, may not have kept up with the most recent changes of reality. The political environment keeps changing in China, and such changes may have negatively impacted some of the strategies in certain conditions. For example, Chapters 6 and 7 illustrated the background of fragmented governments. However, the trend of a tighter authoritarian government may change this environment and leave less space for interpersonal influence. As this trend is still relatively new, more empirical research needs to be done to evaluate its impact.

The last one is that, although the ruling Party can be important in the authoritarian regime, this research did not articulate the role of the Party in the government as the empirical study did not point out findings specifically linked to the Party. The role of the Party could become more important in future research on Chinese NGOs as it has been observed that the Party is attempting to gain more power and influence (Doyon, 2019), as demonstrated by the rapid increase of PMSCs mentioned in Chapter 2. However powerful the Party-state grows to be, there will always be a niche which the government cannot reach to attend to people's specific needs. The service gap makes it necessary for NGOs to provide public goods, and thus it is still essential for NGOs to strategically adopt approaches, as suggested by this study, to ensure their survivals and to improve their performance in this environment.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. For the NGOs who have a partnership with the government

- Partnership formation

1) What is the background of your partnership with the government? (e.g. which one initiated it, what was the motivation/reason to build the partnership) - RD/I/CS[3]

2) What are the key factors linking to the partnership? (e.g., the founder has a personal connection with the bureaucratic officer in charge of the service contract or a certain policy) - I

3) What were the steps towards the partnership? (e.g. being introduced by a third party, face-to-face communication with a bureaucratic officer, bidding for a contract) - I/CS

4) What is the shared goal of this partnership, and how did you define it (e.g. by reading government policy, conferences, discussions)? - C/CS

5) What are the opinion/analysis of both sides towards your shared goal/problems? - C/CS

6) How did you reach an agreement, and in which format? (e.g. formal or informal) - RD/I

7) What resource will be inputted by each side? - RD

- Partnership implementation

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3 The abbreviations indicate the theories behind each question. C: corporatism, CS: civil society, RD: resource dependence, I: institutionalism.

8) What is the structure of your partnership? (e.g. who takes the lead, supervising or assessment arrangement) - C/CS

9) Who involved in the partnership, and what is each one's responsibility? - C/I

10) What is the approach towards the goal in detail? - RD

11) How are decisions made during the partnership? (e.g. one dominates another or makes decisions together) - C/CS

12) What is the communication arrangement between the two sides? (e.g. regular email correspondence or face-to-face meeting) - C/CS

13) Are you satisfied with the partnership and would like to keep it? Why? If yes,

14) What is the strategy to maintain and develop this relationship? (e.g. invite the government officers to visit the project, to join the annual meeting, to join the board of the NGO)

- Partnership outcomes

15) What are the outcomes of the partnership? / What kinds of changes are brought by the partnership? (to both sides of this relationship, to the clients you serve and the society as a whole) - CS

16) What are the benefits/progress your NGO got from the partnership? (e.g. being accepted by the local people, more knowledge about government) - RD/I

17) How do you perceive the power balance in this partnership? Is there any change before and after the partnership? (e.g. felt been dominated by or equal position with the government) - C/CS

18) How will you describe your trust in the government? Is there any change before and after the partnership? – CS

19) Anything else would you like to share on the governmental relationship?

2. Questions for the NGOs who do not have a partnership with the state:

1) Does your NGO have the willingness to cooperate with the government, and why?

2) If yes, what are the obstacles to do so?

3) How do you understand your mission? - CS

4) What is your main approach to undertake your mission? - RD

5) What are your fundraising strategies? - RD

6) What are the difficulties or obstacles in your NGO's operation? - RD

7) Is there any institutional change (including government, policies, laws or social norms) you would like to have in order to better undertake your mission and what is that? – I

8) Anything else would you like to share on the governmental relationship?

Appendix B: Record of Interviews Conducted

No.	Position of Interviewee[4]	Date of Interview
1	Manager of an overseas grant-making NGO	7/11/2018
2	Founder/leader of a social work agency	8/11/2018
3	Leader of an NGO in the area of education	11/11/2018
4	Leader of an overseas NGO in the area of education	12/11/2018
5	Experienced NGO practitioner in the area of NGOs' capacity building	12/11/2018
6	Co-founder/leader of a support organisation for NGOs' capacity building	13/11/2018
7	Manager of an NGO in the area of poverty alleviation	13/11/2018
8	Co-founder/leader of a support organisation for NGOs' capacity building	14/11/2018
9	Leader of a social work agency	30/11/2018
10	Leader of a support organisation for NGOs' capacity building	1/12/2018
11	Manager of an overseas NGO in the area of poverty alleviation	5/12/2018

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4 Names of interviewees and their organizations are withheld for confidentiality reasons. In this column, "leader" indicates the top position of the organization, such as CEO/Director General, and "manager" indicates a management staff generally under the top leader. All of the interviewees have been working in the area for more than two years.

12	Leader of an overseas NGO in the area of poverty alleviation	6/12/2018
13	Founder/leader of a support organisation for NGOs' capacity building	14/12/2018
14	Founder/leader of an NGO in the area of education	14/12/2018
15	Leader of an NGO in the area of environmental protection	20/12/2018
16	Leader of an NGO in the area of environmental protection	4/01/2019
17	Manager of a social work agency	13/01/2019
18	Founder/leader of an NGO in the area of LGBT	21/01/2019
19	Founder/leader of an NGO in the area of environmental protection	22/01/2019
20	Manager of an overseas NGO to support domestic NGOs for capacity building	23/01/2019
21	Manager of a third-sector industrial association	25/01/2019
22	Leader of a charitable community foundation	26/01/2019
23	Leader of an NGO in the area of poverty alleviation	26/01/2019
24	Leader of an NGO in the area of education	18/10/2019

Appendix C: NGO Directory by Issue Areas on China Development Brief in 2020

Rank	Issue area (The **bold** ones are selected in the case study)	Number	Percentage
1	**Education**	1851	34%
2	**NGO capacity building**	1432	26%
3	Elderly	1385	25%
4	**Social work**	1277	23%
5	Community work	1050	19%
6	Social enterprise	1018	19%
7	**Environment**	931	17%
8	Disability	906	17%
9	**Poverty alleviation**	814	15%
10	Corporate social responsibility	663	12%
11	Women/Children	648	12%
12	Culture/Art	386	7%
13	**Gender/LGBTI**	252	5%
14	Migrant worker	243	4%
15	Public health	214	4%
16	Disaster relief	180	3%

17	AIDS prevention	76	1%
18	Animal welfare	43	1%
	Total	5485	