

THE INTERPLAY OF NEOLIBERALISM AND AUTHORITARIANISM: THE  
SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY BY ENVIRONMENTAL  
NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS IN CHINA

By

Ming Xie

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Public Administration

Under the Supervision of Dr. Angela M. Eikenberry

Omaha, Nebraska

July, 2020

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Jodi Benenson

Dr. Tara K. Bryan

Dr. Chin-Chung Chao

Dr. Chao Guo

ProQuest Number:28028515

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent on the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 28028515

Published by ProQuest LLC (2020). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All Rights Reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code  
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

THE INTERPLAY OF NEOLIBERALISM AND AUTHORITARIANISM: THE  
SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY BY ENVIRONMENTAL  
NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS IN CHINA

Ming Xie, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2020

Advisor: Dr. Angela M. Eikenberry

**Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to explore the interplay of neoliberalism and socio-political institutions and their impact on environmental nonprofit organizations' accountabilities in an authoritarian regime—in this case, China. It focuses on how environmental nonprofit organizations in China navigate neoliberalism and their relationship with various stakeholders. It examines the primary research question: How have environmental nonprofit organizations constructed their accountabilities within the neoliberal context of China? Related to the primary research question, this research has three secondary research questions based on the literature of neoliberalism and social constructionist framework of accountability: (1) How have neoliberal discourses been embedded in environmental nonprofit organizations' accountability practices and processes? (2) To whom are environmental nonprofit organizations accountable? (3) How are environmental nonprofit organizations accountable? A multiple case study approach was used, consisting of in-depth interviews, field observations, online observations, and document analysis of three environmental nonprofit organizations in Beijing, China.

The research findings suggest that the environmental nonprofit organizations' accountability building was deeply rooted in their understanding of the nonprofit organizations' roles and functions in society and the state-society relationship. The government's adoption of neoliberal policies has created a nonprofit sector that serves as an extension of the state rather than challenging larger institutional and social structures. For the three organizations studied, various development approaches have been adopted to embrace or resist neoliberal practices and discourses. Two case study organizations developed their capacity through the organizations' marketization and managerialization. Professionalization has been a strategy for these two organizations to maintain their legitimacy, organizational identity, and mission achievement as well as maintain their relationship with funders. In contrast, the third organization has tried to resist marketization, managerialization, and professionalization while remain its social impact. Accountability building was largely based on the organizations' capacity for navigating stakeholder groups who held critical resources or power such as the central government, local government, and domestic foundations. Accountability practices mainly focused on information disclosure to funders and donors, meaningful stakeholder engagement with stakeholders who hold critical resources and power for these organizations, and organizational capacity building to mobilize social and financial resources.

As an ongoing process, this research identifies the dynamics of the state-society relationship and the changing spaces in which environmental nonprofit organizations in China have been allowed to operate. It challenges a simple understanding of the relationship between neoliberalism and civil society.

COPYRIGHT

Ming Xie

2020

**Dedication**

To Mom *Cuiping Zhang*

## Acknowledgements

There is a Chinese saying, “Across the boundless sea of learning, there is a boat made from hard work.” In 2010, when I received my Ph.D. degree in Cultural Anthropology in China, I thought I would never be a student anymore. However, after ten years, upon the completion of this dissertation, I think I started understanding the meaning of the Chinese saying. Academia is a long and hard journey. I wish to thank all the people whose assistance was a milestone in the completion of this project.

Special thanks to Dr. Chin-Chung Chao for sponsoring me as a visiting scholar at the UNO School of Communication. The close interaction and collaboration with her inspired me to apply for the doctoral program at UNO. She has been my mentor, sister, and friend, providing me ongoing guidance and support. She is a role model for me as such a responsible, professional, and committed professor. She exemplifies what it means to be a hardworking person and a great leader by empowering others selflessly.

I am especially grateful to Dr. Angela Eikenberry, my advisor, for her support and inspiration. I admire her intelligence and enthusiasm in academic research, which has inspired me a lot about how we study nonprofit organizations as well as my academic and professional development. She is always responsive and supportive of everything helpful for my career development. Knowing that she is always willing to help me is such a comfort and support for me to face the challenges and anxieties in the academic world. I hope I will be able to do the same thing as she has done for me for others someday.

I am indebted to my dissertation committee, Drs. Jodi Benenson, Tara Bryan, Chin-Chung Chao, and Chao Guo, who have been very helpful in navigating academia and offered invaluable advice about my dissertation research and the job market. It is

whole-heartedly appreciated that your great advice for my study proved monumental towards the success of this study. I also very thank Dr. Meagan Van Gelder, Sue Troester, and Ciera Mosley for supporting my intellectual development and supporting me in other ways.

Thank you, all my wonderful colleagues, B.J. Fletcher, Minshuai Ding, Weijie Liao, Xian Gao, Xiaowei Song, Beth Gillespie, Shine Cho, Jiseul Kim, and YeonKyung Kim. The friendship and support from all of you have encouraged me to be strong, patient, and persistent.

Thank you to the individuals who were willing to contribute their time and expertise to this research. Without your generosity, this research would not be possible. All of your dedication to environmental protection in China has provided so much to me as a researcher as well as a human being. I am so grateful I was able to join your activities and field trips, and have so many in-depth discussions with you.

To my family, thank you! The deepest gratitude is to my dad Wenxin Xie, my husband Gang Feng, and my son Edward. Your companionship makes me fearless about all the challenges and uncertainty in the future. Because of you, I will strive to be a better person.



## Table of Contents

Dedication .....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
1.1 The Impact of Neoliberalism in the Nonprofit Sector .....	1
1.2 A Social Constructionist Framework of Accountability.....	3
1.3 Focus on Environmental Nonprofit Organizations.....	5
1.4 Research Questions .....	6
1.5 Plan of the Dissertation.....	7
Chapter 2 Neoliberalism Discourses and Impact.....	9
2.1 The Definition of Neoliberalism .....	9
2.2 Neoliberalism and Civil Society.....	11
2.2.1 Marketization.....	11
2.2.2 Managerialization .....	12
2.2.3 Professionalization.....	13
2.3 Neoliberalism: Forty Years in China.....	15
2.3.1. The State-Economy in China.....	16
2.3.2 The State-Social Organization Relationship .....	19
2.3.3 Policies and Regulations .....	21
2.3.4 The Rise of Domestic Philanthropic Foundations .....	24
2.3.5 Environmental Nonprofit Organizations in China.....	25
2.4 Examination of the Impact of Neoliberalism .....	27
Chapter 3 The Social Construction of Accountability .....	33
3.1 Neoliberalism and Accountability.....	34
3.2 Definitions: Accountable to What? .....	37
3.3 Stakeholders: Accountable to Whom?.....	39
3.4 Practices and Mechanisms: Accountable How?.....	41
3.5 Social Media as an Accountability Mechanism .....	46
3.6 Messages: What is the Message about Accountability being Conveyed? .....	49
3.7 Summary.....	53
Chapter 4 Methodology.....	56
4.1 Research Approach.....	56
4.2 Multiple Case Studies.....	57
4.3 Data Collection.....	65

4.4 Data Analysis .....	72
4.5 Validity .....	78
Chapter 5 Neoliberal Discourses and Organizational Changes .....	80
5.1 Friends of Nature.....	80
5.1.1 Organizational Structure .....	84
5.1.2 Activities and Projects .....	90
5.1.3 Funding .....	97
5.1.4 Summary of Friends of Nature .....	100
5.2 Green Earth Volunteers .....	101
5.2.1 Organizational Structure .....	103
5.2.2 Activities and Projects .....	107
5.2.3 Funding .....	112
5.2.4 Summary of Green Earth Volunteers.....	115
5.3 E.P.Jing.....	117
5.3.1 Organizational Structure .....	118
5.3.2 Activities and Projects .....	120
5.3.3 Funding .....	122
5.3.4 Summary of E.P.Jing .....	126
5.4 Summary.....	126
Chapter 6 Accountable to Whom: Power Dynamics of Stakeholders.....	133
6.1 Upward Stakeholders.....	134
6.1.1 Central Government.....	135
6.1.2 Local Government .....	140
6.1.3 International Organizations.....	142
6.1.4 Domestic Foundations .....	144
6.1.5 Individual Donors .....	146
6.2 Downward Stakeholders .....	148
6.3 Horizontal Stakeholders.....	152
6.3.1 Boards .....	153
6.3.2 Staff.....	155
6.3.3 Volunteers .....	157
6.3.4 Media .....	160
6.3.5 Partner Organizations and Experts .....	164
6.4 Summary .....	166
Chapter 7 Accountable How: Practices and Processes.....	171

7.1 Accountable How: Evaluation and Information Disclosure .....	172
7.1.1 Governmental Evaluation.....	172
7.1.2 Information Disclosure .....	173
7.2 Accountable How: Meaningful Involvement of Stakeholders .....	178
7.3 Accountability How: Organizational Capacity Development.....	183
7.4 Summary .....	187
Chapter 8 Discussion and Conclusion.....	189
8.1 Summarizing Answers to the Research Questions .....	189
8.2 The Interplay of Neoliberalism and Authoritarianism.....	196
8.3 The Impacts of Neoliberal Discourses.....	202
8.5 Implications.....	210
8.5.1 Theoretical Implications.....	211
8.5.2 Practical Implications.....	213
8.6 Future Directions.....	214
8.7 Concluding Statement.....	216
References .....	218
Appendix A. A Matrix of the Research Design.....	244
Appendix B. Interview Questions.....	245
Appendix C. Interview Protocols.....	247
I. Interview Protocol with ENO’s Leaders .....	247
II. Interview Protocol with ENO’s Staff and Volunteers .....	250
Appendix D. Observation Protocol.....	252

## List of Tables and Figures

Table 3.1 Official Account Categories in WeChat .....	48
Table 3.2 Different Discourses of Nonprofit Organizations and Accountability .....	50
Table 4.1 Research Questions and Methodology.....	56
Table 4.2 Case Study Environmental Nonprofit Organizations .....	62
Table 4.3 Interviewees by Organization.....	68
Table 4.4 Field Observations.....	71
Table 4.5 Codebook .....	73
Table 4.6 Number of Codes.....	76
Table 5.1 The Funding Received by Green Earth Volunteers, 1996-2010.....	113
Figure 5.1 The Core Works of Friends of Nature .....	83
Figure 5.2 Organizational Structure of Friends of Nature.....	86
Figure 6.1 Stakeholder Relationships.....	166
Figure 8.1 Multi-dimensional Concept of Accountability in the Case of China .....	206

## Chapter 1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to explore the interplay of neoliberalism and socio-political institutions and their impact on environmental nonprofit organizations’<sup>1</sup> accountabilities in an authoritarian regime—in this case, China. It focuses on how environmental nonprofit organizations in China navigate neoliberalism and their relationship with various stakeholders. This research was conducted under the paradigms of social construction and a critical framework. Social construction captures nuances of contextual differences and identifies “new ways of understanding social phenomena” (Burr, 2003, p. 155). A critical framework informed this research by questioning assumptions about the neoliberalist construction of accountability.

### 1.1 The Impact of Neoliberalism in the Nonprofit Sector

Neoliberalism refers to the perspective that emphasizes privatization (Eikenberry & Mirabella, 2018; M. Moore, 2006), liberalization of markets and trade (Goldstein, 2007; Schram et al., 2010), and market approaches and rationalities to the public service (Piatak, Romzek, LeRoux, & Johnston, 2018). With the growth of globalization, neoliberalism has become hegemonic (Gramsci, 1971), propagating economic impact and capitalist values such as cost-effectiveness, efficiency, professionalism, transparency, and financial and performance accountability all over the world (Katz, 2006). The prevalence of neoliberalism has left very limited space for “equitable growth and the satisfaction of social needs” (Barkin, 2000, p. 163).

---

<sup>1</sup> In this research, the terms nonprofit organizations, non-governmental organizations, and civil society organizations are used interchangeably.

To ensure economic growth and the use of free market mechanisms, neoliberalism promotes the principles of privatization and devolution of government's responsibilities. From a neoliberal perspective, a market approach that emphasizes supply, demand, and competition is viewed as a sufficient way to ensure an adequate quantity and quality of public services such as for education, health care, and social welfare (McGregor, 2001). The government's responsibility is not only transferred to the private sector and individuals, but also devolved from central government to local government, to enhance the accountability in local contexts (McGregor, 2001). From a neoliberal perspective, the free market is able to regulate itself by emphasizing financial performance, transparency, countable outcomes, and efficiency. A business-like managerial system, New Public Management was incorporated with social governance and service delivery, emphasizing the professionalization of employees and administrative tasks (Appel, 2016).

There is an extensive literature regarding the impact of neoliberalism, including the marketization, managerialization, and professionalization of nonprofit organizations in the context of western countries (Alexander, Nank, & Stivers, 1999; Birch & Siemiatycki, 2016; Desai & Imrie, 1998; Eikenberry, 2009; Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Lipuma & Koelble, 2009; Maier, Meyer, & Steinbereithner, 2014). However, our understanding of neoliberalism in relation to nonprofit organizations within non-western contexts is limited due to the scarcity of empirical research. Scholars have argued that neoliberalism impacts democratic practice differently in various regimes. For example, scholars have discussed the inherent challenge and negative impact of neoliberalism on civil society development in the U.S. (Alexander, Nank, & Stivers, 1999; Eikenberry, 2009; Nickel & Eikenberry, 2016). In contrast, the development of civil society and

notions of empowerment and participation are viewed as closely related to the expansion of marketization within regimes with an authoritarian history (Pearson, 2009; Vaceková et al., 2017; Yu & Chen, 2018).

China is “a typical postsocialist and one-party state” (Yu & Chen, 2018, p. 928). Harvey (2005) identified China as a neoliberal state. In the 1980s, neoliberalism became the national discourse in Deng’s China (Zhou, Lin, & Zhang, 2019). However, as Harvey (2005) argued, neoliberalism opened up opportunities for new structures of state intervention and state power. Recent research in China found that nonprofit organizations can become a tool of government control instead of empowerment and participation (Yang, He, & Long, 2016). In contrast, some scholars argue that neoliberalism and the emergence of the private sector have been seen as a positive force for the development of civil society in China (Heberer, 2009; Hsu & Hasmath, 2017; Yu & Chen, 2018). Some scholars went as far as reporting nonprofit organizations were able to challenge the “monopoly of the Chinese Communist Party-state” (Zhang & Baum, 2004, p. 97). Without concrete empirical evidence, it is problematic to infer either the positive or negative impacts of neoliberalism on civil society.

## 1.2 A Social Constructionist Framework of Accountability

Within a neoliberal context, nonprofit organizations are often seen as instruments and vehicles of public service delivery and emphasize accountability by focusing on performance measurement (Poole et al., 2000), program evaluation (Hoefer, 2002), and outcomes assessment (Campbell, 2002). However, accountability remains one of the most challenging issues for nonprofit organizations (Alexander, Brudney, & Yang, 2010). The civil society sector is facing increased public scrutiny as scandals emerge

(Archambeault & Webber, 2018; de Wet, 2015; Kim et al., 2018; Nair & Bhatnagar, 2011; Wadham, 2016). Specifically, the public has criticized the poor governance, accountability shortfalls, and mission drift of nonprofit organizations all over the world (Gabay, 2014; Greenlee et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2018). Considering the above issues that challenge nonprofit organizations' role in communities, scholars need to expand upon the narrow neoliberalist understanding of accountability, such as the emphasis on financial accountability as well as performance measurement and assessment and being accountable to funders, which is problematic for resource allocation and power distribution.

For this reason, this research sees accountability as a concept of power relations between nonprofit organizations and their stakeholders (Ebrahim, 2005). It adopts Raggio's (2018) social-constructionist accountability framework, which recognizes the link between accountability and power. Raggio's framework critically analyzes the following areas of accountability in relation to nonprofit organizations:

- (1) Stakeholders involved with accountability;
- (2) The ideas and beliefs about definitions of accountability;
- (3) Process and practices put in place to respond to accountability demands; and
- (4) The message(s) generally conveyed about practices and ideas.

The above aspects of neoliberalism and accountability will be explained in detail in the literature review chapters 2 and 3.



### 1.3 Focus on Environmental Nonprofit Organizations

This research focuses in particular on accountability in environmental nonprofit organizations in China because environmental nonprofit organizations are key actors in the process of social change in China. With the rise of neoliberalism since the 1960s, environmental movements have been active in contemporary society (Guldbrandsen & Holland, 2001), which emphasize “community empowerment, citizen involvement, and economic self-sufficiency” (Holifield, 2004, p. 287). On the one hand, neoliberalism prompted the emergence and public participation of environmental activists and organizations. On the other hand, the principle of marketization, competition, and local autonomy espoused by neoliberalism has been in conflict with the requirement of cooperation needed to address environmental issues (Boda, 2018).

In the case of China, since the 1980s, a growing market economy and economic growth have demanded increasing privatization and commoditization of natural resources and a neoliberal practice of environmental protection (Sturgeon, 2007). Compared to organizations in other areas, environmental organizations have had more space to grow and receive governmental support (Brandsen & Simsa, 2016; Yang, 2005; Yu, 2016; Zhou & Pan, 2016). The central government has devolved the political-economic power and responsibility of environmental protection to the local level, which provides opportunities for environmental nonprofit organizations to access policy information and to participate in environmental decision-making (Xie, 2011). The neoliberal goal of economic growth is intertwined with the market approach of efficiency, sustainability, and environmental conservation (Bakker, 2010; Pearson, 2009). In the context of China,

there has not been enough research on if or how environmental nonprofit organizations seek growth and development under state control and neoliberal forces.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

The following primary research question guided this research:

RQ: How have environmental nonprofit organizations constructed accountabilities within the neoliberal context of China?

To address the primary research question, this research has three secondary research questions based on the social constructionist framework of accountability:

RQ1: How have neoliberal discourses been embedded in environmental nonprofit organizations' accountability processes and practices?

RQ2: To whom are environmental nonprofit organizations accountable?

RQ3: How are environmental nonprofit organizations accountable?

This research is important in both theoretical and empirical aspects. The case of China offers a valuable perspective for a cross-context comparison with the existing literature regarding the formation and development of civil society and democratic practice. First, this research fills an existing gap between how scholars construct neoliberalist civil society and how practitioners actually put neoliberalism into practice. It is helpful to understand what types of neoliberal discourse have been articulated with respect to the socio-political context of China and its relationship with a global process of neoliberalization. Second, an examination beyond the western context offers a contextual understanding of the power distribution and relations among nonprofit organizations, the state, and the public. Third, this research challenges the one-size-fits-all understanding of

accountability. It views accountability as a concept of power relations and a lens to understand the role of nonprofit organizations rather than a concept about performance measurement and assessment. An empirical analysis of accountability building also enriches the accountability literature.

### 1.5 Plan of the Dissertation

The remainder of the dissertation is organized into several chapters. Chapters 2 and 3 are reviews of the literature. Chapter 2 provides an overview of a contextual understanding of neoliberalism. It introduces the main neoliberalist principles that are related to civil society, such as marketization, managerialization, and professionalization as well as related scholarly arguments. A particular focus highlights the contradictory statements regarding the relationship between neoliberalist principles and the development of civil society within various contexts. In addition, the development of nonprofit organizations in China and the development of environmental nonprofit organizations within the neoliberalist context is discussed.

Chapter 3 more deeply examines the social construction of accountability framework. Focusing on the four aspects of the framework, the definition of accountability, being accountable to who, how, and the conveyed accountability messages, this chapter integrates the existing literature and identifies the existing gaps regarding the neoliberal context and the social constructionist understanding of accountabilities in the nonprofit sector.

Chapter 4 discusses the research methodology. To address the research questions, qualitative research methods were used to conduct case studies of three environmental

organizations in Beijing, China. Primary data were gathered through field observations and 18 in-depth interviews with leaders, staff, and volunteers. In addition, organizations' documents and social media content were analyzed.

In Chapters 5, 6, and 7, the research findings are discussed and the research questions are addressed. Chapter 5 provides an overview of organizational changes and development under the impact of a neoliberal context in China. It answers the first secondary research question and explores the embeddedness of marketization, managerialization, and professionalization. Focusing on the three organizations' practices, Chapter 6 focuses on the power dynamics of stakeholder groups and discusses to whom environmental nonprofit organizations are accountable within the neoliberal context of China. Chapter 7 addresses the third secondary research question and examines how environmental nonprofit organizations are accountable. Finally, Chapter 8 concludes this study by discussing the findings of the research, the implications for theory, policy, and practice, and directions for future research.

## Chapter 2 Neoliberalism Discourses and Impact

This chapter begins with an overview of neoliberalism, its relationship with civil society, followed by a discussion of the contextual understanding of neoliberalism in different regimes. In 1978, Xiaoping Deng in China initiated the liberalization of the Communist Party-ruled economy by adopting a market-oriented approach (Harvey, 2005; F. Wu, 2008). Almost at the same time, the Reagan administration in the United States promoted “the reduction of big government and the expansion of the private sector” (Corson, 2010, p. 583). Under the neoliberal paradigm, nonprofit organizations are largely viewed as instruments and vehicles of public service delivery; specifically, beneficiaries are viewed as consumers, donors are viewed as investors, and activists are viewed as entrepreneurs (Maier et al., 2016).

### 2.1 The Definition of Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism has been viewed and described as a doctrine, a political project, an ideology, a discourse, or a tool of governmentality (Chiapello, 2017; Hanlon, 2011; Harvey, 2005). Focusing on the role of the market, international institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have promoted market principles in social governance and the global trading regime, including the retreat of capital control, deregulating labor markets, privatizing public enterprises, and lowering taxes since the 1980s and 1990s (P. B. Evans & Sewell, 2013; Ostry et al., 2016). According to Harvey (2005, p. 2):

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual

entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.

Neoliberalism criticizes state interference with welfare systems and trade and emphasizes the individual, organization, and community's capacity of self-governance, minimizing the social and political causes of social problems. In particular, neoliberalism recasts the role of the welfare state by shifting responsibility from state to market and from the collective to the individual (Taylor-Gooby, 2004). It fosters rationalities in society and market mechanisms, such as discipline, efficiency, and competition to organize society, and refigure political governance and citizenship (Bevir, 2011; Boda, 2018; Harvey, 2005; Ong, 2006). Also, neoliberalism reduces the state's role to provide public goods (Birch & Siemiatycki, 2016; Desai & Imrie, 1998; Lipuma & Koelble, 2009).

With the impact of neoliberal ideology, marginalized people and groups are encouraged to be entrepreneurial and to find individualized solutions to their needs. Many social services that were provided by the government are devolved to the private and voluntary sector through contracting-out and privatization. As Brown (2015) stated, with neoliberalism "all conduct is economic conduct; all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics, even when those spheres are not directly monetized" (p. 10). Carroll and Jarvis (2015) argued that neoliberalism generates "a political imperative to co-opt, coerce, and internalize the agency of civil society" (p. 282). In a lot of developing countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, neoliberalism was introduced through a top-down approach by the state and social elites to emphasize the economic development and marketization process (Baker, 2009; Carroll & Jarvis,

2015). The trend that the voluntary and private sectors are stepping into the areas where the state is supposed to be responsible legitimizes the non-performing state (Chandhoke, 2003).

## 2.2 Neoliberalism and Civil Society

The prevalence of neoliberalism has resulted in the marketization, managerialization, and professionalization of nonprofit organizations. These include a focus on commercialization, economic efficiency, and increasing productivity in civil society organizations. For example, for environmental nonprofit organizations, literature suggests that in the U.S. context, more attention has been paid to labor management and capacity building to compete for public and private funding within a market context instead of making efforts aimed at conserving the collective environment for the public good (Boda, 2018).

### 2.2.1 Marketization

Marketization includes the use of market tools, principles, terminology, and business-like assumptions, discourses, and practices that emphasize financial power, profit maximization, and transaction (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010; Eikenberry, 2018; B. Evans et al., 2005; Sanders, 2012). Within the Western context, scholars have identified the tension and the contradiction between marketization and civil society, such as competition vs. cooperation, profit-seeking vs. social equity, and service delivery vs. policy advocacy. Normative market-based standards such as maximizing profits, managerialism, and economic rationalism (Pusey, 1996) are viewed as negatively impacting democracy, reciprocity, social justice, and solidarity (Eikenberry, 2009; Hvenmark, 2016; Keevers et al., 2012; Schram et al., 2010; Skocpol, 2003).

Marketization requires nonprofit organizations to preserve autonomy through revenue diversification (Moulton & Eckerd, 2012); therefore, some scholars claim that in authoritarian contexts, marketization helps to establish an independent and autonomous civil society (Vaceková et al., 2017; Jianxing Yu & Chen, 2018). However, there still lacks empirical evidence regarding the connection between marketization and democratic civil society within different contexts (Eikenberry, 2018).

Within the market mechanism that emphasizes competition and transaction, the decision-making process is dominated by competition rather than consensus making and collective action (Stout, 2018). Therefore, state, market, and civil society act as equal stakeholders with no distinction (Kamat, 2004). Harvey (2005) argued that nonprofit organizations under neoliberalism are elitist, unaccountable, and distant from the communities they serve. With an emphasis on market mechanisms, marginalized people and groups are also encouraged to be entrepreneurial and to find individualized solutions to their needs. Sandberg (2016) argued that the discourse of entrepreneurship measures all things “by their worth as enterprises and by their ability to compete” (p. 62).

### 2.2.2 Managerialization

Managerialism has been recognized as a means to realize and implement the ideology or discourse of neoliberalism, to pursue and consolidate the free market (Georgeou & Engel, 2011; Harlow et al., 2013; Hvenmark, 2016; Knafo et al., 2019). Hvenmark (2016) suggested that the concept of managerialism includes ideology and discourses (managerialism), practices (management), and organizational processes (managerialization). Maier and Meyer (2011) pointed out that the discourses of managerialism encompass the terms of effectiveness, efficiency, resources, and strategy.



From a practical perspective, managerialism refers to the practices “involving continuous increases in efficiency; the use of ever more sophisticated technologies; a labor force disciplined to productivity; clear implementation of the professional management role; managers being given the right to manage” (Evans, Richmond, & Shields, 2005, p. 79). In addition, managerialization is a changing process “in which organizations adopt managerialism and management practices” (Hvenmark, 2016, p. 2849). In the managerialization process, organizations make decisions based on instrumental and rational choices, emphasize strategies to attain certain goals, and measure goal achievement based on the standard of efficiency and effectiveness. Therefore, the managerialization of an organization involves the changes in organizations’ structures, operations, and stakeholder relationships (Hvenmark, 2013).

Scholars have criticized the emphasis and prevalence of managerialism among nonprofit organizations. A market-driven strategy of financial performance and outcomes requires nonprofit organizations to be more efficient, competitive, transparent, and accountable. However, Kamat (2004) pointed out that with managerialism, the activities of nonprofit organizations are constrained to managerial solutions and administrative tasks rather than focusing on power distribution and inequality. Kreutzer and Jäger (2011) found that managerialism, which emphasizes professionalized expertise, led to a decline of volunteer motivation and threatened participatory impulses.

### 2.2.3 Professionalization

According to Suárez (2011), “professionalization refers to the increasing presence of specialized expertise in an organization and to shifts from volunteer labor to paid staff” (p. 311). With the requirement of managerialization to achieve and ensure neoliberal

market mechanisms, professionalization has been recognized as one of the critical components by emphasizing professional knowledge and personnel (Hvenmark, 2013). The professionalization of nonprofit organizations is demonstrated through: staffing and structures, financial management, as well as operational approaches (Cumming, 2008). Through hiring professional staff and providing professional training, organizations are able to improve professional competencies, managerial capacities, and implement managerialization. In terms of financial management, nonprofit organizations are expected to demonstrate their financial performance through practices of transparency and accountability. They are also required to report their detailed financial information to the rigorous government regulatory system. Therefore, nonprofit organizations have been professionalized because of not only the needs of the market, but also the encouragement of the state. For example, scholars have found that the governments in the U.S. and France have incentivized nonprofit organizations to raise their staff's expertise and financial accountability and promoted bureaucratic professionalization through approaches such as procuring government grants and contracts (Cumming, 2008; Suárez, 2011).

The existing research has documented the impact of professionalization on nonprofit organizations' practices. Scholars argued that the institutional environment and key stakeholders such as the state and foundations have transmitted professional mechanisms such as standardized metrics and codes of conduct onto nonprofit organizations (Bromley & Orchard, 2016). Minkoff and Powell (2006) pointed out that professionalism often has led to significant shifts of nonprofit organizations' mission and structure. Jenkins (1998) found that the professionalization of social movements led to a

prescribed fashion and moderate goals and tactics. Hwang and Powell (2009) claimed that the adoption of professionalized standards made heterogeneous nonprofit organizations more similar and created a coherent nonprofit sector with a common set of organizational routines.

The literature on the relationship between neoliberalism and civil society within different contexts presents a need for a contextual understanding of how neoliberalism has been put into practice by nonprofit organizations and other social actors. However, the research regarding the impact of neoliberalism on civil society and participatory democracy in the context of China is still limited.

### 2.3 Neoliberalism: Forty Years in China

As previously mentioned in the introduction, China has been identified as a neoliberal state by Harvey (2005). In the 1980s, with the implementation of the Reform and Opening-up policies, the leader Xiaoping Deng promoted neoliberalism as a national discourse in Deng's China (Zhou, Lin, & Zhang, 2019). However, in the authoritarian regime of China, the development and adoption of neoliberalism has been a controversial issue because of the inherent conflict between free-market capitalism and authoritarian state control (Duckett, 2020; Pieke, 2009). For example, F. Wu (2010) argued that "China's trajectory of market transition does not square exactly with the standard doctrine of neoliberalism" because of the enhancing state control (p. 627). In contrast, MacEwan (2005, p. 172) argued:

Neoliberalism requires a strong state that can ensure the primacy of private property, preserve the dominance of markets over social control, and thus limit

the operation of democratic power. Also, neoliberalism often requires a strong state, sometimes a dictatorial state, for its implementation.

Despite the existing scholarly arguments regarding whether China is a neoliberalist country because of the strong state intervention and control, this research sees neoliberalism as a framework that defines the roles of the state, civil society, and the public in society. According to the previous literature review, neoliberalism highlights “the strengthening of markets, the retreat of the state as welfare provider and the creation of responsible individuals and families” (Pieke, 2009, p. 8). Since economic reform, China has experienced a significant change of social welfare provision and embraced the market economy (Bian & Logan, 1996; Duckett, 2004). After 40 years, Chinese society has been transformed in every aspect of its socioeconomic context for public governance and civil society development, which has created complicated power dynamics among the state, the market, nonprofit organizations, and the public.

### 2.3.1. The State-Economy in China

Since the establishment of Communist China in 1949, the economy has been controlled by a state-planned system and state-owned enterprises. The government monopolized social governance and controlled the market and resource allocation as well as decided on industry and the production prices and profits. The state-planned economy has been transformed to a market-driven economy since economic reforms in the 1980s, focusing on the improvement of governance, and micromanagement of institutions. In December 1978, the official document of the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China brought up the economic reform which

abandoned the state-planned system and embraced “the market economy with Chinese characteristics” (Gong & Cortese, 2017, p. 206). As Xiaoping Deng (1993, p. 123) stated,

We in Mainland China insist on socialism, not the evil path of capitalism. The distinction between socialism and capitalism is common prosperity, not polarization (in income distribution). The wealth that we create first belongs to the state, and second the people. It does not give rise to a new capitalist class. The proportion that the state takes is also used in the interest of the people, for instance on national defense, but more on developing economy, education and science, and improving people’s life and their intellectual and cultural level.

With the economic reform, state-owned enterprises were privatized and given more autonomy in management and non-state enterprises emerged (Cai et al., 2003). The Chinese government signed free trade agreements, encouraged the emerging of private organizations, and adopted a market-driven approach for social governance. Also, the Chinese government has reformed social policies by commercializing education, health care, and housing.

However, an understanding of neoliberalism cannot be separated from authoritarian politics in China. The Chinese government has integrated the pursuit of privatization, marketization, as well as coercive disciplinary forms of state intervention simultaneously (J. Lee & Zhu, 2006). As Harvey (2005) argued, “neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics’ best describes China’s particular kind of market economy that increasingly incorporates neoliberal elements integrated with authoritarian centralized control” (p. 120). Examples are the implementation of a nationwide social credit system since 2014 and trash sorting policies in Shanghai in 2019.

In 2014, the Chinese government announced that a nationwide social credit system will be established. Under the system, individuals, private companies, social organizations, and government agencies are assigned a score, which will be calculated based on daily actions related to such areas as transaction history, professional conduct, law abidance, corruption, tax evasion, and academic plagiarism (Creemers, 2018; Makinen, 2015). The Chinese government stated that the social credit system is designed to boost public confidence and fight problems like corruption and business fraud to reestablish a healthy market system with higher morality and integrity. Currently, several early initiatives and pilot projects have been implemented by private businesses and local governments in China.

In July 2019, the municipal government of Shanghai implemented a trash sorting policy. According to the policy, all trash must be sorted into four categories: dry, wet, recyclable, and hazardous. Households and companies that violate the policy will be punished with strict fines. Based on this pilot project, the Chinese government aims to establish a nationwide trash sorting policy to address environmental issues and promote environmental sustainability, which was called “authoritarian environmentalism” by western media (Kuo, 2019). Both the policies of a social credit system and trash sorting have been described by the Chinese government as necessary actions to ensure economic growth. The implementation was started at the local level or by private businesses; however, state intervention has been the absolute force in the policy-making and implementation process.

### 2.3.2 The State-Social Organization Relationship

In 1978, Xiaoping Deng enunciated a development-first approach to reform the economic system by embracing “market discipline, commodification, and an “open-door” policy to expand the space of accumulation” (F. Wu, 2010, p. 623). The reform started in the economic sphere and then extended to social activities. The state’s power and centralized control were diminished and loosened. The retreat of government intervention in supervising and controlling the market, individuals’ lives, and families has provided spaces for Chinese citizens to solve social problems rather than totally rely on the government (Derleth & Koldyk, 2004). The emphasis on marketization and economic development has been the center of social development and governance. Nonprofit organizations, which are called social organizations in China, have been recognized and promoted for their capability to improve economic growth and provide public goods (Yu, Jia, & Lin, 2018). There are a growing number and a broad range of nonprofit organizations in China, which reflect what many see as overall social progress. An interview with an official of the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs by Büsgen (2006) revealed the acknowledgment of civil society’s contribution to “economic growth, poverty alleviation, environmental conservation, and social service delivery” instead of “promoting participation, debate, and pluralism” (p. 2).

Nonprofit organizations emerged because the government needed them to provide social services. In general, there are two main types of nonprofit organizations in China: government-run organizations and citizen-run organizations “with few or no ties to the government and closer ties to grassroots communities and their concerns” (Shieh, 2017, p. 1790). Both types of organizations are strictly controlled by the bureaus of civil affairs

at both the central and local government levels through a rigorous registration system. The registration system of both government-run and citizen-run organizations in China includes three main categories: social organization, civil non-enterprise unit, and foundation. Social organizations include professional associations and membership-based organizations. Civil non-enterprise units are organizations established with the purpose of engaging in nonprofit social service activities. Civil non-enterprise units are non-membership based nonprofit organizations and have to find a professional supervisory agency, which must be a government-affiliated organization, to be qualified as civil non-enterprise units.

Yang and Alpermann (2014) criticized the registration system as “insecurity by design” (p. 315) because of the absolute power held by the government over civil society organizations. Most of the government-run organizations receive government funds for supplementary service delivery and have their leaders as government officials. Therefore, they have the capacity to navigate the governmental bureaucracy and the available resources from the governmental system. In contrast, many citizen-run organizations could not find such an agency due to the limited number of governmental agencies that are willing to take the responsibility to supervise them. Therefore, they have to register as businesses or maintain an un-registered status, which is a grey area of government regulations. Even for organizations that have successfully registered, the legal status is not automatically related to the tax-exempt status and public fundraising permission. Most citizen-run organizations are not able to apply for these permissions.

The government is very cautious regarding the development of social organizations and emphasizes governance stability more than social problem-solving



(Ding, 2015; Hua et al., 2016). Therefore, there is an inherent tension between the state and nonprofit organizations. For public service delivery, nonprofit organizations mobilize social resources and provide public services in the areas that the government does not perform properly; and the government views nonprofit organizations as a tool for assisting and implementing government policies. However, in the participation of the policy-making process, the Chinese government is suspicious about nonprofit organizations and is cautious regarding to what extent nonprofit organizations should be involved (Gilley, 2012). The government is still experimenting and seeking a way to balance the need to support nonprofit organizations and the tightening of their control.

### 2.3.3 Policies and Regulations

At the central government level, two departments are directly related to environmental nonprofit organizations, the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Ministry of Ecology and Environment. In January 2017, the two departments jointly released the “Guidance on Strengthening the Development and Standardized Management of Environmental Social Organizations,” which emphasizes four aspects of environmental organizations management: registration and supervision, institutional and financial support, standardized management, and organizations’ capacity building. Theoretically speaking, the central government has recognized the complementary role that environmental nonprofit organizations can play as assistants and helpers for the government. A series of policies and regulations have been issued to ensure the development of environmental nonprofit organizations and to promote public participation. For example, the 2014 amended Environment Protection Law allows nonprofit organizations to initiate environmental public interest litigations. In other

words, the central government has been aware of the monitoring function that environmental nonprofit organizations can have on local government and businesses and the education function that they can have for the public regarding the complex concepts and knowledge of environmental protection. In 2015, the central government released the Act of Public Participation in Environment Protection. The act mentioned the role of social organizations in providing advice in policy-making, environmental public interest litigation, and government contracting out.

In 2016, there were two laws released by the Chinese government, which have had a profound impact on both domestic and foreign NGOs in China: the charity law and overseas NGO law. The charity law was released in March 2016, which provided relatively clear definitions and explanations of charity, public interest, registration, tax deduction, and fundraising activities of NGOs. Spires (2019) pointed out that the charity law was “an extension of state efforts to contain and control grassroots civil society” (p. 2). In April 2016, the Chinese government also released a law targeting foreign nongovernmental organizations, which imposed stricter regulations regarding foreign organizations’ registration and collaboration with domestic organizations. The law came into effect on January 1, 2017. According to the law, domestic NGOs have to report to and get permission from the government if they want to collaborate for any activities with any foreign NGOs who are not registered in China.

Both laws have significantly influenced the operation of NGOs in China. Although the Chinese government stated that the purpose of the charity law was to establish a supportive legal mechanism for the philanthropy sector, the law explicitly highlighted the term “charity” rather than “public interest.” NGOs’ activities are much

more limited and narrowed to service delivery and other charitable activities to fulfill the state's need (Kang, 2019). Specifically, many environmental organizations claimed that their work is not directly related to charity and direct public service, but a broader term of public interest. Through a mostly collaborative approach, they identified environmental issues and sought for social and policy change. They have been concerned that their activities and their organizations would be marginalized in the current institutional system, especially with the release of the new laws. For instance, although scholars have claimed that government contracting has been one of the main funding resources for domestic nonprofit organizations in China (Jing, 2018; Kang, 2019), most environmental nonprofit organizations do not have the opportunity to be involved in government contracting. Also, both laws emphasized national security and prohibited all NGOs' activities that might endanger national security. The foreign NGO law assigned the management of foreign NGOs from the Ministry of Civil Affairs to the Ministry of Public Security. Under this umbrella, any activities that are viewed as a threat to national security, including environmental advocacy, can be easily prohibited.

As Huntington (1968) argued, a strong authoritarian government can promote social transformation through its absolute power. Based on the Communist Party's ideology and the primary purpose to stabilize the monopoly power of the party, nonprofit organizations have had the opportunities to develop with limited autonomy compared to their counterparts in Western countries. With the slow emergence of civil society in the public sphere, China is a unique example in contemporary society regarding the power relations between government and nonprofit organizations and the future development of the civil society sector.

#### 2.3.4 The Rise of Domestic Philanthropic Foundations

Rapid economic growth in the last 40 years has accumulated a large amount of wealth in China. With this rapid growth, there has been a plethora of private foundations, social enterprises, and incubators emerging, which have been a critical resource for the development of civil society in China. The Chinese government has strict regulations regarding public fundraising. Currently, very few government-run organizations and big domestic corporate foundations are authorized to conduct public fundraising. However, due to the lack of clear regulation, a lot of organizations are engaging in crowdfunding through social media platforms. The grey area of online fundraising will be discussed later. Overall, due to the restriction of public fundraising and limited foreign resources, domestic corporate foundations such as Alibaba, SEE, Vantone (changed its name to Woqi in 2017), and Wanke Foundation have been the main funding resources and collaborators for many environmental nonprofit organizations in China. As Kang (2019) introduced, private foundations favor nonprofit organizations and projects in the areas that are neglected by government contracting, such as environmental protection, disabilities, and migrant workers. Corporate foundations not only provide grants and funding to nonprofit organizations, but also help them to improve their capacity through their projects. For example, Narada Foundation's Ginko Project and SEE Foundation's Jinciao Project have provided funding, training, and opportunities for nonprofit leaders to attend international conferences. Tencent Foundation has had a project to support fundraising and communication staff of small nonprofit organizations.

With significant economic power, the above mentioned corporate foundations have been a critical social actor in the development of philanthropy and civil society in

China through innovative initiatives and projects to support grassroots nonprofit organizations. H. Zhou (2015) pointed out that corporate philanthropists have had the power to influence the Chinese government by serving as the government's wallet. Also, there has been research exploring corporate social responsibility in China, focusing on corporate ethics and the political and social benefits for private entrepreneurs by participating in philanthropy (Ma & Parish, 2006; Moon & Shen, 2010). On the one hand, the business principles such as transparency, efficiency, and accountability are transferred from corporate foundations to nonprofit organizations through funding and grants. On the other hand, there is a positive relationship between corporate social responsibility and the companies' stock and profit returns (Gao et al., 2012).

Since the 1980s, the Chinese government has gradually allowed more and more private foundations as a response to the market economy (Ni & Zhan, 2017). As previously mentioned, research suggests the entering of businesses and corporate foundations brings market-oriented mechanisms and practices into the nonprofit sector and promotes the managerialization and professionalization of nonprofit organizations. Corporate foundations have been a critical stakeholder for nonprofit organizations as well as a partner of the Chinese government. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the interaction of corporate foundations with nonprofit organizations and the state and the role of corporate foundations in shaping nonprofit organizations' operations.

### 2.3.5 Environmental Nonprofit Organizations in China

The development of environmental nonprofit organizations in China has been prompted by governmental attention to environmental issues since the 1990s. According to the 2014 report by NGO 2.0, School of Philanthropy at Sun Yat-Sen University, and

the Narada Foundation, the environment is one of the service areas that has the highest number of nonprofit organizations in China. Arguably, the existing research on environmental nonprofit organizations in China has so far focused narrowly on the relationship between civil society and the political regime, the opportunities and obstacles affecting their development, and the impact of their activities on environmental quality (Dai & Spires, 2018; Gilley, 2012; G. Yang, 2005). For example, scholars have explored the growth of environmental organizations and activists in China and found differences between China and western countries (i.e. Dai & Spires, 2018; Sima, 2011). Compared to their counterparts in western countries, environmental nonprofit organizations in China focus more on apolitical and non-confrontational issues, lack philanthropic and governmental resources, and are led and developed by dedicated individual leaders' activities (S. Chen & Uitto, 2015; Dai & Spires, 2018; Sima, 2011; Stalley & Yang, 2006; Steinhardt & Wu, 2016; Xie, 2011). Also, scholars find the impact of public pollution information disclosure promoted by environmental nonprofit organizations resulted in less local pollutant emissions (Tian, Guo, Han, & Ahmad, 2016; Zheng, Kahn, Sun, & Luo, 2014).

Organizational-level research in this area is scarce. Limited attention has been paid to how environmental nonprofit organizations navigate available resources and meet the government or international organizations' expectations by adopting marketization strategies and professional capacity building (P. H. Wu, 2017; Xu et al., 2015). For example, P.H. Wu (2017) found that environmental nonprofit organizations in China faced barriers such as scientific terminology, knowledge gaps, and procedural specifications to engage in environmental policy making and communicate with

governmental officials. J. Wu et al. (2017) found that environmental nonprofit organizations lacked any systematic management schemes and stable staff who were familiar with the organization's work due to high mobility.

## 2.4 Examination of the Impact of Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism and the emergence of the private sector have been seen by some as a positive force for the development of civil society in China (Heberer, 2009; Hsu & Hasmath, 2017; Yu & Chen, 2018). Yu and Chen (2018) compared China and the U.S. and argued that the marketization process facilitated the development of civil society in China instead of inhibiting it. In addition, Zhou et al. (2019) argued that the adoption of the Westernized framework of neoliberalism blunts the entanglement of state, capital, and society and marginalized "the theoretical significance of the socio-political conditions and novel developments" in China (p. 35). Therefore, neoliberalism should be understood as a context-specific process rather than global hegemony.

The existing literature demonstrates a universal understanding of neoliberalism as a hegemonic and universal approach and suggests the following are relevant to understanding how environmental nonprofit organizations in China navigate a neoliberal context (S. Chen & Uitto, 2015; Gilley, 2012; Hsu & Hasmath, 2017):

- (1) The devolution and privatization of social responsibility and their emphasis on contracting and competition;
- (2) Marketization's emphasis on financial performance, transparency, countable outcomes, and efficiency;
- (3) Managerialism and professionalization's emphasis on administrative tasks.

To ensure the freedom of the market and economic development, policies, and strategies such as privatization and devolution have been prevalent and led to the processes of marketization, managerialization, and professionalization. Under the neoliberalist paradigm, nonprofit organizations are primarily viewed as instruments of public service delivery; accountability becomes a normative standard of being accountable to funders and for service quality. However, contradictory arguments regarding the impact of neoliberalism on civil society presented a need for a contextual understanding of neoliberalism. Based on the existing literature on neoliberalism, civil society, and environmental nonprofit organizations, an examination of neoliberalism's impact in China focuses on the following aspects:

- (1) Neoliberal policies of devolution and privatization and their impact on nonprofit organizations

In China, the central government has been the ultimate accountable entity for social issues at both the national and local levels. People used to expect the government to address environmental and social issues. Since the 1980s, the Chinese government has started the reform to build a “big society, small government” to relieve the social burden of government. Schwartz (2004) used the word “decentralization” to describe the process.

In the area of environmental protection, the Chinese government realizes the role of environmental nonprofit organizations to deal with the increasing environmental protests focusing on economic development projects, to publish information in relation to environmental public policy. Chen and Uitto (2015) summarized the mechanisms used by the Chinese government to mediate state-society cooperation: institutionalize nonprofit organizations into the decision-making process; provide financial and technical support to



nonprofit organizations; increase the legitimacy and credibility of nonprofit organizations; consolidate nonprofit organizations; and empower nonprofit organizations to implement public policies. The Chinese government plays a primary role in the development process of environmental nonprofit organizations (J. Lu & Dong, 2018).

The prevalence of the neoliberal idea of devolution and privatization significantly impacts the state's attitude toward nonprofit organizations and the relationship between the state and nonprofit organizations. The demands of government for social service providers, including environmental protection services, explains the reason why the Chinese government is tolerant of some non-registered organizations in China. As scholars suggest, non-registered organizations will be able to survive as long as they operate as social service providers instead of challenging governments (Schwartz, 2004; Spires et al., 2014; Xie, 2011).

In addition, devolution and decentralization promotes the participation of various social actors, such as individual citizens, civil society organizations, the media, and businesses, in the social governance process (Baum, 2004). As Gilley (2012) claimed, there are several levels of citizen participation: high level (legally-binding deliberative forums, outright citizen autonomy, legislative sovereignty), medium level (policy activism and protest, informal consultations), and low level (being targets of state propaganda, reporting policy violations, and attending informational meetings). Within the authoritarian context of China, Gilley (2012) pointed out that citizen participation was defined as and limited to internalizing state-produced knowledge and obeying state policies. Also, the activities of nonprofit organizations were limited to "rule-based activism" (Gilley, 2012, p. 291) and "the media has been used to float policy proposals or

‘expose bad examples’ of local government failures but not to challenge state policies” (Gilley, 2012, p. 291). Based on the existing arguments, it is necessary to explore how the adoption of neoliberal policies has influenced the development of civil society organizations in China.

(2) Marketization’s emphasis on financial performance, transparency, countable outcomes, and efficiency.

Lacking funding and financial resources have been identified as one of the main challenges for Chinese nonprofit organizations (Dai & Spires, 2018; Schwartz, 2004; Xie, 2011). In China, not all private donations toward nonprofit organizations are tax-deductible. There are complex regulations and limitations about what kind of donations are tax-deductible and how much funding nonprofit organizations can raise. Although the central government of China has paid attention to environmental degradation issues recently, the investment and funding from the national governmental level mostly focuses on some specific environmental protection projects such as wind energy and reduction of SO<sub>2</sub> emissions (Xu et al., 2015). Organizations and programs that serve vulnerable populations and environmental justice issues normally find it hard to get governmental funding (P. H. Wu, 2017). Before the release of the 2016 foreign NGO law, due to the lack of philanthropic culture, lack of a large base of dues-paying membership, and lack of domestic funding, Chinese environmental nonprofit organizations were forced to seek funding and donations from international organizations and donors. In the interaction process with the government, corporate foundations, as well as international organizations, Chinese environmental nonprofit organizations have been learning the market approach of fundraising, project evaluation, and performance measurement, to

signal their financial capacity and accountability, to demonstrate their competence of performance and transparency, and to improve their efficiency and effectiveness within a neoliberal framework (Xie, 2011). For example, the government's service contracting has prompted nonprofit organizations to be competitive and accountable (Jing & Chen, 2012; R. Zhao et al., 2016). Yu and Chen (2018) identified the impact of business elites on nonprofit organizations in China by bringing the market-driven values and practices of human resource and funding management. S. Chen and Uitto's (2015) research explored the impact of projects of the United Nations on Chinese environmental nonprofit organizations' financial and operational rules and procedures. The rigorous standard from the government regarding fiscal accountability and annual reporting requires nonprofit organizations, specifically registered organizations, to be accountable. For example, staff salaries and operation costs cannot be more than 10% of an organization's annual expenses. How might marketization have embedded itself in environmental nonprofit organizations in China? This research aims to address the question.

(3) Managerialism and professionalization's emphasis on administrative tasks and organizational development.

Managerialism emphasizes the technological solutions and the conviction that professional training and staff will enable organizations to achieve their goals (Hvenmark, 2013). Xie (2011) pointed out that environmental nonprofit organizations in China have to offer competitive salaries for their staff to attract graduates and job seekers. In addition, in their operation process, many environmental nonprofit organizations are targeting highly-educated community residents and journalists rather than a mass audience (Xie, 2011). The interactions with international organizations also

facilitates the professionalization process of environmental activists in China (J. Chen, 2010; S. Chen & Uitto, 2015; Matsuzawa, 2019). The question is, in addition to marketization, how might managerialization and professionalization have embedded themselves in environmental nonprofit organizations?

Based on these aspects, this research aims to provide empirical evidence within the specific socio-political context of China that is necessary to articulate how environmental nonprofit organizations navigate the impact of neoliberalism regarding their operations, management, and development and construct their multiple accountabilities. The next chapter focuses on the social construction of accountability.

## Chapter 3 The Social Construction of Accountability

The concept of accountability has encompassed the discussion of being accountable to whom, being accountable for what, and how to be accountable (Brody, 2001; Brown & Moore, 2001; Ebrahim, 2016; Kearns, 1996; Schatteman, 2013). Raggio (2018) added a fourth aspect: what messages about accountability are conveyed. Social constructivism emphasizes that there is no one-size-fits-all accountability framework across the different political, social, and cultural contexts and that accountability is constructed in relation to the involved people and the context (Mirabella, 2013; Raggio, 2018). Ebrahim and Weisband (2007) suggested that accountability is ambiguous because it is “a socially embedded, politicized, pluralistic, and value-heavy construction” (p. 3). Because of nonprofit organizations’ obligations “between the community-at-large, the fiduciary board, the funding source, and management” (Gardner, 1987, p. 7), accountability is conceptualized and understood subjectively by different individuals and organizations.

To better understand how accountability varies across social and cultural contexts, the examination of accountability from social constructionism employs the research approach of empirical observation and interpretation (Lewis, 2007). From this perspective, Raggio’s (2018) framework criticizes the narrow view of donor-oriented accountability under the neoliberal paradigm and emphasizes the multi-dimensionality of accountability, which involves people, processes, responses, and messaging. In order to understand the existing literature on accountability from both the neoliberal and social constructionist perspectives, the literature review below discusses the following aspects:

accountable to whom, for what, mechanisms, and messages. It starts with an examination of the relationship between neoliberalism and accountability.

### 3.1 Neoliberalism and Accountability

Neoliberal policies encompass a vast range of reforms including privatization and devolution to encourage development of market mechanisms and the private sector in order to distribute social services. Policy transformation has changed state-society relationships as well as the nature of both the public and private sectors (Harvey, 2005; Yan et al., 2017). In the context of western countries, both the external mechanism of enacting accountability by regulation and reporting/auditing systems, and the internal mechanism within the New Public Management, require nonprofit organizations to enact accountability by emphasizing managerialism and professionalism. The principles of managerialism and professionalism have been seen as a form of accountability for all kinds of social organizations. For example, Duval et al. (2015) examined how Canadian nongovernmental organizations were framed as financially inclined performers, focusing “on the standardized delivery of services as driven by financial and results-based imperatives” (p. 49). Therefore, within neoliberal discourse, nonprofit organizations are increasingly accountable for short-term tangible outcomes and to funding and monitoring entities. To promise the effectiveness and efficiency of public service, nonprofit organizations are required to adhere to mandatory accountability (Koop, 2014), which refers to financial and performance disclosure, regulatory oversight, and external control and evaluation. Nonprofits’ accountability is measured by standardized and normalized managerial tasks to ensure funding.

Under the neoliberal paradigm, the discussion of accountability in the nonprofit sector is closely related to performance measurement, financial disclosure, standard operational procedures, and professionalism (P. D. Hall, 2006). For example, the financial reporting system of the government, such as the IRS tax forms, prompts nonprofit organizations to adopt professional management strategies to meet the requirement of governmental regulations and to get government funding as well. As Shafritz (1992) defined, from the governmental perspective, accountability is:

- (1) The extent to which one must answer to higher authority--legal or organizational--for one's action in society at large or within one's organization;
  - (2) An obligation for keeping accurate records of property, documents, or funds.
- (p. 4)

Focusing on public service, the New Public Management emphasizes performance, which refers to better management results in better public service (Behn, 2001). Therefore, the accountability of nonprofit organizations is discussed and analyzed from the perspective of a businesslike approach and the efficiency and effectiveness of public service, focusing on performance measurement (Poole et al., 2000), program evaluation (Hoefler, 2000), and outcomes assessment (Campbell, 2002). Poole et al. (2001) suggested that to ensure accountability, nonprofit organizations have to “assign responsibility for collecting and reporting outcome data as part of staff duties and responsibilities” and “ensure that staff members have training and technical resources to design and implement outcome evaluation systems” (p. 417).

In the context of China, influenced by a corporate management perspective, nonprofit organizations have adopted business-like job titles such as CEO, program

director, and manager and a hierarchical structure, both of which signify the power divisions within the organizations (Yan et al., 2017). Accountability can become an instrument of neoliberalism to ensure the operation of market mechanisms (Y. Zhang et al., 2012). In other words, nonprofit organizations have “initiated many accountability strategies to assure their quality of services” (Yan et al., 2017, p. 982). Business-like assessment terms and tools, such as key performance indicators, balanced scorecards, and return on investment, have been adopted by nonprofit organizations.

Through financial reporting, auditing, and performance evaluation, nonprofit organizations are able to establish an accountability mechanism with measurable indicators and standardized procedures. Resource-based accountability also offers a pragmatic strategy for nonprofit management and governance by prioritizing the authorities and resources held by different stakeholders. However, the efficiency, effectiveness, and the quality of public service cannot be measured objectively. Explicit performance-based accountability is not enough for a comprehensive understanding of accountability in the nonprofit sector, as it is in conflict with the heterogeneous role of nonprofit organizations in society. The feasible and pragmatic strategies might limit the vision of nonprofit organizations regarding their social roles and social responsibility. From a social constructionist perspective, Raggo (2018) reviewed the existing literature based on principal-agent theory and resource dependence theory and points out the insufficiency of a managerial approach to address the accountability demands from multiple sources in reality.



### 3.2 Definitions: Accountable to What?

Because of nonprofit organizations' obligations among the community-at-large, the fiduciary board, the funding source, and management (Gardner, 1987), accountability is always conceptualized and understood subjectively by different individuals and organizations. Regarding the question of accountable to what, Ebrahim (2005) summarized four categories: accountable to finance, governance, performance, and mission. With the impact of neoliberalism, which emphasizes the market approach and rationalities, nonprofit organizations are expected to be responsible for their behavior and performance (Young, 2001). The accountability of nonprofit organizations is discussed and analyzed from the perspective of the business-like approach (Campbell, 2002; Hoefer, 2002; Poole et al., 2000). To promise the effectiveness and efficiency of public services, nonprofit organizations are expected to keep costs low, professionalize operation and management, and to demonstrate measurable outcomes (Alexander et al., 2000). In the process, nonprofit organizations have to do financial disclosure, auditing and accrediting, reporting to the governmental regulators, being compliant with the standards, codes of conduct, contractual obligations, and formal process.

Within the neoliberal paradigm, nonprofit accountability has been largely explained and understood by resource dependence theory and principal-agent theory. Resource dependence theory emphasizes that available resources significantly impact the organizations' survival and capacity building. Pfeffer (1982) pointed out that organizations will and should respond more to the demands of those organizations or groups in the environment that control critical resources. Focusing on the dynamic interaction between organizations and stakeholders, it emphasizes that nonprofit

organizations have to be responsive to the stakeholders who hold critical resources, such as big donors and funders. Also, principal-agent theory focuses on the relations between principals and their agents and, in particular, an agent's accountability to the interest and goals of a principal (Brown, 2007). It views accountability based on asymmetrical superior-subordinate relationships. The theory provides a clear accountability mechanism that principals can hold an agent to implement the principals' objectives. Based on this theory, nonprofit organizations are required to be responsible for stakeholders' demands and interests. Therefore, public agencies that provide government funding and regulations and big donors often have significant power. The primary concern is that the agent's interest might conflict with the principal's interests.

The above descriptions and theories are important to understand and define accountability for nonprofit organizations in the western context. To deal with the diverse, even conflicting criteria and expectations among stakeholders, nonprofit organizations face the challenge of understanding stakeholders' expectations and of prioritizing and coordinating among multiple interests and constituents (Ebrahim, 2016). In the context of China, due to the different compositions of stakeholder groups, it is necessary to examine organizations' understanding and practice, in reality, to identify the similarities and distinctions to Western conceptions. S. Chen and Uitto (2015) pointed out that civil society organizations in China have taken an incident-based or issue-driven approach to accountability to punish the wrongdoing of government officials without a systematic approach to supervise the government.

### 3.3 Stakeholders: Accountable to Whom?

Integrating upward, downward, and horizontal relationships, Raggo's framework suggests that the examination of accountability should pay attention to whose power and interest are prioritized over others and identify the possible misalignment among stakeholders' views.

Broadly speaking, a stakeholder perspective allows organizations to consider a wide range of possible influencers and influenced groups when developing a strategy (Polonsky, 1995). Stakeholders are not only involved in and affected by the work of nonprofit organizations, but also decide and influence the legitimacy, accountability, and effectiveness of nonprofit organizations. Therefore, accountability here is defined as being answerable to stakeholders for the actions of the organization, whether by internal or external initiation (Christensen & Ebrahim, 2006). Through three case studies in the U.S., Benjamin (2008) focused on the negotiation process between nonprofit organizations, funders, and the external environment and analyzed the mutual impacts of the construction of accountability and stakeholders' expectations. Benjamin (2008) suggested that performance-based accountability should integrate the relational work with both upward and downward stakeholders such as funders and grantees rather than solely focusing on technical competences of nonprofit organizations. Coule (2015) conducted a survey of 400 organizations and five focus groups in the UK to explore the relationship between particular governance theories and the associated practices related to accountability. She stated that accountability is a social and dynamic process, which should be investigated from diverse perspectives, contexts, intellectual backgrounds, and interests. Because of the broad range of stakeholders, nonprofit organizations have to

negotiate multiple accountabilities among stakeholders, including upward to government regulators, funders, and patrons; downwards to beneficiaries and clients; and horizontally to organizations themselves such as to staff and volunteers (Ebrahim, 2016; Kearns, 1994; Ospina et al., 2002).

The categories of upward, downward, and horizontal stakeholders offer a holistic analytic system about the various stakeholder groups and their impact on nonprofit organizations' accountability. With rapid and ongoing social change in China, the stakeholders of environmental nonprofit organizations are much more complex, and include the central government, local government, media and scholars, international organizations, domestic enterprises, foundations, donors, as well as the public and community. The relationships between nonprofit organizations and stakeholders are evolving and changing constantly. The collaboration among nonprofit organizations, the media, scholars, and lawyers has been crucial in environmental governance and advocacy. Y. Lu (2007) pointed out that the state-society relationship in China lacked a clear demarcation. For example, some civil society activists and environmentalists were employed by governmental agencies. Also, the development of environmental nonprofit organizations in China has heavily relied on the financial and technical support of international organizations (Dai & Spires, 2018; Hsu & Hasmath, 2014; Y. Lu, 2007). Spires (2012) examined the influence of foreign organizations on Chinese nonprofit organizations and identified donor-oriented accountability, and rarely soliciting the experiences of the community and beneficiaries. However, since the Foreign NGO law was released in 2016, the international organizations' space has been limited with increasing stricter governmental regulation.

Scholars have studied mostly the impact of upward stakeholders such as to the state government and international organizations on Chinese environmental organizations' actions and social impacts (J. Chen, 2010; S. Chen & Uitto, 2015; Matsuzawa, 2019; Xu et al., 2015). There has not been enough attention paid to the interactions with and impact from other types of stakeholders such as the community, beneficiaries, staff, and volunteers. As Spires (2012) claimed, a universal emphasis on "the economic interests of the wealthiest echelons of their societies" has been prevalent from North America to China. Also, the local government has been an increasingly important social actor for public policy implementation of the central government and local decision making with the implementation of neoliberal policies of devolution and decentralization. The devolution of financial power has promoted local government to improve economic performance and governance capacity. As Hsu and Hasmath (2014) pointed out, the interaction with the local government is increasingly impacting the successes of nonprofit organizations in China. However, the interaction between local government and nonprofit organizations has not been explored fully in relation to the impact on nonprofit organizations.

### 3.4 Practices and Mechanisms: Accountable How?

Scholars have criticized the insufficiency of the mechanism of reporting, monitoring, and evaluation for accountability understanding (Coule, 2015; Lewis, 2007; Maier & Meyer, 2011). An explicit and one-size-fits-all accountability framework is not enough for a comprehensive understanding of accountability for nonprofit organizations, particularly outside of a Western context. From a social constructionist perspective, accountability is related to integrating stakeholder participation in the decision-making

process and involving beneficiaries in organizations' activities (Schmitz et al., 2012). As Roberts et al. (2005) stated, accountability is realized through a wide range of behaviors—challenging, questioning, probing, discussing, testing, informing, debating, and exploring. Therefore, accountability can be understood from the perspective of organizations' behaviors that being responsive and adaptive to the input of diverse stakeholders, instead of being a stable mechanism that accounts just for performance and resources. As Alexander et al. (2010) noted, there are some relational, community-focused, process-oriented, or partnership based outcomes that cannot be easily measured and evaluated. From this perspective, there is no generalizable and universal standard of accountability. Accountability can be understood much further and deeper by understanding the social and cultural embeddedness within institutions and power relationships at local and global levels (Lewis, 2007). The ambiguity of accountability can only be resolved by examining the concept and understanding of accountability case-by-case, being sensitive to contextual factors (Williams & Taylor, 2013).

From a social constructionist perspective, the definition of accountability and stakeholder relationships are not enough to understand organizational accountability. As Raggio (2018) suggested, it is important not only how the organizations perceive their accountability to what and to whom, but also about what practices and mechanisms exist and impact the definition of accountability and stakeholder relationships.

With the impact of neoliberalism in the western context, nonprofit organizations are expected to be responsible for their behavior and performance (Young, 2001). The accountability of nonprofit organizations is often discussed and analyzed from the perspective of a businesslike approach (Campbell, 2002; Hoefler, 2002; Poole et al.,

2000). To promise the effectiveness and efficiency of public services, nonprofit organizations are expected to keep costs low, professionalize operations and management, and demonstrate measurable outcomes (Alexander et al., 2000). Also, nonprofit organizations are required to ensure mandatory accountability, such as financial and performance disclosure, regulatory oversight, and external control and evaluation (Koop, 2014). Therefore, nonprofit organizations are prompted to demonstrate their financial accountability, to remain competitive, and to pay attention to the effectiveness and efficiency of public service by adopting the strategic business management and measurement structures.

Compared to the above review of accountability mechanisms in the western context, the accountability of nonprofit organizations in China is still an underexplored area. Both the literature search in English and Chinese demonstrate that accountability in the environmental area in China is still an emergent phenomenon and scholarly research is still at the stage of introducing concepts and practices of other countries such as in Singapore, Japan, and Australia (e.g., Si & Li, 2017; Xu & Si, 2016; Zhong, 2015). The introduction of other countries' experiences focused on the institutions, mechanisms, and social actors in the accountability building process suggested that China should establish a comprehensive system of information disclosure and public participation. Regarding the lack of attention and discussion of accountability mechanisms in the context of China, scholars explain that it is because accountability is always viewed as a democratic concept and is unlikely to be successful in an authoritarian regime (Almén & Burell, 2018; Grimes, 2013). Therefore, it is important to examine how neoliberal policies in

China may have influenced environmental nonprofit organizations related to whom and how they are accountable.

Information disclosure has been one of the main accountability mechanisms for environmental nonprofit organizations in China. First, the financial and professional support from foreign organizations has introduced concepts such as accountability and transparency into the organizations' operations and management. Second, government regulation has required nonprofit organizations to go through annual reporting and inspection to maintain the organizations' legal status. Third, due to a series of scandals that happened in the nonprofit sector in the early 2010s in China, nonprofit organizations realized that they need to pay more attention to accountability building to retain the credibility and public trust for the whole society (G. Deng et al., 2015; Ni & Zhan, 2017; Nie et al., 2016).

In 2005 and 2006, the Ministry of Civil Affairs released the Measures for the Annual Inspection of Foundations and the Measures for the Information Disclosure of Foundations, respectively. The Measures of the Annual Inspection requires both foreign and domestic foundations to provide their annual reports to the relevant registration and administration agency for annual review. It stated that an annual report must include information on accepted donations, funding, financial statements, auditing reports, and any changes of employees and the organization. Accordingly, the Measures of the Information Disclosure requires both domestic and foreign foundations to disclose the information of organizations' operation to the public. The information includes annual reports, donations, and public interest projects.



In 2011, the Ministry of Civil Affairs released the Measures for the Social Organizations' Evaluation Management. According to the measures, the departments of civil affairs at different governmental levels are responsible for evaluating and rating the social organizations' performance, including the evaluation on organizations' physical condition, internal governance, work and program performance, credibility, as well as social reputation and impact. The rating has 5 levels, from 5A (AAAAA), 4A (AAAA), 3A (AAA), 2A (AA), and 1A (A) in order from highest to lowest. The measures stated that,

- Social organizations with a rating of 3A or higher have priority to participate in government contracting out and receive government rewards.
- Foundations, charitable organizations, and other non-profit social organizations with a rating of 3A or higher can apply for the tax deduction of non-profit donations in accordance with regulations.
- Social organizations with a rating of 4A or higher can simplify the annual inspection process during the annual inspection.

In 2018, the Measures for Social Organizations' Credit Information Management was released by the Ministry of Civil Affairs. The measures authorize the civil affairs departments at various governmental levels to collect social organizations' information, including registration, annual reports, and administrative inspections. Based on the collected information, social organizations will be assigned a credit score. A reward and punishment system will be established based on social organizations' credit scores. For example, organizations with a higher score will more easily receive governmental funding. In line with the governmental emphasis on information disclosure and

transparency, environmental nonprofit organizations have to revise their organizations' regulations to meet the governmental requirements.

The 2016 Charity Law also clearly stated that charitable organizations shall submit an annual work report and a financial accounting report to the civil affairs department with which they are registered. Reports should include information on annual fundraising and donation acceptance, the use and management of charitable assets, the implementation of charitable projects, and charitable organizations' staff wages and benefits (Article 13). Also, it has detailed requirements regarding information disclosure of charitable organizations' activities, fundraising, and donations.

Besides governmental regulations, nonprofit organizations themselves have worked together to increase nonprofit organizations' accountability. In March 2009, the Union of Self-Disciplinary Organizations (USDO) was established by more than 100 Chinese nonprofit organizations. USDO is an online platform that aims to promote the social trust, credibility, and self-regulation of nonprofit organizations. Its members are nonprofit organizations that can adhere to the rules of financial transparency and self-discipline. In 2013, USDO collaborated with several domestic foundations and released the China Grassroots Transparency Index (GTI) to promote the improvement of transparency and social credibility of civil society organizations.

### 3.5 Social Media as an Accountability Mechanism

With the development of information technology, social media has been one of the main communication channels to establish and expand the networks of and to strengthen capacity for civil society organizations. Information technology has had great growth in China in recent years. As of June 2019, China has 854 million Internet users,

according to the 2019 report of the China Internet Network Information Center. Although the Chinese government has blocked and banned most foreign social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, the Chinese versions of social media platforms such as WeChat, Sina-Weibo, and Tencent QQ have been integrated into Chinese people's daily lives. The development of the civil society sector in China is significantly influenced by the proliferation of information technology (Tai, 2006; G. Yang, 2003; G. Yang & Calhoun, 2007; H. Zhou & Pan, 2016). Social media provide opportunities for environmental nonprofit organizations to gather and disseminate information, mobilize online conversations, and discuss public events (Dong et al., 2017).

In China, the most popular social media platforms are Sina-Weibo and WeChat for both individuals and organizations. Sina-Weibo is a Twitter-like platform in China. Since its launch in 2009, it has become one of the biggest online platforms and most used social media platform for both individuals and organizations. A lot of social issues such as nonprofit scandals, government corruption, environmental problems, and social conflicts have been revealed and attracted public attention through Sina-Weibo. As of June 2019, Sina-Weibo had 486 million monthly active users.

In 2011, the mobile phone-based application WeChat was launched by Tencent Company, which has become the most popular social media platform over Sina-Weibo. As of September 2019, WeChat had 1.08 billion monthly active users. Compared to Sina-Weibo, which focuses on user-generated content posting and sharing, WeChat is a more comprehensive platform with multiple functions such as instant messaging, audio and video chat, individual posts, online shopping, and gaming. Besides one-on-one chat, WeChat features a group chat function that allows up to 500 users to communicate within

a group. The group chat function provides a closed network and cultivates an alternative public sphere (Tu, 2016), which can be used by family members, nonprofit organizations, or any kind of collaborative group to planning events, sharing information, and generating discussions.

Compared to other social media platforms featuring instant messaging and content sharing, one of the main features of WeChat is official accounts, which include three categories: service account, subscription account, and enterprise account. The three categories of accounts have different purposes and are allowed to post different numbers of posts each month (Table 3.1). Generally speaking, the official accounts allow individuals and organizations to send out posts of text, images, audio, and videos to massive followers. WeChat users can follow an official account through QR code scanning or ID search and receive services and information through the account.

Table 3.1 Official Account Categories in WeChat

	Service account	Subscription account	Enterprise account
Main function	Provide service	Disseminate information	Internal communication and management
Users	Companies, organizations	Individuals, companies, organizations	Companies, organizations
Number of posts	Four times per month	Everyday	No limitation

The WeChat official accounts are open to the general public, anyone can subscribe to the accounts through scanning the QR code or searching ID. In contrast, the group chats are a relatively closed systems; people can only join the group chats through the invitation from the existing members in the group. Therefore, if the official accounts

can be viewed as a type of mass communication, group chat is more like organizational or small group communication, which features a closed connection or shared interest among the group members. A WeChat group chat can have a maximum of 500 members. Each member is able to send out texts, visual materials, documents, and links in the group.

### 3.6 Messages: What is the Message about Accountability being Conveyed?

Based on the above three accountability dimensions, Raggo (2018) suggested that it is essential to examine the alignment of communication with ideas, people, and practice deployed by organizations. From this perspective, adequate communication with various stakeholders is a critical component to ensure accountability (Raggo, 2018). Raggo suggested that nonprofit organizations should align organizational missions with the shared information on websites, documents, and activities, to avoid accountability dissonance disorder.

The conveyed message about accountability might be the least studied part among the four aspects of accountability, which has also mostly focused on the western context. Adopting a discourse analysis approach, Maier and Meyer (2011) analyzed the communication forms and contents of civil society organizations and identified five types of discourses among nonprofits in Austria: managerialist, domestic, professional, grassroots, and civic. The five types of discourses impact the accountabilities of civil society organizations. The impact relationship is shown below in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Different Discourses of Nonprofit Organizations and Accountability

	Managerialist	Domestic	Professional	Grassroots	Civic
Accountable to whom	Funders	Beneficiaries	External peers	Activists	Active members
Accountable for what	Effective and efficient achievement of an explicit mission	Achievements of an implicit mission	Meeting professional standards, successful peer evaluation	Adherence to rules of grassroots democracy	Mass support
Accountable mechanisms	Boards, executive directors	Personal relationships, feelings	Peer assessments, comparison with other organizations in the field	Domination-free discussion, consensus-seeking, organizational openness	Elections, votes, checks and balances, adherences to formal rules

*Source: Maier & Meyer, 2011*

As the above literature demonstrates, managerialist discourse, which promotes a business-like system, has been the dominant discourse, while the other four types of discourses have not been explored fully. For example, Hvenmark (2013) explored the adoption of managerialist discourse and models by Swedish civil society organizations as an ongoing cultural shift that institutionalizes corporate management knowledge and practices. He pointed out that the adoption of a managerialist model “creates and widens the divide between internal democratic governance and executive structures” (Hvenmark, 2013, p. 223).

A discourse explains the organization’s communication by the organizational participants. Therefore, the analysis of messages and discourse has to start with the analysis of communication channels and content. Besides the traditional ways to

communicate, such as newsletters, meetings, and events, social media has attracted scholars' attention as an accountability communication channel for nonprofit organizations. Currently, most of the existing studies of civil society organizations' accountability and social media focus on North American and European contexts. Diverse social media activities and platforms allow nonprofit organizations to convey their transparency and accountability to their stakeholders. In general, the role of social media has been examined from the perspective of democratic theory, the public sphere, and social capital. Nonprofit scholars have started the discussion of the impact of social media on accountability and conceptualized virtual accountability (Dumont, 2013) and web-based accountability (Dainelli, Manetti, & Sibilio, 2013; Lee & Joseph, 2012; Saxton & Guo, 2011; Slatten et al., 2016). For example, scholars discussed the potential for information technology and social media to increasingly engage with broader stakeholders such as donors, funders, volunteers, and the community (Dumont, 2013; Saxton & Guo, 2011). However, Dainelli et al. (2013) found that although social media was used to engage with general stakeholders, web-based communication by nonprofit organizations demonstrated stakeholder theory, which prioritizes the stakeholders who are salient in numbers and power.

Although the Chinese government has blocked and banned most foreign social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, the Chinese versions of social media platforms such as WeChat and Sina-Weibo have been integrated into Chinese people's daily lives. The development of the civil society sector in China is significantly influenced by the proliferation of information technology (Tai, 2006; G. Yang, 2003; G. Yang & Calhoun, 2007; H. Zhou & Pan, 2016). The literature on Chinese

civil society organizations has explored how Chinese civil society organizations use information technology to raise awareness and to express their opinions on environmental issues (Yang & Calhoun, 2007; Zhou & Pan, 2016). For example, Waters and Lo (2012) compared nonprofit organizations in China, Turkey, and the U.S. and examined the cultural impacts on organizational online communication and engagement. They found that Chinese nonprofit organizations outperformed American organizations in promoting their accomplishments, which demonstrates the influence of “western business principles” (p. 313). Also, scholars explored social media use by environmental organizations in China (Büsgen, 2006; Fedorenko & Sun, 2016; G. Yang & Calhoun, 2007; H. Zhou & Pan, 2016). Fedorenko and Sun (2016) found that “the Internet has become a predominant public sphere where environmental activists play a pivotal role in producing and disseminating information to mobilize the public” (p. 2079). They also suggested that social media can play an important role “to create sustainable channels for public dialogue with the State and other opportunities to influence the policy in urgent areas” (p. 2099).

Maier and Meyer’s (2011) research was conducted in the context of Austria. However, the above table provides a comparable system regarding the fourth aspect of Raggo’s framework as well as the power relationships among stakeholders. As Maier and Meyer (2011) suggested, further research within other national contexts will be able to develop a typology of the discourse of civil society organization that is internationally valid. Also, it is important to explore how environmental nonprofit organizations navigate neoliberal discourses and what kind of discourses become dominant over others and why. Based on this idea, Appe (2016) conducted research to analyze the



managerialist discourse and collective accountability by NGO networks in the context of Latin America. An empirical study from the context of China provides an opportunity for comparison across contexts. Also, more study is needed to understand what kind of messages and discourse are conveyed through social media by environmental nonprofit organizations in a digital age, to capture the nuanced link between practice and discourse in China.

### 3.7 Summary

Overall, a lot of nonprofit organizations emerged and thrived in the 1990s. According to Zhao (2000), there are four reasons for the thriving of nonprofit organizations in China in the 1990s: (1) the Reform and Opening-up policy in 1978 provided opportunities and spaces for nonprofit organizations because of the retreat of the state in some social affairs and the emergence of progressive people; (2) there were no policies and regulations regarding the registration and management of nonprofit organizations from 1978 to 1989. Therefore, it was relatively easy to register and establish an organization; (3) the government realized the positive impact of social organizations and purposefully promoted the development of nonprofit organizations; (4) the Reform and Opening-up policy made it easy to learn from foreign NGOs.

Accountability can best be understood based on the comprehensive examination of its definitions, stakeholders, practices, and messages within a specific context. In China, environmental nonprofit organizations are facing more complicated stakeholder groups: central government, local governments, community or the public, donors, and international organizations. A reliance on domestic and international funding, the strict regulation from the government, the balancing between central and local government,

and the mission to serve the community and society are all critical for their survival, growth, and development. This research study proposes that based on distinct socio-political contexts, environmental nonprofit organizations' accountabilities might have different definitions, stakeholders, mechanisms, and discourses within neoliberal China.

As Raggo (2018) argued, accountability involves people, processes, and responses. The definition of accountability can be examined and understood through asking questions such as “whose interests are being served with the definition proposed, whose knowledge is prioritized, and how practices are reflective of the power dynamics” (p. 49). Therefore, this research suggests that the examination of accountability within different social context should start from the understanding of to whom and how questions. In other words, the definition of accountability is reflected through the power relationships and interactions between nonprofit organizations and their stakeholders. By adopting Raggo's framework, this research examines how neoliberalism has impacted the multiple accountabilities of environmental nonprofit organizations in China. To identify and understand the impact of neoliberalism on environmental nonprofit organizations' accountabilities, this research integrated a comprehensive literature on accountability from both the neoliberal paradigm and social construction paradigm. Empirical investigation pays particular attention to the following aspects, which are summarized based on the above literature review:

- (1) Accountable to whom: upward stakeholders including donors, foundations, and government; downward stakeholders including beneficiaries and communities; horizontal stakeholders including the board, staff and volunteers; whose interests are presented through accountability mechanisms

and messages and therefore the power differentiation and distribution of stakeholders;

- (2) How environmental nonprofit organizations convey and demonstrate accountability through messages and discourses: reports and disclosure statements, evaluations and performance assessments, industry self-regulation, participation, social auditing, and adaptive learning; the explanatory process to ensure accountability when nonprofits fail to meet the expectation of stakeholders through measurable outputs and outcomes.

## Chapter 4 Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the methods used to address the research questions. First, the research questions are reiterated, and then the approach of multiple case studies is introduced. Second, the process of sample selection, data gathering, and data analysis are discussed. Finally, the issues of validity and reflexivity of the researcher's role are presented.

### 4.1 Research Approach

A qualitative approach focuses on “the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2014, p. 4). This approach was appropriate to identify nuanced contextual differences in how nonprofit organizations construct accountability within the context of neoliberalism (J. A. Maxwell, 2013).

Table 4.1 Research Questions and Methodology

Research Questions	Methodology
<b>Primary Research Question</b>	
How have environmental nonprofit organizations constructed accountabilities within the neoliberal context of China?	
<b>Secondary Research Questions</b>	
How have neoliberal discourses been embedded in environmental nonprofit organizations' accountability processes and practices?	Interviews with leaders, staff, and volunteers of environmental nonprofit organizations; Observation with field notes; Qualitative content analysis of social media and organizations' documents
To whom are environmental nonprofit organizations accountable?	
How are environmental nonprofit organizations accountable?	

Also, due to the scattered research on nonprofit organizations and the scarcity of primary data, such as first-hand surveys and comprehensive reports, a qualitative approach is appropriate. The research methods are explained in Table 4.1 and the following section.

## 4.2 Multiple Case Studies

This research adopted a multiple case study approach, which allows an in-depth analysis of cases. A case study is “an exploration of a bounded system or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1997, p. 61). According to Creswell (1997), the case study approach uses purposeful sampling, multiple sources of information, and considers the context of the case. The in-depth approach and wealth of details allow scholars to understand real-life situations. Purposeful and strategic sampling is critical for the implementation of a case study approach. This research aimed to select maximum variation cases, which refer to nonprofit organizations that are very different in the organizations’ ages, employee sizes, registration status, the scope of service, community presence (online or in-person), volunteer base, and funding sources. According to Flyvbjerg (2006), maximum variation cases, which generally are “three to four cases that are very different on one dimension: size, form of organization, location, [and] budget” are essential to understand the “the significance of various circumstances for case process and outcome” (p. 230). The maximum variation cases are helpful to reflect how environmental nonprofit organizations are affected by neoliberalism within the authoritarian context of China, to gain a holistic description of the phenomenon.

To make the research manageable, this research selected organizations located in Beijing. There are three reasons to select a research sample in Beijing. First, Beijing is the city that has the largest number of self-reported civil society organizations (Spires et al., 2014). According to the website of the map of environmental nonprofit organizations in China (<http://heyi.lvziku.cn/eo/>), which is a database of self-reported information by environmental nonprofit organizations in China, there are 3,055 self-reported environmental nonprofit organizations in China. Beijing is the city with 307 of these organizations, which is the largest number compared to all the other locations. Second, as the capital and the center of culture and politics of China, Beijing is the center not only for nonprofit organizations, but also for government agencies, policymakers, and media groups. Nonprofit organizations have more opportunities to communicate with both local and national policymakers as well as journalists. Third, the air and water pollution of Beijing has been a big issue that is closely related to every citizen's daily life. Both the government and nonprofit organizations have been actively dealing with it.

As noted earlier, in China, there are two main types of nonprofit organizations: government-run and citizen-run. This research focuses on bottom-up organizations that are established and managed by individual citizens rather than government entities. The sample selection was mainly based on the variables of organizational age, registration status, and community presence (online/offline). In line with Flyvbjerg (2006), the choice to sample a variation of different organization ages was made because the researcher wanted to capture a snapshot into various points of institutional development; specifically, ranging from organizations that are newly established to organizations that have a longer presence in the community. Studies in China have found that organizations'

age is closely related to the organizations' registration status (Hildebrandt, 2013; Hsu & Hasmath, 2017). Therefore, organization age was a dimension to examine the maturity of nonprofit organizations, organizations' structures, and practices.

This research also selected sample environmental organizations that have varying registration statuses. The Chinese government has established a strict registration system to manage nonprofit organizations. Generally speaking, the main registration status of citizen-run environmental organizations include those registered as social organizations, registered as business enterprises but operating as a nonprofit, student groups that are registered with campus Youth League in universities, and unregistered organizations (G. Yang, 2005). Among these, student groups rarely participate in environmental policymaking and don't have many relationships with the government and other social actors (Tang & Zhan, 2008). Compared to government-run organizations, citizen organizations are more autonomous and community-oriented and might be the most similar to civil society organizations in western countries (Hildebrandt, 2013; Tang & Zhan, 2008).

According to the regulation of the Ministry of Civil Affairs in China, the organizations that are registered as social organizations must be affiliated with a governmental entity as a sponsoring institution. However, social organizations are allowed to operate as independent organizations, both administratively and financially. They can open bank accounts and pursue a wider variety of funding opportunities. The sponsoring institutions are their stable institutional ties to ensure their growth and development. However, many organizations do not have a sponsoring government entity to complete the registration step so they have to register as a business enterprise or

remain unregistered while operating and functioning as a nonprofit and nongovernmental organization. This might be because they are not able to find a sponsoring institution or do not want to be supervised under the rigorous government control on the annual report and financial standards. The alternative registration types reflect the adaptive strategy of nonprofit organizations toward the institutional and political context. For organizations registered as business entities, they lose the nonprofit advantage of tax deduction and public fundraising (Jianxing Yu & Chen, 2018). However, they are allowed to establish branches and extend their agendas independently without the requirement to get approval from a sponsoring institution (H. Y. Wu, n.d.). For unregistered organizations, they have much more limited space for activities of both fundraising and community engagement. Many organizations remain unregistered to avoid supervision from the government and the sponsoring institutions (H. Y. Wu, n.d.). It has to be noted that the sample does not include any unregistered organizations. The registration status of nonprofit organizations is related to not only the organizations' legitimacy but also the organizations' operation and management. Because of the formal relationship with stakeholders such as governmental agencies and corporate foundations, nonprofit organizations are required or expected to be more transparent and accountable for their performance. In contrast, unregistered organizations have much fewer funding opportunities and more limitations on financial operation and activities. Therefore, the current research focuses on registered nonprofit organizations. In addition, the decision to include organizations that have both online and in-person community presence is to understand better the role information technology plays in communication among stakeholders as accountability mechanisms and conveying accountability messages.



Funding resources are an important component that affect nonprofit organizations' identity and stakeholder relationships. Generally speaking, scholars identified two main types of funding resources for nonprofit organizations in various contexts such as the U.S. and Turkey: external funds and self-financing (Kadirbeyoğlu et al., 2017; Mitchell, 2014). As Kadirbeyoğlu et al. (2017) suggested, external funding includes funding from local, national, or foreign governments; national or international organizations; and corporations, which are project-specific and beneficiary-specific. Self-financing mostly relies on membership fees, service fees, and private donations from a large community, which allows nonprofit organizations the freedom to allocate money.

Based on the database at <http://heyi.lvziku.cn/eo/>, the researcher excluded 144 organizations that were categorized as student associations, international organizations, and government-run organizations from among the 307 environmental organizations in Beijing. Due to the sensitivity for Chinese organizations to cooperate with international scholars, it was hard to reach out to these organizations without personal connections. Therefore, the researcher gave the remaining list of 163 citizen-run organizations to two personal contacts, one of whom works at the Ministry of Ecology and Environment while the other is an active environmental activist in Beijing. The two personal references were able to provide contact information and personal introductions for nine organizations. The researcher contacted all nine organizations. One organization refused to participate in the research and the other eight agreed to an exploratory interview. The researcher did initial interviews with all the other eight organizations and identified three of them to be included in the research sample. There were three reasons to select these three cases. First, Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers were chosen because of their similar

organizational ages as well as different development strategies. In contrast, E.P.Jing represents a newly established organization, which reflects the distinct characteristics of environmental organizations noted above. Second, among the five eliminated organizations, three have been involved in areas beyond environmental protection but also other activities such as visiting child welfare centers, while the research intends to focus on organizations that mainly focus on environmental protection. The other two are research-based organizations that aim to provide evidence-based support for the experts and other environmental organizations, having limited interaction with the public and communities. Although this type of organization might also be a critical component of the neoliberal governance system, the lack of interaction with the public and communities cannot provide enough information regarding the development of civil society within the neoliberal context. Third, the selection of three cases kept the research manageable. In the future, the researcher will continue to study the other five cases that represent different characteristics of environmental organizations in China. Below in Table 4.2 is the key information about the case study organizations included in this current study.

Table 4.2 Case Study Environmental Nonprofit Organizations

	<b>Case 1 Friends of Nature</b>	<b>Case 2 Green Earth Volunteers</b>	<b>Case 3 E.P.Jing</b>
Year of establishment	1994	1996	2016
Registration status and registration year	Civil Non-Enterprise Unit, 2010	Civil Non-Enterprise Unit, 2007	Business enterprise, 2019
Employee size	34 (26 full-time and 8 part-time)	5 (all part-time)	5 (all full-time)
Scope of Service	National and Local	National and Local	Local

Community Presence	Physical Office Base Website, Sina-Weibo, WeChat	Physical Office Base Website, Sina-Weibo, WeChat	Physical Office Base WeChat
Focus Activities	Policy advocacy, environmental education	Environmental monitoring and policy advocacy	Volunteer activities and community service

Case 1, Friends of Nature, was founded in 1994 by several scholars in Beijing. It is one of the earliest civil society organizations that recognized the conflict between economic development and environmental issues in China (Xie, 2011). This case was selected because the organization's history aligns with the historically-documented growth and proliferation of neoliberalism in China that began in the 1980s. This organization's large capacity was also an asset to this sample selection because the work it carries out has both a local Beijing reach as well as the ability to advocate on a national environmental scale. As a representative of a social organization in the registration system, Friends of Nature has had the opportunity to forge more formal ties with government institutions than other types of organizations. According to the organization's introduction, its funding resources include individual donations, governmental grants, activity proceeds, and donations through other legal channels, which include both external funding and self-financing. Moreover, Friends of Nature has been active in both offline and online activities. Offline activities and online communication offer valuable information regarding the alignment of practice and message of organizational accountabilities.

Case 2, Green Earth Volunteers, was founded in 1996 by award-winning journalist, Yongchen Wang. According to its website, the organization's mission is "to

serve as a vehicle for grassroots public participation through encouraging volunteerism.” Based on Yongchen Wang’s professional expertise in journalism, Green Earth Volunteers has been actively working on areas such as environmental journalists’ education as well as monitoring environmental issues and media publicizing. Its current main funding resource is individual donations. Both Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers were viewed as environmentalist forerunners in China, and they were founded by social elites, such as scholars and journalists, who have had social resources and networks that can be used to support the organizations’ development and activities. However, after more than 20 years’ development, these two organizations have created different organizational structures and development strategies, which will be discussed in the research findings section. The comparison of these two organizations helps understand what kind of strategies have been adopted by environmental organizations and how the socio-political context has impacted these strategies.

Case 3, E.P.Jing, is a community-based environmental organization founded by seven housewives who are living in a village in the suburban area of Beijing in 2016. With the cooperation of the village administration and volunteers, the organization started with the goal to build a clean-living environment and to promote economic development for local residents. They provide education, community service for garbage recycling, and reduction of plastic products. According to the organization’s report, their work can help reduce 70% of garbage production for a village. As a community-based organization, E.P.Jing’s work focuses on raising public awareness of environmental protection and providing community service. It is a good case to explore how newly-established organizations are affected by neoliberalism. In 2019, the organization was

registered as a business entity rather than a civil non-enterprise unit. As a community-based organization, they could not find a professional supervisory agency to register as a civil non-enterprise; therefore, they registered as a business to attain a legal organizational status. The registration status of this organization offers a comparison of the limitations they have faced compared to the other two organizations. Also, the organization has received both financial and technical support from well-established organizations such as the SEE Foundation.

The above three case studies offer important insights into understanding how nonprofit organizations in a Chinese context and are affected by neoliberalist ideals, as well as how they interact with various stakeholders.

The Operations Director of Friends of Nature, and the founders of Green Earth Volunteers and E.P.Jing, gave permission to use their organization's real names in this research. However, all the other interviewees' identifiable information was removed to ensure the anonymity of interviewees, except the Operations Director of Friends of Nature and the founders of Green Earth Volunteers and E.P.Jing.

#### 4.3 Data Collection

After identifying the case study organization participants, the first step was to collect online data. The preliminary data collection protocol included using search engines, including Google and Baidu, to identify publications that were authored by the case study environmental organizations as well as find media and publications written about the organizations. This information was helpful for the researcher to have a

preliminary understanding of the cases and to be able to have in-depth discussions with the leaders of each case during fieldwork.

The second step was the qualitative fieldwork, including interviews and field observations. According to Lune and Berg (2017), case studies of organizations are “the systematic gathering of enough information about a particular organization to allow the investigator insight into the life of that organization” (p. 178). They also suggested that interviews and observations are the main ways for data gathering of case studies. A description of the interview and observation protocols is detailed below.

The sample organizations vary tremendously in size, ranging from 8 to 34 employees. One-on-one interviews were conducted with 18 leaders, staff, and volunteers of the three organizations to collect rich data (See Table 4.3). The researcher used several personal connections, including environmental scholars and government officials from the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, to make connections with these three organizations. First, the researcher was able to contact one board member and the Communication Director of Friends of Nature, and the founders of both Green Earth Volunteer and E.P. Jing. Second, the researcher asked these leaders and staff to introduce more research participants of different types with long involvement with the organizations. As the literature presents, environmental nonprofit organizations in China are typically led and developed by dedicated individuals (Ho, 2001; Hsu & Hasmath, 2017). The researcher was able to interview people who hold leadership positions, including board members, founders, staff, and volunteers. The interviews with various people within an organization were able to triangulate the interview data about how the leaders demonstrated their understanding and philosophy to navigate the socio-political

environment and how the staff and volunteers were attempting to implement the leaders' philosophies. According to Rubin and Rubin (2011), complementary, overlapping, even contradictory versions from people who interact with each other but have different perspectives is a way to get rich data. Therefore, the interviews offered a social constructionist perspective about these organizations' accountability in relation to the power relationship from various standpoints (Raggio, 2018).

Regarding the interview protocol, a set of questions was informed by the research questions and literature review, which include: (1) questions about the interviewees' experience with contextual change such as the change of governmental regulation, and the process of marketization and privatization; and (2) the interviewees' understanding of the concept of accountability and the accountability mechanisms of each organization. The interview protocols with different stakeholders are presented in Appendix C. Overall, the researcher conducted 18 interviews, lasting from 30 minutes to one hour with the average time of 51 minutes, reaching saturation (Guest et al., 2006), which means that new themes were not found by adding more interview cases to answer the research questions. Below in Table 4.3, the interviewees' information is listed. To ensure the interviewees' anonymity, the interviewees are represented by letter C (refers to Case) and numbers (the first number is the case number and the second number is the interviewees' number).

The one-on-one interviews were conducted in person in Beijing (15 interviews) or face-to-face via online video-talk (3 interviews). According to guidance from Rubin and Rubin (2011), the interview protocols were composed of rapport-building questions, open-ended main questions, and possible probing questions. Interview protocols were

developed originally in English and were refined by two pilot interviews of each protocol with members of environmental organizations in China. Then the finalized interview protocol was translated into Chinese and translated back into English by the researcher. In order to fully grasp the essence and meaning of the Chinese participants, the researcher, as a native Chinese speaker, discussed the conceptual framework with several Chinese scholars in the civil society research area.

Table 4.3 Interviewees by Organization

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Year in Org</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Interview Type</b>	<b>Org</b>
C11	Female	25	Board member	Face-to-face	Friends of Nature
C12	Female	25	Board member	Face-to-face	
C13	Female	11	Operations director	Face-to-face	
C14	Female	2	Staff	Face-to-face	
C15	Female	2	Volunteer	Face-to-face	
C16	Male	5	Volunteer	Face-to-face	
C21	Female	23	Founder	Face-to-face	Green Earth Volunteers
C22	Male	10	Board member	Face-to-face	
C23	Male	7	Staff	Online	
C24	Male	1	Previous staff	Face-to-face	
C25	Male	10	Volunteer	Face-to-face	
C26	Female	3	Volunteer	Online	
C31	Female	3	Co-founder	Face-to-face	E.P.Jing
C32	Female	2	Staff	Face-to-face	
C33	Male	2	Staff	Face-to-face	
C34	Female	0.5	Volunteer	Online	
C35	Female	1	Volunteer	Face-to-face	
C36	Female	1	Volunteer	Face-to-face	



During the same time period when interviews were being done, the researcher also conducted field observations of organizations' events, activities, and social media activities. Field observation is "a direct and powerful way" to understand peoples' behaviors within a specific context (Maxwell, 2013, p. 103). This helps to improve the validity of collected data through interviews and identify the possible mismatch between interviews and organizational activities.

There were two types of observations. The on-site observation was conducted from mid-July to mid-August of 2019 in one month. In total, the researcher was able to participate in the public events of these three organizations in Beijing, including a Friends of Nature's volunteer training, a Green Earth Volunteers' journalists meeting, and E.P.Jing's monthly fair. These events lasted for an average of three hours for each organization, allowing the researcher to observe and participate as both a researcher and a volunteer. An observation protocol (Appendix D) was developed to record both descriptive notes such as the portraits of the participants, the description of the meeting, events, and interaction among participants, as well as reflective notes such as the researcher's thoughts and feelings (Creswell, 2014). Based on the Observation Protocol, the researcher collected information regarding who participated in the events and the conversations among the participants to observe the organizations' discourses and involved stakeholders. In addition, the researcher attended a 10-day field trip of Green Earth Volunteers from July 20-30, 2019. Twenty people, including the founder, volunteers, journalists, and scholars, joined the trip from Beijing to Qinghai province to observe environmental issues in local communities. This field observation allowed the

researcher to examine the match between the interviewees' statements and their practices in reality regarding the organizations' operations and accountability practices.

Online observation was also conducted by observing these organizations' online activities and conversations through their websites and social media. The online observation, which were conducted from October 1 to November 30, 2019, focused on all the available online platforms such as their websites, Sina-Weibo, and WeChat. The two-month period of time allowed the researcher to obtain sufficient information about multiple types of messages and was in line with previous research about social media use by nonprofit organizations (e.g., Saxton & Guo, 2011). Sina-Weibo and WeChat are both the most popular social media sites in China (Tu, 2016; H. Zhou & Pan, 2016). Sina-Weibo is the Chinese version of Twitter. Compared to other social media platforms, Sina-Weibo is especially popular for business, civil society organizations, and governmental organizations (H. Zhou & Pan, 2016). At its first start in 2011, WeChat was a platform for real-time communication. In 2012, it launched the public account platform, which allows both individuals and organizations to send out posts of texts, photos, audios, and videos. WeChat has been seen as a platform which deeply changes people's lives, "mediates information diffusion, public discussion, thus promoting the public sphere; it negotiates the relationship between the civil society and the state and creates new forms of daily interactions" (Tu, 2016, p. 345). All three cases have WeChat accounts, while only Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers have a Sina-Weibo account. The researcher was also able to join several group chats of Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers. The online observation focused on what kind of individuals and organizations the research participants interacted with and what type of content they

shared. All organizational information published on Sina-Weibo and WeChat during the two-month time period was downloaded for content analysis. The content analysis was helpful to address the research questions regarding the dimensions of being accountable to who and what kind of messages have been conveyed by these three organizations. Both the offline and online observations of each case were presented in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4 Field Observations

<b>Observation</b>		<b>Friends of Nature</b>	<b>Green Earth Volunteers</b>	<b>E.P.Jing</b>
In-person	Time	July-August, 2019		
	Observation types, location, and length	Volunteer training (Beijing, 3 hours)	Journalism salon (Beijing, 1 hour) River Observation (Beijing, 2 hours) Field trip (Beijing-Qinghai, 10 days)	Monthly fair (Beijing, 3 hours)
	Collected data	Field notes	Field notes	Field notes
Online	Time	October 1- November 30, 2019		
	Observation types	Information and conversation on Website, Sina-Weibo, and WeChat	Information and conversation on Website, Sina-Weibo, and WeChat	Information on WeChat
	Collected data	Social media content; Notes	Social media content; Notes	Social media content; Notes

The third step was to collect data from organizational documents. The researcher was able to collect organizations' documents based on availability. The collected documents include Friends of Nature's annual reports from 2008-2018, Green Earth

Volunteers' annual reports from 2014-2018, the three organizations' strategic planning reports, as well as the organizations' regulations of donation, volunteers, and communication management. The documents complemented the collected data from interviews and observations. The data collected from the above steps were helpful to answer the research questions and to cross-examine the accountability under the intersection of neoliberalism and socio-political institutions.

#### 4.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis consisted of content analysis based on semi-structured interviews, field notes of in-person and online observations, and data collected from organizations' documents and other available resources. Based on Lune and Berg's (2017) suggestion, the data analysis was conducted in three stages: data display to identify the themes and patterns from research participants' responses; data verification to map out the relationship between themes; and final data analysis. The coding of data was developed based on the research questions and conducted by MAXQDA. Data analysis of social constructionism emphasizes different even contradictory layers of meaning generated from the research participants' narratives (Esin et al., 2013). The current research adopted a directed approach of data analysis, which involves "the use of more analytic codes and categories derived from existing theories and explanations relevant to the research focus" (Lune & Berg, 2017, p. 183). The researcher was also aware of the emerging themes or surprising information that was not expected. Initial themes and additional concepts that are not mentioned in the previous interviews were recorded in memos and used for future inquiry. Also, this research adopted a critical perspective to analyze how the discourses related to one another or have power over one

another to understand the concept of power relations in the organization better. For example, if leaders of the organization's narratives were grounded in concerns of professionalization, that might signal a stronger connection to the effects of neoliberalism. Based on the literature review in Chapter 2 and 3, as well as Maxwell's (2012) suggestion, Table 4.5 presents the codebook for data with the categorical coding matrix that is related to the three secondary research questions. In addition, a matrix of the current research design is presented in Appendix A.

Table 4.5 Codebook

Definitions	Examples	
<b>Neoliberal discourses</b>		
<b>Marketization:</b> the use of market tools, principles, terminology, and business-like assumptions, discourses, and practices that emphasize financial power, profit maximization, and transaction	Competition and transaction	“A lot of businesspeople would see the work of nonprofit organizations in a business way, especially for those people who just entered the philanthropy and nonprofit world. This has pushed us to think about the work of nonprofits from a business perspective. Actually, I believe 70% of the organizational work, such as administration and management, should be the same between nonprofits and businesses.” (C12)
	Countable outcomes	
	Economic rationalism	
	Revenue diversification	
	Entrepreneurship: individual's responsibility	
<b>Managerialism:</b> practices that focus on instrumental and rational choices, emphasize strategies to attain certain goals, and measure goal achievement based on the standard of	Standard of efficiency and effectiveness	“The strategic plan not only demonstrated that the direction of the organization was clear, but also meant that the organization's operation was standardized, a clear governance mechanism was established, and the labor-division of decision-making
	Instrumental and rational choices	
	Administrative tasks	
	Strategic management and development	

efficiency and effectiveness		agencies and executive agencies.” (C11)
<b>Professionalism:</b> the increasing presence of specialized expertise in an organization and to shifts from volunteer labor to paid staff	Professional knowledge	“A smarter way is to impact the government by our professionalism, to engage with the government from a collaborative perspective, and to help and assist the government in fixing the problems in existing policies.” (C25)
	Professional personnel and staffing	
	Standardized operation and management	
<b>Accountable to whom</b>		
Upward stakeholders	The central government	“SEE Foundation has provided us not only financial support. Their public welfare experience also pushed our team on a path of professionalism. We began to figure out our mission, reflect on our activities, and gradually grew into a public interest environmental organization.” (C31)
	Local governments	
	International organizations	
	Domestic foundations	
	Individual donors	
Horizontal stakeholders	Boards	“Our team members are great. We work for the same goal without any consideration of personal interest or profit. But, as a leader, I have to think more about how to bring benefit to my team members through the promotion of our organization via media platforms.” (C31)
	Staff	
	Volunteers	
	Media	
	Partner organizations and experts	
Downward stakeholders	The community	“The accountability of a nonprofit organization relies on whether the organization responds to the demand of action from the public to confront the powerful interest groups.” (C13)
	Beneficiaries	
<b>Accountable how</b>		

<p><b>Performances and resources:</b> being a stable mechanism that accounts just for performance and resources</p>	Financial and performance disclosure	<p>From July 3 to August 17, Green Earth Volunteers received ¥100,000 from 138 donors. All the donors' names and donation amounts were published in the WeChat group. The money was used to cover the cost of the field trip and to construct a library for the elementary school at the origin of the Yellow River in Qinghai Province. (Observation notes July 20, 2019)</p>
	Regulatory oversight	
	Evaluation and external control	
<p><b>Responsiveness:</b> integrating stakeholder participation in the decision-making process and involving beneficiaries in organizations' activities</p>	Stakeholder participation and integration	<p>“Van class is the unique characteristic of Green Earth Volunteers. Each participant is equal. Everyone should have the opportunity to express his/her opinion and share it with us. And it is always a valuable opportunity for us to learn from each other, especially every time we have so many experts and scholars in different areas.” (C21)</p>
<p><b>Adaptiveness:</b> organizations' adaptive strategies and capacity that are executed and developed to adjust to the changed circumstances</p>	Capacity development and organizational changes	<p>“At that time, we really did not know what to do. Our organization seemed like it cannot continue. We stopped all of our works and external collaborations. We just signed a contract of ¥800,000 funding with SEE Foundation's North China Project Center. But because of the demolitions, we have not received any money from them until now. Everything has changed.” (C31)</p>

Based on the above table, the coding process produced nine dimensions according to the three research questions. Because of the rich data collected through interviews, observations, organizational documents, and social media content, each dimension has an abundant amount of codes associated with it. Table 4.6 lists the number of codes associated with each dimension.

Table 4.6 Number of Codes

Dimensions		Number of Codes			
Neoliberal Discourses		Inter view	Obser vation	Docu ments	Social Media
<b>Marketization:</b> the use of market tools, principles, terminology, and business-like assumptions, discourses, and practices that emphasize financial power, profit maximization, and transaction	Competition and transaction	51	0	29	11
	Countable outcomes	71	13	45	28
	Economic rationalism	39	21	30	0
	Revenue diversification	42	30	15	13
	Entrepreneurship: individual's responsibility	78	26	59	57
<b>Managerialism:</b> practices that focus on instrumental and rational choices, emphasize strategies to attain certain goals, and measure goal achievement based on the standard of efficiency and effectiveness	Efficiency and effectiveness	10	29	13	0
	Instrumental and rational choices	0	9	0	0
	Administrative tasks	11	15	26	0
	Strategic management and development	65	38	47	26
<b>Professionalism:</b> the increasing presence of specialized expertise in an organization and to shifts	Professional knowledge	60	39	39	18
	Professional personnel and staffing	42	41	30	13



from volunteer labor to paid staff	Standardized operation and management	53	20	24	0
<b>Accountable to whom</b>					
Upward stakeholders	The central government	150	38	18	16
	Local governments	119	68	20	25
	International organizations	32	10	3	0
	Domestic foundations	59	76	15	30
	Individual donors	63	58	25	23
Horizontal stakeholders	Boards	98	16	8	14
	Staff	26	8	3	19
	Volunteers	165	75	26	15
	Media	285	76	35	3
	Partner organizations and experts	195	103	7	24
Downward stakeholders	The community	168	82	19	12
	Beneficiaries	69	10	10	0
<b>Accountable how</b>					
<b>Performances and resources:</b> being a stable mechanism that accounts just for performance and resources	Financial and performance disclosure	34	95	62	9
	Regulatory oversight	5	23	16	0
	Evaluation and external control	12	24	28	11
<b>Responsiveness:</b> integrating stakeholder participation in the decision-making process and involving beneficiaries in organizations' activities	Stakeholder participation and integration	75	56	31	9
<b>Adaptiveness:</b> organizations' adaptive strategies and capacity that are executed and	Capacity development and organizational changes	40	12	36	15

developed to adjust to the changed circumstances					
--	--	--	--	--	--

#### 4.5 Validity

According to Maxwell (2013), respondent validation “is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on” (p. 126). To avoid possible researcher bias and misinterpretation of the perspectives and perceptions that research participants have on accountability, all the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Also, research participants were asked for feedback on preliminary findings. The different sources of data were compared to minimize systematic bias and increase dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Other scholars were also asked for feedback on the conclusions to identify the researcher’s potential biases and assumptions. Data analysis was coded during data collection as soon as the transcriptions were finished. Initial themes and additional concepts that are not mentioned in the previous interviews were recorded in memos and used for future inquiry.

The research is not intended to be generalizable; however, it is expected to resonate with previous research regarding this study’s selected research model and framework. As Brower, Abolafia, and Carr (2000) suggested, building on prior research is often a useful strategy for establishing plausibility. The interview questions and data analysis procedures were designed based on previous civil society organization research and methodologies. For example, the researcher’s choice to ask open-ended questions allowed participants the opportunity to fully reflect on and express their experiences

(Creswell, 2014). These responses from the participants were intended to provide detailed descriptions and insights on how these organizations activate participatory democracy.

## Chapter 5 Neoliberal Discourses and Organizational Changes

This chapter provides an overview of the organizational changes that have been experienced by each of the three case study organizations identified in Chapter 4 and answers the first secondary research question “How have neoliberal discourses been embedded in environmental nonprofit organizations’ processes and practices?” The literature review indicates that the neoliberal discourses that are closely related to civil society organizations include marketization, managerialization, and professionalization. As Raggo (2018) stated, the processes and practices of accountability reflect social reality. Drawing on the organizations’ documents, media coverage, observation and interview data, this chapter compiles a synopsis of the social changes that have influenced the organizations and the uniqueness of each organization, reflecting the organizational changes since their establishments in aligning with the development of neoliberal policies. The research finding provides a general contextual introduction regarding the development of neoliberal discourses in China and their impact on environmental nonprofit organizations’ practices and processes.

### 5.1 Friends of Nature

In 1994, Friends of Nature was founded as a secondary social organization under the International Academy of Chinese Culture, with a focus on environmental education and public awareness. The social organizations that are allowed to have secondary organizations, such as the International Academy of Chinese Culture, are national-level government-affiliated social organizations. Government-run social organizations are an approach by the government to balance the need for enhancing state control and the

market economy (Y. Li, 2012). Established and affiliated with the government, this type of organization is responsible for regulating and supervising their secondary organizations' management and activities.

In the first decade, Friends of Nature had done a lot of educational activities because three of the four co-founders worked in higher education. One of the co-founders of Friends of Nature, interviewee C11, reviewed the establishment of the organization and stated that "at that time, there were very few people in China who could understand the meaning of civil society organizations. Nobody knew what civil society organizations could do." Mostly serving children and seniors, Friends of Nature not only conducted various educational activities, but also developed interest groups: a mountaineering group, wild bird group, botanic group, and leave-no-trace group. The environmental education activities of Friends of Nature played an essential role in the 1990s to raise public awareness and foster environmental activists and environmental organizations' leaders. However, Friends of Nature got its public attention and reputation mostly because of several cases in the protection of endangered wild animals such as the Yunnan Golden Monkey and Tibetan Antelope. According to interviewee C11, the successful cases of Friends of Nature mainly relied on another co-founder Congjie Liang, who was a professor at the International Academy of Chinese Culture and passed away in 2010. Congjie Liang was the grandson of Qichao Liang, who was an important cultural and political icon in Chinese history. He used their personal connections and political resources to influence governmental officials and policymaking.

In 2004, Friends of Nature started the public recruitment of the general director, to seek more professionalized staff to join the organization. Around 2005, with an

increasingly worsening environment and continuous serious environmental issues that happened across China, the founders of Friends of Nature realized that their mission needed to adapt to environmental changes. Also, Congjie Liang's personal resources could not continue to support the organization's development. As C11 said, "the establishment of Friends of Nature was based on a charismatic leader, which is a common characteristic for many Chinese nonprofit organizations. Personal competence and charisma covered any flaw and risk in organizational management."

From 2007 to 2008, Friends of Nature started its strategic planning. In the beginning, they took two months to do an internal evaluation to identify the issues existing in the working procedures, management system, and organizational culture. Then they conducted external interviews to gather suggestions from members, governmental agencies, mass media, experts in environmental protection and nonprofit management, funders, businesses, the community, and volunteers. By 2008, Friends of Nature had its development strategy for the next five years: (1) advocate and establish public participation in environmental protection, represent the vulnerable groups, and influence the public policy-making; (2) raise public awareness, advocate actions through environmental education; and (3) improve collaboration among environmental NGOs. The strategy emphasized public participation, not only awareness but also action, and impact on policy-making. With the strategic planning in 2008, Friends of Nature formed its vision, mission, and core values. Its vision is: "to live in a society in harmony with nature, where every individual shall have the right to enjoy nature's beauty and share safe and clean natural resources." Its mission stated, "Friends of Nature strives to promote public awareness of environmental issues and create platforms for public participation in

environmental decision-making. Friends of Nature is committed to helping its members proactively undertake their responsibilities as both green citizens and green consumers.” Also, its core value include: “1) to befriend nature and, with sincerity and enthusiasm, respect the right to life of all creatures on mother Earth; and 2) to nurture and develop civil society as a critical safeguard towards environmental protection and preservation.” Based on the mission, vision, and core values, the core work of Friends of Nature is shown in Figure 5.1.

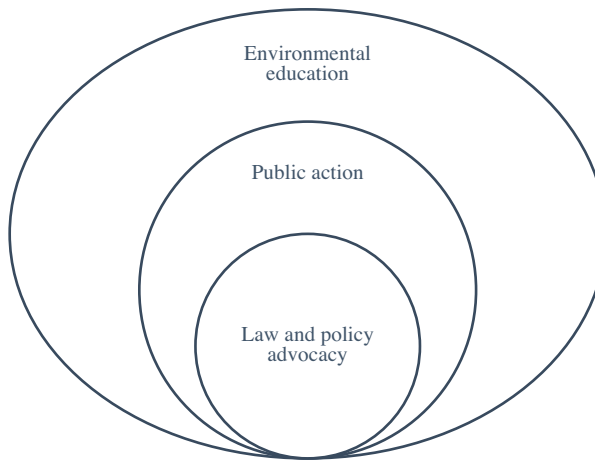


Figure 5.1 The Core Works of Friends of Nature

The strategic planning in 2008 has reflected the organization’s adjustment to social changes. As its 2008 annual report stated, “The challenge for Friends of Nature is to improve influence, accountability, and professionalization, to construct eco civilization, and to take the responsibility of Chinese people in the globalization process” (p. 3). With the increasing amount of serious environmental issues, Friends of Nature realized that environmental education might be “too gentle” and “too slow” to address the current crisis. The board member C12 said that,

At that time of strategic planning [in 2008], we had debates about who should be our target audience of environmental education and how to do the education.

Finally, we achieved a consensus. That is, the most important mission of environmental NGOs should be monitoring the environmental issues in contemporary society, and to promote the improvement or resolution by mobilizing social resources.

### 5.1.1 Organizational Structure

After 25 years of development, Friends of Nature has become a broader network with four entities rather than a single organization. The four entities include a civil non-enterprise unit; a foundation, which was registered in 2013 without public fundraising permission; and two incubated social enterprises: an environmental education school and an architectural design studio. As the Operation Director C13 introduced, from the legal perspective, the four entities are separate organizations; however, they share the same mission, vision, and values. There are a lot of various collaborations among them. This research focuses particularly on the civil non-enterprise unit registered at the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

The registration status of Friends of Nature was changed in 2010. Before 2010, it was a secondary social organization under the International Academy of Chinese Culture, where Congjie Liang was a professor and the vice president. Friends of Nature was required to submit an annual report each year and ask for permission for any activities from the International Academy of Chinese Culture. As a secondary social organization, Friends of Nature was allowed to have members and local branches. However, Friends of Nature developed much faster and bigger than the research and education institute with



more than 30,000 members, which exerted a lot of pressure and caused a lot of administrative issues to the research and education institute. Also, Congjie Liang, who was the connection between Friends of Nature and the International Academy of Chinese Culture, passed away. In 2010, Friends of Nature found a district-level governmental agency - Chaoyang District Science and Technology Commission, which is a district-level governmental agency - willing to be its professional supervisory agency. Its registration status was changed to a civil non-enterprise unit in 2010.

The change of registration status caused a change in organizational structure. According to the 2010 annual report, the independent registration was a necessary step toward professionalization, institutionalization, and standardization for Friends of Nature. Without the buffer protection from the International Academy of Chinese Culture, Friends of Nature had to face direct and strict control from the government. According to the regulation of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, civil non-enterprise units are not allowed to have members and local branches. Friends of Nature had to modify its member system to a volunteer system; and all the membership fees changed to individual donations. The Operations Director C13 said, “Although we don’t call them members anymore, they still think they are members of Friends of Nature. It is a recognition of their identity. But we have to call them volunteers to avoid any potential legal risks officially. Also, we cannot have any membership fees. So, we call it individual donations. We have to be more careful about the legal risks.” Although civil non-enterprise units are not allowed to have branches, Friends of Nature has 25 volunteer groups in several provinces of China, such as Jiangsu, Henan, Shenyang, and Guangdong, besides the four interest groups in Beijing. Overall, both the registration status as a secondary social organization or an independent

civil non-enterprise unit is a strategy of the government to ensure the civil society organizations' cooperation in effective governance (H. Li, 2016). Therefore, through registration, the Chinese government has been able to maintain control of civil society organizations within state-led social governance.

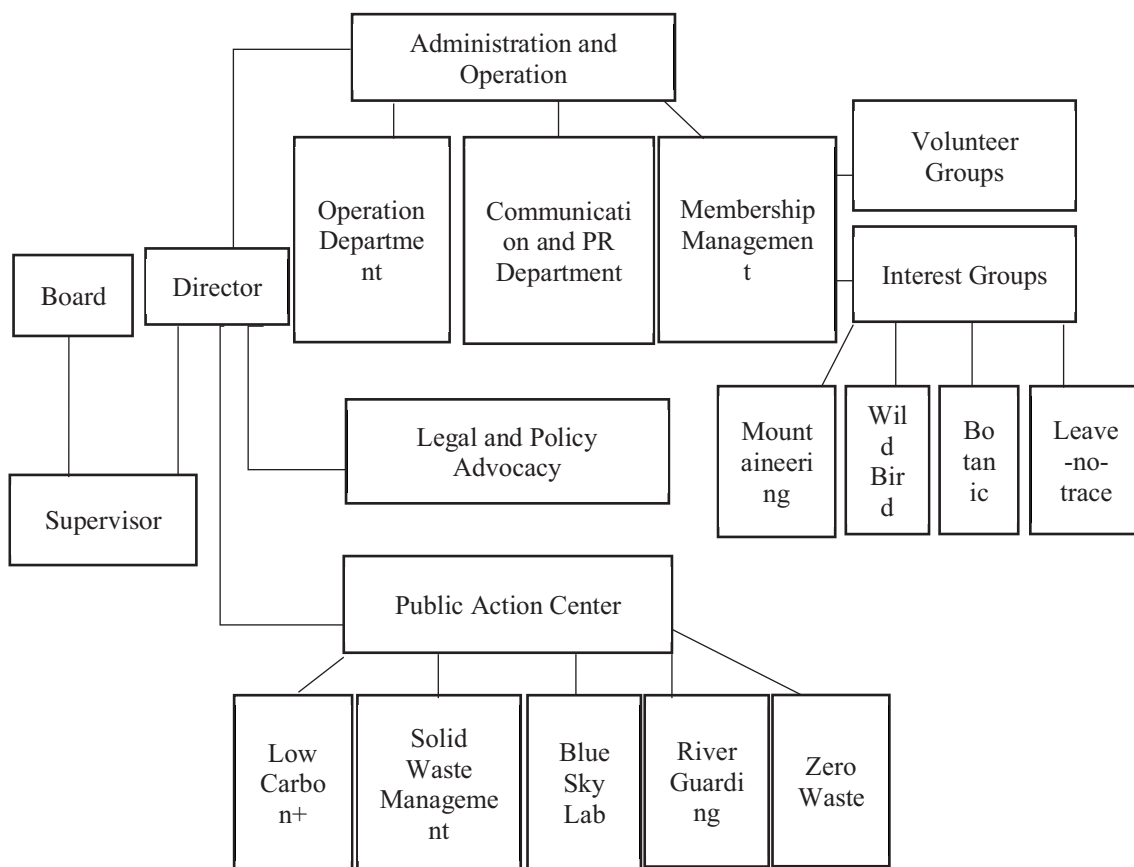


Figure 5.2 Organizational Structure of Friends of Nature

Before the strategic planning in 2008, the board members of Friends of Nature were selected through members' references. To ensure the integration and recruitment of more members with various professional background and expertise, the selection process

was changed to a process of self-nomination, organizational verification, and final publicity. Currently, Friends of Nature has a board with nine board members and one supervisor. The board members include scholars, journalists, and people from businesses, private foundations, and local nonprofits. The board has at least two meetings each year and plays the main role in decision-making. According to the board member C11, the board always meet more than two times each year to decide on development strategies. In 2018, they had four meetings. At the end of every year, the general director needs to summarize the organization's development, such as staff turnover numbers, volunteers, and activities, and report to the board. Under the board, four departments are responsible for administration and management: the operations department, legal and policy advocacy department, communication and public relations department, and membership management center. In addition, teams of low-carbon+, solid waste management, blue sky lab, river guarding, and zero waste compose the public action center. The current organizational structure of Friends of Nature is shown in Figure 5.2.

The managerialization of nonprofit organizations is an ongoing process of organizational changes in structures, discourses, and practices. According to the literature, managerialism is defined as “involving continuous increases in efficiency; the use of ever more sophisticated technologies; a labor force disciplined to productivity; clear implementation of the professional management role; managers being given the right to manage” (Evans, Richmond, & Shields, 2005, p. 79).

The current General Director divided the development of Friends of Nature into three stages: 1994-1999, 2000-2004, 2005-present. Friends of Nature has had various roles and social impacts at different stages. At the first stage, the opening of governance

space to other social actors from the central government provided opportunities for social elites, such as Congjie Liang who had certain social and political resources, to initiate environmental organization from a bottom-up approach. The main impact of Friends of Nature was the enlightenment of public awareness and actions. The education activities and the involvement in environmental issues such as the protection of endangered animals made more people, including policy-makers, realize that environmental protection required both awareness and actions. In the second stage, with increasing international exchange, Friends of Nature became the harbinger of environmental education in China. They organized groups to visit Germany and learn the concepts and skills of environmental education and developed a series of education curricula and activities. After 2004, the Chinese government has emphasized state-led social governance with the integration of social organizations and the public. Friends of Nature started exploring the institutionalization, professionalization, and sustainable development of the organization. The co-founder C11 stated,

The strategic plan [in 2008] not only demonstrated that the direction of the organization was clear, but also meant that the organization's operation was standardized, a clear governance mechanism was established, and the labor-division of decision-making agencies and executive agencies.

In 2010, Friends of Nature's membership system was changed to a system of volunteers due to the requirement of registration as a civil non-enterprise unit. As Hvenmark (2008) has found in his research, members that are officially affiliated with an organization were given "a certain amount of formal power and authority," so that they might be able to be a part of the decision-making system within the organization (p. 12).

In contrast, although volunteers play a critical role for project implementation and daily operations, the non-member volunteers have fewer obligations and commitment for the organization. Skocpol (2003) pointed out that in the U.S., there has been a trend that professional and paid staff took over the individual members' power and control, which profoundly changed the democratic governance within civil society organizations. Therefore, the volunteering and volunteer system has been viewed as part of a neoliberal managerial system, which emphasizes the instrumental values of volunteers for organizations' outcomes.

In 2004, Friends of Nature started the recruitment of the general director publicly, as the first step of the institutional reform of the organization. The co-founder, Congjie Liang, stated that an organization has to rely on the organization's culture rather than the individual leader's charisma. In the five-year summary in 1999, Congjie Liang mentioned, "the early presence of Friends of Nature was more like a club. Managers thought more about how to organize some popular group activities. Some projects happened incidentally, lacking any idea of long-term planning." Therefore, the reform tried to change the organization's heavy reliance on the individual leader to a professionalized nongovernmental organization. One of the staff of Friends of Nature said that the public recruitment of the general director was a brave action to demonstrate that Friends of Nature is a public platform. In 2005, the first General Director took office and stayed in Friends of Nature for 22 months. During that time, a set of regulations of organizational management and project management were developed, which set up a foundation for the professionalization process. From 2005 to 2013, six people have served as general directors. The current general director took office in 2013. The

operations director said that the professionalization process had promoted the organizational structure and management. For example, the board members were reduced from more than 40 to 17, then to 9, which has increased the involvement and activeness of the board within the organization.

#### 5.1.2 Activities and Projects

As mentioned earlier, during the first decade after establishment, Friends of Nature's activities focused on environmental education because three of the four co-founders worked in the education area. The founders believed that public awareness was the foundation of environmental protection and that environmental education was an effective way to raise public awareness. For example, Friends of Nature collaborated with a government-run foundation and initiated a project. The project supported volunteers to go to elementary schools in rural areas where resources were scarce. Through volunteer-led activities, the project aimed to cultivate children's awareness, knowledge, and skills of environmental protection. Since 2000 when the project was initiated, more than 750 volunteers have participated and brought environmental education activities to more than 300 elementary schools in 26 provinces of China. Until today, the cultivation of green citizens is still one of Friends of Nature's core activities. Also, a non-confrontative approach is still a part of their strategy for environmental protection.

During this time, Friends of Nature was involved in addressing environmental issues and public policy advocacy, which significantly improved its social impact and reputation. As one of the co-founders, C11 stated, "things just happened coincidentally. It was not a part of our organization's strategy at that time." In 1995, a county government in southwest China planned to cut a forest to address the governmental financial issues. A

wildlife photographer found that the cut of the forest would affect the habitat of a species of an endangered animal. The photographer took photos and tried to find people who could take action. One of the co-founders of Friends of Nature heard the news and acted immediately. As a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the co-founder wrote letters to the central government through CPPCC and asked his journalist friends to publish the news on mass media. Finally, the central government provided funding to help the local government address their financial issues and to save the forest.

In 1997, the same co-founder submitted a proposal at the annual CPPCC conference to move the Capital Steel Factory out of Beijing City. The factory was one of the main sources of air and water pollution in Beijing. However, it was also one of the main sources of tax revenue for the municipal government. There were a lot of debate and challenges to approve the proposal. After several years' continuous advocacy by Friends of Nature, the factory moving project started in 2005 and finished in 2010. Although the policy advocacy actions have significantly raised public concerns of the environment and public attention to Friends of Nature, as one of the board members, C12 said at that time, Friends of Nature's activities were passive actions without a clear and standardized procedure. Because of this, staff, members, and projects did not have a clear idea regarding the organization's mission and strategies.

The mission statement of Friends of Nature was changed from environmental education to an emphasis on public participation in the late 2000s. In 2008, a clearly stated strategy was developed. As C11 stated, "in the past, Friends of Nature had the concept of disseminating green culture and promoting public participation, which was

more like a slogan. The strategy development [in 2008] clearly depicted our working purpose and mission.” With the emphasis on public awareness and action, Friends of Nature’s work has focused on carbon reduction and waste management in the urban areas. The current General Director of Friends of Nature noted in the 2016 annual report,

The opinion expression and actions on serious environmental issues could increase the social impact of our organization. The public would be able to see Friends of Nature. But it is not enough. We need to be integrated into society, to promote, influence, and promote our participants and the public to take action in their local communities. What I really want to see is that Friends of Nature influences each individual and each group, which can represent the spirit of Friends of Nature and takes actions for the mission of Friends of Nature. I hope that everyone can integrate Friends of Nature into their values and that the mission and vision of Friends of Nature can be integrated into everybody’s daily life. It needs long-term persistence and effort. This work will not be vigorous, but it is what we need in contemporary society.

Although a lot of projects were not “exciting” or “attention-grabbing,” they believe that a non-confrontative approach is an effective way to influence individuals to have a positive attitude and to take action. C13 noted that,

Through the non-confrontative approach, we hope to let everybody know that environmental protection is not only about tragedies and crisis, and is not only the job of the government. Actually, we hope everyone can find that environmental protection is fun and is related to their daily lives. We can do a lot of small things every day to make our environment better.



Although Friends of Nature has claimed that they were taking non-confrontative approaches in environmental protection, it has been actively involved in policy advocacy and engaging with different levels of governments with more caution. At the central government level, Friends of Nature has been actively providing policy suggestions and participating in the policy-making process from a non-confrontative and collaborative perspective. Since 2006, Friends of Nature has published 11 books on the *Annual Report of Environment Development in China*. The reports record and examine the status and development of the environment in China from a practitioners' perspective based on empirical evidence. At the local level, some conflicts with the local governments and local businesses have emerged during environmental public interest litigations. In 2005, Friends of Nature established the Department of Law and Policy Advocacy. The department has participated in various activities such as environmental public interest litigation and the formulation of environmental policies and legislation. From 2014 to 2019, Friends of Nature participated in the formulation and revision of nearly 50 environmental public policies, including the Environmental Protection Law, Air Pollution Prevention Act, Judicial Interpretation of Environmental Public Interest Litigation, etc. In 2017, the Ministry of Environmental Protection (now the "Ecology and Environment Ministry") commissioned Friends of Nature to participate in the legislation research and provide suggestions regarding the first Soil Pollution Prevention and Control Law in China. Friends of Nature was also involved in the amendment of the Water Pollution Prevention Act.

In 2014, the amended Environmental Protection Law was released by the Ministry of Environmental Protection. The law states that environmental non-governmental

organizations can initiate environmental public interest litigation on behalf of people harmed by pollution. The strategy of conducting litigations is not about how many cases they have been involved in, but more about whether the case is influential and representative. Through these cases, their goal is to promote policy change. After the law took effect on January 1, 2015, Friends of Nature has done 40 environmental public interest litigations, including cases related to water pollution, soil pollution, air pollution, and ocean conservation. Among these cases, 34 were accepted by the courts, and 17 cases have been concluded as of the end of 2019. However, Friends of Nature has only won 5 of the cases. Ten of the cases were concluded with the result of court mediation. The current issue is, although the two parties of the case might have had some agreement, such as paying fine or project termination based on the court mediation, the implementation of the mediation requires more time, money, and staff to keep tracking. C13 noted that Friends of Nature does not have the capacity to keep tracking the implementation.

In the field of law and policy advocacy, Friends of Nature has confronted a lot of challenges to deal with the relationship with local government and private companies. In June 2019, Friends of Nature was concerned by water pollution in Nanchang, Jiangxi, caused by the sewage discharge of a local factory. Two agents of Friends of Nature filed the indictment at the Nanchang Intermediate Court. However, the court rejected the case because the case was about water pollution and there are no words related to water pollution in Friends of Nature's registration files. The court stated that Friends of Nature was not qualified to do the litigation, although the previously accepted cases of Friends of Nature included water pollution cases. Due to the different interpretations of the

Environment Protection Law, there have been a lot of unpredictable challenges during the litigation process.

Also, a lot of environmental litigations require a large amount of examination and evaluation fees regarding the impact of pollution on public health or the local environment. Due to the lack of funding for evaluation, several cases have been suspended for many years. For example, Friends of Nature was involved in the chromium waste pollution in Qujing, Yunnan, in 2010. Because of the pollution, a lot of local residents got cancer. The Qujing Intermediate Court accepted the case in 2011 and it became the first environmental litigation initiated by citizen-run nonprofit organizations in China. However, the Qujing court did not hear the first instance until 2019 because Friends of Nature, as the plaintiff, could not afford the ¥ million-level evaluation fee.

Besides the individual cases, the law and policy advocacy work has established a support network that includes more than 30 nonprofit organizations and more than 100 lawyers since 2014. The network has provided funding, capacity building, and information sharing for nonprofit organizations and environmental lawyers. The department collects and summarizes the information and actions related to environmental lawsuits and shares a monthly report to actors, researchers, and policy-makers who are interested in this area.

Neoliberalism emphasizes the individual, organization, and community's capacity of self-governance, minimizing the social and political causes of social problems. Therefore, individuals and organizations are encouraged to be entrepreneurial and innovative and to find individualized solutions to their needs (Boda, 2018). In March 2014, Friends of Nature incubated its first social enterprise, an environmental education

school based on their 20-years' experience in environmental education. As a social enterprise, the environmental education school adopted market and business mechanisms by integrating both the public interest programs and participant paid programs. The current General Director called it as a "special zone" of Friends of Nature, which expanded the impact and leadership of Friends of Nature through a business approach. The Operation Director of Friends of Nature C13 said,

The [environmental education] school is the earliest project of Friends of Nature, which is about environmental education. Now we separate this part to let it can survive by itself. It used to rely on project-based fundraising, which made it harder to pursue our own goals. Now it has its own revenues so that they do not need to compromise our goals to meet the demands of any funders.

In December 2018, a new project was also incubated by Friends of Nature. Based on the mission, vision, and core values of Friends of Nature, the new project provides zero-waste solutions such as professional volunteer teams and communication suggestions for large-scale events. Through collaboration with event organizers, the project provides waste sorting service and zero-waste advocacy at these events to promote public participation and the people's behavior change. As the Operation Director of Friends of Nature introduced, this project was another attempt for them to integrate the value of public interest and a market-based approach. Regarding the marketization process of the nonprofit organization, the board member of Friends of Nature also mentioned the influence from domestic foundations as their main funders,

Previously, the enterprise foundations did not care more about the beneficiaries of nonprofit organizations because they thought nonprofit organizations were too

idealist. A lot of businesspeople would see the work of nonprofit organizations in a business way, especially for those people who just entered the philanthropy and nonprofit world. This has pushed us to think about the work of nonprofits from a business perspective. Actually, I believe 70% of the organizational work, such as administration and management, should be the same between nonprofits and businesses. The only difference is that our clients do not pay for the service we provide.

### 5.1.3 Funding

Neoliberalism emphasizes market principles and financial sustainability. For nonprofit organizations, the neoliberal discourses and practices include marketization's emphasis on financial performance, transparency, countable outcomes, and efficiency and managerialization and professionalization's focus on administrative tasks and organizational development. Resource dependence theory suggests that the survival of nonprofit organizations relies on the organizations' "ability to acquire and maintain resources" (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 2). In the marketization process, revenue diversification and self-financing is an important indicator for nonprofit organizations to demonstrate their organizational capacity in financial performance.

At the establishment of Friends of Nature, the main funding was from donations from founders and members. By 2008, there were six foundations providing funding for Friends of Nature, among which five were foreign foundations. Since the strategy development in 2008, Friends of Nature has started its mission-driven strategy of fundraising to maintain its independence and fulfill its mission. For example, although a funder promised to provide more than a million-yuan in funding for a community waste

recycling project, the project was stopped because the project was not aligned with the organization's development strategy. At that time, the fundraising amount of the whole organization was around ¥ three to four million. In contrast, although most funders did not have a positive attitude toward the law and policy advocacy, Friends of Nature still initiated it because they thought "it was a necessary step to promote the environmental legislation by powerful actors" (C13). On the website of Friend of Nature, there is a statement regarding its work of law and policy advocacy: "Friends of Nature has long been committed to participate in environmental public interest litigations and legislation and policy development, to promote the resolution of environmental issues and the progress of environmental legislation and governance."

To address the loss of funding resources from several big funders, Friends of Nature had to undertake some innovative approaches to diversify funding resources to maintain the independence of the organization, especially the expansion of individual donations. In 2017, because Friends of Nature does not have public fundraising permission, they started accepting monthly donations and individual donations through a foundation that has the permission to do public fundraising. As of the end of 2019, Friends of Nature accepted ¥ 849,345 from 1,666 monthly donors in 2019. As the board member C12 stated, "If we rely on project-based fundraising, our strategic development would be restrained. Also, if we rely on fundraising from private companies, our independence as the plaintiff for environmental public interest litigations [is restrained]." Currently, 64% of Friends of Nature's revenue is from domestic foundations, 17% from private companies, and 15% from individual donations. In 2018, Friends of Nature also

received ¥20,000 in governmental funding, which accounted for 0.2% of their ¥10 million revenues in total.

Friends of Nature has been sensitive regarding the contextual and policy changes that might impact its funding resources. As the Operations Director C13 stated, they started reducing their reliance on international funding before the release of the 2016 foreign NGO law. She noted,

I believe the heavy reliance on international funding was three or five years ago. We reduced our application for international funding before the [2016] law. We turned our target to large domestic foundations that favor environmental protection. Also, we started exploring the monthly donation system very early.

Friends of Nature realized the instability and uncertainty of their financial resources and explored strategies to diversify its revenues. According to its annual reports, in 2008, the revenue from international organizations accounted for 69.5% of its total revenue; others included donations from domestic enterprises, individuals, and membership fees. In contrast, in 2018, the funding from domestic foundations accounted for 64% of its total revenue; other revenue was from enterprises, individuals, research institute, and the government. The shift of main revenue from international organizations to domestic corporate foundations promotes the adoption of market approaches for Friends of Nature. The board member C12 mentioned the application process of Friends of Nature for a trash sorting program by the SEE foundation. She stated,

Friends of Nature revised the application materials many times but the entrepreneurs who were responsible for funding allocation in the SEE foundation

were not satisfied. The entrepreneurs and the foundation were concerned about their investment, the cash flow and output of each grant. So they wanted us to clearly express our output capacity and future direction immediately.

Among the individual donations, they have conducted projects such as online fundraising, monthly donations, and activities such as auctions and receptions. The second General Director of Friends of Nature noted, “I personally feel that self-financing is very important. Project-based fundraising cannot guarantee the financial security of the organization, nor can it guarantee the development of the organization. Discretionary funds are the foundation for an organization.”

#### 5.1.4 Summary of Friends of Nature

The development of Friends of Nature reflects the evolution of neoliberal discourses within the context of China. The organization was founded by social elites who held social resources and focused on environmental education as its primary purpose at the beginning. To adjust to the contextual change, Friends of Nature has sought organizational changes in development activities such as funding diversification, the adoption of a social enterprise-oriented approach, as well as being actively involved in environmental policy advising and public interest litigations. In the 2000s, Friends of Nature experienced a series of transformations regarding registration status, organizational structure, organizational identity, and funding resources. The mission statement of Friends of Nature was changed from environmental education to an emphasis on public participation. The change has demonstrated the continuous exploration by the organization regarding the question of what is the “true problem” of environment protection in China. After 2008, with a clearer mission statement and



strategic development plan, Friends of Nature has been able to manage the organization and develop projects that focus on its purpose, “to promote more self-organized environmental actions by green citizens.” From a neoliberal perspective, the organization emphasizes individual citizen’s responsibility and entrepreneurship for environmental problem solving. Currently, the organization is developing a social enterprise-oriented approach for long-term sustainable development. The environmental education section has been separated as an independent social enterprise. The diversification of their funding resources has helped them to maintain a certain degree of independence to achieve their mission. Also, their environmental policy advocacy and environmental litigation work has been geared to different levels of governments, which mostly focused on the local issues in the context of devolution. As Gillley (2012) identified, the advocacy work aims to expose the local governments’ failure and bad practice rather than to challenge the state policies, which also explains the explicit statement of non-confrontative approach by Friends of Nature.

## 5.2 Green Earth Volunteers

In 1996, Green Earth Volunteers was founded by a famous Chinese journalist, Yongchen Wang. Yongchen Wang was a member of Friends of Nature since the establishment in 1994. Later, she left Friends of Nature because of a difference of mission and started the organization Green Earth Volunteers. Yongchen Wang explained that she believed environmental organizations should actively deal with environmental issues while Friends of Nature preferred a slow and gentle approach. At the time of establishment, the mission of Green Earth Volunteers was “walk into nature, know

nature, and befriend nature” with the value of “no slogan, no preaching, no reputation and profit, act with sincerity toward nature.” As Yongchen Wang said,

Everyone can get close to nature. Everyone can find an opportunity to realize him-or-herself. Everyone can feel the happiness of exchanging views with like-minded friends. We welcome people in every field to our group, and we will help them understand environmental problems from a comprehensive perspective. We hope to find some meaningful things that we like that are related to environmental protection, and we will take action to make contributions to environmental protection.

Currently, Green Earth Volunteers’ mission is “to serve as a vehicle for grassroots public participation through encouraging volunteerism. We also support environmental journalism in China, intending to improve awareness of environmental issues, and improve information disclosure.” In 2007, Green Earth Volunteers registered as a civil non-enterprise organization with the same professional supervisory agent of Friends of Nature, Chaoyang District Science and Technology Commission.

During the 2000s, when information technology and social media platforms had not been prevalent, and the public had very limited access to information disclosure and policy advocacy, Green Earth Volunteers played an essential role in representing local communities and advocating for social and policy change through media outlets. However, with increasing governmental control, the space for Green Earth Volunteers to mobilize the media has shrunk drastically since the late 2000s.

### 5.2.1 Organizational Structure

Compared to Friends of Nature, Green Earth Volunteers has a much looser organizational structure regarding the board, staff, volunteer management, as well as organizational development. Although Green Earth Volunteers has an official board with four members who are influential journalists in China, most of them have stopped participating in board meetings because of their full-time job restrictions, health issues, or moving to another country. However, their names are still listed on the organization's file as the registration requires a formal board with several board members. Currently, Green Earth Volunteers has an informal board with six members, most of whom are journalists. C22 is one of the informal board members who has been actively involved in the activities of Green Earth Volunteers. His name is not on the board's list in the organization's official documents. Yongchen Wang explained that the organization did not formally reform the board because the change of board members in the registration system is very tedious. In addition, the informal board does not have regular meetings; normally, meetings are organized when there were projects that need advice. Therefore, the board is more responsible for the programs and projects, rather than organizational management. Most of the management work was done by the founder, Yongchen Wang.

Green Earth Volunteers has no full-time staff and only five part-time staff and several core volunteers. The part-time staff, including trash collectors and farmers, are responsible for the organization of all the activities. Participants pay to participate in any activities. For example, for the field trip along the Yellow River in summer 2019, each participant had to pay ¥15,000 to join the trip. Besides the money, all the participants

had to provide their opinions, join the discussions, and write reports about the trip they participated in.

Yongchen Wang believes everyone should have the freedom to choose to join or leave the organization. She hopes that loose management could encourage more people to join the environmental protection activities. She said, “NGOs should be a group that can bring happiness to everyone; NGOs should be a space to achieve personal goals; NGOs should be an organization with like-minded people; NGOs should be a group to pursue meaning and value rather than reputation and profit.”

The volunteers of Green Earth Volunteers include journalists, scholars, governmental officials, business people, teachers, students, and retired people. More than 50,000 volunteers have participated in the activities since 1996. Because of the loose organizational structure and management, there have been a lot of critiques from environmentalists and other environmental organizations that Green Earth Volunteers is not professional in both organizational management and environmental protection. As the previous staff C24 said, Green Earth Volunteers’ projects were mostly developed by volunteers, without any evaluation or reward or punishment system. C24 also claimed that the action-based projects need professional staff and management to maintain sustainable development and to maximize social impact.

Compared to Friends of Nature which has embraced the practices of marketization, managerialization, and professionalization, Green Earth Volunteers has shown a more complicated attitude and approach regarding these. The founder of the organization, Yongchen Wang, has been explicitly resisting the marketization process to maintain its original mission. Within the WeChat group chat of the Yellow River Decade

Project 2019 of Green Earth Volunteers, Yongchen Wang stated, “I am a journalist and I am really not good at management. So, Green Earth Volunteers has been poorer and poorer.” She also expressed the same idea during the interview, “I have never paid attention to the organizational management. It might be my excuse. But I have never thought I want to have a big organization. I just wanted to focus on something that is really important for our environment.” The organization rejected the collaboration opportunity with another nonprofit organization because the other organization was too business-like. However, to maintain the organizations’ survival, self-financing has been an important topic for this organization.

The organization has tried several times to professionalize the organization. During the interview with Yongchen Wang in July 2019, she said that Green Earth Volunteers was planning to collaborate with an environmental nonprofit organization in East China. The leader of the organization from East China promised to manage Green Earth Volunteers in a professional and business-like way while maintaining the mission and value of Green Earth Volunteers. However, the attempt failed in November 2019. Yongchen Wang claimed,

In 2019, when we started talking about collaboration with [the organization in East China], one of our volunteers went to [that organization] and tried to work with them. But our volunteer just stayed there for one week and then left. She said that what they do was too business-like. Green Earth Volunteers is still trying to stick with our original idea that we do not care about reputation and profit. We just want things to be done, and our environment could be better... We cannot do the collaboration with the [other] organization [in East China] because we have

totally different ideas. They want to do the study tour for kids, which is a totally business-like way. It does not fit the mission of Green Earth Volunteers. I really hope we can find a person who can be the organization's manager soon so that I can focus more on my work to write more reports and publish more books. But the right person has not emerged for such a long time.

Yongchen Wang also said it was not the first time that Green Earth Volunteers attempted to transform. She has tried to find a professional leader to be the general director twice. But none of them stayed for more than six months. "We had totally different opinions about how to run the organization. So, we have talked many times that Green Earth Volunteers would transform. But until now, we are still like this. So, it is hard to say what will happen this time." In August 2019, Green Earth Volunteers just moved to a new office. Because of the lack of funding to rent an office, Yongchen Wang has used her personal money to pay for the office rental and the salary for part-time staff.

The previous staff C24 said professionalization, including the organizational strategy and management, has been a big issue and challenge for Green Earth Volunteers. When asked about the critiques that Green Earth Volunteers was not professional, Yongchen Wang claimed,

I think they criticized us as not professional both about organizational management and environmental protection. I am not good at organizational management. For me, I just want to solve the environmental problems in our society. I do not really care about how professional we are. If you compare the work we have done with other organizations, I do not think we have done less.

We probably have a bigger social impact than most of the environmental organizations in China.

Also, the organizational change of Green Earth Volunteers has not shown a direction of managerialization with moving to a business-like structure and management. It remains a volunteer-based operation and management since its establishment. From August 2010 to February 2011, Green Earth Volunteers hired a professional general director. However, the director left the organization after six months. Without performance-based pay and systematic evaluation, it has been hard for the organization to retain paid staff. Previous staff person C24 noted that the management of Green Earth Volunteers lacked a quality standard and a systematic approach. All the projects were conducted naturally, without any evaluation.

### 5.2.2 Activities and Projects

At first, for several years after its establishment, Green Earth Volunteers conducted a series of activities such as wild bird observation and tree adoption, which attracted a lot of volunteers. These activities played an important role in educating the public regarding environmental protection in the 1990s. However, the most influential activities of Green Earth Volunteers are several long-term projects lasting for more than ten years, such as the River Decade Project and Yellow River Decade Project.

From 2006-2015, Green Earth Volunteers launched the River Decade Project, a ten-year-long investigation of six great rivers in Southwest China: Min, Dadu, Yalong, Jinsha, Lancang (upper Mekong), and Nu rivers. Also, a similar project, Yellow River Decade Project, was conducted from 2010 to 2019. As a partner of the Global Water Keepers Alliance, many of Green Earth Volunteers' projects focus on water issues. Green

Earth Volunteers has organized projects to raise public awareness, participation, and supervision of the water issues facing the main rivers in China. To examine the ecological change by the rivers and the impact of the change on local residents' daily lives, the projects include weekly river watches in Beijing and annually a river watch across China. For these two projects, each year, a group of people, including scholars, journalists, and experts in environmental protection, travel to the above areas and conduct investigations with local residents, migrants, and experts. As Yongchen Wang stated, the purpose of the project is to study and oversee hydropower development on these six rivers over ten years and to promote information transparency and public participation in policy-making. The two decade-long projects have accumulated plenty of valuable records regarding the change of the environment and people's lives along the river. Also, several serious environmental issues have been found by the groups and addressed because of the organization's actions.

Besides the two annual projects, a weekly Beijing River Watch has been organized since 2007. Every Saturday, a group of people go to a different river in Beijing with environmental experts and volunteers, to see the surrounding areas by the rivers, to "record the beauty of rivers, and to pay attention to China's water crisis- exemplified by scarcity and pollution." During the tours, the experts introduce the construction, culture, and history of the rivers; the participants are able to see the environmental issues in their daily lives and participate in environmental protection through their own experiences. Since 2007, more than 600 activities have been organized related to the 50 rivers in Beijing, with more than 10,000 participants. A lot of participants recorded what they saw and experienced and shared on their social media immediately. They also reported to



governmental agencies when there were water issues along the river. In 2011, a one-year long project to watch the 38 rivers in Beijing was conducted by Green Earth Volunteers, mostly made up of college students. The report of the project attracted the attention of the public, the media, and the government. Yongchen Wang believes it is an effective way to raise public awareness and promote public participation in environmental protection.

Volunteers do most of the organizing work of Green Earth Volunteers. Before a tour, the volunteers of Green Earth Volunteers need to design the route, contact and confirm with the experts who can participate, and send out notices. On the day of the tour, the volunteers need to get to the gathering spot earlier, organize and lead the participants, and examine the water quality. After the tour, the volunteers need to write the activity summary. As a public participation activity, the Beijing River Watch has been organized for a very low cost with no charge to participants. However, there are still issues to keep the project running. As Yongchen Wang said, she has been concerned with how to establish a stable model and funding resources to maintain the project for a long time. Recently, Green Earth Volunteers has been thinking about issues such as how to keep the project innovative to attract more participants, how to maintain a team of volunteers and a team of experts, and how to have tangible outcomes.

Because of the founder Yongchen Wang's background in journalism, Green Earth Volunteers prioritizes its competence to promote and educate environmental journalism. The Environmental Journalists Salon has been organized since 2000. Each month, Green Earth Volunteers invites experts to give lectures to environmental journalists based on current environmental issues. The salon has prompted a lot of journalists to pay attention

to environmental topics and published several books and reports. However, with the increasingly strict government control over both the civil society organizations and media, environmental journalists have been less motivated to attend Green Earth Volunteers' activities. C22 mentioned that when he joined Green Earth Volunteers in 2009, there were around 100 environmental journalists at each salon. However, at the salon held on July 18, 2019, the researcher noticed that there were only three journalists among the 18 audience members. Others included retired governmental officials and university professors. Yongchen Wang summarized two reasons for the shrinking space for environmental journalists and the increasing distance between nonprofit organizations and media: financial reasons and political reasons. From the financial perspective, Yongchen Wang noted,

When I found Green Earth Volunteers in 1996, most media platforms had environmental programs. For example, the Central Television Station had Green Space; I had a program called Read Green at the Central Radio Station; the Chinese Youth Daily had a weekly special issue called Green Island. However, all the programs disappeared after 2000. The media became more and more commercial and there were no money and no people to sponsor this kind of program. A lot of small media that we used to have a very good relationship with already disappeared because of the lack of funding. It was the first wave of alienation between media and NGOs.

Currently, most media agencies do not provide financial support for journalists to do long-term reports related to environmental issues.

Yongchen Wang also commented that the second round of alienation between nonprofit organizations and media is caused by political reasons, mostly because of increasing governmental control. The media reports on environmental issues cannot be published and broadcast. C23, who is responsible for organizing the Environmental Journalist Salon said, “Now the journalists can only help the government to propagate. For example, the government wanted to promote the system of river chiefs. So, all the media published the reports about the benefit of the system. It has been more and more impossible to report any issues.”

In addition to the integration and emphasis of public participation in their mission statements, Green Earth Volunteers is also cautiously balancing the power relations among the central government, local government, and interest groups to achieve their missions and goals. As a journalist volunteer of Green Earth Volunteers C25 stated,

How can environmental NGOs disseminate their ideas and concepts through practices and promote the improvement and change of policies and regulations? Apparently, we cannot stand at the opposite position from the government to criticize. A smarter way is to impact the government by our professionalism, to engage with the government from a collaborative perspective, and to help and assist the government in fixing the problems in existing policies.

Therefore, although Green Earth Volunteers has been actively involved in a lot of environmental issues such as the anti-dam movement in the 2000s, the strategy was to advocate for the administrative intervention of the central government through media outlets. Their reports caught the attention of top leaders and finally successfully stopped

the implementation of projects that might cause serious local environmental issues. Currently, Green Earth Volunteers is fighting for another issue, the protection of an ancient plant species of tamarisk. The staff of Green Earth Volunteers have found the tamarisk in Qinghai Province since the first year of the Yellow River Decade Project in 2010. The expert said that the tamarisk they found was a unique species all over the world, with a large value for biodiversity protection and world natural heritage. However, Qinghai Province was planning to build a hydropower dam in the area that the tamarisk is growing, which would destroy the species and negatively impact the eco-system. The founder of Green Earth Volunteers, Yongchen Wang said, "I asked the local people, which is more important, to build the dam or to protect the trees. The local people said the dam is more important because it could bring money while the preservation of the trees would cost money." In December 2019, Yongchen Wang provided information regarding the issue to publish a newspaper report. She was also seeking ways to submit the report to the top leaders of the central government directly through personal connections, which she thought might be the only way to protect the trees.

### 5.2.3 Funding

As a volunteer-based organization, funding has been a consistent problem for Green Earth Volunteers. The first funding that Green Earth Volunteers received was \$200 from an American woman for the wild bird observation to buy telescopes. Later, Green Earth Volunteers received another \$200 for tree adoption to buy shovels and buckets. Green Earth Volunteers has received funding from foreign organizations such as the Blue Moon Foundation, Canon Company, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the French Embassy, Misereor Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation, and the Global

Water Keepers Alliance (Table 5.1). However, all the funding is not continuous. As Yongchen Wang stated, the total amount of funding from foreign organizations that Green Earth Volunteers has received from the 23 years could not compare with one year's funding for some nonprofit organizations in China. Because of the lack of stable and continuous funding resources, many of Green Earth Volunteers' activities have been stopped. For example, the staff and volunteers of Green Earth Volunteers went to Inner Mongolia to plant grass and fix sands for three years. The project was stopped in 2000 because of a lack of funding.

Table 5.1 The Funding Received by Green Earth Volunteers, 1996-2010

Funder	Country	Amount	Time	Project
Ford Foundation	USA	\$ 20,000	1996-2004	Capacity building
A government-related foundation	Finland	\$ 3,000		Journalist Salon
Conservation International	USA	\$ 10,000	2004	Photography exhibit
American Bar Association	USA	\$ 10,000	2006	The promotion of Journalist Salon in 12 provinces in China
USA embassy in China	USA	\$ 10,000		
The Natural Resources Defense Council	USA	\$ 10,000		
The Royal Institute of International Affairs	UK	£ 12,000	2006	The Conference of "NGO and Media"
Canon	Japan	\$ 10,000	2007	River Decade Project
Blue Moon Foundation	USA	\$ 120,000	2008-2009	Environmental Journalists Network; The investigation of international NGOs
SEE Foundation	China	¥ 130,000	2008	River Decade Project
World Wide Fund for Nature	Switzerland	\$ 15,000		Bird investigation
World Bank	USA	\$ 7,000	2010-2011	
Misereor Foundation	German	£ 25,000		

The Chinese University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong	HK\$9,200		The investigation of Environmental NGOs in China
Rockefeller Brothers Foundation	USA	\$ 50,000	2009	The website of Environmental Journalist Salon
The French Embassy	France	£ 5,000	2010	English website

It has to be noted that Table 5.1 only includes the international funding Green Earth Volunteers received up until 2010. The funding received since then has not been recorded due to the lack of financial management staff. Yongchen Wang said that Green Earth Volunteers stopped receiving international funding in 2014, mainly because of the increasing competition among environmental nonprofit organizations in China as well as the decrease of international funding resources.

Without professional fundraising staff, Yongchen Wang is the only fundraising person for the organization. Currently, the main funding of Green Earth Volunteers is through individual purchases and donations. First, the funding comes from selling books. Green Earth Volunteers has published more than 30 books and is selling the books at the original or higher price. The money has been used to buy books, subscribe to journals and newspapers, and establish small libraries for elementary schools in western China. Second, all the other activities that are organized by Green Earth Volunteers have been funded by personal donations from volunteers and participants. For example, all the participants of the Yellow River Decade Project needed to pay their own trips' costs. Green Earth Volunteers does not earn any money from the activities. All the donations and expenses were disclosed to every participant. One volunteer shared a story that happened in the 2012 River Decade Project. Almost at the end of the field trip, the group did not have money to pay the toll fee on the highway. Finally, a participant used his own

money and paid the toll fee. Yongchen Wang claimed, “Before our activities, I did not think about how much it would cost. I cared more that it was a meaningful activity. Green Earth Volunteers is doing the biggest things with the least money. Sometimes, we even do things without spending money.”

As mentioned earlier, all the activities of Green Earth Volunteers are funded through participants’ payments and individual donations. The organization lacks the financial resources for its daily operation and administrative tasks. Currently, the founder, Yongchen Wang, is thinking of developing a way to encourage and receive individual donations regularly. However, the biggest obstacle is the regulatory restriction. Without the permission for public fundraising, Green Earth Volunteers cannot set up a platform to receive individuals’ donations directly and regularly. The only thing they can do this is to mobilize resources through online platforms.

#### 5.2.4 Summary of Green Earth Volunteers

Similar with Friends of Nature, Green Earth Volunteers was founded by a social elite. The identity of the journalist founder has brought social resources for the organization’s development. Although Green Earth Volunteers has been criticized as not being professional, the organization has been actively educating environmental journalists through media coverage and plenty of publications. Volunteers have played an important role in the organization’s structure. The most successful model of this organization is the collaboration between media and nonprofit organizations. However, in recent years, the lack of funding has forced the closure of significant projects and staff turnover. Also, due to the increasingly strict governmental control and media censorship, fewer journalists are participating in Green Earth Volunteers’ activities. How to maintain

the social impact and the sustainable development of the organization has been a big concern for the organization.

Compared to Friends of Nature, Green Earth Volunteer has adopted a very different strategy regarding the organization's development. The founder, Yongchen Wang, recognized the conflict between marketization and organization's mission achievement. As Yongchen Wang stated, she left Friends of Nature and started Green Earth Volunteer because these two organizations had different understandings regarding the role environmental nonprofit organizations can play in society. She claimed that environmental organizations are responsible for proactively exposing the critical environmental issues, to represent the voice and power of citizens, and to respond to the demands of their members and the public. However, the prevalent discourse of professionalization has produced pressures on Green Earth Volunteers' survival and development. Furthermore, based on Green Earth Volunteers' programs and activities, it is hard to see the organization representing any specific types of groups and communities. Their work seems to be issue-focused rather than people-focused. As the introduction to the Yellow River Decade project stated, the purpose of the project is to promote reasonable and scientific policy-making in environmental protection along the Yellow River. Similar to Friends of Nature's environmental litigations, their media coverage and journalists' education have focused on the disclosure of local governments' failures in environmental protection and the mobilizing of the central government to address the local environmental issues. Therefore, although its mission statement focuses on the improvement of both the public awareness and information disclosure of environmental



related issues, the impact of this organization on policy-making seems limited, mostly remaining at a local level.

### 5.3 E.P.Jing

E.P.Jing is located in a village in the northwestern area of Beijing. It was founded in March 2016 by seven housewives with the vision of “promoting waste sorting to every household, to construct a cleaner living environment for our children.” According to one of the co-founders C31, before 2015, the village was like other villages in China. The waste was stored within the village and occupied a big area of the land. Also, a lot of garbage was stored in the open air. The treatment methods were village collection, town transportation, and district management. A garbage truck came to collect the garbage regularly. However, with the growing population, the truck could not collect all the garbage. The garbage collectors started burning the garbage, which caused significant air pollution in the village. C31 noted,

At that time, I always felt nauseous and had a headache. It was the first time that I knew what the smell was like to burn the plastic garbage and kitchen waste. It was a profound life experience, letting me know that garbage could be troublesome.

The mission statement of E.P.Jing emphasizes public education, awareness-raising, and behavior change regarding waste sorting and daily lifestyles. Their mission statement emphasizes the compatibility of environmental governance from the perspective of the state and the people’s lifestyle changes at the local level. After three years’ of development, the current goal of E.P.Jing is to develop a replicable model of waste sorting and management for rural villages in China.

### 5.3.1 Organizational Structure

In March 2016, seven housewives founded the organization E.P.Jing. The group started the waste management project in April 2016, and the group received funding from the SEE Foundation in 2017. However, E.P.Jing was registered as a business entity in June 2019 because “currently, it is super hard to register as a civil non-enterprise unit,” stated a volunteer C35 who has helped them with the registration process.

At the first year, all the work was done by the co-founders in collaboration with trash workers and village residents. The organization was named an Environmental Group of the village, which reflected a loose and flat structure. There were no professional titles within the organization. C32 described them as a volunteer group at that time, playing an irreplaceable role as the bridge and bond between the village government and local residents in education, guidance, and docking resources for the establishment of trash sorting system. Together with the village’s governance committee, the organization has been dedicated to exploring an effective way for trash sorting in local villages.

As a critical component of managerialism, professionalism emphasizes that managers and staff with professional expertise should be in charge of an organization (Maier et al., 2016). Through hiring professional staff, setting up professional codes of conduct, and providing professional training, nonprofit organizations attain their legitimacy and demonstrate that they are capable of being a part of social governance. The three cases of this research represented the different extents of professionalization of nonprofit organizations in China. Professionalization was demonstrated by E.P.Jing’s structural change as well as the organizations’ programs and activities.

Since June 2017, when E.P.Jing received funding from the SEE Foundation, it has started to explore the professionalization and standardization of its organization management. First, it changed its name to E.P.Jing. Second, several co-founders left the organization. The organization set up the positions of communication director and program manager and recruited full-time staff for these positions. Third, the organization started its affiliation with the Beijing Dandelion Public Welfare Development Center (Dandelion Center hereafter), which is a registered civil non-enterprise unit under the Beijing Bureau of Civil Affairs. The Dandelion Center provided professional support such as the accountants for financial management. C31 also mentioned, “We have been very lucky to work with the Dandelion Center. They are very easy to communicate with. Every time when we need the approval for our programs or activities, we can only make a phone call.” Third, the operational funding can be used by the start-up organization with their discretion, such as to develop strategical plans, rent offices, purchase office equipment, and pay for the staff salaries. With the funding, E.P.Jing has been able to recruit full-time employees, including a program manager and communication manager, and more volunteers to join the organization. Also, the SEE Foundation provided professional training and exchange opportunities as well as a connection with other resources.

Regarding the development of environmental protection in the village, one thing that has to be noted is that 60% of the residents are from outside of the village. Most of them are artists and parents accompanying their children at a nearby Waldorf school. For example, a volunteer of E.P.Jing said that the success of E.P.Jing with the local government relied on the working experience of the co-founder C31. C31 worked in the

Beijing government for more than ten years, so she knew what the local government wanted and how to negotiate with them. The co-founder C32, was a university professor and has been a visiting scholar in Taiwan. She brought the waste sorting system from Taiwan to develop their own project.

### 5.3.2 Activities and Projects

The mission of the organization is to create a model for waste sorting and environmentally-friendly lifestyles in rural China and to provide suggestions for evidenced-based policy-making regarding rural environmental protection. One of the co-founders of E.P.Jing introduced that at the beginning of the organization's establishment, the market-driven approach actually played a very important role to persuade the local government to collaborate with them. The local government noticed the potential economic profit to produce eco enzyme by using kitchen waste. Also, enzyme production has been an attractive term for E.P.Jing to communicate and strengthen the linkage with local residents, other villages, and elementary schools.

The founders believed that a waste-sorting system should be close to people's daily life from a bottom-up approach rather than top-down policy implementation. C31 said, "Although we have talked a lot about waste sorting, the government did not set up a standard system. For us, the most important thing is to explore a recycling system that is useful and effective in rural areas." Before the launch of the project, more than 30 lectures were held to propagate the new sorting system within two months. Volunteers went to each household to educate the residents. In 2019, their focus was kitchen waste collection and management, such as composting.

The organization designed detailed waste-sorting with more than 100 categories. For example, plastic waste is classified as transparent and non-transparent, medical waste is classified as with a package and without a package, and glass waste is classified based on color and size. The detailed classification has proved to be useful to maximize waste recycling. E.P.Jing has set up a collaboration with several recycling businesses to collect used clothing, electronics, and paper products. Professional companies collect hazardous waste. Currently, there are more than 2,000 residents of 400 households living in the local village. Recycling and environmental protection have become the keywords of the village. Every household has two boxes to collect recyclable waste and hazardous substances and two buckets to collect kitchen waste and non-recyclable waste. Regarding the 1.2 tons of waste produced each day, 80% to 90% are recycled. One of the volunteers C36 said that “Although the waste sorting has no tangible reward to the residents, everybody supports waste sorting because we have really seen a better living environment.”

Every Saturday of each month, E.P.Jing organizes a village fair for people to sell and exchange natural products. The village fair does not allow the use of plastic bags. As C31 said, the village fair is also an opportunity to educate the local residents regarding environmental protection and how to reduce plastics in their daily lives. Each time at the village fair, there will be a billboard to persuade the public to take five treasures: lunch box, eco bag, water bottle, eco chopsticks, and handkerchief. At the village fair, there will be volunteers to help people learn how to sort waste into different categories. People even brought waste to the fair to learn waste sorting. At the fair, a person said, “I thought there would be nobody to bring their waste to the fair. But I have seen many people brought

many bags of waste. But it is easy to have volunteers help you. And we learned a lot of knowledge.”

Managerialization promotes individuals’ and organizations’ responsible and rational discretion in a market-driven system. E.P.Jing started with the goal to design and develop a model of balancing economic development and environmental protection. Therefore, at the beginning, the organization has emphasized the effectiveness of its mission achievement. They discussed how their projects could maximize the economic benefits for local community and how their model could be replicated and generalized in other villages in China. Through embracing a market-driven approach, the organization’s management and operations is inherently related to managerialism by focusing on providing high quality service of trash collection and sorting. One of the staffs C34 introduced that the organization was working on their long-term development plan, which includes a clear statement regarding the motivation, the mission and goal, the public interest model, the strategic plan, and expected impact.

### 5.3.3 Funding

As a community-based organization, E.P.Jing has also been involved in non-confrontative advocacy at the local level. Their work was started with a collaboration with the local government. Although the government did not provide direct funding for them, the institutional support and the local residents’ trust toward the government became a kind of endorsement for E.P.Jing’s activities. At the establishment of the organization, the project was conducted with support from local residents’ donations. C31 said that E.P.Jing was founded without money, without professional background, and without governmental support. She also said, “Probably, we would not do this if we

had any professional background because then we would know how hard it is about waste sorting.” However, E.P.Jing’s program started with the close collaboration with the village government. The village government allocated spaces for the organization to set up office, organize workshops, and produce eco enzyme. To support E.P.Jing’s program, the original trash collection spots were closed. The trash workers were required to collect and categorize trash door by door regularly twice every day. The village chief contributed ¥40,000 of his personal funding to support the program. He also issued an administration order prohibiting all supermarkets and farm markets in the village from providing plastic bags, and prohibiting all restaurants in the village from using disposable plastic products. The co-founder C32 described that they were able to start their program of trash sorting because the village head was keenly aware of the potential benefit of the program for the village’s economic development before the central government started the national-level advocacy of trash sorting in 2019. The experience has made E.P.Jing realize that in China, policy reform and social change could not be achieved without the government’s support. In the context of social governance, the trash sorting system has been initiated from the bottom-up approach and transformed to a top-down process. Therefore, C32 stated that it was a critical part for E.P.Jing to establish and maintain a trust relationship with the local government and deal with the environmental issues collaboratively.

Similar to Friends of Nature, E.P.Jing is exploring revenue diversification based on its activities and projects and the development of social enterprise, reflecting marketization discourses and practices. From an entrepreneurial perspective, E.P.Jing has been dedicated in promoting the balance between economic development and

environmental protection at the local village. Currently, E.P.Jing is exploring strategies for sustainable development for both the village and the organization, such as the establishment of a social enterprise. According to C32, one of the co-founders, the model of E.P.Jing has five versions, from the beginning to the advanced level. That is, waste off the ground (version 1.0) - waste sorting (version 2.0) - waste reduction and zero-plastic at the source (version 3.0) - organic plantation (version 4.0) - ecological village construction (version 5.0). Each village can copy the different versions of the model based on their own capacity.

In terms of funding, “It costs at least ¥200,000 each year just for the waste collection. The funding has been the biggest problem for us,” said C31. In 2017, E.P.Jing became a partner of the SEE Foundation’s “Environmental Protection Public Welfare Entrepreneurship Funding” and received ¥200,000. Later, SEE Foundation’s North China Project Center started providing professional support for E.P.Jing. C31 said,

SEE Foundation has provided us not only financial support. Their public welfare experience also pushed our team on a path of professionalism. We began to figure out our mission, reflect on our activities, and gradually grew into a public interest environmental organization.

To maintain the funding resource, E.P.Jing has been planning to do online fundraising through platforms such as Tencent Philanthropy and WeChat, to receive donations and support from people all over the country. As of January 2020, E.P.Jing has received ¥314,521.93 from 25,636 individual donors through the platform Tencent Philanthropy. Staff C34 said,



It is not sustainable to rely on support from the government. We have to explore an industrial chain to achieve the construction of a long-term and effective zero-pollution village. Right now, the best model for us is to make the eco enzyme by using kitchen waste.

The production of the eco enzyme has been used for a strawberry plantation and brought profit to the local residents. On the street in the village, there is a poster that said that “We should not put all the responsibilities to the government or entrepreneurs. Our children will face a worse environmental crisis if we do not try to change.”

Since the summer of 2019, E.P.Jing has organized study tours and workshops. The workshops invited environmental experts from countries such as Australia, Europe, Japan, and the U.S. to discuss topics such as composting, natural capital, and waste management in these countries. Each activity could host around 30 to 50 participants, and the participants paid from ¥60-200 to attend these activities. In July 2019, when the researcher contacted the organization, the first response received from the organization was an invitation to visit their village by organizing a group tour for around 10 people. For the tour, each person pays around ¥100-200. Currently, E.P.Jing is exploring collaboration opportunities with farms and businesses to experiment with the use of kitchen waste compost and enzymes in planting. The co-founder C31 said she hoped E.P.Jing would be able to set up a platform to help the local farmers to sell eco products and to find an innovative way to construct an eco-cycle for rural areas in China. Also, the staff C32 noted that they were seeking opportunities for government contracting based on their successful experience of working with the local governments and providing community service.

#### 5.3.4 Summary of E.P.Jing

E.P.Jing is a community-based organization. Compared to Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers, E.P.Jing emphasizes a connection with the local community. Because of its contribution to the financial development of the local community, it has received institutional support from the local government. For example, the local village model has been recognized by the municipal government of Beijing as a demonstration and education base for waste sorting and recycling. Currently, the Chinese government is promoting the waste sorting system across the whole country. Shanghai has been the first city with a compulsory waste sorting system with a strict penalty of violations since July 2019. The cities of Beijing, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Hangzhou have been revising the waste sorting regulations, and Beijing will implement the system in May 2020. Although the government-led progress has been criticized as “a sort of eco-dictatorship” (Kuo, 2019), it might provide more opportunities for small organizations such as E.P.Jing to assist in policy implementation, to introduce their community-based model to more villages, and promote the real change of citizens’ behaviors and villages’ environmental governance. However, it has to be noted that scholars have discussed the role of nonprofit organizations in shaping an entrepreneurial civil society within the neoliberal context (Cernea & Kudat, 1997; R. R. Moore, 2001). E.P.Jing’s market-driven strategy provides an example to demonstrate entrepreneurial development within the context of China.

#### 5.4 Summary

The three case study organizations have had some common themes as well as significant differences regarding their age, size, program focus, organizational development, and strategies to cope with contextual pressure and developmental

demands. Among all types of civil society organizations in China, environmental organizations have been actively participating in public policymaking and implementation processes. Environmental organizations such as Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers have prompted the government to adopt policies to protect endangered animals and to regulate and punish local businesses for destroying the environment such as Friends of Nature's protection projects of the Yunnan Golden Monkey, Tibetan Antelope and Yunnan Green Peacock as well as Green Earth Volunteers' protection of Tamarisk trees. With the implementation of government's trash sorting policy, the work of E.P.Jing has been recognized by the local government.

All three organizations' mission statements emphasize public awareness, public participation, and policymaking. The change of mission statements of Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers demonstrates a progressive process for them to figure out their development strategies as well as their roles and functions within Chinese society. In the 2000s, the Chinese government started facing both international and domestic pressure to deal with increasingly serious environmental issues. Public participation was recognized and supported by the government. Also, with the continuous popularization of civic awareness, more people began to develop an awareness of the rights of environmental protection and public health and take action. A series of governmental regulations were released during that time, including the Assessment of Environmental Impact Law, Implementation Regulations on Public Participation in Environmental Protection, and the Environmental Information Disclosure Act. Among these regulations, social organizations have been recognized as an important social actor to assist the government's policy making and implementation. Therefore, both the missions of Friends

of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers were changed and integrated the concept of public participation.

During the 2000s, the interaction with foreign organizations has provided financial, conceptual, and operational support for domestic environmental organizations. However, funding resources have changed from a heavy reliance on foreign organizations to domestic foundations and the expansion of individual donations since the late 2000s. For example, in 2018, only Friends of Nature received ¥20,000 in governmental funding, which accounts for 0.2% of their ¥10 million revenues in total. In contrast, media, scholars, and the public have been the main support that was activated by environmental organizations. Although professionalization has been mentioned by all the organizations, volunteers including people with different education levels and social status, are playing an essential role in all the organizations' activities. According to Liu (2012), compared to the older organizations, newer organizations are establishing a professional and systematic organizational structure at the beginning. It might be able to explain why Green Earth Volunteers has failed twice in transforming. However, the question is whether it is necessary to transform for organizations such as Green Earth Volunteers to have impact on improving the environment.

The impact of neoliberal policies was reflected by the evolving organizations' missions, roles, and the stakeholder relationships. First, existing literature has discussed the elitism of environmental movements and activism within the neoliberal context (Baker, 2009; Carroll & Jarvis, 2015; S. Chen & Uitto, 2015; Dai & Spires, 2018). The above three organizations were all founded by individuals such as journalists, scholars, and other social elites such as university professors, journalists, and previous

governmental officials. The research by Baker (2009) as well as Carroll and Jarvis (2015) found that neoliberalism was introduced through a top-down approach by the state and social elites to emphasize the economic development and marketization process in a lot of developing countries.

Second, scholars have argued that the prevalence of neoliberalism does not lead to the liberalization of the economy and politics but the restructuring of social order and state power. For example, De Smet and Bogaert (2017) argued that “pre-existing forms of authoritarianism are transformed in relation to and converged with structural shifts in global capitalism” (p. 212). In the restructuring process, civil society organizations are co-opted into the non-coercive practices of the state. As Q. Wang (2016) suggested, the Chinese party-state has adopted various methods to co-opt the business and social elites and social organizations to maximize the usable social resources. While the environmental policies in China have emphasized the responsibility of individuals and the society to deal with the increasing environmental issues, nonprofit organizations have been recognized as a co-opted apparatus for effective governance rather than the promotion of civil society.

As mentioned above, all the three organizations emphasize public participation, the cultivation of green citizens by raising public awareness and changing citizens’ daily behaviors, as well as trying to impact environmental policy-making. Their statements regarding providing evidence-based suggestions demonstrated their intention to be assistants, helpers, and collaborative actors of social governance with the government. For organizations like Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers, they may criticize a particular project or a particular local government; however, the normal solution has been

successfully convincing governmental institutes and officials with higher authority to deal with the issue. For community organizations like E.P.Jing, it focuses on being a part of the local governance system through the collaboration with the local government and community.

Similar to what scholars have claimed (L. Liu et al., 2017), the increasing domestic support and the emphasis of professional capacity has been the common themes across the three case study organizations. However, the organizations are also seeking innovative ways to balance the abstract concepts of environmental protection and the encouragement of public participation from the ground, and to balance the power dynamics among the central government, local government, businesses, and funders. Overall, these three organizations represent the different development status regarding marketization, managerialization, and professionalization. Marketization includes the use of market tools, principles, terminology, and business-like assumptions, discourses, and practices that emphasize financial power, profit maximization, and transaction (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010; Eikenberry, 2018; B. Evans et al., 2005; Sanders, 2012). Under the neoliberal paradigm, which emphasizes a market-driven economic model, marketization has infiltrated in every aspect of social governance from the state to civil society. The marketization process of Friends of Nature and E.P.Jing organizations included revenue diversification and/or self-financing, the incubation of social enterprises, and the emphasis on the economic development of local communities.

Friends of Nature has embraced the market approach to develop revenue sources and incubate social enterprises. It has adopted managerial strategies to create long-term strategic planning and the most professionalized organizational structure. E.P.Jing was

founded within the marketization context and emphasizes the organization's role to promote local environmental governance and economic development. Therefore, its programs have focused on the collaboration with business partners within a market-drive framework at the beginning. With the funding and professional support from a domestic foundation, the organization is exploring ways to promote the organization's managerialism and professionalism by developing long-term strategy, hiring professional staff, and working with professional experts and scholars. In contrast, Green Earth Volunteers has maintained its volunteer-based operation and mission-driven programs. The organization does not have a clear long-term plan, with limited resources and low level of formality. Although Green Earth Volunteers has organized several programs that last for several years, it has focused on various environmental issues such as hydropower dam construction, desertification, and animal and plant protection, lacking of a focus for their activities. Even without an explicit statement of marketization, managerialism, and professionalism, the organization's mission and activities have focused on local issues and "low level" participation (Gilley, 2012, p. 289). It might be a counter case of the hegemonic discourse of neoliberalism in China.

Professionalization is not only about the recruitment of staff with professional experiences and expertise, but also the organizations' involvement in knowledge production and policymaking (Hsu & Hasmath, 2017). All three organizations have been actively seeking opportunities to develop their expertise to inform evidence-based policies at both the national and local levels. Friends of Nature has participated in the formulation and revision of nearly 50 environmental public policies from 2014 to 2019. E.P.Jing introduced knowledge and experiences from other countries and provided policy

suggestions for the village government regarding waste sorting and management. Even for Green Earth Volunteers, which has been criticized as not being professionalized, the published books and media coverage have been a critical information resource and provided solid evidence for policy change. Within the neoliberal governance system of China, Moe (2013) pointed out that environmental nonprofit organizations are primarily a means for the government to achieve governance goals, mitigate social opposition, and gain access to ideas and voices of the public. From this perspective, professionalization reflects how these organizations posit themselves in contemporary Chinese society. It is also a way for these organizations to demonstrate their legitimacy and contribution to environmental governance in China.

In the following two chapters, the discussion will draw on the experiences of the interviewees, field observations, the organizational documents, and the social media of these three organizations to examine to whom and how they have been accountable within an increasing neoliberal context in China.



## Chapter 6 Accountable to Whom: Power Dynamics of Stakeholders

An examination of how the three organizations experienced changes provides a contextual understanding of the power dynamics among the social actors in Chinese society and how environmental nonprofit organizations manage and balance the power relations of various stakeholders. This chapter addresses the secondary research question: “To whom are environmental nonprofit organizations accountable?” It reviews organizations’ stakeholder engagement activities to understand the involved stakeholders in accountability among the three organizations.

The western literature has discussed extensively that the funding resources and the power dynamics between funders and nonprofit organizations impact the operation and management of nonprofit organizations (L. D. Brown, 2007; Ebrahim, 2016; Hug & Jäger, 2014; Pfeffer, 1982). The nonprofit accountability literature offers insight into how understanding stakeholders can help organizations more effectively communicate and respond to specific stakeholder groups (Barrett, 2001; Kearns, 1996; Markham et al., 1999; Ospina et al., 2002). Scholars have also categorized upward, downward, and horizontal stakeholder groups for nonprofit organizations (Ebrahim, 2005; Raggo, 2018). In the context of China, neoliberal policies have changed the roles of and the interrelationships between the state, the market, and society. For Chinese environmental nonprofit organizations, stakeholder groups include the central government, the local government and business, private foundations, foreign foundations and organizations, the media, the community, and the public.

## 6.1 Upward Stakeholders

Upward stakeholders are individuals and groups who the organization depends on for resources and support, including government regulators, major donors, and other authorities (Ospina et al., 2002). Scholars have argued that stakeholders who hold more resources and power are more salient within an organization. For the three organizations, upward stakeholders involve the central government, local government, international organizations, as well as domestic foundations and philanthropists. The critical resources that are controlled by these stakeholder groups include not only funding but also policies and regulations. Similar to what Q. Wang and Yao's (2016) research found, in China, the government has been almost the sole provider of nonprofit organizations' legitimacy, causing a type of unsymmetrical dependence relationship. This uneven relationship has both direct and indirect impact on the nonprofit organizations. Specifically, the central government has provided political and institutional legitimacy for the three organizations. Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers have successfully mobilized the central government to address local environmental issues. E.P.Jing's trash sorting project was endorsed by the central government's policy. Also, for E.P.Jing, the local government has been its partner for its projects' initiation and implementation. The central government's regulation and policies, such as the 2016 foreign organization law, has significantly impacted the role and activities of international organizations. As a result, both Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers have experienced decreased opportunities to receive funding from international organizations. In contrast, domestic foundations have been the main funding resources for Friends of Nature and E.P.Jing.

Although these organizations have paid extensive attention to upward stakeholders, less content on their social media accounts has been related to upward stakeholders compared to downward stakeholders. The stakeholder groups, such as the central and local governments and domestic foundations, hold critical resources and authority for these organizations. However, they were not mentioned in these organizations' social media content. Therefore, it indicates that nonprofit organizations may employ various accountability mechanisms, including social media differently for upward and downward stakeholders, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

#### 6.1.1 Central Government

Neoliberal policies of devolution from the central government have promoted the emergence of environmental nonprofit organizations in China and created power dynamics among governments at various levels and regions. However, overall the absolute power of the central government over all the other social actors has not fundamentally changed. The central government can shut down an environmental organization and suppress any environmental campaign by administrative orders and registration regulations. For environmental nonprofit organizations, the opportunities to influence policy-making rely on the state's will to integrate civil society into the governance system.

Environmental organizations such as Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers have been actively involved in the policy-making process. In the 2018 annual report of Friends of Nature, there is a statement that,

Environmental social organizations are not only actors who practice environmentally friendly behaviors. They can effectively participate in and

promote appropriate institutional design, policy-making, and implementation. They can become watchers and supervisors of policy implementation and enforcement by exercising their right to participate and monitor. They can be a complementary part of the lack of governmental supervision and become an effective antenna and extension of environmental action supervision.

In 2018, Friends of Nature participated in the formulation and modification of 10 environment-related regulations and public policies, including the Soil Pollution Prevention Act, the Solid Waste Pollution Prevention Act, and the Regulation on Sewage Permission Management. It published the second volume of the Annual Report of Environmental Public Interest Litigation in China. In October and November of 2019, Friends of Nature had six posts out of 54 on its Sina-Weibo which were related to the central government's policy making. The governmental agencies mentioned included the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, National Energy Bureau, National Post Bureau, and the Information Office of the State Council. On November 11 and 12, Friends of Nature also posted two posts regarding the regulation of the eco-certification for the mail and packages by the National Post Bureau. On November 21, a post was about the public opinion solicited by the National Energy Bureau regarding the regulation of small hydropower projects. The posts shared the links and encouraged the public to provide opinions regarding the policies related to local hydropower projects and certification of mail and packages. Also, it received ¥ 20,000 governmental funding by participating in governmental contracting out. The funding was from the Ministry of Ecology and Environment for the organization to conduct an online survey on public opinion in environmental issues.

Green Earth Volunteers has compiled media coverage related to environmental protection through newsletters shared with more than 3,000 subscribers every day since 2005. The English version of the newsletter has been shared since 2009. Also, they have published the annual investigation report of environmental journalists in China since 2006. Every year, they select 12 topics and organize journalists to investigate, interview, and write reports. All of the empirical evidence and information have been valuable resources for policy-makers.

For E.P.Jing, the interaction with the central government has not been very direct. However, the organization benefited from the central government's attention to trash sorting policies. In March 2017, the Chinese central government released a national plan to set up a nationwide standardized trash sorting system by 2020. According to the national plan, cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou have initiated municipal level projects and policies. With the needs of policy-makers to explore an effective system, E.P.Jing's program has been viewed as an exemplar. Visitors from all over China came to learn about E.P.Jing's work. Their model has been replicated within more than 80 villages across China as of July 2019.

Besides the trash sorting policies that have been advocated from the central government level, the strict control system from the central government has caused obstacles for the development of environmental nonprofit organizations. The Chinese government has strict regulations regarding the registration of non-governmental organizations. For example, all organizations that want to register as civil non-enterprise units have to find a governmental or government-affiliated organization that is willing to be their professional supervisory agency. The supervisory agency is responsible for social

organizations' registration, financial and personnel management, and all types of activities (Jia, 2011). However, due to the skeptical attitude that non-governmental organizations might become social movement organizations and cause social problems, it is very difficult for many non-governmental organizations to find such an organization. Many organizations have to register as business enterprises or remain unregistered (Spires et al., 2014). E.P.Jing is an example of this situation. Also, the registration has to be renewed every year, and the renewal might be rejected if the nonprofit organization did something that opposes the basic principles of national security, public interest, or social and public morals (Schwartz, 2004). Therefore, even for formally registered organizations, there has always been uncertainty and risks regarding the organizations' survival because of the regulations' ambiguity. During the interviews, a story of an environmental nonprofit organization in Yunnan, Green Watershed, was mentioned by both the interviewees from Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers. Green Watershed was shut down because the founder, Xiaogang Yu, had organized people from the local community to visit the Yunnan government's hydropower project. Because the project implementation was not as good as the propaganda of the government, the visit caused local people's confrontation against the government's project.

In addition, for organizations such as Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers that have been officially registered, there are other continuous obstacles. For instance, both organizations do not have tax exemption status and the qualification for public fundraising as of the end of 2019. The Operation Director of Friends of Nature C13 said,

The civil non-enterprise unit is a very awkward status. The governmental regulation of NGOs is not as mature as the regulation of foundations. For example, when the foundation of Friends of Nature was approved, they immediately got the tax exemption status and the donation invoice. But for civil non-enterprise units, it is very hard. We got the donation invoice after five or six years after our registration in 2010. That means, during the five or six years, we had to provide a business invoice and pay for the tax when we receive donations. Because of this, we lost some business partners. And until now, we still do not have the tax exemption status. So, we have to pay 25% of the income tax every year. We have applied for the tax exemption but have not received any response. Nobody said what problems you have, just no response. So, we just applied every year.

Similarly, the annual reports of Green Earth Volunteers from 2014 to 2018 showed that they had paid ¥65,560 in taxes during the five years.

Overall, one of the main strategies for environmental nonprofit organizations in China to survive is to achieve institutional support and legitimacy from the central government. Although nonprofit organizations have been characterized as independent and autonomous, such regulations mean they cannot be independent actors in China (Q. Wang, 2016). Environmental nonprofit organizations have to emphasize their identities as partners, assistants, and supporters to achieve their legitimacy, which demonstrates a kind of institutional dependency on the central government by environmental nonprofit organizations. From a neoliberal perspective, the central government has realized that nonprofit organizations can be a positive partner and social resource to improve

governance, save costs, and achieve its own goals. Therefore, it has been tolerant and supportive for the development of various types of nonprofit organizations. However, the stricter control through evolving regulations and policies has demonstrated the unsymmetrical relationship between the government and nonprofit organizations.

### 6.1.2 Local Government

The three organizations' relationships with the local government is complex. For Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers, local governments were the target to reveal and address local governments' failures and wrong doings. For E.P.Jing, the local government has been its close partner.

Schwartz (2004) pointed out that because of the decentralization of the governance system and the devolution of decision-making and policy enforcement from the central government to local government, environmental protection has been the responsibility mostly of the local government. However, in a neoliberal context, the local government has been incentivized more by economic development rather than environmental protection, which cannot produce immediate benefits and profits. There is a gap existing between policy-making at the central level and policy implementation at the local level, which can explain the continuous commitment for environmental protection by the central government on the one hand and the deteriorating environment in China on the other. Environmental nonprofit organizations have been important liaises to address the existing gap. The activities of Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers have focused on how to improve the local governments' responsiveness to environmental issues and environmental protection actions. However, in the area of Beijing, both organizations have not had many interactions with the local government.



Their work has focused on local governments in Qinghai, Yunnan, Jiangsu, and Sichuan, which are far away from the city of Beijing.

As a community-based organization, among the three cases, E.P.Jing has the closest relationship with the local government. The village-level government provided institutional support to allow them to operate because the government officials saw the potential E.P.Jing could have on improving environmental governance and economic development. However, without direct interaction with the central government, E.P.Jing has to balance the power relations between the village level and town level government. At its establishment in 2016, the organization's name was Environment Group of [the village], which was recognized by the village government. Within the first year of establishment, E.P.Jing grew very fast. With support from the local government and local community, E.P.Jing's waste sorting model was established and attracted a lot of external attention. The journalists, governmental officials from various places, and businesses all came to visit and learn from the E.P.Jing model. The organization has spent a lot of money on enzyme production. People were excited to see the magical process that kitchen waste can be used to produce the eco enzyme. However, the founder C31 recognized the problems soon. The amount of produced enzyme was much more than the amount that the organization and the whole village could deal with. The storage, transportation, and later treatment process would cost much more money than the profit it could bring.

After one year's development, the town level government noticed the reputation and influence of this organization and prohibited them from continuing using the name of the village. Therefore, they had to change to the current name. Currently, they invite

government officials to participate in their activities to maintain a good relationship with the local government. One of the volunteers of E.P.Jing said that,

The leader of the village has benefited a lot from the collaboration with E.P.Jing, both politically and economically. First, the village has been a model of environmental protection and waste sorting in Beijing and all over China. Second, the enzyme production and compost have produced an economic profit for the government and local residents.

### 6.1.3 International Organizations

Existing literature has discussed the significant influence of foreign governments and international organizations on the development of environmental nonprofit organizations due to the lack of social recognition and funding resources within China in the 1990s and 2000s (Hsu & Hasmath, 2017; Kang, 2019; Spires, 2012). In the late 1990s, Friends of Nature collaborated with an international gasoline company on a joint program of environmental education at elementary and middle schools. The program lasted until 2008. In 2000 and 2008, 52% and 69.5% of the total revenue of Friends of Nature was from foreign organizations, respectively.

From 1996 to 2010, the main funding resource of Green Earth Volunteers was also from foreign organizations. The previous staff of Green Earth Volunteers C24 said that collaboration with foreign organizations impacted the organization in three aspects: topics, project management, and project reporting and regulation. When asked about how to maintain the accountability to the foreign organizations regarding the three aspects, he said,

I think we have to adapt to their requirement. We are a single organization as a funding recipient, but they are facing a group of organizations as a funder. So, they have to have a set of standards to constrain everyone. We have to learn. Their confidence toward us will increase when we demonstrate that we can satisfy them.

Funding and professional support have been an important resource for the early development of environmental nonprofit organizations in China. However, with the increasing restrictions toward foreign organizations and the rise of domestic businesses and philanthropy foundations, the influence of foreign organizations has decreased drastically since the late 2000s. Currently, Friends of Nature has no more than 0.2% funding from an American university; Green Earth Volunteers and E.P.Jing do not have any funding from foreign organizations.

In terms of the current situation, the previous staff of Green Earth Volunteers C24 expressed his concern,

Right now, foreign money is very hard to enter into China, and domestic money has been active. But I believe the Chinese government's intention to restrict foreign money is to strengthen government control. The Chinese government cannot control foreign organizations. But in China, no matter business, foundations, or anyone else, we all know what we can do and what we cannot do naturally.

#### 6.1.4 Domestic Foundations

Domestic foundations have played an increasingly important role in supporting the development of environmental nonprofit organizations, especially after the retreat of international organizations in the late 2000s. In 2008, the SEE Foundation was established by several business people. Its website states that the SEE Foundation is the first social organization in China that is composed of entrepreneurs and focuses on corporate social responsibility in environmental protection. Currently, the SEE Foundation has 14 local centers, more than 700 entrepreneur members, and has supported more than 400 environmental organizations and activists. In 2017, the Green House Program of the SEE Foundation provided ¥4.9 million to support newly established grassroots environmental organizations, including E.P.Jing ([www.see.org.cn](http://www.see.org.cn)). Another program, Jincao Tongxing, has focused on the capacity building of environmental nonprofit organizations and has provided more than ¥13 million funding for 54 organizations as of the end of 2018. Each organization could receive ¥300,000 per year for three years in total. The unrestricted funding can be used for organizations' employment as well as mission and strategy development. Besides the funding, the program also provides entrepreneur mentors and philanthropy mentors to help the organizations to develop strategies and building capacity.

Regarding the interaction with the domestic foundations, concerns and issues have emerged. First, because of the business background for most of the domestic foundations, the working style and expectation of these foundations have strong business-like characteristics (Lai et al., 2015; Ni et al., 2017). The previous staff of Green Earth Volunteers C24 commented, for example, on the SEE Foundation,

They have a strong business tradition and background because entrepreneurs established the foundation. So, they emphasize a lot about efficiency, outcome, and modelization. They always think about whether your project can be replicated in other places. I think it is problematic for nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit organizations are not business and industrial production. The modelization can be applied in the social enterprise because they emphasize how to survive by making a profit for the organizations. Nonprofit organizations normally are facing a specific problem within a specific context, which might not be replicable.

Second, the interviewees stated that the communication between environmental organizations and the foundations was not adequate. The board member of Friends of Nature C12 said,

The foundation has a very shallow understanding of our organization. Sometimes, the programs of foundations relied too much on experts. It seems like the experts can make a decision. But some experts know nothing about public interest and philanthropy. So, it depends on whether the foundation could find the right experts. They [the foundations] do not have enough communication with the recipients.

E.P.Jing's main funding resources and professional support have been from the SEE foundation and experts in the areas of eco-enzyme production and compost. Both the interviews with the founder and the organization's social media content emphasizes the essential support from the SEE foundation to promote the professionalization of the organization. The founder C31 noted, "a supervisor from the SEE foundation has helped

us a lot. He helped us to find resources of professional training and connection with other organizations.”

#### 6.1.5 Individual Donors

Besides foundations, individual donors have also been a source of revenue and the foundation for project development. The monthly donation project has been a funding source for Friends of Nature since 2017. In December 2018, the Law and Policy Advocacy director of Friends of Nature did a lecture at an online media platform. Her online presence brought hundreds of monthly donors for Friends of Nature during that month. The Operation Director commented,

We talked about that China does not have the culture of individual donations. But I have seen a big change these years, which was based on the efforts of all of us and the increasing attention of the public to environmental protection. We realized that when an organization was able to promote its social impact, the individual donations would increase. For example, last year, our Director of Law and Policy Advocacy’s lecture at [the online platform] and the later publication of her lecture on Tencent have brought us a lot of monthly donors. So, I think the problem is that people do not know our work. We are planning to pay more attention to the monthly donation development. First, the monthly donation is a stable funding source. Second, the money is unrestrictive, which can help us to do something important but hard to raise project-based funds. Currently, the monthly donation composes 15% of our total revenue. We hope it will increase to at least 25-30%.

Recently, the leader of Green Earth Volunteers has thought about how to start its monthly donation plan to cover daily operation costs. For Green Earth Volunteers, it

costs ¥15,000 for organizational operations and publishing books. She planned to send out a monthly donation plan through WeChat groups and ask for individual donations from ¥10-1,000. She said that,

Before for our Yellow River Decade Project, we could raise ¥100,000 just through WeChat groups. But before, we just shared a post with everyone about who wanted to donate how much money. I think it might be a burden or pressure for some people. So, I think it is a feasible plan to ask for a small amount of money as regular donations.

As mentioned earlier, E.P.Jing has received donations from 25,636 individual donors through the platform Tencent Philanthropy. Although there are several online public fundraising platforms such as Tencent Philanthropy and Xinhua Philanthropy, there are issues for organizations such as Green Earth Volunteers and E.P.Jing to use these platforms. Because they do not have public fundraising permission, the organizations have to collaborate with an organization that has permission. The process is, organization A which wants to raise funds from the public submits its information onto the platform. If organization B, which has public fundraising permission, is interested in organization A, B will “adopt” A. The individual donations will go to the account of organization B and B will be responsible for distributing the money to A. Therefore, if there is no organization interested in supporting organization A, A will not be able to do the fundraising.

## 6.2 Downward Stakeholders

While most of the stakeholder and nonprofit accountability literature highlights the importance of upward stakeholders, increasingly scholars are calling attention to the need for a more inclusive and broader understanding of stakeholders to include beneficiaries, clients, and members (Ebrahim, 2016; Ospina et al., 2002; Saxton & Guo, 2011; Van Puyvelde et al., 2012). Because downward stakeholders do not have the power and influence that upward stakeholders do, their needs and perspectives have been overlooked by nonprofit managers (Edwards & Hulme, 1996). At the same time, downward stakeholders have a significant “stake” in the work of the organization because they are more closely impacted by the organization than many upward stakeholders. More importantly, neoliberalism emphasizes individuals’ responsibility for problem-solving. Therefore, nonprofit organizations demonstrate their accountability to their downward stakeholders by mobilizing the public’s awareness and behavioral changes regarding environmental protection, but have little relationship with political rights and democratic participation.

Due to the restriction of membership for nonprofit organizations in China, all three organizations do not have a membership system currently. The downward stakeholders for them include the public and beneficiaries. As previously discussed, the public has been the core of the three organizations’ mission statements and social support. Through the advocacy of citizenship and public participation, the organizations gained institutional legitimacy. The public has been mentioned in the organization’s mission, as the Operation Director of Friends of Nature C13 emphasized the essential relationship between the organization’s accountability and mission achievement, “the



accountability of a nonprofit organization relies on whether the organization responds to the demand of action from the public to confront the powerful interest groups.” Since the organizational transition in 2008, public participation has been the development direction of Friends of Nature. C13 also said,

Our mission has been decided to “construct a platform for public participation in environmental protection, to make the awareness of environmental protection popular and translate it into practical actions” since 2008. Until now, I think it is still very forward-looking. We are trying to cultivate green citizens. The green citizens are not just individuals. They can influence more people. So, our next step is about how to find the core green citizens, support them, and help them to influence more people.

Based on this idea, the communication department organized an online reading club since 2018. The main purpose of the online reading club was to encourage more people to participate in Friends of Nature through various approaches. More importantly, the staff C14 believed that to use the words that the public understands was the most important thing to engage with the public. The architectural design studio of Friends of Nature was initiated based on public participation. The director of the studio introduced,

When we started the [Architectural] Design Project, we held more than 20 workshops within two years, with more than 600 participants. The project was finished with more than 4,000 hours’ volunteer service. This is a collective process to identify problems, learn solutions, and take action.

The emphasis on awareness raising and behavioral change has been reflected through the above activities as well as Friends of Nature’s social media. On Sina-Weibo,

40 out of 50 posts are related to public awareness and behaviors such as bird observation, reading and education, donating used clothing, picking up trash along the rivers, as well as reducing consumption. For example, on November 13, 2019, a post was about the reducing consumption. The post stated,

Stopping shopping for clothes is really hard. All women love beauty. But if it is your own active pursuit and from your own heart, you would think stopping shopping is a joy rather than a challenge. It is more meaningful because not everyone is able to do it. What's more interesting is that stopping shopping is the greatest respect for the material. You can only realize the beauty of the material when you really need it. So, an ordinary white shirt can touch you.

Although several of the posts mentioned people such as women, college students, and children, Friends of Nature does not present a specific population that it serves. Also, the social media posts have nothing related to empowering the beneficiaries and the public. The public participation was defined and limited as being a responsible citizen for environmental protection through actions such as trash picking and reducing consumption. Although being a responsible citizen through these activities might be viewed as types of self-empowerment, it also limits civic values from political participation and civil rights expression. Similar to Friends of Nature, Green Earth Volunteers does not present any specific beneficiaries through their activities and social media posts. The WeChat subscription account of Green Earth Volunteers was mostly about the newsletter of the environment protection media coverage. Over the two months examined, two journalist salons' information was shared on the account. No specific group of people was mentioned otherwise. Also, the number of reads of Green Earth

Volunteers' posts were very low, only 12 reads for each post. Also, the posts that got the most reads were about the journalist salons (185 and 98 times for two posts, respectively). The part-time employee who was responsible for the WeChat management explained that because all the newsletters had been sent to the subscribers' emails directly, the people who were interested in the information might have gotten the information through emails. Therefore, they did not need to access the newsletters through WeChat. As Benjamin (2013) suggested, transferring power to the public is a critical approach to ensure downward accountability. The lack of representativeness and voice of the beneficiaries indicated the prioritization of upward stakeholders in the organizations' accountability practices.

Compared to Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers, E.P.Jing has a more clearly targeted beneficiary: the village and the local residents. E.P.Jing has focused more on the connection with the local community, such as the local businesses and village governance as well as how to contribute to the community construction and improvement through their waste sorting and reproduction activities. As C31 said, "E.P.Jing could not be here without the support from the village government and the local residents. So, we have to always think about how our work can benefit the village and the local people." Therefore, based on the organization's vision of "to construct a cleaner living environment for our children," the staff of E.P.Jing has advocated for the local residents to participate in their waste sorting activities and the village fair every month. They went to each household, gave small gifts to them, collected waste, and shared with them the knowledge of waste sorting. The local people have been the volunteers to help E.P.Jing

organize activities and donated their clothing and household stuff. Through several years' effort, they have established mutual trust with the local people.

In E.P.Jing's WeChat subscription account, there were a lot of stories about the local businesses which have participated in the village fair, including local restaurants, artistry and craft stores, and thrift stores. The organization started to pay for the kitchen waste collection since May 2019. Each trash collector could send the kitchen waste they collected to E.P.Jing and get paid. E.P.Jing published the payment standard on their WeChat subscription account. More importantly, the account posted the photos that the trash collectors received the first payment from the organization. On E.P.Jing's WeChat, the most posts were about the village fairs. In a post on November 6, it said, "The villagers came to the fair with the vegetables they planted and they ate daily and share with us." With a happy face of a local woman in the photo, the organization conveyed a vivid message of its work. Through sharing, the organization was able to demonstrate its contribution to the local community as well as to encourage more participation. The texts and photos provided vivid examples regarding the participants' experiences of E.P.Jing's activities and environmental protection practices.

### 6.3 Horizontal Stakeholders

Compared to the vertical relationships with upward or downward stakeholders, nonprofit organizations have horizontal relationships with their staff and volunteers, as well as partner organizations and networks, emphasizing relational reciprocity and mutual ties (Costa & Silva, 2019; Ebrahim, 2016; S. P. Maxwell & Carboni, 2016; Raggio, 2018). For environmental nonprofit organizations in China, the horizontal

stakeholders include internal stakeholders such as boards, staff, and volunteers, as well as external stakeholders such as the media, partner organizations, and experts.

### 6.3.1 Boards

According to the government regulation of civil non-enterprise units, all registered organizations are required to have a board. For Friends of Nature, the board is composed by seven to nine members and is responsible for decision-making regarding regulation modification, business and activity plan, annual budgeting and accounting, revenue expansion, branch establishment, merger, or termination, the hiring and firing of leaders and financial directors, the recruitment and firing of board members, the setup of internal departments, the creation of international management regulation, and employees' salaries. The board members meet at least twice every year. At the end of each year, the general director, and the directors of operation, communication, and membership management have to report the performance of each department to the board. In the 2009 annual report of Friends of Nature, there was a discussion regarding the role of the board:

The operation and growth of a non-profit organization are inseparable from a healthy and supportive internal and external environment. The board is an important part of internal management. Its management culture and ability of social resources mobilization are the guarantees for the healthy development of non-profit organizations. After 16 years of development, Friends of Nature is facing the challenge of constructing an action-oriented and resource-oriented board, to professionally supervise and support the organization's operation and the accountability system.

Based on the statement, core work of Friends of Nature in 2010 was the establishment of the board's performance evaluation of the general director. Also, professionalization is demonstrated through the clear mission statement and the effective strategies to address environmental issues and to provide evidence-based solutions.

From the perspective of neoliberalism and managerialization, the boards and executive directors are the main factors within an organization's system (Maier & Meyer, 2011). Friends of Nature's social media content included the presence of the general director at those events and the board meetings. For example, the protection of the Green Peacock has been the main activity of Friends of Nature in 2019. Its posts on Sina-Weibo shared the collaborative activities such as about an art exhibition and performance with Beijing Modern Music Institute, domestic foundations, and other nonprofit organizations.

Different from Friends of Nature, Green Earth Volunteers has two boards. One is the formal board written in the organizational documents, but most members of the formal board have stopped participating in Green Earth Volunteers' activities. The other is an informal board with six members. The informal board has focused mostly on project implementation of the organization rather than the organization's management and operations. Both the formal and informal board's information is invisible on the organization's public documents and social media platforms. Only the annual reports to the government regulatory body include the information about the formal board.

E.P.Jing is a registered business enterprise. Therefore, it is not required to have a board. Currently, besides the five full-time staff, it does not have a board.

### 6.3.2 Staff

Within the neoliberal context, professional staff has been seen as a necessary part for nonprofit organizations to ensure administrative tasks and services in an accountable manner (Sandberg, 2011). More professionalization of staff has been seen as a way to demonstrate capacity and responsibility to the regulators and funders. For example, the General Director's involvement in the activities was highlighted on Friends of Nature's social media platforms. Generally speaking, the staff of environmental nonprofit organizations have been described as lacking of professional skills and educational background (Luo, 2008; Jundong Yu & Zhao, 2005). As previously mentioned, Friends of Nature and E.P.Jing have established an organizational structure to recruit more professional staff. However, when discussing the recruitment of professional staff, the interviewees emphasized a lot regarding the importance of finding the people who share the same values and the specific trainings in communication and fundraising. Nothing was mentioned in terms of the interaction with and the representativeness of the community and the public.

Regarding employee recruitment and staff management, the Operations Director of Friends of Nature C13 said that, for nonprofit organizations, the hardest part is to hire people in communication and especially fundraising. First, in China, the fundraiser does not have a specific university major to match. Second, nonprofit organizations could not afford to hire somebody from the business sector with expertise in marketing. As previously mentioned, volunteers have been a pipeline for Friends of Nature to recruit employees. As the Operation Director C13 introduced, their employee recruitment

focused more on the value and concepts of the employees rather than individuals' competence. She said,

We have found that it is so important to find the right employees, which will reduce our later costs in operation and management a lot. Friends of Nature is a value-driven organization. So, we emphasize a lot about the value of employees. We have also found that competence and ability is something that can be trained, but the value is hard. For example, we hired a person who is responsible for the management of monthly donations in 2017. It took us half a year to find the person. Later, we hired a person who has had some training at the [environmental education school]. She did not have any fundraising working experience. But during the interview, we found that she had a deep understanding of the value of Friends of Nature because she had the training and had been the volunteers at Friends of Nature. She was hired. And then, her working attitude has been very active, and she has done a lot to promote our fundraising programs and to communicate with colleagues of other departments. So, we pay more attention to the person's value during hiring. But it is hard to evaluate a person's value through several interviews.

Currently, Green Earth Volunteers has no full-time employees. The founder Yongchen Wang is responsible for the organization's external communications and fundraising. One part-time employee and one volunteer are doing the daily operations and administrative work, such as contacting lecturers for the journalist salon and sending out information regarding the weekly and monthly activities. The volunteer quit the full-time job at Green Earth Volunteers in May 2019 and has found a new job in the



government. However, he still helps the organization without getting paid. Another part-time employee, a college student, is responsible for collecting and sharing the daily River Newsletter. Yongchen Wang is paying the salaries of these part-time employees all by her personal funding.

For E.P.Jing, the organization's structure changed significantly in 2018. Because of the different opinions of the organization's development, all the other co-founders have left E.P.Jing. Currently, it has five full-time employees. One employee is responsible for projects such as the monthly village fair and a newly-founded project. The new project, Sustainable Living Pavilion, was started in 2019. The pavilion is open four days each week as a place for people to exchange used household appliances, books, toys, and clothing, etc. Another employee, who used to be a teacher at the Waldorf School, is responsible for external communication.

### 6.3.3 Volunteers

In the case study organizations, the volunteers' identities are often flexible. That is, board members can be volunteers, and volunteers sometimes are donors. The flowing identity of volunteers has provided more involvement opportunities for them to engage in the organizations. Also, organizations have been able to mobilize more resources through close connections with their volunteers.

From a managerialist perspective, Friends of Nature emphasizes the benefits of volunteer work and uses the individual stories and narratives to demonstrate the effectiveness of the organization's mission achievement. As Maier and Meyer (2011) discussed, the managerialist discourse systematically encourage "training and development to strengthen management skills" (p. 742). According to the 2018 annual

report, Friends of Nature's low carbon project established a volunteer training system and trained 26 one-day directors as their volunteers in 2018.

The board member of Friends of Nature C12 has been a volunteer for both the environmental education school's teachers and the one-day director of the low-carbon house exhibit. In the 2018 annual report, Friends of Nature published the volunteers' stories for the first time. The staff C14 said it was a way to express the organization's respect for the volunteers. In the annual report, each department had a volunteer story after the department's summary. Through the stories, the readers could learn more about the work of Friends of Nature and how the volunteers were attracted to and involved in Friends of Nature. The Low Carbon+ project publicly recruits a one-day director from the public as a volunteer. The one-day director will get some training and be responsible for explaining the low carbon household exhibit for visitors. Some of the volunteers, such as the volunteer teachers at the environmental education school, have become full-time employees. Also, the current director of the architectural design studio used to be a volunteer at the education school. As the Operations Director C13 said, the volunteers have been a pipeline for them to find the right employees with a deep understanding of Friends of Nature's mission, vision, and core values.

Also, the researcher was able to join in the WeChat group of Friends of Nature's botanic group. The botanic group is composed mostly of the members of the botanic interest group of Friends of Nature. The discussions in the group chat mostly were about the plants and the activities of the Botanic interest group. The members posted the photos of the plants they saw and asked for information such as the plants' names and categories, or they asked the tips of taking care of a specific plant. The group chat was like a

knowledge exchange platform for people who are interested in plants and nature. The members were from various places all over China, such as Beijing, Hainan, Guangdong, and Shandong. One member sent out posts of advertisement twice but received no responses. Another member posted discussions related to political issues. The member was immediately criticized by other members. The other members said that the group chat was for people who were interested in plants but not for political discussions.

For Green Earth Volunteers, volunteers have been responsible for core operational work. Currently, because of the lack of funding, the informal board members and the accountant are all volunteers, without receiving any money from the organization. At the same time, the volunteers are also donors. Green Earth Volunteers collected donated clothing, books, and money from the volunteers and sent them to the rural villages during their field trips of the Yellow River Decade Project and River Decade Project. Also, volunteers were responsible for leading and managing the projects.

Green Earth Volunteers has a WeChat group chat called the big family of Green Earth Volunteers. The group members are the founder, part-time staff, volunteers, and activity participants. The discussions included topics such as the establishment of national parks, donation soliciting, and the experienced pollutions in local communities. Besides the general discussion on broader topics, two types of information were specifically shared within the group. The first was the information about financial and donation disclosure. The accountant of Green Earth Volunteers shared the received money donations within the group. Also, the collected clothing and books were distributed to the local communities. The organization's volunteers took photos when distributing the donations and shared the photos in the group chat. The second type of

content was also from local communities. The farmers from various places were able to sell their products, such as apples and crops, through the group chat.

Similarly, the current communication director of E.P.Jing used to be a teacher at the Waldorf School in the same village. Then she became a volunteer and later an employee of E.P.Jing. Another volunteer joined E.P.Jing because she was living in the same village. She liked E.P.Jing's mission, and she has helped the organization with the registration process and marketing plan development because of her educational background in journalism. Also, she has actively participated in E.P.Jing's activities of training and workshops, as well as door-to-door trash collecting and sorting.

#### 6.3.4 Media

Among all the interviewees, the media has been the most mentioned stakeholder group. The 2018 annual report of Friends of Nature said that various media outlets reported their activities and events more than 200 times. In 2010, the field trip for Green Earth Volunteers' River Decade Project was live broadcasted on Fenghuang Philanthropy, which is an online news platform.

Historically, Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers have had a lot of successful collaboration with the traditional mass media to address environmental issues. In the 1990s, the media had a very close relationship with environmental nonprofit organizations, such as Friends of Nature. In the newsletter of Friends of Nature (1998, Volume 3), the co-founder Congjie Liang claimed, "China has the greenest media in the world."

On WeChat, Friends of Nature has a group chat with its media partners. The members of this group included communication staff of Friends of Nature and journalists from various media platforms such as the Central Television Station, Xinhua News Agency, and several newspapers and journals. The staff of Friends of Nature C14 was the main person who was managing the group chat. She introduced that the purpose of this group was to make close connections with various media outlets and provide information resources for media to report the activities and events of Friends of Nature. Therefore, most of the information in this group was about the upcoming events of Friends of Nature such as conferences, workshops, and activities, as well as a regular newsletter of the events summary of Friends of Nature.

As a journalist, Yongchen Wang started a program for Green Earth Volunteers about environmental protection. She said that, during the late 1990s, each main mass media platform had its program that was related to environmental protection. Yongchen Wang also had a column at a famous newspaper in Beijing. However, all the programs and columns have disappeared. Similarly, in the 2000s, most web portals had a section called environmental protection. Later, environmental protection was merged into the section on philanthropy. Yongchen Wang said, “It is interesting. But environmental protection and philanthropy are not the same things. They have different characteristics.”

The current informal board members of Green Earth Volunteers are all from a journalist background. Yongchen Wang is actively advocating the protection of tamarisk trees in Qinghai province through the media. For environmental nonprofit organizations, the media is not only a platform for the public’s information access and awareness-raising, but more importantly, it is a way to get the attention of governmental officials,

especially at the central government level. The media's large-scale social impact is still an influential tool for environmental activists. Also, a lot of journalists, especially the journalists from the state-run media, have many direct connections with top leaders and decision-makers. Yongchen Wang said,

In 2005, when I went to Italy to attend a conference of environmental journalists, I was asked whether I am a journalist or an NGO person. They could not understand why I can be both the judge and the athlete at the same time. I understand that the media and NGOs sometimes have different stances. But NGOs in China are too powerless, and what NGOs are doing is so urgent. So, we need the media's attention.

The recent advocacy of the protection of the tamarisk trees was an example of mobilizing media and journalists. In November 2019, Green Earth Volunteers published the call for action letter on Sina-Weibo and WeChat. To address the Qinghai Province's hydropower project and its impact on the tamarisk trees, the letter highlighted the value of the trees in environment protection and the research of biodiversity and advocated the media's attention and governmental intervention. Within the WeChat group chat, the members from the local community shared the current activities taken by the local government on the trees. Also, Yongchen Wang asked the members to share the letter with both the central and local government officials and journalists. As an ongoing process, the issues have not been solved as of the time when the researcher finished the data collection. Yongchen Wang said that Green Earth Volunteers would not give up any chances to protect the trees. The advocacy strategy of Green Earth Volunteers has been to

promote the media and journalists to be involved in the environmental protection news reports and community activities.

Currently, the work of E.P.Jing has been reported by media outlets such as Xinhua News, Tencent website, Sina website, and Sohu website, which are all main news websites in China. For E.P.Jing, although it has not had direct connections with mass media, it has recognized the importance of media for the organization's marketing and social impact. The organization's next step is to promote its media presence. C31 said,

Our team members are great. We work for the same goal without any consideration of personal interest or profit. But, as a leader, I have to think more about how to bring benefit to my team members through the promotion of our organization via media platforms.

Because of the limited information communication channels, the collaboration between media and environmental nonprofit organizations has been an important and effective strategy. As G. Yang (2005) stated, "the alliance between the media and ENGOs in China may well reflect an international pattern, indicating the news-making value of environmental issues. Such an alliance, however, also reflects deeper and more complex relations among different institutional fields in China" (p. 56). However, the collaboration between media and environmental nonprofit organizations has been decreasing. Due to the limitation from media agencies, most of them do not have time and financial support to conduct long-term and investigative reports with environmental nonprofit organizations. For example, a report on *The New York Times* in July 2019 discussed the disappearance of investigative reports in China due to the strict state control and the economic consideration (Hernández, 2019). The article stated that "Many news

outlets in China... have eliminated investigative reporting teams, which typically require more time and resources and produce fewer stories” (para. 16). Also, because of increasingly stricter media control, environmental nonprofit organizations have to seek alternative channels for their mission achievement such as through social media.

### 6.3.5 Partner Organizations and Experts

Scholars have pointed out that environmental nonprofit organizations in China generally lack collaborations among themselves (S. Chen & Uitto, 2015). However, both Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers have been dedicated to constructing platforms and networks for nonprofit organizations and other stakeholders. At the early stage after establishment, both the founders of Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers utilized their personal connections and networks to promote the organizations’ activities and advocacy work. They have realized that their capacity and social impact would be increased as a sector rather than single organizations.

Friends of Nature established the network for environmental public interest litigations in 2014. The network has provided funding, training, capacity building, and information sharing for environmental nonprofit organizations and environmental lawyers. The environmental journalist salon by Green Earth Volunteers is another example regarding the networking effort of environmental nonprofit organizations. As an environmental journalist who has regularly participated the salon said, the salon is a platform for opinion exchange in the environment protection area, a platform for communication between experts, scholars, and journalists, and a platform for the participation and growth of citizen journalists. In 2004, the salon won the Ford Company Environment Protection Award. The award commented on the journalist salon as below,



The environmental journalist salon has held more than 50 lectures with regular participants, which has been an influential platform for the promotion of environmental protection. The salon created an ideal communication platform for experts and scholars from multiple disciplines, governmental officials from multiple departments, media, and environmental nonprofit organizations. It has been a green class for environmental journalists to expand their knowledge, achieve important information and opinions, communicate, and collaborate. The project is also a unique communication platform for people who are interested in environmental protection to access information and disseminate new ideas.

For E.P.Jing, the establishment of a network with experts and scholars has been discussed as a critical strategy for the long-term development of the organization. As an organization without a professional background in environmental protection, E.P.Jing has established its network with scholars and experts. As mentioned earlier, they invited experts in compost, eco enzyme production, and environment protection from Europe, Japan, Malaysia, and the U.S. to conduct workshops. The workshops were open to the public and charged fees to cover the workshops' costs. Also, their village fairs have been a platform for local small businesses and local residents to make connections. During the observation period, six out of ten posts on its WeChat official account were about the invited experts and scholars to the village and their works. On November 9, 2019, a post was about the lecture on trash sorting and management by a scholar from IVL Swedish Environment Research Institute. The post mentioned, "The scholar was very confident to the environmental management in China. He supported the trash sorting practice in [the local village] and expressed hope to collaborate with E.P.Jing in the future."

## 6.4 Summary

This chapter examines the involved stakeholders in these organizations to understand their power dynamics. In terms of stakeholders, the most mentioned stakeholder group was the media, which demonstrated the historical and contextual characteristics of environmental nonprofit organizations' development in China. When there was no systematic institutional and legal support, the media have been critical advocates for policy change and to address environmental issues. However, with the increasing governmental control on both the media and nonprofit organizations, there has been less space for the collaboration between these two sectors. Therefore, it is necessary to keep tracking the interaction between media and nonprofit organizations. More importantly, it demonstrates that the examination of the nonprofit organizations' relationship with various stakeholders needs to consider the changing power that stakeholders' have held both in these organizations as well as in the whole society.

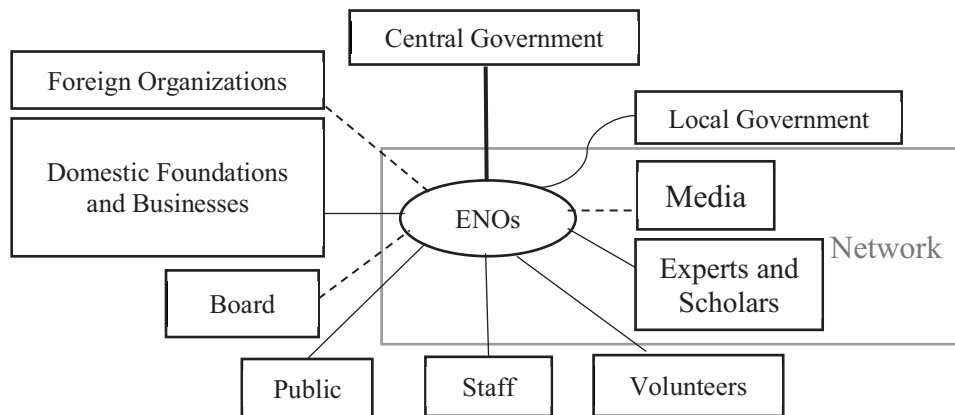


Figure 6.1 Stakeholder Relationships

Figure 6.1 shows the three organizations' interactions with various stakeholder groups. Overall, the central government has been the institute with higher authority for environmental nonprofit organizations to seek for institutional support and endorsement of their legitimacy. The environmental nonprofit organizations have to frame their identities and functions in compliance with the discourse and directions of the central government's policies and regulations. For example, both the emphasis of public participation and the active involvement in policy-making are strategies to respond to the demands of the central government positively. A thick line shows the absolute power of the central government. Foreign organizations such as foreign governmental agencies and international nonprofit organizations played a very important role for environmental nonprofit organizations' development in the 1990s and 2000s by providing funding and professional support. However, since the late 2000s, with the increasing control of social organizations by the Chinese government, as well as the growing number of domestic philanthropists and foundations, foreign organizations have had very limited space in China. The powers of foreign organizations and the media have changed significantly in the past two decades, which are shown in dotted lines.

Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers have played the role of monitor and supervisor of environmental issues and exposed the local governments' failure and bad practices in environmental protection. All the cases of environmental issues and litigations have been in the provinces, cities, and towns outside of Beijing. Because of the physical distance of these two organizations with the local governments, it might be easier for them to take a confrontative approach. Even for E.P.Jing, its relationship with the local government is complex. Without direct interaction with the central government,

E.P.Jing has to balance the power relations between the village level and town level governments and maintain a good relationship with them. Therefore, the complex relationship of environmental nonprofit organizations with the local governments is shown as a curved line.

Due to the different registration statuses and the organizational structures, the board has had different roles within these three organizations. Although the government regulations require nonprofit organizations (civil non-enterprise units) to have a board, not all of the organizations have a board that plays a decision-making role. Due to the tedious administrative process to establish a board as well as selection and changing board members, the organizations might not be able to have a formal and active board that can really contribute to the organizations' operation and management. Therefore, the dotted line shows the limited role that the board can play in nonprofit organizations.

The public, staff, and volunteers have been essential stakeholders for environmental nonprofit organizations by providing support and resources. The case study organizations have successfully mobilized social and financial support from these stakeholder groups. It is clear that the organizations emphasized that the recruitment of staff and volunteers were based on the people who share the same values with the organizations. Therefore, the interactions between the organizations and these stakeholders was shown in straight lines. Regarding the identity of the public, it can be understood as individual donors or people who pay for themselves to participate in the organizations' activities. However, in terms of beneficiaries or the organizations' representation of the community, the concept of the public for both Friends of Nature and

Green Earth Volunteers is vague and lacks representativeness based on clear identification.

In terms of partnerships, both western and Chinese scholars have discussed the importance of networking for environmental organizations and activists, especially the personal networks of the organizations' leaders at the early development (Foo, 2018; Rios, 2000; Sullivan & Xie, 2009; Xie, 2011). This is true for Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers. Personal networks have helped them to shape a collective identity and to coordinate actions. Without stable funding resources, the organization has established a close network or alliance with journalists to express the voices on behalf of and advocate for environmental protection of minority and remote communities. It has been an effective strategy since the organization's establishment, due to the lack of information access to the public in the 1990s and 2000s. The organization's accountability has been focused on the accountability to the network and alliance. However, the networks were mostly composed by social elites such as scholars, artists, and experts, lacking representativeness of the community and the public. Also, due to political and institutional uncertainty, the partnerships are not always stable. Therefore, the partnership is more like a strategy to respond to the restraints and limitation of resources and authority, reflecting the neoliberal idea of self-sustaining of the civil society sector.

Lastly, it has to be noted that during the interview, the founder of Green Earth Volunteers, Yongchen Wang, mentioned the convergence of environmental protection into philanthropy through media platforms. As the literature suggested, the shift to philanthropy is also reflected not only through media platforms but also through the

discourse of government policies and regulations as well as the contextual changes (Kang, 2019). Environmental philanthropy refers to the behaviors of giving time and money to environmental nonprofit organizations (Katz-Gerro et al., 2015). Therefore, the promotion of responsible and green citizens, as well as the advocacy of behavioral change by local households, can be viewed as a strategy for these organizations to mobilize community participation in their activities and programs rather than the advocacy for citizens' environmental rights.

In the next chapter, the discussion will focus on the third secondary research question, exploring accountability mechanisms and how the organizations convey their messages that were related to accountability to different stakeholders.

## Chapter 7 Accountable How: Practices and Processes

This chapter focuses on the third secondary research question “How are environmental nonprofit organizations accountable? It explores the accountability mechanisms and the messages of accountabilities that have been conveyed by Chinese environmental nonprofit organizations through those mechanisms. In connection with Chapter 6, this chapter examines how understanding of the environmental nonprofit organizations regarding their roles, the stakeholders, and the context has been reflected through their accountability mechanisms.

With the impact of neoliberalism, which emphasizes a market approach and rationalities, nonprofit organizations are expected to be responsible for their behavior and performance. The accountability of nonprofit organizations is discussed and analyzed from the perspective of the business-like approach (Campbell, 2002; Hofer, 2000; Poole et al., 2000). To promise effectiveness and efficiency, nonprofit organizations are expected to keep costs low, professionalize operations and management, and to demonstrate measurable outcomes (Alexander et al., 2010). Nonprofit organizations are required to ensure mandatory accountability such as financial and performance disclosure, regulatory oversight, and external control and evaluation (Koop, 2014). From a social constructionist perspective, accountability is related to integrating stakeholder participation in the decision-making process and involving beneficiaries in organizations’ activities (Schmitz et al., 2012). Ebrahim (2003) identified five dimensions of accountability: information disclosure, evaluation and assessment, self-regulation, stakeholders’ participation, and organizational learning. He also pointed out that information disclosure and evaluation are tools of accountability that are normally

tangible and repetitive, while the latter three dimensions are processes that are broader than tools and probably intangible.

## 7.1 Accountable How: Evaluation and Information Disclosure

The literature has discussed that information disclosure was one of the main accountability mechanisms for environmental nonprofit organizations in China (G. Deng et al., 2015; Ni & Zhan, 2017; Nie et al., 2016). Because of both the impact of foreign organizations and the increasingly strict governmental regulations, nonprofit organizations have been expected or required to disclose their financial performance to maintain the organizations' legal status as well as financial resources.

### 7.1.1 Governmental Evaluation

As mentioned in the literature review, the Chinese government authorizes bureaus at different levels and regions to evaluate nonprofit organizations with the rating from 5A to 1A. In the city of Beijing, the Civil Affairs Bureau conducts the evaluation every three years. According to the Publicity of Beijing Municipal Social Organization Evaluation Results in 2018, 321 organizations were evaluated including 48 5A organizations, 115 4A organizations, 138 3A organizations, 16 2A organizations, and 4 1A organizations. Among these organizations, Green Earth Volunteers was rated at the level of 4A and Friends of Nature was evaluated as 3A. E.P.Jing was not in the list because it is registered as a business enterprise.

Since its formal registration, Green Earth Volunteers has reported its annual financial auditing to its professional supervisory agency and Beijing Civil Affairs Bureau. The annual auditing was conducted by an external professional accounting agency and included information on finances, organization's change in staffing, property, and assets,



as well as activities. Yongchen Wang said that Green Earth Volunteers has been rated at the level of 4A twice by the Beijing Civil Affairs Bureau. She was proud that Green Earth Volunteers was the only environmental organization that was rated as 4A. However, the organization has been struggling with how to maintain the 4A rating for the upcoming evaluation in 2020. When was asked what kind of benefit they have had for getting the 4A rating, she said, “Actually, we did not get anything. It is just like a recognition because we have done so many works with so little money and so few people.”

Besides the evaluation, nonprofit organizations are also required to submit annual reports regarding the financial information to the regulatory agencies. The external pressure from the regulatory institutes has promoted these organizations to be accountable to the governmental regulations. As Bies (2001) cited the research of Edwards and Hulme (1996), with a limited organizational capacity, the external pressure “might direct their organizational energies toward meeting external accountabilities rather than toward effective change efforts” (p. 60).

#### 7.1.2 Information Disclosure

From its early development, Friends of Nature has paid attention to communication with its members. The organization has published bi-monthly newsletters and shared with its members since 1996 and started its website in 1999. The newsletters covered the organization’s activities and environment-related news. In 2014, the newsletter was shared with more than 10,000 subscribers. Since 2007, Friends of Nature has started to publish its annual report and financial report regularly. The annual reports include information such as board meetings, activities, projects, publications, media

coverage, financial information, and auditing reports. According to the 2013 annual report, Friends of Nature was ranked as the top one environmental nonprofit organization by the China Grassroots Transparency Index regarding the organization's transparency in 2013.

Friends of Nature established its website in June 1999. Currently, Friends of Nature has a website with both Chinese and English, a Sina-Weibo account, two WeChat accounts (one official account and one service account), and several WeChat groups. Currently, the monthly donations' information, including donors' names and donation amounts in 2016 and 2017, was published on its website. The annual reports from 2007 to 2018 and the financial auditing reports from 2010 to 2018 of Friends of Nature can be accessed online from their official website and WeChat official account. However, the information on the website was mostly from before the end of 2018. At the time period of data collection in October and November 2019, the researcher only found one article about the environmental education school published in April 2019. All the other information was published before 2019.

Friends of Nature also has one subscription account and one service account on WeChat. The subscription account is more like an integration of the website and interaction platform. On the main page of the account, there are three sections: About Us, Support Us, and Funny Stuff. The About Us provided similar information as the website, including the organization's history and founder Congjie Liang, the annual reports, the newsletter of environmental public interest litigations, and the members' stories. The Support Us section provided information regarding the contact information of the litigations, the volunteer opportunities, monthly donation acceptance, and disclosure, as

well as hiring information. The Funny Stuff section was more about environmental protection information such as reading lists, knowledge and skills of house renovating, and kid games. In addition, Friends of Nature regularly publishes the received monthly donations through its WeChat service account. The subscription account stated that it aimed to share the latest environmental protection information, activities, stories, and daily life tips with the subscribers. The post memorializing the founder, Congjie Liang, on October 28, 2019, got the most readings: 15,000 times.

At another main social media platform, the Sina-Weibo account of Friends of Nature had 291,108 followers and 11,591 posts as of November 2019. Within the online observation period, there were 54 posts, which included information about the volunteer recruitment, the organization's events and activities, such as the event of Green Peacock Protection and environmental public interest litigations, as well as the discussion of current environmental issues. There was one post about the board meeting in November, introducing the work reporting by the general director to the board. Among the posts, stakeholders such as the domestic foundations, the general director, the project teams, the volunteers, and partner organizations were mentioned.

Since its formal registration, Green Earth Volunteers has reported its annual financial auditing to its professional supervisory agency and Beijing Civil Affairs Bureau. The annual auditing was conducted by an external professional accounting agency and included information on finances, organization's change in staffing, property, and assets, as well as activities. For the individual donations, the leader, Yongchen Wang, posted the received and spent donations in WeChat groups. For example, in summer 2019, Green Earth Volunteers launched WeChat fundraising for last year's Yellow River Decade

Project. From July 3 to August 17, Green Earth Volunteers received ¥100,000 from 138 donors. All the donors' names and donation amounts were published in the WeChat group. The money was used to cover the cost of the field trip and to construct a library for the elementary school at the origin of the Yellow River in Qinghai Province. Before the trip, Green Earth Volunteers published information regarding the needed materials for local residents in the WeChat group. The group members could donate clothing, books, and toys based on the list. Later, the money spent was also published in the WeChat group. On the website of Green Earth Volunteers, the information on book sales has also been published since 2005.

Because E.P.Jing received funding from the SEE Foundation, they have to submit their financial report regarding received funding and expenditures to the SEE Foundation. E.P.Jing has also participated in online fundraising on the website Tencent Philanthropy. Therefore, the financial information regarding received donations and the development of E.P.Jing's projects were published on the website Tencent Philanthropy. Generally speaking, both the websites and social media platforms have been a place for organizations to store and share archived documents such as the main events, newsletters, and annual reports.

During the online observation period, the E.P.Jing WeChat account sent out ten posts, mostly focusing on the village fairs, workshops, and the invited environmental protection experts. Although most of the WeChat posts of E.P.Jing did not have a lot of viewers, the communication director believed that the use of social media was necessary. She stated,

I could not say that social media has been very effective for us, but I think it is necessary. Sometimes when you wanted to introduce the organization to someone, or when someone wanted to know more about our organization, social media would be a convenient platform. I can share our WeChat account with others easily, and they can clearly see the organization's introduction and our previous posts.

It has to be noted that both the subscription accounts of Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers provided the information regarding the organizations' registration numbers and registration type. According to the platform statement, each year, the Tencent company and a third party would inspect the organizations' information. Therefore, for E.P.Jing, although its introduction stated that it was a professional public interest institute focusing on waste sorting in rural areas, the account was categorized as a personal account rather than an organizational account.

As the literature review suggested, information disclosure has been one of the main accountability mechanisms for environmental nonprofit organizations in China. All the three organizations have disclosed their financial information through their annual reports, websites, and WeChat, focusing on funders and donors. The information disclosure includes both mandatory disclosure and discretionary disclosure. However, the emphasis on financial performance and organizations' performance demonstrate a neoliberal mechanism of accountability rather than the accountability focusing on democratic participation and the public empowerment.

## 7.2 Accountable How: Meaningful Involvement of Stakeholders

One of the goals of Friends of Nature is to identify, promote, and accumulate the bottom-up power of green citizens. To achieve this goal, the organization's operations and management have focused on how to mobilize the various stakeholders to construct a stable and diverse system of resources and support. In 2005, in response to the organization's change from the single leader's influence to a systematic approach, the first general director proposed the concept of "community culture." He said that nonprofit organizations should be like a polis; everybody should have the freedom of entry and exit. Therefore, Friends of Nature did not belong to a specific person or a small group of people and the organization should be understood and designed based on an open concept.

Since its establishment, Friends of Nature's activities have been mostly promoted by members and volunteers. The four interest groups--mountaineering group, wild bird group, botanic group, and the leave-no-trace group--were all founded and self-governed by volunteers with the same interest. Members initiated the protection activities of endangered animals of the local communities. As the co-founder Congjie Liang said in previous media coverage, "Members are the best resource for Friends of Nature. They are experiencing and feeling the suffering environment all over the country like censors" (Friends of Nature 2008 Annual Report) As previously mentioned, Friends of Nature started with a system of membership and changed the membership system to a registered volunteer system in 2010. In the annual reports from 2010 to 2018, there were a lot of stories regarding how volunteers were involved in the organizations various projects and

activities. For example, according to the 2014 annual report, volunteers contributed 20,000 hours to Friends of Nature.

The other co-founder C11 highlighted two characteristics of Friends of Nature's governance, a unique working model and a responsible board. C11 called the working model of Friends of Nature "molecular fission," which featured in a platform for the public to participate in the existing activities and to initiate new activities. Based on this model, the organization's working scope has been expanded. C11 said,

All of Friends of Nature's projects are open systems so that they can attract and involve the public to participate in environmental protection. Although each of our projects has only two or three employees, their working scope and outcome has far exceeded our expectations. This is because each team is constantly expanding its work by involving and training newcomers. After the training, the newcomers will be the extension of the team and continue the project. The area covered is getting larger and larger.

The board of Friends of Nature has clear rules of decision-making procedures. One of the basic rules is that board members must be from among the people who have been involved in Friends of Nature. In 2007, when the fourth board was formed, the board members were selected based on the process of members' self-nomination, group inspection, and public announcement. The process has been maintained until the present. The operation director said that the board member selection was a way to ensure the integration of the organization and its members. It has also enhanced the enthusiasm and involvement of members.

On Friends of Nature's WeChat, the subscribers could fill out the online forms of litigations, volunteer registration, and event sign up. The account sent out a daily post directly to the subscribers. The subscribers were able to access the post at their personal information page without logging in the main page of the account. In contrast, the purpose of a service account was providing a platform for donors and volunteers to keep track of the donations and volunteer opportunities, as well as to find interest groups and activities. At the service account, the subscriber was able to view their donations and manage the donation amount, time, and frequency.

With Green Earth Volunteers, during the field trip for the Yellow River Decade Project, the participants were required to participate in daily discussions regarding the environmental issues and concerns raised during the trip. Normally, the discussions were held on the way because each day, the group spent at least six to eight hours in the van. Yongchen Wang called it "Van Classes." She said,

Van class is the unique characteristic of Green Earth Volunteers. Each participant is equal. Everyone should have the opportunity to express his/her opinion and share it with us. And it is always a valuable opportunity for us to learn from each other, especially every time we have so many experts and scholars in different areas.

Also, the participants were responsible for writing journals. No matter the participant is a scholar or a college student, each participant was assigned to write at least one day's journal. One of the participants complained, "Sometimes I really do not know what to say. But it really is a great practice for me to organize my ideas and express them immediately." After the trip, all the recordings of the "Van Classes" and the journals



written by the participants were collected and edited, then published as a book. Green Earth Volunteers has published three books for the River Decade Project and three books for the Yellow River Decade Project. In one of the journals that was written by Yongchen Wang for the River Decade Project, she wrote,

We have never thought about giving up. The support from all the people has been much more important for us than money support. Luckily, each time we had a great team. Along the way, more and more journalists, scientists, engineers, professors, councilors of the State Council, and volunteers who love the environment have joined. Everyone joined the trip with their love and responsibility for our nature and with concerns for the minority groups living status. It is our characteristic that experts from various disciplines have joined and collaborated with the media.

For public participation, environmental nonprofit organizations in China have been dedicated to representing minority groups that were impacted by environmental problems. The River Decade Project published the audio recordings of more than 100 local residents from Nu River on the Internet. Yongchen Wang believed it was a way to let more people really experience and understand what had happened to the local people because of the construction of the hydro-power station on Nu River. In 2014, Yongchen Wang was denounced by a local governmental official at Nu River. She said,

I always felt struggling because I understand that they could not make decisions on their own. So, what we can do is only to record and to influence policy-making. It is easier to influence policy-making than to influence people's concepts.

Stakeholders' participation is a type of accountability mechanism. As scholars suggested, various stakeholders including the beneficiaries should be integrated into the organizations' activities and decision-making process (Ebrahim, 2016; Koop, 2014). However, through the examination of the stakeholder engagement of these three organizations, two characteristics should be highlighted. Based on the resource dependence theory, it is apparent that the involved stakeholders were the individuals and groups that held resources for these organizations. Although Friends of Nature emphasizes its pipeline from members/volunteers to board members, the current board members include people of university professors, managers of international organizations and businesses, and leaders of other nonprofit organizations. For Green Earth Volunteers, the participants of field trips were not only journalists and scholars but also donors for the activities. Second, the broader stakeholder engagement, especially the downward stakeholder engagement, remained at the activity level rather than the decision-making process. Although both Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers have claimed that they are representative for the local people and communities that were impacted by environmental issues and litigations, there were no people from these communities being represented in the organizations' leadership.

Meaningful stakeholder engagement has focused on experts and scholars in the areas of enzyme and compost production for E.P.Jing. As mentioned earlier, during the observation period, six out of ten posts on its WeChat official account were about the invited experts and scholars to the village and their works. Although they emphasize their work in the local community, the people from the local community have been presented

as beneficiaries, without involvement in the organization's decision-making process such as program design and strategic planning.

### 7.3 Accountability How: Organizational Capacity Development

According to Ebrahim (2003), organizational capacity building is a process for nonprofit organizations to reflect and analyze the organization for their mission achievement critically. All three organizations have mentioned the process of professionalization. Besides professionalization, all the organizations have focused more on the organizations' capacity to mobilize social resources and promoting social change. However, the current development of the organizations' capacity has reflected different strategies regarding the understanding of organizational capacity.

Friends of Nature's capacity has been reflected through its professionalized organizational structure and market-like strategies. The first General Director of Friends of Nature stated,

Responding to the public's expectation is actually a question of the organization's capacity of responsiveness. When we are facing various expectations, we need to understand who we are and what we can do clearly. We need to identify the target group that we should respond to take reasonable responsibility so that people will not expect us to do things that we cannot do. During the process, effective communication is important to let everyone know what you can and cannot do. It needs a balance. When we say we cannot do this, we cannot do that, and we have to do something exciting. Without that, we will lose the spirit and energy.

The General Director position and the hierarchical structure of Friends of Nature reflected a managerial approach to increase the organization's credibility through

professionalization and to maintain the organization's accountability to multiple resources, including the funders and the regulatory institutions. Focusing on the effectiveness and efficiency of mission achievement, the organization emphasizes how to maintain its strategic planning and resources to achieve its mission. For example, there were six Sina-Weibo posts during the observation period that were about the success of an environmental litigation case and the accepted cases of several environmental litigations. On October 18, 2019, the post stated,

Recently, Friends of Nature received the Civil Judgment issued by the Intermediate People's Court of Yancheng City, Jiangsu Province on September 29, 2019. In response to Friends of Nature's case of litigation to Jiangsu Daji Power Generation Co., Ltd. In, the judgment stated:

The defendant, Jiangsu Daji Power Generation Co., Ltd., shall compensate for the atmospheric environmental treatment costs of ¥ 5,551,119.93 within three months from the date of the entry into force of this judgment, which will be used for the rehabilitation and treatment of the atmospheric environment of Yancheng City; The defendant shall make public apology on media for its illegal act of discharging pollutants into the atmospheric environment. The defendant bears the case acceptance fee, supplementary appraisal fee, plaintiff's attorney's fees and travel expenses.

There was one comment below the post stating, "I am from Yancheng, I think you are doing a great thing! I am a lawyer and hope to have the opportunity to join you." Through these cases, Friends of Nature tried to convey its effectiveness in impacting environmental policy-making.

For Green Earth Volunteers, the organization's capacity is based on the massive support from people such as trash collectors, farmers, retired people, and students, as well as a close network of journalists and scholars. Yongchen Wang has been the core figure since its establishment. She said, "I am only a facilitator rather than a leader or an organizer of Green Earth Volunteers." Without a complete organizational structure and management system, the accountability discourse of Green Earth Volunteers has been a grassroots approach, which focuses on the mobilization of media, journalists, and mass support.

The group chat on WeChat of the Yellow River Decade Project 2019 was for the participants of the project, including organizers, volunteers, participants, and local residents of the project. Therefore, the group chat did not have a lot of members, but the information was more targeted and focused on the project. During the field trip in summer 2019, the group chat was the main communication platform for the 2019 trip members for sharing information on the trip as well as personal feelings and reflections. For example, the photos from the local communities when they received the donations were shared within the group. Also, because each participant was required to write at least one daily journal for the trip, the group chat served as a coordination platform for the organizers and participants to share and manage documents. Other information related to environmental protection, especially the protection of Yellow River and tamarisk trees were discussed within the group. Overall, all the group chats have remained a relatively active discussion among members. Members were able to share and receive the information they were interested in. Although most of the content was not directly related

to the organizations themselves, the group chats provided equal opportunities for the members to communicate with each other.

For E.P.Jing, organizational capacity has been impacted by both the internal conflicts and external pressures in 2017. Within the organization, there were conflicts regarding the organization's future development. For example, one of the co-founders thought the organization should be more research and data-driven rather than focusing on groundwork. Another co-founder suggested paying more attention to publicity and external collaboration. Later, several co-founders left. During the process to deal with the internal conflict, E.P.Jing tried to use various ways for internal communication. For example, C31 used Jianshu, an online blog website to publish the working summary and her personal reflection on the organization's management. Her purpose was to use the blogs as an internal communication channel between her and her colleagues and to avoid misunderstandings. She said,

In around 2018, we had a lot of internal conflicts among the staff. Our work was very hard and we had totally different opinions about the organization's development. And sometimes, I just felt that it was hard to talk with them. So, I hoped the blogs could be a way for us to understand each other.

Externally, in 2017, the municipal government of Beijing initiated the demolition and renovation plan in rural areas. All the alleged illegal buildings and structures were required to be demolished. The regulation significantly impacted rural villages. A lot of buildings were demolished. E.P.Jing lost its office space. Many of its volunteers had to move out of the village because of the loss of their living space. C31 said,

At that time, we really did not know what to do. Our organization seemed like it cannot continue. We stopped all of our works and external collaborations. We just signed a contract of ¥800,000 funding with SEE Foundation's North China Project Center. But because of the demolitions, we have not received any money from them until now. Everything has changed.

Later, the organization started over with its community-based project, focusing on the compost and enzyme production by using kitchen waste, to explore a model of waste sorting, reproduction, and eco-agriculture that can be used and replicated. Therefore, internally, the organization has recruited full-time employees who have an environmental protection background. Externally, the organization has sought professional support from experts all over the world. The neoliberal discourse emphasizes nonprofit organizations' capacity building through marketization, managerialization, and professionalization. Nonprofit organizations are expected to keep improving their capacity of fundraising, source mobilization, and outcome effectiveness. The above activities of these three organizations demonstrate their efforts to improve their organizational capacity through the improvement of organizational management, internal communication, and understanding changes in the external environment.

#### 7.4 Summary

Overall, the three organizations represented various strategies and practices that have been used by environmental nonprofit organizations to demonstrate their accountabilities toward different stakeholder groups. As the most developed environmental nonprofit organization in China, Friends of Nature has established a set of managerial and administrative standards to ensure its mission achievement and

accountability building. Its annual reports demonstrated the organization's effectiveness in public education and environmental litigations through numbers of activities, participants, and cases. A managerialist approach has been established through the hierarchy of the board- the general director- departments- volunteers.

In contrast, Green Earth Volunteers has demonstrated an alternative approach of resisting marketization while maintaining social impact. As Yongchen Wang said, the organization's accountability was demonstrated through massive support and the government's recognition of the 4A evaluation. Green Earth Volunteers was also doing financial information disclosure. However, the disclosure was not as systematic as Friends of Nature's, which included all the funding received and spent. Instead, the financial disclosure of Green Earth Volunteers focused more on individual donors. To ensure the massive support, Green Earth Volunteers published the donations received from the individual donors and the donation distribution, but not the organization's whole financial status.

E.P.Jing's accountability focused on the connection with the local community and their everyday work. The social media content has shared personal stories of the participants in the organization's activities such as the village fairs, enzyme production, and compost process. The local community's responses and experiences were effective ways for them to demonstrate their accountability toward their beneficiaries.



## Chapter 8 Discussion and Conclusion

The social constructivist framework of accountability emphasizes that there is no one-size-fits-all accountability definition and mechanism across contexts. The practices and activities of three environmental nonprofit organizations in environmental protection in China have experienced both external contextual change and internal organizational changes within the neoliberal context of China. In this chapter, the discussion will summarize answers to the research questions, as well as the implications for nonprofit accountability research and practices.

### 8.1 Summarizing Answers to the Research Questions

This research explores the social construction of accountabilities by environmental nonprofit organizations in the neoliberal context of China, answering the following research questions:

*RQ: How have environmental nonprofit organizations constructed accountabilities within the neoliberal context of China?*

RQ1: How have neoliberal discourses been embedded in environmental nonprofit organizations' processes and practices?

RQ2: To whom are environmental nonprofit organizations accountable?

RQ3: How are environmental nonprofit organizations accountable?

The research identifies the organizational changes throughout the prevalence of neoliberalism since the 1980s and finds that the discourses and practices of marketization, managerialization, and professionalization have embedded more or less

into these organizations. Under the neoliberal paradigm, marketization has infiltrated in every aspect of social governance in China (Jianxing Yu & Chen, 2018).

Friends of Nature has embraced marketization and adopted developmental strategies of marketization such as social enterprise incubation and the emphasis on the economic development of local communities. The social enterprises such as the environmental education school, architectural design studio, and zero-waste event planner that have been incubated from Friends of Nature demonstrate their continuous marketization approach for the organization's development. Marketization has been embedded in organizational management, function fulfillment, and funding relationships.

For E.P.Jing, the organization has taken a continuous effort to find a replicable model of waste sorting and management in rural areas. Through the marketization approach, they have been seeking for a way to transfer the waste sorting products to the market and to create a sustainable cycle for rural areas' development. Through their activities, the local community and the village governmental officials have received the benefit of social attention and political reputation. Therefore, marketization is E.P.Jing's strategy to demonstrate their accountability to the local community. Their purpose is to make a cleaner and livable environment for themselves and for the local residents. However, similar to the argument of Evans et al. (2015), the issue is there has been no challenge regarding the cause of the unlivable conditions in rural China and of the increasing urban-rural inequality in China, as well as who should be responsible for the cause. From a neoliberal perspective, their strategy is to mobilize every individual and household to take responsibility for their change of behaviors and lifestyles. Within this organization, nobody has asked the question regarding what right the rural people should

have for a livable living condition as well as who should be responsible for establishing an effective waste management system. Also, nobody in this organization has questioned the level of consumption that causes waste to begin with. From a neoliberal perspective, this approach indicates the promotion of consumption within a market and commercial sphere (Harvey, 2007).

From a managerial perspective, Friends of Nature and E.P.Jing have attempted to recruit employees with professional training and background in fundraising and communication. Professionalization have been prevalent among these organizations because of both the government and the domestic foundations with business background. Similar to what other scholars have identified, professionalization is not only about professional personnel but also professional knowledge (Hvenmark, 2013).

Although Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers were founded almost at the same time and both by influential leaders, these two organizations have developed different even opposite strategies regarding the organizations' operations and management. Friend of Nature has successfully transitioned from an organization that was based on a charismatic and influential leader to a professional and institutionalized organization. Although the founder of Green Earth Volunteers has explicitly stated that she rejected the business-like approach, its professionalization was reflected through its expertise and knowledge in journalism and media reports. Within the neoliberal governance system of China, professionalization reflects how these organizations demonstrate their legitimacy and contribution to environmental governance and posit themselves in contemporary Chinese society. For example, the founder Yongchen Wang

has been very proud to be rated 4A, which was seen as a recognition from the government.

Regarding the second secondary research question “To whom are environmental nonprofit organizations accountable,” the three organizations have sought various ways to balance the evolving power dynamics among the central government, local government, international organizations, domestic foundations, the board, staff, volunteers, media, experts and scholars, as well as the public and community. Overall, these organizations demonstrate a resource-based accountability to their upward stakeholder groups. In order to receive institutional support and endorsement, environmental nonprofit organizations are dedicated to demonstrating their accountability to the central government through their annual reports, their contribution to policy-making and environmental governance such as the disclosure of local governments’ wrongdoings and local environmental issues. The interaction with domestic foundations by Friends of Nature and E.P.Jing has influenced these organizations to demonstrate their approaches of marketization, managerialization, and professionalization.

In terms of the downward stakeholders, although these organizations emphasized their contribution to the public and the communities, meaningful stakeholder engagement was limited to engagement with stakeholders who hold critical resources and power. In contrast, the downward stakeholder engagement, remained at the activity level rather than the decision-making process. For example, although Friends of Nature emphasizes its pipeline from members/volunteers to board members, the current board members of Friends of Nature include people of university professors, managers of international organizations and businesses, and leaders of other nonprofit organizations. For Green

Earth Volunteers, the participants of field trips were not only journalists and scholars but also donors for the activities. Although both Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers have claimed that they are representative for the local people and communities that were impacted by environmental issues and litigations, there were no people from these communities being represented in the organizations' leadership. Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers both lack a clear identification and consistent representation of the public and community. Similarly, meaningful stakeholder engagement has focused on experts and scholars in the areas of enzyme and compost production for E.P.Jing.

The research finding echoes Benjamin (2012)'s argument, "the beneficiaries have an ambiguous standing, relative to other stakeholders, in the nonprofit accountability environment"(p. 1224). Even for these organizations' social media engagement, most of the information was still about the organizations' promotion of events and activities, lacking the public's input. Therefore, although public participation has been a prevalent term in their mission statements and strategic planning, it is hard to tell how they have been accountable to downward stakeholders. Similarly, volunteers' contributions have been highlighted in their annual reports and social media. Both the public participation and volunteers' contribution have been framed to highlight the effectiveness of the organizations to mobilize the public rather than providing opportunities for these people to express themselves politically and in a rights-based fashion.

Besides upward accountability to the central government, the three organizations have shown their resource-based accountability based on the stakeholders who have held critical resources for the organizations. The various mechanisms and discourses reflected

resource-oriented accountability and the power relations of different stakeholder groups. For example, all the organizations disclosed their financial information. However, the disclosures were at different levels and with different purposes. According to the 2018 annual report, 64% of Friends of Nature's revenue came from domestic foundations with a business background. Therefore, Friends of Nature has enacted accountability by a professionalized organizational structure as well as the demonstration of effectiveness and efficiency through numbers, financial disclosure, and social enterprise incubations.

For Green Earth Volunteers, the most important resources and support have been from the media/journalists, volunteers/participants, as well as individual donors. Therefore, their accountability mechanisms have been mainly focused on these groups. First, the regular journalist salons, newsletters, and publications have been the main way to reinforce a close network with the media and journalists. The journalists were able to receive training and information resources from Green Earth Volunteers for their media reports. In turn, Green Earth Volunteers has been able to achieve their goal through the mobilization of media and journalists. Therefore, the main accountability mechanism for Green Earth Volunteers was to retain mutuality with the media and journalists. Second, the financial disclosure of Green Earth Volunteers was targeted to individual donors to maintain the trust and accountability with the mass support. Instead of disclosure of the organization's financial status and auditing, the organization tries to demonstrate that the individuals' donations have been delivered to the people and communities in need. The organization published photos when the local community received the donations and the information regarding how many libraries have been established and how many books have been purchased by using the individuals' donations. In the process, Green Earth

Volunteers played the role of an intermediary to connect individual donors with beneficiaries, and they clearly knew how to satisfy the individual donors' demands and expectations. As the founder Yongchen Wang stated, the information sharing through social media was based on the expectation of individual donors. They would like to see the beneficiaries' status and the happy faces of the kids from local communities when they received clothing and books.

In contrast, E.P.Jing's work focused on the mobilization of support from the local government and the local community. Therefore, its information disclosure focused on the beneficiaries' experiences and their contributions to communities rather than the organization itself. For E.P.Jing, the stakeholders and the resources they held were not only the foundations and the funding they received but also the community's participation and the organization's reputation. Therefore, although the beneficiaries did not provide financial support for the organization, the organization's discourses have focused on the citizens' responsibility for problem-solving in the community. Through their positive description of the active participation and the influence on the community, the organization attempted to create shared values and advocate individuals' responsibility for environmental protection.

Regarding the third secondary research question "how are environmental nonprofit organizations accountable," this research identifies the practices of governmental evaluation, information disclosure, stakeholder involvement, and organizational capacity. The accountability mechanisms that were adopted by these organizations have reflected their compliance with the absolute power of the central government and the identification of the organizations' roles and functions in society. As

the research findings demonstrate, both the emphasis of public participation and the active involvement in policy-making are strategies to respond to the demands of the central government positively. As mentioned earlier, the devolution and decentralization policies have created gaps among central government and local governments in various regions. Therefore, organizations such as Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers confront the local governments and businesses outside of Beijing and yet retain a collaborative relationship with the central and local government in Beijing. They have been important liaises to address the gap between policy-making at the central level and policy implementation at the local level, focusing on improving the local governments' responsiveness to environmental issues and environmental protection actions in the areas that are far away from the central government in Beijing. They have played the role of monitor and supervisor of environmental issues and exposed the local governments' failure and bad practices in environmental protection.

## 8.2 The Interplay of Neoliberalism and Authoritarianism

Although there have been scholarly discussions regarding whether the institutional change in China since the 1980s was really a neoliberal reform (Tang & Zhan, 2008; M. Wang, 2010; Wong & Lee, 2001; F. Wu, 2008), this research views neoliberalism as an institutional design which emphasizes the retreat of the state in public service provision and the establishment of market-driven governance in all social aspects. As Harvey (2005) argued, "neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics' best describes China's particular kind of market economy that increasingly incorporates neoliberal elements integrated with authoritarian centralized control" (p. 120). Thus, the process is not totally government-free. Rather, it is a process ensured by state intervention through



institutional and policy design. From this perspective, China has experienced a process of the strengthening of the market, the retreat of the state in public service and social responsibility, the emphasis of individual's responsibilities, as well as the devolution to local governments, while also increasing regulation on nonprofit organizations.

Historically, the Chinese government had been viewed as being responsible for every aspect of individuals' lives. Since the late 1970s, environmental governance in China has transformed from a strong focus on the central government's authority and limited citizen involvement to a market-oriented system with decentralization dynamics, growing openness and integration, and bureaucratic reorganization (Mol & Carter, 2006). The transformation has diminished rigid and vertical control and brought decentralization and more flexibility. Local governments were given authority to implement national policies and to develop their strategies and models regarding financial growth and environmental protection.

Although the Reform and Opening-up policy in the late 1980s focused on economic reform, the policy also provided opportunities for environmental activists to learn from other countries regarding environmental governance. The Reform and Opening-up policy in the late 1980s broke the institution of government-run organizations. A group of people in China accessed the concept of civil society and found that nonprofit organizations have been active social actors in environmental protection in many countries. Civil society organizations emerged based on the market economy and social needs in China. However, as F. Wu (2008) stated, China's market-oriented reform has its own political-economic, historical, and social origins. For the past 25 years, since the establishment of environmental nonprofit organizations, policy and social changes in

China have not been in one direction. Both the government and nonprofit organizations have been trying to find the boundaries and balances of the state-society relationship. Through the review of the three environmental nonprofit organizations' development, there are several aspects that have been influenced by the neoliberal policies and social changes.

First, through a registration system, the Chinese government has been able to institutionalize and integrate nonprofit organizations into the environmental governance system. The three organizations included in this study are playing the role of intermediary agencies between the government and the public. Friends of Nature has been the representative of local people and communities to confront local government and businesses through their environmental public interest litigations. Green Earth Volunteers has advocated for environmental issues through their field trips and addressed those issues through the media and at the central government level. The advocacy work at the local level by both Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers focused on the identification and exposure of the misconduct of the local government and on the intervention of the central government. In contrast, E.P.Jing has been more like an assistant to the local government to implement environmental policy through their actions and engagement with local residents. Through direct participation in environmental policy-making, monitoring environmental issues in local communities, and community development, environmental nonprofit organizations have emphasized their role to educate the public, mobilize social resources, and provide community services from a non-confrontative approach. Their involvement in policy advocacy activities has also been from a helper's perspective.

The Chinese government recognizes the role of environmental nonprofit organizations as watchdogs (Kostka & Zhang, 2018); however, as scholars argued, the findings suggest as well “a political imperative to co-opt, coerce, and internalize the agency of civil society” (Carroll & Jarvis, 2015, p. 282). All three organizations have experienced some obstacles in the registration process and being recognized as nonprofit organizations. Friends of Nature changed from a secondary social organization to civil non-enterprise unit in 2010. Green Earth Volunteers took more than ten years to be officially registered. E.P.Jing can only be registered as a business. None of the organizations have tax-exempt status. Through explicit restrictions and obstacles, the central government conveys its absolute power and makes sure nonprofit organizations operate within the tolerant boundary of the government.

One of Xiaoping Deng’s most famous statements was “crossing the river by feeling and stepping on the stone,” which means that the Chinese government has sought a trial and error process for the social governance and problem solving in opening up to neoliberal policy reform. In order to stabilize governance and control, the Chinese government has been trying to adopt a different approach to balance the state-society relationship. For example, the time gap between the organizations’ establishment to formal registration demonstrated the government’s regulation experiments. The vagueness and uncertainty of the policy has created more obstacles for civil society organizations, especially regarding the registration process, public fundraising permission, and the scope and type of activities. Also, the regulations and policies that have been issued in recent years, such as the Charity Law and Foreign NGO Law, have demonstrated the government’s advancing control of the nonprofit sector. Based on the

regulations, the foreign organizations' space and influence have been shrinking, while the rise of domestic foundations and philanthropists could be another extension of the state power rather than the development of civil society (S. Chen & Uitto, 2015).

Second, the emphasis on economic development and the devolution process since the 1980s has created the gap between central public policy-making and local policy-implementation. Both Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers have been engaged in environmental cases in areas such as Yunnan, Qinghai, and Inner Mongolia. Both Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers identified and addressed local governments' mismanagement of local businesses and the inappropriate implementation of policies through institutional support and endorsement from the central government. Through advocating for awareness and endorsement at the central government level, they were able to initiate environmental litigations and to stop local projects that caused environmental issues.

Policy and social change have created not only a gap and power dynamics between the central and local government, and also spatial inequality among different regions. Compared to the city of Beijing, the provinces such as Qinghai, Yunnan, and Inner-Mongolia have had much fewer opportunities for socio-economic development (Sun, 2013). With fewer resources and opportunities, local governments in the remote areas have faced more pressure to promote economic development at the cost of environmental degradation. On the one hand, the local government was allowed to implement the national policy with autonomy and discretion; on the other hand, the central government has strengthened its power and control through the strategic delegation of authority (Kostka & Zhang, 2018; Mol & Carter, 2006; Ru & Ortolano,

2009). Therefore, the process has created a dynamic power relationship among the central government, local government, and civil society organizations. The power dynamics and gaps have provided opportunities for environmental nonprofit organizations to play the role of monitors at the local level and assistants at the central level simultaneously.

This research complements the literature on neoliberalism and advances our understanding of neoliberalism within the authoritarian context. Civil society organizations' practices and interactions with the state and other social actors reflect that neoliberalism cannot be simplified as free-market mechanisms that are exclusively against top-down approach and authoritarianism. Instead, the neoliberal reforms have been enacted through authoritarian mechanisms and the mobilization of institutional power. The interplay of neoliberalism and authoritarianism has shifted the coercive state apparatuses to a consensual governance system and a co-constitutive relationship. The decentralization and devolution process in China did not reduce the power of the state in governance. Instead, the state shaped the nonprofit sector as the extension of state power through institutional design. The stories regarding how nonprofit organizations, such as Green Watershed in Yunnan, which advocated for citizen rights were shut down have reminded all the other environmental nonprofit organizations to clearly understand where the bottom-line of the government is and comply with their missions and activities with the tolerated scope of the government. From this perspective, the governmental annual inspection of nonprofit organizations' performance has been a way to exert control rather than a measurement of the organizations' performance, efficiency, and effectiveness. Therefore, the applying of neoliberal policies and reforms in the authoritarian state of China leads to increasing state intervention. It is true that the state has retreated from the

service provision. However, considering the social governance including environmental governance, the state intervention has been penetrated in every aspects of the society, including citizens' lives and the civil society sector.

### 8.3 The Impacts of Neoliberal Discourses

The three case study organizations have demonstrated various statuses or strategies to adopt or resist neoliberal discourses of marketization, managerialization, and professionalization. The research findings also demonstrate that the organizations' practices are influenced not only by the neoliberal discourses but also by the nature of the work of environmental protection and advocacy in China. On the one hand, we can see that neoliberal discourse is not hegemonic as a universal standard and adopted by every organization; on the other hand, more attention has to be paid to the diminishing role of advocacy of citizen rights and social justice in authoritarian regimes with the impact of neoliberalism. Organizations are adopting different approaches to embrace or resist contextual change.

For example, social enterprise and entrepreneurship internalize economic development and marketization into social practices. It has been a way for nonprofit organizations to demonstrate their flexibility and innovation to mobilize social resources and achieve their missions and goals. Kreitmeyr (2019) pointed out that social entrepreneurship "has been aligned with the authoritarian regimes and cements neoliberalism as a mode of governance" (p. 289). Therefore, as a type of marketization, social entrepreneurship might be a non-coercive and co-optation strategy of the authoritarian regime to integrate the civil society into social governance and to stabilize the regime.

The research findings echo existing literature that the marketization process in the nonprofit sector has been impacted by the increasing involvement of businesses. As Jianxing Yu and Chen (2018) pointed out, business elites and corporate foundations have brought both capital as well as market values and practices into philanthropy and nonprofit organizations' operations in China. Domestic corporate foundations such as SEE foundation have been the main funding resources for Friends of Nature and E.P.Jing. Also, Friends of Nature and E.P.Jing have been dedicated to pursue market strategies through the incubation of social enterprises, revenue diversification, and collaboration with local businesses and enterprises. This research finding is contradicted with what Yu and Chen (2018) argued regarding the emergence of social entrepreneurship in China. They suggested that social entrepreneurship is a strategy for organizations to attain the legal status by registering as businesses within the strict regulation system, which was different from the U.S. model of social enterprise in relation to the transformation of nonprofit operations and management. However, the practices of Friends of Nature demonstrated that the development of social entrepreneurship was an essential part of the organization's strategic development within the neoliberal context. The social enterprises such as the environmental education school, architectural design studio, and zero-waste event planner that have been incubated from Friends of Nature demonstrated their continuous marketization approach for the organization's development. For example, while E.P.Jing paid the trash collectors and local households for trash collection, it became a financial transaction and incentive rather than promoting the responsibility for the local residents to sort trash by themselves. Therefore, although Yu and Chen (2018) claimed that marketization provided opportunity for nonprofit organizations to counter

government power and promote civil power, it is hard to identify the causal relationship between marketization and civic engagement.

Interestingly, Green Earth Volunteers has been explicitly resisting the marketization process and business-like approach. The founder claimed a conflict between the business-like approach and the organization's mission. What they talked about the most was how to take the responsibility to achieve their own mission. However, within a neoliberal context, the current reality of this organization is a lack of funding and staff. The organization's activities have been supported by participants and individual donors. From the perspective of received funding and financial performance, the organization is not very successful. However, it also demonstrates that there seems to be no absolute linkage between the marketization process and the organizations' effectiveness. From a non-financial perspective, the organization has successfully educated and advocated environmental journalists to focus on local environmental issues with very limited sources. It might be worthwhile to pay attention to the future development of the organization to see if this organization can continue to survive based on massive support and the resistance of marketization. Also, it demonstrates that there seems to be no linkage between the government's ratings and level of professionalization. For organizations with limited capacity and resources, it might be an alternative way to think about nonprofit organizations' legitimacy within the state-led governance system.

In connection with the above discussion of dynamic conceptualization of neoliberalism with the authoritarian context, the vagaries of neoliberalism and its impact on nonprofit organizations' practices cannot be simplified as either positive or negative. Overall, the process of marketization, managerialization, and professionalization have



helped environmental nonprofit organizations to increase their legitimacy, visibility, and social impact in China. While the confrontative approaches and bottom-up resources are limited, the neoliberal discourses and principles have been necessary for them to survive within the authoritarian context. The bottom-up collective actions and grassroots mobilization should be recognized as an essential component of the emerging civil society and the counter balance of state power. However, the three case study organizations also demonstrate that the process of is not necessarily related to an organizations' age and life cycle. To promote the development of civil society, the nonprofit organizations have to keep testing the boundaries of the allowed discourses and activities by the political and social institutions, and to create "the arena in which people come together to advance the interests they hold in common not for profit or political power, but because they care enough about something to take collective action" (Edwards, 2001, p. 2).

#### 8.4 The Understanding and Practice of Accountabilities

As the research findings showed, the three organizations have had various strategies, mechanisms, and discourses of accountability. For environmental nonprofit organizations in China, accountabilities that are related to organizations' legitimacy and identities have been a salient measure for organizations' survival and development. Neoliberal policies emphasize the effectiveness and efficiency of social governance through a market-based approach, managerialism, and professionalism. As Evans et al. (2005) argued, increased governmental regulation "deflects attention away from the most significant aspect of accountability, the responsibility of the organization 'to the cause' it was 'established to benefit'" (p. 84). Since the 1980s, the Chinese government has

realized the imperative needs to deal with the increasing environmental issues and that nonprofit organizations can be an assistant for the government to design and implement policies. The government documents have described environmental governance in China as state-led social governance with the integration of social organizations and the public. Therefore, the organizations' mission statements that emphasized public participation have been a strategy to fit with the neoliberal governance structure rather than the promotion of participatory democracy within the authoritarian state.

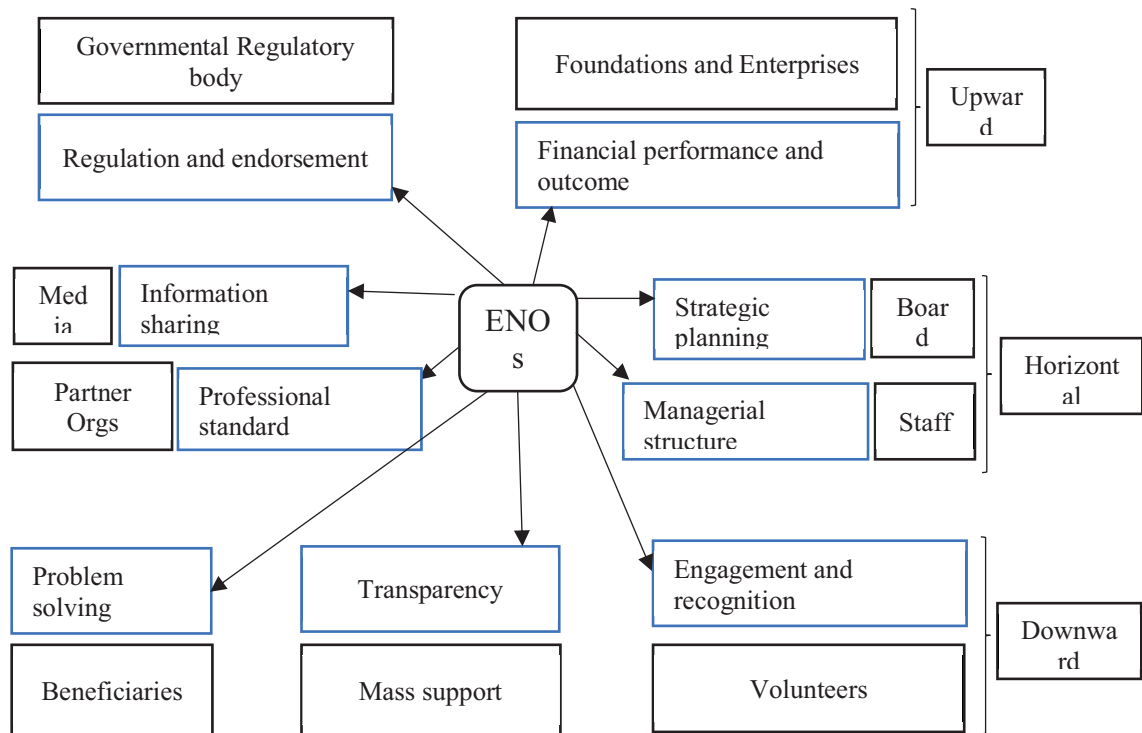


Figure 8.1 Multi-dimensional Concept of Accountability in the Case of China

To maintain their legitimacy and accountability toward the central government, the three organizations have formulated their statements of visions, missions, and values

to respond to the government's needs. For example, both the missions of Friends of Nature and Green Earth Volunteers have integrated the component of public participation that has been emphasized by the government's policies and documents.

The above understanding and practices of accountability by the environmental nonprofit organizations present a complex and multi-dimensional concept of accountability. As Figure 8.1 shows, the black-lined boxes are stakeholder groups and the blue-lined boxes are various mechanisms and practices to be accountable to different stakeholder groups. As Christensen and Ebrahim (2006) defined, accountability is "being answerable to stakeholders for the actions of the organization, whether by internal or external initiation" (p. 196). The understanding of the organizations' practices has to be based on the understanding of the nuanced power relations of various stakeholders and each organization's unique stakeholder groups. Even for financial disclosure, it cannot be understood as the accountability mechanism only for funders. The organizations were disclosing the information based on various purposes.

Comparing the accountability practices and process of Chinese organizations and the literature of western countries, there are both similarity and differences. First, there is a distinction regarding state-society relationships. As Salamon et al. (2017) stated, American society has an inherent resistance toward the state authority and power. Following Tocqueville's idea of associated society, the civil society sector in the U.S. has more autonomy and independence. However, the relationship between the state and the civil society sector has attracted scholars' attention regarding the regulation and accountability system and the increasingly blurred boundaries due to the co-optation process. Both in China and in western countries such as the United States, the external

enforcement and evaluation from governmental regulations is an essential mechanism to ensure the accountability for nonprofit organizations. The financial reporting system of the government, such as the IRS tax forms in the U.S. and the annual investigation in China, prompts nonprofit organizations to adopt professional management strategies to meet the requirement of governmental regulations. Therefore, nonprofit organizations can generate accountability through the delegated power from the state authority. From the global perspective, there are different power relationships among social actors based on the particularities of the social norms, cultural and political contexts in each country. Accordingly, the conceptualization of accountability stretches throughout the governments, civil society organizations, international funders, and citizens.

Second, the western literature has discussed the nonprofit accountability that emphasizes the cost-effectiveness (Salamon, 1987), the quality of public service, and regulation compliance (Ospina et al., 2002). Based on administrative regulations and obligations, accountability is a clear and unambiguous standard to measure performance and operational procedures. In the process, nonprofit organizations have to do financial disclosure, auditing and accrediting, reporting to governmental regulators, being compliant with the standards, codes of conduct, contractual obligations, and formal process. Similarly, the discussion of accountability by Chinese environmental organizations has focused on transparency and effectiveness, the legal and procedural aspects of accountability. Moreover, in the authoritarian regime of China, the discourse of state authority and public attention focus on economic development and social stability instead of democratization, civic engagement and participation (Kou, Kow, Gui, & Cheng, 2017).

Third, the emphasis on the media as an essential stakeholder group for the case study organizations demonstrated a unique strategy for them to navigate power dynamics and to mobilize available resources. When there was no systematic institutional and legal support, the media have been critical advocates for policy change and to address environmental issues. Because of the limited information communication channels, the collaboration between the media and environmental nonprofit organizations has been an important and effective strategy. However, with the increasing governmental control on both the media and nonprofit organizations, there has been less space for collaboration between these two sectors. From the neoliberal perspective, environmental nonprofit organizations appear to be limited to internalizing state-produced policies and obeying the state's rules.

Overall, the case studies in this research have produced a review of the changes that have occurred in the three organizations since their establishments and revealed the nuanced and evolving power relations among various nonprofit stakeholders in Chinese society. This research has argued that although neoliberal policies has been seen as beneficial for the development of civil society, there are many areas in which the institutional change has been detrimental to the overall vision of the nonprofit organizations and civil society in China. It has to be noted that neoliberal policies have created institutional and social change. First, government reform has created gaps among governments at various levels and regions and allowed environmental nonprofit organizations to navigate and mobilize the available institutional resources. Second, a series of governmental policies and regulations have authorized environmental nonprofit organizations' legitimacy and spaces for development. Third, a pursuit of accountability

throughout the organizations to demonstrate their efficiency and effectiveness has led to them being the state's helpers and assistants. Therefore, although scholars have argued that neoliberalism strengthens the nonprofit accountability, autonomy, and organizational effectiveness (Vaceková et al., 2017; Jianxing Yu & Chen, 2018), within the unique context of the authoritarian China, the neoliberal discourses have also been used by the government to be a tool of defining the public interest, steering the nonprofit organizations' mission and scope, and therefore enhancing the state's power over civil society. For example, although only Friends of Nature has received a small amount of governmental funding while the other two organizations have not received any governmental contracting and funding, the series of government regulations and policies have defined and restrained the role of nonprofit organizations as an intermediary agent for public participation. Also, the organizations' statements, such as the cultivation of green citizens and community improvement, also reflected a neoliberal discourse of emphasizing the individuals' responsibility in social problem solving, lacks a more radical political agenda regarding social and environmental justice.

## 8.5 Implications

Environmental nonprofit organizations have experienced a lot of external and internal changes since the 1990s. The cases in China demonstrate that within a distinct political context, nonprofit organizations are navigating power relationships and adopting various strategies to adapt to contextual change. In the authoritarian regime of China, the discourse of state authority and public attention focuses on economic development and social stability rather than democratization, civic engagement, and participation (Kou et al., 2017).

It has taken time for the Chinese government to figure out how to integrate the nonprofit sector into the governance system. Besides the regulations and policies, the government has adopted the annual auditing and regular rating system to ensure the nonprofit organizations' accountability. For these organizations, they have always faced uncertainty for the organizations' future. They have to be aware of political boundaries. For example, they could report and criticize local environmental issues without pointing out the issues of national-level agencies and policies or the local government where the organization registered.

#### 8.5.1 Theoretical Implications

The case of China is valuable to compare how neoliberal policies have been adopted and transformed within regimes with a strong state. In the authoritarian regime of China, the neoliberal policies have been diligently integrated into the governance system. State intervention and regulation have grown together with the market and economy. For example, the research found that environmental issues have been framed as philanthropy rather than a citizen right to a clean environment. Regarding the relationship between philanthropy and environmental protection, existing literature has found that the shift to corporate philanthropy inhibited grassroots movements and nonprofits' self-determination through procedural constraints (McCarthy, 2004). As the research findings show, the emphasis on environmental philanthropy has been reflected through the three organizations' active promotion of responsible and green citizens. It also indicates the state's intention to establish a neoliberal governance system that focuses on service delivery rather than broader citizens' rights. More importantly, the current research did not find that neoliberalism has promoted the development of civil society in authoritarian

contexts as some scholar argued (Vaceková et al., 2017; Jianxing Yu & Chen, 2018). In fact, the interplay of neoliberalism and authoritarian institutions might actually produce more obstacles for civil society development. Similar to the western literature, effectiveness under a neoliberal paradigm is defined as the organizations' capacity to mobilize resources and maintain strategic development. The prevalence of marketization, managerialization, and professionalization has prompted nonprofit organizations to prioritize stakeholders that hold critical resources, focusing on instrumental problem solving rather than challenge the status quo and root causes of environmental issues. Also, with the pressure of being competitive and effective in the market mechanism, civil society organizations have been integrated into the authoritarian system of governance. Therefore, for scholars of neoliberalism and civil society, the research on neoliberalism and civil society needs "to adopt a dynamic historical perspective to examine how neoliberalism emerged, transformed, and mutated over a long period of time" (So & Chu, 2012, p. 184). For example, this research shows that before the 2016 foreign NGO law, market-driven policies have created spaces and opportunities for nonprofit organizations to grow with the support of foreign organizations. The Chinese government used to be receptive to adopt and promote the principles, standards, and perspectives of international organizations. However, the Chinese government is currently adopting state neoliberal policies to conduct social governance and promote economic development at the same time. The environmental nonprofit organizations seem to be more and more like state extensions.

In terms of accountability, the interplay of neoliberalism and authoritarian institutions also inhibited the civic discourses of accountability, which emphasizes the



democratic participation. First, the governmental restriction of membership-based civil non-enterprise units prevents the emergence of civil society organizations with a coherent and solid membership base. Therefore, the organizations have not practiced downward accountability very much due to the lack of a clear understanding of the represented communities and groups. Second, the resource dependence theory within the neoliberal context can be used to explain the accountability understanding and practices of Chinese environmental nonprofit organizations. Generally speaking, the stakeholders and the resources they have are still the determined factors for nonprofit organizations' accountability practices. A contextual and institutional perspective helps understand the environmental organizations and their activities to educate citizens, promote environmental justice, and influence environmental policymaking. Third, the case studies explore the possibility of collaboration between environmental organizations and other social actors such as governmental and private sectors as well as cross-country collaboration to address the environmental issues globally.

#### 8.5.2 Practical Implications

For practitioners, this research provides empirical evidence regarding how environmental nonprofit organizations educate citizens and influence environmental policy-making by leveraging networks and power relations of various social actors. The three organizations have adopted different strategies to engage with their stakeholders and communicate accountabilities, which were embedded within their understanding of the organizations' characteristics and identities, as well as the social and political context. They need to understand the organizations' accountability and their role in civil society. With the institutional restraints, it is impossible for environmental nonprofit

organizations to participate in some advocacy work and emphasize some democratic values such as civil rights during their operations and management. For example, the research findings show that the organizations' activities have focused on issue-based projects rather than promoting the citizens' rights and challenging root causes.

## 8.6 Future Directions

There are several directions for further research. First, although challenge remains regarding sufficient data collection of some specific types of organizations in different countries, the qualitative approach will be necessary to collect intensive and detailed data case-by-case. The current research only focuses on three organizations in the city of Beijing. More cases with various organizational structures, missions, and funding resources from various areas of China would be helpful to accumulate knowledge of the whole landscape of environmental nonprofit organizations in China. Also, it would be valuable to keep track of the ongoing development of the three organizations.

Specifically, Green Earth Volunteers. In January 2020, Green Earth Volunteers just hired a new director. Would the new director bring more professionalized management to the organization? Would the retreat of Yongchen Wang cause the mission drift of the organization and the loss of the existing network with experts and journalists? This research indicates the need to identify and examine the evolving understanding of the nonprofit sector, public interest, and civil society by policymakers, activists, and the broader public. Also, regarding the marketization process within a neoliberal context, this organization provides an alternative perspective to examine the relationship between neoliberal effectiveness and effectiveness in a broader social perspective. In contrast,

how the incubation of social enterprises of Friends of Nature and the envisioned business development of E.P.Jing would offer comparative evidence on the above topic.

Second, with the increasing environmental issues and crisis at both the global and local levels, it is necessary to examine and understand the discourse of environmentalism and environmental governance within a global neoliberal context. For example, the concept of sustainable development has been popular in the global regime by emphasizing the balance of economic development and environmental protection. Duffield (2010) suggested that sustainable development is a “mobilizing concept of governance that encouraged different and largely unconnected actors to interact and forge new, overlapping and hybridized assemblages of knowledge and power” (p. 68). In contrast, scholars have also argued that the concept has promoted governance structures and power relations based on the status quo of neoliberalism (Crawford, 2009; Parr, 2009). Therefore, future research could examine the framing of environmental protection and how discourses impact the practices of international and local environmental nonprofit organizations as well as their relationship with other social actors such as the state and the market.

Third, the research identifies the various mechanisms and discourses of accountability that have been adopted by nonprofit organizations in China. As the research findings indicate, various discourses might be adopted by the same organization. Therefore, the discourses are not exclusive with each other. There might be several discourses existing within an organization and being used at different interactions and situations. It is necessary to explore in more details about the organizations’ discourses. Specifically, the civic discourse, which emphasizes democratic rights based a

membership-based, has not been found within the case study organizations of the current research. More research is needed to understand the development of civic discourse in the authoritarian regime of China.

Fourth, in order to map the global phenomenon of civil society organizations' development, cross-country comparison of the social construction of accountability by civil society organizations, the research can be expanded to more countries that represent different types of civil society regimes. In the context of China, the prevalence of neoliberalism has not been able to promote the civil society development. The marketization, managerialization, and professionalization have been utilized by the state to exert power through the format of networked governance. Within the system, policies and regulations can be adjusted and modified within existing political frameworks and institutions. Nonprofit organizations have faced a constant struggle between their organizational determination and political constraints, lack the ability to prompt institutional reform (Horesh & Lim, 2017; So & Chu, 2012).

## 8.7 Concluding Statement

The impact of the governmental adoption of neoliberal policies has been profound, nuanced, and multifaceted. Scholars have stated that the introduction and development of neoliberal policies in the authoritarian state of China have promoted the development of civil society and participatory democracy. However, this research found that the neoliberal policies of decentralization and devolution have been an approach to exert state control and co-opt nonprofit organizations into the environmental governance. With the continuous pursuit of economic development, the deterioration of environment has caused significant impact on numerous individuals and communities. The

environmental nonprofit organizations are playing a critical role in contemporary society by educating citizens, exposing the serious issues of environmental pollution and the destruction of natural resources, and mobilizing social resources. Their activities have promoted the policy changes and pushed the boundaries of politically accepted actions. For example, the Environmental Protection Law was amended in 2014, allowing nonprofit organizations to initiate the environmental litigation. The government has been promoted to be more responsive and active in environmental protection. During the process, the nonprofit sector has been forced to being accountable to the state, by implementing environmental policies and being the intermediary agencies between policy-makers and the public.

At the time finishing this research, the municipal government of Beijing started its mandatory trash sorting policy on May 1, 2020. E.P.Jing has published several posts on its social media to provide instructions of the trash categorization and the policy explanation. What these environmental nonprofit organizations are doing probably are still far away from an organized and empowered civil society. These cases might not be representative of the whole environmental nonprofit organizations in China. However, their practices and development are indicative of the environmental governance in an authoritarian regime.

## References

- Alexander, J., Brudney, J. L., & Yang, K. (2010). Introduction to the symposium: Accountability and performance measurement: The evolving role of nonprofits in the hollow state. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 39(4), 565–570.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764010369662>
- Alexander, J., Nank, R., & Stivers, C. (1999). Implications of welfare reform: Do nonprofit survival strategies threaten civil society. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 28(4), 452–475.
- Almén, O., & Burell, M. (2018). Social accountability as social movement outcome: Protests in a Chinese city. *Social Movement Studies*, 0(0), 1–20.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2018.1521716>
- Appel, S. (2016). NGO networks, the diffusion and adaptation of NGO managerialism, and NGO legitimacy in Latin America. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(1), 187–208. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-015-9594-y>
- Archambeault, D. S., & Webber, S. (2018). Fraud survival in nonprofit organizations: Empirical evidence. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 29(1), 29–46.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21313>
- Baker, A. (2009). *The market and the masses in Latin America: Policy reform and consumption in liberalizing economies*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bakker, K. (2010). The limits of ‘neoliberal natures’: Debating green neoliberalism. *Progress in Human Geography*, 34(6), 715–735. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132510376849>
- Barkin, D. (2000). Overcoming the neoliberal paradigm: Sustainable popular development. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 16(1), 163–180.  
<https://doi.org/10.1163/156852200512030>
- Barrett, M. (2001). A stakeholder approach to responsiveness and accountability in non-profit organizations. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, 17, 16.

- Baum, H. S. (2004). Citizen participation. In N. J. Smelser & P. B. Baltes (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of the social and behavioral sciences* (pp. 1840–1846). Elsevier.
- Behn, R. D. (2001). *Rethinking democratic accountability*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Benjamin, L. M. (2008). Account space: How accountability requirements shape nonprofit practice. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 37(2), 201–223.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764007301288>
- Benjamin, L. M. (2012). The potential of outcome measurement for strengthening nonprofits' accountability to beneficiaries—Lehn M. Benjamin, 2013. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 42(6), 1224–1244.
- Bian, Y., & Logan, J. R. (1996). Market transition and the persistence of power: The changing stratification system in urban China. *American Sociological Review*, 61(5), 739–758.  
JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2096451>
- Bies, A. L. (2001). Accountability, organizational capacity, and continuous improvement: Findings from Minnesota's nonprofit sector. *New Directions for Philanthropic Fundraising*, 2001(31), 51–80. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pf.3104>
- Birch, K., & Siemiatycki, M. (2016). Neoliberalism and the geographies of marketization: The entangling of state and markets. *Progress in Human Geography*, 40(2), 177–198.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132515570512>
- Boda, C. S. (2018). The entrepreneurial Sunshine State: Neoliberalism, growth management and environmental conservation in Florida. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 40(6), 838–862.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2017.1413287>
- Bovens, M. (2005). Public accountability. In E. Ferlie, L. Lynne, & C. Pollitt (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of public management* (pp. 182–208). Oxford University Press.
- Brandsen, T., & Simsa, R. (2016). Civil society, nonprofit organizations, and citizenship in China: An editorial introduction to the China issue. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of*

- Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(5), 2011–2020.  
<http://dx.doi.org/leo.lib.unomaha.edu/10.1007/s11266-016-9774-4>
- Brody, E. (2001). Accountability and public trust. In L. M. Salamon (Ed.), *The state of nonprofit America* (pp. 471–498). Aspen Institute and Brookings Institution.
- Bromley, P., & Orchard, C. D. (2016). Managed morality: The rise of professional codes of conduct in the U.S. nonprofit sector. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 45(2), 351–374. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764015584062>
- Brower, R. S., Abolafia, M. Y., & Carr, J. B. (2000). On improving qualitative methods in public administration research. *Administration & Society*, 32(4), 363–397.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00953990022019470>
- Brown, L. D. (2007). Multiparty social action and mutual accountability. In A. Ebrahim & E. Weisband (Eds.), *Global Accountabilities* (pp. 89–111). Cambridge University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511490903.007>
- Brown, L. D., & Moore, M. H. (2001). Accountability, strategy, and international nongovernmental organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 30(3), 569–587. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764001303012>
- Brown, W. (2015). *Undoing the demos: Neoliberalism's stealth revolution*. Zone Books.
- Burr, V. (2003). *Social constructionism* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Büsgen, M. M. (2006). NGOs and the search for Chinese civil society environmental nongovernmental organisations in the Nujiang campaign. *ISS Working Paper Series/ General Series*, 422, 61. <https://repub.eur.nl/pub/19180>
- Cai, F., Li, Z., & Lin, J. Y. (2003). *The China miracle: Development strategy and economic reform*. The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press.
- Campbell, D. (2002). Outcomes assessment and the paradox of nonprofit accountability. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 12(3), 243. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.12303>



- Carroll, T., & Jarvis, D. S. L. (2015). The new politics of development: Citizens, civil society, and the evolution of neoliberal development policy. *Globalizations*, *12*(3), 281–304. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2015.1016301>
- Cernea, M., & Kudat, A. (1997). *Social assessments for better development: Case studies in Russia and Central Asia*. World Bank.
- Chen, J. (2010). Transnational environmental movement: Impacts on the green civil society in China. *Journal of Contemporary China*, *19*(65), 503–523. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670561003666103>
- Chen, S., & Uitto, J. I. (2015). Accountability delegation: Empowering local communities for environmental protection in China. *Development*, *58*(2–3), 354–365. <http://dx.doi.org.leo.lib.unomaha.edu/10.1057/s41301-016-0025-1>
- Chiapello, E. (2017). Critical accounting research and neoliberalism. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, *43*, 47–64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpa.2016.09.002>
- Christensen, R. A., & Ebrahim, A. (2006). How does accountability affect mission? The case of a nonprofit serving immigrants and refugees. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, *17*(2), 195–209. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.143>
- Corson, C. (2010). Shifting environmental governance in a neoliberal world: US AID for conservation. *Antipode*, *42*(3), 576–602. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2010.00764.x>
- Costa, E., & Silva, G. G. da. (2019). Nonprofit accountability: The viewpoint of the primary stakeholders. *Financial Accountability & Management*, *35*(1), 37–54. <https://doi.org/10.1111/faam.12181>
- Coule, T. M. (2015). Nonprofit governance and accountability: Broadening the theoretical perspective. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *44*(1), 75–97. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764013503906>

- Crawford, K. (2009). Emergency environmentalism: On fear, lifestyle politics and subjectivity. *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, 14. <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/research/publication/emergency-environmentalism-on-fear-lifestyle-politics-and-subjectivity/>
- Creemers, R. (2018). China's Social Credit System: An Evolving Practice of Control. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3175792>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (4th edition). SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Cumming, G. D. (2008). French NGOs in the global era: Professionalization “without borders”? *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 19(4), 372–394. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-008-9069-5>
- Dai, J., & Spires, A. J. (2018). Advocacy in an authoritarian state: How grassroots environmental NGOs influence local governments in China. *China Journal*, 79(1), 62–83. <https://doi.org/10.1086/693440>
- Dainelli, F., Manetti, G., & Sibilio, B. (2013). Web-based accountability practices in non-profit organizations: The case of national museums. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 24(3), 649–665. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-012-9278-9>
- De Smet, B., & Bogaert, K. (2017). Resistance and passive revolution in Egypt and Morocco. In C. B. Tansel (Ed.), *States of discipline: Authoritarian neoliberalism and the contested reproduction of capitalist order* (pp. 211–233). Rowman & Littlefield.
- de Wet, F. W. (2015). Dealing with corruption in South African civil society: Orientating Christian communities for their role in a post-apartheid context. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 36(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v36i1.1388>

- Dempsey, S. E., & Sanders, M. L. (2010). Meaningful work? Nonprofit marketization and work/life imbalance in popular autobiographies of social entrepreneurship. *Organization*, 17(4), 437–459. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508410364198>
- Deng, G., Lu, S., & Huang, C.-C. (2015). Transparency of grassroots human service organizations in China: Does transparency affect donation and grants? *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance*, 39(5), 475–491. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2015.1076751>
- Deng, X. (1993). *Selected works of Deng Xiaoping: Vol. III*. People's Publishing House.
- Derleth, J., & Koldyk, D. R. (2004). The Shequ experiment: Grassroots political reform in urban China. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 13(41), 747–777. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1067056042000281473>
- Desai, V., & Imrie, R. (1998). The new managerialism in local governance: North-South dimensions. *Third World Quarterly*, 19(4), 635–650. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436599814172>
- Ding, S. (2015). Modernization without democratization in the digital age: China's micromanagement of its contentious state–society relations. *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 23(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2014.1002852>
- Duckett, J. (2004). State, collectivism and worker privilege: A study of urban health insurance reform. *The China Quarterly*, 177, 155–173. JSTOR.
- Duckett, J. (2020). Neoliberalism, authoritarian politics and social policy in China. *Development and Change*, online first. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12568>
- Duffield, M. (2010). *Development, security, and unending war: Governing the world of peoples*. Polity Press.
- Duval, A.-M., Gendron, Y., & Roux-Dufort, C. (2015). Exhibiting nongovernmental organizations: Reifying the performance discourse through framing power. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 29, 31–53. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpa.2015.01.003>

- Ebrahim, A. (2005). Accountability myopia: Losing sight of organizational learning. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 34(1), 56–87.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764004269430>
- Ebrahim, A. (2016). The many faces of nonprofit accountability. In D. A. Renz (Ed.), *The Jossey-Bass handbook of nonprofit leadership and management* (pp. 102–123). Jossey-Bass.
- Ebrahim, A., & Weisband, E. (Eds.). (2007). *Global Accountabilities: Participation, Pluralism, and Public Ethics* (1 edition). Cambridge University Press.
- Edwards, M. (2001). Introduction. In M. Edwards & J. Gaventa (Eds.), *Global citizen action* (pp. 1–16). Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Edwards, M., & Hulme, D. (Eds.). (1996). *Beyond the magic bullet: NGO performance and accountability in the post-cold war world*. Kumarian Press.
- Eikenberry, A. M. (2009). Refusing the market: A democratic discourse for voluntary and nonprofit organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 38(4), 582–596.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764009333686>
- Eikenberry, A. M. (2018). *Can the marketization of philanthropic organizations lead to democratization in countries with transitional or authoritarian regimes?* [Unpublished manuscript].
- Eikenberry, A. M., & Kluver, J. D. (2004). The marketization of the nonprofit sector: Civil society at risk? *Public Administration Review*, 64(2), 132–140.
- Eikenberry, A. M., & Mirabella, R. M. (2018). Extreme philanthropy: Philanthrocapitalism, effective, altruism, and the discourse of neoliberalism. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 51(1), 43–47. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517001378>
- Esin, C., Fathi, M., & Squire, C. (2013). Narrative analysis: The constructionist approach. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 203–216). SAGE.

- Evans, B., Richmond, T., & Shields, J. (2005). Structuring neoliberal governance: The nonprofit sector, emerging new modes of control and the marketisation of service delivery. *Policy and Society*, 24(1), 73–97. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1449-4035\(05\)70050-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1449-4035(05)70050-3)
- Evans, P. B., & Sewell, W. H. (2013). Neoliberalism: Policy regimes, international regimes, and social effects. In P. A. Hall & M. Lamont (Eds.), *Social resilience in the neoliberal ear* (pp. 35–68). Cambridge University Press.
- Fedorenko, I., & Sun, Y. (2016). Microblogging-based civic participation on environment in China: A case study of the PM 2.5 campaign. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(5), 2077–2105. <http://dx.doi.org.leo.lib.unomaha.edu/10.1007/s11266-015-9591-1>
- Foo, K. (2018). Examining the role of NGOs in urban environmental governance. *Cities*, 77, 67–72. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2018.01.002>
- Gabay, C. (2014). Two ‘transitions’: The political economy of Joyce Banda’s rise to power and the related role of civil society organisations in Malawi. *Review of African Political Economy*, 41(141), 374–388. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2014.901949>
- Georgeou, N., & Engel, S. (2011). The impact of neoliberalism and new managerialism on development volunteering: An Australian case study. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 46(2), 297–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2011.567970>
- Gilley, B. (2012). Authoritarian environmentalism and China’s response to climate change. *Environmental Politics*, 21(2), 287–307. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2012.651904>
- Goetz, A. M., & Jenkins, R. (2002). *Voice, accountability and human development: The emergence of a new agenda* (HDR 2002; p. 89). United Nations Development Programme.
- Goldstein, N. (2007). *Globalization and free trade*. Facts on File, Inc.

- Gong, X., & Cortese, C. (2017). A socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics: The accounting annual report of China Mobile. *Accounting Forum*, *41*(3), 206–220.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.accfor.2017.04.002>
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Lawrence & Wishart.
- Greenlee, J., Fischer, M., Gordon, T., & Keating, E. (2007). An investigation of fraud in nonprofit organizations: Occurrences and deterrents. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *36*, 676–694.
- Grimes, M. (2013). The contingencies of societal accountability: Examining the link between civil society and good government. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *48*(4), 380–402. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-012-9126-3>
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, *18*(1), 59–82.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903>
- Guldbrandsen, T. C., & Holland, D. C. (2001). Encounters with the super-citizen: Neoliberalism, environmental activism, and the American Heritage Rivers Initiative. *Anthropological Quarterly*, *74*(3), 124–134. <https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2001.0025>
- Hall, P. D. (2006). A historical overview of philanthropy, voluntary associations, and nonprofit organizations in the United States, 1600-2000. In W. W. Powell & R. Steinberg (Eds.), *The non-profit sector: A research handbook* (2nd ed., pp. 27–42). Yale University Press.
- Hanlon, R. J. (2011). Engineering corporate social responsibility: Elite stakeholders, states and the resilience of neoliberalism. *Contemporary Politics*, *17*(1), 71–87.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2011.552689>
- Harlow, E., Berg, E., Barry, J., & Chandler, J. (2013). Neoliberalism, managerialism and the reconfiguring of social work in Sweden and the United Kingdom. *Organization*, *20*(4), 534–550. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508412448222>

- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2007). Neoliberalism as creative destruction. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 610, 22–44. JSTOR.
- Heberer, T. (2009). *China: Creating civil-society structures top-down?* 41–57.
- Hernández, J. C. (2019, July 12). ‘We’re almost extinct’: China’s investigative journalists are silenced under Xi. *The New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/12/world/asia/china-journalists-crackdown.html>
- Hildebrandt, T. (2013). *Social organizations and the authoritarian state in China*. Cambridge University Press.  
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unomaha/detail.action?docID=1099886>
- Ho, P. (2001). Greening without conflict? Environmentalism, NGOs and civil society in China. *Development and Change*, 32(5), 893–921. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00231>
- Hoefler, R. (2000). Accountability in action? Program evaluation in nonprofit human service agencies. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 11(2), 167–177.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.11203>
- Holifield, R. (2004). Neoliberalism and environmental justice in the United States environmental protection agency: Translating policy into managerial practice in hazardous waste remediation. *Geoforum*, 35(3), 285–297. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2003.11.003>
- Horesh, N., & Lim, K. F. (2017). China: An East Asian alternative to neoliberalism? *The Pacific Review*, 30(4), 425–442. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2016.1264459>
- Hsu, J. Y. J., & Hasmath, R. (2014). The local corporatist state and NGO relations in China. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 23(87), 516–534.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2013.843929>
- Hsu, J. Y. J., & Hasmath, R. (2017). A maturing civil society in China? The role of knowledge and professionalization in the development of NGOs. *China Information*, 31(1), 22–42.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X16676995>

- Hua, R., Hou, Y., & Deng, G. (2016). Instrumental civil rights and institutionalized participation in China: A case study of protest in Wukan village. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(5), 2131–2149.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-015-9616-9>
- Hug, N., & Jäger, U. P. (2014). Resource-based accountability: A case study on multiple accountability relations in an economic development nonprofit. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 25(3), 772–796.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-013-9362-9>
- Hvenmark, J. (2008). *Reconsidering membership: A study of individual members' formal affiliation with democratically governed federations* [Dissertation]. Stockholm School of Economics.
- Hvenmark, J. (2013). Business as usual? On managerialization and the adoption of the balanced scorecard in a democratically governed civil society organization. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 35(2), 223–247. <https://doi.org/10.2753/ATP1084-1806350203>
- Hvenmark, J. (2016). Ideology, practice, and process? A review of the concept of managerialism in civil society studies. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(6), 2833–2859. <http://dx.doi.org/leo.lib.unomaha.edu/10.1007/s11266-015-9605-z>
- Hwang, H., & Powell, W. W. (2009). The rationalization of charity: The influences of professionalism in the nonprofit sector. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 54(2), 268–298. <https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.2009.54.2.268>
- Jenkins, J. C. (1998). Channeling social protest: Foundation patronage of contemporary social movements. In W. W. Powell & E. S. Clemens (Eds.), *Private action and the public good* (pp. 206–216). Yale University Press.



- Jia, X. (2011). Civil organization-government relationships: Functional cooperation and power dilemmas. In M. Wang (Ed.), *Emerging civil society in China: 1978-2008* (pp. 209–237). Brill.
- Jing, Y. (2018). Dual identity and social organizations' participation in contracting in Shanghai. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 27(110), 180–192.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2018.1389007>
- Jing, Y., & Chen, B. (2012). Is competitive contracting really competitive? Exploring government–nonprofit collaboration in China. *International Public Management Journal*, 15(4), 405–428. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2012.761054>
- Kadirbeyoğlu, Z., Adaman, F., Özkaynak, B., & Paker, H. (2017). The effectiveness of environmental civil society organizations: An integrated analysis of organizational characteristics and contextual factors. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 28(4), 1717–1741. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-017-9848-y>
- Kamat, S. (2004). The privatization of public interest: Theorizing NGO discourse in a neoliberal era. *Review of International Political Economy*, 11(1), 155–176.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0969229042000179794>
- Kang, Y. (2019). What does China's twin-pillared NGO funding game entail? Growing diversity and increasing isomorphism. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 30(3), 499–515. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-018-00085-1>
- Katz, H. (2006). Gramsci, hegemony, and global civil society networks. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 17(4), 332–347.
- Katz-Gerro, T., Greenspan, I., Handy, F., Lee, H.-Y., & Frey, A. (2015). Environmental Philanthropy and Environmental Behavior in Five Countries: Is There Convergence Among Youth? *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 26(4), 1485–1509. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-014-9496-4>

- Kearns, K. P. (1996). *Managing for accountability: Preserving the public trust in public and nonprofit organizations*. Jossey-Bass.
- Keevers, L., Treleaven, L., Sykes, C., & Darcy, M. (2012). Made to measure: Taming practices with results-based accountability. *Organization Studies*, 33(1), 97–120.
- Kim, M. Y., Oh, H. G., & Park, S. M. (2018). How to encourage employees' acceptance of performance appraisal systems in Korean nonprofit organizations? An empirical exploration of the influence of performance monitoring systems and organizational culture. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 47(5), 1007–1030.
- Knafo, S., Dutta, S. J., Lane, R., & Wyn-Jones, S. (2019). The managerial lineages of neoliberalism. *New Political Economy*, 24(2), 235–251.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2018.1431621>
- Koop, C. (2014). Theorizing and explaining voluntary accountability. *Public Administration*, 92(3), 565–581. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12058>
- Kostka, G., & Zhang, C. (2018). Tightening the grip: Environmental governance under Xi Jinping. *Environmental Politics*, 27(5), 769–781.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2018.1491116>
- Kou, Y., Kow, Y. M., Gui, X., & Cheng, W. (2017). One social movement, two social media sites: A comparative study of public discourses. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)*, 26(4–6), 807–836. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10606-017-9284-y>
- Kreitmeyr, N. (2019). Neoliberal co-optation and authoritarian renewal: Social entrepreneurship networks in Jordan and Morocco. *Globalizations*, 16(3), 289–303.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2018.1502492>
- Kreutzer, K., & Jäger, U. (2011). Volunteering versus managerialism: Conflict over organizational identity in voluntary associations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 40(4), 634–661. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764010369386>

- Kuo, L. (2019, July 12). "A sort of eco-dictatorship": Shanghai grapples with strict new recycling laws. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/12/a-sort-of-eco-dictatorship-shanghai-grapples-with-strict-new-recycling-laws>
- Lai, W., Zhu, J., Tao, L., & Spires, A. J. (2015). Bounded by the state: Government priorities and the development of private philanthropic foundations in China. *The China Quarterly; Cambridge*, 224, 1083–1092.  
<http://dx.doi.org.leo.lib.unomaha.edu/10.1017/S030574101500123X>
- Lee, J., & Zhu, Y. (2006). Urban governance, neoliberalism and housing reform in China. *The Pacific Review*, 19(1), 39–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512740500417657>
- Lee, R. L., & Joseph, R. C. (2012). *Survival of the fittest: Online accountability in complex organizational populations*. 7.
- Lewis, D. (2007). Bringing in society, culture, and politics: Values and accountability in a Bangladeshi NGO. In A. Ebrahim & E. Weisband (Eds.), *Global Accountabilities* (pp. 131–148). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511490903.009>
- Li, H. (2016). Community governance and social management system innovation — — Case study of Ningbo city. *Journal of Public Management*, 1.  
[http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article\\_en/CJFDTototal-GGGL201001011.htm](http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article_en/CJFDTototal-GGGL201001011.htm)
- Li, Y. (2012). The development of social organizations in China. *China Journal of Social Work*, 5(2), 173–177. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17525098.2012.674179>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Lipuma, E., & Koelble, T. A. (2009). Social capital in emerging democracies. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 20(1), 1–14.  
<http://dx.doi.org.leo.lib.unomaha.edu/10.1007/s11266-008-9076-6>
- Liu, H. (2012). Struggling, confusing, and progressing: The impression of the investigation of Chinese environmental NGOs. In Y. Wang & A. Wang (Eds.), *Watch: The media*

- investigation of Chinese environmental NGOs* (pp. 429–454). Environment Science Publishing of China.
- Liu, L., Wang, P., & Wu, T. (2017). The role of nongovernmental organizations in China's climate change governance. *WIREs Climate Change*, 8(6), e483.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.483>
- Lu, J., & Dong, Q. (2018). What influences the growth of the Chinese nonprofit sector: A prefecture-level study. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 29(6), 1347–1359. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-018-0042-7>
- Lu, Y. (2007). Environmental civil society and governance in China. *International Journal of Environmental Studies*, 64(1), 59–69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207230601157708>
- Lune, H., & Berg, B. L. (2017). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (9th edition). Pearson.
- Luo, S. (2008). A research on the identity recognition and specialized of the full time personnel in non-profit organization—《》2008年06期. *The Journal of Gansu Administration Institute*, 6. [http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article\\_en/CJFDTotol-GSXX200806016.htm](http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article_en/CJFDTotol-GSXX200806016.htm)
- Ma, D., & Parish, W. L. (2006). Tocquevillian moments: Charitable contributions by Chinese private entrepreneurs. *Social Forces*, 85(2), 943–964. JSTOR.
- MacEwan, A. (2005). Neoliberalism and democracy: Market power versus democratic power. In A. Saad-Filho & D. Johnson (Eds.), *Neoliberalism: A critical reader* (pp. 170–176). Pluto Press.
- Maier, F., & Meyer, M. (2011). Managerialism and beyond: Discourses of civil society organization and their governance implications. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 22(4), 731–756. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-011-9202-8>

- Maier, F., Meyer, M., & Steinbereithner, M. (2016). Nonprofit organizations becoming business-like: A systematic review. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *45*(1), 64–86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764014561796>
- Makinen, J. (2015, November 22). China prepares to rank its citizens on “social credit.” *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/world/asia/la-fg-china-credit-system-20151122-story.html>
- Markham, W. T., Johnson, M. A., & Bonjean, C. M. (1999). Nonprofit decision making and resource allocation: The importance of membership preferences, community needs, and interorganizational ties. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *28*(2), 152–184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764099282003>
- Matsuzawa, S. (2019). *Activating China: Local actors, foreign influence, and state response*. Routledge.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Maxwell, S. P., & Carboni, J. L. (2016). Social media management: Exploring Facebook engagement among high-asset foundations. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, *27*(2), 251–260. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21232>
- McCarthy, D. (2004). Environmental justice grantmaking: Elites and activists collaborate to transform philanthropy. *Sociological Inquiry*, *74*(2), 250–270. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682X.2004.00089.x>
- McGregor, S. (2001). Neoliberalism and health care. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, *25*(2), 82–89. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1470-6431.2001.00183.x>
- Minkoff, D. C., & Powell, W. W. (2006). Nonprofit mission: Constancy, responsiveness, or deflection. In W. W. Powell & R. Steinberg (Eds.), *The nonprofit sector* (2nd ed., pp. 591–611). Yale University Press.
- Mirabella, R. M. (2013). Toward a more perfect nonprofit: The performance mindset and the “gift.” *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, *35*(1), 81–105.

- Mitchell, G. E. (2014). Strategic responses to resource dependence among transnational NGOs registered in the United States. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 25(1), 67–91. JSTOR.
- Moe, I. (2013). *Setting the agenda. Chinese NGOs: Scope for action on climate change*. Fridtjof Nansen Institute. <https://www.fni.no/publications/setting-the-agenda-chinese-ngos-scope-for-action-on-climate-change>
- Mol, A. P. J., & Carter, N. T. (2006). China's environmental governance in transition. *Environmental Politics*, 15(2), 149–170. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644010600562765>
- Moon, J., & Shen, X. (2010). CSR in China research: Salience, focus and nature. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 94(4), 613–629. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-009-0341-4>
- Moore, M. (2006). Good Government (Introduction). *IDS Bulletin*, 37(4), 50–56. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2006.tb00286.x>
- Moore, R. R. (2001). China's fledgling civil society: A force for democratization? *World Policy Journal*, 18(1), 56–66. JSTOR.
- Moulton, S., & Eckerd, A. (2012). Preserving the publicness of the nonprofit sector: Resources, roles, and public values. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 41(4), 656–685. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764011419517>
- Nair, N., & Bhatnagar, D. (2011). Understanding workplace deviant behavior in nonprofit organizations. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 21(3), 289–309. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.20026>
- Ni, N., Chen, Q., Ding, S., & Wu, Z. (2017). Professionalization and cost efficiency of fundraising in charitable organizations: The case of charitable foundations in China. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 28(2), 773–797. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-016-9765-5>
- Ni, N., & Zhan, X. (2017). Embedded government control and nonprofit revenue growth. *Public Administration Review*, 77(5), 730–742. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12716>

- Nickel, P. M., & Eikenberry, A. M. (2016). Knowing and governing: The mapping of the nonprofit and voluntary sector as statecraft. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(1), 392–408. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-015-9552-8>
- Nie, L., Liu, H. K., & Cheng, W. (2016). Exploring factors that influence voluntary disclosure by Chinese foundations. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(5), 2374–2400. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-016-9689-0>
- Ospina, S., Diaz, W., & O’Sullivan, J. F. (2002). Negotiating accountability: Managerial lessons from identity-based nonprofit organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 31(1), 5–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764002311001>
- Ostry, J. D., Loungani, P., & Furceri, D. (2016). Neoliberalism: Oversold? *Finance & Development*, 53(2), 38–41.
- Parr, A. (2009). *Hijacking sustainability*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.
- Pearson, T. (2009). On the trail of living modified organisms: Environmentalism within and against neoliberal order. *Cultural Anthropology*, 24(4), 712–745. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2009.01045.x>
- Pfeffer, J. (1982). *Organizations and organization theory* (1st edition). Pitman.
- Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. R. (1978). *The external control of organizations*. Harper & Row.
- Piatak, J., Romzek, B., LeRoux, K., & Johnston, J. (2018). Managing goal conflict in public service delivery networks: Does accountability move up and down, or side to side? *Public Performance & Management Review*, 41(1), 152–176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2017.1400993>
- Pieke, F. (2009). *The good communist: Elite training and state building in today’s China*. Cambridge University Press. <https://www.amazon.com/Good-Communist-Training-Building-Todays/dp/0521199905>

- Poole, D. L., Nelson, J., Carnahan, S., Chepenik, N. G., & Tubiak, C. (2000). Evaluating performance measurement systems in nonprofit agencies: The program accountability quality scale (PAQS). *American Journal of Evaluation, 21*(1), 15.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/109821400002100102>
- Pusey, M. (1996). Economic rationalism and the contest for civil society. *Thesis Eleven, 44*(1), 69–86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513696001044008>
- Raggio, P. (2018). The social construction of accountability in international nongovernmental organizations. In A. M. Eikenberry, R. M. Mirabella, & B. Sandberg (Eds.), *Reframing nonprofit organizations: Democracy, inclusion, and social change* (pp. 38–52). Melvin & Leigh.
- Rios, J. M. (2000). Environmental justice groups: Grass-roots movement or NGO networks? Some policy implications. *Review of Policy Research, 17*(2–3), 179–211.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-1338.2000.tb00923.x>
- Ru, J., & Ortolano, L. (2009). Development of citizen-organized environmental NGOs in China. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 20*(2), 141–168. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-009-9082-3>
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2011). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd edition). SAGE.
- Sandberg, B. (2011). *From methodless enthusiasm to professionalization*. Arizona State University.
- Sandberg, B. (2016). Against the cult(ure) of the entrepreneur for the nonprofit sector. *Administrative Theory & Praxis, 38*(1), 52–67.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10841806.2015.1130524>
- Sanders, M. L. (2012). Theorizing nonprofit organizations as contradictory enterprises: Understanding the inherent tensions of nonprofit marketization. *Management Communication Quarterly, 26*(1), 179–185. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318911423761>



- Saxton, G. D., & Guo, C. (2011). Accountability online: Understanding the web-based accountability practices of nonprofit organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 40(2), 270–295. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764009341086>
- Saxton, G. D., Guo, C., & Brown, W. A. (2007). New dimensions of nonprofit responsiveness: The application and promise of Internet-based technologies. *Public Performance & Management Review*, 31(2), 144–173. <https://doi.org/10.2753/PMR1530-9576310201>
- Schatteman, A. (2013). Nonprofit accountability: To whom and for what? An introduction to the special issue. *International Review of Public Administration*, 18(3), 1–6.
- Schmitz, H. P., Raggo, P., & Bruno-van Vijfeijken, T. (2012). Accountability of transnational NGOs: Aspirations vs. practice. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 41(6), 1175–1194. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764011431165>
- Schram, S. F., Soss, J., Houser, L., & Fording, R. C. (2010). The third level of US welfare reform: Governmentality under neoliberal paternalism. *Citizenship Studies*, 14(6), 739–754. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2010.522363>
- Schwartz, J. (2004). Environmental NGOs in China: Roles and limits. *Pacific Affairs*, 77(1), 28–49. JSTOR.
- Shafritz, J. M. (1992). *The Harper Collins dictionary of American government and politics*. Harper Collines.
- Shieh, S. (2017). Same bed, different dreams? The divergent pathways of foundations and grassroots NGOs in China. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 28(4), 1785–1811. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-017-9864-y>
- Sima, Y. (2011). Grassroots environmental activism and the Internet: Constructing a green public sphere in China. *Asian Studies Review*, 35(4), 477–497. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2011.628007>
- Skocpol, T. (2003). *Diminished democracy: From membership to management in American civic life*. University of Oklahoma Press.

- Slatten, L. A. D., Guidry Hollier, B. N., Stevens, D. P., Austin, W., & Carson, P. P. (2016). Web-based accountability in the nonprofit sector: A closer look at arts, culture, and humanities organizations. *Journal of Arts Management, Law & Society*, 46(5), 213–230.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10632921.2016.1211048>
- So, A. Y., & Chu, Y. (2012). The transition from neoliberalism to state neoliberalism in China at the turn of the twenty-first century. In K.-S. Chang, B. Fine, & L. Weiss (Eds.), *Developmental politics in transition: The neoliberal era and beyond* (pp. 166–187). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Spires, A. J. (2012). Lessons from abroad: Foreign influences on China's emerging civil society. *The China Journal*, 68, 125–146. <https://doi.org/10.1086/666577>
- Spires, A. J. (2019). Regulation as political control: China's first charity law and its implications for civil society. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, online first.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764019883939>
- Spires, A. J., Tao, L., & Chan, K. (2014). Societal support for China's grass-roots NGOs: Evidence from Yunnan, Guangdong and Beijing. *The China Journal*, 71, 65–90.  
<https://doi.org/10.1086/674554>
- Stalley, P., & Yang, D. (2006). An emerging environmental movement in China. *The China Quarterly*, 186, 333–356.  
<http://dx.doi.org.leo.lib.unomaha.edu/10.1017/S030574100600018X>
- Steinhardt, H. C., & Wu, F. (2016). In the name of the public: Environmental protest and the changing landscape of popular contention in China. *China Journal*, 75(1), 61–82.  
<https://doi.org/10.1086/684010>
- Sturgeon, J. C. (2007). Pathways of “indigenous knowledge” in Yunnan, China. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 32(1), 129–153. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030437540703200106>

- Suárez, D. F. (2011). Collaboration and professionalization: The contours of public sector funding for nonprofit organizations. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 21(2), 307–326. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jpart/muq049>
- Sullivan, J., & Xie, L. (2009). Environmental activism, social networks and the Internet. *The China Quarterly*, 198, 422–432. JSTOR.
- Sun, Z. (2013). *Explaining regional disparities of China's economic growth: Geography, policy and infrastructure*. university of California, Berkeley.
- Tai, Z. (2006). *The Internet in China: Cyberspace and civil society*. Routledge.
- Tang, S.-Y., & Zhan, X. (2008). Civic environmental NGOs, civil society, and democratisation in China. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 44(3), 425–448. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220380701848541>
- Taylor-Gooby, P. (2004). New social risks in postindustrial society: Some evidence on responses to active labour market policies from Eurobarometer. *International Social Security Review*, 57(3), 45–64. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-246X.2004.00194.x>
- Tian, X.-L., Guo, Q.-G., Han, C., & Ahmad, N. (2016). Different extent of environmental information disclosure across chinese cities: Contributing factors and correlation with local pollution. *Global Environmental Change*, 39, 244–257. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2016.05.014>
- Tu, F. (2016). WeChat and civil society in China. *Communication and the Public*, 1(3), 343–350.
- Vaceková, G., Valentinov, V., & Nemeč, J. (2017). Rethinking nonprofit commercialization: The case of the Czech Republic. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 28(5), 2103–2123. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-016-9772-6>
- Van Puyvelde, S., Caers, R., Du Bois, C., & Jegers, M. (2012). The governance of nonprofit organizations: Integrating agency theory with stakeholder and stewardship theories.

*Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 41(3), 431–451.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764011409757>

Wadham, B. (2016). The minister, the commandant and the cadets: Scandal and the mediation of Australian civil–military relations. *Journal of Sociology*, 52(3), 551–568.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783316655637>

Wang, M. (2010). *Emerging civil society in China, 1978-2008*. Brill.

<http://web.b.ebscohost.com/leo.lib.unomaha.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzM2ODEwMV9fQU41?sid=504f4eb3-9363-4885-8bab-6e9eaa39dcde@sessionmgr102&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1>

Wang, Q. (2016). Co-optation or restriction: The differentiated government control over foundations in China. *Research Infrastructure of Chinese Foundations Working Paper Series #6*. The 45th ARNOVA Annual Conference, Washington D. C.

<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2846635>

Wang, Q., & Yao, Y. (2016). Resource dependence and government-NGO relationship in China. *China Nonprofit Review*, 8, 27–51. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18765149-12341304>

Waters, R. D., & Lo, K. D. (2012). Exploring the impact of culture in the social media sphere: A content analysis of nonprofit organizations' use of Facebook. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 41(3), 297–319.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2012.728772>

Williams, A., & Taylor, J. (2013). Resolving accountability ambiguity in nonprofit organizations.

*VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 24(3), 559–580. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-012-9266-0>

Wong, C.-K., & Lee, P. N.-S. (2001). Economic reform and social welfare: The Chinese perspective portrayed through a social survey in Shanghai. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 10(28), 517–532. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670560120067162>

- Wu, F. (2008). China's great transformation: Neoliberalization as establishing a market society. *Geoforum*, 39(3), 1093–1096. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2008.01.007>
- Wu, F. (2010). How neoliberal is China's reform? The origins of change during transition. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 51(5), 619–631. <https://doi.org/10.2747/1539-7216.51.5.619>
- Wu, H. Y. (n.d.). *NGOs in China: The case of Friends of Nature (FON, 自然之友)*. University of Washington.
- Wu, J., Chang, I.-S., Yilihamu, Q., & Zhou, Y. (2017). Study on the practice of public participation in environmental impact assessment by environmental non-governmental organizations in China. *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, 74, 186–200. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rser.2017.01.178>
- Wu, P. H. (2017). Practices and representations of environmental rights in rural China and India. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 27(3), 250–266. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2016.1278250>
- Xie, L. (2011). China's environmental activism in the age of globalization. *Asian Politics & Policy*, 3(2), 207–224. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1943-0787.2011.01256.x>
- Xu, Z., Ramirez, E., Xu, J., & Liu, Y. (2015). The effects of neoliberalism and trade liberalization on China's environment over time: A macromarketing perspective. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 35(2), 187–201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146714547951>
- Yan, M. C., Cheung, J. C.-S., Tsui, M., & Chu, C. K. (2017). Examining the neoliberal discourse of accountability: The case of Hong Kong's social service sector. *International Social Work*, 60(4), 976–989. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872815594229>
- Yang, B., He, Y., & Long, W. (2016). Alienation of civic engagement in China? Case studies on social governance in Hangzhou. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and*

- Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(5), 2150–2172.  
<http://dx.doi.org.leo.lib.unomaha.edu/10.1007/s11266-015-9632-9>
- Yang, G. (2003). The co-evolution of the Internet and civil society in China. *Asian Survey*, 43(3), 405–422. <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2003.43.3.405>
- Yang, G. (2005). Environmental NGOs and institutional dynamics in China. *The China Quarterly*, 181, 46–66.
- Yang, G., & Calhoun, C. (2007). Media, civil society, and the rise of a green public sphere in China. *China Information*, 21(2), 211–236. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X07079644>
- Yang, K. M., & Alpermann, B. (2014). Children and youth NGOs in China: Social activism between embeddedness and marginalization. *China Information*, 28(3), 311–337. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X14554350>
- Yu, Jianxing, & Chen, K. (2018). Does nonprofit marketization facilitate or inhibit the development of civil society? A comparative study of China and the USA. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 29(5), 925–937. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-018-9952-7>
- Yu, Jundong, & Zhao, W. (2005). Configuration, characteristic and management of human resources in nonprofit organization. *Science of Science and Management of S. & T*, 12. [http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article\\_en/CJFDTotat-KXXG200512026.htm](http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article_en/CJFDTotat-KXXG200512026.htm)
- Yu, Z. (2016). The effects of resources, political opportunities and organisational ecology on the growth trajectories of AIDS NGOs in China. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(5), 2252–2273. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-016-9686-3>
- Zhang, X., & Baum, R. (2004). Civil society and the anatomy of a rural NGO. *The China Journal*, 52, 97–107. <http://dx.doi.org.leo.lib.unomaha.edu/10.2307/4127886>

- Zhang, Y., Andrew, J., & Rudkin, K. (2012). Accounting as an instrument of neoliberalisation? Exploring the adoption of fair value accounting in China. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 25(8), 1–29.
- Zhao, R., Wu, Z., & Tao, C. (2016). Understanding service contracting and its impact on NGO development in China. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(5), 2229–2251. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-016-9714-3>
- Zhao, X. (2000). The investigation of Environmental NGO in Beijing. In M. Wang (Ed.), *The investigation of NGO in China: A case study approach* (pp. 37–50). Qinghua University.
- Zheng, S., Kahn, M. E., Sun, W., & Luo, D. (2014). Incentives for China's urban mayors to mitigate pollution externalities: The role of the central government and public environmentalism. *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, 47, 61–71. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2013.09.003>
- Zhou, H. (2015). Corporate philanthropy in contemporary China: A case of rural compulsory education promotion. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 26(4), 1143–1163. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-015-9587-x>
- Zhou, H., & Pan, Q. (2016). Information, community, and action on Sina-Weibo: How Chinese philanthropic NGOs use social media. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(5), 2433–2457. <http://dx.doi.org/leo.lib.unomaha.edu/10.1007/s11266-016-9685-4>
- Zhou, Y., Lin, G. C., & Zhang, J. (2019). Urban China through the lens of neoliberalism: Is a conceptual twist enough? *Urban Studies*, 56(1), 33–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098018775367>

## Appendix A. A Matrix of the Research Design

Research questions What do I need to know?	Why do I need to know this?	Sampling decisions Where will I find this data?	Data collection methods— What kind of data will answer these questions?	Whom do I contact for access?	Data analysis
How have environmental nonprofit organizations constructed accountabilities within the neoliberal context of China?	To understand the contextual uniqueness of neoliberal impact on environmental organizations' accountability in China.	Leaders, staff, and volunteers of ENOs; orgs' meetings and events; orgs' documents;	Interviews; Observations; Documents	ENOs in China	Audio taping; transcription ; coding; re-reading;  Content analysis of social media and organizations' documents
How have neoliberal discourses been embedded in environmental nonprofit organizations' accountability processes and practices?	To analyze the possible embeddedness of neoliberal discourse in multiple accountabilities of environmental nonprofit organizations.	Leaders, staff, and volunteers of ENOs; ENOs' meetings and events; orgs' documents; orgs' Sina-Weibo and WeChat accounts			
To whom are environmental nonprofit organizations accountable?	To understand the stakeholder relationship in relation to accountabilities				
How are environmental nonprofit organizations accountable?	To examine the practices and mechanisms of accountabilities				



## Appendix B. Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
How have environmental nonprofit organizations constructed their accountabilities in the neoliberal context of China?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In general, what would you say your organization is trying to accomplish?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Have these objectives changed any since you involved in this organization?</li> <li>⇒ if so, in what ways have they changed?</li> <li>⇒ What caused these changes? Why?</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. What are the major obstacles, if any, to reaching your objectives? Are there any changes that you would like to see in the organization's goals and strategies, now or in the future?</li> <li>3. What kind of changes, if any, has your organization experienced regarding               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ governmental regulations?</li> <li>⇒ the organization's relationship with the central government?</li> <li>⇒ the organization's relationship with the local government?</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. What caused these changes? Why?</li> </ol>
How have neoliberal discourses been embedded in environmental nonprofit organizations' accountability processes and practices?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Would you please tell me a little bit about how your organization is structured?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Approximately how many full-time employees does the organization have?</li> <li>⇒ How about volunteers? Do you use interns? How many does the organization have?</li> <li>⇒ Do you have any membership programs? Can you explain how membership works in your organization?</li> <li>⇒ What role does your board play in the organization?</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Can you describe how to secure funders and resources for your organization?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ How does the need to secure funding affect the goals, strategies and the organization internally?</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
To whom are environmental nonprofit organizations accountable?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To whom is your organization accountable to?</li> <li>2. What kind of changes, if any, has your organization experienced in the relationship with each stakeholder? Any examples?</li> <li>3. What kind of changes, if any, has your organization experienced regarding the structure of staff or volunteers, and the interaction between them? Any examples?</li> <li>4. What do you do to show you are accountable to each of your stakeholders? Any examples?</li> <li>5. How satisfied are you about your accountability to each stakeholder? Why?</li> </ol>

<p>How are environmental nonprofit organizations accountability?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How do you define accountability?</li><li>2. To what do you perceive that your organization is accountable to? Why?</li><li>3. How do you envision accountability in relation to the organization's development? Any examples?</li><li>4. What are the challenges of showing you are accountable? Any examples?</li><li>5. What happens when accountability is not satisfactory? Any examples?</li><li>6. Can you describe how your organization recruits staff and volunteers?</li></ol>
--	--

## Appendix C. Interview Protocols

### I. Interview Protocol with ENO's Leaders

Date (of interview): \_\_\_\_\_

Location (city where interview is conducted): \_\_\_\_\_

Organizational ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Respondent's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender of Respondent: M F

Approximate Age of Respondent: 22-35 36-45 46-55 56-65 65+

#### Introduction

Thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me today. This study investigates accountability of your organization. Your experience and responses will help me complete my research.

As discussed, there is no compensation for your participation in this study. Now, let's go back through the Informed Consent Form. Did you read through it? Do you have any questions or concerns regarding the interview process?

All of your responses will remain confidential and anonymous. Raw data from the interview will not be shared with anyone and your comments will remain anonymous. The data from the interview might be shared with other research colleagues, but all personally identifiable information will be removed. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to deny responding to any questions or prompts presented by the researcher. You can withdraw from the study at any time and end the interview at any point.

Would it be okay if I record the interview for the purpose of my study?

Intro questions (These questions are designed to build rapport with the interviewees)

1. Would you please describe the specific role you play in this organization?
2. How long have you been in this position or role?
3. How long have you been active in the organization overall?

Now let's talk about your organization.

#### Neoliberalism

4. In general, what would you say your organization is trying to accomplish?
  - ⇒ Have these objectives changed any since you involved in this organization?
  - ⇒ if so, in what ways have they changed?
  - ⇒ What caused these changes? Why?
5. What are the major obstacles, if any, to reaching your objectives? Are there any changes that you would like to see in the organization's goals and strategies, now or in the future?

6. What kind of changes, if any, has your organization experienced regarding
  - ⇒ governmental regulations?
  - ⇒ the organization's relationship with the central government?
  - ⇒ the organization's relationship with the local government?
7. What caused these changes? Why?
8. Can you describe how you secure funders and resources for your organization?
  - ⇒ How does the need to secure funding affect the goals, strategies and the organization internally?
9. Would you please tell me a little bit about how your organization is structured?
  - ⇒ Approximately how many full-time employees does the organization have?
  - ⇒ How about volunteers? Do you use interns? How many does the organization have?
  - ⇒ Do you have any membership programs? Can you explain how membership works in your organization?
  - ⇒ What role does your board play in the organization?

#### Accountability

10. How does your organization define "accountability"?
  - ⇒ To what do you perceive that your organization is accountable to? Why?
  - ⇒ How do you envision accountability in relation to the organization's development? Any examples?
11. To whom do you perceive your organization is accountable?
  - ⇒ Are there particular kinds of stakeholders that you feel the need to be most accountable to, and why?
  - ⇒ Could you please share some stories with me, if any, about the challenges of meeting competing stakeholders' demands?
  - ⇒ What challenges have you had to ensure the accountability to them? Any examples?
12. What do you do to show you are accountable to each of your stakeholders? Any examples?
13. How satisfied are you with your organization's accountability with each stakeholder?
  - ⇒ Would you please explain why?
14. What happens when accountability is not satisfactory? Any examples?

#### Closing questions

In closing, I have two remaining questions.

1. Is there anything else you wish to add regarding any of your previous responses or anything else you feel I should know about your experiences?
2. In the event that I have more questions regarding this study, can I contact you in the future?

**Closing:** I want to thank you for participating in my study and allowing me to interview you. Once I have finished conducting the remaining interviews and analyzing

the data, would you like to see the results? Again, thank you for your time and participation. I truly appreciate it. Have a good day.

## II. Interview Protocol with ENO's Staff and Volunteers

Date (of interview): \_\_\_\_\_

Location (city where interview is conducted): \_\_\_\_\_

Organizational ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Respondent's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender of Respondent: M F

Approximate Age of Respondent: 22-35 36-45 46-55 56-65 65+

### Introduction

Thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me today. This study investigates accountability of your organization. Your experience and responses will help me complete my research.

As discussed, there is no compensation for your participation in this study. Now, let's go back through the Informed Consent Form. Did you read through it? Do you have any questions or concerns regarding the interview process?

All of your responses will remain confidential and anonymous. Raw data from the interview will not be shared with anyone and your comments will remain anonymous. The data from the interview might be shared with other research colleagues, but all personally identifiable information will be removed. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to deny responding to any questions or prompts presented by the researcher. You can withdraw from the study at any time and end the interview at any point.

Would it be okay if I record the interview for the purpose of my study?

Intro questions (These questions are designed to build rapport with the interviewees)

1. Would you please describe the specific role you play in this organization?
2. How long have you been in this position or role?
3. How long have you been active in the organization overall?

### Neoliberalism

Now let's talk about your organization.

4. In general, what would you say your organization is trying to accomplish?
5. Have these objectives changed any since you involved in this organization?
  - ⇒ if so, in what ways have they changed?
  - ⇒ What caused these changes? Why?
6. What are the major obstacles, if any, to reaching the organization's objectives?
7. What the changes you have seen or you would like to see about:
  - ⇒ The organization's relationship with the government
  - ⇒ The organizations' relationship with the public and the community
  - ⇒ The funding sources
  - ⇒ The recruitment of staff/volunteers

⇒ The interaction between staff and volunteers

8. What caused these changes or why do you want to see these changes? Any examples?

#### Accountability

9. How do you define “accountability” for your organization?
10. To whom do you perceive your organization is accountable?
  - ⇒ Are there particular kinds of stakeholders that you feel the need to be most accountable to, and why?
  - ⇒ Could you please share some stories with me, if any, about the challenges of meeting competing stakeholders’ demands?
11. How satisfied are you with your organization’s accountability with each stakeholder?
  - ⇒ Would you please explain why?
12. To what do you perceive that your organization is accountable to? Why?
13. What do you do to show you are accountable to each of your stakeholders?
  - ⇒ What specific mechanisms have been established? Any examples?
  - ⇒ What are the challenges of showing you are accountable? Any examples?
14. What happens when accountability is not satisfactory? Any examples?

#### Closing questions

In closing, I have two remaining questions.

1. Is there anything else you wish to add regarding any of your previous responses or anything else you feel I should know about your experiences?
2. In the event that I have more questions regarding this study, can I contact you in the future?

#### **Closing:**

I want to thank you for participating in my study and allowing me to interview you. Once I have finished conducting the remaining interviews and analyzing the data, would you like to see the results? Again, thank you for your time and participation. I truly appreciate it. Have a good day.

## Appendix D. Observation Protocol

Location:

Date:

Time of Day:

Length of Activity: X minutes	
Descriptive notes	Reflective notes
	Sketch of the setting

*Source: Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 171*