

INSIDE THE THIRD SECTOR: A GONGO LEVEL ANALYSIS  
OF CHINESE CIVIL SOCIETY

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This thesis investigates a new variant of the relationship between society and the states: Government-Owned (or Organized) Non-Governmental Organizations (GONGOs). Past research has typically understood civil society as a means to explain the orientation of groups of citizens towards collective outcomes. For decades, NGOs have been a key component of this relationship between political actors but the systematic study of GONGOs has been widely neglected by research. I used an original dataset collected from an NGO directory developed by the China Development Brief (CDB) that provides information on the functional areas of NGOs, their sources of funding and various organizational facts. These data were used to code a series of concepts that will serve as the basis for an initial systematic study into GONGOs and their relationship with the Chinese government. My theoretical expectations are that the primary predictors of an NGO's autonomy relate to their functional areas of operation, their age and other geographical factors. I find preliminary support for the effect of an NGO's age on its autonomy from the state, as well as initial support for the dynamic nature of the relationship between NGOs and the state. I close with a discussion of these findings as well as their implications for future research.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND PUZZLE

There has been a significant amount of literature in the study of comparative politics that has focused on the field of civil society, and the term itself is meant to articulate aspects of the relationship between citizens and the state (Putnam 1993, Foley and Edwards 1996, Booth and Richards 1998). Civil society has traditionally been understood as a “third sector” of society in between the public sphere of government and the private arena that is largely dominated by business and commercial interests (Civil Society International 2003). In the last century, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have played a key role in the development of civil society, but in recent decades a new form has emerged that has altered previous conceptualizations of civil society’s place between the state and the citizens and is subsequently the subject of this thesis: Government-Owned (or Organized) NGOs, also known as GONGOs.

Despite the absence of quantitative research on the subject of GONGOs, the existing literature offers evidence that provides valuable insight into a series of potential explanatory variables which may help to elucidate the relationship between GONGOs, the state and its citizens. However, while one of the requisites of a GONGO is some affiliation with the government, explicit or otherwise, there is a significant amount of variation in the level of autonomy afforded these organizations. It is this variation that this thesis seeks to explain. To this end, I posit the following research question: Why are some GONGOs more autonomous than others? To explain this variation, I focus on several explanatory factors, including the bureaucratic structures within provincial governments that oversee these organizations, geographical factors, as well as the organizational goals of these groups as they relate to state interests.

Using data from China, this thesis will examine what explains variations in autonomy across GONGOs. In doing so, this thesis incorporates concepts identified by qualitative research on the subject. Further, unlike previous studies of GONGO which focus on single cases, this study will examine the autonomy of GONGOs quantitatively using a database of 176 GONGOs in the People's Republic of China. The systematic nature of this study will hopefully serve as a basis for future research and innovation in this fledgling field of comparative politics.

### What is a GONGO?

To define what a GONGO is, it is first necessary to identify what is meant by "NGO." The term NGO itself originated with the creation of the United Nations in the 1940s as a means to distinguish between international private organizations and intergovernmental agencies with specialized agendas (Vakil 1997). The traditional roles of NGOs include activities such as providing humanitarian aid or advocating environmental causes on behalf of private interests, as well as any number of not-for-profit domestic pursuits. The aforementioned separation from the state is a function specifically recognized by international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and is typically considered an explicit requisite to receive private international aid (Vakil 1997). The purpose of this requirement is to ensure that the gap between public goods and private interests is filled and that civil society, in the form of NGOs, serves to fill in the gap left between the two. As Lau (2009) argues, NGOs fill in where governments operate ineffectively or inefficiently.

According to the United Nations, there are over 47,000 active, registered NGOs worldwide and their categories range from formal, international organizations with numerous private donors to small, informal groups sustained only by membership dues (United Nations

2013). Based on criteria such as mandatory state registration and various regulations regarding allowable sources of funding, many NGOs constitute an institutionalized form of civil society. Contemporaneously, the theoretical understanding of the relationship between NGOs and the state is tenuous at best because while, by definition, they do not maintain ties to any national government, many of them are explicitly sanctioned, sponsored or funded by host nations, or they receive support from international organizations that are directly affiliated with said nations (Vakil 1997).

Congruent with traditional concepts of civil society such as horizontal interactions among citizens across social cleavages, proponents of NGOs argue that they promote democratic values and prevent dictatorships or other non-democracies by advocating collective interests against the tyranny of a minority. However recently, many NGOs have been forcibly dissolved by the state for acting as a channel for undemocratic or radical causes; these include militant terrorist factions or organizations with intolerant agendas. As a result of these practices, as well as any potential threat to state interests which might be presented by NGOs, some states, both democratic and non-democratic, have resorted to various systems of control over NGOs as a means to ensure that international regulations over their organizational goals and interests are abided (Naim 2007).

In the wake of this newly evolving relationship between civil society and the state, GONGOs are a recently emerged form of NGO that further blurs the line between the two. Unlike Putnam's (1993) characterization of civil society in which a series of horizontal social interactions among citizens are responsible for the efficacy of democratic practices, in the case of GONGOs, institutionalized civil society originates through a vertical arrangement fostered by the state, although the relationship is different from standard conceptions of corporatism (Schmitter 1974). The previously unprecedented combination of private interests and public goals is the

reason for this inherent oxymoron. However, despite the presence of this fascinating puzzle there exists limited systematic research on the subject. It is reasonable to speculate that the reason for this dearth of empirical investigation relates to the ambiguous nature of the subject itself. There are inherent difficulties in the conceptualization and quantification of many concepts addressed herein. As a result, existing work on GONGOs is typically limited to single unit case studies (Wu 2003, Saich 2000).

A pioneering piece on GONGOs appeared in 2007 in an article in *Foreign Policy* by Moises Naim entitled “What Is a GONGO?” which in and of itself constitutes a puzzle broad enough for its own research design. Naim uses the Myanmar Women’s Affairs Federation, Nashi, a Russian youth group, and the Sudanese Human Rights Organizations as examples of GONGOs, noting that “They have become the tool of choice for undemocratic governments to manage their domestic policies while looking democratic” (Naim 2007: 95). China is of particular interest to this puzzle because of the economic transition that has transpired over the last thirty to forty years. The end of the Cultural Revolution with communist Mao Zedong’s death in 1976 opened the floodgates for the rapid influx of free market reforms. GONGOs were an offshoot of this reform as the Chinese Communist Party attempted to preserve its hegemonic position by exerting control over pockets of civil society that were beginning to form through the forced registration of NGOs beginning in the early 1990s (ICLN 2013). The organizations that remain today are an artifact of this economic revolution and the relationship between the PRC and these groups leaves significant room for understanding and elaboration.

#### Outline of this Thesis

The following research proceeds as follows: Chapter 2 provides a review of the extant



literature on the relevant subject material, including existing research on the contributing factors to NGO autonomy as well as a discussion of the theoretical foundations of the civil society argument. Chapter 3 builds on these foundations as well as a series of previous qualitative findings to develop a theoretical argument and present a set of testable hypotheses. Using Chinese GONGOs as the unit of analysis, Chapter 4 tests these hypotheses with a system of original coding and quantitative methodology. This thesis concludes with a discussion of the results as well as their implications for future research.

In sum, the goal of this thesis is to add a quantitative element to the existing literature on the relationship between citizens and the state. GONGOs represent a recently emerged manifestation of this relationship and a breakdown of the typical public/private dichotomy, thus warranting further investigation. The case of China presents one of the more puzzling and interesting examples of this relationship and is subsequently the country of observation for this thesis. By addressing and further explaining the relationship between two facets of contemporary public life, the results contained herein will provide future researchers with a series of empirically defined and categorized measurements which will allow for the growth of systematic inquiry in this fledgling sub-field of comparative politics.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I begin by framing my argument in terms of the literature on political culture, which serves to explain the motivations of individuals for pursuing collective action in the name of personal interests. Then, I examine some of the literature on civil society, in particular the literature on corporatism and pluralism. Subsequently, I review the present state of research on GONGOs, including an examination of the historical and social factors that led to their formation in China.

#### Civil Society and Political Culture

Almond and Verba's (1963) concept of political culture is a necessary precursor to the discussion of civil society. Political culture refers to the political orientations of a group of citizens that affect their perceptions of governmental legitimacy. These orientations are the shared traits among individuals that serve as the basis for the formation of groups in pursuit of collective interests. These group formations are the foundation of civil society which subsequently serves as the foundation of my theoretical argument. Almond and Verba argue for three specific types of political culture, as well as many other tangential combinations that establish the link between the polity and the government itself.

As an approach to the field of comparative politics, Inglehart (1990) advocates political culture as an alternative to rational choice theory as a means to explain political behavior. Whereas rational choice models operate on a series of explicitly binding assumptions, a political culture argument is more malleable and fills in the residual gaps left by rational choice theory. "Thus, political culture is an intervening variable that helps explain why economic development

is conducive to, but does not necessarily lead to, the emergence of modern or mass-based democracy” (Inglehart 1990). Inglehart also argues that the durability of culture is a contributing factor to political development. Because different political orientations persist through various leaders and regimes, the collective interest that endures various transitive authorities eventually manifests itself in the form of Almond and Verba’s participant culture in which citizens are able to influence the government and are subsequently affected by it, which allows for the eventual transition to a developed democratic state. Hence, using the conceptualization of a political culture argument, the formation of interactions between individuals and the role of these relationship in effective democratic practices has been presented, which establishes the foothold of the civil society argument.

Putnam (1993) argues that civil society results from the series of horizontal networks of civic engagement that cut across social cleavages between members of a society through which collective group interests are manifested. He bases this definition and a substantial amount of his theoretical orientation on concepts such as socialization and social capital as initially developed by Alexis de Tocqueville (1835) through his interpretation of American society in *Democracy in America*. Having observed the failure of a series of French democracies, Tocqueville travelled America to see what allowed its form of government to prosper and he concluded that it was various forms of indoctrination and a culture of American ideals among groups that contributed to the pursuit of collective interests. It is this socialization mechanism that serves as the premise for Putnam’s argument. Conversely, Foley and Edwards (1996) argue that Putnam ignores political associations such as social movements or political parties and their ability “...to foster aspects of civil community and to advance democracy” (41). But if civil society is to act as a counterweight to the state as argued by Foley and Edwards, as well as Booth and Richards

(1998), then political associations must surely play a role, if only as a buffer or mediator between the polity and the state. To this end, Foley and Edwards distinguish between three types of civil society: Civil Society I, which falls in line with the conceptualization of Putnam and Tocqueville, "...puts special emphasis on the ability of associational life in general and the habits of association in particular to foster patterns of civility in the actions of citizens in a democratic polity" (39); and Civil Society II which "...lays special emphasis on civil society as a sphere of action that is independent of the state and that is capable—precisely for this reason—of energizing resistance to a tyrannical regime" (39). And finally, if not entirely pertinent, they describe a third form of civil society which is comprised of militant groups such as the KKK or other violent organizations with intolerant agendas that use a similar bottom-up framework in order to advance their causes. Regardless of this distinction, the first two examples are the most prudent for the purposes at hand.

As previously indicated, civil society has typically been understood as a series of formal or informal groups that exist outside the realm of the state and are entirely autonomous, acting on behalf of the collective interests of relevant parties. Based on Putnam's conceptualization, the state is on the opposite end of a continuum and plays no direct role in civil society, other than as the supposed result of interactions between societal and political actors; conversely, competing theories such as Foley and Edwards point out that this is a dissonance in Putnam's theory and argue that the state is implicitly responsible for the creation and sustenance of civil society.

However if, as Foley and Edwards argue, political affiliations and organizations with political goals are a theoretically neglected, yet critical component of civil society, then their form and function must be incorporated into the investigation of GONGOs. In his analysis of the relationship between the state and civil society in Bangladesh, Haque (2002) provides several

historical and contemporary examples of NGOs that blur the distinction between the public and private arenas as well as the diverse functions the organizations serve. According to Haque, some of the dynamic effects of this newly evolved relationship between the state and civil society include: the marginalization of government responsibility based on the privatization of traditionally public domains; the diminished public accountability of these organizations due to the fact that they are not comprised of elected officials; a fragmented development agenda due to incongruent priorities between the state and NGOs; and finally, a de-radicalized political culture resulting from the maintenance and reinforcement of status quos through the delivery of conflicting tones and messages about organizational goals and ambitions. These represent a series of generalized effects resulting from a continuously changing relationship with the state that can be seen in other countries around the world, including China. This relationship between civil society and the state has a significant background in the literature and there are two juxtaposed schools of thought on the subject that are commonly known as corporatism and pluralism.

### Corporatism and Pluralism

Corporatism and pluralism are theoretical terms used in the field of comparative politics to articulate the economic relationship between civil society and the state. An adequate explanation of these two contradicting theories of state-society relations is a necessary component for understanding the GONGO concept. The term “corporatism” originated in Book I of Aristotle’s *Politics* and was originally used to describe a series of naturally based classes and social hierarchies, but contemporaneously, the term has a much different meaning. Phillippe Schmitter defines corporatism as “...a system of interest representation in which the constituent

units are organized into a limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognized or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports” (1974: 93-94). Unger and Chan (1995) distinguish two variants of corporatism: (1) the *liberal* or societal type, where the leaders are beholden to their memberships, not the state, and the state does not directly dictate the terms of agreement between sectors; and (2) the *authoritarian* or state type, where the state exerts top-down decision making power. They emphasize a common ground for both as “organized consensus and cooperation,” in contrast to the divisive competition and conflict characteristic of pluralist interest-group models of organization.

However, what is missing from these definitions is the element of legitimacy by which these groups are permitted to act in such a way by both society and the state. In his critique of corporatist practices, Magagna (1988) argues that the legitimacy of corporatist practices is rooted in their goal of significant contributions to national economic welfare and the use of an efficient means to effectively represent the economic interests of strategic actors of behalf of the state. Similar to most theoretical papers, Magagna emphasizes that while it may not be prone to a great deal of external validity, his goal is to establish a pure theory of corporatist interaction between the state and society that is not obscured by the confusion and ambiguity of specific cases. However, Magagna does note that there are two critical components of any corporatist system: organizational hierarchy and monopoly. A review of the current GONGO literature suggests that they are not always the result of corporatist practices and it is therefore necessary to understand other potential explanations for their presence.

In contrast to corporatism, pluralistic theory revolves around membership, financial power, and the intensity of its members' preferences. Robert Dahl (1956) was the first to articulate pluralism as "...a principle of representation that stresses the need to effectively represent the maximum possible number of intensely held preferences." An example that further articulates the role and function of a pluralist organization is the National Rifle Association (NRA) in the United States. Under corporatism, the government gives privileged access to major producer groups, but under pluralism, this privileged access is attained on the basis of the aforementioned characteristics and is meant to be seen as contributing the betterment of a public good. The NRA exerts significant policy influence as an interest group because they are well-funded, have a large sustaining membership and the preferences of those members supersede all potential threats to the goals of the group. The organization itself is not directly affiliated with the United States government but through its powerful lobby it is able to affect policy in ways it deems appropriate. In *Polyarchy* (1971), Dahl highlights the primary characteristics of a pluralist state: "In a pluralist state, the norm of public justification would have to be a procedural standard that would evaluate institutions and interests in terms of their contribution to the greatest possible expression of multiple social needs. Illegitimate interests would be those rooted in force or deceit, and the most legitimate interests would respond to the widest range of social preferences. The exercise of popular sovereignty would gain practical realization through the aggregation of man and diverse points of view." While not everyone agrees with the motives or the practices of the NRA, it nonetheless represents a legitimate interest in the spectrum of American government and operates in accordance within the confines of a pluralist framework.

The debate thus boils down to a comparison between the activism of a corporatist state and an agnostic pluralist state. In corporatism, we observe the assignment of privileged access to

strategic actors by the state in order to achieve some sort of fixed goal, economic or otherwise. With pluralism, the state does not play a direct role in selecting or deselecting any fixed goals and as a result, there is no privileged access assigned by the state for any groups or individuals, which in turn leaves actors to freely pursue any interest they wish, ultimately leading to an extremely diverse collection of demands.

Briefly stated, corporatism represents a system of interest representation based on a top-down relationship whereby the state is largely responsible for the formation and maintenance of interest groups. This relationship is reflected in Foley and Edwards' previously addressed interpretation of civil society; whereas pluralism, in which the relationship is inverted, is better reflected in the theoretical understanding of civil society as presented by Putnam (1993). In *Patterns of Democracy* (1999), Lijphart provides one of the more succinct definitions by which it is easier to understand the relationship between the state and GONGOs, as opposed to offering a specific, categorically definition: "...pure pluralism and pure corporatism are rare, and most democracies can be found somewhere on the continuum between the pure types" (172). While Lijphart's observation is specifically focused on democracies, the statement itself conveys a generalizable point regarding the continuum on which any system of interest representation can be placed.

## GONGOs

To begin, there is no commonly accepted definition for NGOs, but there are some criteria by which most, if not all, are expected to abide. Steinberg (2001) aptly states these: One, they are formal organizations (as opposed to *ad hoc* entities); two, they are or aspire to be self-governing on the basis of their own constitutional arrangements; three, they are private, in that they are



separate from governments and have no ability to direct societies or the require no support from them; and finally, they are not in the business of making or distributing profits. In addition to these characteristics, Salamon and Anheier (1992) argue that they must be voluntary organizations. In her book, *Nongovernments: NGOs and the Political Development of the Third World* (1998), Julie Fisher argues that autonomy (which relates to Steinberg's third criteria), the primary concept of interest to this thesis, is the defining criteria for NGOs. According to Fisher, autonomy plays a key role because it vitalizes an NGO's functions and enables it to influence government, and hence to play a part in the advance of political pluralism.

These are the defining tenets for NGOs and as it stands, the relationship that many Chinese NGOs have with the state has denoted China as an outlier in existing research because the line between the public and private arenas has been blurred. In addition, the number of these groups has increased almost exponentially in recent decades. The Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA) counted 4,544 registered NGOs at the end of 1989 and approximately 354,000 in 2006, however, in both samples the estimates do not incorporate unregistered NGOs which may number well into the millions if small, rural organizations are included. As will be shown, very few, if any, of these formal, registered organizations are entirely autonomous from the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), making it difficult to categorically define them as NGOs, which begs the questions: Do NGOs even exist in China? Keping (2000) argues that Chinese NGOs are government led organizations with official and civic responsibilities. In this context, all NGOs in China fall under the GONGO category.

In addition, NGOs have their own problems that do not pertain to governments or private enterprises and, more often than not, relate specifically to the "third sector." The first is accountability. Because of their funding sources, NGOs are not required to be receptive to the

demands of an electorate and as a result, the goals of these organizations can be myopic to the point of neglecting other interests relevant to the issues at hand, which can be especially problematic if those interests relate to goals of the state. This fact also represents a second problem with NGOs: single-issue orientation. At their root, NGOs are special interests that tend to suffer from tunnel vision and as a result are often transient in their longevity because once a goal has been accomplished, the function of the organizations ceases and it no longer serves a purpose. The inherently terminal nature of many NGOs has also made them a target for critics because often times they elongate their projected timeframes as a means to sustain their very existence. There are also normative problems that must be understood in terms of the practical operation of NGOs in the real world. One of these problems is that many people assume that NGOs are inherently benevolent and anti-bureaucratic, but this is not always the case due to the lack of accountability. As a result, many NGOs in China and throughout the world are prone to abuse whatever privileged access they may have to society or to the state. GONGOs face a similar series of problems but some are resolved and others exacerbated based on a continuously evolving and dynamic relationship with the parent state.

As previously discussed, the present state of research on GONGOs is generally lacking but there has been some work on related organizations, the Quasi-Autonomous NGOs (QUANGOs) in Europe. While not entirely congruent with theoretical conceptions of GONGOs in China, the research on these European organizations is much more thorough and will lend a significant amount of clarification to the GONGO concept. Similarities between GONGOs and QUANGOs include "...[breaking] down the classic public/private dichotomy and [allowing] a wider and more diverse range of organizations and individuals to be involved in conducting public tasks" (Ridley 1996). They include "...special public agencies, state-owned companies

and companies owned by local governments, public-private companies, private companies with contracts for public services, self-governing institutions and voluntary organizations” (Greve 1996). However, there are no strict procedures or criteria as to which organizations can be categorized as GONGOs or QUANGOs (Flinders and Van Thiel 1997).

Research on QUANGOs in the Netherlands has categorically defined three broad types of organizations that could qualify as QUANGOs (cf. Committee Sint 1994: 23), which I subsequently translate to the GONGO literature. The first category is composed of a small number of privatized formerly state-owned enterprises. Comparatively, Quisha Ma (2002) argues that there are three separate levels of national organizations with varying degrees of autonomy. The first level resembles the aforementioned category in the Netherlands in which a small number of organizations with close ties to the PRC act in sort of a supervisory role over the lower levels. The relationship is described as “patron-client” where second level organizations pay fees to the first level for legal status and political protection (Li 1998). The second category of QUANGOs in the Netherlands are manifested in a form of functional decentralization in which a small number of administrative departments have been given greater discretion in policy implementation in more geographically isolated parts of the country. This relates to the second level of Chinese social organizations in that the Dutch agencies are accountable to the organizations above them. The major distinction between the Dutch and Chinese systems occurs at the third and lowest level. In China, this level is comprised largely of voluntary associations that operate with significant autonomy from the PRC, but this autonomy is contingent on the goals and actions of the organizations themselves. For example, because the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has a questionable human rights record, groups with formative goals that involve relieving this ill are often tightly monitored and controlled because of the potential threat they

pose to the regime (Ma 2002). However, organizations with non-political goals are typically left to their own devices with government intervention only at the point where state or party interests are threatened. The third category in the Netherlands is largely comprised of administrative agencies charged with the distribution of government benefits to various parts and societal sectors of the country. Therefore, the organizational hierarchy is present in both countries but they do not directly reflect the central tenets of a corporatist state.

In the interest of offering a distinction between GONGOs and QUANGOs, I would argue that based on the preceding literature, QUANGOs serve a more administrative purpose than GONGOs. Both are similar in terms of their voluntary status, however, the goals and objectives of QUANGOs revolve around making the state's job easier by maintaining control over policy implementation. In this context, I would argue that QUANGOS operate in a more corporatist environment relative to GONGOs. While there is literature to support a similar role for the latter, Chinese GONGOs more accurately reflect an institutionalized form of civil society in which the government monitors the formation of groups, as opposed to the government creating NGOs to handle various administrative tasks.

### The Emergence of GONGOs in China

A number of historical and cultural factors have contributed to the emergence of GONGOs in China. For instance, both Rankin (1986) and Strand (1990) argue that an "incipient civil society" existed in China under the Qing dynasty as a result of the actions of the landowning and merchant elite which caused a public sphere of activity outside the bureaucracy to expand rapidly. As a result of this external development, more and more Chinese citizens at the lower levels of society began to form a series of social organizations conglomerated around

various collective interests. Ma (1995), Wang (1996), and Zhu (1996) argue that as a result of a gradual increase in autonomy over associative matters, these new collective organizations began to develop features of European style civil society. Contrary to their European counterparts, Chinese society conceives of social existence in terms of obligation and interdependence rather than rights and responsibilities (Wakeman 1993). As a result, Chinese civil society was meant to harmonize the relations between society and the state and was subsequently mutually accepted by both sides (Ma 1995). Since 1949, Chinese social organizations have had to adapt to three distinct periods: (1) the socialist reform period, 1950-66; (2) the Cultural Revolution, 1966-76; and (3) the post-Mao and economic reform period from the late 1970s to the present (Ma, 2002). These three phases of interest representation constitute the recent history of Chinese civil society and lend a significant amount of explanatory value to the state of NGO relations in China today.

The formation of GONGOs, as they exist today, began as an offshoot of the economic reforms that came about after the Chinese Cultural Revolution that ended in the mid-1970s with the rise of Deng Xiaoping as the reformist leader of the CCP. In the 1950s, there were three basic forms of what could be construed as a private sphere: the first was an artifact of “old China” consisting of private organizations of an academic and professional nature; the second was largely comprised of friendship associations organized for the promotion of trade and cultural exchange; and the third group was made up of people’s organizations which most closely resembles traditional concepts of civil society. During the Socialist reform era, these collective groups were taken over by the PRC and transformed into governmental NGOs which acted more as administrative agencies than autonomous interest groups. They remained this way until the end of the Cultural Revolution introduced a wave of economic privatization in which many of

these organizations gained varying levels of autonomy although many remained tied to the state in any number of ways (Ma 2002).

In addition, there were a series of historical events and legislation that also contributed to the state of Chinese civil society as it exists today. The pro-democracy protests at Tiananmen Square in the spring of 1989 were the culmination of generations of frustration with the domination of the CCP. Ma (2002) argues that the demonstrations that preceded the massacre in June 1989 were the most salient example of civil society in 20<sup>th</sup> century China. Beja (2006) argues that the protests were the result of a decade long struggle for civil society that was “...born out of the impossibility of creating a political opposition...” to the CCP. In addition to no less than twelve articles from the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, as amended in 1982, that relate to the nonprofit, charitable and philanthropic sector, there are a number of national laws and regulations which are meant to exert some degree of control over the NGO sector (ICNL 2013). The most important of these is the 1998 Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations which requires the registration of any new NGO with MOCA, in addition to requiring a sponsoring organization that is one organizational level below the CCP itself. This and other regulations were a response to the disruption caused by an unregulated civil society that resulted in the 1989 massacre at Tiananmen Square.

One of the main puzzles of GONGOs is that they are difficult to classify as organizations. Often times, they are simply classified as “...organizations which spend public money and fulfill a public function but exist with some degree of independence from politicians” (Greve et al. 1999). However, this definition is nebulous and overly simplistic; as a result it is necessary to delve into the existing literature on the subject in order to develop a appropriate definition of these entities. As of 2001, MOCA defines an NGO as an “...organization formed by citizen

volunteers which carry out activities aimed at realizing the common aspirations of their members in accordance with organizational articles of association” (Chen 2001). From this definition, some of the basic characteristics of NGOs are endorsed by the CCP such as volunteerism, formality, and self-governance, but there is no explicit mention of autonomy or privatization, which according to other definitions are the most critical to the non-governmental status of an organization. The ambiguity of the MOCA definition of an NGO leaves ample malleability in the term itself to warrant the inclusion of any number of organizations whether or not they are affiliated with the CCP. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, a GONGO will be defined as follows: an NGO that initially forms outside the influence of the state in the interest of pursuing a private good which is then subject to approval and supervision by the state apparatus.

The present state of research on Chinese GONGOs is largely comprised of single case studies such as Wu (2003) and Saich (2000). Both reference the sparse existing literature on the subject and incorporate traditional concepts of civil society and corporatism, but Wu is careful to distinguish GONGOs as “...society organizations [who] have been able to reconfigure the relationship between themselves and the state” (Wu 2003: 37). Saich does not offer an explicit definition but, in an argument similar to Wu, notes Leninist forms of control by the state over these organizations and incorporates “state-dominant” theories to explain their relationships with the state.

Wu and Saich both elaborate on the theoretical origins of Chinese GONGOs by contrasting theories of state-led organizational development with competing schools of thought that suggest more privatized origins rooted in the prominence of elite interests. Beja (2006) sides with the former argument, suggesting that an intra-elite process among intellectual leaders led to the expansion of academic journals which incorporate Western ideas and theories which

eventually led to a middle ground transformation and weakened the Marxist-Leninist ideology that had been so crucial during the 1980s. Wu and Saich both argue that many of these organizations are initially created or co-opted by the state as an indirect means to aid in the achievement of state goals through non-traditional avenues such as receiving international assistance from various intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) which is typically reserved for non-state actors and their affiliated goals. It is precisely this type of behavior that has led to GONGOs being mischaracterized as “badly behaving NGOs,” as noted by Steinberg (2001). In this instance, Saich argues that the Chinese government allowed further societal integration of these groups so as to “...prevent a plurality of definitions [from] arising by revising the structure of the regime and the state’s relationship to society” (Saich 2000: 124). Over time however, these organizations develop more autonomy and capacity, often with the assistance of technopoliticians and through the enlistment of former government employees, which allows for the maintenance of ties to the state in the form of a proverbial watchdog.

Saich continues his argument by suggesting that leaders and elites are proponents of this system. Again, Beja supports this argument in his contention that civil society is only allowed to grow where the CCP permits it to do so by exerting a system of control whereby dissidents are allowed to practice within limits under government supervision. In this context, the CCP is the determining power regarding any particular group’s autonomy and will allow these dissenting factions to practice as they will without actually presenting a threat to the hegemony of the party-state. Saich suggests that the demands of modern society for social safety nets led to further integration of these groups as a means to cope with these demands because the state-owned enterprises were overwhelmed and these privatized, market driven social organizations under the control of the state might be the best solution. Government co-optation as well as systematic



modes of repression actually led to a decrease in the prominence of traditionally conceived civil society interests.

Saich then explores both formal and informal modes of negotiation and circumvention that are used by some of these organizations to evade state implemented controls. The ultimate goal of government control was for these organizations to become financially independent of government support within three years of formation, while still maintaining ties to the state, which is an argument similar to that of Wu. However, this autonomy eventually led to significance amounts of influence on behalf of these groups as a result of funds received from international organizations and private donors, similar to funds that might be receive by NGOs. Because the state desires these fund to pursue its own interests, many of the organizations used these resources as a bargaining tool with the states as a means to achieve their own organizational goals.

In sum, the literature on GONGO autonomy offers some important concepts for the following research design. First and foremost, Chinese GONGOs do not fit the mold of a non-governmental organization as originally designated in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Instead, the relationship between any given organization and the state is dynamic and causes a significant amount of variation in the level of autonomy afforded for different groups by the CCP. I also expect that this relationship is highly contingent on the formative goals of the organization and that the state will be more likely to intervene if its interests are threatened. Scholars recognize that the GONGO debate proceeds on a tenuous path because of a lack of theoretical precision and the absence of robust quantitative methodology (Young 2002). But this scholarship can be expanded if the state-society relationship is further articulated using conceptualizations from European literature on similar subject matter and that is the goal of the research set forth herein.

In the next chapter, I will establish the theoretical connection between these features and an organization's autonomy.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORY

In the following chapter, I present the theoretical approach of my thesis, including a series of assumptions around which my theory will be based, as well as a set of hypotheses which I intend to empirically test in a Chapter Five. The goal of this section is to establish the concepts of interest for my research as well as their predicted relationship in terms of addressing the previously posited research question: why are some GONGOs more autonomous than others?

Regarding GONGOs, the primary characteristic of interest is the organization's autonomy from the state. The literature indicates that the *defining* criteria for a GONGO relates to the organization's autonomy in relation to the party-state. According to Nick Young, GONGOs serve two purposes: "One is to receive expertise and philanthropic funding that the government itself finds hard to access, particularly from international sources including INGOs;" the other consideration relates to the organization's distance from the CCP which enables it to explore new areas of work (2002). The "distance" to which Young is referring is the physical distance of the GONGO's headquarters from the CCP headquarters in Beijing. Young has also explicitly categorized organizations such as the All China Women's Federation and the China Society for Human Rights as GONGOs but there is no empirical support for this except to say that they abide by his preceding criteria and he classifies them as such.

Based on these characteristics, the primary operating assumption of this thesis will be that all NGOs under observation will be considered GONGOs. The reason for this assumption is rooted in the work of Keping who argues that the various power relations among the different levels of government in China led to "A mandatory economic structure and a political system featuring unified leadership [that does] not allow for the existence of a relatively independent

civil society” (2000: 9). He argues that because the functions of the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA) include establishing the rules by which civil society organizations form and operate, as well as annual monitoring, inspection and examination of their functions and procedures, that these organizations are under the supervision and scrutiny of the CCP at all times.

Inferred from the previous discussion, the dependent variable for this thesis will be an organization’s autonomy from the state. Without a legitimate and distinct separation from the state, including its various strands of influence, an NGO is that in name only and does not represent a counterweight to the state as posited by Foley and Edwards’ conceptualization of civil society. As a result, it remains to be seen whether the collection of formal, voluntary groups in China is actually civil society or if it is something entirely different. In her cultural assessment of Chinese social organizations, Ma (2002) argues that what we see in China is not civil society at all, rather a form of social corporatism, which is closer to the system practiced in Denmark in which the state acts to preempt the emergence of autonomous groups. Various aspects of this practice are manifested in the amount of control the CCP has exerted over social organizations since the demonstrations and subsequent massacre at Tiananmen Square in 1989.

The previously discussed social corporatist framework is an appropriate foundation for a discussion of GONGOs. The top-down model of interest representation may not be suitable for a general description of all state-society relations in China but it is certainly appropriate for the discussion at hand. Explicitly, the corporatist model is a system by which an activist state preempts the formation of civil society (as traditionally conceived) in order to maintain a hegemonic position and to ensure the pursuit of goals congruent with those of the state. In the case of GONGOs this point is manifest in the implicit relationship that exists between the party-state and the organizations themselves. When addressing the defining criteria of a GONGO, it is

more appropriate to address the common characteristics that GONGOs share and those that are not present in the ostensible GONGO community. As opposed to offering an explicit definition of the term, this assessment and description of the common characteristics will serve as a better explanation of the concept.

Nick Young articulates these characteristics most clearly. For one, GONGOs' areas of interest are "...typically concentrated in the areas of social service provision, economic development, women's rights, human rights and environmental protection" (1998: 68). In a democracy such as the United States, these policy domains typically fall within the state's jurisdiction and are regulated thusly because they usually fall under the classification of a public good, for which the state is typically responsible. But in China these have only become salient policy areas in the last few decades as a result of a wave of modernization that has overtaken the country since the end of the Cultural Revolution. As a result of the state's negligence of these programs, it became necessary for the private sector to address them. However, given the supremacy of the CCP in China, the involvement of the state was somewhat inexorable as it was bound to intervene in any sort of collective action to resolve the public's grievances over these issues. Therefore, with the increasing salience of these concerns to the general public, the Chinese government set about to address them in such a way that they would not be forced to relinquish control over the policy domain itself. It is in this task that the purpose of a GONGO presents itself while also addressing the inherent contradiction in terms: to provide a public good through private means under implicit government supervision.

While the following discussion may share similarities to the previously addressed definition of an NGO, there is a critical distinction. Recall that the purpose of an NGO is to fill the need for a public good where the state ends and society begins. In the case of a GONGO, the

terms simply overlap with the state acting preemptively to maintain control over this gap between public and private domains. By [forcibly] inserting itself into the relationship, the Chinese government is able to exert its public influence in private domains while giving the outward impression of mutual exclusivity. However, research into the organizations themselves reveals another set of characteristics that further distinguish GONGOs from traditional NGOs.

While the relationship is not the same in all instances, more often than not, GONGOs are staffed with former government employees whose pay may even be supplemented by the government itself. Due to the fact that the nature and degree of the CCP's control and involvement is secretive and subject to speculation, it is reasonable to infer that these employees have some interest in ensuring the congruence of the organization's activities with the interests of the state. However, this point is not requisite for GONGO status, it merely serves as an adequate indicator that might be considered for use in future research.

These two characteristics are the most important for GONGO status but they are not the only ones. Other features of GONGOs include the acceptance of government subsidies, which follows logically given the vested interest of the CCP in the organization's goals. However, the immediate question that presents itself is why would the government subsidize an organization from which it expects to receive discrete international donations? The logic of this answer is easily deduced when thought of in the context of the CCP's interest in controlling the organization. It behooves the Chinese government to ensure the survival of certain GONGOs that represent an intermediary through which the government is able to receive international funds that are meant for the organization's cause. By subsidizing these specific organizations, the CCP ensures the continued receipt of these proprietary funds. But these transactions are mostly clandestine in nature and not likely to be recorded given their prohibited nature as dictated by

international regulations regarding the receipt of funds from international organizations.

Therefore, for the purposes of my inquiry, these criteria are not entirely relevant.

These characteristics serve as guidelines for conceptually understanding GONGOs. However, due to the nature of this thesis, the formal definition of an NGO as well as the goals and the purpose of a GONGO will suffice as an appropriate definition. The consequence of this lack of a specific definition is that categorizing which organizations are GONGOs is addressed in my primary operating assumption that all NGOs included in the model are GONGOs.

### Theoretical Assumptions

As He (1997) argues, "...autonomy is a matter of degree," and in this instance, it is the degree to which the CCP permits the organization in question to practice that is of primary concern to this thesis. The extant literature is scattered with references to the power the CCP exerts over most aspects of Chinese society and the NGO sector is no different. Between the requirements to register with the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA), the requisite sponsoring parent organization and the lack of tax benefits for charitable organizations, there is ample reason to infer that any formally organized NGO operating in China is within a proverbial arm's reach of the CCP. Therefore, the first assumption of the theoretical model is that the CCP exerts absolute control over registered NGOs in China. Any NGOs that might fall outside the influence of the CCP are typically unregistered, rural organizations or are registered as business foundations or otherwise, which excludes them from NGO classification even though many are still de facto NGOs but are not able to register with the MOCA because they are not permitted to do so by the CCP. Therefore, these particular organizations are of no consequence to the research at hand.

As a corollary to the social corporatist model of Chinese interest representation as argued by Ma (2002), it stands to reason that under this system NGOs are formed under the control of the party-state; this point has been descriptively researched (Wu 2003; Saich 2000) and theorized extensively (Magana 1988). The system of preemption used in China allows for a limited exercise of interest representation and the minimization of dissident activity which further contributes to the total control of interest representation by the CCP. This finding brings me to the second critical assumption: due to the contemporary model of interest representation in China, it will be assumed that all NGOs are formed and remain active at the behest of the Chinese party-state. As a result of this assumption, the empirical model *will not include* International NGOs (INGOs), Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), or any other organization which was not formed in the PRC or is not registered with the MOCA. The immediate counter argument to this assumption is that there is an intrinsic prejudice based in the idea that only including registered organizations inherently limits the sample size and the research subsequently suffers from selection bias. However, this problem will be subject to the data and any potential limitations.

The previous point regarding available information for Chinese NGOs relates to a relevant distinction between traditional concepts of civil society and the way the de facto interest representations system operates in China. Part of the reason for the distinction between Chinese and traditional Western concepts of civil society relates to non-governmental actors such as religious institutions. For example, Flinders and Thiel (1997) posit that the reason civil society was so successful in Eastern Europe is that participants in various extra-governmental organizations had a support structure outside of the state in the form of religious institutions. Although China has de jure freedom of religion according to their constitution, there is limited de



facto religious practice en masse in the PRC and even active religious institutions that do exist do not constitute a significant threat to the CCP, which is subsequently the only reason they are allowed to practice as such. While this fact typically applied only to lower level, rural organizations for the most part in Eastern Europe, it still represented an institutionalized form of protection for civil society. In China, this protection does not exist because the CCP does not allow any institution, religious or otherwise, to persist in similar size and intensity if it poses a threat to the party-state. As a result, the traditional political conceptualization of civil society in terms of western concepts is not ideal; instead, in the Chinese case it is more prudent to conceive of civil society in sociological terms.

White et al. (1996) articulate this sociological concept by distinguishing individuals as social rather than political beings. This framework is more appropriate than the political conception because the latter implies a dichotomous relationship between civil society and the state which is not entirely suitable given the prevalence of state-party domination in China. Without the typical polarization of state and society as is apparent in Western models of civil society, this re-conceptualization is necessary. As a result, the sociological concept of civil society as outlined by White argues that individuals should be characterized as social beings with no interest in representing a counter-weight to the state. Rather, the formation of the cross-cutting, horizontal relationships of civil society occurs solely for the purpose of actualizing group interests in the name of group interests as opposed to developing a collective interest to counteract the power of the party-state. This point is elaborated by Pye (1999) in his criticism of the Chinese conceptualization of social capital as embodied in a complex system of institutional nepotistic personal connections among family members, friends, and acquaintances with the same birthplace or from the same school. It is more effective to think of Chinese civil society in

these terms as it leads to a better understanding of the top-down model that has recently been in practice. There have been many examples of Chinese organizations that have attempted to combat the state in arenas such as human rights violations or pro-democracy demonstrations (i.e. Tiananmen Square), to which the state has responded forcefully and even violently as a means to suppress these anti-state activities. These violent responses to pro-democracy demonstrations have discouraged further attempts at government subversion and as it stands, civil society organizations, aka NGOs, typically operate in arenas that are mutually exclusive from the interests of the state.

The aforementioned sociological framework of Chinese civil society establishes the basis for the third assumption: as defined by the MOCA, NGOs offer no assertion of civic power against the party-state. As discussed in the literature and established by the previous theoretical assumptions, the CCP exerts control over NGOs and as a result these organizations are unable to pursue goals that have not been sanctioned by the state. The primary example of this would be the CCP's efforts to control rights protection activities as evidenced by years of human rights abuses, according to Freedom House's human rights score in previous decades (Freedom House 2013). Implicit in this assumption, as well as the first, is the fact that the CCP will act to control or eliminate any groups it perceives as a threat to the interests of the party-state. If NGOs and other groups are unable to pursue goals or activities that are not advocated by the state, it follows that there can be no assertion of power against the state. The counter argument to this point would be the example of underground groups and organizations that represent interests and goals which are counter to those of the state. However, because these groups are underground and therefore undocumented, their inclusion lies outside of the empirical model and must be relegated to the realm of conjecture.

However, a consequence of the third assumption is the ambiguity of the threat posed by organizations to the party-state. Therefore, the fourth assumption relates to the perception of threat by the CCP: the functional area of an NGO constitutes a threat to the CCP if perceived as such. Because the CCP exerts such hegemonic power over most aspects of life in China, potential threats to the regime are perceived at the discretion of the regime itself. While this assumption may seem endogenous to the third, it is in fact distinct and therefore necessary. The reason for this is that not all NGOs are interested in asserting any kind of power against the state. Most, if not a plurality of Chinese NGOs serve non-political purposes and therefore do not constitute a threat to the Chinese government and the CCP has no vested interest in exerting a significant degree of control over these particular groups. But again, this presents a tautological counterpoint in that the politically oriented groups that might attempt to develop are preempted by the Chinese government and not permitted to persist. As a result, it follows that the only organizations that will be included in the model will be those that do not constitute a significant threat to the CCP, precisely because the party has allowed them to form, register and persist.

The last, but certainly not least important, assumption involves the evolutionary process of Chinese NGOs. First, it is prudent to understand that Chinese NGOs begin on their own and are subsequently involved in a long and tedious process of registration and compliance, as well as existing in an almost perpetual state of government surveillance (ICNL 2013). This process can be loosely articulated as follows: in the first incarnation of the NGO, a series of individuals have organized, formally or otherwise, to achieve a collective goal; second, the group takes on the characteristics of a formal organization, including membership requirements as well an official set of rules and operational guidelines by which the organization sets about to achieve its goals, whatever those goals may be; third, as the organization begins to take on the shape and

characteristics of an NGO, as defined by the MOCA, it seeks out a parent or “sponsor” organization to supervise its activities so that it may register with the MOCA; fourth, the group formally registers its NGO status with the MOCA; fifth, the organization must undergo a clandestine series of protocols and investigations by which the CCP is able to determine whether or not the organization and its goals represent a threat to the party-state apparatus; sixth, once the supposed neutrality of the NGO has been established by the CCP, it is free to practice as it deems appropriate, subject to monitoring by the CCP, until the organizational goal has been accomplished; and finally, once the goal has been accomplished, the terminal nature of the organization comes into question as to whether or not it ceases to exist, having fulfilled its goal, or perpetuates in the interest of a new goal, in which case the process may begin again somewhere between steps one and four. The primary assumption derived from this process is this: at any given point in time, the NGOs observed in this thesis will be somewhere between phases four and six. The reason for this is that it will not be possible to track, score and classify any NGOs that are in the first three phases because of their lack of formal recognition by the MOCA.

These assumptions largely revolve around the concept of party-state dynamics. In China, it is difficult if not impossible to distinguish between the two, and the traditional assumptions of a civil society argument must be relaxed in order to arrive at a series of hypotheses about the interaction between the state and society. Due to the fact that the CCP and PRC are not mutually exclusive in any conventional sense, traditional theories regarding the dynamic between political parties and the state are not entirely relevant to the issue at hand. As a result, the preceding assumptions are a necessary component of any theory regarding NGO autonomy in China.

## Hypotheses

As discussed in the previous section, the variables that contribute to the autonomy of a given NGO are rooted in the interest the CCP has in controlling the organization itself. Therefore, the most critical independent variable for this research will be the organization's goals. In other words, to what end does the organization exist? As previously discussed, organizations that constitute the biggest threat to the interests of the regime will be subject to the greatest scrutiny by the CCP. As a result, the operational autonomy of the organization will be affected. This point brings me to my first hypothesis:

H1: Organizations that represent a functional area that could be a potential threat to the CCP regime will have less autonomy than organizations that do not represent such a possible threat.

To understand this relationship it is best to think of it in terms of three ordinal tiers. The first tier is comprised of organizations that operate in the areas of rights protection activities, pro-democracy movements, human rights, and the environment. This top tier will operate with the least amount of autonomy because their activities are oriented around goals that exist in direct contradiction to the Chinese government's objectives and interests. For example, the Chinese government is technically a version of free market communism whereby the state apparatus exerts influence in all aspects of life while simultaneously suppressing the rights of its citizens. As a result, it is resistant to the formation of democratic movements and acts to preempt their formation by controlling the NGO sector through the use of regulatory procedures. In addition, the government operates in such a manner that concealing its questionable human rights record acts as a means to perpetuate the anti-democratic nature of the communist state. Contemporary examples of scholarly literature regarding the human rights of Chinese citizens typically invoke data compiled by sources outside of China such as Freedom House or Polity because internally

valid and reliable sources of Chinese human rights data are not generally available. As a result, these top tier organizations operate with the least amount of autonomy from the Chinese government.

The second tier is comprised of groups that represent interests which may not directly threaten the regime itself but constitute the means by which resistance may develop and arise. This tier includes groups pursuing interests such as education funding, scientific research, labor and the media. The common trait among these types of organizations is that they embody a collection of interests that serve as a precursor to state resistance. For example, research and education are central tenets to Chinese society but it is the subject matter that is of importance to the CCP. Part of the reason for the modernization after the Cultural Revolution was an influx of diverse ideas that led to a rapidly growing economy that has since catapulted China to the top of the global market for goods and services. Implicit in this argument is the notion that the CCP would prefer this course of development to stay on track in such a way that its power will not be threatened. As a result, I would argue that this second tier constitutes the initial manifestation of the state's preemption of civil society. In line with theories of civil society and political culture it stands to reason that increases in social science education and research would increase the public's awareness of its repressed state and lead to the formation of groups that would seek to resolve this condition. As a result, it behooves the Chinese party-state to intervene in these affairs in order to control the type of knowledge that is being produced by the scientific community. However, because educators and researchers do not constitute a direct threat to the regime itself, it follows that the CCP would not exert as much control over these organizations as those that are perceived to be a direct threat to the interests of the regime.

The third tier is comprised of organizations whose interests do not constitute a threat to the regime and whose functional areas do not constitute the means by which a threat could potentially emerge. However, this does not mean that these groups exist outside the realm of the CCP's influence. Because the groups are registered with the MOCA, the CCP is aware of their existence and because of the sponsor-organization requirement, the goals of these third tier organizations are known to the CCP, but due to the nature of their functional areas, these groups are not subject to strict scrutiny by the CCP. The goals of these organizations include: arts and culture, children and youth, emergency relief, as well as any number of miscellaneous organizations that the Chinese government does not perceive as a threat. This tier is comprised of groups whose functions represent the more traditional conceptualization of an NGO. Because the goals of these groups largely revolve around charitable causes and social issues, the Chinese government is more likely to allow them more operational autonomy. I would argue that the reason for this is that these third tier organizations address mostly private concerns and therefore the state is less likely to intervene than at the other two levels.

With regards to the previous hypothesis it is important to note that it does not mean to imply that the organizations' activities are the inherent cause of state intervention; rather, according to the assumptions of the model, it is the perception of a potential threat by the CCP that causes the state to seek to more tightly control the affairs of a given organization. As a result, the model should perform as theoretically predicted for each corresponding tier of organizations.

The second independent variable will be the age of an organization. The terms used herein are somewhat ambiguous in that an organization's inception could imply the year of its actual formation, which would in fact precede its registration with the MOCA and the actual

commencement of its operational activities, but the measurement of this variable is contingent on data availability and the reliability of coding. But this precise definition is not necessary at this stage and therefore, I move on to the second hypothesis:

H2: Older NGOs are likely to be more autonomous than younger ones.

According to the theoretical assumptions, if this hypothesis is to perform as predicted then the relationship between the CCP and the organization will change over time, with the CCP gradually relinquishing influence over the group. The corollary is that as the state reduces its intervention, the group functions with increasing autonomy. The dynamic nature of this relationship is indicated by the assumptions of the model. If NGOs offer no assertion of civic power against the state, then it is reasonable to infer that the organization will persist for longer periods of time. It follows that an organization that limits its functional threat to the CCP will be more likely to persevere for a greater length of time than a group by which the CCP is threatened.

H3: The greater the distance an organization is headquartered from Beijing, the more autonomy that organization will have.

The third hypothesis is rooted in a geographical argument posited by Nick Young regarding factors that contribute to a group's autonomy and relates solely to the distance each GONGO is from Beijing. At approximately 3,747,000 square miles, China constitutes the third largest governed region in the world, only behind Russia and Canada. As a result, I would argue that the distance an organization's activities occur from Beijing has a positive effect on the CCP's ability to maintain control over various NGOs. The basic logic behind the argument is that if an NGO is operating in a corner of a province or municipality that is a significant distance from Beijing, the operational headquarters of the CCP, it stands to reason that the CCP is able to exert less control over the NGO's activities than if it were closer to Beijing. However, the immediate counterargument to this point relates to the particular system of quasi-federalism used



in China, which will be discussed shortly. Many scholars argue that political power in China is already decentralized while some government officials contend that there is no, and never will be, any federal system in China (Zhiyue 2004). But the nuances of these federal arguments are not relevant to the point at hand.

H4: An NGO's autonomy from the CCP is contingent on its location within the various administrative divisions of China's provincial structure.

The fourth hypothesis relates to the decentralized nature of China's allegedly federal system of government. Please note that the term "federalism" is not meant to imply that China's governmental structure is similar in any way to federal systems such as that of the United States. The term itself is meant to describe the nature of power distribution from the central government authority to the various provincial governments. A 2004 study found that provincial administrators have greater institutional power over their individual provinces than those of the central government (Zhiyue 2004). There are 33 defined territories in China consisting of 22 provinces, four municipalities, five autonomous regions, and two special administrative regions. In addition to the geographical distance from Beijing, I would also argue that these categorizations have an effect on an NGO's autonomy. For example, municipalities are at a higher level of a political status than cities but operate directly under the Chinese government. Provinces are led by a provincial committee that is headed by a secretary whose power is superordinate to the provincial governor. Both the secretary and the governor are accountable to the CCP but their operational autonomy is greater than that of the municipalities. The case is the same with both autonomous regions and special administrative regions. Autonomous regions contain concentrated populations of ethnic minorities with their own local governments that have greater authority to exercise their own local laws and jurisdictions. Special administrative regions are typically highly autonomous from the CCP and have their own provincial divisions

with a respective series of chief executives for each of these subdivisions. If we were to arrange these categories hierarchically according to their autonomy from the CCP, it would be in this order: municipalities are the least autonomous, followed by provinces, autonomous regions, and special administrative regions. Following this ordinal categorization, I would argue that as the hierarchy descends an NGO's autonomy from the CCP increases.

In these four hypotheses the groundwork has been laid for an initial empirical study into the GONGO puzzle. The next chapter will capitalize on the aforementioned assumptions and hypotheses to develop a series of empirical tests by which the usefulness of these variables for future research will be determined. If the models perform as theoretically predicted then a foundation for quantitative research into the GONGO puzzle will have begun. As of yet, this subject matter remains quantitatively unexplored and researchers are left to speculate as to the extent of the effect that these predictors will have.

To conclude this chapter, it is important to note that these variables are not meant to provide a comprehensive explanation of all variation in the autonomy of Chinese NGOs; rather, they are the ones predicted to yield the most significant results in this initial systematic inquiry. Future research and theoretical development will have a foundation on which to base future research as a result of the conclusions derived from this thesis. Negative findings will lead to an innovation of theory and of methods while findings that confirm my hypothesis will be subject to scrutiny and future testing. The goal of this chapter was to establish those variables of greatest import to the research question at hand and it remains to be seen whether the models will perform as one would expect.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter discusses the concept operationalization of the variables, the characteristics of the data and the methodological components of this thesis. I begin by addressing the dependent variables to be included in the models, as well as the justifications for using them as proxies for GONGO autonomy; second, all four concepts for the hypotheses are reviewed as well as the rationale for their use and inclusion in each model; and finally, an outline of regression models to be employed is discussed.

#### Variables and Data

The data for this thesis are comprised of a series of variables derived and coded from the China Development Brief (CDB), an English language translation project under the Beijing Civil Society Development Research Center (BCSDRC). The mission statement of the CDB is to “...improve understanding and cooperation between the international community and China’s growing civil society sector, and in turn, to give that sector a greater voice in the international community. [They] do this by providing edited translations of CDB’s Chinese-language reporting on China’s civil society sector, and passing on news of important developments in civil society overseas to CDB” (CDB 2012). The organization itself was formed in 2003 as an information sharing and networking platform for Chinese NGOs. It publishes the Chinese CDB, which is the longest running independent online and print publication covering the nonprofit, NGO sector in China and was formed with the help of Nick Young, whose work serves as the basis for several of the variable concepts around which the majority of this chapter is focused.

The relevant data were developed from the CDB’s NGO directory which is comprised of 250 NGOs representing twenty five different functional areas of operation. Each of the participating organizations is a member of the grassroots, independent NGO sector and was selected for inclusion because they were either tracked by the CDB or recommended by the CDB’s nine regional NGO partners with whom the CDB consulted in the formation of the NGO directory. Each NGO in the directory was sent a form to complete regarding their functional areas of practice, annual budget and other general information about the organization. The form also requests information about the group’s major sources of funding as well as other partner organizations with whom they collaborate frequently. For the purposes of this thesis, only those groups that returned the form were included in the analysis; and due to the exclusion of international NGOs from this analysis, in addition to data availability, the dataset is comprised of 176 organizations that submitted information and the unit of analysis will be the GONGO. However, there were many organizations that did not submit complete information and as a result, the number of observations in different models is expected to vary.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Obs</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>
Budgetfunders	110	14.371	1.690	10.820	18.699
Funders	176	3.357	3.405	0	23
Sector	176	.557	.498	0	1
TriSectors	176	2.182	.822	1	3
InvSectors	176	.739	.441	0	1
Age	176	8.824	4.793	2	29
Age2	176	100.700	122.121	4	841
Distance	176	1391.42	774.853	5	3477
Level	176	1.284	.489	1	3
Projects	176	4.159	1.401	0	7

There are two dependent variables for this thesis.<sup>1</sup> The first is an additive measure of the number of funding organizations listed on the organization's directory page (*Funders*) and the other is a combination of *Funders* and the logged transformation of the organization's annual budget as listed on the individual directory page (*Budgetfunders*). The reason for two dependent variables is rooted in the inherent difficulty of conceptualizing a GONGO's autonomy and I review the reasons for both in turn.

The first independent variable, *Funders*, is a count measure of "Major Funders" listed on the organization's CDB directory page. According to the individual pages funding organizations include but are not limited to: other NGOs, Chinese governmental agencies, international NGOs and external government organizations. However, there is a problem that may arise from the coding used for the *Funders* variable that may lead to problems with the performance of the respective models. This complication arises because many of the entities listed on the directory pages are plural in nature such as "all levels of women's organizations." These were coded as one funding organization because it is not possible to determine or subsequently verify the number of funders that can be derived from this ambiguous terminology. As a result of this coding, the number of funding organizations listed on the web page may actually be less than the actual number of organizations that contribute to the GONGO's budget. Therefore, results may not be appropriately interpreted but I would argue that any potentially favorable results would be further reinforced if the actual data were available because there would simply be more variation to be explained by the independent variables and it follows from this that coefficients would most likely be larger if more data were available.

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<sup>1</sup> The literature review included an extensive search for an existing precedent by which to code the dependent variable. However, empirical data on NGO autonomy is essentially non-existent; therefore, *Funders* and *Budgetfunders* are used as the dependent variables for the reasons set forth in this chapter.

In addition, there is a degree of ambiguity in the term “funders” itself. Intuitively, it seems obvious that a “funder” is someone who contributes financial resources to the organization for the pursuit of common interests. However, as with other survey responses, there is the possibility of a problem with subjectivity in the manner in which a respondent interprets and answers the question (Zaller 1992). Therefore, someone who responds may interpret a “funder” as someone who donates other resources, or in some other context which may ultimately skew results. Regardless, these data serve as appropriate operationalizations for the concept at hand.

*Funders* serves as a suitable initial indicator for a GONGO’s operational autonomy because it directly relates to the sources of funds for the GONGO’s activities. I argue that higher numbers of funders equate to greater autonomy for the group in question. The logic behind this suggests the more funders that contribute to an organization the less accountable the organization is to any single entity and therefore operates with greater autonomy. The immediate counter-argument to this point would be that because of the increase in the number of funding organizations, the more likely it is that the group would have less autonomy because the number of groups to which the GONGO is accountable would decrease the amount of latitude with which the group is permitted to act. This follows from the notion that different funders expect varied organizational pursuits as a result of their contributions which would seemingly lead to conflicting interest and debates among GONGO leaders as to the most appropriate means by which to spend the funds, which would subsequently decrease the operational autonomy of the organization. However, *Funders* will serve as the initial dependent variable with *Budgetfunders* essentially serving as a robustness check on the validity of the autonomy concept presented in Chapter 3.

The second dependent variable, *Budgetfunders*, is presented as an additive combination

of the logged transformation of the GONGO's annual operating budget as shown on its individual directory page and its *Funders* value. Its descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1. Given the theoretical predictions of the hypotheses as well as the research question, I argue that the *Budgetfunders* variable will serve as an appropriate proxy for an organization's autonomy because groups with higher operating budgets and high numbers of funders are more likely to have higher levels of activity in the relevant sector of interest. The logged transformation of a group's budget was added to its number of funding organizations because the budget alone does not serve as an adequate indicator on its own due to the fact that one funder could be contributing a substantial amount of money to the group's activities, in which case the theory suggests the group would be less autonomous based on its accountability to one source. In addition, an organization's operating budget is a specific value that in and of itself will result in limited bias within the interpretation of its coefficients. The logged transformation is necessary as a means to eliminate some of the outliers in the data and for greater ease of interpretation.

In addition, because the additive term is indicative of the latitude with which the GONGO is permitted to act, but not necessarily of how active it actually is, a control variable will be included to account for this. *Projects* is a count measure of the number of active projects listed on the organization's page and is appropriate for inclusion in the model as a control because it accounts for the level of activity by the GONGO. In accordance with the theory, I would argue that higher numbers of active projects are indicative of greater autonomy and controlling for this is necessary because a group with a high number of funders and a substantial budget could potentially be myopic in their activities as a result of funders' demands which would indicate less operational autonomy. Therefore, *Projects* will be included as a control to account for this theoretical problem.

The first independent variable relates to the organizational goals of the GONGOs. According to the CDB directory, there are 25 different sectors in which NGOs operate and many of the sectors overlap within the operations of a given organization. These functional areas range from seemingly benign goals such as “Culture,” to areas that could be construed as jeopardizing CCP interests such as “Legal Aid” or “Women/Gender.” These various categorizations were proffered by the CDB as part of the form that was sent out and the options may therefore be limited in terms of how the group, or merely the person completing the form, perceives its organizational goals. Due to the many instances in which the functional areas overlapped, a nominal variable was not appropriate for this concept. Therefore, a categorical dummy variable was used for each sector and subsequently included in both models. According to theoretical expectations, some of these sectors should affect a group’s autonomy more than others and this variation will be addressed in the analysis. Given that the first hypothesis is concerned with the sector in which an GONGO is active, and not whether these sectors overlap or interact, it is not prudent to account for this overlap or interaction in the model; therefore, a dummy for whether or not the group is active in that particular sector is appropriate. As a result, GONGOs are coded as a “1” if the sector is listed on their directory page and “0” if it is not. Due to the fact that many NGOs in the dataset are active in more than one sector, this system of coding serves as a suitable indicator for the concept at hand. For relevant models, *Animal Protection* will be excluded as the reference category.

Based on the expectations set forth by Nick Young (1998), I predict that the first tier of organizations to have the lowest autonomy coefficients will be in the following sectors: *Environment, Legal Aid, LGBT, Ethnic Minorities* and *Women/Gender*. For these sectors, significant, negative coefficients are predicted due to expectations of lower autonomy. As



outlined in the theory, the second tier of organizations, those with slightly higher autonomy scores than the first tier, will include the following sectors: *Education, Think Tanks, Media/Information* and *Labor/Migrants*. The coefficients for these sectors are expected to be significant, but the directionality could be positive or negative—thus, it is expected that the substantive change of the coefficient will be proportionally greater than those of the first tier, indicating greater autonomy. Negative coefficients are expected for the first two tiers because the presence of impact variables in these tiers is predicted to affect an organization’s autonomy negatively, thereby resulting in negative coefficients for these first two tiers although the size of the coefficients is expected to differ. The third and final tier is comprised of organizations that are considered benign to CCP interests and should result in positive and substantive coefficients based on the presence of impact variables in these sectors.<sup>2</sup>

The second independent variable is the age of an organization. This measurement was calculated according the “Year of Formation” as indicated on the individual pages of the CDB’s NGO directory. The listed year was then subtracted from 2010, the year in which the survey was completed and returned to the CDB. Due to the fact that specific information regarding the “Year of Formation” was not included in the directory and the questionnaire is not publicly available, it cannot be determined whether the formative year was the one in which the group collectivized their interests, registered with the MOCA, or simply began to actively engage in organizational pursuits. Regardless, the same question was posited to each group in the same manner and whoever was responding to the survey answered it in accordance with the group’s desires or with their interpretation of when the group formed. Therefore, *ceteris paribus*, this measurement of an organization’s age serves as an appropriate indicator for the purposes of the second hypothesis.

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<sup>2</sup> Third tier sectors include: Animal Protection; Capacity Building; Children; Community Development; CSR; Disabilities; Disaster Relief; Elderly; HIV/AIDS; Poverty Relief; Public Health; Rural Development; Social Enterprise; Social Work; Volunteering.

Given the predicted relationship of the second hypothesis, I expect positive and significant coefficients for this variable across all models. In addition, because of the dynamic nature of a GONGO's relationship with the state, a quadratic transformation may potentially be used in lieu of the first order form of the *Age* variable, the results of which will be discussed if necessary.

For the third independent variable, the distance in kilometers between an organization's headquarters and Beijing, China, is used; the primary argument behind this hypothesis is that groups operating further away from the capital are less likely to encounter governmental interference in the pursuit of organizational goals. The *Distance* measurement was calculated as the traveling distance between both points and was developed using Google Earth to establish the distance between the points. While it may seem more appropriate to use an "as the crow flies" measurement, this measurement is more adequate because an absolute geographical distance does not encompass the difficulties inherent in reaching certain provinces in China. The reasoning behind the inclusion of this variable relates to the ability of the Chinese government to control or monitor the GONGO in question. Due to remoteness or other extraneous variables such as the proximity of airports or available roads, some GONGOs might be more difficult to communicate with or to physically control than others in terms of their distance from the capital. For example, it is reasonable to assume that a group operating 100 km from Beijing is more easily monitored than one operating 1500 km away, primarily due to the fact that the latter GONGO could very well ignore correspondence or other non-punitive measures for longer periods of time if the group in question operates at a greater distance from Beijing. However, implicit in this assumption is the notion that a group seeking to operate in a potentially controversial sector would desire to operate at a greater distance from Beijing in order to function with greater autonomy. The tautology of this point is moot however, given the inability

to know and understand the particular motivations of a group for selecting their particular base of operations. In addition, the variation in functional goals is controlled through the *Sector* variables and addressed in my model. As a result, I expect greater distances to result in higher autonomy figures in this dependent variable; therefore, I expect positive and significant coefficients for all models.

The fourth independent variable is an ordinal measurement of the various administrative zones in which GONGOs operate. This variable is coded on an ordinal scale in which the regions predicted to operate with the most autonomy will have the highest values. The *Level* variable is coded as follows: Special administrative regions are a “4,” autonomous regions are a “3,” provinces are a “2” and municipalities as a “1,” in accordance with the theoretical hierarchy. The reasoning for this ordinal scale is based on the criteria for each category as set forth in Articles 30 and 31 of the PRC constitution.

“Municipalities” is technically a short term for Direct-Control Municipality or Municipality Directly under the Central Government. In the context of administrative levels, municipalities are technically at the same level as a province but operate in a manner similar to that of a city in terms of bureaucracy and governmental structure. Each municipality has a mayor who is also a delegate to the national legislature, but the highest administrative authority belongs to the Secretary of the CCP Municipal Committee, also known as the Party Secretary. At this time there are four municipalities in the PRC: Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and Chongqing; but there have been as many as eleven at any given time since the end of the Qing Dynasty. The Party Secretary constitutes a direct tie to the CCP and therefore, it is reasonable to predict that GONGOs headquartered in these administrative regions will operate with the least amount of autonomy.

The second tier of the administrative hierarchy is comprised of provinces. Geographically, provinces cover the greatest amount of land in the CCP, and subsequently, theirs are the largest in terms of the number of areas within China. Provinces are led by a provincial committee headed by a secretary, although different in occupational function from the aforementioned Party Secretary, who is superordinate to the provincial governor. At this time there are twenty two provinces in the PRC and they comprise a substantial majority of the Chinese land mass. Provinces are subordinate to municipalities in the hierarchy of the model for two reasons; one, the lack of a Party Secretary removes the direct tie to the CCP that exists in municipalities; second, the sheer area of China covered by provinces dictates that power is likely less concentrated than in the smaller municipality areas. Therefore, it follows that GONGOs operating in provincial areas operate with greater autonomy than those in municipalities. Worthy of note in this section is that, technically, the Chinese government considers Taiwan one of its provinces although that classification is in a perpetual state of dispute by the Taiwanese government. The CDB sides with the latter argument and therefore, Taiwan is not included in the model.

Third tier zones include autonomous regions. At this time, there are five autonomous regions in China but only three of those regions contain operational NGOs, according to the CDB. Despite this point, autonomous regions play an important part of my theoretical model as I would argue that GONGOs operating in these regions are more autonomous than in the previous two tiers. The reason for this is that autonomous regions have more de facto legislative rights than provinces or municipalities, although the de facto status of these rights remains in dispute. In addition, autonomous regions have their own local governments with no direct tie to the CCP and are also classified as minority entities that contain more concentrated populations of

minority ethnic groups. Regardless, based on their categorizations, I would argue that groups practicing in autonomous regions have greater functional autonomy in terms of their relationship with the state than those in the previously addressed categories.

The fourth and final tier of the administrative hierarchy is comprised of Special Administrative Regions as outlined in Article 31 of the PRC Constitution. Some might argue that organizations operating in these areas would be subject to greater scrutiny than provinces and municipalities because they operate under the direct supervision of the Chinese government. However, these regions are different from the province/municipality structure in that they are in fact separate and distinct from the Chinese government because they have their own legislatures and governing bodies. At this time, only Hong Kong and Macau are considered among China's Special Administrative Regions. Despite the fact that these regions are highly active in the China's economy, for the purposes of this thesis, only two NGOs submitted information regarding their activities and therefore, the number of observations in this category will be minimal.

The categorization and coding for this final independent variable is justified by the historical and political circumstances in each region. However, while this series of coding is based on the de jure operation of administrative regions, it could be argued that these descriptions and ordinal categorizations are not congruent with the de facto process in any given region. It could also be argued that there is variation among the different categories in terms of autonomy from the Chinese government, i.e. some provinces are less tightly controlled than other provinces; but this is a deviation from the point of this variable. The hypothesis itself is focused on the categorization of the administrative region in which a GONGO is headquartered and as a result, variation within the category is not prudent to the research question and its

subsequent hypothesis. The reasoning behind this is supported by the fact that further division of these four groupings would involve a system of subjective coding whereby the impending results might be skewed due to the system of judgment coding in use. By using the categorizations as outlined in Articles 30 and 31 of the Chinese constitution, the common criteria and subsequent inclusion in each hierarchical tier is justified according to the terms outlined by the Chinese government. Based on the ordinal scale previously described in relation to the predicted effects in the fourth hypothesis, I expect positive coefficients and significant results.

### Methodology

Having established the source and coding for the variables of importance, the first model will use the *Funders* dependent variable and will be performed using a negative binomial regression model due to the count outcome of the variable measurement. The second model for *Budgetfunders* will be performed using ordinary least squares (OLS) methodology due to its continuous nature. All models will be performed using robust standard errors to correct for heteroskedasticity within the model. The initial main effect model will include all categorical variables dictated by the first hypothesis with *Animal Protection* excluded as the reference category; *Age*, *Distance* and *Level* will also be included as predictors, with *Projects* as a control. One potential problem of this initial model relates to degree of freedom. Model fit tests will dictate whether or not the model contains superfluous variables which will be indicated by poor R squared values; step-wise regressions will then be run to determine the variables of importance and will proceed from there. In addition, because there are 25 different sectors for my first categorical variable, it may be necessary to compress and dichotomize that variable in the interest of model parsimony. Variables will be coded according to the tier one and tier two

arguments of Hypothesis 1 with the impact variables of the first two tiers coded as a “1” and all other sectors coded as a “0.” This variable will be identified as *Sector* and should correct for any potentially problematic fit test results and create a more parsimonious model.

As an initial robustness check on the model, a trichotomous version of the *Sector* variable will be used to confirm the effect of three different tiers of the first hypothesis argument. In addition, because of the different number of potential outcomes, the coefficient will not indicate what changes are derived from which level of the dependent variable. Positive results will then necessitate further investigation into what effects are caused by which level. Having addressed all necessary robustness checks and relevant models, the next chapter will address their results and offer a discussion of their implications for future research.

## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS

The purpose of this chapter is to perform, review and to test the hypotheses set forth in Chapter 3. I determine what, if any, is the relationship between the variables of importance and whether that relationship is reflective of theoretical predictions. In that process, this chapter provides a series of explanations and responses to the posited research question.

In total, data were available for 176 NGOs in 2010, however, due to missing budget data, only 110 observations were available for the *Budgetfunders* model. This chapter will begin with an analysis of the main effect negative binomial and OLS models, including an interpretation and discussion of the results; then a series of robustness checks will be conducted in order to verify the subsequent findings of the initial models; this will be followed by an analysis of the overall performance of the models as well as potential explanations for poor performance and differential findings. A discussion of the results and their implications for future research will conclude this chapter.

#### Funders

The initial model was performed using all of the variables specified in Chapter 4, including all 25 categorical dummies for the various functional areas of GONGOs. Recall that Hypothesis 1 revolved around the organizational goals of an NGO. As shown by Model 1 in Table 2, 25 categorical variables were used to categorize the relevant sectors in which an NGO was active. In the *Funders* model, only one variable confirmed the expectations of Hypothesis 1: *Legal Aid*. Z-scores and percent changes were both significant and substantive indicating that involvement in this sector has a substantially negative effect on an NGO's autonomy. Despite



this sole affirmative finding, support for this first tier argument is also found in two other sectors: *Women/Gender* and *LGBT*. Negative coefficients for these coefficients are indicative of the predicted relationship; however, these results, in addition to the poor performance of *Environment* and *Ethnic Minorities* does not allow for the confirmation of the first tier argument of Hypothesis 1.

**Table 2. Initial Negative Binomial Regression Model w/ All Categorical Variables and Robust SEs**

	Model 1	% Change
Capacity Building	0.304 (0.238)	35.5
Children	-0.243 (0.166)	-21.5
Community Devel.	0.0739 (0.185)	7.7
CSR	-0.204 (0.464)	-18.5
Culture	0.589** (0.269)	80.3
Disabilities	0.267 (0.273)	30.6
Disaster Relief	0.638* (0.375)	89.2
Education	0.0892 (0.196)	9.3
Elderly	-0.305 (0.363)	-26.3
Environment	0.0622 (0.198)	6.4
Ethnic Minorities	-0.784** (0.397)	-54.3
HIV/AIDs	0.636** (0.295)	88.8
Labor & Migrants	0.190 (0.210)	21.0
Legal Aid	-1.603*** (0.398)	-79.9
LGBT	-0.278 (0.343)	-24.2
Media/Information	-0.426 (0.315)	-34.7

	Model 1	% Change
Poverty Relief	-0.528*** (0.200)	-41.0
Public Health	0.227 (0.310)	25.5
Rural Devel.	0.213 (0.226)	23.8
Social Enterprise	-0.654 (0.825)	-48.0
Social Work	0.199 (0.282)	22.0
Think Tanks	-1.645*** (0.387)	-80.7
Volunteering	-0.148 (0.239)	-13.8
Women/Gender	0.429 (0.265)	53.6
Age	0.0224 (0.0154)	2.3
Distance	-2.11e-05 (0.000121)	-0.0
Level	0.185 (0.183)	20.3
Projects	0.0614 (0.0515)	6.3
LnAlpha	-0.927*** (0.224)	
Constant	0.367 (0.462)	-0.927*** (0.224)
Observations	176	176

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

For the second tier of the Hypothesis 1 hierarchy I predicted proportionally smaller coefficients than the first tier but that directionality could be either positive or negative. To begin, the poor results of the first tier hinders the viability of the argument for the second tier. In this regard, the second tier did not conform to theoretical expectations. Namely that the model failed to achieve significance in any of the four specified sectors and that several functional areas fall into the incorrect tier. If we abide by the remaining criteria for tier two status, that the substantive coefficient would be proportionately less than tier one groups, and compare their

results to the three tier one groups that indicated the predicted relationship, we can see that the four remaining tier two groups have higher percent changes than those of tier one. Recall that tier two predictions only specified that the coefficients would only be proportionally greater than those of tier one, indicating higher degrees of autonomy; therefore, support for the tier two argument was been found, although  $p$  values for these variables indicated that the support is negligible.

The third tier argument presented the most interesting results regarding Hypothesis 1; namely that *Disaster Relief* and *Poverty Relief* achieved .05 level significance while *Culture* and *HIV/AIDS* achieved significant results at .1 levels. These contradict theoretical expectations because third tier organizations were expected to result in non-significant coefficients. While support for the third tier argument is provided by *Culture*, *HIV/AIDS*, and *Disaster Relief* based on substantial percent changes, the negative coefficient and substantive change on *Poverty Relief* would warrant inclusion in tier one and I intend to address this point in my discussion.

Despite intriguing results for the Hypothesis 1 variables, Hypotheses 2, 3 and 4 received limited support from the initial version of the *Funders* model. Incorrect directionality and a weak coefficient for the *Age* variable suggest that Hypothesis 2 is unconfirmed. Preliminary correlations between *Age* and *Funders* revealed a positive relationship but the weakness of this relationship was reinforced by the model's poor performance. The percent change confirms this problem and I can safely say that Model 1 fails to confirm the second hypothesis even though the results of the naïve models suggest that the relationship may be curvilinear in nature and a quadratic term is most likely necessary. Therefore the remaining models in this chapter will include both *Age* and *Age*<sup>2</sup>. The extremely poor percent change of the *Distance* variable is a reflection of the large values input for the various NGOs but it is not of terrible concern as the

coefficient does not approach statistical significance. The only supporting evidence that the initial model provided for Hypothesis 3 is correct directionality, which was surprising given the negative correlation between the two variables of importance; but despite this point, it is safe to say that the third hypothesis is unconfirmed. The *Level* variable for Hypothesis 4 did not yield significant results but the positive relationship and substantial percentage change provides some vague support for the fourth hypothesis; however, this support is again negligible due to a poor  $p$  value.

Null hypothesis testing and correlations aided in the elimination of some of the useless variables in the model but in the end, step wise regression was used to determine the predictors worthy of inclusion in the model. I included all variables that had  $p$ -values of .2 or lower as a means to offer maximal explanation of variation in the model. While this cutoff might seem arbitrary, contemporary research methods dictate that variables that do not achieve significant results should not necessarily be excluded for the model. Unfortunately, the revised model that included only relevant variables did not contain some of the independent variables presented in Chapter Four and explained less than one percent of the variation in the *Funders* variable. Again, it is apparent that *Legal Aid* remains a contributor to the model if only at .1 significance, which is in fact less than the original fully specified model. In this instance, my theoretical expectations suffer in the name of model fit.

While this model is more parsimonious than the fully specified version, less than one percent of explanatory value warrants further methodological revision. Therefore, in an effort to further simplify the model as a means to offer more explanatory value, per my research design, the Hypothesis 1 variables were compressed into a dummy coded as “1” for impact variables in the first two tiers and benign variables as “0.” However, this attempt at parsimony once again

resulted in a negative R squared value for Model 2 and the results do not warrant further discussion.

**Table 3. Negative Binomial Regression w/ Robust SEs**

	Model 2	% Change	Model 3	% Change
Sector	0.0609 (0.138)	6.3		
Age	-0.0863* (0.0515)	-8.3	-0.0863* (0.0513)	-33.9
Age2	0.00388* (0.00209)	0.4	0.00386* (0.00209)	60.2
Distance	-0.00191 (0.0107)	-0.2	-0.00182 (0.0107)	-1.4
Level	0.225 (0.183)	25.2	0.224 (0.188)	11.6
Projects	0.0525 (0.0460)	5.4	0.0514 (0.0456)	7.5
TriSectors			-0.0342 (0.0854)	-3.4
Constant	1.045** (0.469)		1.160** (0.466)	
LnAlpha	-0.685*** (0.191)		-0.685*** (0.191)	
Observations	176		176	

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 3 shows the results for Models 2 and 3 and includes percentage change figures instead of marginal effects for ease of coefficient interpretation. In addition, both incorporate a number of changes from the initial main effect model that included all of the various categorical variables for Hypothesis 1; namely, that Model 2 used the dummy *Sector* and Model 3 used the trichotomized version, *TriSectors*. Due to the dichotomous nature of the *Sector* variable, only two potential outcomes are used to account for variation among 25 sectors of operation included

the potential overlap of one GONGO's participation in several sectors. While the dichotomous coding was used in the interest of parsimony, extrapolating this measurement to account for further variation within the predictor is necessary. As a result, the trichotomous *TriSectors* measure was coded respectively according to the different tiers predicted by the theory: "1" for Tier 1 organizations, "2" for Tier two groups and "3" for benign GONGOs. As a result of this recoding, the expected coefficient will be inverted in relation to the *Sector* variable because was previously expected that the presence of an impact variable would have a negative effect on a group's autonomy; therefore, an increase in one would indicate the presence of an impact variable and subsequently result in a negative value if *Sector* performs as predicted. Due to the revised ordinal coding of this new variable, an increase in the predictor are indicative of greater autonomy, therefore, a positive coefficient is expected in this instance. While this might seem intuitive, it would help to understand that if the variable coding were inverted ("3" for tier 1, "1" for tier 3), the coefficients would mirror the results of the *Sector* models with a negative coefficient for the *TriSectors* variable. Furthermore, as a result of the initial tests, in addition to theoretical predictions, the quadratic term *Age2* was also included in both of these versions of the *Funders* models.

Upon initial inspection, the only point worthy of note relates to the findings for the pair of *Age* variables. Model 2 presents with the *Age* and *Age2* variables significant at .1 levels, although the change of the coefficient is not entirely substantive. However, Model 3, with the *TriSectors* measurement presents with *Age* and *Age2* at .1 significance levels with substantive coefficient changes. Also, the negative value of *Age* and the positive value of *Age2* are indicative of a concave parabolic relationship in which autonomy decreases until a point of approximately nine and a half years, after which point autonomy begins to increase at a faster rate than it

decreased on the downslope. Both of these findings lend support for the second hypothesis and the dynamic nature of the relationship between an organization's age and its autonomy from the party-state apparatus. In this circumstance, I would argue that *TriSectors* serves as a more reliable measurement than the dummy variable *Sectors*, although I would confine this argument to the realm of the *Funders* dependent variable at this time.

While the second hypothesis receives support from Models 2 and 3, the same cannot be said for Hypotheses 1, 3, and 4. Regarding Hypotheses 1 and 3, directionality of the coefficients for *Sector* and *Distance* is incorrect in both instances and the coefficients themselves are not substantive or significant, as a result, Models 2 and 3 do not support the predictions of the first and third hypotheses. For Hypothesis 4, the directionality for the *Level* variable is correct but the coefficient is not significant or substantive. As a result, Models 2 and 3 provide limited support for Hypotheses 1, 3 and 4 but the findings regarding Hypothesis 2 warrant further investigation and I will address this point in the discussion. Therefore, I will now address my second dependent variable.

#### Budgetfunders

As shown in Table 3, Models 4 and 5 lend further preliminary support to the findings from the *Funders* models; namely with regards to the *Age* variables and *Level*. The *Funders* models founds statistical support for Hypothesis 2 and substantive support for Hypothesis 4 although support for Hypotheses 1 and 3 was essentially negligible. A review of the figures in Table 4 shows that both *Sector* and *TriSectors* performed poorly as did the *Distance* variable in both models. The only expected finding related to the directionality of the coefficients with all three variables across both models performing as predicted by the theory. Unfortunately, these

results are subject to scrutiny as there is little in the way of statistical significance or substantiveness on the part of the respective coefficients, especially with regards to the *Distance* variable. As a result, I would argue that Models 2 through 5 offer only a modicum of support for Hypotheses 1 and 3 although the results of Models 4 and 5 are not inconclusive. As a result, a significant portion of the remainder of this chapter will be devoted to exploring the findings of the *Age* and *Level* variables.

Similar to the results of Models 2 and 3, the *Age* variable was not appropriately specified on its own in an initial model, therefore, the *Age2* term was included and is an appropriate specification for Models 4 and 5, as dictated by model fit tests. Model 4 was performed using the dummy version of the *Sector* variable and performs slightly less admirably than Model 5; however, the findings still warrant further investigation. Regarding Model 4, again please note that *Sector* was only correct in terms of directionality. Correlations confirm the predicted negative relationship between the two variables and a naïve model presents with statistically significant results which support its inclusion as a variable of importance, although it does not perform well within the model as a whole. Regardless, this finding suggests that the first two tiers of Hypothesis 1 have an effect that is congruent with its theoretical expectations. Recall that the presence of impact sectors from the first two tiers of the Hypothesis 1 argument was predicted to yield negative coefficients as a reflection of lower autonomy. As a result, the negative coefficient for the *Sector* variable is supportive of the posited relationship. Given the dichotomous nature of *Sector* the size of this coefficient in the naïve model demonstrates further support for the substantive effect that a particular functional area has on an NGO's autonomy. However, the confidence interval for *Sector* includes zero and as a result I argue that while this model demonstrates preliminary support for Hypothesis 1 given the correct directionality and the



size of the coefficient, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected in the robust model and it is therefore inconclusive. In Model 5, *TriSectors* does not perform well although directionality is correct and the coefficient is more favorable than its counterpart in Model 4. Again, as with Model 4, a naïve model presented with statistically significant results. As a result, I would argue that the results of the main effect model are not entirely indicative of the predicted relationship between the variables and I will address this further in the discussion.

**Table 4. OLS Regressions w/ Robust Standard Errors**

Variables	Model 4	Model 5
Sector	-0.304 (0.363)	
Age	-0.121 (0.0927)	-0.118 (0.0942)
Age2	0.00754** (0.00343)	0.00748** (0.00347)
distance	0.000108 (0.000200)	0.000102 (0.000199)
Level	0.746** (0.351)	0.736** (0.350)
Projects	0.0156 (0.101)	0.0221 (0.0996)
TriSectors		0.215 (0.212)
Constant	13.68*** (0.956)	13.01*** (0.961)
Observations	110	110
R-squared	0.118	0.120

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

Similar to Models 2 and 3, the *Age* variables performed largely as expected in Models 4 and 5 with correct directionality for both, indicating the same concave parabola found in the former models. Again, similar to Models 2 and 3, computations indicate that the apex of the parabola is at approximately ten years, which is only six months different than the finding from Models 2 and 3. Theoretically, this approximately ten year period of declining autonomy could

presumptively constitute phases 1 through 4 of the development of a GONGO as outlined in Chapter Three, but this is merely speculation. Therefore, similar to Models 2 and 3, GONGOs typically exist in a state of decreasing autonomy for the first ten years, after which time the state appears to relinquish its control and allows the organization in question to function with greater autonomy over time although the severity of the increase in autonomy is also reflected in the results from Models 2 and 3 as well. However, unlike the latter, only the upslope of the parabola in Models 4 and 5 is statistically significant. Regardless, naïve models in both instances found similar results which confirm the validity of the model and the appropriate specification of the quadratic term. By and large, all four models lend support for the second hypothesis and I would argue that its inclusion will play an important role in future research.

Models 4 and 5 also present with important findings regarding the *Level* variable; namely that correct directionality, combined with statistically significant and substantive coefficients indicates that the predicted relationship from Hypothesis 4 is supportive. This preliminary finding is confirmed with correlations, null hypothesis testing and a naïve model regressing *Level* on *Budgetfunders*. Given the ordinal coding of *Level*, it was necessary to determine which particular regions were potentially driving the results of main effect model. In a series of follow up regressions to confirm the robustness of the findings it was found that individually, municipalities and provinces were driving the results. In a naïve model that included a series of categorical dummies for the various administrative regions with special administrative regions dropped as the reference category, municipality observations were dropped due to collinearity. A summary of the data shows that none of the participating NGOs operated in the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong or Macau.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the ordinal scale did not contain

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<sup>3</sup> Information from the Asia Foundation's NGO directory was originally considered for inclusion in this dataset because it only contains information for NGOs operating in Hong Kong or Macau but limited information and

any “4” values and the model had already been biased by the overabundance of “provincial” categories which outnumbered the sum of the other three regions combined. In addition, the two NGOs that were headquartered in autonomous regions did not submit any budget information and were therefore not included in Models 4 and 5. As a result, I would argue that the results shown in Table 3 are subject to scrutiny, especially given the fact that there were so many more provinces than any other category. However, it was not unexpected that these results presented as they did, given the data with which the analysis was performed. Regardless, conceptually I would argue that the location of a GONGO within these various administrative regions plays a role in the organization’s autonomy.

The *Distance* coefficient warrants little review in terms of its results since its coefficient is miniscule in relation to the others in the model. While the directionality of the *Distance* variable complies with theoretical predictions, I would argue that in both models its coefficient is small enough to refute its inclusion as a relevant finding. This model demonstrates that a GONGO’s distance from its central government offices has essentially no effect on the organization’s autonomy. In terms of the measurements used for these two concepts, this finding makes sense although conceptually I would argue that there is still a connection.

I contend that to this point, Model 5 is the most appropriately specified as it provides reasonable support for Hypotheses 2 and 4. A series of robustness checks were performed to verify the findings for the *Age* variables and the *Level* variable. First and foremost, while it did not perform well, I would argue that conceptually, *TriSectors* is the most valid measurement for the Hypothesis 1 concept. Regardless, a new OLS model was performed that excluded *TriSectors* and *Distance* to verify that they are not having an adverse effect on the coefficients of the core

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unstandardized responses would have unfavorably biased any subsequent results. Therefore, these data were excluded from the research in the interest of standardized survey responses.

variables. The results of the revised model for the *Age* variables and *Level* were essentially replicated in the subsequent version and demonstrated that the two core variables affect the outcome variable independent of any influence from the aforementioned independent variables.

## Discussion

The robustness checks and subsequent modeling suggest two conclusions: 1) the age of a GONGO has a curvilinear effect on its autonomy from the Chinese party-state, although the extent of this relationship is not entirely clear because of the dynamic nature of the relationship; and 2) the administrative level in which a GONGO is located has an effect on its autonomy from the state although this is most likely relegated to provincial regions of China.

Despite favorable results in some instances more than others, these are not the only findings from this thesis. The continuously poor results for the different versions of the *Sector* variables and *Distance* warrant further discussion in this section in that I think it could potentially be argued that neither variable provides some support for their respective hypotheses. The results for *Age* and its quadratic counterpart raise concerns because their coding is relatively simple and the initial downward bias of the variable could be an artifact of the manner in which the question was worded on the form completed by the NGO respondents. Zaller (1992) finds that the particular wording of a question may prime a respondent to answer in an unpredictable manner. Unfortunately, the research for this thesis was unable to uncover the actual questionnaire that was sent out and I am therefore left to speculate regarding the source of this complication.

However, the term “year of origin” shown on the individual directory pages leaves this among the possible explanations. The phrase itself could imply the year an organization first registered or was recognized by the MOCA, the year it submitted formal paperwork for parent-organization sponsorship, or the year it actual commenced operational activities. A more standardized question such as “In what year were you formally registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs?” could potentially resolve this problem of subjective interpretation.

The unfavorable results for *Distance* may potentially be the result of two factors: a weak theoretical foundation or an empirical flaw. Rooted in Nick Young’s work, it was reasonable to assume that a GONGO operating further away from a nation’s capital would be subject to less scrutiny than one operating at a closer proximity. Unfortunately, the work from which that argument is derived is fifteen years old and confounding factors could include any number of advances in travel or technology made in that time span. Furthermore, having reviewed the results of this research regarding the functional area of an NGO, future analysis might do well to create an index variable combining this concept and the distance variable in order to see if there is an indirect effect regarding a GONGO’s distance from the national capital.

For this thesis, the distance variable did not prove to be an influential variable except with regards to the directionality of the coefficient, which was correct. As a result, it is apparent that there is a positive relationship but the empirical support for this finding is limited. However, this does not mean that the concept itself should be excluded from future research; rather, a more reliable measurement may yield better results. For example, this thesis used the distance from the national capital to the GONGO headquarters but an alternative measurement could be the distance from the GONGO’s headquarters to the provincial capital in each region. The new measurement would still capture the same conceptualization as the one used above, although the

variation would be reduced due to lesser distances between points. Regardless, I side with Nick Young on this argument and will simply acknowledge that the measurement I used may not have been the most reliable.

In conclusion, this analysis has demonstrated the first example of empirical support for Nick Young's theory and determined that the age of an organization has a dynamic, curvilinear effect on a GONGO's autonomy but this finding should be subject to future confirmation and more nuanced interpretation. Finally, it is apparent that data limitations and theoretical flaws probably resulted in the problems with the findings for the first and third hypotheses. Despite these problems with the aforementioned hypotheses, the concluding chapter will address what these findings will mean for future research.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The research question that prompted this thesis was “Why are some GONGOs more autonomous than others?” The extant literature has compiled a significant amount of qualitative findings in an attempt to explain the relationship between the Chinese government and civil society. The goal of the research presented in this thesis was to systematically test and confirm some of the existing theories on this relationship. To achieve this, I used an originally coded dataset derived from the China Development Brief and a theoretical framework rooted in the work of Nick Young. In the process I was able to find initial levels of statistical support for existing theories while simultaneously failing to confirm others.

The implications of this study for scholarship and future research into GONGOs are substantial. The results of the analysis not only support aspects of Nick Young’s years of qualitative research in the field of GONGOs, they offer findings that will be subject to replication and subsequent confirmation using alternative coding methods. The results for *Level* and the *Age* variables also constitute a pair of significant findings that may catalyze future GONGO research.

Despite the findings, however, what is needed is a more elaborate coding for the variables. Due to the wide range of functional areas, as well as their predicted effects, I maintain that a series of case studies on the individual NGOs operating in these areas will yield important insights into their relationship with the state. These individual studies would serve to confirm the presence of some of the other covert characteristics of GONGOs; namely the staffing of government employees, their sources and respective amounts of funding and the extent to which

they channel funds to the Chinese government.<sup>4</sup> This thesis has identified several sectors and dozens of individual NGOs worthy of future investigation and I contend that continued attention and investigation into these organizations is warranted.

In response to the ultimate question of why this research matters, civil society is one of the primary ways in which citizens counteract the dominance of the state. GONGOs, especially those in China, flip this concept on its head and prompt the question of whether or not these organizations are efficacious in performing the traditional functions ascribed to NGOs. The findings of this thesis suggest that the answer is “no.” According to the results, the functional areas that most directly affect citizens are those that are the most tightly controlled by the CCP. The most significant and therefore salient findings of this study related to the age of the organization and its geographical location within the various administrative structures of China. In practice, this means that without reform from within the Chinese government, these factors and the individuals they affect will continue to be marginalized due to the fact that the bottom-up model of civil society first articulated by Alexis de Tocqueville 1835 is not present in China. As a result of this inherent stratification, those who seek to remedy these ills through the traditional means of collective action are subsequently relegated to subordinate status in the hierarchy of NGO operations in China

However, this research was not without its shortcomings. With regards to the lack of findings in some instances, the data is the most likely culprit. While the variables and subsequent coding were taken directly from the individual directory pages of the various NGOs, there is inherently an element of subjectivity in the coding methods. The terminology used for the individual functional areas was highly ambiguous. For example, what types of groups fall under

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<sup>4</sup> Inquiries were made to several organizations via email in an attempt to solicit this information but to this point I have not received a response from any of the groups in question.



the “culture” category and how does one classify their organizations as such? A cursory review suggests they are mostly related to art and music; however, there is also the possibility that the individual completing the form may have an incongruent concept of “culture” in relation to the person who wrote it. “Autonomy,” the concept of greatest importance to this research is also ambiguous in its own right as addressed in Chapter Three and its subsequent conceptualization and coding is reflective of this. I have already addressed some of these problems but I would argue that any subsequent research based on the findings herein set forth with a larger sample size at the very least. Time series data would be preferable as well in the interest of robust conclusions but that was an inherent limitation of this initial foray into a previously unaddressed school of systematic research. This would not only increase the chance of achieving statistical significance in more variables but would also increase the generalizability of the results.

Further, while this dataset may have yielded some supportive findings for my theoretical expectations, the small sample size and the lack of a time series, which was unfortunately a limitation of the available data, limits the generalizability of this study. In addition, the clandestine transactions that occur within the state-NGO relationship are entirely confined within the theoretical assumptions of the model. These transactions may be one of the most important components of the GONGO puzzle and are unfortunately unquantifiable at this point.

Nonetheless, the above research represents an important first step. Until this point, it seems as though there may have been a degree of trepidation in the academic community to tackle the GONGO topic systematically as a result of the previously addressed difficulties. Inherent in these difficulties is the nature of the GONGO puzzle itself. Based on the registration requirements outlined by the Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations (1998), it is reasonable to infer that the Ministry of Civil Affairs maintains records

and data regarding NGOs and their particular operations in China, but this information has not been made available to the public.

Nonetheless, I contend that the findings for my first and second hypotheses are robust in the context of this thesis. Further, the research conducted in this thesis, in my view, constitutes a significant first step in the systematic study of GONGO research and I look forward to seeing of any follow up research in the field.

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