



Introduction to the Chinese NGO Internationalization Database

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The second decade of the 21st century has experienced a significant growth in the number of international projects by Chinese non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in or towards developing countries. An increasing number of Chinese NGOs are seen on the global development stage, including large government-organized NGOs (GONGOs), usually initiated by the government to mobilize social resources and provide services to address certain social problems (e.g., Deng et al., 2016; Hasmath et al., 2019). Examples are the China Foundation for Peace and Development, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation, and the Chinese Red Cross Foundation, as well as independent NGOs, such as the Global Environmental Institute, the Paradise International Foundation, and the Rainbow Volunteer. Still relatively small in scale and limited in scope, Chinese NGOs are showing increased commitment and diversity in their overseas endeavours. As such, they are an often overlooked and under-analysed aspect of an increasingly global China.

While the overseas activity of Chinese NGOs is a topic of academic interest for both NGO scholars and contemporary China scholars, literature on the issue is often limited to case studies on individual NGOs. There is a paucity of studies from a macro perspective. One apparent reason is that there is lack of data on Chinese NGO donations and projects overseas. Chinese academics and media have endeavored to uncover this macro picture, usually through surveys. For example, Deng (2019) created a listing based on questionnaires sent to the person in charge of each of the 500 foundations listed in the Chinese Foundation 500 Directory. However, the return rate of the questionnaires was only 16.4%.

The *Chinese NGO Internationalization Database* relies instead on a systematic and intensive search through various online sources, including:

- The China Foundation Center database,
- Major NGO information platforms, for example the China Development Brief, China Philanthropy Times, and China Foundation Forum,
- NGO official websites, official Wechat accounts, newsletters, and annual reports,
- Academic journals and policy reports.



Relying on these various sources, the *Chinese NGO Internationalization Database* (Wang, 2020) tracks more than 100 Chinese NGOs involved in international donations or aid projects across more than 100 countries, though the degree of involvement varies significantly. They range from pure monetary donations to projects and international offices established in the target countries. Chinese NGOs are mostly focused on emergency/humanitarian assistance. For example, the 2015 Nepal earthquake represented a landmark moment in the rise of international donation and humanitarian assistance from Chinese NGOs, many of which stepped out of China for the first time. Apart from humanitarian assistance, Chinese NGOs are also solidifying their footprint in development aid, particularly in the fields of education, healthcare, and environmental issues. Notably, the current COVID-19 pandemic has stimulated a significant growth of Chinese NGOs' international involvement (e.g. medical supplies donations, knowledge sharing).

The scale of Chinese NGOs' international activities is still very limited when compared with other established international NGOs. Taking three of the most important and sizable Chinese foundations as examples, the China Foundation for Peace and Development (2019), the China Foundation for Poverty Reduction (2019), and the Chinese Red Cross Foundation (2019), the total expenditure for their combined international activities in 2018 was around 65 million RMB, or 9 million USD. This amount significantly falls behind the magnitude of prominent international NGOs. For example, Save the Children (2019) and Oxfam International (2019) respectively had program expenditures of 774 million USD and 790 million USD¹ during the same period.

Chinese NGOs' donations and projects are often sporadic and one-off in nature (e.g., Deng, 2013; Hsu et al., 2016; Li and Dong, 2018), while we do see more and more Chinese NGOs demonstrating long-term overseas commitments by extending their domestic signature projects and establishing local offices in other developing countries. 'Journey of Light (光明行)', 'Project Hope (希望小学)', 'Fraternity Home (博爱家园)', and the 'Panda Pack Project (爱心包裹)' are some of the famous domestic projects that have been extended overseas. Myanmar, Nepal, and Ethiopia are the top destinations for local registration, attracting NGOs like the China Foundation for Poverty Reduction (in all three countries), the Ruili Women and Children Development Center (in Myanmar), or the Rainbow Volunteer (in Nepal). Other NGOs have collaborated to internationalize, as for example Common Future and the Peaceland Foundation, which have jointly set up an office in Lebanon.

Chinese NGOs face many challenges in their internationalization processes. Among these, we need to emphasize the lack of official regulatory and policy frameworks, insufficient funding, and inadequate management and operational capability (e.g., Deng 2013; Deng, 2019; Huang, 2011; Li and Dong, 2018; Lu, 2015; Lu et al., 2015; Yang, 2013). All these challenges are

¹ The number is originally published in euros (670 million).



characteristic of an emerging field where regulatory, financial, and human resource infrastructure is not fully developed yet.

The Chinese NGO Internationalization Database aims to aid practitioners and researchers with an interest in the internationalization of Chinese NGOs and the role of civil society in contemporary China more broadly. For researchers, the database could be conducive to intriguing research questions and could provide preliminary answers, such as, why are Chinese NGOs located primarily in certain areas, e.g. Southeast Asia or East Africa, but not in others, e.g. Latin America? How does the presence of Chinese NGOs differ from other international NGOs? How do GONGOs and independent NGOs differ in geographical presence? Are Chinese NGOs more adaptive to countries with democratic or authoritarian institutions? Do the Belt and Road Initiative and Chinese overseas commercial activities have an impact on the global presence of Chinese NGOs? How does the COVID-19 pandemic affect the internationalization of Chinese NGOs? All these questions can be meaningful to advance our understanding of China's civil society and China's global development footprint more generally.

The database can also be beneficial for NGOs themselves, which have internationalized, are preparing to internationalize, or simply keep an eye on the progress of internationalization of Chinese NGOs. NGOs which have international projects could better position themselves vis-à-vis other Chinese NGOs in a global context and make strategic decisions in the future. For NGOs that are prepared to go international, the database could help them avoid unnecessary twists and turns by identifying and learning from their peers in certain countries. International NGOs interested in the progress of their Chinese counterparts may also find the database helpful, bridging information gaps and potentially encouraging productive collaborations.

The database is an ongoing project that will be kept updated as new information becomes available. Feedback and comments should be directed at Ying Wang:
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