The Politics of Doing *Gongyi*:
an Ethnographic Study of Chinese NGOs

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Abstract

NGO development in authoritarian states has long been seen as an important indicator of state-society relations. The past decade has witnessed great changes in China's NGO sector: withdrawing international donors, increasing government funding of social service delivery, rising domestic donors from the private sector, and so forth. Researchers have investigated the dynamics of the relationship between the authoritarian state and NGOs in China and the survival strategies of grassroots organizations, given the policy changes. However, few studies have looked at the internal politics and structure of China's NGO sector, particularly, language changes and knowledge production. This thesis aims to fill this gap as reflected in the ways in which "*gongyi*", translated as 'public interest' or 'philanthropy', has been used by the Chinese state and non-state actors. It focuses in particular on the relationship between the state, Chinese entrepreneurs, and NGOs. The changing use of *gongyi* both in official state discourse and in China's NGO sector shows a shift from a state-centric discourse in the late 1980s towards a more market-oriented discourse in the past decade, alongside a process of commercialization. Re-examining Chinese NGOs in epistemological terms, through the language of *gongyi*, suggests that China's NGO sector has become increasingly heterogeneous. The market and rising entrepreneurship, with the help of the local state, are shaping the sector not just financially but in terms of knowledge production. Moreover, Chinese NGOs, given such changes in the past decade, have strengthened corporatism and social inequality in their daily operation, rather than challenge them. In this sense, my study of *gongyi* understands corporatism in China in two ways: how the local corporatism contributes to a more fragmented authoritarian state in China; and how it connects to a rapidly unequal society in people's daily life.

Based on my yearlong multi-sited ethnography of an entrepreneur-founded foundation and its partner organizations in China, this research reveals how *gongyi*, a language that popularly used by most of the organizations in China's NGO sector, has been firstly reinvented by the Chinese business elites, applied in the office of their own foundations, and then widely disseminated, learned, and negotiated in different grassroots organizations in other parts of China. This research presents the normalization of different forms of corporatism in Chinese NGO sector under the name of "doing *gongyi*". At the same time, my ethnographic study of the everyday life of Chinese NGO workers reveals how *gongyi* and corporatism has been performed, negotiated, and challenged in various ways. Based on the findings at both organizational and individual levels, the thesis argues that *gongyi* contributes to and increasingly depoliticized and commercialized culture in Chinese NGOs, while also helping to reproduce social inequalities in today's Chinese society at large, particularly in terms of gender and family labor division.

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Acronyms

AF   A Foundation (a domestic donor)

CAB   Civil Affairs Bureau (a governmental department in charge of NGO issues)

CRC   China Red Cross

CSSC   Construction of Socialist Spiritual Civilization

CYDF   China Youth Development Foundation

GBP   British Pound

GH   *Gongyi* Heart (a Chinese NGO, in partnership with AF)

GONGO   Government-organized non-governmental organizations

GVC   *Gongyi* Volunteer Centre (a Chinese NGO, in partnership with AF)

INGO   International non-governmental organization

NGO   Non-governmental organization

RMB   Renminbi (Chinese Yuan)

ROC   Republic of China

WDC   Women Development Centre (a Chinese NGO, in partnership with AF)

YCL   Youth Communist League

YVA   Youth Volunteers Associations

1 British Pound=9 Chinese Yuan (exchange rate as of 01/06/2016)

Glossary (with original Chinese characters)

chuxin	original heart	初心
cishan fa	charity law	慈善法
dage	elder brother	大哥
dajie	elder sister	大姐
dalao	big boss	大佬
fanzhengfu zuzhi	anti-government organization	反政府组织
feizhengfu zuzhi	NGO	非政府组织
fu qiang	wealthy and powerful	富强
gongmin shehui	civil society	公民社会
gongyi	public interest	公益
gongyi ren	a person working for *gongyi*	公益人
guanxi	relationship	关系
huo Lei Feng	living Lei Feng	活雷锋
jieji	class	阶级
langxing	wolf spirit	狼性
laoshi	teacher	老师
liudong renkou	floating people	流动人口
minjian	among the people	民间
minjian zuzhi guanli ju	bureau of civil organizations administration	民间组织管理局
minzu yingxiong	national hero	民族英雄

qinghuai	mentality or passion	情怀
qunzong	the common people	群众
rencai	talent	人才
renren gongyi	everyone can do *gongyi*	人人公益
shehui jieceng	social strata	社会阶层
shehui tuanti	social groups	社会团体
shehui zuzhi	social organization	社会组织
sushi	human quality	素质
tian zhi jiao zi	God's favored ones	天之骄子
wuzhengfu zuzhi	anarchic organization	无政府组织
xiansheng	Mr.	先生
xiaodi xiaomei	younger brother and sister	小弟小妹
xiongdi	brother	兄弟
xuesheng gongzuo	student work	学生工作
zhen pengyou	true friend	真朋友
zhidao	guide or supervise	指导
zhiyuanzhe jingshen	volunteer spirit	志愿者精神
ziwo fuquan	self-empowerment	自我赋权
ziyou zhuyi zhe	liberalist	自由主义者
zuoren	become person	做人

Preface

My interest of research political and social change in China started from about 12 years ago, when I was still a college student in Guangzhou, China. After years of preparing for the college entrance examination, I was finally admitted into a 'key university' in China. Entering a 'key university' means a lot for many ordinary Chinese families. In 1998, the then Chinese president Jiang Zemin initiated the 'Project 985' to develop the national higher education system by founding the world-class university in the 21st century. The name 985 represents the date of its initiation, May 1998. This project aimed to reconstruct China's universities and research institutes that had been largely destroyed by the Cultural Revolution in the Maoist era. With large scale financial and policy supports from both Beijing and various local governments across the country, 39 Chinese universities (out of 2631) have been chosen as the 'key universities' to deliver this 985 Project. Given China's big population, the national average admission rate of the key universities in China is around 1% to 2%; there is a saying in China that all those '985 students' are 'God's favored ones' (*tian zhi jiao zi*, 天之骄子). After starting my college life, I soon realized that being a 'key university student' could enjoy more 'privileges' than I ever imagined. As the key universities are heavily subsidized by the state, I only needed to pay about 550 pounds per year, including both tuition fee and accommodation on campus; while for my cousin who entered into a non-key, private university in a nearby city, he had to pay around 4000 pounds per year. Food provided in my campus is subsidized too, at least one third cheaper than those in the city of Guangzhou. There are also many opportunities for financial assistance in the university sponsored by the state, from student loan, studentships, part-time jobs, to even free laptops; while my cousin can almost find nothing like these in his university. In the job market, many employers, from the various governmental bodies to private companies, would publicly claim that job applicants from 'key universities' would be prioritized. In the final year, I was told by a faculty that a bachelor's degree from a key university would also give us a 'cadre's qualification' as part of my personal record in the Chinese *Hukou* system, which 'distinguishes' me from other university students who can only get a '*qunzong*

(the masses or the common people, 群众)'[1]. A cadre's qualification would help me get a speedy promotion if I choose to work in any governmental institutions after graduation.

But I also noticed something unusual behind all these privileges. One is that, although there were financial assistances available, many of them had no applicants; which means that most of the students in my university today were from at least middle-class families so that we can hardly find enough 'poor students' in the key universities anymore. While in my cousin's university, many of his course mates and their families were actually in heavy debts due to the high tuition fee and living costs for their undergraduate studies. The other thing is more invisible. In my university, I found many staff's jobs were neither about academic research, teaching, nor administrative work. Instead, they were allocated to do 'student work (*xuesheng gongzuo*, 学生工作)', including a wide range of jobs. For instance, they were supervisors of student societies, directors of Communist Youth League (the youth branch affiliated with the Chinese Communist Party) on campus, regulators and ratifiers of student activities (from debate competition, New Year festival, student union election, to volunteering activities). As 'student workers', they would also organize many events like dormitory hygiene inspection, monthly political ideological education, developing potential Communist Party members, launching singing competitions to celebrate Chinese National Day etc. In order help the 'student work', normally one or two students in each class would be chosen as 'messengers' to report to the 'student workers' regularly[2], their reports may involve a wide range of what was happening among the students, from romantic relationships, gossips, academic performance, to potential political trouble makers, suspicious activities and conversations. Although there is also a similar 'student work' system in my cousin's university, they had much less staff working for that system; and the whole structure was so loose that they can even elect their own student union leader without any intervention from the 'student workers'.

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[1] This policy has been stopped since 2016.
[2] It's a paid part-time job, so normally the messengers were from poor family backgrounds.

The different experiences of myself and my cousin's undergraduate years constituted the first chance for me to closely observe how authoritarian politics and social inequality have been deeply intertwined and performed in people's daily life in China in the 2000s. Entering into a 'key university' did give my classmates and me many political and economic privileges that most Chinese young people can never have. Since then, I have been put into a 'faster track' as the 'chosen one' in the Chinese society. But at the same time, I also realized that as a 'national talent', I was also in a closer surveillance system which deeply shaped my daily life from what I can talk, what friends I can make to my possibilities of upward mobility and future career. Being a good college student, in this context, means to be more incorporated into the existing political regime and enjoy the 'benefits' of social inequalities at the same time. The cons and fors are also obvious for everyone, that almost all my classmates soon got to know how to take the most advantages of this university system. For some who grow up in a civil servant family, many of them would try to build up good relations with the 'student workers' so that they can join the Communist Party as early as they can; for those who wanted to adventure in the business world, they would spend most of their time exploring the university alumni network to ensure their prioritization in the job hunting. Interestingly, among all my classmates, those who spent most of their time in the library studying and reading, were mostly from the peasants' families. They seemed to still stay in the 'high school study mode' and therefore a bit 'lagged behind' in understanding that they were actually in a very different, dynamic world. My 'diligent' classmates did all have good places to go after our graduation. In all the 48 students in my class, one third of us got admitted to various postgraduate programs in other key universities with scholarships; about 10 students received well-paid offers from big state-owned companies or transnational corporates; 12 students got into different government bodies including 5 in national security departments; and 3 students remained in our original university for a funded doctoral program (they are all from poor family backgrounds). While in my cousin's case, about one third of them ended up with unemployed or part time jobs when they graduated.

However, the higher education system and everyday life on campus are not always like what I have experienced before 1989. Given my father was also a 'university student', his experience in the late 1980s was quite different from mine. As the first college student in his village, he found most of his classmates

were just as poor as him. Although they were all fully funded by the state at that time, they all needed to save every penny so that they can bring the savings back to feed up the other family members. The political control in the late 1980s was also much looser, so that when the college students in Beijing launched protests and movements, students in my father's college in the city of Chongqing, about 1700 kilometers from Beijing, all went to streets overnight. As my father said, most of them also wrote petition letters to support Beijing students, even including their 'student workers' at that time. But things got changed dramatically by the end of 1989, when he just graduated that summer. Before 1996, every college student in China would be allocated with a job by the state when they graduated, normally these jobs were very good government positions in the big cities or the national ministries. But in my father's graduation year of 1989, all the college students were asked to 'exercise themselves from scratch'. My father was sent back to his hometown, working for township government; while some others sent back to even lower level government branches in the villages. From then on, college students in China were never simply seen as 'national talents' only, but also unreliable subjects due to 'educated'. This has led to big scale political reconstruction of the surveillance and education system in the Chinese universities, from compulsory military training of every college freshman, strengthened system of 'student work', proactively reshaping student organizations and campus culture, to the remaining socialist legacy of 'cadre's qualification' in the *Hukou* system. My father often missed his undergraduate years, talking about the food shortages and street protests that all his classmates had been through together. He was also surprised that when he found my university years were so different, in his words, "with so many calculations to do every day".

But China's national development in the recent decades also brought me chances to see something 'new' in my undergraduate years, which finally turned to be the main theme of my doctoral study. For instance, it was in an anthropological lecture that I began to know the words 'non-governmental organization (NGO)' and 'civil society'; through the faculties researching labor movements, I can visit NGOs in Guangzhou from time to time and take it as an escape from my campus life. With the help from the Yale University, 10 students in my university can take a fellowship each year to be an intern for several American community-based organizations for at least six months. Students awarded with this fellowship turned out to be a new type of 'national talent' on

campus, featured with their 'intercultural cooperation' and 'global learning'. These are something that my parents never heard about. I also organized an underground reading club with some friends to read classic political theories on civil society together, taking NGOs as a new politics in China with transformative forces in a long term. After finishing my master's program at LSE, I was determined to work in the Chinese NGO sector, with the belief that it could be the place to make some real changes in the country. But soon, my working experience changed my mind, which finally becomes one of the important reasons for me to do my doctoral research on the internal politics of Chinese NGOs today.

My first job was working as a project assistance in an NGO research institute in Guangzhou, which was directed by a very famous scholar (and also a practioner) called as 'the godfather of Chinese civil society'. This institute had very good reputation among many grassroots organizations in China, providing small grants and training programs for these organizations. However, during my working with this institute, I found that most of the work that myself and other colleagues did, was no longer around the grassroots organizations but maintaining good relations with various governmental officials. Just like what my university classmates did, even in the NGO world, maintaining good relations with the state not only can bring up with more political safety, but also there are many benefits especially state funding. Although both this research institute and its director were under close political surveillance from time to time, meanwhile drinking, banqueting and socializing with various government officials turned out to be one of the most important jobs that me and most of my colleagues were asked to do. Just like my director said, "being a change maker with a blurred face". This working experience just took me back to my undergraduate years again and again. When in most of the news reports and academic discussions, Chinese NGOs have been portrayed as a potential change maker, something new in the society, but my daily work, especially the banqueting and drinking events, just made me realize how deeply this 'new sector' has been embedded within the politics of corporatism in today's China, just like its university system.

My director's blurred face strategy did reward the institute in many ways. With good relations of various government officials, the institute gained political shelters at multiple government levels from the province, city to district. This

was particularly helpful when the whole organization was suspected by the national security departments due to its international donations. At the same time, state funding from various governmental bodies turned out to be the biggest financial resources in the institute; it became a useful hand in helping the local government in regulating the grassroots organization in numerous ways from policy drafting and implementation to large scale survey of the volunteer groups. Although I was not sure whether the flooding funding from the state could really make a change for the Chinese NGOs, it was obvious that the funding did change someone's personal life. My director, for instance, bought two villas in the outskirts of the city for weekends; while in the weekdays he and his families lived in the most expensive area in the city center of Guangzhou. Although his partner is a housewife, their daughter had several private teachers from piano, tennis, to English lessons. All his clothes and shoes were tailor-made. Although most of my colleagues' incomes (around 300 to 600 pounds per month) were below the average level in the city of Guangzhou (around 700 pounds in 2014), I understood that in fact my then income was already higher than many other ordinary workers in the grassroots organizations. Comparing to my college classmates who had become 'real talents' by working in the business world or government bodies, as an ordinary NGO worker, I 'successfully' achieved certain kind of social mobility in China: moving downward (and of course, my director moved upward at the same time).

Given my working experiences in the past few years, I realized the importance of studying the internal political and culture among Chinese NGOs, which finally constituted the focus of my doctoral research. In my yearlong ethnographic fieldwork across the country, I also noticed that many of my former working experiences just appeared repeatedly in various organizations and individuals, from the drinking and banqueting culture, to the symbiosis of luxury life and the most basic dormitories. All these life experience, stories, and findings from both myself and my informants in the fieldwork, I believe, are not only telling us something 'new' or 'veiled' in the Chinese NGO sector, but also they are taking me to back my old memories in the undergraduate years from time to time, reminding me of connecting them in the big picture of political and social change in China as well as understanding them in the complexity of people's everyday life and practices.

Chapter 1   Introduction: Studying *gongyi* and Chinese NGOs

It was a morning of March 2017, the first working week after the Chinese New Year. I was attending a two-day conference called 'the Second Annual *Gongyi*[1] (public interest, or 公益) Fair of City Nan' in the K Province, China. Including myself, there were about 100 participants from various social organizations and volunteer groups across the province, sitting in the conference room. In the conference program book, there were two organizers: a government department called the Civil Affairs Bureau (CAB) of the municipal government; the other was a local social organization called *Gongyi* Heart (GH). As a research student, GH workers were my informants during my yearlong fieldwork on Chinese NGOs from June 2016 to July 2017. GH was important to my research because I was doing research on a big Chinese foundation called AF, established by a group of domestic entrepreneurs, and GH was one of their partner organizations in the K Province. Before visiting GH in the city of Nan, I had spent six months working and living in AF's office and staff dormitory as an intern to study their internal organizational culture and politics. In order to better understand the relations between AF and other grassroots organizations in China, I started my second phase of fieldwork by looking at its different local partners. However, I never expected that my fieldwork with GH would lead me to a grand conference room in a four-star hotel in the city of Nan, listening to hours of boring speeches made by several officials from the provincial and municipal governments. The participants sitting in the conference room,

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[1] *Gongyi* has several translations in English. Both as a verb and a noun in the Chinese language, most of time people would use 'gongyi organization' to refer to a non-profit organization in China. Therefore, many Chinese NGO workers would also say that they are 'gongyi people (公益人)' to identify their profession, and their work is known as 'doing gongyi (做公益)'. However, in some English news reports, journalists directly translate these organizations as 'civil society organizations' or even 'activists', and I argue in this thesis that this misunderstands and underestimates the complexity of the daily language and politics of Chinese NGOs. In the Chinese mainstream media, 'gongyi' has been understood as 'public interest', covering a wide range of social issues from social welfare, environmental protection, anti-corruption, poverty reduction to any volunteering activities or free public service.

mostly AF's local partner organizations invited by GH, all felt as tired as I did; although the occasional free buffets, refreshments and hot drinks provided helped us stay awake.

About two months before the conference, I had been told by Humphrey, the leader of GH, that he would organize a closed event after the Chinese New Year getting all AF's partner organizations in the province together, to discuss what they had done in the past year and what should be improved in AF's local network. But one month later, I received a call from Humphrey's wife Sue, who told me that the local government was 'very interested' in their plans too. She explained that the CAB officials wanted to make it part of the local *gongyi* fair which was just hosted by the local CAB for the first time in 2016. As a friend of both Sue and Humphrey, I knew that GH had been doubted and regularly checked on by the local government since its establishment five years ago, due to their connections with several international donors. As the organizational leader, Humphrey had little choice but to say yes to the CAB demands. From then on, the whole event went in a very different direction. The CAB officials set up most of the conference schedules: during the day there had to be government speeches made by the provincial and city level CAB officials, while GH's local networking activities could only be carried out in the evenings. Moreover, as the co-organizer of this 'big event', GH was asked by the CAB officials to donate about 600 pounds to support the conference. In Sue's phone call, I could feel that she was very angry not only because of the arranged government activities, but also because 600 pounds was a lot for her and her husband. As two of the three full time workers at GH, 600 pounds was almost equal to one month's income of Humphrey and Sue combined.

Figure 1.1 The daytime conference. Photo by the author. Location anonymized.

That was the reason why I found myself attending this conference. In the morning, there were long official speeches about the 'extraordinary achievements' of the local CAB in developing the local social organizations; there were graphs and charts to show the fast-increasing numbers of social organization growth in the city during the past several years. In one speech made by the vice-governor of the provincial government, he said that the local government had spent a lot of money in purchasing social services from various organizations, but that was unsustainable for the local government's finance. So, in the next few years, organizations in the province should think about bringing in other funding resources. In the afternoon, Humphrey was given opportunities to speak too; he was the only speaker in the room who was not in a formal suit but instead wearing quite an old (second-hand) outdoor jacket and baseball cap. His speech did not mention too much about GH's work but was mostly about several domestic foundations like AF. Humphrey's speech introduced how AF had supported various organizations in the K Province from finance to project management in the last year. At the end of the speech, he was more like a salesman for AF, promoting its child protection projects, and calling for more local organizations to join him as part of AF's network. In many ways, Humphrey's speech echoed with that of the vice-governor. He tried to align

himself with the vice-governor by portraying GH as a mediator and introducer of a more sustainable, politically safe, financial resource: the emerging Chinese entrepreneurs and their foundations.

The governmental sessions ended at 4pm, followed by a free dinner, and the evening session of AF's local network started at 6pm. This evening session took place in a small budget hotel, with a very different atmosphere. Apparently, the 50 attendees travelling from different parts of the province knew each other well; during the ice break session, the meeting room was full of laughter. As the hosts, Humphrey and Sue were very excited to invite them to sit around so that they could have small group discussions during the whole session. Humphrey started the session with some jokes, calling the attendees 'my dear *gongyi* sisters and brothers'.

Figure 1.2 AF's local partners' meeting in the evening. Photo by the author. Location anonymized.

The evening session lasted for about 90 mins. The first 40 mins was a summary of the disaster relief projects that they had done in the last winter. With the direct instructions from AF, GH set up some awards for those organizations

which had sent out the most disaster relief materials, those that could get the most media reports, as well as the most successful in local fundraising. My previous fieldwork in AF's headquarters office had already let me know that the awards would bring these partner organizations more funding from AF for the next year, so the award winners announced in the session were quite excited. For the remaining 50 mins, GH set up a short training workshop to enhance the 'organizational capacity' for the attendees, while the guest trainer, recommended by AF, was working at an Internet company as the manager of the corporate social responsibility. The trainer did not mention anything related to how to run a volunteer group or how to do disaster relief work in the local community; instead he started by analyzing how 'weak' were the Chinese grassroots organizations today in using online fundraising tools. And then most of the training contents were about how to 'Internetize' the social organizations from their daily operation; in his words, 'We need to embrace this time of modern *gongyi*'. The trainer used many cases of the most successful Chinese internet companies in demonstrating how effective their online platforms could be in 'mobilizing public participation', and this attracted most attendees' attention.

Just several minutes before the end of this short training, Sue suddenly asked me whether I could stay for one more hour afterwards, since they were going to have another smaller meeting, for which they needed a volunteer to take some notes and write a brief summary. I agreed. This unexpected session started at 8 pm with about 15 people. As the hotel worker in charge of the evening sessions asked all of us to leave their conference room at 8:30pm, therefore Sue decided to just hold this one-hour meeting in the lobby outside the conference room. The lobby was free and located on the top floor of the budget hotel, so no one would interrupt us. As the meeting began, I realized that it was in fact planned by GH's other donor, Oxfam. An Oxfam project officer came to meet a group of the disabled people in the city, who had been working with GH in the past two years to improve the public barrier-free facilities through various forms of policy advocacy to the local CAB. This project had been funded by Oxfam. But obviously, both GH and Oxfam did not want the local government to know too much about their connections, so the Oxfam worker arrived silently with a list of questions for evaluating the project. After briefly introducing herself, the Oxfam worker then gave the question list to all the participants and she became a facilitator of their discussions. Unlike the award-

giving and training sessions in AF's local partner networking event, GH workers especially Humphrey and Sue did not get many chances to talk. For most of the time, it was only the members of the disabled group sharing their different experiences during the past two years. At the very beginning, I felt a bit awkward because there was a very foul-smelling toilet just besides the lobby, which seeped into the whole lobby. The light in the lobby was very dim too; there were several sofas in the lobby, but they looked more like pieces of old furniture abandoned by the budget hotel, full of dust. However, the attendees seemed to be fine with all these conditions and continued without any complaint. Although I did not get the chance to ask them questions, I could still sense that many of them were probably from the poorest class in the city, wearing ragged, slightly smelly clothes and shoes. But very soon as the meeting began, both GH workers and the disabled group members were very focused on the discussions, asking questions actively, even though some of them had had a long day at the conference. Very interestingly in this meeting, only infrequently would the participants describe what they did as '*gongyi*'. Rather, they would use the word 'self-empowerment' (*ziwo fuquan*, 自我赋权), which was learnt from a previous Oxfam's training program.

The different settings above constituted one of the longest working days during my fieldwork; I never expected to see so many different but overlapping actors in one day. The sessions were just like a microcosm of the fast-changing and heterogeneous Chinese NGO sector in the past decade. Mostly seen as 'a new creature' created by Chinese economic reform and open-up policy, the past three decades have witnessed the growth of various non-governmental organizations in China. As most of the social organizations were demolished in the socialist era, many of the NGOs have gained vigor from the legacies of traditional clans and the entering of various international donors since the 1980s. According to the national statistics of the year 2018[2], there were more than 816 thousand organizations registered with various government departments in China, covering numerous fields from education, health, and rural development to humanitarian assistance. What was striking about this growing sector was the 'great leap forward' in the past decade, with about half

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[2] Source: https://www.chinanews.com/sh/2019/07-12/8892801.shtml

of the registered organizations appearing after 2008. The morning government session in my fieldwork above echoes with this 'NGO growing' narrative, that the whole Chinese NGO sector today has been recognized, tolerated, or even encouraged by the state. The government officials in the city of Nan would take this 'growing industry' as part of their working achievements which would then be perfectly demonstrated in a four-star hotel in front of the provincial leaders at the '*gongyi* fair'.

Alongside these growing numbers of organizations, however, are also the longer running debates regarding the relations between the Chinese social organizations and the authoritarian state. As the above story of the local CAB and their political demands towards Humphrey's organization suggests, there are always tensions, struggles, and negotiations between the state and many organizations in China. The forced donation asked by the local CAB officials reveals the rent-seeking nature of the state power in regulating Chinese NGOs at the local level. Beijing's hostile and suspicious attitude towards international organizations, as we can see from Oxfam's experience above, has also led to the withdrawal of international donors from China in the past decade. As part of the survival strategy, grassroots organizations like GH have had to find a way to work with the local government and the officials.

But at the same time, we can also see that this 'official performance' could be somehow closely linked with another force: the rising domestic donors and the Chinese entrepreneurs. Although AF did not show up directly during the whole day, its strong influence among the grassroots organizations and its close connections with the local government can also be well demonstrated by the vice-governor's speech, Humphrey's public statement, the awards and the training workshop in the evening session. Given that international donors have been leaving China during the past decade, the rise of Chinese entrepreneurs as domestic donors is playing a crucial role in supporting and shaping the Chinese NGO sector. Although there were only about 1000 foundations in China in the early 2000s and most of them had been founded by the government, the number of Chinese foundations had increased to more than 7500 by August 2019[3]. Most of the newly established foundations were founded by private

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3 Source: http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.org.cn/news-23275.html

entrepreneurs or their companies, and they have out-numbered the government-established foundations since 2007. From the two evening sessions above, we may also find that these new domestic donors may differ from their international counterparts in many ways. They sponsored different projects, used different languages and knowledge, enjoyed very different relations with the Chinese state, and built up their local network with different strategies.

What interests me most in these three different settings is the language that different actors used in different situations. Although the CAB officials, Humphrey and the guest trainer in the evening session all used the same language of *gongyi* to communicate what they thought NGOs should do, the meaning of this language and the way it was used has both differences and similarities among these different actors. For the vice-governor, *gongyi* is an official language to cover all the social welfare issues, in which NGOs are taken as an integral part of the service delivery. Government officials performed their dominant power in all areas of the conference, from managing the conference schedule, and the venue layout to their speeches. Even though unhappy with the conference organization and forced donation, GH was 'incorporated' into this governmental performance as a representative of the new, domestic donors. For Humphrey, although he tried to use the same language in this governmental activity, he emphasized the importance of another social force, the Chinese entrepreneurs, emerging in the field as a funding resource outside the state apparatus. Moreover, the commercialized 'modern *gongyi*' training in the evening seemed to strengthen Humphrey's standpoint that the new domestic donors are not only changing the financial landscape of Chinese NGO sector, but that they are also introducing new skills, organizational culture, and thinking patterns among the grassroots organizations. The absence of *gongyi* in the last Oxfam session indicates that the use of *gongyi* is not only a linguistic or cultural issue in China, it is also a new, domestic knowledge different from the traditional development industry, whose production process has been deeply embedded within the political and social dynamics in China.

Also important but less visible in the three different performances (or non-performance) of *gongyi* is the different groups of people who were using (or not using) it. For the local government officials, the *gongyi* performance was used to strengthen their extraordinary political and social status in front of the local

NGO community. This is also partly the reason why Humphrey, a man who can barely afford the 600 pounds 'donation', must make sense of his work in the public by connecting GH with another group of elites - the new domestic donors and their extraordinary founders. In this case, speaking *gongyi* in the AF's way and acting like AF did empower GH in facing the local government, although at the same time it also helped to conceal the huge economic and social gap between the rich domestic donors and the poor NGO frontline workers such as Humphrey in China. This dilemma of *gongyi* appeared directly in the case of the disabled groups. Since most of them who were living at the bottom of Chinese society and not speaking *gongyi*, this poor, disabled group were more invisible and isolated in the mainstream society. Their organization were neither recognized by the state nor the emerging domestic donors such as AF. This was highlighted by the fact that their meeting had to be held quietly under the dim light next to an unpleasant smelling toilet.

The Chinese language of *gongyi* is the major subject of this thesis. As a language that has been popularly used in Chinese society since the national economic reform, the past three decades have witnessed its changing meanings given the social and political changes in the country. In particular, I pay attention to the recent history of *gongyi* in the past decade, since this is the period that the whole Chinese NGO industry reached its highest number and growth rate, along with new knowledge, actors, and politics. In this thesis, I argue that this language of *gongyi*, as my ethnography of AF and its partner organizations presents, is key word to understanding the changing landscape of Chinese NGO sector in the past decade. Presenting an increasingly complicated picture of the Chinese NGO community, this study examines the emerging domestic donors from the private sector and the accompanying changes of knowledge production and organizational culture. Through ethnographic research of Chinese NGOs and the everyday life of their workers, this study tells a story of how a seemingly growing NGO industry (and the civil society at large) in the authoritarian state has gone through the process of normalization in the past decade. The thesis argues that this process has strengthened the status quo of the authoritarian regime by NGOs' deeper embeddedness within corporatism in various ways, and it has also helped with reproducing social inequality in the Chinese society. This chapter introduces the main research questions, arguments and the analytical framework of the thesis.

1.1 What this thesis is about

My research aims to answer the following interconnected questions. Firstly, given the rise of the Chinese private economy and the authoritarian state, how did Chinese entrepreneurs identify themselves as new donors under the name of *gongyi*, and how did they imagine NGOs should be like in China? This question looks at the process of how *gongyi* has been imagined and reinvented under the tremendous influence of the Chinese entrepreneurs as new domestic donors. The question responds to one of the most critical aspects of this widely used language of *gongyi*: where its knowledge resource comes from and how it is practiced in terms of daily language and working skills. My answer to this question is mostly based on my six-month ethnography in AF's head office working as a full-time intern. Frequently reported as a 'national *gongyi* model', AF's founders, a small group of the most successful Chinese entrepreneurs, largely decided AF's organizational structure, working strategy and daily operation. Therefore, Chinese entrepreneurs become a crucial part of studying *gongyi;* my ethnographic work of these entrepreneurs' personal backgrounds, social status, public and internal speeches, media presentations, as well as their interactions with the ordinary NGO workers would be helpful in answering this question.

Secondly, how did the Chinese state think about and contribute to this new *gongyi* in different local contexts? This question analyzes why and how *gongyi,* an entrepreneur-invented language, can be tolerated, legitimized, or even encouraged by some local Chinese states, how the new domestic donors and their local partners have been incorporated by the state, and the crucial role that *gongyi* plays in this regard. The answer to this question lies in my studies of the different NGO-government relations in multiple sites: between the municipal government of Shenzhen city and AF, between the government of city Nan and GH, and so forth. My answer to this question presents various forms of corporatism in China which, I argue, is very important for us to understand how *gongyi* can be disseminated, learned, and negotiated across the country.

Thirdly, what did this *gongyi* mean for ordinary Chinese NGO workers, in particular, how did *gongyi* shape the private life and personal identities of

Chinese NGO workers, and how did they deal with *gongyi* in different ways? This question looks at how *gongyi* worked at an individual level from the perspectives of gender, religion and cultural norms. The answer to this question is based on the first two questions. On the one hand, my ethnographic work of living with AF's workers in its dormitory reveals how the entrepreneurial *gongyi* can serve as a mechanism for reproducing inequalities among NGO workers, with the help of the labor re-division in Chinese families since the economic reform. On the other hand, my study of the private lives of AF's local partners also helps us understand how the different forms of corporatism in the local society can be practiced as an arrangement of organizing people's everyday life, which constitutes their different understandings of 'doing *gongyi*'. The answer to this question shows how the knowledge and language of *gongyi* help to strengthen the polarized nature of Chinese NGOs and their workers, which is deeply embedded within the highly differentiated, unequal Chinese society today.

In answering these three main questions, this research understands the multiple meanings and performances of *gongyi* by applying it to the dynamic NGO-state relations in China as well as the everyday life of Chinese NGO workers. Considering the crucial roles that the Chinese entrepreneurs played in shaping Chinese NGOs, I present the process of how *gongyi*, once a socialist morality, has become increasingly commercialized in recent years. The new meanings of *gongyi* were firstly reinvented by these Chinese entrepreneurs, which were called as 'modern *gongyi*'. By looking at the daily operation of AF in the city of Shenzhen, I argue that this modern *gongyi* is producing new knowledge and skills.   As a farewell to the socialist traditions, this 'modern *gongyi*' puts an emphasis on the spirit of aggressiveness in NGO workers' everyday life, a characteristic known as 'wolf spirit', which is shared by the market economy and many Chinese enterprises today. This new *gongyi* also led to profound changes at the individual level: more employees (mostly men) with the mastery of the new, commercialized languages and fewer 'family burdens' were seen to be better equipped with the 'wolf spirit' to do modern *gongyi*, while female workers were increasingly marginalized in China's NGO sector. Furthermore, this research also argues that although *gongyi* seems to be a "commercialized (and seemingly depoliticized)" knowledge reinvented by the Chinese entrepreneurs, its dissemination and reproduction is largely embedded in various forms of local politics in different places. In some cases,

the modern *gongyi* model helped strengthen corporatism by building partnerships between AF, the local government, and government-organized NGOs (GONGOs). In some others, however, it turned out to be a political shelter for the grassroots organizations to disguise their cooperation with international donors. Being a 'successful *gongyi* worker' in this sense also involves new elements other than the commercialized skills: it means that the NGO workers need to reorganize their everyday life in order to cultivate and maintain various social relations in the local society.

By discussing the role of the Chinese state played in different case studies, *gongyi* presents a more complicated picture of deepening corporatism in China in various forms. Corporatism in this sense, is not only a national regulatory framework towards the civil society in an authoritarian state, but it also works in more indirect and decentralized ways by collaborating with the private sector, entrepreneurs and some NGO leaders in different places across the country. At the same time, the multiple meanings of doing *gongyi* as a profession in the Chinese NGO community also unveils an increasingly unequal society in the making under this corporatism.

It should be noted that there have been several seemingly similar but different words mentioned so far in this thesis: social organization (*shehui zuzhi*, 社会组织), non-governmental organization (*fei zhengfu zuzhi*,非政府组织), and civil society organization (*gongmin shehui zuzhi*, 公民社会组织). In many literatures and news reports, these words are taken as equivalent to one another, pointing to some vague and broadly defined forces or groups outside the state. But in China's context, they are used in very different ways by different groups of people, indicating different political meanings and types of organizations. Therefore, it is first helpful to clarify the kinds of organization I am specifically looking at in this thesis. The first one, 'social organization' is widely used in governmental documents, especially when people try to categorize various GONGOs, community centers, academic associations and business unions. It covers a wide range of organizations both including for-profit and non-profit ones, without mentioning the autonomy of these organizations. The second one, the non-governmental organization, or *fei zhengfu zuzhi,* is a Western word imported into China in the 1980s. While it reflects organizations' independence from the state, this translation is also the

most controversial in China. In some cases, *feizhengfu zuzhi* is confused with *wuzhengfu zuzhi* (anarchic organization), or *fanzhengfu zuzhi* (anti-government organization) (Suo, 2008). In my former work experience and this fieldwork with Chinese NGOs, the word 'NGO' has been very popular among the Chinese organizations deeply influenced by various international donors. These organizations often posit themselves as part of 'the growing third sector' or 'civil society' outside the state and the market, working for social development issues in China. Given NGOs' controversial translations and transnational links, I find many Chinese NGO workers would nowadays only use this term among themselves in private conversations; when in front of the Chinese government or the general public, they turn to using the term 'social organizations' in order to avoid political troubles. Based on 'NGO', 'civil society organization (CSO)' goes a bit further in its political contents. As I discuss in the next chapter, 'civil society' has been seen as a term of political danger brought by the Western world and which has been censored in China in the past few years. Hence, 'CSO' in China has been often related to social or political movements and is more welcomed among advocacy groups and political activists.

In this thesis, the organizations I study overlap between 'social organization' and 'NGO' in China's context. All of them would publicly claim that they are 'social organizations' doing '*gongyi* deeds', or simply '*gongyi* organizations'. But many of the organizations' workers I study had personal connections with international donors; they may have been a former worker of the international donors, received funding or training programs from them, or had studied abroad. Therefore, on many informal occasions, they would also use Western words like 'NGO' to identify themselves. In what follows, I situate the two major themes of this thesis - corporatism and everyday life in reformist China - in the larger fields of theoretical debates.

1.2 The Analytical Framework

In discussing corporatism in this section, I firstly introduce how the relevant debates have been developed in understanding state-society relations in reformist China. In particular, I present the debates around two different scholarly traditions in understanding Chinese NGOs: civil society and

corporatism.   In this thesis, I argue that the corporatism framework would be better than the civil society approach in analyzing the internal structural changes of the Chinese NGO sector in the past decade, as it still provides a very useful framework in understanding the changing regulatory strategies of the Chinese state as well as the dynamic political and social environment in the country at large. But my research also extends the literature on corporatism in two ways.

On the one hand, this thesis presents a more complicated picture of the making of corporatism in China by taking new actors and knowledge from the private sector into consideration. On the other, the thesis goes further to look at the essential (but understudied) role that corporatism plays in shaping Chinese NGOs in different places. In this sense, I present the fragmented nature of the Chinese state and analyze how this fragmentation has contributed to different state-NGO relations. I argue that the depoliticization trend and normalization process of the Chinese NGO sector is largely based upon the deeper development of corporatism in different places across the country. Then in section 1.2.4, I turn to the second major theme of the thesis: everyday life in reformist China.   Given the changing landscape of the Chinese NGO sector and the dynamic political environment, the continuities and changes in NGO workers' everyday lives demonstrate the cultural and social meanings of "doing *gongyi*" in China's context. In this section, by engaging with the existing literature on Chinese popular language and everyday life in the reformist era, I pay attention to the meanings of *gongyi* from two perspectives: gender and social inequality.

1.2.1 The civil society framework

There have been two main types of literature - corporatism and civil society - debating Chinese NGOs, developing from different academic traditions and historical periods. To better understand the discussion around corporatism in this section, I will first introduce the civil society approach and its debates.

Many scholars rely on insights from the literature on civil society, which usually assumes that social actors have a contentious or counterbalancing relationship with the state (Cohen and Arato, 1992; Fine, 1997) and that the various activities it explains will lead to political change (e.g. Putnam, 1993; Keane,

2003). The dominant literature maintains that NGOs could be a challenge to authoritarianism by increasing political participation (especially among marginalized populations) and keeping state power in check (Mercer, 2002), and thus a fundamental source of democratization (Diamond, 1994). Most civil society scholars see NGOs from a decidedly liberal perspective, maintaining that democracy requires this autonomous civil society to balance a strong state and represent the diverse interests within society. In China's context, academic discussions on whether and how to apply civil society theories in the country have been ongoing since the 1989 Student Movement in Beijing. In his research, Zhao (1998, 2002, 2013) analyzed how the weaknesses of the various movement organizations in Beijing finally contributed to the failure of the larger movement, and this he attributed to the lack of 'civil society' and 'organizational capacity' in the country. Therefore, Zhao called for more 'intermediate organizations between the state and the society' in China, a perspective which shares many common arguments with the NGO literature referred to above.

Zhao's research has been further developed with China's increasing development of urbanization and marketization reform, which leads to more and more research on the relations between the emerging urban middle class and a growing civil society in China (e.g. Cai, 2005; Zhang, 2010; Tomba, 2014; Zhou, 2014). These studies can be found from a wide range of examples such as *qigong* groups, private entrepreneurs, new pop cultures and clubs in various Chinese cities, which have all been seen as expressions of a new social stratum in the society indicating the possibilities of a separate, more independent sphere outside the state. Among the studies of the 'middle class and civil society', researchers on Chinese social media and NGOs directly link these new phenomena with political change (Yang and Calhoun, 2007; Yang, 2012, 2017). While studies on religious associations and women's groups offered the possibilities of how these 'voluntary associations' may lead to the development of an autonomous social sphere (e.g. Howell, 1995, 2007, 2012; Cao, 2008), researchers of Chinese online platforms and marketized media emphasize the various ways that this rising sphere may change the political agendas of the Chinese state around many social issues (e.g. Yang and Calhoun, 2007; Zhan, 2017). These two research groups together contribute to more analyses of social movement in urban China, looking at how 'voluntary associations' and their collaborations with ordinary citizens online have ultimately affected the

rise and fall of various environmental movements in different Chinese cities (e.g. Ji, 2000; Wong, 2016; Hsu and Hsu, 2017).

Therefore, some researchers conclude that even though civil society might not bring democracy to China, civil liberties are sure to increase because of the very existence of these social organizations (e.g. Morton, 2005). In recent years, there have been researchers looking at the increasing number and various types of organizations, taking it as the 'growth of China's civil society'[4]. According to this approach, the main obstacles to Chinese NGOs developing a more 'mature civil society' may lie in two factors: the collaboration among these organizations (Peng and Wu, 2018; Yang and Cheong, 2019), and their relations with the Chinese state (Hsu and Jiang, 2015; Zhu, Ye and Liu, 2018). Many studies on China's NGOs today emphasize the importance of organizational collaboration between NGOs to form a stronger 'civil society', so as to provide more social welfare services and/or build up a more independent network outside the state apparatus (e.g. Ma and Parish, 2014; Spires, Tao and Chan, 2014; Shieh, 2017; Wu, 2017). The independence of Chinese NGOs in relation to the state has become the major concern of many civil society researchers.

This liberal civil society approach has been facing many challenges of empirical evidence in China's context. Some scholars have come to realize that civil society may be different in China. They argue that China's civil society is described as highly regulated (Xiaoguang and Heng, 2008), limited by "Asian characteristics" (Madsen, 1993), and usually less confrontational than in other contexts (Pye and Ogden, 2003). Many note that the state must be taken into consideration when using the concept of civil society (Chamberlain, 1993; Nevitt, 1996). As Spires (2011)states, there could be "organizational isomorphism" between the governmental bodies and non-governmental actors in China, so that 'we should not assume NGOs in an authoritarian state, even

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[4] It should be noted that more and more researchers in this approach do recognize the different types of these emerging Chinese organizations, although they do not necessarily problematize the differences (e.g. Lai *et al.*, 2015; Shieh, 2017). For instance, some researchers view the rapidly increasing number of private charitable foundations and celebrity philanthropy as a great opportunity for the Chinese NGO sector to get more funding and enhance their efficiency and internal governance, etc (e.g. Deng, 2015).

independent grassroots organizations, are working toward democratic purposes' (p35). Ogden (2002) argues that some NGOs may weaken the state, but that in itself does not necessarily bring any benefits to the society. Beja (2008) and Hildebrandt (2011) argue that some Chinese NGOs may prioritize the specific needs of the state and marginalize those seeking for more radical change in China, so as to maintain the extraordinary political status in the NGO community.

Given these challenges in the liberal civil society approach, some scholars rectify this with the Gramscian concept of civil society, suggesting that civil society is more like an extension of the capitalist state. In this regard, Howell's research (2012) tries to bring market back to the analysis of Chinese NGOs. By tracing the different historical periods of the Chinese NGO sector since the national economic reform, Howell finds that the rise and fall of Chinese NGOs, labor organizations in particular, have been highly dependent upon national economic conditions at different times, which also affects the Chinese state's various attitudes and changing regulations towards different types of organizations. The correlations between NGO development and economic growth can be best found in the early 2000s when China had just joined the World Trade Organization. Since then, China as a 'world factory' has witnessed a rapidly increasing number of labor unrest, and the state has also begun to take a more hostile strategy towards organizations working on labor rights protection issues. Howell's research inspires us to question the dichotomized nature of the state-society (or state-NGO) relations in China, as the development of the Chinese NGO sector may have already been deeply embedded into the neoliberal marketization reform and globalization trend.

1.2.2 The corporatism framework

To some degree, researchers of the corporatism tradition have some similarities with the Gramscian approach mentioned in the last section. Both of them look at the political economy factors in shaping the state and society relations in China, evaluating political and social change from a longer historical perspective. But the Gramscian approach and corporatism framework are trying to answer different questions. By putting the development of Chinese NGOs into the structure of neoliberalism at the global level, the Gramscian

approach is useful in evaluating the dynamics between the state and NGOs through the changing regulations of Chinese NGOs. But unlike civil society researchers who seek to explore how the society can change the state politics in China, corporatism aims to explain the status quo (Hildebrandt, 2013): with the growing civil society in China in the past decades, why can we still see no visible political change in the country? How can we understand the resilience of China's authoritarianism?

Schmitter (1974: 93-4) calls corporatism "a system of interest representation" where organizations are given "representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports". Corporatist insights have been increasingly adopted to explain the negotiated, highly structured relationship between the state and society in China. The use of corporatism has been firstly and widely used by social scientists to analyze the political factors in shaping the Chinese economic development path as well as the relations between the Chinese state and the private sector. Walder (1987) holds that China's corporatist tradition should be better understood in its socialist history of state-owned factories, which created a system of public ties between selected subordinates (the ordinary factory workers) and their superiors (factory leaders) that was in accord with the dictates of Party policy. This system almost inevitably slipped sideways into personalized patron-client relationships and favors trading, which has not yet been touched by the national economic reform. Instead, this clientelist corporatism constitutes an important feature of China's economic development model in the past three decades. For instance, Wank (1999) and Pearson (1997) find that despite the expansion of the sphere of the market, the power of the state imposes constraints on every aspect of business and often uses its leverage to pressure entrepreneurs into redistributing wealth to the community. The corporatism literature is particularly insightful in analyzing China's economic and political development from a decentralized perspective. Researchers, such as Oi (1989), Shue (1988) and Duckett (1998), suggest that the local state can be entrepreneurial and productive in facilitating China's economic reform. The local state is neither a shaper nor a regulator of markets only; rather, it is the player in the local market (Oi, 1995). Furthermore, given studies on different development paths in different Chinese provinces (e.g. Blecher and Shue, 2001;

Remick, 2002; Hsu and Hasmath, 2012), the subtleties of state–society relations across the country are brought to the fore.

Some NGO researchers hold that corporatism could better explain Chinese NGO development by questioning the nature of the 'growing civil society'. They are partly inspired the Gramscian approach in examining Chinese civil society. If one looks at the organizations established by the state, one may find it is these organizations, rather than the non-state ones, that have been dominating China's NGO sector in the past three decades (Spires, 2011; Hildebrandt, 2011; Hsu and Hasmath, 2015; Lai *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, many corporatism researchers look at the roles that GONGOs play in shaping the whole NGO sector, even though the funding resources and non-state actors have been much more diversified than ever before (Spires, 2011; Xijin, 2011; Zhu, Ye and Liu, 2018; Kang, 2019). More importantly, given the restrictions and repressive regulations towards Chinese NGOs, in order to survive and get funding, it is possible that many of China's local NGOs are more willing to be incorporated within the current regime (Hildebrandt, 2012). Similarly, some studies reveal that many Chinese NGO leaders keep special ties with local officials for political protections (ibid.; Fulda, Li and Song, 2012). The whole NGO sector may then exclude those who are 'politically contentious' rather than challenge the authoritarian institutions (Hildebrandt, 2015). Meanwhile, they also argue that the civil society approach takes the interactions between the Chinese state and NGOs as a zero-sum game or balance of power; however, some corporatism researchers argue that the game players could be symbiotic (Spires, 2011). NGOs and their leaders in China may share more similarities with the state than differences.

In short, under the corporatism framework, researchers challenge the assumed link between democracy, economic liberalization and NGO development in China. Empirical evidence of East Asia has demonstrated that liberalization in both economy and politics could be tolerated within, or even mutually consolidates, authoritarianism (Evans, 1995; Leftwich, 1995). So, the techniques used to discipline Chinese NGOs could be more advanced, complicated, subtle and invisible (Howell, 2019). In recent years, inspired by the corporatist political economy studies of China's local states, more and more researchers have examined the differences between how NGOs are administered in different areas in China, how local states implement the

national regulations in different ways, and how local officials manage their personal relations with NGOs with various strategies (e.g. Hildebrandt, 2013; Hsu and Hasmath, 2014a; Hsu, 2012). These studies are particularly helpful in understanding the heterogeneity of China's political and social development in a more decentralized way.

1.2.3 *Gongyi* and corporatism in China

Although this research on AF and other Chinese NGOs is greatly inspired by the debates of both the civil society and corporatism framework, it engages more directly with and also contributes to the corporatism approach.

Firstly, the main research subjects in the thesis are the organizations that have been recognized and/or at least tolerated by the state. As I present in the empirical chapters, most of the organizations I studied in my fieldwork are the mainstream, 'overground' organizations that had various kind of ties with the Chinese state, but not those who have been seen as political threats in China. The linguistic history of *gongyi* (see the next chapter) can also be traced back to China's socialist revolution. In this sense, my research of *gongyi* documents the 'normalization' process of how the NGO community in an authoritarian state like China have moved from an underground, marginalized, or political opposition status (as discussed by many civil society scholars) to an overground, legitimatized industry, without greatly challenging the status quo.

Based on the current corporatism literature that mostly focuses on the relevant regulatory policies and GONGOs in China, this research documents and analyzes a more complicated picture of how corporatism works in China. The increasingly complicated picture is mostly demonstrated in the collaboration between the local state, entrepreneurs, and Chinese NGOs. In this thesis, I argue that corporatism is not just appearing in the increasing state surveillance and regulations towards NGOs, but it is also working through many indirect ways: for instance, deeper collaboration between the state and the emerging domestic donors at the local level; the commercialization of the NGO sector; the changing everyday life of ordinary NGO workers in China. The new knowledge of 'doing *gongyi*', I propose, is largely a product of these new, complicated interactions between the three groups of actors in this thesis.

Secondly, based on my multi-sited fieldwork across seven different provinces in China, this research on *gongyi* never takes the Chinese state, entrepreneurs, or NGO workers as homogenous actors. Instead, I present the various performances and understandings of *gongyi* by putting it back to different local contexts. In this sense, I present the fragmented nature of the Chinese state and analyze how this fragmentation has contributed to different state-NGO relations. In the past ten years, the Chinese state at the national level has strengthened its political control towards the international donors as well as NGOs involved with contentious politics. But the changing regulatory framework has never performed evenly in the local society. The thesis argues that although *gongyi* seems to be a "commercialized (and therefore depoliticized)" knowledge reinvented by the Chinese entrepreneurs, its dissemination and reproduction is largely embedded in various forms of local politics in different places. The widely used language as *gongyi* in the last decade is never a phenomenon of depoliticizing in its nature, or a retreat from a more contentious politics in China; rather it is still a highly political language but with different performances from the previous historical periods.

My multi-sited fieldwork also leads me to think about corporatism in China in a more contextual and decentralized way. In practice, we may find corporatism is not only a national regulatory framework established by a strong, centralized, Chinese state at the time of the 1989 Beijing Student Movement, but that there are also various forms of corporatism based on different negotiations between the local state and NGOs in their everyday life within the past decade. In the empirical chapters, we may find that Chinese state's surveillance towards NGOs, whether they are legally registered or not, is everywhere. For people like Humphrey, although his organization has been legally registered for years, his contacts with international donors has been closely watched by the local police. That is also the reason why, as I write at the beginning of this thesis, Oxfam's meeting with him can only take place in a dark hotel corridor. Registration gives Chinese NGOs the legitimacy for their daily activities, so they are no longer 'underground' anymore. However, it also means that all these organizations, including AF and GH, have to be checked by the local authorities regularly. According to the national NGO regulations (see more in Chapter 6), AF and GH must submit their annual work plans, financial reports, funding resources, partner organizations' materials and so forth to the local government every year for approval, so that to 'maintain' their legal status.

That is one of the reasons why that most of the NGOs I encountered had to use certain language, like *gongyi*, to identify themselves in their daily work, so as to be incorporated into and recognized by the local government. But the way that these organizations and their workers understood and used *gongyi* is quite different. For foundation workers in one of the biggest cities in China, they try to fit themselves into the urban 'white collar' community as a '*gongyi* professional', and therefore they need to learn to be a new man with 'wolf spirit' in a fast-changing society. But in the other places, NGO workers prefer to refer to themselves simply as '*gongyi* people' (rather than a professional attached to a certain institution), as this name gives them more flexibility in presenting their faith in and social relations to the local society, especially their connections with the local state, government officials, and the business world. In this sense, I argue that corporatism is not just a concept for understanding state politics in authoritarian countries, but it also means various arrangements of organizing people's everyday life from their social relations, political ideology, family life, to their religions.

However, this research should not be understood as a mere counter argument to the liberal civil society literature in understanding Chinese NGO development. As some criticism towards corporatism suggests (Howell, 2007; Hildebrandt, 2013), many corporatism studies over emphasize the state power and capacity while neglecting the dynamics and changes in China, which has been better captured by the civil society approach. My research does look at the 'new' languages, influential actors and funding resources, as well as many other changes that have happened in the Chinese NGO sector; however, I argue that such changes are not necessarily 'new' in the Chinese society in a larger picture. For instance, the market (and entrepreneurs from it) is not a 'new' actor in influencing Chinese NGOs today; as I discuss in the next chapter, they have been seen as 'natural allies of Chinese NGOs' since the failure of the 1989 Student Movement in Beijing (Wang, 2011). As the corporatism literature shows, clientelism between Chinese private entrepreneurs and the local states has been deeply embedded in the national economic development process during the past three decades. Therefore, my ethnographic work on their relations through the daily operation of Chinese NGOs may help develop our understanding of how such clientelism has been practiced in different forms and situations.

Moreover, my research goes further to examine how and when such corporatism in different places can be challenged or solidified. As my ethnography on Chinese NGO workers (and the next section) shows, people may have different interpretations and strategies of "doing *gongyi*" in their everyday life. Some of my AF colleagues would take the highly commercialized *gongyi* language as an effective tool in competing with GONGOs and the other state affiliations in the fundraising market. But at the same time, they would be very careful in deciding whether to send humanitarian aid to the capital city of Beijing when needed in a natural disaster, since they worried that this action would raise political doubts from the national leaders. In other words, my ethnographic account on corporatism in China is not in an institution-based approach to provide a large-scale sample of testing which theory (be it civil society or corporatism) is correct or not. Instead, this thesis is a practice-oriented work to take corporatism as an arrangement of organizing people's personal network, social relations, career, and private life (Zhang, 2002). Given the increasing corporatism in the Chinese NGO sector in the past decade, different actors need to find their own ways of dealing with, negotiating, resisting and making sense of this situation in their daily life. This thesis aims to expand our understanding of the concept of corporatism in China's context.

1.2.4 Language and everyday life in reformist China

As a popular language widely used in people's everyday life, *gongyi* is not only useful in the normalization process of Chinese NGOs, but it also redefines NGO work as a new profession in the Chinese society. Therefore, in this thesis, I also discuss *gongyi* in terms of NGO workers' everyday life. The changing popular languages in China, including *gongyi*, provide a good opportunity to observe the fast-changing Chinese society and people's everyday life during the past three decades. This section provides a literature review of how these languages have been studied by social scientists (especially anthropologists) to understand social and cultural change in China. This literature, I believe, offers insights for this thesis to understand *gongyi* in methodological and theoretical terms.

Many researchers pay attention to the changing use of popular language and the making of social hierarchies in reformist China. The term of *suzhi* (human quality), for example, is a 'key word' in understanding the making of social

hierarchy in reformist China (Woronov, 2016). *Suzhi* was popularized in the late 1980s, concurrent with the economic reforms and spread of the theory of human capital accumulation (Anagnost, 2004; Greenhalgh and Winckler, 2005; Hoffman, 2010). For instance, Greenhalgh (2008) understands how *suzhi* was initiated by the discussions of population control and national development within an elitist group of Chinese physical scientists and missile engineers. She puts the policy making process of China's One Child Policy from the 1970s to 1980s in a broader context: the scientization and statisticalization of sociopolitical life in the post-socialist era. Research on the lower classes or the powerless of Chinese society, on the other hand, views *suzhi* as an important lens through which to analyze immigrant workers, prostitutes, or peasants in China, as it has been used by the state to create new forms of social hierarchy between the 'high' and the 'low quality people' in the national economic reform (Zheng, 2009; Woronov, 2016). Inspired by the studies on '*suzhi*', this thesis also pays attention to the relations between *gongyi* and social inequality in China from two main perspectives: class and gender.

The language of class has raised heated debates due to the increasing number of studies on the emerging middle class and the newly rich in urban China (e.g. Goodman, 2008; Osburg, 2013b; Tomba, 2014); their daily life has been studied from many aspects including housing, consumption, profession, and family. However, the concept of 'middle class' is controversial in these discussions, since the word 'class (*jieji*, 阶级)' is rarely used in China today (Woronov, 2015). As researchers note, class has been closely related to China's socialist revolution history of 'class struggles', when Chinese people were categorized by their different 'class elements (*jieji chengfen*, 阶级成分)'. Therefore, as a word heavily burdened by meanings of social unrests, conflicts, and many other socialist memories, 'class' has become unwelcome in Chinese society since the economic reform (Guo, 2008). In the 1990s, 'social strata (*shehui jieceng*, 社会阶层)' replaced 'class' to describe people's different economic and social conditions in China (ibid.). The changing language of class is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but it also presents changing attitudes towards social inequality in Chinese society today. As Anagnost (2008) points out, the use of the term "social strata" erases the Cultural Revolution from historical memory, depoliticizes social hierarchy, and removes the possibility of using social class

as an analytic category (see also Guo, 2012). As a result, the concept of classes as structural social categories inexorably in conflict with each other, as in Maoist social theory, has now been replaced with a neoliberal concept of individual responsibility, so each person is individually responsible for his or her own "social status" (Anagnost, 2008; Tomba, 2009; Ren, 2013). Woronov's (2016) anthropological study on China's vocational schools reveals how this depoliticized, individualistic concept of 'social strata' can be strengthened and reproduced among younger generations in school. Often identified as 'stupid' or 'lazy' in the mainstream Chinese culture, vocational school students are socially excluded from 'white-collar jobs' or 'high quality people' in China. By articulating inequality as a cultural and/or intellectual difference, new forms of hierarchy can be established and tolerated among the ordinary Chinese.

My study of *gongyi* in this thesis echoes with the studies on 'social strata' in China: as witnessed during my fieldwork, 'doing *gongyi'* (or participating charitable activities) on many public occasions has been seen as 'a new lifestyle of being middle class' in urban China today, and was particularly popular among the various foundation-organized 'charity marathons' in the metropolitans. But behind this 'new lifestyle', as Woronov's study (2016) shows, is the alienation and exclusion of the beneficiaries of their charitable projects in rural China. Similar to 'social strata', the practices of the increasingly commercialized *gongyi* in AF's office and its project sites also help to create hierarchies between different NGO workers based on their commercial skills and economic conditions, and this greatly affects their career paths. This study of *gongyi* as a profession and a new class identity in urban China reveals how NGOs contribute to the increasing social inequality rather than reduce it.

Researchers of the new popular languages in China have also discussed them from a gender perspective. Hoffman's (2006) study of '*rencai* (talent,人才)' in Dalian City's job market argues that the new forms of labor flows and professionalism in reformist China should be understood from the gender perspective; gender-specific differences have been incorporated into ideas about professionalism. Hoffman finds that the emerging private sector was seen as a 'battlefield' with more risks and potentially higher payment. Inside many Chinese families, there were "one family, two systems": women were often those to stay inside the remaining socialist, 'less competitive (and thus less profitable)' bodies, like the state-owned companies, public education

institutes, and public services. Even though such jobs could be much lower paid than the private sector, the 'low competition and stable welfare' would make sure that they had enough energy for family care. At the same time, men were expected to fight in the private sector and make a good fortune (ibid). Therefore, the ideas of 'national talents' are linked with new visions of what a 'secure', 'happy' modern family should be like, based on the 'strategical split of labor' within families. Hoffman's findings have been further developed by other social scientists intersecting with different aspects of everyday life in China. Cao's (Cao, 2010) research on the discourse of '*xinyang suzhi* (faith quality, 信仰素质)' of the Christian church in the city of Wenzhou, for instance, suggests how *suzhi* has become increasingly masculinized in the everyday practice of Christian entrepreneurs (p97-125). Cao's fieldwork revealed that many Christian churches in Wenzhou were dominated by male leaders, promoting 'high quality believers' in the local community. Such 'faith quality' discourse can be understood as a 'top-down, elitist' approach of spreading faith, which was performed in the grand evangelical banquets organized by the affluent head Christians. These banquets were carefully designed by the male leaders to create closedness amongst the successful entrepreneurs in the local community by distributing their own magazines and giving speeches on topics such as 'God is my CEO'. But at the same time, women believers can only appear on such occasions as a receptionist, a waitress, or 'a learner' of these head Christians since their 'faith quality' was not 'high enough'.

My fieldwork on Chinese NGO workers also finds a very similar family structure in their private life of 'one family, two systems'. As there were many more women than men in the Chinese NGO sector, most of the female workers were not expected to be the major bread winners of the family while their partners worked in other 'competitive, profitable' industries. Such family structure made the low payment widely acceptable among most of the NGO workers I met, which consequently led to a more extraordinary status of Chinese entrepreneurs in this sector: *gongyi* needed to be more 'competitive' by bringing more male, business-background, senior managers. By identifying *gongyi* as an industry lacking "competitiveness", the Chinese entrepreneurs as emerging donors are asking for more 'ambitious' workers in the NGO sector, which they called "wolf spirit". In my case studies, I find that this wolf spirit has strengthened the existing 'one family, two systems' as it requires longer

working hours and less family obligations, which finally turns to a major obstacle for most women workers and "good daddies" in their career ladder.

My research into *gongyi* attempts to deepen the current discussions of language and everyday life in reformist China in the following ways. Firstly, as the literature of language and everyday life presented as above, the old and new languages in reformist China are not only a cultural or linguistic expression. They have become important thinking patterns, knowledge, and power structures that ordinary Chinese people use to make sense of their everyday work and life in a fast-changing society. In particular, as the literature on gender and class show, these languages help us understand how various forms of social inequality can be expressed, tolerated, and/or resisted at an individual level in their daily practices of the popular languages. Similarly, my research on *gongyi* suggests that this popular language has produced a localized knowledge of what an NGO should look like in China as well as shaping the power structure in China's NGO sector. Inspired by studies on '*suzhi*' as a 'key word' in understanding the various forms of social hierarchies in reformist China, I argue that *gongyi* should also be understood as the 'key word' in understanding the changing landscape of the Chinese NGO sector over the past decade.

This thesis argues that in the past decade, the emerging domestic entrepreneurs in China's NGO sector, by bringing in commercialized knowledge and organizational culture, have reinvented the meaning of *gongyi*. The rise of commercialized *gongyi* in China should be better understood by putting it back to the daily work and life of individual NGO workers in terms of their class, gender and religious background. Seen as a 'progressive force' in China, Chinese NGO workers are in an awkward situation. On the one hand, they are in a symbiotic relationship with the private sector: they have to depend on the new rich Chinese for fundraising, to move from the marginal to a more mainstream position so as to be recognized by these new domestic donors. But at the same time, they are also expected to respond to various social problems and to reflect on the increasing social inequality and injustice during China's economic reform. In fact, they themselves could be the victims of the rapidly divided Chinese society today. This complicated situation leads Chinese NGO workers to produce new knowledge of what NGO work should be like in China's context.

Secondly, my research of *gongyi* in terms of people's private lives also helps us better understand political ideologies and social change in China. As the studies

on *suzhi* have shown as above, the popularity of *suzhi* language is largely a political product of the neoliberal national development model in China, and a farewell to the socialist language of 'class struggles'. But as Hoffman (2006) demonstrates in her research on college students in Dalian, high *suzhi* college students may not necessarily be self-claimed individualists; on the contrary, they would identify themselves with a new political, collective value: "patriotic professional". Although this thesis unveils the polarization and inequalities of various NGO workers in their everyday life, my fieldwork also discusses the reasons why such inequalities have been tolerated at the individual level to some degree and how different workers consider each other. As my research shows, 'doing *gongyi*' in some cases is not just a job, but also a 'standing with private entrepreneurs' and other NGO workers to 'reform the state'. While learning from the private sector to be more 'wolf-like', certain political ideologies - identified as 'liberalist values' in my fieldwork - still remain crucial factors in shaping NGO workers' career choice and self-identity in their everyday life. Although these 'liberalist values' have been performed as a departure from the official socialist propaganda as with *suzhi*, somehow the organizations and NGO workers in these cases can be warmly welcomed by and deeply incorporated into the local state.

Moreover, many other popular languages that have been studied as seen above were firstly created by the Chinese state, for example, *suzhi*, or floating people; their changing meanings were also largely shaped by other domestic factors like the local government policies, gender gaps, or religions. My research on *gongyi*, however, involves global actors. I present how the international donors (though withdrawing from China) have influenced the meanings and individual workers of *gongyi* in terms of political ideology, personal career, and working ethics, and how the falling of a Westernized language and its legacies, known as 'civil society', gave rise to a localized *gongyi*.

By analyzing the daily operation of AF and its partner organizations, this thesis engages with two larger debates. One is the debate on the role that NGOs play in authoritarian states. Many researchers of this debate connect NGOs with democratization, regime change, state governance, or governmentality, discussing to what degree that NGOs as part of the 'growing civil society' can help challenge the existing regimes (Mercer, 2002; Lewis, 2013; Froissart,

2014). Such work is particularly extensive on Eastern European countries in the post-socialist transition, as well as China, Vietnam, Cuba, Myanmar and sometimes the Middle East. However, research on NGOization and civil society has begun to challenge those literatures in a broader context, stating that most NGO efforts are palliative rather than transformative. For instance, Banks & Hulme (2014) argues that in doing "democracy promotion work", most foreign donors have taken NGOs as "clients" to work on their limited set agendas. The trend of technocracy in the development industry has aimed to work with more "professional organizations" to delivery projects, rather than those that are deeply embedded in the local political and social movements (Choudry & Kapoor, 2013). In Banks *at al* (2015)'s research, they classify the NGO world into two types: one is the NGOs that project-based and donor-dependent, aiming to be a professional service delivery organization; the other is that membership-based organizations such as labor unions and religious groups, with deeper roots and transformative forces in the local society.

Ishkanian's (2008) study of NGOs in post-socialist Armenia embraces the criticisms of NGOization in authoritarian states. Except for the trend of technocracy in the development world, she goes further to understand why most NGOs in Armenia failed to bring structural change by contextualizing international donors and their local partner organizations in social, political and economic changes in Armenia. Her anthropological research demonstrates that the international donors and the booming new organizations in Armenia could be more like a useful strategy for social mobility in NGO workers' everyday life, which is a product of the dramatic social and economic change in a certain historical period that cannot be simplified as something 'new, liberal politics' or not. Being "a professional NGO worker" in Armenia in the 1990s became an important social ladder for the previous 'socialist workers' to maintain their economic conditions and deal with the political uncertainties. Also, establishing a professional NGO and networking with Western donors could be a bonus for the former socialist politicians to win elections in the new democracy, rather than to change the status quo.

Banks (2015)'s and Ishkanian's ethnographic account set up an insightful framework for me to look at the multiple roles that NGOs play in a country in political transition. As my case studies present, my focus is on those organizational and people that had various ties with international donors.

However, given the leaving of external donors, NGOs and their workers in China have been more intertwined with the state and business circles, which, just like Armenian NGO workers did in the 1990s, becomes a way of dealing with political and economic uncertainties and rebuilding their own social identities in this fast changing country. This research echoes with the criticisms of NGOization literatures, revealing the fact that Chinese NGOs are "palliative rather than transformative" (Banks *et al* 2015: 709). In fact, my case studies unveil that most of the Chinese NGOs have become more service delivery oriented after the leaving of international donors. Like Ishkanian, in order to understand why Chinese NGOs fail to be a driver of transformative forces, this research puts these organizations and their workers back to the changing landscape of Chinese NGO sector and its dynamic relations with the state.

During my fieldwork, I repeatedly encountered statements describing 'doing *gongyi*' as something that the emerging Chinese urban middle class should do as their new lifestyle and thinking pattern as 'a modern citizen' in the country. It is not difficult to question the 'truth' or logic of such statements, but what is perhaps more important for me in this thesis is to understand the reasons why people would make such statements. My ethnography of NGO workers reveals the links between *gongyi* and the middle class in China: by bringing new knowledge and identifying themselves with 'modern values', Chinese NGO workers attempt to redefine their profession of *gongyi* as part of the emerging middle-class community in the country. At the same time, the workers of their partner organizations in different places need to identify themselves in a more relational approach; *gongyi* turns out to be a performance of cultivating their social relations and strengthening their extraordinary social status in the local society.

This leads us to the second debate around business elites and the current studies of philanthrocapitalism. Many scholars have already noted the democratic and political concerns with relying on elite philanthropists to play such a role in creating social policy (see e.g., Nickel, 2015; Webb Farley, 2015). Philanthropists have long been criticized for being unaccountable and unequal influence on national and international development agenda (Eikenberry & Mirabella, 2018). Scholars understand philanthrocapitalism both as a neoliberalist ideology and certain ruling practices in the development industry.

For instance, Wilson (2014)'s research on a development project in Uganda finds that the project sponsor, a philanthropic organisation based in New York, tries to create a "fantasy" (1144) since its cause-related marketing campaigns invite Western consumers to enjoy their imagined distance from 'African' suffering. The research argues that philanthrocapitalism is better understood as an ideological formation, which mobilises a disavowed enjoyment of global inequality. Meanwhile in practice, taking the Gates Foundation as an example, McGoey (2012, 2018) looks at how the American billionaires have restructured charitable foundations based on their previous business experiences and influenced the state education programs through their big donations in the US.

Like the big philanthropists in the global north, the newly super rich entrepreneurs in emerging economies like China, India, Russia, and Brazil are "learning from their American counterparts" (Jansons, 2015). In China's case, given that international donors have been leaving the country, these domestic philanthropists have become more and more crucial for national development programs. The way that Chinese entrepreneurs and their partner organizations imagine and run charitable organizations shows us the complicated process of how philanthrocapitalism as a global trend could take place in a specific context in both ideology and practice.

Ideologically, the Chinese entrepreneurs and their foundations are new to the Chinese society since the establishment of the socialist state in 1949. As we discuss in Chapter 2, they have been long viewed as a "progressive force" in China's economic reform in the past four decades, which is different from their counterparts in the capitalist societies like the US. Davies's anthropological research on Chinese celebrity entrepreneurs (Davies, 2010: 193-215) takes these entrepreneurs as a new cultural and political phenomenon. His research observes how these entrepreneurs have performed as a new role model in Chinese society. The 'new' image they are presenting may offer them great power over not only reshaping the Chinese economy, but also over the political ideologies and social relations of ordinary Chinese people including grassroots NGO workers. Therefore, in understanding the emerging domestic donors in China, I think it is equally important to look at how they have been imagined, presented, and interpreted by the ordinary Chinese and the mass media, which is very helpful for us to understand why it is entrepreneurs, rather than other social groups, that could be the major inventors of the popular *gongyi*.

In terms of practices, this research echoes with McGoey (2018)'s study on Gates Foundation, exploring how Chinese NGOs have been changed from within, such as their internal structure and organizational culture. This is also something that the AF workers called as "wolf spirit" in their daily work (see Chapter 4 and 5). However, China's case can contribute to the current philanthrocapitalism debates by bringing the important role that the state plays in shaping those philanthropists' practices. As we may find from the current literatures, most of the research takes the state, whether in the US or Africa, as a relatively passive role in dealing with the big, individual donors. However, China's case may present us a different story of how philanthrocapitalism can take place in a different way.

As I previously discuss in this chapter, research on Chinese entrepreneurs has been long connected with corporatism of the local state. Although some researchers acknowledge the roles that entrepreneurs play in the policy making process (e.g. Oi, 1995; Schubert & Heberer, 2017; Tsai, 2005), others argue that the Chinese state still remains to be the decisive power in shaping private entrepreneurs' political attitudes and daily practices towards the existing regime, rather than vice versa (Tsai, 2005; Dickson, 2007, 2008, 2018; Chen and Dickson, 2017). Therefore, when considering how and why the "business practices" have been brought into the NGO community by the new, domestic donors, this research also looks at the role that the Chinese state plays in shaping these practices.

1.3 The organization of this thesis

This thesis is organized as follows. In the first chapter, I introduce the analytical framework of the thesis by discussing the two major themes: corporatism and everyday life in reformist China. As a popular language used by various actors, *gongyi* provides us with a chance to examine three things: the state-NGO relations in an authoritarian state; the everyday life of NGO workers in a fast-changing society; and how these two things at different levels are connected with one another. Therefore, my analysis of *gongyi* is organized around these two themes. In the first chapter, I introduce how corporatism and everyday life in reformist China has been discussed in the scholarly world, and how my research findings can engage and contribute to these discussions. Then the

second chapter turns to the research context of *gongyi* and NGO development in China from a historical perspective. In this chapter, I talk about how *gongyi* has been used in three historical periods: the socialist and post-Mao era; the late 1980s to early 2000s; and the past decade. Specifically, I discuss the process of how *gongyi* has firstly been closely linked under the influence of Western donors to the ideas of civil society, and then how it turns to the market given the policy changes in the recent years. Chapter 3 presents the process and reflections of how I did my fieldwork in researching *gongyi* with AF and its partner organizations in different places. During my yearlong ethnographic work, I had different professional identities whilst working with different organizations. For the first half of the fieldwork, I was an intern working with AF and living with its workers, learning to be a 'professional *gongyi* worker' as a freshman. But in the second half with AF's partner organizations, I was introduced with a more 'respected identity' as 'Teacher Zhao', and therefore I had the benefit of being positioned differently which gave me the advantage of seeing things from a different perspective.

Chapters 4 to 7 present the ethnographic parts of this thesis. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the series of highly commercialized reform launched by the entrepreneurs sitting on AF's council board. Chapter 4 focuses on the daily operation in the AF office, and so presents us with how 'modern *gongyi*' was performed in these reforms. In particular, I discuss the impacts of this highly commercialized modern *gongyi* on an individual level, as we can see that a new man with 'wolf spirit' is in the making. In both Chapters 4 and 5, I discuss how this 'wolf spirit' was affecting AF workers' everyday life and how it finally strengthened and reproduced the social inequalities between men and women both in the workforce and at home in China. I argue that this commercialized *gongyi* was not just happening to the AF or the workers, but that it is also a product of collaboration between the local state and entrepreneurs in the city.

Chapters 6 to 7 turns to the partner organizations in other parts of China. Although all the partner organizations of AF spoke the same language of *gongyi* in my fieldwork, the ways that they imagined and performed *gongyi* were different from one place to another. The two chapters present the dissemination process of *gongyi* as negotiations between local states and NGOs in two different places. In Chapter 6, we find that although AF's partner organizations may have different understandings of how to do *gongyi*, similar

to the state-NGO relations in Shenzhen, these partner organizations were also deeply incorporated into the local state in different ways. In this sense, Chapter 6 is a mirror and an extension of Chapter 4. Similar to Chapter 5, Chapter 7 discusses the everyday life of NGO workers in the partner organizations. But unlike the '*gongyi* professionals' working in the big cities, these NGO workers prefer to identify themselves in a more ambiguous way: "*gongyi* people". This identification features the importance of cultivating, bridging and managing various social relations in the local society (but not attaching themselves to a specific big foundation). I argue that the new identity reveals how being incorporated into the local state has become a way of living in the local society, and how people's family life, personal faith, and social relations have all become performances of doing *gongyi*. Chapter 8 concludes the whole thesis by revisiting the three main research questions in this section and summarizes the research findings.

Chapter 2   *Gongyi* as NGO work in China: the historical context

In September 2016, three months after I started my fieldwork, Beijing initiated the national 'charity law' (*cishan fa*, 慈善法).   This law has been widely seen as the first national regulation on Chinese NGOs and their activities in a more formal and institutional way, covering a wide range of the NGO issues like registration, fundraising, internal governance, accountability, and so on. When I was doing my fieldwork, many Chinese NGOs, foundation workers in particular, were talking about this law with very mixed opinions. As a law that had been drafted in Beijing for years before its enforcement, what interests me most is the language that the ruling party uses to define the various social organizations in the country. In fact, this law-drafting work can be dated back to the late 1980s, when the then Chinese political leader Zhao Zhiyang launched a series of political reform plans along with economic reforms; therefore, a working group was set up in the central government to draft laws on citizens' associational rights and freedom of speech in 1987 (Wang, 2014). However, this working group was dismissed after the 1989 Student Movement in Beijing, and a series of very repressive NGO regulations were set up in China (see chapter 6). For a very long time, NGOs, including various international donors in China, have been seen as potential political threats in the eyes of Beijing. It was not until 2014 that Beijing finally restarted to draft its first comprehensive law on NGO issues on the national scale. But this time in this new law, the Chinese lawmakers avoided using the terms like 'associational rights' or the Westernized 'NGO', although they also tried to cover social development issues and NGO activities in the country as many as they could. Therefore, in the first part of the charity law, a very vague, widely defined 'charitable organization' was introduced by using the language of *gongyi*[1]:

> 'Charitable activities' in this law refers to the following **public interest**[2] activities voluntarily carried out by natural persons, legal

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[1] Source and translation: http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/articles/the-charity-law-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china/

[2] The original word in Chinese is '*gongyi*' (公益), here the *China Development Brief* translates it as 'public interest'. I have also seen another translation

persons and other organizations through the donation of property, the provision of services or other means:

(1) Helping the poor and the needy;

(2) Assisting the elderly, orphans, the ill, the disabled, and providing special care;

(3) Alleviating losses incurred by natural disasters, accidents, public health incidents and other emergencies;

(4) Promoting the development of education, science, culture, health, sports and other causes;

(5) Preventing and alleviating pollution and other public hazards, protecting and improving the eco-environment;

(6) Other **public interest** activities in accordance with this law.

During my fieldwork in China, I have heard some comments from legal professionals criticizing that the definition of 'what is charity and charitable organization' is totally a mess because '*gongyi*' is also a very broad term, which may lead to many misunderstandings in the practice. But from a historical and sociological perspective, we can also view these seemingly confusing terms in the law as a compromise in the state-society negotiations and struggles in China's context. From the law drafting on associational rights to the charity law, Chinese NGOs and civil society at large, have gone through a very long negotiating process with the state. These negotiations are still undergoing, and the multiple understandings of *gongyi* are the products of this negotiating process. However, most of comments I have heard from Chinese NGO workers and news reports in the field were positive. Many of them hold that the establishment of the law means that NGOs in China, once a 'political threat' in the relevant regulations, have finally gained a normalized status in the country. Some of their roles and functions, defined by "doing *gongyi*", have been

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version from the UNDP that takes *gongyi* as 'social welfare', see: https://www.cn.undp.org/content/china/en/home/library/democratic_governance/handbook-of-charity-law-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china.html

recognized by the Chinese state, which may bring more space for the whole NGO sector. Such opinions were shared by many of my informants at AF, the foundation that has been called as "the role model of Chinese *gongyi*".

To some degree, using *gongyi*, a localized language, to define various 'charitable activities' in the law means that *gongyi* has become a concept with social and cultural meanings in the Chinese society, although people may use and understand it in different ways. As a former university student and NGO worker in China, I have heard tons of discussions of how to be recognized by the state since my college years. Treating as a threat without formal regulations, only the student activities approved by the 'student workers' on my campus were allowed (as I introduced in the preface). Likewise, outside the campus, only the NGOs with certain kinds of special ties with the local government and/or officials can have better chances to survive. Therefore, I can deeply understand why my informants, whether working in the NGO sector or not, were excited with the feeling that the NGO work has finally been recognized by the state.

Restrictive regulations towards civil society and NGOs are by no means unique in authoritarian states today. Yet the conception of Chinese NGO work as *gongyi* in the recent decades and the specific culture and political meanings attached to NGOs are distinct in China. How have been Chinese NGOs understood by the state and the Chinese society in different historical periods? Why it is *gongyi*, rather than other languages that was ultimately accepted and used by the state, entrepreneurs, and NGO workers in China? This chapter introduces the historical background of *gongyi* by exploring these two questions above. In particular, I focus on the history of who has discussed *gongyi* in the past three decades and how. Firstly, this chapter presents the history of *gongyi* in its early years, when it was a state-centric discourse to maintain the socialist morality and collective values in the changing Chinese society in the post Mao era. Then I discuss its close connections with other non-state-actors, including Chinese NGOs, entrepreneurs and the market, in the recent two decades (which also sets up the context of my research subjects).

Looking into the history of *gongyi* in the past two decades, we can find that this popular language was not always widely used as it is today, it has been through ups and downs. From the 1990s to the early 2000s, *gongmin shehui* (公民社会，civil society), a translated Western concept, was the competing language that

many Chinese NGO workers used to identify what they did. The rising of *gongmin shehui* in that historical period came with the entering of various international donors and national modernization projects in the country. In many aspects, the change from *gongmin shehui* to *gongyi* indicates the changing NGO regulations and state-society relations in China: the Chinese state has begun to take a more hostile attitude towards international donors and social activists, it encourages more organizations to work as social service deliverers under its new regulations. In this chapter, I argue that it is the deepening development of state corporatism and surveillance in the past decade that finally led to the censorship of *gongmin shehui* language and the rising of a (seemingly) depoliticized *gongyi.* Furthermore, the state corporatism has become more complicated by collaborating with the new rich Chinese and corporates under the name of *gongyi* marketization. In the end of this chapter, I also talk about the increasing heterogenous nature of Chinese NGO sector by looking at those who stopped using the *gongyi* language in their work.

2.1 *Gongyi* and the socialist state

Gongyi, normally translated as 'public interest', was originally an intellectual term used by scholars and revolutionaries in the late 1800s. As a translated word from Japanese, people used this word to clarify a political sphere beyond the traditional empire and warlords of that time. In the traditional Chinese culture, the boundaries between 'public' and 'private' was very vague. There is an old saying in a Chinese poem which can be dated back to 2500 years ago: "Under the sky, nothing isn't the king's land; the people who lead the lands, no one isn't the king's subjects."[3] In the revolution of destroying the last Qing dynasty in the late 1800s, Chinese revolutionaries used the new concept of 'public interest' to justify their actions as well as to construct a new, modern state. Revolutionaries like Sun Yat-sen who was also the founder of Republic of China (ROC), used the term to differentiate what they did as being for "*gongyi*", public interest and common people, rather than for emperors and royal families (Ma, 1994). In the ROC period, private businessmen were encouraged by the state to fight against the dumping goods from the European countries. During

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[3] Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_sovereign

the Maoist era, between the 1950s and 1970s, *gongyi* became redundant since under the socialist revolution all social resources became public and there was no need to distinguish between the 'private' and the 'public'. Institutions and organizations seen to be 'private' were criticized as 'capitalist tails' that must be 'cut down', which included private businesses, traditional clans, private hospitals and schools, private cinemas and publishing industry, etc. In this 'new China', many new attempts were made to redefine what is 'public'. A large number of public services were established under the name 'people' from the People's University, people's libraries and parks, to *People's Daily*. In this period, many new, socialist languages were created in the country as a substitution of 'public interest', or *gongyi*.

Although the revival of *gongyi* did not occur till the economic reform era in, a historical link remained with original the socialist state. The most well-known spokesperson for *gongyi* among many Chinese today may not be anyone in the ROC period, but a 'role model' called Lei Feng (雷峰), one of the most well-known "communist soldiers" in socialist China (Reed, 1995; Zhuang, 2010). Though considered a hero, Lei Feng was described as an ordinary, quiet and shy young man in the official propaganda. His good deeds included helping an old lady to get back home and buying a train ticket for a woman who lost her wallet. It was exactly the persistence of these small good deeds in his daily life that gave him the title of great "communist soldier". After his sudden death in an on-the-job accident in 1962, the party officially launched the "learn from Lei Feng" movement. Until now, March 5th of every year is still celebrated as "the learning from Lei Feng's day" in China.

Figure 2.1 A poster of Lei Feng holding Mao's book in the Cultural Revolution, saying "Chairman Mao's good soldier – Lei Feng".

Before the 1980s, Lei Feng had mostly been praised for his loyalty to the political leader Mao as well as his self-sacrificing spirits (Reed, 2006). In most of his stories, Lei Feng anonymously helped others not because they were "the weak"; but because they were "the comrades" sharing the same bitterness as proletarians (ibid.). So the good deeds were a way to implement Mao's class struggle.   Whereas after the economic reform, the official propaganda of Lei Feng was changed from "being loyal to communism, class struggle and chairman Mao" to "doing deeds every day to serve the people", no matter which class "the people" belonged to (Zhang, 1999). He was depicted more like a "warm hearted person" than a "communist soldier" (Zhan, 2011). Meanwhile since 1980s, on "Lei Feng day", people would no longer study "chairman Mao's quotations on class struggles". Instead, many students and people working for the state-owned companies or governmental bodies would be organized to provide certain free service for others, so as to "enhance their moral level". Such state-organized free services, including haircut, car wash, and street cleaning,

would also be called as "doing *gongyi*" under the name of 'serving the people' in 1980s (ibid).

Against this background, the revival of *gongyi* that began in the 1970s in China was not like its original meaning as '*public* interest', because it was not used to define what is public and what is not. On the contrary, it is a state creation of a new interpretation of socialist morality. *Gongyi* is still promoted as part of a (state-sponsored) collective mentality, aimed at pacifying rather than strengthening the Maoist class struggle: people involved in the *gongyi* activities should no longer be viewed through a class perspective. The series of activities entitled "learning from Lei Feng" in the post Mao era was part of a larger project launched by the Central Committee of China Communist Party: the Construction of Socialist Spiritual Civilization (CSSC) in the late 1970s. CSSC in the early 1980s was put forward to emphasize the importance of Marxist education, so as to make sure that Chinese people, in the chaos and uncertainties of the post-Mao era, could still maintain the ideals of communism and comradeship among people. But very soon in 1986, when the then political leader Deng Xiaoping was determined to deepen the economic reform, the contents of CSSC were also changed: its aim was redefined as 'nurturing patriotic socialist citizen' in order to 'push forward national modernization development and speed up comprehensive reform and opening up policy' (Zhan, 2017).

It is in this context, in the late 1980s, that *gongyi* was incorporated into a state discourse, part of a project to create 'new' supporters of China's economic reform who are 'patriotic' and 'more modernized'. As the discussion of *suzhi* discourse presented (Hoffman, 2010), the Chinese state at that time was trying to create its people, especially the university students, as 'national talents' to support the new market-based economy, for which the state initiated a new language as 'high quality people' (p17). But it never means that these 'more modernized, high quality talents' should be just the same as the people in any Western countries. In Hoffman's study of China's new professionalism in the 1990s, she found the Chinese state also emphasized its socialist morality and collective spirit in the daily practices of Chinese universities, for which she called it as 'patriotic professionalism'. Under this background, the various social activities organized by the state in the name of 'doing *gongyi*' became very important ways of promoting the spirit of 'serving the people' among the

younger generations in the reformist China. A good example is the intersection between *gongyi* and the 'volunteerism' that began in the mid 1990s. At that time the Communist Youth League, as the youth branch of the Chinese Communist Party, established numerous Youth Volunteers Associations (YVA) across the country to cultivate *zhiyuan jinshen* (volunteer spirit, 志愿者精神) (Rolandsen, 2008). In many mainstream media reports in China, these volunteers were upheld for their selflessness and portrayed as the "living Lei Feng (活雷锋)" (Hansen and Pang, 2014). Activities included visiting orphanages to helping the elderly; sometimes such activities were accompanied by study sessions during which the newest political ideologies issued by the ruling party were presented (ibid). During my own college years in China, I also attended these "learning from Lei Feng" activities with my classmates every semester, including visiting orphanages and studying political speeches made by the then national leaders. Most of these activities were organized by the University YVA. In official reports, these university students and state-owned company employees were described as the role models of 'qualified modern citizens' in the reformist era, because they did not only have more advanced knowledge in China, but also they reached higher, collective moral standards for the whole country's future development (Rolandsen, 2008; Zhuang, 2010). The Lei Feng discourse is so influential that even until today, many Chinese NGOs, no matter which field they work in, are still being reported as "living Lei Feng" in the mainstream media.

From the 'living Lei Feng' to youth volunteers, the popular use of *gongyi* in the post Mao period could be seen as part of the bigger state modernization project. Although *gongyi* has origins in the socialist history, its revival in the 1980s to 1990s was more like a process of negotiation, adaptation and reinterpretation of what socialist morality and capitalist development should be like in a country in transition. Although some GONGOs and spiritual groups appeared after Mao's death (Palmer, 2007), the imagination and practices of doing *gongyi* at that time, was closely linked to government-organized voluntary activities in the mainstream Chinese society.

2.2 *Gongyi* and Chinese NGOs in the post Tiananmen era

What made *gongyi* to be more like its original meaning as '*public* interest' was the appearance of the first-generation NGOs in the 1990s (Howell, 1995). In the early stages, these NGOs looked like many other government-organized voluntary groups, as their activities seemed to be very similar, like bird watching, tree planting, street cleaning, etc[4]. However, given their independent relations with the Chinese state, they were more often called as *minjian zuzhi* (organization among the people, 民间组织). *Minjian* (民间) is a very traditional Chinese word to categorize all the social forces outside the state from imperial China, including a large range of organizations like clans, folk religions, peasants' rebellion groups, business associations, etc. Although the traditional *minjian* did not emphasize the independence from the state, it did indicate there could be something different (or sometimes even opposite) from the state. As we have discussed in Section 2.1, the Chinese state in the socialist era firstly eradicated most of those *minjian* organizations by defining them as the legacies of the feudalism and capitalism. Therefore, for a very long time there was no specific state regulations or institutions specifically for administrating any social organizations in China. This led to a relatively open space for many self-claimed *minjian* organizations showing up after Mao's death between 1976 to 1988. As Veg (2019), in this period, as long as these organizations were not identified as a direct political threat to social stability, they were simply neglected or tolerated by Beijing.

However, the various political movements in the 1980s, especially the 1989 Beijing Student Movement in Tiananmen Square, made the Chinese state realize the importance of regulating social organizations in a more systematic way. By the end of 1989, a set of national regulations were announced on NGO issues, which turned out to be the foundations of China's NGO policy reform in the past three decades (Howell, 2012). In these regulations, business associations which were beneficial for the economic development have been encouraged; organizations with government supports as their supervisory bodies were allowed to register; while the independent labor unions,

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[4] Interview with two NGO workers B1 (15/11/2016) and B13 (25/07/2017) in Beijing. See appendix.

underground student organizations and religious groups were strictly prohibited (ibid.). Moreover, state apparatus began to set up across the country for close surveillance from organizational registration, financial resources, annual check, staff background review, to detailed instructions of establishing a 'qualified' board and so forth. In 1998, a government department called '*minjian zuzhi guanli ju*' (民间组织管理局, translated as 'bureau of civil organizations administration') was set up under the supervision of Ministry of Civil Affairs; since then from up to bottom, every local government in China has a relevant institution in charge of NGO regulation issues. That said, since Mao's death, the ruling party in China has been through many changes in understanding and regulating various non-state actors. By establishing government institutions specifically for '*minjian* organizations', for a very long time Chinese NGOs were officially identified as something politically suspicious, with different features from the state, and therefore subject to be 'governed' by the state. In this period, the language of *gongyi* did not enter the official documents and speeches regarding NGO issues yet, since most NGOs were depicted as suspicious or even negative. The positive meanings of *gongyi*, or public interest, would not be attached with them.

It was the first-generation NGOs in the 1990s, trying to legitimatize themselves in the public, that began to use the word *gongyi*. As *minjian* was a confusing word with traditional meanings and political doubts, some of the NGOs began to identify themselves as *minjian* organizations working for 'public interests', so as to distinguish themselves in two ways: firstly, they were not part of the socialist *gongyi*, they were people-based organizations, not a government apparatus. Secondly, they were not 'political threats' to the country and its people; they were organized to promote *gongyi*, or public interest. The first-generation NGOs were mostly funded by various international agencies, establishing their own organizational missions (Ji, 2000). In the late 1990s, some of them turned into environmental advocacy groups, women's organizations, etc. In many circumstances, these organizations were more tended to interpret *gongyi* with a new word (that is different from the socialist morality): *gongmin shehui*, or civil society, a language directly translated from the Western world. By connecting *gongmin shehui* with *gongyi,* the emerging Chinese NGOs in the 1990s redefined the Lei-Feng-like, socialist *gongyi* with different meanings.

According to Ma (1994), the notion of *gongmin shehui* did not appear in Chinese intellectual debates till 1986. Initially, the term was only used by a small group of Chinese theorists attempting to understand the differences between a socialist society and a capitalist society. After the failure of 1989 Student Movement, many intellectuals, whether in exile or at home, began to emphasize the autonomous nature of civil society (Zhao, 1998), taking independence from the state as an alternative to authoritarianism. However, their notion of civil society was more like an urgent solution in responding to the failure of the student movement. It was these 'liberal intellectuals' that greatly impacted the emerging Chinese NGOs. During my fieldwork, I find that some founders of the first-generation NGOs in China had close links with the 1989 Student Movement[5]. Some of them were activists in the movement themselves and therefore maintained close relations with the political dissidents. Others admitted that their ideas of civil society were greatly influenced by these activists[6]. In the 1990s to early 2000s that Chinese NGOs began to use the notion of *gongmin shehui,* or civil society, in terms of what it was against rather than what it stood for. By distancing themselves from the state-sponsored *gongyi*, NGOs tried to re-define their activities as the 'real *gongyi*' since they were from '*minjian*'. For example, the volunteers and donations mobilized by the Communist Youth League were referred to as 'forced volunteerism' or 'fake volunteerism'[7], arguing that these participants were not joining such activities out of their own thinking. Hence according to these NGOs, 'real volunteers' were only those who engaged in 'good deeds' from their own 'independent thinking' (Jia and Sun, 2013).

Gongmin shehui is also used as an umbrella term for all individuals who engage in anti-state politics, no matter how different their economic conditions and personal backgrounds are. One of my interviewees, Humphrey, often complained to me that he had severe conflicts with Perry, a leader of another organization. These two organizations were both sponsored by AF, but had very different ideas about how to redistribute the sponsor's funding in their network. Humphrey was like a proletariat and his organization could only

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[5] Interview with an NGO worker B1 (15/11/2016) in Beijing.
[6] Interviews with an NGO worker H3 (17/07/ 2017) in H Province.
[7] Both B1 and H3 had the same comments on CYL's activities.

afford to hire himself and another full-time worker; this led him to portraying himself as a representative of those at the margin of the society. By contrast, Perry's organization had more than 20 workers and was more like a middle or upper class in a Chinese metropolitan. He also had his own companies, properties and cars in the city. Perry's proposals tended to be more ambitious than Humphrey's and aimed at mobilizing more state funding and well-off citizens to participate in his charitable projects. When I asked him whether *gongyi* consisted in doing good deeds, Humphrey vehemently rejected this definition: "No, of course not. We are all liberalists, we believe in the *gongmin shehui* values, a smaller government and a big society. So we should do *gongyi* together!" Humphrey said.

From the discussions above, we may find that intellectuals and NGO practioners has reinvented '*gongyi*' with a new value system, a mere normative knowledge, and a political ideology to solidify activists, departing from a socialist language. As an ideology, we can hardly see any serious discussions of how different civil society theories could be applied in analyzing social change in China, or what kind of internal conflicts of Chinese *gongmin shehui* may have among Chinese NGOs. Moreover, *gongmin shehui* changes '*gongyi*' to be an action-oriented knowledge. As one NGO worker told me, '*gongmin shehui* is not done by talking, but only by doing'. The issue seems to be not what kinds of *gongmin shehui* China is going to have, but how to construct this *gongmin shehui* and when can Chinese people achieve *gongmin shehui*. In 2011, activist and NGO leader Liang Xiaoyan in a public speech delivered in Hong Kong University, told her audience that she had dedicated herself to 'constructing China's *gongmin shehui*'. Asked by the host how he felt about the speech, a student responded:

> "Actually, I still do not know what exactly *gongmin shehui* is. But one thing I know is that, if everyone just participates in it, this *gongmin shehui* can be better"[8].

In this sense, this consensus among Chinese activists around the meaning of *gongmin shehui* and how to achieve it has changed the political nature of *gongyi*. At least among China's NGO sector, *gongyi* was no longer being used in socialist, state-centric discourses for the national economic development. In many news

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8 Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vg4hsoFPFP4

reports and research, 2008 was being referred to as the 'year of China's *gongmin shehui*' (e.g. Deng, 2008; Teets, 2009; Yang, 2017). That is largely because for the first time, people found NGOs in China did not have to work underground: a large number of volunteers and social organizations joined in the disaster relief work following the devastating Sichuan earthquake that year. Almost at the same time, many local governments at the provincial and municipal levels began to reform NGO regulations, making the NGO registration process much easier (Hildebrandt, 2011).

However, the popularity of this revived '*gongmin shehui*' did not last long. The major sponsors behind many national organizations promoting '*gongmin shehui*' from the early 2000s were international agencies and have been seen as a threat to the state. Since 2010, Oxfam China has been under strict political surveillance and their volunteer recruitment in all Chinese universities was abolished; many of their local partner organizations were subjected to surveillance and police checks[9]. In 2011, these sanctions were formalized in an article calling for more 'innovative and scientific social management in China', written by the then General-Secretary of the ruling party's Central Commission of Justice and Law, Zhou Benshun. In this article, Zhou wrote that the country should 'guard against mistaken beliefs and propaganda, lest we fall into the trap of so-called *gongmin shehui* that some Western countries have set for us' [10]. Subsequently, *gongmin shehui* was listed in an internal Communist Party propaganda document as one of the 'seven don't-says'.

To some degree, the Chinese government's reaction confirms that the notion of *gongmin shehui* has become a contentious force threatening mainstream propaganda. Since the censorship, a very visible change is that people no longer use '*gongmin shehui* construction' when explaining *gongyi* in public. As *gongmin shehui* has been seen as a radical and dangerous language, it needs to give way to a more 'depoliticized' or 'neutral' understanding of *gongyi*.

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[9]   Source: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/feb/23/china-tells-schools-ban-oxfam
[10]   Source: https://www.theepochtimes.com/chinese-official-warns-against-trap-of-civil-society_1497993.html

2.3 The emerging '*gongyi* market' in the absence of *gongmin shehui*

The censorship of *gongmin shehui* and repression of international donors did not necessarily mean that new meanings of *gongyi* would be absolutely different. Despite government censorship, *gongmin shehui* is still the focus of discussion and has had a profound political impact, in terms of the way in which people think about their relationship with others and with the state. In my fieldwork, I often found many foundation leaders and ordinary NGO workers, though quite different from political dissidents in terms of their work and personal background, in many private occasions they all tried to explain to me that they were strong supporters of 'China's *gongmin shehui*' and were just working for it in a different way by collaborating with the private entrepreneurs.

Chinese entrepreneurs have never been far away from the NGO sector. After the failure of 1989 Student Movement, some Chinese intellectuals have called for "an alliance between intellectuals and entrepreneurs as an important step in formation of *gongmin shehui* [to constrain the state power]" (Ma 1994). That said, for the advocates of a *gongmin shehui*, entrepreneurs are seen as an important ally rather than something outside of it. Although many Chinese entrepreneurs have begun to set up their own foundations or donate to charitable projects as early as the late 1980s, the attempts of taking entrepreneurs and the private sector as a crucial part of *gongyi* and Chinese NGO sector did not appear until 2010, which has been summarized as a school of '*gongyi* marketization' in many news reports[11]. Interestingly, if we search '*gongyi* marketization' today online, we may find that the most influential advocates of this *gongyi* marketization are not the entrepreneurs themselves, but a small group of people with multiple 'hats' on their heads. An examine of how *gongyi* marketization was promoted at the beginning and who were the

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[11] My summary of the changing meanings of '*gongyi* marketization' here is inspired by an article written by a Chinese NGO practitioner Liu Tao (2018). The article (in Chinese) can be found here http://www.gongyisixiang.org/yanjiu/news-id/9194/.

advocates may help us understand the new meanings of *gongyi* and its relations with the state in the recent decade.

Mr. Xu Yongguang is one of the important advocates in promoting *gongyi* marketization among Chinese NGOs. In fact, Xu is not an entrepreneur; he has been reported more like a 'liberal' or 'open-minded' government official with successful experiences in 'dealing with market'. As a senior official, Xu worked for Youth Communist League (YCL), the youth branch of the Chinese Communist Party from 1970s to 1980s, during which he drafted the political reform proposal for the YCL, trying to launch competitive elections and de-administration reform within YCL. By the end of 1989, he established the China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF), a GONGO affiliated with YCL. In his leadership of CYDF, Xu launched a very famous charitable project named the Hope Project. It was a program of financial assistance for Chinese rural students with donated money from the general public. Backed by the ruling party, CYDF asked the ministry of education and all the local communist party branches to do the resource mobilization and promotion work in Greater China (Zhan, 2011). The promotion strategy of this project was dominantly patriotic: to claim that the motherland was suffering from heavy financial burdens, it should be everyone's (including overseas Chinese) responsibility to "help the weak compatriots" (ibid). From 1989 to 2004, the Hope Project received more than 220 million yuan (about 2.2 billion pounds) from public donation, supported more than 2500,000 students, and funded 9508 elementary schools with its own namesake (Hsu, 2017). In many aspects, Xu's Hope Project was more aligned with the collective, socialist morality of *gongyi* and a distinctive state-centric feature. Therefore, for a very long time, Xu and the Hope Project was seldom mentioned as part of the Chinese NGO community that were self-claimed as '*minjian* organizations' or 'China's *gongmin shehui* constructors'. On the contrary, given the strong supports of the state, the Hope Project was more like the 'irrational' or 'fake' *gongyi* that was criticized by many first-generation NGOs since people hardly know whether those public donations were given on a voluntary basis or not.

However, the criticism towards the Hope Project did not last long. In fact, most of the criticisms came from activists and their international donors that were proposing a very different agenda that we have discussed as *gongmin shehui* in China. However, given the censorship of *gongmin shehui* language, many of the

activists had to act in a low profile, and more international donors began to withdraw from the country (Teets and Hsu, 2016; Sidel, 2018). Under this condition, some interesting phenomena appeared. For one thing, many INGO workers in China began to look for domestic job opportunities; they started a new career in the rapidly increasing domestic foundations like AF. During my fieldwork, many of my informants, especially the organizational leaders or senior managers, had working experiences with various INGOs before 2010. These previous INGO workers became the major practioners of a new *gongyi* after the fall of *gongmin shehui* period.

Furthermore, as the political activists had to be 'more silenced' in the country, people enjoying special ties with the Chinese state and business elites had bigger voices in China's NGO community. In my fieldwork, I was surprised to find that some of the young NGO workers in recent years only knew Liang Xiaoyan as a grassroots NGO worker working for rural education. But Liang was quite famous in my college years as an activist and a survivor of the 1989 Beijing Student Movement, her public speech in the campus attracted more than two hundred students in a classroom which can only hold one hundred. At the same time, almost everyone I met in the fieldwork knew Xu Yongguang very well, especially what he had done as an "open-minded" government official in his early years.

In 2006, Xu resigned his leadership at CYDF and joined Narada Foundation, a private foundation that was fully funded by a real estate company in Shanghai. Since then, he has become the board chair of Narada Foundation. In many interviews and reports, Xu described the Hope Project as "a social innovation to reform the state-owned welfare system", declared himself as 'an explorer of Chinese *gongyi* industry'. According to Xu, *gongyi* was neither a socialist morality nor a liberal political stance, rather it should be like a formal profession with its own knowledge, logics and skills. But where did the knowledge and skills come from? Xu puts forward that *gongyi* should be working in the same principle as the market because there were intrinsic values of 'marketization' by tracing back the history of marketization reform in China. Therefore, he claimed that '*gongyi* marketization is the absolute correct way' of whole Chinese NGO community. In this sense, Xu suggested that NGOs should learn from private companies in the organizational structure: donors are like investors, donations are equivalent exchanges, beneficiaries are customers or

buyers, and the values of NGOs must be promoted by marketing and branding processes. Xu also identified that NGO's working procedures should be designed from 'marketing positioning', 'product development', 'pricing', to 'marketing'; just the same as any companies. In 2016, Xu went further to argue that 'only the *gongyi* projects that can be replicated in a large scale should be praised, while those looking at small or marginalized issues should be obsoleted in the *gongyi* market due to their low efficiency'.

By taking *gongyi* as an industry, a market, and a profession, Xu's speeches have been warmly welcomed by both the Chinese entrepreneurs and government departments. In the empirical chapters of this thesis, we can find that Xu's ideas were very much implemented in the new foundations like AF and then disseminated across their partner organizations. Moreover, the new ideas of *gongyi* embraced the changing regulatory strategies in Beijing. In 2010, the then Chinese president Hu Jintao made a speech on 'scientific social management', in which he mentioned eight major tasks for the ruling party including "supporting people's organizations" and improving the management of services for marginalized groups (Howell, 2019). Since then, more and more government funding from various levels of the state has entered into the Chinese NGO sector, under the name of social service subcontracting. Although the government subcontracting trend is not the major topic of this thesis, almost all the NGOs I visited in the research were involved in this government subcontracting more or less. According to Kang's research (2019), the two-pillared funding game between the government and the new foundations is largely based on the same logic: learning from the market competition. In order to succeed in the funding game, NGOs need to compete with each other for 'higher project efficiency', accept the status quo, and fit themselves into various governmental and foundation's demands [12] (ibid). "Supporting people's organization", as introduced by Hu Jintao, turned out to be an important drive of producing more 'professional' subcontractors in many aspects (Kwan Chan and Lei, 2017).

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[12] In Chapter 4 and 6, I discuss how the big domestic donors like AF also needed to fit itself into the governmental demands at the local level, which constitutes an important part of my analysis on corporatism in China.

2.4 "Don't call me *gongyi* worker": the divided Chinese NGO community in the past decade

The ideas of taking *gongyi* as a market raised lots of discussions among Chinese NGOs. However, there were very limited NGO workers who publicly showed their disagreements with Xu. During my fieldwork in the city of Shenzhen, I came across a public debate on 'whether marketization is good or bad for *gongyi*' in September 2016, according to my knowledge, that debate was the only public event to openly discuss the different logics behind marketization in Chinese NGO sector in recent years. Before the debate, I was even told by one of the debaters from the negative side, Gideon, that they cannot find enough teammates to argue against the *gongyi* marketization. The debaters from each side perfectly presented the different reactions of this new trend of *gongyi*.

The affirmative party of the debate, holding 'marketization is good', all worked for entrepreneur-founded foundations or GONGOs. While the three debaters of the negative side were from grassroots organizations. For most of the time, the positive side started their speeches by referring to the economist Frieditch Hayek, saying that "anything without market could only lead to 'the road to serfdom'". Then they iterated Xu's ideas and took marketization as the most valuable experience that China has been through in the past three decades. Meanwhile, the negative party held that the logics behind the market and the '*gongy*i sector' could be very different, so they were worried that this 'efficiency-based *gongyi*' only leads to big, oligarchic organizations enjoying most of the resources. Some of them also made it clear that this marketization trend would be 'a betrayal of *minjian* and China's *gongmin shehui* construction', as it would be a self-constrain of people's political imagination of Chinese NGOs.

The debate above demonstrated the divided nature of Chinese NGO community today. In the Post Tiananmen era, the first-generation NGO workers were much united under the name of 'constructing China's *gongmin shehui*'. Along with the increasing numbers of NGOs in China, a highly heterogenous NGO sector has been established. The whole sector has become much more complicated with new donors, new funding, new knowledge, and so forth. Not everyone can get used to the changing environment in the past few years. Although most of the NGO workers I met during my fieldwork in China called themselves as *gongyi*

workers, there were also people who refused to identify themselves under the name of *gongyi*.

The workers I present here questioned *gongyi* in terms of its knowledge resources, internal hierarchies, and working purpose. Some of them, though quite limited, were from within AF. But more were from grassroots organizations working for 'sensitive issues' in China, especially those from grassroots women's group working for the immigrant workers' communities. They felt that they had been largely marginalized in this new "professional *gongyi*"[13]. In my interviews, some of them began to deny what they do as '*gongyi*', an identity that they once shared with many '*gongmin shehui* supporters'. Some of them told me directly that, "don't call me a *gongyi* worker, I am not doing *gongyi*". Instead, they preferred to use the new term of 'feminists' or 'women workers', rather than putting themselves back into a shared community with other types of NGOs again. In interviews with two women's organizations, some informants suggested that the biggest difficulty of their community organization was to get domestic funding from new donors. For a long time, they had been funded by international donors, but international funding has been now strictly prohibited by Beijing. Meanwhile, the new domestic foundations asked them to prove their organizational capacity in terms of "branding, public communication, and marketing" so as to guarantee their "competitiveness". An informant said:

"These new words really make me dizzy. I do not know how our work in the community can be related to these words. I just find the new foundations do not really care about our projects or the people we are working for, not at all. They just look for a lot of numbers, the donation numbers, the numbers of how many people we can serve, how many media reports...But all I want is a space that our children can have a place to go after school...They [the foundations] don't have a heart"[14].

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[13] From the interviews with Y3 (04/04/2017) in Y Province, H4 (15/09/2015; 18/07/2017) and H5 (12/09/2015;17/07/2017) in H Province, and an informal conversation with Gillian in December 2016 (see Chapter 6).

[14] Interview with H4 (18/07/2017) in H Province.

Therefore, their funding applications with these new, domestic foundations could hardly succeed since their work in the immigrant workers' community cannot be proved as 'efficient' and 'professional'. Not surprisingly, these women's groups have been rapidly marginalized in the mainstream NGO industry. Although they constituted the most critical group of resisting *gongyi*, their voice was hardly heard by the sector. In September 2016, I attended the national charity fair in Shenzhen; it was in this event that I witnessed the debate on "*gongyi* marketization" discussed at the beginning of this section. Although the negative side arguing against the marketization trend finally won the debate, the reality was just the opposite: none of the women's groups had been invited for this debate; in fact I could hardly see any organizations working for the female factory workers' rights among the hundreds of organization attendees. Just before the opening of the charity fair, two grassroots organizations working for immigrant factory workers in Shenzhen were just shut down by the city government.

Not surprisingly, these "women workers" can hardly survive this changing landscape, since many of them were actually former factory girls without the new knowledge to help them adjust to such changes. In 2017 when I was still doing my fieldwork in China, an informant Daisy working for female immigrant workers suddenly contacted me online, asking if I knew any job opportunities in other NGOs in Guangzhou. I was surprised to know that as the organization founder, Daisy just dismissed the whole organization since they cannot survive the political dynamics and funding draining anymore. Given her working experience in women's work, Daisy had tried to find an NGO job in the field of women's development, but only to find there were less and less grassroots organizations working on this issue. As a former factory girl herself, Daisy did not have a higher education degree, which made her chances of getting into a domestic foundation almost impossible. When I finished my fieldwork, Daisy ended up in an insurance company as a saleswoman; her social media posts were no longer talking about gender or class equality issues, but about how the life insurance may help people have a happier life.

2.5 Conclusion: researching *gongyi* in a Chinese Foundation

In the official published Lei Feng's Diary, he wrote the famous sentence that has been recited all the primary students in China until today: "one's life is limited, but the service for the people is unlimited. I will devote my limited life to the unlimited service for the people". In 2014, one of the largest online shopping websites in China, Taobao, introduced a service named 'Lei Feng Diary' for its every customer: the more you buy, the more money that the stores on Taobao would donate to charitable foundations including AF. The Diary would record customers' donations automatically, so that to remind people to buy more if their donation numbers go down. Customers with high online orders and donations would be given some delivery priorities, named as "red soldiers". This new Lei Feng Diary was soon reported by the People' Daily, one of the biggest official newspaper in China, calling this as the "*gongyi* of our times".

So far, the chapter provides a historical understanding of the language of *gongyi* in China. From learning from Lei Feng, serve the people, *gongmin shehui*, to *gongyi* market, the meanings and practices of *gongyi* have been greatly shaped by the Chinese state in the past three decades. However, since China's economic reform, Chinese entrepreneurs and the private sector has never been far away from the NGOs. For followers of *gongmin shehui*, the development of market in China were seen as their 'natural allies' in front of the state, although INGOs supported most of these organizations in the post Tiananmen era. However, we may also find that such thinking about the Chinese state and market would be soon challenged: the regulatory strategies of the Chinese state have become more adaptive and selective in dealing with different types of organizations; the market and the rising Chinese entrepreneurs have a very ambiguous face in front of the state. Meanwhile, the individuals who are now working in this new *gongyi* era are never new: they could be just from the state and INGOs. From the people who are no longer use *gongyi*, the changing history of *gongyi* presents the widening social gap in the Chinese society in terms of class and gender. In the later empirical chapters of this thesis, I will present my ethnographic study of the everyday practices of this new *gongyi* in different contexts in China, analyzing how its new meanings have been shaped by the corporatism in different places and how social inequalities have been reproduced from its internal structure. But before that, I will firstly discuss the process of how I did the fieldwork with various Chinese NGO workers. In this section, I will briefly introduce the background of my main case studies, which can help us move to the next chapter on research methods.

The cases presented in this thesis are from my yearlong ethnographic work with a Chinese foundation, AF, and their partner organizations in difference provinces. AF is a foundation established by a group of the most successful entrepreneurs in China. Among its 7 founders, two of them are Internet tycoons in China, one is a famous banker, one established a very successful real estate company, and the rest are big manufacturers. Given such influential founders, AF attracted lots of media attention even before it had been legally registered. In the past decade, it had been often seen as a role model of Chinese gongyi in many news reports.

In China, normally the right to raise public donation was given to GONGOs as a privilege. Although the newly rich Chinese have been encouraged by Beijing to do charitable work since 2004, according to the national regulation they can only set up private foundations, receiving donations from their own families or companies. Given these restrictions, AF has been told as a 'breakthrough' of China's NGO regulation reform in the past decade. In fact, AF was one of the first foundations that were not organized by the state but gained the public donation right in China, although it took its founders several years' endeavor before it could be finally legally registered as a public foundation in Shenzhen city in 2011. By the end of 2010, an influential Chinese TV program interviewed one of AF's founders J on his work. In this program, he publicly expressed his disappointment with China's national foundation regulations, saying he desired to innovate the "traditional gongyi" by setting up this new public foundation so that more Chinese people can get involved. Soon this interview was broadcasted on the state-owned China Central Television. In the early 2011, being introduced by a senior official of the central government, the city government of Shenzhen permitted AF to register as a public foundation with public fundraising rights within the city. This was taken as a milestone of NGO regulation reform in China at that time.

Except its registration story, what made AF to be the pioneer of "Chinese gongyi" were two unexpected GONGO scandals. As we discussed in the history of gongyi language, gongyi was deeply embedded in a socialist morality with close connections with the Chinese state. For a long time, people viewed gongyi as an equivalent of GONGO, Fei Long or the collective spirit. However, gongyi's close connections with the state turned out to be very detrimental during various anti-corruption campaigns in China since 2000s. In the 2008 Sicuan earthquake,

the general public donated more than 7million pounds in 6 months. While more than 50% donation went to the local governments directly, about 40% donation was received by various GONGOs. However, given more and more media reports on governmental corruption of these donations, GONGOs cannot escape such charges as well. By the end of 2008, a senior official of one of China's biggest GONGOs, China Red Cross (CRC), was sentenced for ten years' prison because of donation misuse. A bigger scandal occurred in 2011, when people found that a 20-year-old lady Guo Meimei, had kept showing off her extremely luxurious life online, but she had a job title as a manager of CRC. Millions of Chinese netizens soon responded with angry posts. This scandal launched massive suspicions and criticisms towards GONGOs nationally. In 2011 and 2012, the public donation that CRC received decreased dramatically by 80%. many other foundations also experienced similar fundraising declines. Ultimately since 2000s, the image of gongyi workers, no matter which kind of organizations they worked for, has been largely polarized: if gongyi workers are not selfless socialists like Lei Feng; then they must be corrupted Guo Meimei.

It is these two consecutive scandals that give the rise of "new foundations". Taking AF as an example, in 2007 it only received about 1 million pounds when it was still affiliated with a GONGO in China. But in the next year during the Sicuan earthquake, AF's donation was more than 20 million, most of which came from small individual donors. This number was much higher than most of the GONGOs at that time. After the Guo Meimei scandal, AF became one of the most trusted foundations to receive public donation. In the 2013 Ya'an earthquake, AF received about 40 million pounds, becoming one of the richest foundations in China. The extraordinary fundraising performance made AF a role model to "innovate the tradition gongyi" in numerous media reports. During my fieldwork with AF, I found that although AF is much younger than many other GONGOs or international agencies, this organization could be quite ambitious about what it wanted to achieve. Many AF workers tried to set up a new image of what a gongyi worker should be like in the mainstream Chinese society, for which they called "the professionalization of gongyi workers". This worker, they claimed, should be distancing from the state sponsored gongyi.

AF had more than 80 workers in its headquarters. These workers came with very different backgrounds, from government, public relations, media, branding, sales and digital marketing, banking, to traditional international

development agencies like Save the Children and Oxfam. In my fieldwork, I found that its workers had very different views of their founders and colleagues. It was a big and influential organization in China, but full of internal tensions, debates or even struggles about how to do gongyi correctly. While some AF workers had been working with various international organizations, their founders proposed to make it as a "customer-centered bank" so as to 'occupy the gongyi market'. It was the diversity and conflicts within AF that offered me great opportunities to observe and document the complicated process of how gongyi as a discourse and knowledge could be shaped by different actors.

But AF should never be seen as a single organization only. As a role model in China's NGO sector, it also built up a very big national network supporting more than 1000 organizations across the country, from cities, towns to villages. Its gongyi ideals had to be implemented by its local partners in practice. Therefore, AF was also deeply embedded into the politics between different local governments, grassroots organizations and the local communities. In the fifth chapter, we find that some of AF's local partner organizations would like to take advantage of AF's famous founders to socialize with the local business elites and officials; but others use its fame to leverage political recognition from the local government. Although almost all the actors involved spoke the same gongyi language, studies of how AF's work can be done at the local level can let us know how gongyi can be spread, learned and reinterpreted across boundaries. In the next chapter, I will discuss my reflections of doing fieldwork with Chinese NGOs with more details.

Chapter 3   Research methods: "This is Dr. Zhao and she can drink"

This research is based on my 12 months' multi-sited ethnography in China from June 2016 to July 2017. Before the fieldwork, I have had three years' working experience with grassroots organizations and an international donor in the city of Guangzhou, from which I realized that the domestic donors and the rising 'philanthropists' in China could be a very crucial social force in China but most of them still kept unknown. Therefore, my original plan was to study these new "philanthropic foundations" in the city of Shenzhen and make a comparative study with the grassroots organizations in Guangzhou. In the first six months, I had chances to work closely with an entrepreneur-founded foundation in their office five days a week as an intern from June 2016 to December 2016. I also moved into their staff dorm. The internship with AF changed my mind, as I began to realize that the new foundations like AF were not just a different type of NGOs in China, but also they were trying to shape the whole NGO sector by producing new knowledge, language, and culture. By the various funding and training programs, domestic donors like AF were trying to construct their own "industrial chain" by working with a number of grassroots organizations across the country. My fieldwork within AF's office and its different workers opened a new window for my research, so I decided to change my research plan from the comparative study between the 'old' and 'new' organizations to multi-sited ethnographic research of AF's "industrial chain" under the name of doing modern *gongyi*.

Multi-sited ethnography has been popularly used in the studies of social mobility, immigration, and globalization in recent years.   According to Falzon (Falzon, 2009:2), "the essence of multi-sited research is to follow people, connections, associations, and relationships across space". As an influential donor in China, the daily conversations in AF's office were not just about its own workers, the workers were also talking about the people and projects in many different places; their dynamic relations with different local governments and their partner organizations were very frequently discussed in the office. These conversations reminded me not to take AF and other organizations as mere different, scattered case studies as my original research plan, but to analyze their connections and differences in a bigger picture: how these different organizations together contributed to a newly constructed knowledge as

gongyi that can be tolerated by the different local states and welcomed by the Chinese businessmen.

While my internship led me to AF's partner organizations by following the flows of the donation money, the daily conversations and practices in people's teahouse and the Buddhist pray room made me realize that *gongyi* should also be seen as different lifestyles in the Chinese society, rather than a "professional job" (see Chapter 5 and 7). Xiang's (2007) anthropological research on Indian IT workers greatly inspired me during my fieldwork with various Chinese NGO workers. Xiang's work looks at how the high-end, profitable IT industry could be possible in Silicon Valley given the production of "IT grooms" in Andhra, India. It is in the small Indian towns and villages where the negotiation on marriage and dowry were conducted, which largely decided the how much the Indian families could invest on their sons' IT education, and whether these "IT grooms" can realize their "American dreams" afterward (p.24-38). As he said in another article (Xiang, 2013), multi-sited ethnography "constructs rather merely reflects reality", therefore ethnographers should "trace people's concerns, calculations, and strategies…according to the logic of how the reality is internally constituted in practice" (p. 296). My ethnographic work with Chinese NGO workers in their dorm, teahouse, and homes gave me more perspectives to analyze and reconstruct the meanings of *gongyi* that I had observed in various NGOs' offices. People's multiple interpretations and performances of *gongyi* with the flowing donation from AF to the other organizations have indicated that the language of "*gongyi*" was never a random pick in their daily work and life, rather it is based on many careful calculations of their own social status, economic conditions, gender, and the dynamic political environment in different local societies.

The first half of my fieldwork was mostly done by participant observation and ethnography. I had dual identities while I was working at AF: a doctoral researcher collecting data for the thesis, and a full-time intern working for the research and evaluation team in the office. I was not only closely observing the daily practices of AF's internal politics and its workers, but also, I learned how to be a good *gongyi* worker through interactions with different colleagues. This learning process, as I present in this chapter, covers a wide arrange of issues from participating in various internal meetings, doing the intern jobs under the supervision of my team leader, joining the midnight chats with my roommates,

and so forth. In the eyes of many AF workers, the whole learning process transformed me from 'an AF freshmen from the UK' to be 'my friend Hailing'; I was not a neutralized, indifferent observer at AF; rather in many cases, I was a participant in the field, a consultant of my working team, and a friend of many AF workers. Hence, most of my data collected in this first stage were not from formal, one to one interviews, though all the AF staff had already known my dual identities. The data was from my daily participant observation and the organizational documents, meanwhile, I also kept a diary every day to take down field notes and my reflections.

From February 2017, after 10 days' pilot study in December 2016, I spent another month doing ethnography in AF's partner organization in K province, also living and working with them. It was in K that I got chances to see how AF's ideas of *gongyi* were learned, discussed and negotiated at the daily operations, and how different the local NGO workers could be from those sitting in AF's office in terms of their daily life. Meanwhile, I began to have a bigger picture of AF's national network and to know who is who in the network is.   From March 2017, based on my preliminary findings and personal networks in province K, I traveled across the country to do more interviews with AF's local partners, visited AF's former employees, and ended up with more interviews of some other foundation workers. My interviews were done in 11 different cities covering 7 provinces in China; most of the interviewees were the organizations' leaders. During my fieldwork, I found that all the foundation workers I had worked with, whether via formal interviews or participant observations, were located in the most prosperous cities in China: Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. Most of their partner organizations I have ever visited were in the western part of China, mostly underdeveloped regions. For the rest of the chapter, I present more details of how my multi-sited fieldwork was done in China, what challenges and reflections that I have got in this process; and more importantly, how I posited myself differently in the various fieldwork sites and how I deal with research ethics both in the field and at desk.

For my whole fieldwork, I did 40 one to one interviews, mostly done in November 2016, and from March to July 2017. Most of the interviews were conducted in various restaurants, along with dinners or lunch. Among all the interviewees, 15 are AF's then or former workers; 11 are from AF's partner

organizations; 14 are NGO workers in other foundations or grassroots organizations in China.

3.1 Enter the field: researching Chinese NGOs in a dynamic context

As a former NGO worker in China, I deeply understand that China's NGO sector is a very closed circle than many other research subjects in the local context. The most direct and visible answer for this closeness is the government's hostile attitudes towards many organizations, given the authoritarian nature of the state (see chapter 6). Some organizations are running underground; more are swinging from the gray area to the overground in their daily work. In fact, even for "powerful foundations" like AF, their national network with other NGOs (which has been widely reported by the Chinese media) is also technically "illegal" according to the national regulations. This political climate has been worsened since international donors have become more "sensitive" in the eyes of Beijing in the past few years, which has made fieldwork research affiliated with a Western university more difficult[1]. Under this condition, it is not surprising to find that many organizations would be quite hesitant and cautious to researchers, especially those unknown to them and from a Western university. They might simply not want to reveal their "illegal working details" which may make them in trouble.

However, this does not mean that researching NGOs in a party-state is impossible. On the contrary, in many Chinese NGOs' eyes, scholars and public intellectuals could be their "natural allies" (Wu, 2012). In March 2016, a popular Chinese magazine named *China Philanthropist* launched a special issue on a group of five social scientists researching Chinese NGOs, calling them "*yi shi* (*intellectuals for public interests*)". A common feature of these five researchers is, they all have senior faculty positions in Chinese universities, at the same time they keep very close connections with the Chinese NGO sector as active participants. Three of them had their own organizations, including

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[1] During my fieldwork with AF and some of its partner organizations between 2016 and 2017, I found them began to reduce their connections with international organizations and Western scholars, partly due to the more and more political surveillances from the national security departments.

foundations and community-based organizations. Also, all of them were the board members of many different foundations, acting as consultants or judges of many grant-making projects, or as trainers of NGO training programs. They had all participated in the relevant policymaking process too, at both central and local government levels. The front-page (as below) features five Chinese scholars, saying: 'they are intellectuals, producing ideas for the frontline NGO workers. They are moving from thinkers to change-makers; they participate in social development and explore more public sphere for the society'. Such a statement means that there have been close collaborations between Chinese NGOs and researchers.

Figure 3.2 Source: the magazine of *China Philanthropist*

In the international academic world, there are also more and more research and publications on NGOs in China, from large-scale survey (e.g.Hildebrandt, 2011), big data analysis (e.g. Ma and DeDeo, 2018; Zhu, Ye and Liu, 2018),

interview (e.g. Tang and Zhan, 2008; Wu and Chan, 2012; Hsu and Hasmath, 2016), to ethnography (e.g. Spires, 2007). In fact, my main research subject, AF, had also been researched by several scholars in the past few years[2], therefore they were not surprised at all when I talked about my research proposal for the first time. In this sense, it is more likely that many Chinese NGOs look forward to changing the current policies and institutions for long, for which they need more sympathetic, trustworthy, and well-informed researchers to work with. The biggest challenge, under many circumstances, maybe not telling their experiences and concerns out or not, but to whom they can tell and how their narratives would be interpreted. That is to say, it is still possible to research with Chinese NGOs, although there is a relatively high threshold for researchers to enter to China's NGO world[3]. It is crucial for researchers to build trust with their informants and understand the political dynamics in the local context; therefore, a researcher with an insider's perspective could have more advantages in getting access to his or her fieldwork (Zhao, 2017).

Researchers working on a geographical community may find themselves "at home" in their research given the similar race, gender, or cultural background (Giwa, 2015). In my research, it is the life experience as an NGO worker that makes me be seen more like an "insider" in the eyes of my informants, which helped me gain trust with the informants later. My fieldwork started with a dual identity as both an AF intern and a postgraduate researcher from June 2016; before that, I had three 'job interviews' with different AF workers to get the research approval, from which I began to have a sense that this new foundation may have a more complicated structure than I expected.

The first two interviews were done between me and AF workers in charge of their research projects. I was first introduced to an AF worker A by one of my close friends B working at another foundation in Shenzhen. A kindly suggested

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[2] During my internship, I found at least two Ph.D. students and one senior faculty from overseas universities had already visited AF for their research projects. Meanwhile, AF also had experiences of hiring Chinese researchers as their consultants from time to time.

[3] China scholars today may have to admit that this threshold has become higher and higher in recent years after Xi's presidency since 2013.

me to emailing my CV, research introduction and cover letter to her, and then she recommended me to the human resource department and forwarded my email. Very soon I got a Skype interview invitation, which was mostly on my research topics, personal background as well as former working experiences. This interviewer Cindy, a project officer in AF's research team, became a great help of my research during the yearlong fieldwork. After another week of this interview, I suddenly got another call when I was in the Amsterdam airport on my way back to China. This time, the interviewer was Cindy's line manager Justin; he was calling to know more about my personal and working background. Justin also showed his interests with my research topic and discussed how my research may contribute to AF's work and the whole NGO sector in China. Although Justin said that I would receive a formal offer very soon, a week later I was caught by surprise when I received the third call from the human resource department, which turned out to be another interview. This human resource interview was quite different from the former two, with many standardized managerial questions like "what's your advantage and disadvantage", "what is your career plan" and so forth. In their questions, I came to realize that the human resource team was confused with my dual roles both as an intern and a researcher; they did not quite understand why as a researcher I did not ask for an intern stipend either. While in the former interviews I had been frequently asked about the details of my former working experiences, like who was I working with, and what my projects were about, etc. Although I finally confirmed my internship with AF, I realized that it could have a complicated organizational structure with two groups of workers. On one hand, some workers were looking for the "familiarities" within China's NGO circle; what they did in the first two interviews were conducted to test my knowledge, personal network, and political understanding of Chinese NGO sector, to make sure that I would be a "sympathetic researcher" to understand the complexity of AF. But at the same time, my interview with the human resource team shows there is another different force that tried to restructure AF, making it a more formalized organization without too many differences from a company.

Before my work with AF, I had been told that its research director Justin would be my supervisor. But in my first two weeks, Justin and his team members were traveling so that I had to do self-introduction repeatedly to other colleagues. Very soon when Justin came back, he invited me and all the other project

officers to have dinner together, during which he did a very detailed introduction about my working and education background, taking me like a colleague who had been working with him for some time. In fact, it was also in the dinner that I realized that Justin and I had many mutual friends; and thus, my former working experience made me like a "friend" to him rather than a stranger, even though it was the first day we met. With Justin's introduction, the other people seemed to be quite comfortable with my appearance so that they began to talk about many sensitive issues from the fundraising pressure from the AF board, the severe competition with GONGOs, to various China's political movements in the 1980s. After this dinner, the other project officers began to invite me for more dinners and other social events, also I got more access to internal meetings and documents.

Comparing with AF, the processes of approaching its partner organizations were more complicated. In order to guarantee the voluntary participation of my informants, I did not ask the then AF workers to introduce me to their partner organizations, as I noticed that their 'partnership' maybe not very equal between the AF (as a donor) and the grassroots organizations (as recipients). On many occasions, I found that AF was in a more dominated role in front of its partner organizations. So I got access to these organizations through my former co-workers and friends in China's NGO sector: through some mutual friends, I knew Humphrey, Sue and their organization GH[4] that happened to be an AF's partner organization in the past five years. In fact, Humphrey and Sue were more likely to take me as "an old friend" given our mutual friends, they kindly hosted me in their home and allowed me to observe their organization's daily operation in the office. I did one month's ethnographic work with GH, during which I began to develop a more detailed picture of the other partner organizations in AF's national network. It was also through Humphrey and Sue that I can get access to many other organization leaders later in my fieldwork.

But it should be noted that "being a friend of GH" did not necessarily help me to get through all the AF partner organizations. During my second stage fieldwork, I visited AF's partner organizations in 11 different places and talked to their workers; but I had also been refused by three organizations. All these three

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[4] I have mentioned Humphrey and Sue at the beginning of the introduction chapter, more of their stories can be found in chapter 6 and 7.

organizations had very close ties with the local government; although I was introduced by Sue as her 'good friend', they became very cautious with my identity as a research student in a Western university. Furthermore, as I discuss in Chapter 6 and 7, in these 'refusing moments' I realized that people like Humphrey and Sue were actually 'marginalized' in the Chinese NGO community due to their conflicts with the local government, close ties with Oxfam, and their lower-class status in the society. In a casual conversation with an NGO leader in May 2017, for instance, he criticized Humphrey and Sue's organizational leadership because they 'could not be more integrated into the local business circle but just focus on some minor social problems'. Therefore being introduced by Humphrey and Sue may not necessarily give me any advantages of becoming 'a trusted friend' or 'sympathetic researcher'; on the contrary, my friendship with them may sometimes put me in a more disadvantaged position in getting access to different types of organizations.

3.2 Working as an AF intern

NGOs in authoritarian states like China are often discussed as "sensitive issues" that should be strictly protected under research ethics. That said, researchers should always consider the potential political risks of the research participants in every step of the research (Nyiri, 2008). That includes questions like how to gain participants' consent, how to record and store the research data, how to protect participants' privacy by effective anonymization, and how to disseminate the research findings in different situations, etc. Although I do acknowledge and understand the possible risks of researching the "illegal activities" and "underground organizations" in China, the general research ethics above may also simplify the complicated power relations between researchers and informants in different situations. On the one hand, with the growing number of social organizations and the advancement of technologies, the Chinese state has been more sophisticated in social surveillance (Creemers, 2017). That is to say, it is possible that "being underground or illegal" does not necessarily mean that they are unknown to the state and thus always in danger of "disclosure". On the contrary, the large-scale existence of "underground organizations and illegal activities" is more likely a result of negotiation, compromise, and cooperation between some Chinese NGOs and the state; they have been tolerated by the state in non-institutional ways (Tang and Zhan,

2008). In these conditions, the state or officials may have already known "the underground world" very well. What more important for the researcher in conducting ethical fieldwork in this dynamic environment then, is not to essentialize the concept of "political sensitivity" in the local context. Instead, an ethical researcher should carefully observe and recognize the changing boundaries between what has been tolerated by the authoritarian state and what has not, so that to adjust their research strategies accordingly.

In my fieldwork, I found this politics of being tolerated greatly complicated the power relations between my informants and me. As I discuss in chapter 4, being tolerated in AF's case can be largely understood in terms of the distinctive social and economic status of its founders, a small group of successful entrepreneurs in China. Seen as a representative of Chinese entrepreneurs, AF's charitable activities and projects, no matter they are technically illegal or not, have been widely reported by the mainstream Chinese media. At the same time, independently registered with a city famous for its private economy, AF also maintains a close collaboration with various local government institutions and senior officials, which can be found from AF's internal governance, project operation, organizational branding, to even its office decoration. Except for the GONGOs in China, such deep collaboration is very rare to be seen in the Chinese NGO sector. So in many ways, being tolerated by the Chinese state in AF's case means obtaining a political privilege in the local context. Under this situation, although I am researching a seemingly "politically sensitive issue" in China, some informants in my research are quite privileged people in the Chinese society, enjoying a much higher political, economic, and social status than me. This created very unbalanced power relations between AF's board members, its senior management team and me.

This unbalanced power relations started from my first working day at AF. A project assistant made a brief introduction of AF's history, during which she talked about how a founder, Luke Lee, had contributed to AF. "Then does Luke Lee still come to see us in the office like before?" I asked her, wondering if I can meet Luke during my internship there. "No, I guess we don't have that honor. He is such a big man with so many things to do every day, extremely busy...And I need to remind you that we call Luke Lee as Lee *xiansheng* (Mr. Lee, 李先生), we wouldn't call his full name. This is his exclusive name here", the project assistant answered. *Xiansheng* is a traditional Chinese title to honor those

outstanding male intellectuals or educators, while calling one's full name is seen as disrespect to those senior or more powerful. Although Luke Lee did not even finish his primary education, his work on *gongyi* did earn him great social influences and titles beyond his economic status. Later in the fieldwork, I found that AF founders' extraordinary social status was not only recognized by its workers but also widely accepted by many of its partner organizations at the grassroots level. Every year, AF would send out some awards and prizes for its favorite partner organizations; interestingly, AF workers were very proud to set up a special prize for these grassroots organizations: meeting Luke Lee in person and shaking hands with him. Under this condition, it was not surprised to learn that other AF leaders, from its other founders, board members, general secretary, to program directors all had their "exclusive names".

This process of "language learning" from the first day not only helped me better understand the meaning of being a *gongyi* worker in this new Chinese foundation, but also using the language greatly defined my relations with AF's leaders: I have been identified as a young, inexperienced postgraduate student who should respect and learn from these successful leaders. When I was talking with AF's general secretary in some team meetings, I needed to call him "*laoshi* (teacher, 老师)" like all the other workers, although he understood that I was an independent researcher at the same time. Sometimes in our conversations, the general secretary would perform his authority by asking me questions like "how is your research going, what do you know about our organization so far". No matter how I answered his questions, in most cases he would interrupt me very quickly and try to reorganize my answers into the directions he wanted. These questions were more like "class tests" to reconfirm my status as a "student" in front of an "authoritative teacher".　Such conversations reveal the hierarchy between my informants and me. So in most circumstances at AF, my fieldwork was not a "politically risky" project in an authoritarian state, rather it was more likely a study-up ethnography of social and economic elites in a fast-changing society. Although it is important to protect and "keep honest" to these elite research participants like many other powerless groups in the society, some researchers of elite studies also put forward that in practice researchers should manage their project strategically, being aware of possible interventions from the powerful researched in knowledge production (Cookson, 1994).

Being a Chinese woman, my gender did help me in getting access to the roommates. By the end of the first month, in dinner they began to talk about their working problems especially the payment issues in front of me, asking for my opinions, from which I realized that I was no longer a "stranger" in their eyes. In fact, these roommates became another important "walking sticker" for my adventure at AF. The dorm experience did provide me more insights into understanding the nature of *gongyi* in a bottom-up perspective to observe AF workers' different working schedules, family life, living environment, and their daily anxieties[5].

Although sitting in the office let me know the working environment, in many cases, it was the various social events, casual talks, and dinners after work brought me more useful insights into understanding how AF workers think about their work. Quite often I would have dinner or have coffee during the lunch break with a small group of AF workers in a relatively relaxed atmosphere, during which I can ask more difficult questions and share some of my observations (like the organizational hierarchy and inequality) so that we can have a deeper discussion. In many circumstances, these workers would also talk about their problems or complaints among themselves proactively, which turned out to be another useful way to understand the organizational culture and its internal politics.

From the second month of my internship, as I had been invited to more dinners and social events after work, I found myself face a great pressure of drinking. Drinking has been taken as a widely used method to promote "brotherhood" in AF and its partner organizations, which I had encountered many times during my fieldwork. As Osburg (2013a, 2013b) argues in his ethnography in Chengdu's businessmen, drinking and banqueting together were very important ways in performing their masculinity, reclaiming elites' power, and strengthening the "brotherhood culture" for future profit-making. Therefore, drinking and banqueting constituted important parts of Osburg's ethnographic work in China. My fieldwork echoes with Osburg's experience. Quite often being a young woman made me a "target" of being pushed to drink as more as possible, and the male senior managers would give orders of who should drink on the table. In these drinking events, I started another lesson in the learning of

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[5] More can be found in Chapter 5.

how to build "brotherhood" with other NGO workers, which I discuss deeper in Chapter 5. It was in such drinking events that people began to talk more about their family life, their pressures and anxieties, and their understandings of Chinese politics. Joining this drinking culture did bring me some benefits in my fieldwork later. After taking three glasses of wine for the first time in front of a senior manager Larry, I found myself did not have any obstacles to getting access to most of the social events. Quite often Larry would introduce me like "this is Dr. Zhao and she can drink"; and then I became "a welcomed guest" in the banquet. This gave me more freedom to ask questions and build personal relationships with more male leaders.

Figure 3.2 A photo was taken during a dinner with AF workers in 2016. One AF worker (left) was pushing another other (right) to gulp the liquor down. A senior manager sitting outside the photo was giving orders.

However, it was also in such events that I witnessed how some female workers at my age who refused to drink in the banquets were becoming more and more marginalized in the organization, how those who did not want to drink were struggling; and how the junior male and female workers who actively

participated in drinking and toasting each other successfully became "a brother" of his or her line manager. As a person with a slight allergy to alcohol, my participation in this drinking culture confirmed my gendered identity in the eyes of my informants and demonstrated how powerful that these drinking events were in shaping Chinese NGO workers' career and daily work in unexpected ways. Banqueting and drinking in this sense were a performance of reclaiming the existed power relations in the office; by discussing "private matters", these relations extended to other aspects of life. Ethnography in this context means that I as a female NGO researcher needs to enter and explore in a highly masculinized culture with risks, biases, and physical challenges.

3.3 Producing situated knowledge: 'failures' I had made at AF

As I was becoming a 'real *gongyi* worker' at AF, I realized that I was facing more and more dilemmas in the organization. On the one hand, moving into the dorm and keeping a low profile did bring me more contacts or even 'friendships' with many 'ordinary' AF workers; but on the other hand, such strategies also made me miss some opportunities of knowing those 'extraordinary workers'. According to my former working experience, most NGO workers, especially those work at the grassroots level, would be wearing very casual t-shirts and jeans every day. That was also what I did during my internship at AF. But very soon I found that the lifestyle, including people's wearing and eating habits, was quite divided at AF. Most of AF workers working for its humanitarian assistance projects were just wearing like me in a very casual way, since they may need to travel to their project sites in the village from time to time. In order to save money, most of them would also go to the staff canteen every day that offered affordable lunch. But there were also some workers (about 10 out of 80) who never showed up in the staff canteen. Instead, they would drive their own cars together (normally Benz or BMW) to the nearby shopping malls to enjoy sushi for lunch. The outlook of these 'extraordinary workers' was quite different from others too, from tailor-made shirts to designer made skirts. Although these workers may have very different positions at AF, from directors to project assistant, what threaded them together were two things: 'local citizens' of Shenzhen and experiences of studying abroad from a very young age.

During my first days at AF, I encountered a project assistant of this 'extraordinary group', who just finished her a-level, undergraduate and master's program in the UK. She came up to me and asked whether I was 'from the UK too'. She then asked many details of my personal backgrounds from my hometown, undergraduate university, master's program, to my current academic affiliation; while she seemed to be not interested in my former working experiences at all. In the beginning, I thought she might be just curious about my appearance in the office, just like many other colleagues. But later I realized that her questions were more like 'an evaluation' of my 'qualification of entering to the extraordinary group', and obviously, I failed.

Two things let me know that I had 'failed the evaluation'. The first was that after the first conversation, I had never received any invitations from them again for any social events. My family background as an immigrant of Shenzhen, my casual clothes in the office, and the close relationships with the other 'ordinary workers' built up through the lunches and dinners together, largely defined that what I looked like at AF. I was not a typical 'local Shenzhener', 'high-end', or 'international' person as they expected.

The second thing indicated my 'failure' in a more direct way. Two months after I arrived at AF, I came across Tim in the lift. At the age of 28, Tim had been promoted as the fundraising director at AF; he was almost like a 'leader' of the 'extraordinary group' that I met at AF[6]. Although Tim and I met in the office quite often, we never had chances to talk since he never appeared in any social events organized by the 'ordinary workers'. When I met him in the lift on the 20th floor, there were only two of us in that narrow space while he kept staring at the changing floor numbers. So I decided to be the icebreaker. I said, "I heard that you are graduated from the London School of Economics? Me too!" He turned to me: "oh really? What degree do you get from there then? Master's or undergraduate?" "Master's", I replied. "Ok, well, I got my undergraduate degree there, three years, you know", he said with an unnoticeable smile. At that moment, we arrived on the ground floor and the lift door was open. As we both walked out of the lift, he asked me: "are you walking to the metro station or driving home?" "Metro station", I answered. "Ok, I need to go to the car park to get my car now. Bye!" Tim said to me very quickly. Tim's reactions in our

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6 More Tim's story can be found in chapter 5.

conversation made me soon realized that I was 'failed' to join their group again. During my whole internship at AF, I hardly had any chances to talk to Tim privately, although I did interview him after finishing my internship.

In many aspects, my former working experience did affect the way I posited myself in the field. In the beginning, I took the casual clothes and the 'friends' I made at AF for granted, as those seemed to be the lifestyle that most AF workers shared. This consequently led me to some unexpected 'failures' in my fieldwork. However, I also find that these failures contribute to my deeper understandings of the polarized nature of the *gongyi* workers in their daily life, particularly those AF workers who lived in the dorm. After talking to Tim in the lift, I suddenly realized that it might be almost impossible for my roommates to become Tim one day, even though they were working in the same space every day. My roommates' upward mobility has been largely limited from the place and economic conditions they were born into, the education background they had, and the clothes, food, and transport they can choose everyday.

Given my 'failures', sympathetic stance with the 'ordinary workers', and the changing positionality in doing the fieldwork, the empirical data, and analysis presented in this thesis are producing "situated knowledge"(Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002)[7]. Situated knowledge production allows me to become answerable for what I learn to see – that is, accountability means that 'analyses cannot be complicit with dominant representations which reinscribe inequalities' and that the researcher must be accountable for their knowledge claims (Bhavnani, 1994: 29). Except being a researcher from a Western university, my sub-identities including a woman, a second-generation immigrant in Shenzhen, a former NGO worker in China, an intern, a roommate, and sometimes a friend of my informants, largely determine what I can see, hear, and experience in the field (Giwa, 2015). Particularly, my academic training in the UK and former working experiences with grassroots organizations in China together decide my problem consciousness; and thus in the interactions with my informants, the questions I asked and the language I used also revealed who I am and what stance I could take in their eyes, which in return influences how they redefined and answered my questions (England,

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[7] A feminist methodology claims that all knowledge is partial and, to use Donna Haraway's term, 'situated'(Haraway, 1988).

1994). Therefore, according to the feminist objectivity (Haraway, 1988), my research is based on limited location and position which produces situated knowledge, rather than transcendence and splitting of subject and object. This feminist approach also leads to the question of reflexivity in this research: researcher accountability to knowledge claims and critical examination of the micro-politics of research (Joseph and Moira, 2007).

3.4 Researching AF's partner organizations in the local society

After finishing my internship in AF's office, I started the second stage fieldwork by interviewing AF's partner organizations, most were done by snowball sampling. I started my research with one AF's partner organization, GH, in K Province whose founders happened to have many mutual friends with me. This time again, I was treated more like "an old friend", received warm hospitality in K Province. GH's openness to my research provided me a better horizon to understand how and why the ideas, knowledge, and skills of *gongyi* can be disseminated, learned and renegotiated at the grassroots level. Also, the one-month participant observation at GH's office helped me to analyze *gongyi* in the local political dynamics. More important, it was through GH that I got to know more other partner organizations in different provinces. GH workers shared their contacts and introduced me to them. In most cases, GH's introduction was successful in guaranteeing my next interview, as long as the organizational leaders were "friends" with GH's leaders. But sometimes GH's introduction did not get any feedback, which could be seen as a silent decline. Most of such organizations were GONGOs with a very different background. In these circumstances, GH's founder Sue said: "I am not surprised with them at all. We had many meetings together, but we are not known to each other. They are not in the same circle with us".

These research experiences of "silent decline" confirmed the closedness and segregated nature of China's NGO sector, and thus personal relations play a crucial role in entering this research field. In Fulda & Hsu (2020)'s research, she analyzes this phenomenon as a mechanism of "social capital accumulation and transfer" between Chinese NGOs. Researchers are positioned and repositioned not only by their education background, age, and gender (like what I encountered in the AF dorm room), but more importantly, people in Chinese

NGO world (not limited to researchers) are identified by his or her former life experience and personal networks (ibid.). In fact, even for AF's former workers who never met me before, all of them accepted my interview invitations without much hesitation, when they knew that I was an intern at AF. It is the life experience and personal networks that indicate one's political ideologies and the "circle" that one belongs to, which largely decides the attitudes of Chinese NGOs to different researchers.

Researching AF's partner organizations was quite a different experience from its headquarters. Given AF was an important financial resource for most of these organizations; I decided to use my personal network to approach them to ensure their voluntary participation, rather than being introduced by AF or its current workers. I was taken as a very different person in interviewing AF's partner organizations. For GH, as we had many mutual friends, they also took me like "an old friend" who was supposed to be understanding and sympathetic to what they were doing. For other grassroots organizations that were unknown to me, many of them thought highly of my education background, viewing me as an "authority of *gongyi*". Most of them called me "teacher Zhao (赵老师)"; some of the interviewees even asked me to "*zhidao* (guide or supervise 指导)" their projects before we met. Although I was also invited to have dinner with some of these informants, none of them had ever pushed me to drink or toast during the dinner. In other word, I was no longer taken as a "gendered subordinate" but an outsider and an authority in many cases.

But my fieldwork with these partner organizations was never easier than in the AF office. Given many of the organizations, I planned to visit were very financially depended on AF's funding, at the beginning I thought their understandings of *gongyi* might have many similarities with AF. But I gradually realized that these partner organizations were quite different than I had imagined in many aspects; their relations with various donors and their daily practices were very deeply embedded in the local politics, especially their relations with the local government.

My first understanding of the complexity of the local organizations did not come from the interviews or any other conversations, but from an unexpected call that Humphrey received in an evening when I was having tea with him and Sue in their apartment. The caller shouted at Humphrey very loudly from the very

beginning to the end with great anger so that I could hear what he said very clearly. The caller was complaining that GH did not distribute the resources received from various foundations more among its "local brothers" in the city; at the end, the caller threatened Humphrey that "you need to be more careful in retributing things as long as you want to work in the city. You are now making trouble to yourself". During the call, Humphrey said nothing but just listening to him very quietly. I was really surprised by such a 'straightforward' caller, but Sue and Humphrey seemed to be calm with it. Sue said,

> "This happens almost every month, the local organizations were watching us. These organizations are not easy to deal with…they wanted to be our 'brothers'… At the beginning when they found us receive donations, they began to invite us to drink and banquet with them…But that is not possible! Who wants to make friends with these people?!"

Then I was told the caller was a leader of a local volunteer group, who was also an official working in the city government in charge of social organization issues. In the local NGO community, especially when it comes to the township and village level, such kinds of organization leaders were not rare to be seen; these groups constituted important parts of AF's national disaster relief network. Just as Sue said, I encountered another call like this during my research with GH, asking Humphrey to "think about his local brothers more".

These two calls made me realize that for many Chinese NGOs, maintaining good relationships with the local government means more than avoiding the politically sensitive issues in an authoritarian state as well as maintaining good relations with the donors. The state could be anywhere and anyone, affecting from NGO's office work to what kinds of 'friends' that NGO workers could make in their everyday life. Working in the local society asks Humphrey and Sue to manage their social relations very carefully, which had been a very big challenge for them. During my fieldwork with various organizations, most of the organization leaders were only open to the 'formal' questions regarding their development history, financial resources, governmental relations, etc. But when it comes to their personal networks and private life, most of the informants would become much hesitant and try to bypass those questions. That is especially the case for informants who enjoyed an extraordinary social status in the local NGO community and maintained a good relationship with the

local government officials. Most of them[8] tried to avoid my questions on their economic conditions, family backgrounds, personal connections with the local political and business elites, and sometimes their religions; although at the same time they were more open to discuss the NGO regulations and other more politically sensitive issues in China. The different interactions between me and different organization leaders, their hesitance in particular, to some degree revealed the complexity of the local state-NGO relations.

3.5 How I deal with research ethics in this thesis

The different fieldwork experiences with AF and the other organizations lead me to the questions of how to deal with research ethics in different power relations and contexts. For AF and some of its partner organizations, they had established very solid connections with the local government since their registration; what they did were not only tolerated but also encouraged or even privileged by the Chinese state in China's NGO sector. On the other hand, organizations like GH were more likely a semi-underground organization, often seemed like a "trouble-maker" in eyes of the local government. Taken these differences into consideration, it would be problematic if we essentialize the "political sensitivity" question across these different organizations, since they may face very different levels of political risks. In this research, I use a slightly different strategy of doing anonymization. I anonymize all the names of organizations and individuals mentioned in the thesis. But for some grassroots organizations that might be "politically sensitive" in the local community, I also anonymize the place they were located so that to avoid the potential risks for them. For others that have been widely accepted by the mainstream society and the local government, their cities or provinces are specified. Therefore, for all the AF's partner organizations at the local level, I would not specify their geographic locations. In fact, during my whole fieldwork, I did not disclose any specific information on who and where I was going to visit any AF workers.

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[8] Except Humphrey and Sue, another two organization leaders discussed their private life with me, for which I present in Chapter 7.

In getting consents, in AF's case, I wrote a formal email with my research plan and later discussed relevant research ethics regulations with its leaders face to face. Finally, I got verbal approval. For the other organizations and individuals, in order to better protect them, there was only verbal communication and approval before my research so to ensure that there would not be any formal evidence showing they had been interviewed by a researcher from a Western university. For the same reason, in all the interviews I never used recorder but took notes by my handwriting, laptop, or smartphone.

Some scholars argue that even though sometimes powerless in researching the powerful, researchers in the academic world do have more power in analyzing, writing and publishing processes (Joseph and Moira, 2007; Hertz and Imber, 2014). This constitutes an important reason why we should be "sympathetic" not only to the powerless but also to the elites that are more powerful than us. But it should be noted that such an argument is based on a hypothesis that the academic world is to some degree independent from the people we research, which offers researchers the power to write and publish critically. This hypothesis and argument are challengeable in many ways. At the global level, given more and more business elites are now entering the non-profit world by big donations and setting up their own charities, it is not surprising to find many of them also support large numbers of research and higher education programs, which in return legitimatizes their wealth and power in many academic discussions (McGoey, 2012). Therefore, "a sympathetic researcher" of these elites and their organizations would inevitably lead to the lack of analysis in class and other forms of social inequality. In my fieldwork of China's newly founded foundations, I find some of them, like their international counterparts, also pay attention to the academic world.

Take AF for example, they have sponsored many international academic conferences in China every year in the field of child protection and disaster relief, not to mention the research projects directly collaborated with social scientists. Moreover, AF leaders were very aware that being part of the academic world could be very useful in producing more influence in the country. When I talked about my research topic with its general secretary for the first time, he asked me: "So you are going to write a book? That is great for us!" Then he turned to other colleagues: "Have you ever noticed how many books that SEE [Society of Entrepreneurs and Ecology in Beijing] has already had now?

Two! But AF has none. We should let ourselves be known by the academic world; we should make AF a good case so when people study Chinese *gongyi*, they will think about us". In AF's case, these new foundations are not only changing the Chinese NGO sector and the society at large by their donation and projects but also the new ideas and knowledge they produce is shifting both the NGO and academic world. Therefore, as a researcher, criticality and reflexivity should come first before sympathy in this situation.

Meanwhile, my sympathy has been mostly demonstrated in some grassroots organizations and NGO workers who were not only problematized by the local state, but also marginalized by their counterparts due to their gender and economic conditions in the Chinese society. My sympathetic stance with these "powerless" NGO workers made the fieldwork with them much easier. While I attended many drinking and banqueting events with AF's leaders, I also talked to the other young female and male workers who were upset with such social activities. My allergy to alcohol raised many interesting discussions between me and these informants who shared their thinking and puzzles of their work and life. Also, close observation of their daily life and work helps me to analyze the relations between *gongyi* and social inequality in China in a bigger picture.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter talks about the process of how I did my ethnographic work. It discusses the challenges and strategies of researching NGOs in an authoritarian state with fast socio-economic changes. Given that the Chinese NGO sector has been in a gray area for long, the closedness of this sector has established a high threshold for researchers. However, it is not saying that doing such research is impossible. During my fieldwork with Chinese NGOs, my personal experience in working within this sector before did give me advantages to gaining access to my informants at both organizational and individual levels. Although I had 'failing' moments and difficulties with people from more elitist backgrounds, such experiences also reminded me of linking different NGO workers' everyday life with the normalization of the whole NGO sector in the country, paying attention to the homogenous nature of different actors. In the next four chapters, I will present my empirical findings with more details and analyses on these different actors and their interactions with doing *gongyi*.

Chapter 4   The Making of modern *gongyi* in Shenzhen

Located in the CBD area of Shenzhen, AF's office was situated in a skyscraper, as any medium sized company might be. The space had been unified and decorated to host at least 50 workers; everyone had their own nametag and a computer on their desk. The office occupied almost a whole floor of the building; except for the large open office space, there were several small rooms specially designed for its council board chair, general secretary, and for conferencing. Five months before I started my fieldwork at AF, the then general secretary decided to set up two fingerprint readers near the lift; every AF worker was required to input their fingerprints before starting work each day in order to monitor their working hours. This was part of a large internal reform of 'learning from corporate management'. There was a reception area and a fridge with soft drinks sponsored by Coca Cola, so that everyone could have unlimited free drinks during their working hours. The whole working space of AF is wrapped around by clear glass, along with a visitors' corridor throughout the whole working space. So, the office is much like a huge fish tank: from the visitors' corridor, people can see very clearly what every worker was doing inside. In the corridor, there were pictures showing AF's achievements from the past decade, from handshaking with the then vice Prime Minister in 2012, government awards from Beijing and Shenzhen, to its increasing donation numbers and disaster relief works.

Figure 4.1 A fingerprint reader at AF near a lift. Photo by the author.

Figure 4.2 A picture of AF office. Photo by the author.

At first sight, it seemed that AF's office was like any well-equipped company in Shenzhen. However, AF's office is provided by a local GONGO (called the Shenzhen Non-governmental Organization Association, SNOA) for free, in order to demonstrate how successful the city government is in supporting local 'philanthropists' and their foundations. Indeed, the Shenzhen government seemed to be more 'supportive' in helping the local organizations than many other city governments in China (see chapter 6). There was an exhibition just next door to AF's office organized by SNOA to show the development of local NGOs. Most of the exhibition was presenting how active and diverse Shenzhen's social organizations were, with an emphasis of entrepreneur-sponsored foundations, chambers of commerce, and various voluntary groups in the middle-class communities. As a role model of China's NGO regulation reform in recent years, the Shenzhen government has appeared in many Chinese news reports and research papers. Normally when people such as the Civil Affairs Bureau officials from other provinces came to Shenzhen to learn about Shenzhen's social development model, , they would be taken to the exhibition first. And then the visitors would take a tour walking through AF's 'fish tank office'. AF became a living example of the exhibition to show how successfully the entrepreneurs and local companies had been in collaboration with the city government in contributing to Shenzhen's social development, and how transparent these new foundations were in doing "modern *gongyi*".

Organizations like AF could be seen as 'typical mainstream' NGOs in China; they were relatively more independent from the state than most of the GONGOs (at least from its founders and funding structure), legally registered, and doing '*gongyi*'. But from its office, though seemingly different, we can still have a sense that their daily operation might be greatly shaped by the Chinese state. Compared with some other local governments that I studied in the fieldwork[1],

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[1] Some of AF's partner organizations in different provinces I visited also enjoyed free offices offered by the local government or GONGOs. But most of the office space in the other places were quite small and basic; in many cases, these free office rooms would not be the first choice for NGOs. More information can be found in chapter 6.

the Shenzhen government was much more generous and sophisticated in dealing with NGO issues, and they had a clear definition of what *gongyi* should be for in the city. AF, as a good example of Chinese entrepreneurs' rising awareness of social responsibilities, has been accepted as part of the local government's social development projects.

This chapter discusses the very popular term of 'modern *gongyi*' since this was the word that I heard very frequently from many Chinese foundations, grassroots organizations, government officials, news reports, and the 'big philanthropists' throughout my yearlong fieldwork. I have discovered that 'modern *gongyi*' is never a simple linguistic term, but an influential concept with specific knowledge, skills and political indications in China's NGO sector. As a role model of Chinese 'modern *gongyi*', AF workers were performing 'modern *gongyi*' in their office every day, which I present in this chapter. Moreover, as seen in the next chapters, it was also happening in many different places like the AF workers' dorm, everyday life, and the other organizations. This chapter aims to answer these questions: what does 'modern *gongyi*' mean and how has it been reinvented as knowledge about Chinese NGOs in the context of Shenzhen? What are the roles that the Shenzhen government and entrepreneurs have played in shaping the knowledge production of 'modern *gongyi*'?   I answer the questions in the following ways.

Firstly, my research takes 'modern *gongyi*' as a new man in making a reformist China, particularly in the city of Shenzhen. The use of the word 'modern' here refers to both the Shenzhen government and the entrepreneurs attempting to define AF and many other local foundations as a new and more "progressive" creature, departing from the GONGOs that have been seen as 'traditional' socialist legacies. As a farewell to the 'traditional', this 'modern *gongyi*' puts an emphasis on the spirit of aggressiveness in people's daily work and life, a character that has been seen as a symbol of the city since its establishment as China's economic reform pioneer three decades ago; it has been called a 'wolf-like spirit' in many Shenzhen private enterprises today. In this chapter, I argue that the wolf-like spirit, or the aggressiveness shared by many workers in the AF has aimed to create a new type of organization in China's NGO sector: by

imagining themselves as a representative of the rising private entrepreneurs, they are ambitious to compete with GONGOs as a "reformer". This new type of NGOs with 'wolf-spirit' have no longer been a mere 'follower' of the international development agencies, even though some of their workers have had working experiences with various international donors. Instead, these Chinese NGOs have become a 'competitor' of the Western donors.

Secondly, 'modern *gongyi'* has brought new languages, skills, and organizational structure changes to the Chinese NGO sector. It has brought a 'donor/customer-centered' culture that can be better promoted among the ordinary Chinese. But the new personhood and languages should be understood in political terms. These new skills and languages, as a process of implementing the 'wolf spirit' in AF's daily operation, have also led to profound changes in terms of its human resource structure: new, male employees with better mastery of the new languages were brought into the organization, which created a bigger gap and conflicts between employees in terms of gender and income in AF's office. By putting AF's case into a bigger picture of social change in China's reform and the local contexts of Shenzhen, I argue that this 'modern *gongyi*' has become part of the reproduction mechanism of 'one family, two systems' in China, contributing to the widening gender gap in the workforce.

The first chapter of this thesis analyzes the different approaches in understanding Chinese NGOs, in which I argue that the corporatism framework is more relevant for this thesis in analyzing the politics of NGO-state relations in China. This chapter is an extension of the theoretical debates on the corporatism approach by looking at the process of making 'modern *gongyi'* in AF's office. For most of the time during my internship with AF, the city government did not show up directly in the office on a daily basis. It was the ideas and commands from entrepreneurs and the senior management team that occupied most of my energy in learning how to be a 'modern *gongyi* worker' at AF. However, in several public crises that AF encountered in 2016, I began to realize the importance of the deep collaboration between AF and the local government in Shenzhen. As I discuss in the third section, most of these crises were not only publicly challenging AF's organizational image as a role model of

'modern *gongyi*' in China, but athey were also questioning the increasing influence of private entrepreneurs in Chinese society. In this context, the patronage and support from the Shenzhen government did help AF and its modern *gongyi* model to be 'normalized' in China, and this provides us with a good opportunity to understand how such corporatism at the local level can happen and be challenged in the country.

In the following sections, this chapter firstly introduces in brief how the 'city characteristics of Shenzhen' have been formed since China's economic reform. In particular, I discuss how 'wolf-spirit' appeared in the local corporates and how it has been promoted among AF workers as a 'modern *gongyi* worker'. I also pay attention to the process of how it has been incorporated into the Shenzhen government's changing regulations of the local NGO community. Then the chapter looks at the specific skills and daily work of 'modern *gongyi*' in AF's office, documenting the commercialized organizational culture created by the entrepreneurs. In particular, this chapter analyses the impacts of these new knowledge and languages on the human resource management of different AF workers. Finally, the chapter discusses the moments when this 'modern *gongyi*' could be challenged and how such challenges could be dealt with by the help of the Shenzhen government. Those discussions can help us understand the boundaries of the 'modern *gongyi*' model in China.

4.1 becoming a wolf: the making of a new man

I have been to Shenzhen Airport many times during my fieldwork, travelling from there to other Chinese cities. While I was waiting for my flights at the airport, what attracted me most were the airport bookshops. Just like many other airport bookshops I have been to in different countries, the bookshops at Shenzhen airport had many types of books for travelers to kill time. But all the Shenzhen's bookshops had a screen in the front of the shop with a loudspeaker, showing various lectures made by some Chinese business elites. These speeches covered a wide range of topics from business management, personal leadership, how to establish a start-up, and how to find your first gold, to their

own business experiences. There were often a lot of books and DVDs on the same themes piled up for sale besides the screen, occupying the central area of these bookshops. According to my travel experiences at the airport bookshops, Jack Ma, the Chinese Internet tycoon, must be the winner in the competition of the big bosses. He is not only a passionate speaker, but his speeches involved many his personal stories of how he became successful from scratch in the past two decades, in order to convince audiences that everyone can 'go big' if you have a certain kind of personality or just "think like Jack Ma".

Jack Ma is not just popular in Shenzhen airport; in many other city airports, people can also see him on screens, in bookshops, and in commercials. In fact, most of those books in the airports were not even published by Ma himself. In a public interview, Ma said that the publishers would not even notice him; most of the bestselling books were violating his intellectual property rights. That means people in China today are not just interested in the specific methods or skills Ma used to build up his business empire, but also in his narrative and thinking patterns of 'how to be successful' in China, which has been called the 'wolf-like spirit' in many of Jack Ma's speeches. The titles of the books sold in the bookshops mostly included 'wolf-spirit' in different permutations from 'wolf-like marketing skills', 'wolf-like team building and human resource management', 'wolf-spirit culture in e-commerce' and so forth. Then what is this 'wolf-spirit' about and how could it be introduced to the non-profit world in China?

4.1.1 Chinese entrepreneurs and wolf-spirit

The 'wolf-spirit' was originally from a best-selling Chinese novel called *Wolf Totem* in 2004. The book is about a Chinese man in his late twenties who left his home in Beijing to work in Inner Mongolia. Through descriptions of folk traditions, rituals, and life on the steppe, *Wolf Totem* compares the culture of the ethnic Mongolian nomads with the Han Chinese farmers in the area. The book praises the "freedom, independence, respect, unyielding before hardship, teamwork and competition" of the former and criticizes the "Confucian-

inspired culture" of the latter, which is "sheep-like". By the end of the novel, the author extended its conclusion by saying that the "sheep-like culture" should be discarded, and the Han Chinese should learn from the other cultures especially those which had been historically more aggressive: the Westerners, for example, given they were the 'wolf on the sea'. Although this wolf-like spirit seems to be too aggressive and racist in many ways, it is somehow in accordance with many Chinese entrepreneurs who have taken the risk and made breakthroughs by their own hard work in the reformist era, proving a major difference from the 'socialist workers' during the command economy.

One of the good examples is the company of Huawei, with its CEO Ren Zhengfei who changed his career in the 1980s from the army to the business world. On the official website, Huawei introduces its company culture as follows[2]:

> The major organizational culture of Huawei Company, which demonstrates the set of key values, beliefs and attitudes shared by organizational members, is known as 'wolf-culture'. The first character of wolves is bloodthirsty. Employees of Huawei are extremely sensitive to the market information and could response promptly to any changes. The second character of wolves is resistant to coldness. The fearlessness of difficulties and eagerness of making progress are insisted by every member of Huawei, no matter how complicated the hardship is... The 'wolf-culture' brings Huawei a high level of keen insight about the unsteady market and assists the company to quickly react to any existing opportunities. As a result, Huawei could expand its business volume about approximately twenty percent every year.

4.1.2 Wolf-spirit and AF

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[2] Source: https://huaweico.wordpress.com/our-culture/

Although 'wolf-spirit' has been quite popular in the Chinese business world, it was quite unusual to talk about this among the Chinese NGOs when I was doing my fieldwork in the 2016. In my former work experience in China's NGO circle, I had never heard about this word from any organizations I knew. On the contrary, 'aggressiveness' or 'wolf-spirit' seemed not to be welcomed among many organizations, and NGO workers were more likely to present their 'softness'. In my interviews with different NGO workers, most of them would firstly talk about their NGO work experience by telling stories about their 'original heart (*chuxin*, 初心)', or where their original *gongyi* compassion came from. Quite often these stories were about their faith in Buddhism (see chapter 5 and 7), and this narrative was particularly common among the NGO workers who had left the business world. 'Wolf-spirit', in many circumstances, was still a new word in many NGOs' daily work.

At AF, this "wolf-spirit" was firstly introduced by Jack Ma to define what *modern gongyi* should be like in its spirit. Then it was gradually learned by their foundation workers who came from other traditional international agencies. At an annual dinner for AF's council board members and its workers in 2011, one of AF's important council board members, Jack Ma, delivered a speech, calling its workers to have 'wolf-spirit' in their daily work[3]:

> "In our board meeting during the day, the executive team has already got enough praises for their hard working in the past year. All I want to say now is that, I think our activities are not sexy enough for the young people; we cannot mobilize more of them to join and donate to us. More importantly, our working team is lack of a **spirit of wolves**; our workers need to be more aggressive in their daily work. AF is now the leader, much more influential than most of our competitors in the gongyi sector. But we should be like **a wild wolf** that always has a strong sense of crisis in competing with others. Wolves are very acute and proactive in finding their food and expanding their territories. We

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[3] Source: a video of AF's internal archive. Translated by the author.

should just be like them, to be more aggressive to cultivate all of our energy to attract donations and mobilize people. We should not only think about how to make a big business in China, but also think about the whole world".

Table 4.1 AF's council board members in 2011 (11 people in total)[4]

Name	Personal background	Have other foundation affiliations
Chi Chou[5] (board chair)	Professor in Development Economics at Peking University. Male.	Yes.
Heng[6]	Founder and CEO of a listed real estate company. Male.	Yes.
Luck Lee[7] (AF founder)	Movie star and financial investor. Male.	No.
Chuanzhi Liu[8]	Founder and CEO of a high-tech company, Lenovo. Male.	Yes.

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[4] Source: the official website of AF. In 2016 when I was doing fieldwork with AF, the council board still kept 11 members, with only one people changed.
[5] Name anonymized here.
[6] Anonymized.
[7] Anonymized.
[8] Chuanzhi Liu has been affiliated with a number of philanthropic foundations in China and widely reported as a 'philanthropist' in many mainstream Chinese media. Therefore, I don't anonymize his name here, as his specific affiliation with AF may not that easily recognized as other council board members who have less involvements with *gongyi*. I also apply this anonymization method to Pony Ma and Jack Ma in this table.

Pony Ma	Founder and CEO of a high-tech company, Tencent. Male.	Yes.
William Ma[9]	Former CEO of a commercial bank (retired). Male.	Yes.
Jack Ma	Founder of a high-tech company, Alibaba. Male.	Yes.
Sheng Niu [10]	Founder and CEO of a listed food company. Male.	Yes.
Yang Si[11]	Founder and CEO of a listed real estate company. Male.	Yes.
Peng[12]	Former senior official in Beijing, general secretary of AF from 2011 to 2014. Male.	Yes.
Amy Zhou[13]	Friend of Luck Lee, financial investor. Female.	Yes.

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[9] Anonymized.

[10] Anonymized.

[11] Anonymized.

[12] Anonymized.

[13] Anonymized.

Jack Ma was not the only one to promote the 'wolf-sprit' at AF. During my fieldwork, I heard and read repeatedly from various internal documents and ordinary workers about how the general secretaries of the foundation had problems in communicating with their council board members. They had been criticized as having a "**lack of wolf-spirit**" when they found themselves having difficulties in achieving the growth rate of fundraising targets set up by the council board every year. For instance, when James had just taken the leadership post at AF, he and the whole senior management team received an 'assignment' from its then council board committee president, William. William gave the team a list of ten big Chinese companies' CEOs, asking the executive team to find out the CEOs' contacts, arrange meetings in a month and persuade at least three to five CEOs to donate to AF. In fact, as one of the most successful bankers in China, William already knew all these CEOs well. The purpose of this assignment was to motivate the 'wolf spirit' among the AF leadership to 'challenge themselves', so that they could 'stimulate more personal potential and team spirit' in attracting funding and donors. When he discovered that the management team failed his test, William was so disappointed; he criticized James by saying he 'does not have enough training in the business world'.

At the beginning, I was very confused why Jack Ma and William would introduce 'wolf-spirit' to AF workers, since the differences between their own companies and the charitable foundation were so obvious. If for a company, being aggressive means that people should always have a sense of crisis in competing with other companies in the market, then what does it mean for the non-profit sector in China? Who should be their competitors, and what are they competing for? Also, 'wolf-like' companies like Huawei and Alibaba offer very good salaries[14] to their workers to motivate their 'wolf-spirit' and competitiveness; but for most Chinese NGO workers whose average income could be lower than

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[14] The average annual salary at Huawei in 2017 was more than 60 thousand pounds per person, while in the same year the national average just reached 7 thousand pounds in urban China. Source: https://t.cj.sina.com.cn/articles/view/6434923859/17f8d2553001004zh3

the national average income, how can AF and its workers deal with their increasingly wolf-like work?

4.2 Competing for what?

Larry was part of the senior manager team[15] in charge of all AF's disaster relief work. When Larry talked about "competing with others" in the office, one of the possible "competitors" he thought of was the international agencies working in China. Although Larry was the second worker to have jumped across from Oxfam, in his eight years at AF he had witnessed more and more people joining AF from various international organizations. This is particularly interesting that in an internal meeting note of 2011, I found that the then board members decided to take Oxfam China as their major "rival" in the disaster relief field in the country. Indeed, for people like Larry and maybe some of his new colleagues, they seemed very proud of working with the influential entrepreneurs to "beat their former employers". In an internal meeting with his working team in 2016, Larry talked about the achievements that AF had made in the past few years:

> "In 2010 and 11, our board member Si saw the effective work of Oxfam's disaster relief team in several earthquakes in China. So he asked us to take Oxfam as our 'benchmarking organization'. But now [in 2016], we have already been far beyond Oxfam. The main reason, to be frank, is that we have enough money. We can spend a large amount of money on disaster recovery and backup infrastructures, building large-scale warehouses, maintaining good supply chains and purchasing massive disaster relief materials beforehand. Now the scale of our disaster preparation system in western China is 2 to 4 times larger than Oxfam. If I were still in Oxfam, I can never do that, since its internal examination and approval procedures would take years long for such big projects. If any big natural disasters really come up now, Oxfam can never react in a short time. But now at AF, I can approve any project budget fewer than 500 thousand yuan (about

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[15] I discuss AF's personal management system and hierarchy more specifically in the next chapter.

50 thousand pounds) simply by a signature. We do not have so many project regulations as INGOs, not too many demands of our project results and evaluations. It is much easier to get things done here, more flexible, more space, and a larger platform for personal development".

From Larry's speech, we may find that his agreement with the entrepreneurs was partly based on the criticism of the international organizations' work in China, which also partly explained the withdrawal of INGOs from China in the past decade. On the one hand, compared to the domestic foundations, international organizations had lost their dominant status as a financial resource in China. The rising entrepreneurs and domestic foundations had begun to "win the battlefield" by using more aggressive strategies of organizational branding, marketing, fundraising mobilization, etc.   On the other hand, the bureaucracy and fixed norms in many international organizations also brought obstacles in dealing with the dynamic situations in their work. In this aspect, entrepreneur-founded organizations seemed to be more "flexible" with less internal regulations and hence "higher efficiency". In fact, as an organization with about ten years' history, AF still did not have its own project monitoring and evaluation system when I was doing my fieldwork there, even though some of its senior managers had been experts of project evaluation in other international organizations.

Diagram 4.2 The organizational structure of AF in 2016. Source: AF's official website.

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          ┌──────────────┐         ┌──────────────┐
          │ Council board│◄───────►│  Supervisory │
          │              │         │     board    │
          └──────┬───────┘         └──────────────┘
                 │
                 ▼
          ┌──────────────┐
          │   General    │
          │  secretary   │
          └──────────────┘
```

Administration team	Gongyi projects center				Fundraising and Branding team
	Social innov-ation team	Disaster relief team	Child Protection team	Research Team	
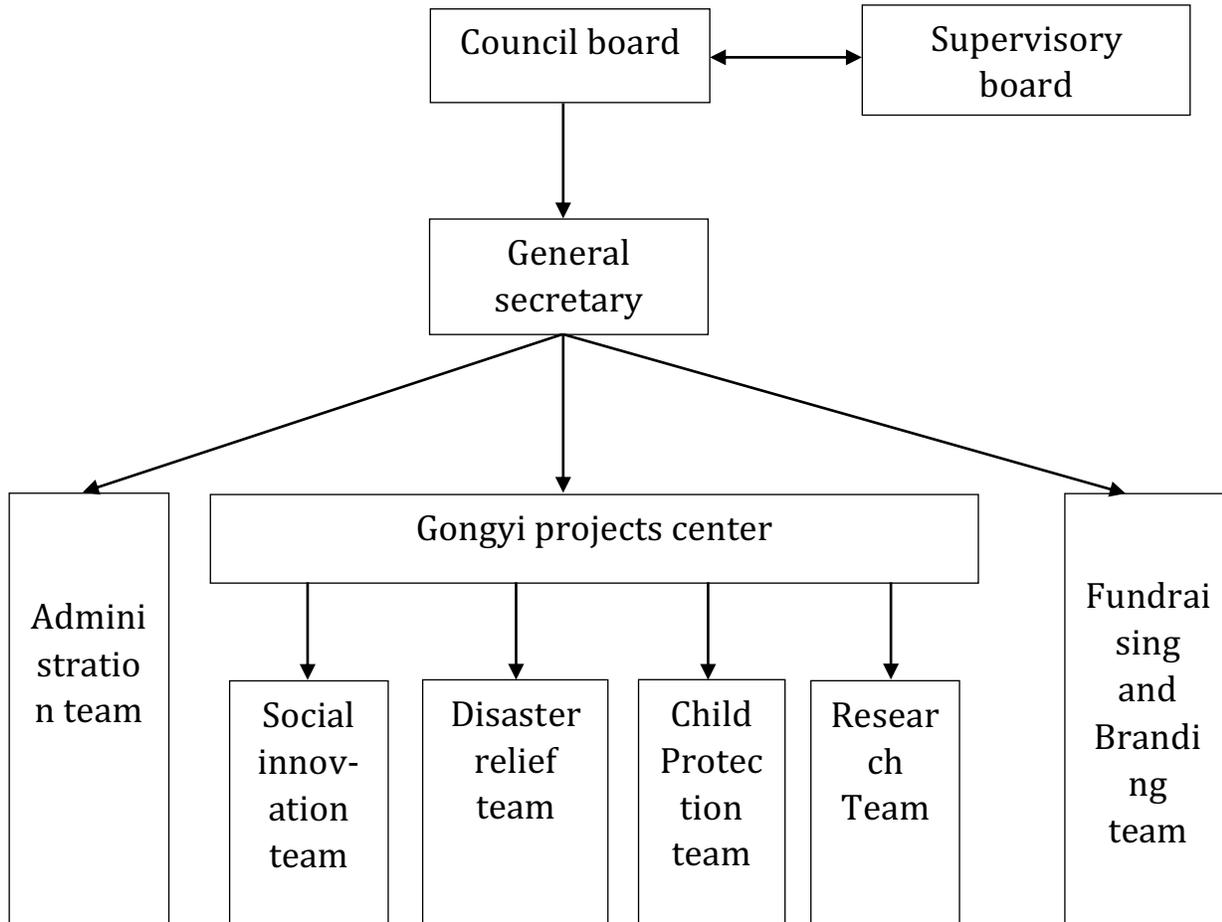
Similar to Larry, his old colleague Calvin also realized INGOs' problems, which made him determined to work with domestic entrepreneurs even earlier. It was in 2005 that Calvin decided to leave his community development work in Guizhou Province, when he found that participatory development methods taught by the international organization he worked for was merely a "project performance" in the villages. Given the rapid urbanization in the nearby cities, in less than two years most of the villagers in their work sites had chosen to be 'farmer-workers' in the cities, which would normally greatly help to raise their living conditions but also hollow out the villages. The "slow" or "long-term" community development projects, in Calvin's eyes, were too "outdated" to get the local economic development up to speed. For instance, in some of the villages where international donors had supported the drilling of a new well,

the project officers just found the well was locked in their project evaluation afterwards. On a fieldtrip with Calvin, he told me:

> "Only children and the elderly had been left in the village; they do not need the well at all. We had made lots of effort to make sure the daily management of the well can be arranged in a more democratic, participatory way among villagers. But where was the key keeper? He was working on a construction site outside the village!"

After this, Calvin began to realize how greatly rural China and peasants had been changed by its economy, as well as to question whether the experiences and knowledge of INGOs' development work could really be applied in the local context of China. In our conversations, Calvin shared his ideas frankly that he thought only the "power of e-commerce can really help people in the rural areas", and therefore "it is better to teach people to do online business, rather than any community development projects". Very early on in 2006, Calvin went to a domestic environmental foundation established by a group of Chinese entrepreneurs in Beijing; in 2010, Calvin joined AF.

But INGO is not the only "enemy" of AF (and it has been "defeated"). The reason why AF workers accepted the new thinking pattern and worked well with their "wolf-like" entrepreneurs is also embedded in their political stances with Chinese private entrepreneurs in a bigger political structure. When I was talking with AF workers, whether it was in or outside the office, no matter what posts they may hold, the most frequent thing they would mention were not any specific projects they were doing at that moment. On the contrary, they were deeply concerned about AF's donation numbers. This phenomenon reminded me of what Jack Ma mentioned in his annual speech with AF workers. In the speech, Jack Ma made it clear that every AF worker should try their best to "mobilize people for more donations".   Therefore, it seemed that many AF workers shared the same concerns as the entrepreneurs. This was unusual because AF had been more successful than most of the organizations in terms

of its donations in the country. At a dinner with several senior managers in the summer of 2016, Calvin told me of their "money anxiety":

"Have you ever heard of the 500 Million Yuan (about 56 million pounds) Club in China? According to last year's donation statistics, the top 5 foundations (with the most donations) were all GONGOs, and they all received more than 500 million yuan last year. We are the only one of the top 10 foundations not supported by the government. Although we tried so hard to do fundraising last year, we only reached 200 million yuan in the end; the financial gap between AF and the GONGOs is becoming bigger and bigger. Our board members are so concerned about this".

Calvin then made a joke about the GONGOs:

"You know, the GONGOs have so many special links with various ministries and government branches, so they do not need to do anything at all. Companies, whether they were foreign or domestic, would just donate to them so eagerly in order to build up governmental ties. Maybe the most important person in these foundations is the telephone operator, because he needs to receive so many donors' calls a day!"

At that dinner, I realized that Calvin and his colleagues were very proud to represent a new social force "outside the state": the emerging entrepreneurs from the private sector. Calvin's words on entrepreneurs and GONGOs can be better understood in the political economy in reformist China. For a very long time in China's history, entrepreneurs and the private sector were seen as the lowest class according to Confucius, since they were greedy and not that stable as farmers and craftsmen (Yang, 2013). In the socialist era, entrepreneurs were criticized as capitalists, who should be politically repressed (Guthrie, 2009). However, after Mao's death and the fall of the Cultural Revolution, entrepreneurs have been seen as one of the most important forces to stimulate

China's economic development. Researchers have found that most of the reforms were initially started by experiments in a smaller region, normally launched by a small group of entrepreneurs with their own private businesses (Dickson, 2007). Their networking and cooperating with the local government officials did help to innovate the local policies and make the local state more tolerant and open in terms of political participation (Tsai, 2005). Under this background, in many people's eyes, including Calvin and his colleagues, the entrepreneurs were the "progressive" force in China. In fact, private entrepreneurs in China have long been seen as a "natural alliance" with Chinese liberal intellectuals and social movements. This was first discussed in the post 1989 era as an urgent solution to dealing with the failure of the student movement in Beijing. Later, the growing, marketized, private economy seemed also to confirm the "fact" that the private sector is a liberal, progressive force in China, challenging the old, socialist party-state. As we may find from AF's case, this "progressive" narrative of Chinese entrepreneurs can partly legitimatize their dominant status in the Chinese NGO sector.

Not only were AF workers identifying themselves as "representatives of a more progressive force", but they also felt they shared the same "battlefield" with private entrepreneurs against various state agencies. Although many entrepreneurs did enjoy benefits created by the economic reform policies of the state, on many occasions their competitors were also the multi-layered state: the state-owned companies. As Huang (2008) states, even though the Chinese state had withdrawn from many industries, private enterprises have been systematically excluded from a great number of profitable industries including banking and finance, energy, public transport, telecommunications and so forth. The barriers for private enterprises to receiving loans from the state-owned banking system were often much bigger than many of them could overcome. Moreover, the late 1990s witnessed a rapidly increasing number of large state-owned companies in big cities, mostly run by provincial or central governments as well as the reducing of small private enterprises (ibid). So, the nature of the Chinese state is much more than a regulator of the market; rather, it is a strong player in the market competing with foreign and private capitals (Oi, 1995).

In AF's case, by allying with private entrepreneurs, the organization performed the 'modern *gongi*' by distancing itself from the state and GONGOs. The wolf spirit, in this context, helped to set up a new image of 'being an innovator' and 'a winner' in China's NGO sector and its international counterparts.

4.3 Learning to be a 'modern *gongyi* worker' at AF

To do 'modern *gongyi*' means something more than 'wolf spirit'. My fieldwork in AF's office as a full-time worker let me learn the new languages, skills and qualifications of how to apply the wolf spirit in the daily work. This section talks about the specific skills and languages used in AF's office, how AF's human resource system was changed in order to be more 'competitive', and how this new knowledge became part of the NGO regulation reform in Shenzhen.

4.3.1 "Donors are our God": the changing languages in the office

When I was doing fieldwork in AF's office, its then board chair William was the former CEO of a Chinese commercial bank. In order to mobilize more public donation and set up a better image of how AF had done "modern *gongyi*", he firstly gave the senior management team "a special training", asking them to contact company CEOs for donations (see section 4.1.2). After this "training", William launched some reforms to change the whole organizational structure: for instance, by changing the roles of all staff to "account managers" so as to "serve our donors better".   In an internal speech, William said that many AF workers were too devoted to their humanitarian assistance projects; they were "too product-oriented but not client-centered enough". Actually, during the fieldwork, it took me a while to understand William's language, such as the meaning of "product" or "client" here. In a media report, William proudly explained his ambitious reform as this:

> "We are going to be the foundation with the most individual donors in China... So, we need to let people know that, no matter how much they

donate, whether it is one jiao (about 1 cent) or one yuan (10 cent), they are all the masters of AF. In the language of a commercial bank, they are all our clients, our 'God'. We need to serve them well so that more people can join us".

William's speech above revealed entrepreneurs' thoughts of "what AF is supposedly for". Based on the propositions of NGO marketization, foundations turn out to be more like a listed company with numerous shareholders. AF's transparency and accountability work, to a large extent, were mostly done for their donors. In this sense, AF's various humanitarian projects were reduced to 'products' (for attracting more donations); donors become 'clients' and the owner of the 'products'. AF workers were the "servers of their clients"; everyone was asked to have a "donor's perspective" in their daily work. This meant that even when some of them were doing humanitarian assistance work in villages, they also needed to think about doing public communications and branding at the same time, which made the pictures and stories they collected in the village particularly important for AF.

In fact, this "client/donation-centered" culture also turned the foundation office into a big stage for performing "accountability and transparency" to the general public. During my fieldwork in the office, I found that AF's office was basically an 'attraction' to show its "transparent working environment" (as the opposite of 'corrupted GONGOs') to its visitors, the whole working space of AF is wrapped by clear glass, along with a visitors' corridor throughout the whole working space.

William's reform gained most support from the other two Internet tycoons sitting on AF's board; since their e-commerce companies were so influential among the ordinary Chinese people, therefore when AF's projects have had free access to campaigning through their e-commerce websites on a daily basis since 2013, this new foundation won a huge advantage in terms of marketing and fundraising. So, to establish a 'donor-centered' culture was not to think about the general public's expectations of AF, but also to serve the demands of

those online platforms. An important part of AF's reform then, was to make all its humanitarian projects more 'sellable' through various e-commerce websites. During my internship at AF, in my monthly meetings with all other workers on different humanitarian assistance projects, what people discussed most were not about what was going on at the project sites, but the different donation numbers of different projects. From July to August 2016, those meetings became once a week, since a big online fundraising event called "Gongyi Day" was going be held by one of the Internet tycoons sitting on AF's board in September, under the name of 'enhancing rational *gongyi* in China". During that period, AF workers, from the public communications team, and finance managers, to disaster relief assistants, were all trying their best to mobilize their partner organizations across the country, mostly grassroots NGOs, to help promote their projects in different places in order to attract more donations (see more in chapter 6).

4.3.2 "Bringing more wolves to AF"

For AF, competing with GONGOs in terms of fundraising means it had to put a lot of effort in public communication and marketing, in order to make their humanitarian actions more 'attractive' to the general public. In order to achieve the donation numbers and growth rate that had been set by the board members in the previous year, in 2016 the then general secretary decided to hire more workers with sophisticated skills in marketing and branding in the business world. Consequently, AF's structural change was also conducted in its human resource management, although this change seemed to be more complicated than simply learning a new language.

Like most of the prosperous areas in urban China, Shenzhen has more men than women: among its 12 million population, more than 60% are men. The gender gap in the local high-tech companies is even bigger: for Huawei, in the past five

years only 20% of its workers are women[16]. In another of Shenzhen's Internet giant, Tencent, its female employees equal less than one third[17]. As Huawei's CEO Ren Zhengfei said in an interview this year, "In order to reach the annual income of one hundred billion US dollars in the next three years, we need to build an iron-like army to win this battle". Indeed, the employees in Huawei are very much like an army in terms of their gender. For most of the high-tech companies in China, and Shenzhen particularly, 'wolf spirit' in the business circle is highly masculinized. As more and more Chinese NGOs began to learn from the wolf-like enterprises, the human resource system at AF went through some very interesting changes.

The general situation in China's NGO sector is quite different. Although there is no comprehensive data of Chinese NGO workers' personal information, a national survey conducted by one of the largest Chinese foundations shows that, in 2016, more than 60% of Chinese NGO workers were women; however, only 30% of the organizations were led by women. That is to say, although men dominated the leadership positions in China's NGO sector like the high-tech companies in Shenzhen, in order to be as 'wolf-like' as the entrepreneurs, most of China's NGO leaders were male and their employees were not. In my fieldwork at AF, I found that even though AF's board members were calling for more 'wolf-spirit', or 'competitiveness' in the foundation workers, many of their employees were not that motivated to be 'aggressive' and 'devoted' to their work as expected, and this was especially true among the married female workers. Being an NGO worker at AF, to some degree, is only a secondary choice for many female workers and their families; as E (the personal assistant of AF's general secretary, female) told me at a lunch, she was 'not coming for battle but for love'. E claimed herself to be a very pious Tibetan Buddhist, which finally led her to AF's position.

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[16] Source: the official website of Huawei, https://www.huawei.com/cn/about-huawei/sustainability/win-win-development/develop_love.

[17] Source: *Harvard Business Review*, https://www.hbrchina.org/2015-12-18/3686.html

In 2016, AF had 81 full time workers, about 60% of them were women; among the married women workers, all of their husbands worked in "more competitive industries" like high-tech and finance in the city. None of them had partners working in the lower paid NGO sector like themselves. Of all the married female workers, I found only one of them, Y, was living in a rented flat with her husband, for which they needed to pay about 200 pounds per month. As a project officer at AF, Y's monthly rent took about one third of her salary. For all the other female married workers, they lived in their self-owned houses in Shenzhen with their families. In 2016, the average housing price in the city was about 4500 pounds per square meter, while the average salary at AF in 2016 was 700 pounds per month. This indicated that these female workers were not the major breadwinners in their own families; their salaries may only constitute a small part of the family income.

Hoffman's (2006) ethnographic research in the city of Dalian found that, the emerging private sector was seen as a 'battle field' with more risks and potentially higher payment. Inside many Chinese families, there were "one family, two systems": women were often those who stayed inside the remaining socialist, 'less competitive (and thus less profitable)' bodies, like the state-owned companies, public education institutes, and public services. Even though these jobs could be much lower paid than the private sector, the 'low competition and stable welfare' can make sure that they had enough energy for the family care. At the same time, men were expected to fight in the private sector and make a good fortune so as to build up their masculinity (ibid). The sectors outside the market, in this sense, have been gendered as the "secondary sector", being overridden by the more masculinized for-profit sector. Hoffman's research partly explained the high percentage of women doing *gongyi* in today's China, since *gongyi* was long seen as state agencies in the socialist era. The non-profit sector in many parts of the world has been described with a woman's face due to the gender stereotypes (Yarrow, 2008; Hindman and Fechter, 2011).

In some casual conversations with my female colleagues during the lunch break, when asked why they chose to work in the non-profit sector, many of them

would make it clear that they were not coming for "wealth or power". As a colleague D aged 22 said, "Who would come to AF if one wants to make money?". Instead, many of the female workers, especially the married ones, would attribute their career choice to their own interests or religion (mostly Tibetan Buddhism), and they held that working in the non-profit sector was less stressful than most of the companies in Shenzhen. Only two female workers (both single) directly connected their career choice with a certain kind of political ideology or their education backgrounds (philosophy and anthropology). F, a fundraising manager told me that she would never do the same job as her husband did in an Internet company in the city, since her husband needed to work about 12 hours a day, six days a week. "It is too competitive in the business circle and I was so tired of it. So, my husband asked me to find a job that can make me happier. Then I found working for a charity is exactly what a Tibetan Buddhist should do", F said.

Under this context, it is not surprising to find that AF's entrepreneurs would view the non-profit sector as "not competitive enough" and therefore tried to "innovate" AF's human resource system by introducing more business elites to occupy senior positions. At the same time, enhancing competitiveness means more male leaders in practice. In AF's board, all its members, the entrepreneurs, were men. In its senior managers' team, more than 70% were men; and the salary gap between the highest and lowest-paid staff in the organization (among the 80 workers) was more than 15 times, which indicated a big pay gap between different genders. During my internship, most of the messages I received from E (on behalf of the then general secretary) were about the introduction of new colleagues. More than 10 new employees joined the senior management team during my internship, all of which were from the business world, just as the general secretary noted in the email, "To create a more competitive atmosphere within our organization, we need to bring more wolves to AF". Not surprisingly, only two of these new senior managers were women, all of them were working for the public communication, branding, and fundraising issues.

As most of the new senior managers had never worked in the NGO sector before, their coming raised interesting debates and conflicts within the organization. In September 2016, all the AF senior managers from different offices were asked to come to Shenzhen to attend the welcoming meeting. But three of them asked to fly first class rather than economy class, and when refused by the then general secretary James, these three new managers bought their own first-class tickets. This incident triggered anger among some old workers. F, the fundraising manager who had been working at AF since 2015, said to me at a dinner: "You know what, these professionals are not coming for *gongyi*, they are coming to rule this organization".

4.4 Chinese state and the creation of *wolf-spirit*

Although the wolf-spirit in the Chinese NGO sector seemed to be a creation of the Chinese entrepreneurs, we can hardly attribute its impacts to the rising private sector in China only. On the one hand, at the national level, taking private entrepreneurs as ambitious innovators and reformers has been a very important part of the national modernization project for the Chinese state in its economic reform. On the other hand, though performing the gesture of distancing itself from the socialist moralities (just as I have discussed in Chapter 2 about Lei Feng), at the local level wolf spirit also fits into the development model of Shenzhen. This led to the close collaborations between the Shenzhen government and AF. I argue that the popularity of wolf-spirit in Chinese society is more like a state narrative in making a nationalist person that can be incorporated into the various forms of state-directed development projects or reforms (Hoffman, 2006, 2010), while AF's case should be better understood in the context of Shenzhen's NGO regulation reform in the past few years.

Before the economic reform, 'entrepreneurs' were known as 'capitalists' according to Maoism. They were the class that should be eradicated socially and physically in China's socialist revolution. People who started their own businesses were called 'the tails of capitalism', which should be 'cut down'. It

should be noted that although the economic reform had already begun in the 1980s, the appearance of private entrepreneurs was still under serious attack from Marxists in and outside the ruling party. The word 'entrepreneur' was not popularly used in China until the open up policy launched in 1992 by Deng. Deng's call for further reform by setting up special economic zones, stopping ideological debates, and opening up to the external markets and capital in 1992 greatly contributed to the rise of private businesses in China's coastal areas (Coase and Wang, 2016). A visible consequence of the booming private business was the phenomenon of *'xiahai' (jumping into the sea)*: government officials, employees of state-owned companies, university scholars gave up their *'tie fanwan' (iron rice bowl)* and opened up their own businesses. According to the national statistics, in 1992 alone, there were about 120 thousand government officials who left their posts and *xiahai*; more than 10 million officials took unpaid leave to join the private sector (Coase and Wang, 2016). However, this is not to say that doing private business was easy at that time. On the contrary, many people working for the government, state-owned companies and research institutes in the early 1990s were still enjoying many benefits of the socialist welfare system. Instead, to start their own businesses outside the state was a very risky move; since it was only two or three years after the 1989 student movement, no one was certain about how economic policies and political situations would be in China. That was why people called it 'jumping into the sea'; it was more like a gamble to start a private business at that time.

As a major beneficiary of Deng's reform, Shenzhen was the first special economic zone in China thirty years ago, and it has also been 'the experimental site of Beijing' (Keith *et al.*, 2013; Yang, 2013). In just two decades, the city, once a fishing village, has become the largest manufacturing and hi-tech center in China. At the beginning of the establishment of Shenzhen, this coastal city was actually one of the 'seas' that many people 'jumped into'. Compared to many other Chinese cities like Beijing and Shanghai, Shenzhen had much less state investment and manufacturing infrastructure. Much of the capital was from foreign and private investors; today it is the city with the biggest private economy in China, which has contributed to more than 80% of the positions in the local job market.

In many Chinese news reports and the official statements, Shenzhen's development achievement is not only limited to its GDP; the city has been also defined by various types of "new person" in the grand, official narrative of China's reform (Walder, 1995). These 'new persons' include the 'open-minded' local government officials who tolerate the new economic activities and create a 'business-friendly environment', 'innovative' private entrepreneurs who make their own business thanks to that friendly environment, to ordinary workers who took the risks to look for their first gold, and so forth (Yang, 2013). A very well-known saying from a former city leader, as a representative of Shenzhen's "reform spirit" since the 1980s, goes as "time is money, efficiency is life". In the mainstream Chinese media, Shenzhen has a long reputation for its "Shenzhen speed": Deng Xiaoping first used the term "Shenzhen Speed" during his 1984 tour to describe the construction of Shenzhen University, where students designed and built their own campus. During his second tour in 1992, Deng was taken to the revolving restaurant at the top of the International Trade Building in the city center, which went up one floor every three days. Very soon, the KK 100 Plaza broke that record, going up one floor every two days[18]. All these new persons, the 'Shenzhen speed' constructors, are telling the same story of how a person, once a socialist worker of class struggles, has now got rid of the socialist ideologies and the 'traditional' state apparatus and joined the new economy of creating personal wealth. In addition to the stories of 'jumping into the sea' in the 1980s and 1990s, in recent years the 'wolf spirit' has a new meaning in a market survey sponsored by the Shenzhen government[19]: as the pioneer of Chinese reform, its corporates should now join the global competition and occupy the international market. The survey concludes that as most of the private corporates in Shenzhen have been growing from very small business to big companies in the past decades, they are full of 'wolf-spirits', and Huawei is the 'head wolf' of the local business circle.

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[18] Source: https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%B7%B1%E5%9C%B3%E9%80%9F%E5%BA%A6

[19] Source: https://www.yicai.com/news/5032247.html

In Davies's research on Chinese celebrity entrepreneurs (2011: 193-215), he finds these entrepreneurs have been portrayed in the mainstream Chinese media in interesting ways. Successful businessmen have become a role model of how to "*zuoren* (做人, literally translated as 'make person' or 'become person')" in China's fast changing marketization reform, emphasizing their outstanding personal qualities (such as perseverance, creation and hard work) and talents (knowing how to manage people and money). By studying several phenomenal 'reality shows' of national business competitions on China's Central TV, Davies suggests that Chinese entrepreneurs are not presented as an 'individual success' or 'wealthy business model' only; their image has been deeply framed into the national discourse of making China 'wealthy and powerful (*fu qiang*, 富强)'. The successful entrepreneurs have become a symbol of national developmental efforts, a 'national hero (*minzu yingxiong*,民族英雄)' representing the bright future of the country in the global competition. Moreover, the repeated reports, TV programs, and the flooding autobiographical publications of celebrity entrepreneurs in China are also important means of creating narratives of the 'new person' for the market economy.

Echoing Davies' research, the thesis pays attention to the cultural and symbolic meanings of 'being a Chinese entrepreneur', and my analysis in the last section presents how the entrepreneurs' economic capital has been transferred into symbolic capital of 'wolf spirit' in the making of 'modern *gongyi*'. Very similar to the history of the Shenzhen's development of making a 'new person', this new model of *gongyi* is more like a state-directed project with local entrepreneurs incorporated. In performing the wolf-spirit as something competitive and different from the GONGOs and Western international agencies, Shenzhen government and its officials have played a crucial role in making it happen, acting as the patron again.

Since 2010, the city government of Shenzhen began its reform experiment in NGO regulation and welfare system under the supervision of the Ministry of Civil Affairs in Beijing, which was the start of the 'Shenzhen Model of NGO development' (Lai *et al.*, 2015). One of the most visible policies in the reform was to simplify the NGO registration procedures in Shenzhen; private foundations and service delivery organizations were particularly encouraged to set up in this city (I will discuss this policy further in the sixth chapter). Additionally, the Shenzhen Civil Affairs Bureau (CAB), the governmental institution in charge of NGO regulations, launched the 'market-based' social service purchase, calling all the NGOs to join in the competitions for governmental funding. More than 100 million pounds of government funding has flooded into various 'gongyi competitions' in the name of "venture capital investment" every year (ibid.). From the community level to district and municipal levels, many government bodies have participated in sponsoring such competitions. At the same time, in order to raise the competitiveness, a number of GONGOs named 'social organization incubation centers' have been established in every district to 'create more NGOs for the city development'. This means that the whole NGO sector has become an industry that can be manufactured on a large scale. In this Shenzhen model, the local government is no longer just a regulator; rather it has become a more powerful but invisible force in shaping the NGO sector by actively directing, participating and sponsoring the whole game. This model highly emphasizes the role that NGOs should play in serving the local economy, especially the local enterprises (ibid.; Wu & Chan, 2012).

Therefore, when AF failed to register at the national level in Beijing from 2007 to 2010, its founders' strong influence in the business sector turned out to be an advantage in Shenzhen. The local CAB not only approved its registration as a public donation in Shenzhen so that it could compete with the other Chinese GONGOs in the fundraising market, but also some local CAB officials joined its supervisory board. Since its registration with the Shenzhen CAB in early 2011, AF has set up two boards above the executive team: the council board, consisting of entrepreneurs; and the supervisory board, consisting of auditing consultancies and local CAB officials. For example, the chair of the board of supervisors, Mia, was the highest-ranking official in charge of all NGO-related

issues in Shenzhen. The appearance of CAB officials in AF's internal governance seemed to be a political signal that AF had strong support from the city government. AF has never been a foundation of China's emerging philanthropists. To a large degree, just like the economic development model of Shenzhen, AF is also a product of the national reform from Beijing and a creation of the corporatism in Shenzhen [20] . Indeed, in many cases, the registration of AF has become a major achievement of Shenzhen CAB's social organization regulation reform experiment. In fact, the exhibition of the Shenzhen Social Organization Development (mentioned at the beginning of this chapter) is located just next door to AF's office in Shenzhen. Shenzhen, as the local CAB claimed in the exhibition mentioned at the beginning, "is the city of China's reform".

4.4.1 Moving between Beijing and Shenzhen: the moments when an ambitious Chinese NGO could be a problem

During my fieldwork, I had the chance to observe some internal board meetings over the past few years, where AF entrepreneurs and the local CAB official met to discuss AF issues on a seasonal basis. In these meetings, AF's wolf spirit in competing with the GONGOs and producing greater social influence was much appreciated by the government officials. In some circumstances, some local CAB officials would even ask AF's senior managers to organize some training programs for the other foundations in Shenzhen, in order to promote their modern *gongyi* model in the city. However, the good relations with Shenzhen government as well as the greater social impact are not enough for

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[20] As I have discussed in Chapter 1, this thesis aims to present a more complex picture of how corporatism works at the local level in China (but not to take corporatism as a state regulatory framework). AF's case here shows us vividly how Chinese NGOs can be more incorporated into the state by the close collaboration between the emerging 'philanthropists' and local government officials. Although the new foundations like AF had been doubted by Beijing at the very beginning, their special ties with the local state and government officials have been tolerated.

legitimatizing the rising entrepreneurs and their organizations in China. In my fieldwork, I witnessed two incidents that challenged the legitimacy of AF; these two stories demonstrated the moments when the wolf-spirit and its alliance with private entrepreneurs turned out to be a problem for Chinese NGOs (rather than a benefit). These two cases can help us to better understand the boundaries of 'modern *gongyi'* in China's NGO sector and Chinese society at large.

The first case is about its disaster relief work in different areas. Most of the time, AF often did its disaster relief activities with a high profile through close collaborations with the local media, government, and volunteer groups. As a foundation with a donor's perspective, all these humanitarian actions in rural China were seen as good opportunities to do branding and attracting donations at the same time. In its project guidelines, mobilizing local media resources to report AF's work constituted a very important part of their disaster relief work. In many ways, AF was not just using media as external resources to *work with*, but the way it was working had been largely mediatized: its work was 'constrained to take on a form suitable for media representation' (Couldry, 2008: 376). Also, in order to do organizational branding, all of AF's local partners and volunteers were required to wear AF uniforms in public. But all these guidelines were not applied to the humanitarian work in the Beijing summer flood in 2012.

On July 21, 2012, a flash flood hit the city of Beijing, in 24 hours the floodwaters killed 79 people, destroying at least 8,200 homes[21]. Although the Beijing government did help to do disaster relief work during the day, it took almost a week for the government to send out the first official rescue team, which led to the resignation of the city mayor afterwards. AF also joined the disaster relief work in Beijing, but in a very interesting way. At a board meeting in 2013, Peter,

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[21] Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/July_2012_Beijing_flood.

the then general secretary of AF, reported how they did disaster relief work during Beijing's summer flood:

> "We have enough disaster relief materials and delivery equipment in a nearby town when the whole city was flooding everywhere. But when we were going to take actions, we just found that the city government was very short of such things. How can we send out so many materials and rescue boats with AF logos so quickly, when the capital government has no boat at all! What would the national leaders in Beijing think of us, a non-official organization suddenly appearing in the capital city, and so well equipped?   If we stick to our original plans, we may make a huge political mistake! Finally, we left the city center to the government, and sent out only two boats to the suburban area silently. Also, we took off all our logos and told citizens there that we were just a group of volunteers. We were just learning from Lei Feng".

Then he thanked Mo for her suggestions of this 'silent action'. Mo was the highest-ranking official in charge of all NGO-related issues in Shenzhen, sitting on AF's supervisory board. Mo knew clearly that the situation in Beijing could be quite different. As the strongest local government in China, it would be a big humiliation for the Beijing government if they found that even an NGO could do much better than them. Moreover, AF's strong performance in Beijing may also make national leaders worry about the national resource mobilization of this Shenzhen-registered foundation, which is the thing they wanted to avoid through the national regulation since the 1980s[22]. This incident shows that no matter how wolf-like AF could be in China's NGO sector, they were more likely to constrain their "competitiveness" and "innovation" in a more technical and commercialized area. Although AF workers were imagining themselves as a political alliance with the private entrepreneurs against the totalitarian state, their "progressiveness" was quite limited.

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[22] More discussions of national regulation change of Chinese NGOs can be found in chapter 6.

Another incident was a public crisis of questioning the close relations between the entrepreneurs and AF. In the summer of 2016, an upcoming Chinese romance film was drawn into a political drama, as pressure from Chinese patriots online led to its lead character being removed for his alleged support of Taiwan independence. While the lead character was a Taiwanese actor, Vicky, a popular Mainland Chinese actress, directed the movie[23]. The online attack came at a time when activity on the country's social media platforms was agitated after the international court's unfavorable ruling for China on the South China Sea. The social-media protests against Vicky were backed up by state-owned media, including a military newspaper, which asked her not to "touch the bottom line" of "national feelings." As a close friend of several board members of AF as well as a Buddhist, Vicky had just donated about 100 thousand pounds to AF, due to the serious flood in the middle of China that summer. Meanwhile, a picture of an AF founder with the Dalai Lama was also leaked online, since the founder was a Tibetan Buddhist. All these seemed to be evidence that AF was a group set up by and for people who were 'anti-China' and 'separatists'.

In response to the attack, AF sent out an official statement denying all the accusation and claiming that as 'a patriotic organization', it had reported all the required information to Shenzhen government regularly. However, several days after the statement, most attacks online were somehow deleted, which raised another round of anger. A national newspaper, owned by the Communist Youth League in Beijing, said, "We should be very careful about the capitalists, they are controlling our mind, and selling our country to the Westerners!" Then there were more and more online posts and fake reports on how the money donated by ordinary Chinese had been misused by the AF entrepreneurs, in order to support the Western politicians and the Dalai Lama. Among these posts, the mostly discussed texts among AF workers were those written by Maoist

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[23]   Source: https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jul/15/taiwanese-actor-dropped-china-no-other-love-independence

scholars in some Chinese universities, who were asking to what degree these super rich philanthropists had helped the poor working class; also, they raised questions about whether the Shenzhen government had been corrupted by the emerging capitalists.

Although wolf-spirit as a symbol of China's economic reform has been largely accepted by the society, being seen as an affiliate of the Chinese private entrepreneurs might be still full of political risk.

It is especially the case when the entrepreneur-founded foundations need to fundraise from ordinary people, while social inequality has continued to grow and Maoism has begun to regain its vigor in such social context (Cho, 2013). Competing with GONGOs, building a 'donor-centered' structure, and learning from the entrepreneurs did bring AF more credits of looking like a more 'modern' organization and distancing itself from the GONGOs; however, their close relations with the super-rich entrepreneurs also meant the organization and their workers fail to respond to the increasing social inequalities in China. As we may find in the last section, AF were actually creating more social gaps in terms of gender in their daily work. That is exactly the political dilemma that the new foundations and their workers have faced since their establishment in China.

During this crisis, the city government of Shenzhen helped AF again. By introducing AF to the leaders of China Central Television, the Shenzhen government officials gave AF a helping hand from another influential state-owned media. Very soon, a news report titled "How AF's rural projects have successfully warmed village children's hearts" was broadcast at peak time in China.

Conclusion

This chapter talks about what "modern *gongyi*" means in AF's case. As a concept invented by the private entrepreneurs in China, "modern *gongyi*" aims to create

a new man with "wolf-spirit" among Chinese NGO workers. By looking at the organizational reforms launched by the entrepreneurs of AF, we may find a highly commercialized culture has been established in the foundation. But this commercialized *gongyi* should not be simply understood as a cultural phenomenon. Commercialization, as a symbol of "modern *gongyi*", has been seen as a strategy of distancing oneself from the socialist legacies in China, a "competitiveness" of battling with the state affiliations and the Western donors. Under the condition of national NGO regulation reform, this process of modern *gongyi* making has been tolerated by Beijing, and then supported and fitted into the local state in Shenzhen. In this sense, as a reformer of the traditional socialist *gongyi* and the state NGO regulations, this new foundation AF has somehow been more incorporated into the local state in Shenzhen. And the city government, on the other hand, turns out to be a patron of AF and the modern *gongyi.*

The close collaboration between the Chinese entrepreneurs and the local state has also shaped many ordinary AF workers' professional identity and their imagination of their personal life. The new, "wolf-like" NGO workers asked for a more "competitive", "manly man" in the workplace, which put the female workers and their "non-commercial" experiences in a more marginalized position in AF's office. The next chapter moves onto the different AF workers posited at different levels in the organization's hierarchy. I will discuss the daily working routine, private life, and personal anxieties in and outside AF's office, so as to present a more comprehensive understanding of what "modern *gongyi*" means in people's everyday life.

Chapter 5   The making of a 'professional *gongyi* worker': everyday life of AF workers

Cindy was the first person I knew in my internship at AF. In my first month in AF's office, she became my 'walking sticker' in the foundation by introducing me to many other colleagues. In many aspects, Cindy, a project officer at the middle level, seemed to be one of the most promising workers in the foundation: she had a master's degree from overseas; before joined AF, she had worked in a famous consultancy company in Hong Kong for three years. Born into a business family, Cindy's parents had moved to Hong Kong several years ago, her husband was also working in a well-paid finance company there. In many ways, Cindy was a perfect employee for AF: she did not ask for a high salary because she did not need to be the breadwinner of her family; her experience in the business world could be helpful for promoting the "corporate culture" in AF; she also had a very good personality, getting well with all her colleagues in the office. In fact, during my internship several colleagues told me that Cindy might get promoted very quickly. But in just 15 months, Cindy quit her job at AF. As one of my important informants and also a friend at AF, in her last working days in the office, Cindy said to me "it may be a mistake to start my new NGO career from here".

I was not surprised with Cindy's decision. In my fieldwork, I heard complaints and gossips about unfair payments and personnel management system among AF workers very frequently. The inequalities between men and women workers, between those from rich family conditions and disadvantaged backgrounds were discussed during the lunchtime break very often.   As Cindy and I were in the same working team under the leadership of Justin, there were only four full time workers (including me and Justin). In my internship, I witnessed the working team expanded to seven project officers in a year, but currently only Justin still remained there. Workers at the middle level, like Cindy, had the highest turnover rate at AF[1]; many of them would change their jobs in less than two years. The reasons for such high turnover were different from one to another. For some of them who transitioned from the business

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[1] Interestingly, the workers at the top and bottom level were the most stable groups. I will discuss these different groups of workers in the later sections.

world to the NGO sector, they may feel difficult to get used to the working environment at AF; for workers who were former housewives or from local GONGOs, they were tired of the longer working hours and pressure from the AF board, so they turned to some government positions later.

In the previous chapter, I have talked about the making of "modern *gongyi*" in AF's office. As the chapter argued, NGO workers were expected by the entrepreneurs to have more wolf spirits in their daily work; the internal structural changes were not just happening in the working patterns, languages and skills in the office, but also it did have profound impacts on individuals in terms of their gender and marriage status. Before moving to the stories of AF's partner organizations in other different places in China, this chapter goes further to discuss 'modern *gongyi*' outside the AF office, looking at how AF workers' imagined and dealt with their jobs in their private life with more details. Although AF workers, like many of its partner organizations, were doing very similar jobs from project management, meeting relevant stakeholders, and, so forth, the way that they thought of their job could be different from their partner organizations at grassroots level. For the other organizations that I researched in my fieldwork, most of their leaders and ordinary workers were like running a small family business; doing *gongyi* for them was not only their daily work, but it had been deeply embedded into their personal relations in the local society (see more in Chapter 7).

Given that a more corporate culture has been set up in this new foundation, many AF workers were more likely to imagine themselves as a 'professional' or 'white collar' in one of the most prosperous cities in China. Every morning when people arrived at the office, the fingerprint readers nearby the elevator would remind them to record their working hours, get rid of their own personal issues, and to be 'more devoted' to their office work. In the last chapter, I have discussed the meaning of 'wolf-spirit' in terms of gender and domestic labour division among AF workers. In this chapter, I continue to present other aspects of 'wolf-spirit' in terms of workers' everyday life, in which gender also works as an important factor in and outside the AF office. By the ethnography of AF workers' working hours, family structures, income and daily routines, I find that the new domestic donors like AF are creating and reproducing various forms of social inequalities among its workers, rather than reducing them. To be more 'competitive' and 'efficient', the foundation asked for more workers

with longer and flexible working hours with lower pay. Hence, overtime working was quite popular among most of its workers, more jobs with lower paid were created. This type of 'wolf like' workers at AF highly impacted its staff's family life: the harder they work, the more likely that they would be promoted and gain a higher salary, the more 'heroic' they can be. On the contrary, the more they were devoted to being family caretaker, the more likely they would be eliminated from the foundation. However, there are also exceptional cases. As I demonstrate in the next section, family background and religion also played crucial roles in deciding the future of one's career in China's NGO sector. In this chapter, I argue that the normalization process of Chinese NGOs is producing a new way of living and working as 'professional *gongyi* worker'. The making of this new *gongyi* worker needs to learn the new commercialized language and skills (as I have discussed in the previous chapter); meanwhile a professional *gongyi* worker must restructure his or her everyday life in many aspects.

5.1 The organizational hierarchy of AF

Before moving to the stories of different individuals working at AF, it is better to firstly introduce AF's organizational hierarchy here. This chapter divides AF employees into three groups so as to discuss their everyday life according to their different position levels in the organization. The three groups are senior managers, middle level, and entry level. But it should be noted that dividing them into three groups simplifies the complicated hierarchy of this organization in reality. In the office, there were 66 workers categorized with 9 different levels. For the same level workers, their titles were different from team to team. I present the hierarchy as below.

	General Secretary, 1st Level		
	Salary: 50 thousand pounds/year, with extra housing and phone call allowances		
1st-3rd level:	Projects Center 2nd Level: 1 Vice General Secretary	Communication and Fundraising Center 2nd Level: 1 Vice General Secretary	Administration Center n/a
	Salary range: 25-36 thousand pounds/year		

senior management team (10 ppl)	Social Innovation Team	Disaster Relief Team	Child Protection Team	Research Team	Public communications	Fundraising Team	
	3rd Level: 1 Director	3rd Level: 1 Director	3rd Level: 1 Director	3rd Level: 1 Director	3rd Level: 1 Director	3rd Level: 1 Director	3nd Level: 1 Director
	Salary range: 12-24 thousand pounds/year						
Middle: **4th-6th level workers** **(29 ppl)**							4th Level: 2 vice directors
		5th Level: 1 Senior Project Officer	5th Level: 1 Senior Project Officer		5th Level: 2 Senior Managers	5th Level: 2 Senior Managers	
		6th Level: 2 Project officers	6th Level: 2 Project officers			6th Level: 7 Managers	6th Level: 10 Managers
	Salary range: 6-11 thousand pounds/year						
Entry: **7th-9th level workers** **(27ppl)**	7th Level: 2 assistant officers	7th Level: 3 assistant officers	7th Level: 2 assistant officers	7th Level: 2 assistant officers		7th Level: 6 assistant managers	
							8th Level: 1 Assistant
		9th Level: 3 Consultants			9th Level: 2 Consultants	9th Level: 6 Consultants	
	Salary range: 3.6-6 thousand pounds/year						

Table 5.1 The organizational structure of AF.   A summary: 66 people, 9 levels in total.   37 based in Shenzhen (headquarters), 29 based in another 3 offices (Beijing, Shanghai, and Chengdu). Source: internal documents.

The 9 levels above were divided according to their different salary levels (The specific salary conditions will be discussed in the next three sections). Among all the foundation workers, 34 of them only had experiences working in corporates and 12 were former INGO workers without any business experience. The following table shows the statistics of gender.

	Total Amount (percentage of the same level)	1-3th Level (percentage of the same level)	Middle level (percentage of the same level)	Entry level (percentage of the same level)
Female	40 (60.6%)	3 (30%)	11 (37.9%)	26 (96.3%)
Male	26 (39.3%)	7(70%)	18 (62.1%)	1 (3.7%)

Table 5.2 The percentage of male and female workers at AF. Source: internal documents.

AF's personnel data in 2016 is a mirror of the whole NGO sector in China in many ways.

The next section part of this chapter looks at the senior managers at the top of the whole executive team. By introducing their different education background, working experiences, and family conditions, I argue that their different imaginations of "professional identities" are largely based on their different gender and religion. Given most of the senior managers were male at AF, they were expected to be a 'manly man' in their own families as the breadwinner. At the same time, given the longer working hours and frequent travel between different AF offices, these male leaders were also the "missing daddies" in their own families, which turned out to be a good story of showing their "devotedness" to *gongyi*. Then I move to the workers at the bottom of the organization, one female living in the free staff dorm and two male workers project assistants. These workers might have even longer working hours than the senior managers, but with a much lower salary. The dorm, though in a quite basic condition, was more like an extension of their office. I discuss how such situation has been constructed in the 'modern *gongyi*' model, and then how the female workers at the bottom of the organization could tolerate it while the male workers could not. Finally, I summarize and discuss the different AF

workers' everyday life with relevant literature, which helps us better understand the meaning of being a professional *gongyi* worker in urban China today.

5.2 Workers at the top: the senior managers

When I just started my fieldwork, AF had 10 people in its senior management team. Only these 10 senior managers had access to attend the seasonal board meetings with the entrepreneurs, and three of them (one general secretary and two vice general secretaries) had chances to speak in these meetings. There were 3 women and 7 men in the senior management team, 9 of them were married. Although all these senior managers had very similar salary packages from 15 hundred to 25 hundred pounds every month, their daily routine and private life was quite divided[2]. In fact, I was surprised to see the highly divided everyday life in different senior managers, not only in terms of their working hours, but also their career paths, family backgrounds, social life, and the way they thought about their work as "doing *gongyi*". In this section, I take two male senior managers as examples to show and analyses the differences of *gongyi* workers at the top.

5.2.1 Tim: a "professional *gongyi* manager"

Before my fieldwork, I had heard Tim's name repeatedly from my friends and other NGO workers in the city. Born in 1988, he grew up in a rich business family in Shenzhen, got his bachelor's and master's degrees in world-renowned universities in the UK and US. Prior to AF, he set up his own organization in rural education when he was still an undergraduate student at London School of Economics in 2007, affiliated with a GONGO in Shenzhen. Tim has been awarded many prizes by the municipal Civil Affairs Bureau and Communist

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[2] The general secretary was an exceptional case, however. He earned about 50 thousand pounds/year (4166 pounds/month) with extra benefits. According to the council board meeting notes that I read during my internship, all these salary standards were decided and annually reviewed by the council board members.

Youth League in Shenzhen, such as "*Gongyi* Ambassador" and "Role model of Shenzhen youth", which has been widely reported by the local media. Besides the government awards, Tim was also very popular among many other organizations since he started working with AF as a fundraising officer. He has been as a "*gongyi e*xpert" in many NGO trainings in China, listed as a paid consultant in "*gongyi* professionalization" in a Chinese service outsourcing website. I was very looking forward to meeting this "*gongyi* star" before my fieldwork. However, after my fieldwork began, I just found Tim was a myth at AF.

Normally driving his Benz to the office, Tim's work at AF started from 11am. Although AF had a canteen providing affordable lunch for its workers (about 1.5 pounds per meal), Tim never appeared in the canteen that was just five minutes' walk from the office. Instead, he would normally invite two or three colleagues out for lunch in the fancy shopping malls several kilometers away, driving together. Then at about 2pm, Tim would be back to work again and leave at about 4pm. Although Tim had worked at AF for five years, when asked how they thought of Tim, many AF workers just shook their heads and said that they did not know much about him. Some people thought that Tim was not very serious with his job; he was working at AF just for fun. There was also gossip that Tim was working here only to build up connections with the board members, which may help him to establish his own business later.

In fact, Tim was the youngest in AF's senior management team. In just five years, he had got several promotions from an ordinary fundraising officer to the director in charge of all AF's fund-raising issues, normally such promotions would take up to nine to ten years in this foundation. He earned about 2300 pounds per month, about three times higher than the average income in the city. Meanwhile, Tim was also the personal secretary of AF's board chair William, offered him great access to all the successful entrepreneurs sitting in the board. But in my interview with Tim[3], he seemed to not care about AF's job very much. Unlike the other senior managers who were often overtime working, Tim told me frankly that he only spent about 60% of his energy on AF's job:

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[3] Interview on 23/05/2017 in Shenzhen.

"From 4-5pm, I would go to the gym, and then having dinner with some business friends...you know, I also need to help my family business. Then I will work on my own companies, I have been running a start-up company since last year, and I have some other investments too...I won't let AF to occupy all my time, it simply isn't worth it".

In all of my informants, Tim seemed to be the most "relaxed" worker I have ever met. Just like the other married female workers that I have discussed in the last chapter, he attributed to his motivation of doing *gongyi* to his religion of Buddhism, although he never revealed his belief in the office. As a "part time businessman" in his life outside the office, interestingly, he did not appreciate the corporate culture and the structural changes at AF all. As a Buddhist, he thought he could better understand the reasons why the entrepreneurs, especially the founder Luck Lee, decided to set up this foundation, since most of the board members were also Buddhists. In the interview, Tim explained his understanding of 'wolf-spirit' like this:

"I think AF in recent years is walking in a wrong way. We have more and more humanitarian projects and we spend most of the time in thinking how to design the projects, how to sell them in the markets, how to exchange these projects for money...That is not the thing that our founder wanted at the beginning. Our founder and the other elites in the board, they want something much bigger; they wanted to change culture, they are eager to colonize Chinese people's brain with a new idea, just like a religion".

In many ways, Tim is an exceptional case among his colleagues. He had his own little circle and distinctive lifestyle in the foundation. Unlike the other AF workers (such as Justin) who normally shared their working projects in their social media, Tim shared a lot of his daily sports and travels abroad.

5.2.2 Justin: a busy manager

In many casual talks with AF workers during my fieldwork, people like Justin were often praised as role models, not only because they had 'made some achievements in *gongyi*', but also they had 'a wonderful family and a considerate wife, which can fully support the husbands' work in the outside

world'. Justin was my line manager and supervisor during my internship at AF. He is five years older than Tim; before AF, he had worked for the research and project evaluation team at Oxfam China. Unlike Tim who was working in the office but very few people knew about him, Justin had a very different personality. As the director in charge of the research and post-disaster construction projects at AF, Justin travelled frequently in between different project sites and offices but everyone knew him. For the first time when I met him in the Shenzhen office, he just finished his travel in a village in Sicuan province, carrying a big backpack with him. He said hello to everyone in the office and then turned to me with a big smile: "You must be Hailing! Welcome!".

Justin was one of the most hard-working people at AF. He often started his work at around 10 am by bus or his motor, replying emails or meeting partner organizations until lunchtime. When he was not travelling, he would have lunch at the staff canteen, have a quick snap, and then go back to work from 2pm. In the afternoon, Justin would hold meetings with his different team members in the office. Sometimes, if Justin just finished a long period of travelling, these team meetings would be extended to dinners together, which could last for several hours until late night. With the help of Justin, I was invited into such dinners almost every week, which often started with the continuing discussions of the various projects in the office, but ended with tons of gossip about families, the anxieties of marriage and housing prices, and wine spits. Although Justin cannot drink too much in such occasions, he was believed to have the best skills of pushing others to drink at AF. After the dinner, Justin would go back to write various reports for the research team, since that was the only time that he could be alone. As an intern working with him, I often received his emails at 2 or 3am. Since Justin spent such a long time on his work, he was a heavy smoker so as to stay awake during the day; sometimes he would take his work home or simply sleep in the office.

Although he had longer working hours than Tim, Justin earned about 1500 pounds per month. Unlike Tim who often wore business casual in the office, Justin's outlook was always blue jeans with various AF's working T-shirt that were offered free to its workers. We had dinner a number of times; most of the restaurants I went to together with Justin were the cheap eats in the city. Born into a peasant's family in one of the underdeveloped areas in China, Justin finished his undergraduate and master's education in Gansu province. He had

long time fieldwork experience in rural China firstly as a sociology student, then a community organization leader receiving funding from Oxfam, and finally an Oxfam worker. "In all my training, I have been told that I am a rural development worker", Justin told me in a dinner, "but that period was passed. I need to be a professional *gongyi* worker now". In an interview with him[4] in May 2017, Justin talked more about his family and the reason why joined AF:

> "I did enjoy my working experiences with Oxfam...Oxfam is an old farmer who is very knowledgeable in how to deal with his soil, how to plough the land; it is intensive agriculture. But AF is like an industrialized company, growing very fast so as to occupy more market shares of gongyi as possible...But I had to make a choice since I was going to marry. Oxfam's salary had been good enough for me as a freshman in the job market, but I need to settle down...AF paid me double, and it is a very good springboard for people to jump to other big foundations".

Justin finally accepted AF's job offer since he could be both based in AF's two offices of Shenzhen and Chengdu (the capital city of Sicuan Province in western China). The housing price in Chengdu was only one third of Shenzhen; therefore, he was able to buy his new family a small apartment there after getting married.

Comparing with Tim, Justin's personal situation could be more common in the senior management team. As most of the senior leaders were men, these male leaders but Tim, were all the backbones in their own families. Justin's wife, for instance, obtained the same higher education as his course mate. She was expected to do in 'a less competitive job and take care of the family'; so she became a teacher of a primary school in Chengdu. It means that she did not need to travel like Justin; she can have longer vacations and take care of the old and young in the family. From all the details of Justin's daily life, I found that he was trying his best to save money; in fact, he was also doing some part time jobs with his tight schedule at AF. In a lunch break, he told me that his wife would take care of all the family issues. 'But how could she manage to do a full-time job, look after your baby daughter and do all the housework at the same time?',

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[4] Interview on 04/05/2017.

I asked Justin. 'No worries, my mother-in-law is living with us to help', Justin answered.

At AF, both Tim and Justin have been described as "star workers", although in different ways. Tim was always the "expert of doing professional *gongyi*" in many training programs organized for AF's partner organizations at grassroots level. He was a very experienced trainer in teaching fundraising skills and the case studies of American philanthropists. His trainings were also full of 'heroic' stories of how experts like him, with more professional fundraising skills and "entrepreneur-like mind", had successfully saved the struggling NGOs from financial broke to be a greater "change maker". But Justin's story often appeared in AF's promotion leaflets in the general public with another two senior managers, since they were all the "missing husbands" and "dads" who sacrificed their own family time to work for a noble cause as *gongyi*. In Justin's story, he was still keeping working in the disaster relief frontline when his wife was giving birth to their first child. These self-sacrifice stories have been repeatedly mentioned throughout my ethnographic work, in various AF's fundraising campaigns and the official news reports. In these similar narratives and stories, senior managers like Justin were described as an "reluctant Lei Feng": on the one hand, AF's founders understood that this new foundation as a 'modern *gongyi*' promoter should not stick to the old socialist tradition as being a 'Lei Feng'. However, as *gongyi* as an emerging profession is still neglected by the mainstream Chinese society, AF workers like Justin had to work harder and sacrifice more for promoting *gongyi*.   What often was not mentioned much were the details of how the sacrificed wives, mothers, and children were struggling to overcome the family difficulties on their own, just for their men's career achievements.

But interestingly, all the narratives of Tim and Justin would normally only lead to the same conclusion that how the meaningful that *gongyi* could be as a decent and professional job, which were worth more than the donations and respects from society. The argument is that *gongyi* as a profession should be at least the same important as the other profitable sector for the Chinese society. This NGO worker, with Tim's "professional skills" and Justin's "*gongyi* hearts", has constituted a perfect image of 'modern *gongyi*" for AF and its workers. Such conclusions greatly help to make the senior male workers as "legendary heroes", getting rid of their image as an "ordinary, less-earned man working in

a non-competitive sector" that was not "manly" enough in the mainstream culture. On the contrary, such narratives were reclaiming the male managers' masculinity by presenting their jobs in a different but heroic way, so that China's NGO sector could be accepted at least like a normal profession, no longer in an underground area.

5.3 Workers at the bottom

It was not easy to recognize who were working at the bottom and who were not at AF at the first glance. AF's 66 employees were divided into 9 levels with different salaries, but for the workers at the same level, their titles could be different given their different working teams. So, in my first days at AF, I was really confused with the different titles and my colleagues' real positions in the organization's hierarchy. Moreover, as I have discussed above, some senior managers may need to save every penny in their daily life to support their family finance, while some other workers who earned much less may have a better living standard from their daily outlook. By saying "workers at the bottom" here, I point to the workers at the entry level of the organization's hierarchy (salary range from 300 to 450 pounds per month), whose living standards were largely based on how much they could earn from AF. In fact, as these workers' salary levels just reached the lowest income level in Shenzhen (or half of the average income in the city), their income is very close to immigrant workers of the manufacture factories in the suburban area. But unlike the immigrant workers who are often not very well educated, all the workers at AF had at least a bachelor's degree, about half of them had master's degrees. Although earning a lower income, I found all the "bottom level workers" were trying their best to keep a lifestyle like a "white collar" working in the city center. Unlike the senior managers who were mostly middle-aged men with at least seven years working experience, the backgrounds of these entry-level workers were quite diverse. Some of them were young women who just graduated from the college; some were new parents who had been struggling in the city for years.

Both practitioners and scholars have discussed the low payment issues of China's NGO workers. Some scholars focus on the limited financial resources in the whole Chinese NGO sector, calling for more domestic donors and

foundations (e.g. Deng, 2015; Lai et al., 2015; Kwan Chan and Lei, 2017; Zhu, Ye and Liu, 2018). Such arguments are strengthened given the withdrawal of international donors and the repeatedly political repression from the Chinese state. Such research recognizes the external environment that shapes many Chinese NGOs, but as I discuss in the introduction chapter, the mainstream literature neglects the rapidly heterogeneity happening within the sector; in particular, it lacks analysis of how low payment and inequalities can be created from the internal structure of different NGOs. The emerging Chinese foundations in many ways are no longer in the funding crisis anymore, different from the first-generation Chinese NGOs whose survival were highly dependent on international donors and the tolerance from the government. When the entrepreneurs bring their ideals and experiences directly from their own companies, the high payment gap and the factory-like working model just come together, as a symbiosis of the "modern *gongyi*".

Based on my ethnographic work with AF, I found about 8 workers who can be categorized as the "working at bottom", and three of them were living in the staff dorm as my roommates. In this section, I tell stories of two workers, one female worker and one male. The female worker was my roommate in the dorm, who shared the same bunk bed with me for five months. The male worker had worked at AF as a project assistant for shorter periods, but he decided to quit his job very soon.

5.3.1 Lisa and her sleepless nights

Just sitting next to Tim's desk, Lisa was an assistance working in Tim's team. After getting her bachelor's degree in public administration in 2015, she joined AF with an interesting title as "consultant". There were several workers at AF with the same title; some of them were just part time workers. But after working and living with Lisa in the same office and dormitory, I realized that Lisa's work and life was quite unusual.

Lisa often got up from bed at about 7am, when she would spend an hour in reading. There were about ten books piled beside Lisa's bed, including a wide range of topics from English grammar, sociology studies, to management skills. At 8 am, Lisa would makeup herself and have breakfast. Lisa normally got to work at about 8:30 am; often the first one arrived the office since she had a very

busy schedule almost every day. As an assistant of fund-raising events, her job includes drafting and publishing public communication messages, taking and editing pictures, replying emails from the event participants, communicating with the event outsourcing companies, checking event schedules with her line manager, running the AF's social media accounts, etc. It seems that Lisa was not getting a job, but multiple jobs. At about 12:30 pm, Lisa would go to AF's canteen with some colleagues, take a snap, and go back to work from 2 pm. Lisa's afternoon work often finishes at 6 pm, but after the dinner, she would take her laptop back to the dormitory to continue her work until 9 or 10 pm.

I got to know Lisa better when we shared the same dormitory room (with another two female colleagues). As I have mentioned in the methods chapter, it was a quite basic two-bedroom apartment of about 70 square meters nearby AF's office. The living room was used as the AF's lunch canteen; and the two bedrooms were for men and women workers, two bunk beds for four people in each room. Except for the two residents like myself who were just working temporarily as an intern, Lisa and other residents had been living in this apartment for at least two years. In fact, Lisa had started working with AF firstly as an intern assistant in her last year undergraduate in a nearby city, since she can only get about 60 pounds a month at that time therefore AF offered her a free accommodation in the dorm. After her graduation, AF's new board chair decided to enhance the "corporate-style management" at AF to recruit more new managers with experiences in the private sector, as a result the quotation of the entry-level position was cut off. Lisa finally had to accept a contract without any pension or other social insurances at AF, with a temporary title as "consultant". Since the contract provided her about 350 pounds a month which just reached the lowest income line in Shenzhen, she could hardly find any affordable place to live in the city that had the highest housing price in the country. After negotiation with the management team, Lisa was finally approved to stay in the shared dorm for free.

Lisa was not the only worker in this situation at AF. In the dorm, another two female assistants at their age of 20s had almost the same contracts and working hours like Lisa. A very interesting phenomena is that, given more "business elites" have been recruited at AF, the senior management team became bigger and bigger, which means the remaining entry level assistants were more needed in the office than ever before, which was one of the reasons why they

all had long working hours every day. Therefore, the existence of AF's dorm was not just functioning as a "special subsidy" for its workers or interns, instead, it is a deliberate construction to ensure that its low payment and long working hours be tolerated by those working at the bottom, so that cheap labors could be produced to make things done at the lowest cost (Pun, 2005; Cho, 2017); while the elites from the private sector would be ultimately benefited to help maintain the "modern *gongyi* model" in this organization.

Figure 5.1 The dorm room I shared with another three female workers at AF. Photo by the author.

Given the quite different working schedules between Lisa and Tim, in our casual chats in the dorm, Lisa sometimes did show her confusions with Tim's working schedule. But most of the time when talking about Tim, she would attribute Tim's short working hours in office to his other "crucial duties of socializing with important people", and then just expressed her appreciation

with his education and family background, which offered him the skills and confidence for these "crucial duties she can never do".

Lisa was often in anxiety, which made her sleepless at night. Most of these sleepless nights were not related to her long working hours, but after Lisa received the phone calls from her parents, asking for money. As the only child with a university degree in her family, Lisa was born into a small town about three hours' drive from Shenzhen. In fact, both Lisa's parents had proper jobs in her hometown, and she did not have any siblings to be taken care of:

> "In my hometown, people like me who can earn a living by themselves have to pay their parents back. My mom told me that is what a filial daughter should do...She has asked me to give red pocket money (hongbao) and gifts to her, my grandparents, and my young nieces, for almost every holiday! I do not know how to say no to this, otherwise she would feel so ashamed in the family...I have tried my best to save more money, but every time there was a festival, my savings would be just zero", Lisa said[5].

Lisa's financial obligation of becoming a good daughter comes from the Confucian filial piety in China, which viewed daughters as "debts" in their original family. This patriarchal tradition is still prevail in many parts of China, especially the rural area (Shen, 2016). The most possible way to get these debts paid in the traditional culture, is to arrange a marriage for the grown-up daughters as early as possible, so that her parents can receive a great number of *caili* (betrothal gifts) from the bridegroom family. In fact, Lisa's parents did not care about her career and income in Shenzhen at all, but they often pushed her to get married soon in their phone calls, and thus Lisa had had several dates arranged by her parents. Therefore, in Lisa's daily life, most of her concerns were actually not about the overtime working or her low-paid contract at AF, but the anxieties from her family. In most cases, she was not taking her job at AF as exploitation; rather, as Lisa said, "doing *gongyi* here is an escape away from the tedious old town". In fact, in many of our daily conversations, Lisa was very proud of being a *gongyi* worker at AF. Unlike many of her friends who chose to stay in their hometown and get married very early, Lisa was happy to

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[5] A private conversation with Lisa during a dinner in Shenzhen. 07/08/2017.

choose a different path and devote herself into "a greater cause". The reason why she got up so early to read every morning was that she wanted to get admitted to a good postgraduate program, so that she can "catch up with Tim one day".

Lisa's story echoes with some scholars' research on female immigrant workers in China, which argues that the massive immigration from towns and villages to the urban area has produced mixed impacts on women. For instance, in Shen (2016)'s ethnographic research of restaurant waitresses in Shanghai, she finds that that these new working opportunities do provide female workers chances to negotiate and redefine the traditional culture of "being a filial daughter". In many cases, independent living and working in the cities empowers women in terms of their bargaining power of their own marriage and finance, although they may be still under the influence of the traditional ideas from time to time. But at the same time, women in this new world may also face more difficulties than men due to institutionalized discrimination based on gender, age or the household registration system (*Hukou*) in China (Thunø, 2005; Otis, 2008; Cliff and Ngai, 2009; Howell, 2012; Peng, 2018). Scholars like Pun (2005) finds that rural young women at their 20s to 30s were mostly welcomed by the Chinese sweatshop factories in the 1990s, since they were the most disciplinable group that was deeply bonded by the traditional culture and family obligations to be "a good daughter".

However, what was interesting in Lisa's case is that, most of the labor studies above focus on "low-end industries" only; university graduates are normally outside their research in China's context since they are normally seen as "national talents" or "white-collar class" in the reformist era (Hoffman, 2006; Rolandsen, 2008). But Lisa's experience reminds us of the increasing "working poor" in the Chinese society, and the difficult situations that women may face in the dilemma of the traditional patriarchic family and the embodied exploitation in the workforce (Liu, 2004; Jieyu, 2007). At the same time, Lisa's story also tells us how the gendered anxiety caused by traditional, man-dominated Confucian culture could ultimately make the unfair working conditions and huge payment gaps tolerable in the increasingly commercialized NGO sector in China, with the help of a particular social reconstruction of NGO workers' daily life in the dormitory and workplace (Xiang, 2007) .

5.3.2 Jerry: the eliminated good husband

It should be noted that this new gendered *gongyi* work is not only affecting the female but also male workers. The most visible anxieties at AF were not on women like Lisa, instead in most cases, it was male workers who talked about their pressure and anxiety much more often. These "anxiety talks" was quite popular among the male NGO workers who had only worked in the NGO sector, without any exposure to the business world before. As discussed in Justin's story above, whether in or outside the office, when talked about their family, most male workers I have ever met at AF would tell almost the same story of their great pressure from getting married, buying house, raising kids, and taking care of their parents. As I discuss in the first section, money-making and "competing in the market" are the crucial indicators to prove their masculinity in their own family and the mainstream Chinese society. Like Lisa, Jerry and Chris had also worked at the entry level, struggling to make a living in the city; but they never got the chances to be described as a "legendary story" at AF.

Jerry worked at AF for a year as a project assistant in disaster relief. Before I started doing my fieldwork, he already quitted his job. In an interview, I asked him when he felt a sense of achievement during his working experience at AF, he shook his head and said, "It never happened to me". According to Jerry, his days at AF were full of great pressures, because people there were so "high-end": many of them had degrees from the overseas; they were so "confident and knowledgeable":

> "You know what, a photo sent by Tim in our working group on his internship at the UN in New York just made me feel bad with myself. He had a master's degree from Cornell, he can social so well with our founders; I think I can never do that though we are sitting in the same office…"

Born into a peasant's family in the middle part of China, Jerry finished his undergraduate degree in his hometown in social work. Unlike Justin who had contacts with the international development industry in his early years, Jerry never heard about any international donors at all during his college years. As part of the national NGO regulation reform since 2011, the Shenzhen Civil Affairs Bureau decided to purchase social services from the local social

organizations as part of its welfare supply. The booming funding from the government soon stimulated the industry of social workers' production, some organizations and GONGOs also travelled a long way to Jerry's college to hire social work graduates. Jerry was part of this supply chain of China's social worker production in the past decade (Kwan Chan and Lei, 2017). Jerry and some his course mates (including his girlfriend, they got married in Shenzhen later) were hired by a Shenzhen GONGO as a social worker. However, in Shenzhen[6], Jerry realized that the payment of being a social worker was so low, only 300 pounds, that he could not make a living by himself in this expensive city. Jerry's job changes from a social worker to project assistant at AF helped him raise his salary to 400 pounds per month, but when his wife, also a social worker, gave birth to their son, they went broke. The couple had to move to the cheapest area of Shenzhen, one hour's drive from AF office; while he had to spend 40% of his monthly income on housing. Very soon after this move, Jerry quit his job at AF and became a part time Uber driver, since he also shared a lot of housework with his wife and helped to take care the baby. He was also thinking of leaving this city.

Though working in a junior position, Jerry's resignation from AF seemed to be a big loss to his line manager Larry and the whole disaster relief team. When I started my fieldwork, Larry was trying his best to persuade Jerry to stay (although without any pay rise). Being rejected, Larry then started to recruit a new team member. About one month later, Chris took Jerry's post. Chris just finished his master's program in development studies in Australia, three years younger than Jerry. In his first week at AF, I asked Chris how he would make a living in the city, since he did not move into the free staff dorm so that he had to rent a place by himself. Chris answered like this:

> "I cannot just live with so little pay in Shenzhen, I still need family supports. But I am not coming for the salary anyway. AF is such a big platform that I can get access to all kinds of organizations in China, I can jump to a better-paid foundation several years later from AF".

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[6] According to the municipal statistics bureau, Shenzhen's housing price has been increased by 28 times 1981 and 2014. Even though it is the place with the highest average income in China, it would take an average incomer more than thirty years to buy their first home in this city.

One month later when I had lunch again with Chris, he just finished travel with several AF's partner organizations in northern China. This time, Chris seemed to change his mind:

> "Do you have any good job recommendations for me? I think I will jump from AF very soon. You know why they wanted me? Not because of my development degree, not my past internships with NGOs, no…they want a man who can travel frequently to meet the partner organizations and to drink with them. Larry just kept asking me to drink, to be a brother with them…I have vomited several times this month!"

Chris was not the only one who complained about his job at AF. Just before him and Jerry, there had been another two male workers who quit their jobs at AF. Although these two workers had slightly higher levels as project officers, their working contents were almost the same: travel, drink, and brotherhood. As both of them decided to have their own children like Jerry, they did the same thing as Jerry did: quit their posts and moved to other Chinese cities. In fact, in my whole fieldwork, I have never heard about any stories about these "leaving daddies" in any formal or informal conversations with its workers; until one day, a roommate in my dorm talked about them in a quite simple sentence: "the good husbands have been eliminated from AF, they are not wolf enough".

5.4 The making of a 'professional *gongyi* worker': discussing NGO workers in China

In studying Chinese NGO workers, the mainstream research looks at them in the perspective of state politics, focusing on their various personal relations with the governmental officials (e.g. Hildebrandt, 2011; Hsu & Hasmath, 2014); The importance of personal relations in grant-making resonates the argument that most of the NGOs and their workers are "extremely weak" in front of their donors in China (Kang, 2019). But just as Ishkanian's research shows, NGO workers cannot be reduced to a "political person" only; this is especially the case when a state has been undergoing great social and economic transition and thus NGO workers need to redefine their socio-economic position via their daily work in the NGO sector. Chinese NGO workers share many similarities as what discussed in Ishkanian' work. Like many other Chinese, the daily work of

NGO workers is deeply influenced by their daily life in terms of gender, marital status, economic conditions, education, etc.

Anthropologists of current Chinese society describe China as 'an increasingly hyper-materialistic society, where a new life orientation is emerging and what it means to be a man is shifting' (Zhang, 2010). Furthermore, Liu (2002: 176-177) observes the rise of a 'new man' since China's economic liberalization: "This man, as a reincarnation of an old spirit, keep his eyes wide open, both at work and at home, checking and examining how everyone around him—his neighbors, colleagues, and friends—manage their lives. Life has become a management of material things, comparable to and measurable in terms of other people's possessions.   Based on Liu's research, some researchers also find that the marketization reform in China have greatly changed the gender relations (Hershatter and Wang, 2008; Osburg, 2013a). The increasing marketization has brought with bigger inequalities between men and women, and some researchers explain these phenomena as the changing expectations and imaginations of what 'men' and 'women' should be like in today's Chinese society (Zhang, 2010; Yang, 2013; Wu, 2018). As Zhang says, "men must now contend even harder than women in the race of material gain in order to claim their manhood and gain marriage. Masculinity in post socialist China is increasingly being defined by one's entrepreneurial ability and the power to provide and consume" (2010: 186).

In many aspects, the hard-working husbands at AF did confirm those anthropologists' discussions. Being a wolf-like worker in the office means more pressure from the entrepreneurs and the increasingly competitive fundraising market. Being a family head means men are expected to buy houses and cars in one of the most expensive cities in the world, even though the average income of Chinese NGO workers is much lower than the business world. Being a project assistant with the lowest pay means that the junior workers always need to think about another way out, keeping an eye on the job and marriage market. The diffusing pressure of material things led to a high turnover in AF's human resource system: when I was just starting my fieldwork, there were 66 workers in the foundation; in 6 months, the headcount raised to 81. One year after I finished my fieldwork, about three fourths of the AF workers I knew left their posts. When I finished my yearlong fieldwork in China, most of the middle level workers I knew had left AF.

But the everyday life of being a *gongyi* worker in the last two sections also tell us something more than just how to make a living in a rapidly materialistic society. In AF workers' daily narratives, we may find that 'doing *gongyi*' is still a highly moralized job, different from many other jobs in the city. Interestingly, this moralized job has been discussed, presented, and reproduced not in a 'modern' way as it expected to be. On the contrary, narratives go back to the socialist morality of Lei Feng, so that to be better incorporated into the mainstream society in China. As a new 'noble cause', *gongyi* justified most of the self-sacrifices that I encountered during my internship, if not all. The unbalanced work and family life among most of its male senior managers, which turned out to be 'heroic' performance of reclaiming their masculinity and 'wolf spirit' in the Chinese society. In Tim's case, *gongyi* went even further to be a mere spiritual work, a performance beyond the materialistic privileges he enjoyed in his daily life. In some other cases, this 'noble cause' of *gongyi* also helped female workers at the bottom escape from the traditional patriarchy of their original families in the rural. By imagining herself as an office lady working for *gongyi* in the modern cities, the basic living conditions in the dorm and the long working hours seemed to be more tolerable.

Conclusion: Cindy's "mistake"

Given the rising domestic entrepreneurs in the Chinese society and their close collaborations with the state, NGO workers understand their profession of "*gongyi* workers" in very different ways. The changing landscape of Chinese NGOs is creating a polarized ecology in the daily work of NGO workers: the flooding funding from the private sector and the endorsements of the business elites does attract a great number of "talents" with better education, family and working backgrounds, making the sector more "prosperous" and "high-end" than ever before, no longer seen as an underground industry. But at the same time, under the modern *gongyi,* the NGO sector in China does not reduce social inequality but strengthen and reproduce it from its internal structure. The polarized payment and living conditions among AF workers are creating even more social inequalities in different forms. Cho (2017)'s ethnographic research on the actual social work practices in Shenzhen's Foxconn industrial zone reveals how neoliberal-style outsourcing has created precarious labor conditions for frontline social workers. Her research finds that most of the

government-commissioned social work positions in the factories were filled up with migrant youth from the countryside, reproducing and perpetuating China's rural–urban divide. These social workers, normally seen as part of the "white collar class" and "civil society actors" in sharing the state responsibilities for providing social welfare, may just find themselves ended up like factory workers they were working for.

But at the same time, the moralized narratives around *gongyi* and self-sacrifice, as widely reported as Justin's stories, have constituted a crucial part in defining what is professionalism among China's NGO workers while sustaining the existing social inequalities in the society. Although in the new foundations like AF, the emerging Chinese entrepreneurs have reinvented the meaning of *gongyi* in many ways by bringing in more commercialized knowledge and skills, a highly moralized *gongyi*, as we discuss in the last section, has many similarities with the narratives of Lei Feng in the reformist era.

In May 2017, when I had almost finished my fieldwork in China, I found a new man's image and personal stories appeared in AF's official website. Named as Anthony, he took over Cindy's job. Much like Tim, Anthony has been described as a "young *gongyi* professional" who chose to give up the business world as a self-sacrifice and helped AF to do modern *gongyi*. In fact, Anthony had also worked in the business consulting industry for several years, while established his own companies and other investments at the same time. It seemed that Anthony would have a bright future in doing modern *gongyi* at AF. After quitting her job by the end of 2016, Cindy travelled across the country to visited more rural schools and grassroots organizations in different provinces before going back home. In March 2017, I met her and her husband in Sicuan. She told me again that she regretted starting her NGO career from AF, what she needed more was the knowledge and skills to work with the grassroots community: "AF just gave me a piece of job to know what is *gongyi*. But I need more than just doing *gongyi*". Then Cindy's husband said to me with a big smile: "But Hailing, thank you so much. Now Cindy can go home, you must be one of those friends who persuaded her to leave this foundation!"

Chapter 6   Everyone can do gongyi: AF and its partner organizations

Women Development Center (WDC) started its cooperation with AF in has started since 2015. WDC's history can be traced back to 1990s; it was one of the first-generation Chinese NGOs that have been supported by the international donors. Its founder Gillian was a senior government official in the provincial government, but in 1989, given her sympathetic stance with the student movements in Beijing, her political career has stagnated since then[1]. As a participant of 1995 World Women's Conference in Beijing, Gillian was one of the first local partners and consultants of various international development agencies in China. Although Gillian and her organization had been affiliated with the provincial government for a long time, WDC can have a very high degree of autonomy in terms of its internal governance, daily operation, to the financial structure. In fact, according to my interviews with two WDC workers, before 2009, donations from international agencies took up to 96% of WDC's total annual income[2]. The main reason for its collaboration with AF was quite simple: most of its international donors began to leave China. From 2009 to 2015, the donation that WDC received from international agencies was decreased by 40%; they had to look for new donors anyway.

But WDC's cooperation with AF came with more difficulties than most of other partner organizations. In December 2016, I met Gillian in an NGO conference in south China, when she had retired from her government position and her leadership at WDC. In a lunch, Gillian described her first experience of working with AF in 2013 like this:

> "We were so angry when my colleagues and I first read the project contract that AF sent to us. AF does not need to do much but most of the responsibilities would be ours. It requires our colleagues to wear the AF uniforms on the project sites, taking the project outputs as its

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[1] A private conversation with Gillian in 2015.
[2] In its annual report, the total income of WDC in 2015 was around 700 thousand pounds.

own products, WDC won't be even mentioned at all…is that the way how these new foundations treat its partners? This is totally exploitation!"

WDC did not sign the contract in 2013, although in 2015 they restarted their cooperation again. In my interview with WDC's current leader Jim in April 2017, he told me the reason why they could cooperate with AF was that, AF decided to set up a new project which specifically focuses on child protection in a long term, not just short term disaster relief work, for which the project officers needed more help from WDC. In fact, Jim took the project as a way of implementing the participatory methods that he had been trained by and applied with his former donors, or in his words, "to bring in the elements of development work". Jim told me in an exciting tone that working with AF was not simply for money, but to change the domestic donors in another way:

> "They [AF] say that everyone can do gongyi, they say public participation is important…OK, let me tell you how to do participation in a more sophisticated way. We are not just to implement AF's ideas, but we try to involve more children and schoolteachers into our projects on campus…International donors are leaving, now the domestic donors are so crucial for the whole NGO sector, they really need to learn more about development"[3].

WDC's story here leads us to AF's partner organizations that imagine and perform *gongyi* in different ways. In the previous chapters, I discuss how *gongyi*, as new knowledge and a 'wolf-like' man in making, has been reinvented by the emerging Chinese entrepreneurs, and encouraged by the local state which also fits into the development path of Shenzhen. Chapter 5 talks about what the 'modern *gongyi*' means to NGO workers' everyday life. In Chapter 6 and 7, I turn to AF's partner organizations in different places at both organizational and individual levels, looking at how *gongyi* has been disseminated from the new foundations to other NGOs. Looking at AF's national network across the country, the two chapters do not take these partner organizations, mostly grassroots NGOs, as a passive learner or follower of "modern *gongyi*". Instead, as we can see from WDC's story here, these partner organizations also played crucial roles in negotiating and redefining what *gongyi* could be like. It is through this

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[3] Interview with Jim on 04/04/2017.

renegotiation process that *gongyi,* as a language and knowledge, can be widely disseminate and reproduced in a larger scale in the NGO sector and the Chinese society at large, not limited to the new foundations only. Chapter 6 focuses on how *gongyi* was performed and negotiated differently at the organizational level; I discuss the nature of the interactions between AF and its partner organizations and try to understand these interactions in the context of different local politics. Chapter 7 examines the private lives of different NGO leaders. In particular, I pay attention to how doing *gongyi,* as a lifestyle (rather than a salary-based job at AF), has been interconnected with the organizational culture, social lives and political identities in the local society.

As one of the most influential donors today in China, AF does play a crucial role in grant making in the field of disaster relief and child protection. For many of its partner organizations across the country, AF was not just an important funding resource, but also, they had learned AF's language of the commercialized modern *gongyi* in various training programs*.*   On the project sites, AF's partners would wear the same t-shirts and use the same slogan, 'everyone can do *gongyi*', which also constituted part of AF's branding work. Although many AF's partner organizations were former partners of various international donors, they still kept active given the changing donors but with very different faces. In this chapter, I argue that the emerging domestic donors have greatly changed the nature of NGO alliance in China: in most cases they are not replacing the role of international donors in supporting grassroots organizations, but more like producing and buying smaller organizations as their subcontract manufacturers.

Furthermore, by studying AF's partner organizations in different places in this chapter, I also suggest that this collaboration between AF and its partner organizations was deeply embedded in the various forms of corporatism in the local society. The dissemination of the modern *gongyi* across the country cannot be simply attributed to commercialization of Chinese NGO sectors, neither to the withdrawing INGOs. Instead, I argue that this seemingly commercialized language is highly politicized in its nature, which can help us understand the complicated corporatism in China in the following ways.

Firstly, like the municipal government of Shenzhen, the local governments in other places also warmly welcomed the entrepreneurs and their foundations, while taking a hostile attitude towards international donors. As we have

analyzed in chapter 4, AF's establishment and development were largely based on a "progressive", entrepreneur-friendly environment in Shenzhen. The close collaboration between entrepreneurs and Shenzhen government contributed to the creation of "modern *gongyi*". But for other local governments in an underdeveloped area with different social and economic environments, they might have their own imaginations and interpretations of this modern *gongyi*. The other less developed places in my case studies took AF as an important external resource of implementing their poverty reduction policies. The symbolic meanings of the entrepreneurs and AF as a 'innovator' or 'reformer' in doing modern *gongyi* China (distancing from the socialist legacies and GONGOs) were not that significant in these contexts. On the contrary, as I present in this chapter, many AF's partner organizations were GONGOs in the local society; also many organization leaders had governmental affiliations in various ways. Therefore, my research finds that in the practice, the wide dissemination and use of modern *gongyi* across the country highly depends on whether AF's projects and funding can be more aligned with the local government agendas. The "modern *gongyi*" that AF promoted finally turned out to be a helping hand of various local governments and GONGOs in different places, rather than "distancing from the state". Under this condition, as this chapter suggests, using the language of *gongyi* in the local society is also the process of being incorporated into the local state.

Besides, the restrictive NGO regulations and decentralized reform in China also put the players of local politics in a more advantaged position in facing the external donors. Although AF's national network seems to be a quite successful story in terms of its geographical scale and partner organization numbers, this cross-regional network had to work in a gray area according to relevant NGO regulations set up by Beijing (see next section). Given the severe restrictions on cross-regional activities, how AF's *gongyi* idea and knowledge could be learned, imagined, practiced in different places highly depends on the different NGO-state relations and the personal backgrounds of the organizational founders in the local community (rather than on AF itself). In some cases, AF's *gongyi* model was largely duplicated by the local business elites to build up 'cross-boundary' collaborations with government officials. But in other cases *gongyi* was seen as a political shelter against the status quo, which brings unsteadiness of corporatism in China.

This chapter will firstly go through the national regulation change of Chinese NGOs in the past three decades, analyzing the structural reasons of why AF could set up the national network across different regions in China's context. Then the chapter will put the *gongyi* disseminating and reinterpreting process back into two different local contexts, presenting the dynamics in negotiating *gongyi* between AF, partner organizations, and the local governments.

6.1 National Policy Change

Researchers have different approaches of categorizing the history of NGO policy change in China starting from 1980s (e.g. Cheng, Ngok and Zhang, 2010; Spires, Tao and Chan, 2014; Lai *et al.*, 2015). While many of them have reached a similar conclusion of the first two historical periods of NGO policy change in China of 1980s and 1990s, still there are debates on the periods since 2000. Let me start with 1980s first.

The first period is from 1978 to 1991. From 1978 to the early 1980s, there was no specific regulation on NGOs since all the charities or other civic associations had been identified as 'capitalist tails' or 'feudalist traditions', so they were eradicated in the socialist revolution. However after the economic reform since the late 1970s, NGOs started to grow in China, among which business associations and research institutes were very active. It should be noted that there were hot debates around whether and how to reform the socialist system across the country, from ordinary citizens, university students to the political elites. Such debates were not only around economic issues, but also about political reforms (Lieberthal and Lampton, 1992). Many study groups and salons were organized by university scholars for public debates.   It was also the time that the term 'civil society' was translated from English to Chinese, known as '*gongmin shehui*' (Calhoun *et al.*, 2006). However, after the failure of the student movement in 1989, all the groups, salons and law drafting work were asked to shut down. In three months, a set of national regulations were announced on NGO issues, called as 'Management Regulations on the Registration of Social Organizations'(Hildebrandt, 2011). The 1989 regulations turned out to be the foundations of China's NGO policy reform in the past three decades (Howell, 2012). In these regulations, business associations which were beneficial to the economic development have been encouraged; organizations

with governments as their supervisory bodies) were allowed to register; while the independent labor unions, underground student organizations and religious groups were strictly prohibited (ibid.). In order to prevent any possible nation-wide movement, the 1989 regulation also limited the geographical spaces that NGOs can work within to the bureaucratic level of government they registered with. For instance, for GONGOs like the China Red Cross, since it is registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs at the national level, then it has the right to work across the country. Along with this policy, there is another policy to strictly ban all the NGOs from setting up sub-branches across regions; even though NGOs could establish their regional offices, the relations between the headquarters and the regional offices should not be in subordination(Saich, 2000). So for AF, since it was only registered at the municipal level, in theory it is not allowed to work outside Shenzhen or set up sub-branches in other regions.

The second period is from 1992 to 1999. This period started with the political leader Deng Xiaoping's 'South Tour' in Shenzhen and the launch of Special Economic Zones in coastal areas. With deepening economic reform, the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing became a political signal for China's opening up policies. This conference made international aids and NGOs visible in China, which created many domestic women NGOs and study groups consequently (Hershatter, 2014). But the political climate changed in 1998 again. In 1998, a popular folk religion called Falun Gong caught the attention of Beijing. With more than 70 million followers across the country, this underground religious group accumulated huge influences very soon. Given the then president Jiang Zemin's decision to the then president Jiang Zemin decided to close up the whole organization since 1996, Falun Gong's charismatic leader Li Hongzhi finally turned his religion into a political group against Beijing (Penny, 2005). Between 1998 and 1999, all the NGOs were required to re-register with the government again. As a result, the number of registered social organizations fell from 220,000 in 1998 to 136,841 in 2000, almost a third less than the 181,060 groups registered in 1993. Alongside with this, the state

specified the NGOs into three sets of organizations[4] with different regulation measures (Howell, 2012).

The third period started from 2000s until now, with the striking feature of growing NGOs. There has been no visible 'tidying up' policy since 2000 like before, and the number of registered social organizations in China has reached 810000 in April 2018. Different scholars explain the rocketing number in different ways. For Howell (2012;2015), the growing Chinese NGOs should be attributed to the entry of the World Trade Organization in 2001. China's deeper integration into the global economy leads to the rising inequalities at the same time, which witnesses the social groups losing out in the economic reform getting organized. Howell also mentions the increasing strategies of NGOs to circumvent the state regulations and gain legal identities.

However, Feng (2015) notices that the Regulations of the Management of Foundations in 2004 could be more influential among Chinese NGOs than many other factors. Although relevant regulations on foundations had been established in the 1990s, they set up very high criteria for public foundations: for those who wanted to register at the national level, the initial funding had to be above 8 million pounds; the provincial level had to be above 4 million pounds. But in practice, almost all the national public foundations had to have funding of more than 50 million pounds for registration[5]. Therefore, before the 2004 foundation regulations, most of the foundations in China were established by government or state-owned companies. In the 2004 foundation regulations, private foundations were allowed to register at the local level with initial funding of 2 million yuan (200 thousand pounds). Since then, the private foundations, mostly founded by private companies and new riches, have outnumbered the public ones, rising from 712 in 2004 to 6495 in 2017. Some researchers hold that a more tolerant policy in 2004 means the state would like to introduce more private wealth to the third sector, which provides a good foundation for other types of organizations and social welfare system to develop (Xiaoming, 2015; Howell and Duckett, 2019; Kang, 2019).

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[4] The three sets of organizations were: private non-enterprise organizations; foundations; and 'shehui tuanti' (social groups) established to develop memberships only.

[5] Source: NGOCN.

Researchers above analyze the recent third historical period from different perspectives. Some look at the external and global factors, while others examine the policies from the central state. But both of their analyses fail to put the historical development of China's NGOs in a more dynamic perspective. As we may find from the 1980s to the late 1990s, the rise and fall of China's NGOs revealed that the NGOs were seen as more related to national security issues; although the state tried to separate the business associations with other types of organizations. So the policies and 'tidying up' movements launched by the central state have played a major part in shaping the political ecology of China's NGO sector. However, the increasing number of NGOs started since 2000s cannot be simply attributed to the central government alone. Instead, the changing state-society relations at the local level have transformed the way how the multi-level state think about NGOs in China (Teets, 2013, 2015; Hsu and Hasmath, 2014b).

For one thing, the national policies become highly selective for various local governments in terms of how to apply them. In 2014, an NGO called Liren (literally: "cultivating talents") was shut down by the Chinese government. Their 22 rural libraries in different provinces were closed; some of their senior managers were also arrested by the national security[6]. However, Liren's cross regional activities had started since 2008, although the organization was registered with the city government of Chengdu. In fact, most of Liren's rural libraries were founded by close cooperation with various local governmental bodies, like education bureaus and public schools. That's to say, many local governments in different regions had at least tolerated such 'illegal' cross-regional activities. However, in September 2014, in only one month, all Liren libraries were asked to be shut down by their local governments for many different reasons; its headquarter was also closed too in the name of 'illegal cross-regional activities'. Local governments alone cannot take such quick and well-coordinated actions. According to the news reports of Liren workers, the order of repression may come directly from Beijing, for two possible 'highly politically sensitive' reasons: one was its public declaration of its "liberalist stance", e.g. their close links with human rights activists, the books displayed in

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[6] Source: https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/22/rural-library-chain-closes-citing-tremendous-pressure/

their libraries were also mainly translated from the Western countries in humanities and social sciences. The other was Liren founder's public speech about his identity as a Christian. Given its founder's personal connections with underground churches in China, Liren was also doubted as part of the underground Christian community movements. But no matter what reason it could be, this case at least shows the differences between the local and central governments in regulating NGO in China: the central government is much more politically sensitive and proactive in regulating NGOs, while local governments may be intending to treat NGOs in a more apolitical way by viewing their projects as a complement of the local welfare system.

Given the priority on economic development and the lack of investment on social welfare, some local states also realized the role that NGOs could play on poverty alleviation, welfare delivery and reducing social tensions in the early 2000s. To some degree, the booming number of NGOs in China in the current third period could be also a product of local governments in responding to the increasing social service demands and social tensions at first. Then the various NGO management models at the local level changed the national policy since 2010s by encouraging more service delivery organizations across the country. As Teets (2013) says in her research, there are many 'civil societies' and various development models in China.

Yunnan province is a good example. As China entered into WTO in 2001, more and more international organizations came into China. Most of these organizations may have projects in multiple regions, but most of their project sites were in southwestern China, the regions with the least economic development and the most ethnic minority groups. Although most of the INGOs cannot get recognized from Beijing for a legal status, in many cases they were tolerated or even warmly welcomed by the local governments. Because southwestern provinces with much worse social, geographical, and economic conditions cannot attract foreign direct investment as much as the eastern provinces, INGOs were seen as one of the very few external resources for local development. The arrival of INGOs helped to create a number of local partner organizations to do development work, although most of their projects were under the name of 'poverty alleviation'. Yunnan province, the area with the most ethnic groups and transnational heroin trade, and the highest HIV/ AIDs infection rate in China, became the home of many INGOs (Hildebrandt, 2012).

It was through the international aids that Yunnan set up its health regulation and education system of HIV/AIDs from villages to the capital city (Teets, 2015). In 2010, the Civil Affairs Bureau (CAB) in the provincial government in Yunnan became the first governmental body that gave INGOs a legal status in China; the registration procedures for their domestic partner organizations were also largely simplified (Spires, Tao and Chan, 2014). Although such policies were only valid within the province, the local policy innovations did strongly support the NGO sector in a longer term.

Unlike Yunnan that viewed NGOs as a helper and financial source of its 'poverty alleviation' programs, provinces in eastern China viewed them more like 'welfare contractors' or 'deliverers' of the local states. One example is Shanghai. Due to the one-child policy since late 1970s, many Chinese cities have to face a rapid aging population structure in the past three decades, as the one-child policy was more strictly implemented in cities than in rural areas. Shanghai turned out to be one of the most aged cities in the world since late 1990s[7]. Given the large demands on elderly care services, in 2000, Shanghai became the first Chinese city to start governmental purchase of social service from NGOs (Lai, 2001). A number of service delivery organizations, especially the community social work centers providing elderly care and medical therapies, appeared with the booming funding from various local government bodies (ibid).

Consequently, the government purchase of social services in Shanghai and some other cities led to the national welfare reform in 2006 by the decision to 'build up a grand team of social workers across the country'[8]. A number of social work centers fully funded by various local states have appeared in communities, providing services from elderly care, youth education, nursery services to marriage counseling. During my fieldwork in both Shenzhen and Guangzhou, I found that the government purchase of social work was so popular that even other types of organizations were also asked to take the national social workers' test so as to demonstrate their professionality as part of the local NGO registration procedures.

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[7] Source: Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau.
[8] Quoted from a speech made by the then national leader, president Hu Jintao. Source: the official website of Chinese Communist Party.

However, even under the same welfare reform, the national political leaders have different priorities from the local states. It should be noted that the national reform was initially launched in the sixth plenum of the 16th China Communist Party Central Committee, against the background of 'constructing a harmonized society' (Zheng and Tok, 2007). In fact, 'constructing a harmonized society' was one of the major themes during Hu Jintao's presidency from 2003 to 2013, it was also the time when the national budgets of internal police and security outnumbered the national defense in China (Ewing 2003). As one of the 'harmonious society' goals is to establish a basic safety net for the people, the national political leaders encouraged both central and local governments to do more social service purchases from social organizations. But at the same time, the central committee also mentioned the urgent needs of 'keeping social stability' that all the social services should respond to. Therefore, many local budgets of social service also went to organizations that can do 'harmonious society construction' like offering psychological counseling to the local activists (ibid; Cho, 2017). Since Xi Jinping's leadership in 2013, a new type of social workers has also been created: social workers of communist party construction. The major work of these social workers includes organizing communist party members to learn the new speeches of Xi and do some volunteer works in their communities. Meanwhile, most of the social service centers have been asked to change their names into 'community service center for communist party members and the people' (Womack, 2017).

Except the welfare reform and the rising of social service delivery, another striking feature since Xi's presidency is the (still) changing policies towards INGOs, which greatly affects the landscape of domestic organizations. From 2013 to 2016, the number of arrested social activists and human rights lawyers in China outnumbered the amount of Hu Jintao's whole presidency (Vogel, 2015). Many of them have been accused in the name of 'receiving Western funding to overthrow socialist regime in China'. The national securities or CABs also warned NGOs that received funding from INGOs. The climax of INGOs withdrawal appeared in between 2016 and 2017, when the new law on INGO regulation was finally in effect, asking all the INGOs to register with the national security departments, alongside with many other restrictions (Teets and Hsu, 2016; Shieh, 2018). During my fieldwork, although organizations like World Vision and Oxfam told me that they have registered under the new rules, it is still very difficult to carry on their projects in the local communities, since local

governments have been told not to cooperate with the Western donors anymore.

To summarize, the first two historical periods of China's NGO sector were largely dominated by the policies from the central state. However, although there are many positive comments on the increasing numbers of organizations in the current third period since 2000s, the factors in shaping the NGO regulation have been more complicated than before. The differences and dynamic negotiations between the central and local states greatly affect how NGOs could be regulated in different parts of China. As Landry (2008) suggests, the Chinese state is not a homogenous actor, rather it is a 'fragmented authoritarianism'. Besides, the changing social structures in terms of demography and economic development also contribute to the shifting nature of China's NGO sector, regardless of the long-lasting national security concerns from Beijing. These differences and dynamics within the state apparatus provide political opportunities for new foundations like AF to build up national influence in China. At the same time, the fragmented nature of the Chinese state also requires these new donors to be more embedded in the different local NGO-state relations in different regions.

6.2 "Everyone can do *gongyi*": AF and its partner organizations

For most of the donors in the development industry, local partner organizations could be very important for their project implementation. But for new domestic foundations in China like AF, the grassroots organizations were not only their project partners, but also crucial for promoting their social influence, branding, and fundraising campaigns in the country. In fact, before AF's final registration as public foundation in Shenzhen, its founders had put forward a very famous slogan "everyone can do *gongyi*", which appeared repeatedly among AF's workers and media reports throughout my fieldwork. By saying "everyone can do *gongyi*" here, there have been two meanings at AF. On the one hand, in many news reports and interviews with AF's entrepreneurs, they took ordinary Chinese people's donations in their everyday life as a very important indicator of '*gongyi*'; therefore in those reports, the slogan "everyone can do *gongyi*" has become an issue of how to mobilize more individual donors and create a donating-culture in China.

In Tim's story in Chapter 5, he mentioned that the entrepreneurs at AF were much more ambitious than simply focusing on the various humanitarian assistance projects. As he said, what those elites really wanted to do was to change the Chinese culture; or in his words, "change people's minds and hearts". Tim's saying echoes with one of AF's founder Luck Lee, a pious Buddhist, who made an internal speech in 2017 saying that "As every Chinese can do one small piece of *gongyi* everyday with us, more good karma would be created, and our social environment can be improved".

But at the same time, the leaders of AF's executive team may have different understandings. When I was doing my fieldwork, AF had had three general secretaries. The first general secretary took her leadership position for two years before AF's registration in Shenzhen, mostly because she was a close friend and business partner of Luck Lee, and a pious Buddhist too. The second and the third general secretaries, Peter and James, were more likely to understand "everyone can do *gongyi*" as "working with grassroots organizations in different places", since then the foundation began to set up its partnership with various NGOs across the country. Peter and James all had experiences working with different international and domestic donors, and both of them viewed the "everyone can do *gongyi*" in a more complicated way rather than mere donation. As James said in an internal speech in September 2016:

> "AF should become a platform of creating opportunities for ordinary people to do gongyi... they can donate, they can volunteer, they can work with their local NGOs, anyway, AF should mobilize more public participation. This is how more social capital can be created in our country".

But to build up partnerships with other NGOs in different geographical areas is never easy in China. AF's national network was largely based on several natural disasters happening between 2008 and 2013; it was during those natural disasters that it started to support the disaster relief work through various local organizations and voluntary groups, trying to organize them into a more "standardized" network step by step. Given the repressive NGO regulations in Beijing, it is very unusual to see an organization like AF establishing such a big network covering more than 28 provinces (out of 31) in the past decade, supporting more than 2000 organizations or voluntary groups from big cities,

towns, to even villages. That is partly the reason why foundations like AF with a national network are particularly influential of creating and disseminating knowledge in the whole NGO sector in China. In the early 2016, a notice from Ministry of Civil Affairs raised concerns about AF leaders, which iterated the strict prohibition of 'illegal cross-regional activities' of NGOs. AF had good reasons to worry about such regulations. It was only registered with the Shenzhen government, so in theory its activities should only be limited within the city. Although there was no sign that the Shenzhen government would apply the notice seriously against AF, AF's national network, which is illegal according to the national regulations, has been very well known to the state. That is to say, although AF's work might be tolerated by the Shenzhen government, no one can guarantee that its political shelter in Shenzhen can be sustained in a long period nor its projects in other places can be protected. Although it has involved in more than 100 small and medium-sized disasters across the country every year, the intense media coverage it received did not necessarily justify its legal status in Beijing. The national network has been moving in a gray area.

Under this condition, it is crucial for AF to build up a good relationship with different governments at the local level so that to ensure its projects can be done from one place to another. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that most of AF's local partners had to maintain good connections with various local governmental institutions or GONGOs in different provinces. AF's need for good governmental relations in local areas offered opportunities for its local partner organizations to negotiate and redefine *gongyi.*

As I have presented in the last two chapters, inspired by the entrepreneurs, AF reformed its organizational structure to be more "professional" or "modern". By reading its management guidelines and project reports, I found that similar reforms also applied to its national network to enhance its management efficiency. One is standardization. The foundation had set up all the project details, as many as it could, from organizing local volunteers, distributing disaster relief materials, collecting local information, to implementing post-disaster infrastructure reconstruction projects, etc. AF even drafted samples for its partner organizations to post on the social media in communicating with the general public about their activities. That's to say, to a large degree, the projects that AF's partner organizations did were on behalf of AF in the local communities; all its partner organizations were much more like a 'contractor'

or "retailer" of AF. Like some of them told me in a very direct way: "we are doing AF's projects, not ours".

The other is to "make the game more competitive", which can be seen as an extension of the "wolf-spirit" promoted within AF. AF set up a series of variables to evaluate their partner organizations in different provinces, which included key factors from the number of implemented projects and beneficiaries, local resource mobilization (like volunteer numbers), how many awards won from the local governments, to how many "good pictures and stories were disseminated" in local official media. All these variables were set as indicators to measure the "public participation", or in another words, to achieve "everyone can do *gongyi*". Every year, AF would also send out a ranking of their partner organizations in difference provinces based on those variables, which would largely decide AF's funding distribution among its partner organizations for the next year. In AF's network, NGOs from different provinces needed to compete with each other to get a higher ranking, so that to ensure more funding. In short, AF had successfully made its each partner organizations to be a "standardized project assembly line" to deliver what it wanted, and the whole national network became a "competitive game" to satisfy its donor-centered strategy. By emphasizing "standardization" and "competitiveness", AF also wanted to "teach" other Chinese NGOs its "modern *gongyi*" ideas.

My interests in AF's partner organizations started from the daily conversations among AF workers in their office. Sitting in the office and talking to the workers, I realized that the "standardization" and "competitiveness" did not actually work very smoothly among its partner organizations. Very few of AF's partner organizations would do all the jobs that AF "taught" them to do. Given that the AF's projects were quite demanding in terms of workload, my fieldwork with some of its partner organizations found that most of them would only take some measurement variables seriously. Even for AF's "star partners" that had done all the jobs, their understandings of *gongyi* in reality may not come from AF, but from the local politics. Some may just want to take advantage of AF's brand to leverage more governmental recognition; others may think highly of AF's project management system learned from the entrepreneurs, but they did not want to be just a retailer or a follower of AF in the local society. Against this background, I started my second-stage fieldwork with AF' local partners in several different provinces. In the following parts of this chapter, I divide these

partner organizations into two types: one is more like "a close friend" of AF, sharing most of its modern *gongyi* ideas and enjoying many special ties with the local governments. The second is the organizations that may have very different imagination and agenda of what *gongyi* should be like from AF, but for some reasons (e.g. taking AF as a political shelter to conceal their activism in the local state) they chose to stay within this modern *gongyi*.

6.3 GVC: a true friend of *gongyi*

In many aspects, AF's local partner organization in the H province, *Gongyi* Volunteer Center (GVC), was an ideal one in AF's eyes. GVC started its disaster relief work in the province since 2006, when AF had not been founded yet. GVC's director Perry knew many AF workers very well before they started their cooperation. In fact, in many internal meetings and pictures, Perry was told to be AF's helping hand to establish its national network by attracting more grassroots organizations and setting up the organizational evaluation system. Until today, GVC is still helping AF to manage its national network of the disaster relief projects.   To a large degree, GVC had been thought more like an extension of AF, rather than an independent organization: according to my interviews with both AF workers and Perry, AF's funding took at least 80 to 90 percent of GVC's annual budget (about 700 to 900 thousand pounds per year); almost all its work was closely related to AF's projects. In fact, in many occasions AF's workers would call the GVC workers directly as its 'national network coordinators', rather than the 'partners from G' like what they call workers from other partner organizations. The office of GVC in the city of G was decorated much like a branch of AF, full of AF's logos, pictures or leaflets. Moreover, as a local organization with more than 10 years history, GVC knew the local society well in the province; the organization maintained a very high ranking in AF's national network in terms of local resource mobilization.

More importantly, GVC was not a simple "grassroots" organization in G area, a bit like AF in Shenzhen. GVC had a very good and close relationship with both the municipal and provincial governments, enjoying an extraordinary political status in the local NGO community. In theory, it is affiliated with the Spiritual Civilization Office in the city, the propaganda department of the Chinese Communist Party branch in the province. But interestingly, unlike many other

Chinese GONGOs whose funding and human resources were mostly controlled by the government, GVC enjoyed a high degree of autonomy from financing, organizational management to its daily operation. In GVC's early history, it was firstly a volunteer team affiliated with a local GONGO (Red Cross in G area) but funded by Oxfam to do humanitarian assistance work in poor neighborhoods in the city. It was also because of Oxfam that GVC finally became a more formal organization and got to know the then Oxfam workers who transited to AF later. Around 2010s when Oxfam decided to withdraw most of their work and funding from H Province, GVC turned to AF for help.

GVC's history is deeply intertwined with the personal development of its founder and current director Perry, too. In GVC's early years when Perry was its volunteer team leader, he also had official titles awarded by the local Red Cross. During the cooperation with Oxfam, Perry was a very active participant of Oxfam's "civil society training network", through which he kept close relations with many social and political activists in China. And then after establishing GVC, Perry paid more attention to the local governmental relations and got even more official titles from various local GONGOs and the communist party branch. The history of GVC and its founder Perry demonstrates the nature of changing discursive and financial donors in China's NGO sector, which is never simply a new substitution of the old one. GVC's transition from an international donor to a domestic one means that Chinese NGOs need to adjust their working strategies and the relations with the state at the same time, it also decides what other organizations they can be networking with.

Perry's multiple "hats" on his head did help AF's national network in the whole province. In the past several years, every winter when AF started its annual snow disaster relief work in G, GVC would make it as a big event ceremony under the name of "targeted poverty alleviation", attracting many local official news media. As one of the poorest provinces in China, since Xi's leadership in 2013 H province has been taken as one of the "core working area" to do "targeted poverty alleviation". Therefore, the ceremony organized by GVC was illustrated as a great contribution that AF had done to reduce local poverty in H province. Many senior government officials from the provincial government would be invited to give their speeches in these "poverty alleviation ceremonies" with AF's entrepreneurs. With the help of GVC and Perry, the political endorsement from local government officials made G become the province with

the most AF project sites and funding from in the national network. During my fieldwork in G, I was a bit surprised that most of the AF's activities were not only reported by the mainstream state media, but many reports would also be listed on the official websites of provincial or municipal governments, appreciating the contribution that AF had made as "a social force" in "poverty reduction" and "enhancing *gongyi* environment in G". Very interestingly, since GVC's experience in the local society was so successful, AF also put it into their standardized project procedures. According to AF's project implementation handbook, before each project started, all AF's partner organizations would be asked to do a big "project launching" ceremony to attract media attention and get governmental officials' endorsement. The number of such activities and participants was also part of the organizational evaluation in terms of realizing "everyone can do *gongyi*".

If GVC's working strategy and political access in the local society made it "a close friend" of AF, then the organizational culture in GVC made it "a true friend". Before my fieldwork with AF's partner organizations, I had heard about GVC and Perry's stories for many times in AF's office. In these conversations, GVC had been described as a very "professional *gongyi* organization", with a clear, highly standardized project management system; its leaders and workers were also "passionate" with their work, always ready to "occupy more markets (regions)" not covered by AF network yet. Like AF's human resource structure, its male leader, Perry, has led GVC since its establishment. Although Perry's wife has been also working with Perry in charge of its daily operation, Perry has been seen as the "absolute leader" in all my informants; as he was the one to "work outside": dealing with AF, meeting government officials, talking to the other NGO leaders, socializing with the local media, etc.. At the same time, most workers at GVC, just like AF, were female.

6.4 GH: who is the "true friend (*zhen pengyou*)"?

Located in K Province, *Gongyi* Heart (GH) joined AF in 2013. On the face of it, GH shared many similarities with GVC: both of them were founded by a couple, running like a family business. One of GH's founders Humphrey was also an active member of Oxfam's civil society network years ago, where he got to know Perry. GH's development has also been greatly supported by Oxfam from its

early years until now, under its "civil society and gender mainstreaming" program. As a good friend of Humphrey, GVC's leader Perry was sitting in GH's council board. In fact, if one looks at GH's self-introduction and organizational mission stated on its website or leaflets, one may find the contents seem to be exactly the same as those in AF's promotion leaflets. GH stated its organizational mission as "disseminating gongyi spirit, changing the backwardness of *gongyi* work in K Province, being a supporting center to help other *gongyi* organizations in the province by enhancing their organizational capacity". This statement looks exactly like what AF had declared by "everyone can do gongyi" and its NGO network. But in my fieldwork, I find GH was never a "close friend" of AF like GVC. The way that GH understood *gongyi* was different from AF, although they did share a very similar thinking pattern. Also, unlike GVC that enjoyed extraordinary political connections in H province, GH and its workers had a very different position in the local politics, which greatly influenced what *gongyi* would be like in the local society. Let us start with GH's history first.

GH's founder Humphrey was born in the 1970s in a small town in K Province. But he left his hometown at a very young age and worked for an international agency in rural community development for years before he founded GH. As an INGO worker, he went to Gansu, Yunan and Sicuan Provinces to work, all of which are the poorest regions in China. However, Humphrey also found that although these regions are poorer than others, they enjoyed the most international aids and therefore contributed to some of the most prosperous local NGO communities in China. In 2010, Humphrey decided to quit his job, went back to his hometown J, and set up his own organization. In a journalist interview, Humphrey said, "since J is neither poor nor rich enough, it seems to be totally forgotten. No INGOs, no domestic donors, nothing. If no one takes care of NGOs in J, I would do it". From Humphrey's word, he took *gongyi* as an equivalent of NGO development. In my fieldwork, I found him not very interested in the issues like donation or media coverage that were highly emphasized by AF and GVC. In his knowledge, *gongyi* was more an independent sector consisted by formal, structured organizations with their own expertise to deal with local social problems, rather than something that can be directly related to the general public.

Humphrey's wife Sue was a devout Buddhist, active in volunteer work and underground religious activities when at grad school. When Humphrey wanted to launch his own organization, Sue became his first employee. Different from GVC that had about 20 workers, in 2017 GH was still a very small organization, with only 3 full time workers (including the couple founders) and 2 part-time ones. When I was visiting GH in the winter of 2016, about 60% to 70% of GH's annual income came from AF; two out of the three full time workers' salary at GH were also from AF's funding. The office of GH was a small room located in a quite old building, shared with another organization. There were five small tables in the room, which was very crowded with big boxes of disaster relief materials, books, documents and snacks.

When Humphrey launched GH in Nan, the capital city of K province in 2011, he found it very difficult to get registered with the local government. In an interview with him, he attributed his difficulties to the "backwardness of the local *gongyi* environment". In 2010 when Humphrey called the Civil Affair Bureau in the city Nan for registration for the first time, the officials just asked questions about his personal background and then refused his application. As a stranger in the city, Humphrey's working experience of INGO as well as GH's funding from Oxfam made him very "suspicious" in the eyes of the local government. Then he soon found that except GONGOs, there were only less than ten registered NGOs in the capital city at that time; the local government did not know much about the unregistered groups either. This awkward situation lasted until 2012, when a serious summer flood occurred in K province. For the first time, Humphrey and Sue decided to do disaster relief by cooperating with AF: GH helped to coordinate the local volunteer groups, and AF offered the materials and media resources (including coverage from *People's Daily* and China Central TV, the influential state-owned media in Beijing). The media reports and the endorsement from AF seemed quite welcomed by the local government: although they knew little about GH and Humphrey, but they all had heard about the entrepreneurs and AF quite often. Being depicted as "a helping hand" of the local government in the summer flood in the news reports, GH proved its "practical values" as a welfare deliverer to the local society. Then in the end of 2012, Humphrey organized a conference so that the unregistered groups in K could communicate with each other (most of which had helped GH in the summer disaster relief); the local officials were also invited. Soon after the conference, the registration procedures in the city of N were simplified.

Humphrey's organization, with other 8 organizations, got registered at the beginning of 2013. At a diner with Humphrey and his wife, he explained how AF was valuable to his organization:

> "So, you see? AF is a quite useful political umbrella for our organization. The local government may not understand what NGO means, but they all know AF and its founders, they understand the good deeds we have done in the summer flood. Even now some INGOs give me resources to do disaster related issues, I can just tell the officials that these donations are just like AF. Think about this, if now I call off the cooperation with AF, GH would be like the only organization fully funded by international organizations in K province. What would the government do to us?"

Humphrey's words can make more sense if we compare the two types of projects sponsored by its two major donors: AF and Oxfam. For AF-sponsored projects, most of its funding went to the purchase of various disaster relief materials in the local society; and most of GH's jobs (as AF's local partner) were around logistics and volunteer coordination. But for the projects sponsored by Oxfam, GH did a lot of work on "civil rights protection programs" in providing small grants and public advocacy for the social minority groups including the disabled, LGBTQ, and HIV groups in K province. According to Sue, Oxfam seemed   like their "true friend (*zhen pengyou*, 真朋友)" in doing 'real *gongyi*', but AF was just using GH as a tool for marketing and branding in occupying the 'local market' for the foundation itself.

Not surprisingly, the local government did not welcome GH's partnership with Oxfam: during my fieldwork I attended a meeting between Humphrey and the local government officials. In the meeting, GH was criticized as "not focusing on its major role of being an NGO supporting center but wasting too much energy on those fields that government would never support". In fact, GH's close collaboration with Oxfam and local activism did raise concerns from the national security departments in the city Nan with frequent checks and close surveillances of their daily operation. I also found that in some conversations with Perry and AF leaders, they were not happy with those programs related to sexual minority and HIV/AIDs group either, thinking these works would only bring GH more troubles.

Except the cooperation in specific disaster related projects, AF also tried to shape GH's daily work by disseminating its knowledge of how to do *gongyi*. But these efforts went not smoothly in the end. In 2015, AF and several new domestic foundations launched a grant together to promote "professional *gongyi*". An important part of this program was called as '*Gongyi*-Business Elite Plan'. This plan aimed to attract talents from the business world to work for NGOs, so as to raise NGOs' 'working efficiency' and their "professionality" in terms of fundraising, marketing, branding, and management. Ten business professionals would be paid by AF to work for its ten different partner organizations at 'a market price': at least 10 thousand pounds per year per person. Humphrey and Sue told me that they did not want to join such a program at the first hand, since they did not think they really need a 'sophisticated fundraising officer' in such a small organization. However, the leaders of AF thought that it was just because GH was still so small in the past several years; GH should change their development strategy to become "bigger and more competitive". In fact, in an internal meeting of AF when some senior managers discussed their partner organizations, a project officer Anthony complained about Humphrey and GH like this:

> "Last year I wanted to help GH to design a good product that can enhance their competitiveness in the market, so that they can sell that product to those who can pay them more. But the whole counseling process was extremely hard. I need to change Humphrey's brain first, but it was really difficult to communicate with him about the product design".

Anthony's words raised agreements among some of his colleagues, the then program director Calvin concluded:

> "To select which partner organization, we should give more supports is also a process of selecting a good organization leader. There is a group of old NGO people in our sector that have been long influenced by international donors, the so-called civil society ideas. These people are full of stubborn ideals, but do not notice that time has changed. Humphrey seems a bit more lightened up now by working with us".

Finally, for the 'Gongyi-Business Elites Plan', AF's workers persuaded GH to accept a very experienced insurance salesman. "You know, they told us that

insurance salesman knew how to do promotion by knocking on everyone's door, that's what we need for social mobilization and public participation today. So we finally agreed to have a try", Sue said. But only three months later, the insurance salesman recommended by AF resigned from his job; Sue told me that the salesman couldn't understand her and Humphrey at all, or in her words, "no any self-identity with our organization and the way we work". In fact, this program created a very ironic scene in GH: based on the "market price", the plan paid more than 800 pounds a month to an experienced salesman to enhance the "professionalization and organizational competitiveness"; but as the organizational directors, Humphrey and Sue could only get about 300 to 400 pounds a month each, although their salary was funded by the same donor.

6.5 "We should do *gongyi* together!"

So far, it seems that AF was only useful in a very utilitarian way for GH, as a political shelter and a financial resource. Also given the big differences between GH and GVC, the Humphrey couple often had conflicts with Perry and AF leaders in funding distribution. It seemed that the partnership between the two organizations may not be that strong since they had very different agenda. But the longer I stayed with GH workers, the more I realized that GH were still sharing the same thinking pattern of *gongyi*, although there could be differences in terms of specific working skills and strategies in their daily work. It should be noted that Humphrey's "stubborn civil society ideas" were largely based on the anti-state politics in China. Although Humphrey and Sue put helping the social minority groups as his working priority (rather than serving the donors), they held that it was the state and the party-state that should be responsible for these groups, rather than others. Like many Chinese intellectuals who take private entrepreneurs as a "natural ally of Chinese civil society" in the post 1989 era, Humphrey thought it was more important to make solidarity with other NGOs and non-state actors, regardless of the differences between them. Against this backdrop, the AF workers, as well as many private entrepreneurs, often shared the same name: "liberalists (ziyou zhuyi zhe 自由主义者)" (Li, 2017). At a dinner with me, Humphrey explained why he would why he would like to keep a long partnership with AF and GVC:

"You know, even I had serious debates with AF and Perry, I think we are still friends. Because we all have strong *gongyi qinghuai* (mentality or passion, 情怀)". "Then what do you mean by *gongyi qinghuai* here? A warm heart to do good deeds?" I asked. "No, of course not. We are all liberals, we believe in the same value, like what a good government should be like in China...So we should do *gongyi* together!"

In my fieldwork, Humphrey was not the only one preferred to identifying themselves as a "liberalist", rather than just a "NGO worker". There was even an active social media group named "Liberalists of China's NGO sector" with more than 200 members, while Humphrey, Perry, Calvin, and many other AF workers were all active members of this group. The group chats maintained a wide array of topics from financial situations in China, discussions of Friedrich Hayek's books, NGO regulation changes, to world politics. In the group chats, I found that people normally took "civil society" almost as an equivalent of "*gongyi*". The slight difference between these two words was that "civil society" in China's NGO sector in the past contained only political meanings as anti-state politics (see more in chapter 2); now for *gongyi*, people also need to think more proactively about "cooperating with more cross borders (like the business elites)". But no matter what languages people used in China's NGO sector, they were identified as the same in the political nature as 'liberal'.

In this sense, GH should be seen as a supporter of AF and reproducer of *gongyi* thinking patterns. The support was not just demonstrated in similar political stances, but also these NGO workers had very similar mindsets in terms of the role that NGOs should play in contributing to Chinese society. In many circumstances, Humphrey and Sue told me that they thought 'the grassroots NGOs in China are quite immature', so 'they should be more "organized" and "professional" by working with big donors'. Then I asked them why a more organized and professional organization could be so important in China, Humphrey gave me an interesting answer:

"Have you ever heard about Tocqueville? In his book, he concluded that NGOs could contribute to democracy. That is exactly what China needs today. The stronger, the more organized NGO we have today, the better it would be for future".

Humphrey's words were very similar to many of AF's leaders' internal speeches, which often claimed that NGOs, including their partner organizations in the local societies, were important in producing a stronger social force in China for a more peaceful social and political transformation. In my fieldwork, I encountered Tocqueville's name repeatedly, in particular, his theories were part of the internal training contents at AF in August 2016. During my visits to different organizations across the country, I could also find Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* very often on their bookshelves.

But Tocqueville never mentioned the specific strategies of how to make NGOs stronger (particularly in China's context); while AF's standardized projects turned out to be a good option of "strengthening grassroots organizational capacity" across the country in a short period. In reality, GH's partnership with AF became one of the important procedures of disseminating and reproducing *gongyi* paradigm in the local society: in the past few years, GH actively invited all the organizations and groups they knew in K province to do AF's projects (for example, Humphrey invited a mutual help group of homophiles to help distribute the flood relief materials). Such projects were quite easy and highly standardized, like distributing disaster relief materials or building AF-designed art classrooms or playgrounds. More than one interviewee even told me that the most they learnt from AF was not about how to do disaster relief or child protection, but the standardized project management skills. This statement echoed with a public speech made by AF's then program director Calvin in the National Charity Fair in Shenzhen in 2016. He said he was very proud to see that AF had successfully promoted grassroots NGOs' capacity by the everyday training of "project management" skills: "that is the way AF does modern *gongyi*: we are not supporting organizations from one to another, we are supporting organizations in a large scale so that everyone can participate in the easiest way".

Discussion and conclusion

There have been discussions on the interactions, especially the networking and alliances among NGOs in China. In literatures, scholars pay attention to the limitations that constrain the cooperation among Chinese NGOs and the survival strategies (e.g. Dong, Guo, & Huang, 2019; Hu, Guo, & Bies, 2016; Peng

& Wu, 2018; Shieh & Deng, 2011; Teets, 2009). These scholars explain how the various NGO regulations and the political censorship in China have greatly impeded the networking and collaboration among different NGOs and other social actors. As we discuss further in this chapter, those repressive national policies can be dated back to three decades ago; the 1989 Student Movement in Beijing could be one of the major reasons in producing such restrictive policies. Also some other scholars look at how NGO cooperation could be possible in China's context, particularly they examine the rise and fall of the NGO alliances appeared in several devastating natural disasters in the past few years (e.g. Deng, 2008; Dong et al., 2019; Kang, 2017; Teets, 2009a). Most of their research emphasize the role that social media played in establishing such alliances in a very short time (e.g. A. Yang, 2017; G. Yang, 2012), and attribute the collapse to the external political factors and mistrusts among different organization leaders (e.g. Kang, 2017; Lai, Zhu, Tao, & Spires, 2015). In these researches, the political limitation of NGO networking in China not only constrain the social environment they are living in, but also it greatly shapes people's mindset: organizations need to be self-constrained and censored to survive in this dynamic political environment.

But what's missing in the current discussion is that most researchers do not analyze the nature and internal structure of these so-called networking or cooperation. In this chapter, I argue that in the various forms of interactions between NGOs, new knowledge, language and skills of *gongyi* have also been disseminated and negotiated. The rise and fall of Chinese NGO alliance may not be necessarily attributed to the external political opportunities, since "collaboration" or "cooperation" may also lead to interest and/or ideological conflicts as well as hierarchy production. For example, Wu (2012), suggests that the languages and ideologies used in China's NGOs are borrowed from various local public intellectuals, activists and scholars. This would suggest that the activists and NGO leaders are natural allies. However, the potential collaboration is undermined by very different agendas. This is illustrated very clearly in Zhou's (2018) research on China's equal education campaign in Beijing where the gap between the human rights organizations and the community-based NGOs led to the collapse of their partnership. The human rights activists saw the campaign as part of a larger constitutional project aimed at challenging the political regime. By contrast, NGO workers at the community level simply wanted to improve immigrant children's welfare and

thought the activities would threaten any progress that has been made in this regard (ibid).

The chapter reminds us to reflect on the concepts like "partnership" or "collaboration" that people often use in studying the third sector, since such words may neutralize or conceal the mechanisms of hierarchy making process among different social organizations in the reality. Besides, even though the Chinese state does play an important role in shaping the knowledge dissemination and organizational interactions in China's NGO sector, their impacts in shaping Chinese NGOs could be also highly contextualized at the local level, deeply embedded within the local economic conditions and social relations. Corporatism is still a very useful analytical tool in understanding Chinese NGOs today, but this research also suggests using it in a more localized and flexible way.

Moreover, a thread of the stories in this chapter is the legacies and influences of international aids in China. Although they have been leaving the mainstream arena in China's NGO sector, their local partners and former workers are still playing very important but invisible roles in shaping the whole sector. These "old NGO people", as Calvin called it (in section 6.4), have still kept active in this field though with very different faces. Although many international donors in China have been criticized as 'not grounded enough' (as discussed in chapter 4, also see Hsia and White, 2002; Spires, 2012), their precedents seem to be no better: the new domestic donors are trying to 'modernize' Chinese NGOs by large scale standardizing, disciplining the smaller organizations with different agendas. This trend has been strengthened by grassroots workers' popular belief of the ideas on anti-state politics. However, we can hardly say that the new donors and their hegemonic *gongyi* is de-contextualizing or escaping from the Chinese society. Rather, it is better to view it as a mirror and product of political and social change in China today.

Chapter 7   The making of a '*gongyi* people': everyday life in the local society

It was a rainy December afternoon in the city of Nan, K Province. I was sitting in GH's office, shaking my feet to keep myself warm. The temperature was 8 Celsius degree outside, while the office room was also cold and very humid with only a small heater (there was no central heating in the city). I knew it was better to stay in the room, at least it was bright and smelled good. There was a stinky toilet just next door that we had to share with more than 20 people working on the same floor, a quite old toilet with a dirty pit and a rusty faucet. There were four desks in the office; one of them belonged to another 'organization' working for the local disabled people, although this organization only had one full time worker. GH did not rent the office; it belonged to a local GONGO called 'City Nan's Social Organization Incubation Center', affiliated with the Civil Affairs Bureau (CAB) of the city government. The whole floor, including five office rooms and two conference rooms, was owned by the GONGO. By signing up an 'incubating contract' with this GONGO, GH could move into one of the rooms for free; at the same time, GH became one of the cases in showing how successful the incubation center was in producing more NGOs in the city. Most of the people working next door to GH's room were the local CAB officials.
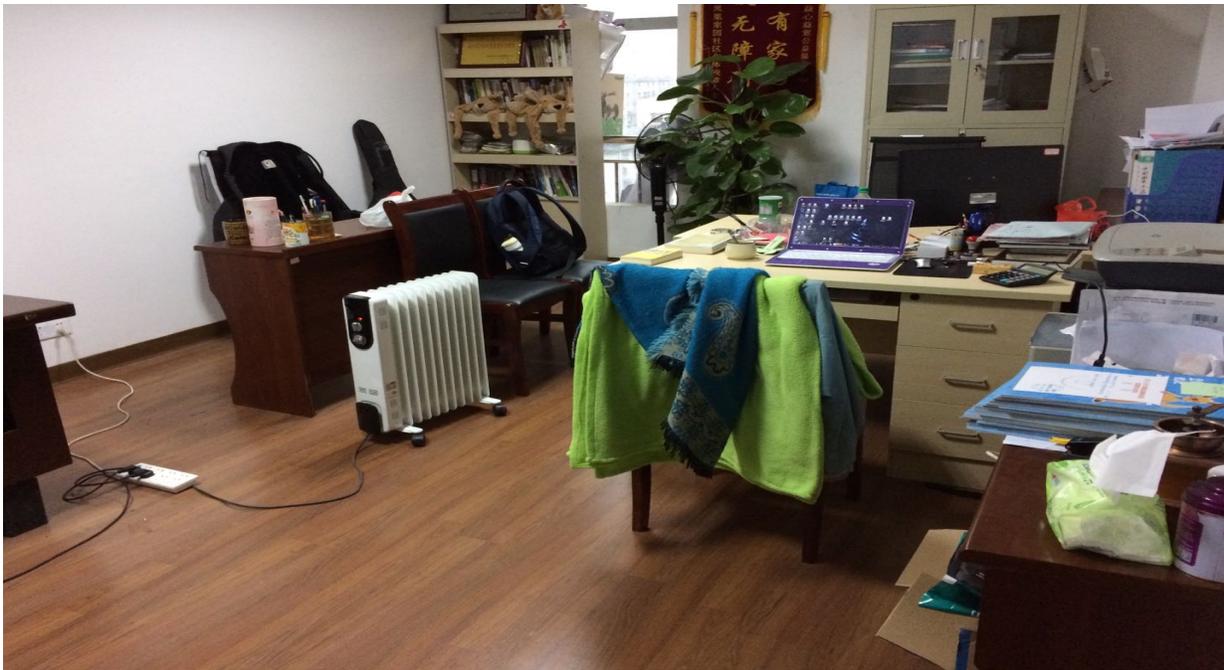
Figure 7.1 A picture of GH office. Photo by the author.

This was the first time that I visited Humphrey and Sue in their office, although I had known them a year ago through a mutual friend. The couple was the only two full-time workers at that time, although they also had a part-time worker and several volunteers. GH's office did not surprise me at all; as in my former working experience, I had seen many Chinese NGOs' offices just like this in a small room, with very few workers.

Comparing with AF workers in a hierarchic organization in the city of Shenzhen, doing *gongyi* in this small office room in K province has different meanings. For one thing, in my fieldwork with AF's partner organizations across 7 different provinces, none of them had set up any devices or designed their office rooms in the way that deliberately separated their '*gongyi* jobs' from other parts of everyday life. As we discussed in Chapter 5, in the 'learning from corporate' reform, AF set up a system to record each staff's working hours, including the fingerprint reader in the office. When an AF worker entered into the office every morning, he or she needed to change into a different identity by scanning their fingerprint, registering their attendance via the online system, sitting in a fixed table with their name tags and official titles, and sometimes, getting a free iced coffee from the reception desk to 'refresh themselves'. It is difficult to say that how this well-designed office life would contribute to AF's various humanitarian projects, but it did help most of the AF workers establish a new, professional identity as part of the 'white-collar' community in one of the prosperous cities in the country. Therefore, in many public speeches and presentations, I found that most of my AF colleagues would introduce themselves by their official titles at AF to show the professionalism[1].

But things were quite different for the grassroots organizations in the local society that I encountered. Given the limited size of these organizations, I hardly knew what their 'official titles' were; most of them would simply introduce themselves as 'a *gongyi* people' (*gongyi ren*, 公益人), or 'a person

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[1] The attempts of creating a professional identity is not unique for AF, I also found very similar phenomena during my visits with other new foundations in China.

working for *gongyi*". In some public occasions, they would not even mention the name of their organizations, as these organizations were not the only way that they were doing *gongyi*. Instead, people like Humphrey and Perry would talk about which part of China they were from (as a representative of the local NGO community), explaining who they were and what they did by their various relations with the local GONGOs, governmental bodies, business circle. Before my fieldwork with AF's partner organizations, what I had learned in AF's office were not their daily operations at the organizational level, but mostly about these organization leaders' names, their personal networks and backgrounds, as well as their various social relations in the local society.

Furthermore, many of these local organizations were running like a family business. Each 'family business', as demonstrated in this chapter, also involves gendered labor divisions, very similar to the 'one family, two systems' pattern as AF workers. In the meantime, the '*gongyi* people' in this chapter were more open to showing and discussing their work with their faiths, although they did it in different ways. Therefore, we may find that for local '*gongyi* people', the boundaries between "private life" and "work", "home" and "office", "family" and "business" could be quite ambiguous. The ambiguousness also appeared from the multiple jobs and identities of these '*gongyi* people' and their everyday life. Like Chapter 5, this chapter focuses on the meaning of gongyi at individual level, aiming to answer the third overarching question. In AF's case, most of its workers only had one job as a '*gongyi* professional' working at AF. But for the '*gongyi* people*' in the local society, they could also be running other businesses at the same time, such as small companies, religious groups, consultants of local governments, affiliations of the local GONGOs, and so forth.

In my fieldwork, I found that these multiple social identities and jobs of the '*gongyi* people' were not separated from each other; on the other hand, they were highly intertwined. The capacity of cultivating, bridging, and managing the various social relations has largely redefined what is a professional *gongyi* worker in the local society, which differs from AF workers in many ways. The most crucial knowledge and skills in this new professionalism, as I present in the case studies, are not those from the corporates and entrepreneurs, but the capabilities, performances, and relations that could contribute to more oligarchic and charismatic NGO leaders in the local society. Given their close relations with the local government and officials, these extraordinary '*gongyi*

people' and their organizations finally helped the local NGO community to be deeper incorporated into the local state. In this sense, I argue that corporatism is not just a concept of understanding the state politics in authoritarian countries, but also in the local society, it is an arrangement of organizing people's everyday life from their social relations, family life, to their religions.

This chapter, like chapter 6, divides the '*gongyi* people' into two types: the 'incapable *gongyi* people', and those 'successful', 'professional *gongyi* people'. For the "failing" type, I discuss the personal history of Humphrey and my participation observation experience with him in doing modern *gongyi* in the city. For the "successful" type, I talk about the stories of Perry and Sarah's daily life, which would lead us to their daily activities in different spaces. Then the chapter summarizes and discusses the key factors in constituting a successful, professional '*gongyi* people' that I have found in the local society: building and managing social relations across different sectors, practicing their religions in distinctive ways, and their relations with the local state.

7.1 Humphrey: the life of "poor philanthropist"

Born in 1973, Humphrey is older than Sarah and Perry, but very few people would call him "elder brother" in the NGO sector. In AF's office, quite often my colleagues would praise him for his hard work, but GH was seen as a negative example, lacking "organization capacity of doing modern *gongyi*". In an interview with a former AF worker in Beijing, she thought that the "reason why GH is still so small [in terms of its size] is that the organization's leader is so weak [of linking the media and government resources] in the local society". In my fieldwork, a study of Humphrey's personal history makes it clearer why Humphrey and his organization was not that respected as the others: as the person who had been "far lagging behind" in China's economic development, Humphrey never got the chance to set up his own company or dig out his first gold like the other successful '*gongyi* people'. AF's modern *gongyi* model, which highly emphasized the commercial skills in fundraising and marketing, was a huge challenge for people like Humphrey who never had such business skills or experiences. Furthermore, seen as an organization with potential political risks, Humphrey and GH never had the advantage (like GVC) of learning the language of communicating with the local authorities.

7.1.1 Humphrey's early years

There were many different versions of Humphrey's early life. Someone said he had many years of working experience in a multinational company in Shanghai and spoke very good English; therefore, to become a *gongyi* worker was a big sacrifice for his career development. However, when I tried to confirm this story with Humphrey and his wife Sue, both of them laughed and shook their heads. Sue said: "Oh I cannot imagine that Humphrey would be so high ended one day. He did work in Shanghai for some years, but never in any big companies".

Humphrey was born into a village in Province K when his mother, like other young students from Shanghai, was asked by Mao to give up schooling and educate herself in the countryside. In the late 1980s, as a state "compensation", Humphrey's family finally got an opportunity to go back to Shanghai to work again. Humphrey decided to take this opportunity so that his younger sister could have the money to continue her studies. In the early 1990s, Humphrey was allocated with a job to work for a university in Shanghai: a boiler operator He spent ten years there working with coals and hot streams, during which he earned an associate degree in English through self-study. Before went back to his hometown to establish GH, Humphrey never worked for any big companies or in governmental positions. Instead, as I read from an article written by a friend of Humphrey in his blog, Humphrey attended many activities that seemed to be "useless" in the reformist era: teaching English in rural schools, joining English song competitions, launching a band, writing novels, etc. He also joined Action Aid for five years, working as a project assistant in the poorest regions in China. Like the article said, "I would never forget that in this noisy world, in a boiler's chaotic dorm, a person was working at the bottom of the society trying to absorb nutrition from the books and growing up like a big tree".

Humphrey's wife Sue had a master's degree in religious studies. As a devout Buddhist, Sue was active in volunteer work and underground religious activities when at grad school, and finally she turned Humphrey a Buddhist too. So, when Humphrey wanted to launch his organization, Sue became the first employer. In the local NGO circle, many people knew Humphrey very well, taking him as the spokesman of GH. Although Sue also contributed a lot to the

organization (if not less), very few would come to her if they had any problems. In an evening at their home, Humphrey started to smoke, one cigarette after another in the living room, when Sue and I were having tea next to him. Sue suddenly talked about the labor division rules in their everyday life to me:

> "Hey, you see, this is the reason why I do not want to speak outside and socialize with the other organizations with Humphrey. This is a man's world, you need to join their hobbies, either drinking or smoking. Look at the AF senior managers, they are all heavy smokers…I have tried to persuade Humphrey to give up smoking many times but it is not working at all as long as he needed to hang out with those guys…I really dislike these things, it is much better to stay at home and do my work…".

In many aspects, Sue and Humphrey's labor division in their office and home was a bit different from most of the AF workers in the pattern of 'one family, two systems'. Although Humphrey had been seen as the absolute leader of GH, in their everyday life from project management, organizational operation, to their family finance, it was Sue rather than Humphrey that made the major decisions. During my ethnography with this couple, although there were arguments from time to time, I could hardly see anyone of them as really 'dominating' either the office or their home. This also applies to my observations of GVC, between Perry and his wife. In both couples, the husband and wife, as the co-founders of their businesses, enjoyed more equal status.

During my stay at Humphrey and Sue's home, I was surprised that they even set up a room for worshipping the Buddha in their apartment. Both of them would wake up at 6 am every day, za-zen and mediation for 1 hour, worship on bended knees for 30mins, and then cook their breakfast. They would do this again before sleep. But unlike Perry who would like to perform Buddhism with his business and NGO worker altogether, Humphrey and Sue told me that they tried to avoid their religion in their daily work deliberately, "since this is a quite personal thing, there is no point in showing it", said Sue.

The office of GH is a small room located in a quite old building. The room is very crowded with big boxes of disaster relief materials from AF, books, documents, and snacks. The whole atmosphere was quite relaxing, people often made jokes with each other, and the director Humphrey often played music in the office

during the lunch break. Unlike the AF workers that are more conservative about their personal stories, I almost got to know everyone's personal background in the office for the first time when I joined the "afternoon tea" at GH, when everyone shared their snacks in the room.   As a recipient of AF' funding, Sue's salary was 380 pounds per month in 2017; Humphrey's was even lower, about 300 to 350, which just reached the local lowest income line.

7.1.2 Getting to know the business circle: a failed attempt

Inspired by AF's modern *gongyi*, Humphrey tried to hang out with local entrepreneurs. In February 2017, I had a chance to go with him for such occasion, but it turned out to be a quite awkward experience, which made me realize the challenges that NGO leaders like Humphrey had in getting more integrated into the local elite circles for "modern *gongyi*". Humphrey wanted to thank two entrepreneurs who co-owned a local express company, since they helped Humphrey to send out disaster relief materials in both summer and winter in the whole province for free. So, Humphrey hoped that these two entrepreneurs can continue their free express service in the next year and donate to GH. I took a small wooden award designed by GH, and Humphrey carried two bags of organic rice as gifts. It took us more than 2 hours to get to the company office by bus. Then we were introduced to Mr. Wang's office and kept waiting there for more than 20 minutes before Mr. Wang appeared. Mr. Wang was the CEO of this company and served us tea.   Humphrey expressed his gratitude, and Wang suggested I take a picture for him and Humphrey with that award. Then Wang asked for my contact to make sure he can have that picture later. When I sent the picture to his phone, he murmured, "Ah, the words on the award are not big enough". "Really? Let me magnify the picture for you", I said. "Wonderful! That is what I want", Wang said with a big smile, "you know why I need this picture? I would post it on my social media, so the head of my son's school could see it. You see, there is 'AF Benevolent Enterprises' on the award. The school head will be happy if he knows I have such a close relation with AF".

Then Mr. Wang told us that he had wanted to transfer his son into a better primary school, but he did not know anyone in such schools.   But by delivering materials during the disasters, he got to know a team leader of a local volunteer

group who was a friend of a good primary school head. AF had donated that school's playground before. So very luckily, Wang found access to the school head and sent him a present (about 120 pounds). Now his son is sitting in the new school. After hearing this story, Humphrey and Wang both laughed, smoking and drinking tea together. Humphrey said, "How wonderful it is! You see, a good act will be well rewarded. You are accumulating your virtue and luck; the Buddha will give it back to your offspring". Mr. Wang was very happy to hear this, so he opened a small bottle of liquor and invited us to join him. "Sorry I cannot drink this, I am a Buddhist", Humphrey said. "Really? So you do not drink and eat meat at all? What a pity!" Wang said. Then Humphrey told Wang about GH's plan and asked whether he was interested in donating, "We are all local people, and we do have enough ambitious entrepreneurs. So, we need to help each other and support the local *gongyi*", Humphrey said. But Wang seemed confused, "I do not understand your *gongyi* circle at all. So what are you making a living on, philanthropist? Are you leading a group of volunteers?" Humphrey shook his head, he seemed to realize that to attract funding from Mr. Wang was not easy. So they turned to Mr. Wang's son's story and Humphrey's religion again.

After another hour of repeating gratitude, Mr. Liang arrived. Mr. Liang is the founder with a larger share of this company. He nodded his head when Humphrey and I came in, and then turned to Mr. Wang to discuss their business. After about half an hour, Mr. Wang introduced Humphrey to Liang, and Humphrey expressed his gratitude again. Mr. Liang shook hands with Humphrey, serving him tea, and then turned to his phone calls. I thought Mr. Liang was quite busy at that moment, but I was wrong. After several phone calls, Liang began to search for something on the Internet——actually, he was refreshing his social media. It seemed that Mr. Liang had already heard about Humphrey and what was he doing before we arrived, but he was not interested at all. So after another very awkward hour, Humphrey said: "Mr. Liang, I have one last request before I go, I am going to set up a website for my organization, GH, could I put your company logo on the website as a way of thanksgiving?" "Oh, of course, no problem! What a pity that you are leaving so early today, you should stay here for dinner. I always admire people like you, philanthropists! "Mr. Liang turned off his phone.

On our way back, I asked Humphrey whether he had tried to wear formal suits or not, suggesting maybe a more formal suit could make him look better on such occasions. Humphrey shook his head and said, "Never. I do not think I belong to suits. I am proud that all my clothes are secondhand from my friend", he smiled, "I think it is OK (to wear like this in front of this businessmen). People imagine that we are just poor volunteers. In fact, we really are". Then he murmured to himself, "I planned to stay longer with them so to know them better. But it seems that we are still too different, aren't we?"

If we call GVC's leader Perry a local elite in G, then Humphrey and Sue must be in a much lower social status. They came from very different social backgrounds, enjoyed a totally different political status in the local society. And thus, their organizations just seemed to be in two different worlds: GVC was like a part of a well-running medium-sized family group with good business, leading by an extraordinary boss who can manage the different social relations in the local community. However, GH was like a small family store struggling to find a balance between different stakeholders, especially the donors and the state. In fact, during my stay at Humphrey and Sue's home, I even encountered two calls that Humphrey received late at night. The caller seemed to be drunk, scolding Humphrey loudly that since GH had received so many donations from the big donors, he should distribute more money among "his local brothers". The caller was a local official in charge of the NGO regulation issues; he was also the supervisor of several local GONGOs that had a partnership with Humphrey. Seeing me very surprised by the call, Sue tried to comfort me like this: "That is quite normal, we have to face it regularly... as long as we are not a big boss here".

7.2 Perry's life: a successful *'gongyi* people' in the local society

I was a bit surprised by what I saw for the first time I visited GVC in person. The whole organization was more like part of a traditional family group run by Perry and his wife, rather than any typical "professional" organization or "modern *gongyi*" that I had heard from AF's office. When I was entering Perry's office room by walking through GVC's office for the first time, I just found myself in another world: outside Perry's room, the organization looked like just the same as AF's office, from the AF logos, leaflets, even the big fish-tank-like crystal glass everywhere. But behind the door of Perry's room, I saw a big Buddha

statue there, surrounded by a small basin and bamboo curtain. There was also a smog-making machine behind the Buddha, so to make the statue more elegant and mysterious. Perry invited me to enjoy tea in front of the Buddha and I found the whole tea table and tea sets were quite exquisite. The whole room was more like a private tearoom for relaxing and socializing, rather than a real "professional working place" like the other parts of GVC's office.

After the interview with Perry, I had lunch with him and several other GVC workers. Interestingly, all the workers were calling Perry as "elder brother (大 哥, *dage*)", treating him with much greater respect than simply an employer. Before Perry arrived, food had been ordered based on his personal preferences; once Perry showed up, a male worker asked him whether he wanted to smoke and then light a cigar for him. In our dinner later, the same scene happened again: Perry would sit in the middle in front of a big round dining table, surrounded by his workers who were ready to serve him. After the lunch, Perry suggested me to have a look at his teahouse together in the city center, and then another male worker just became the driver of Perry's brand-new SUV. In our conversations, Perry never mentioned his workers as his "employees (员工, *yuangong*)", instead he would call them "my younger sisters or brothers (小弟 小妹, *xiaodi xiaomei*)", trying to personalize the relations in his organization, while he was the family head.

Figure 7.2 Pictures of Perry's teahouse with lots of decorations from Tibetan Buddhism. Source: the public Wechat account of the teahouse.

Perry's teahouse offered another crucial perspective in understanding his daily life, in which he just spent more than 90 thousand pounds on refurbishment and decoration. In that teahouse, Perry told me proudly that to make sure the high quality of their tea, they also bought a tea plantation and set up a tea company in Taiwan last year. That is to say, unlike many other full-time NGO workers, *gongyi* was only a "part-time job" for him. Comparing to his other businesses, GVC might not be the most important one. Interestingly, in Perry's teahouse, I came to realize that he and his wife were not going to divide their different jobs into separated time slots and geographical spaces. In that teahouse, I found a banner in the entrance stating that it was also 'the G-City Club for AF Family", surrounded by a variety of Buddha beads. In AF, all its workers, volunteers and donors would be called 'AF family'. I have never heard of such club anywhere else but at Perry's teahouse. Perry told me this was the only physical club that had been approved by AF, so that the internal training of many other AF partner organizations could take place here. At the same time, Perry's wife also made it as a local Buddhist society, they organized a number of Buddhist lectures and preaching workshops there.

During my visit to the teahouse, Perry and his wife also received several guests from the local business circle, including two bankers and one real estate developer. In the discussion, I found that they were also frequent visitors of the teahouse, buying tea and participating in the Buddhist activities there. But this time, the visitors were not only coming for tea but also to discuss donation issues and business cooperation with AF. In just one hour, the real estate developer decided to donate 70 thousand pounds to the charity marathon to be hosted in the province. The charity event was initiated by AF to launch more "public participation" in doing *gongyi*, which had been hosted in different Chinese cities for years. In order to realize "everyone can do *gongyi*", normally the marathon would be held in the city center or famous tourist attractions to gain more participants. But Perry finally decided to put the marathon route in a newly developed tourist area in the suburban-based on the suggestions of the city government; as the new tourist area was part of the "poverty reduction project" for the ethnic minority groups in China since Xi's leadership. Both Perry and the real estate developer were quite happy with their cooperation in the teahouse: through this donation, the real estate developer could get access to AF's entrepreneurs and he was confident that this marathon event would be good for his company branding. For Perry, the marathon became a good

opportunity to strengthen his extraordinary capacity of getting things done in the local society by satisfying both the government officials and AF. In our later conversation, Perry was quite positive that in the next year, he could have a bigger say in how to distribute the donation money with AF.

The overlapping space from leisure, religion, NGO, to business activities, seemed to be a good thing for the teahouse' revenue, Perry's teahouse was very popular in the city that it only accepted the customers with early appointments. At the same time, it also became a small hub for building up an elite circle with the local businessmen, monks and NGO leaders. Under this situation, since Perry's different "jobs" were interconnected, it was not surprising to find that the GVC workers I met in its office also had work to do in the teahouse (and maybe in Perry's tea company too) at the same time. A female GVC employee that I had seen in an AF's public event was introduced as project assistants; but she also showed up in the teahouse, making tea for its visitors. In this "family group", none of these workers, including Perry, were acting like a real full-time AF worker in the fish-tank office in Shenzhen. In fact, in our conversations, Perry's wife told me that she thought both running the teahouse and doing *gongyi* were just different ways of practicing Buddhism in her daily life: "I do not want to show that people doing *gongyi* are only those self-sacrificed; we can be quite fashion too…it is not necessary to hide my faith in the workplace, I can present it in a very elegant way".

GVC's extraordinary status in the NGO community did not just come from Perry's personal political ties with the local governmental officials. It is more likely a combination of Perry's economic and social capital in the local society that has made Perry and his organization a perfect broker of *gongyi*. Being part of the local society, Perry knew how to work with the local government and the business circle very well, and also, how to make a profit from it. This has made him an almost irreplaceable actor in the local society in the eyes of external donors; regardless of the language or policy changes in China's NGO sector. In fact, in March 2017 when I visited Perry, he just decided to work with Oxfam again. Although his organization had turned to AF and cut down their collaboration with Oxfam in the past five years, GVC could be one of the very few organizations that could still cooperate with international donors without many political risks in the province. In the interview, Perry explained his new action like this: "Oxfam's civil society ideas are still very important for us so I

think it's time to do more NGO training programs with them now. It is a great complement to AF. We just need to change the program title a little bit, don't mention the sensitive word civil society..."

Perry was not the only one that I encountered in my fieldwork who can be called as 'the successful *gongyi* people' by AF workers. In AF's ranking of its partner organizations across the country, almost all the high-ranking organization leaders were just like Perry, enjoying an extraordinary status in their communities; while *gongyi* was only part of their daily life. Interestingly, many of them also attributed their passion of *gongyi* to their religions (mostly Buddhism), although they presented their religions in different ways[2].

For instance, Sarah, an organization leader in eastern China, was also in charge of several GONGOs in her city under the supervision of the local Youth Communist League. In a dinner with her in April 2017, she told me that *gongyi* only constituted half of her energy in the daily life, since she was running two listed companies with her husband in real estate marketing. As a Buddhist since young, her *gongyi* career was started by the volunteer activities with the local Lions Club, where she can meet other Buddhist entrepreneurs. However, in 2012 the local Youth Communist League (YCL) came up to her and suggested that her volunteer group can be legally registered as long as it is under YCL's supervision. Later, with the national NGO regulation reform, the local government decided to invest more money in purchasing social services, and then Sarah's organization became one of the major beneficiaries of government funding. Although Sarah did not have funding from international donors like Perry, how they had been gradually incorporated into the local state was almost the same: firstly recognized as an economic "success" in the local society, then their efforts in combing their Buddhist faith and volunteer activities were tolerated and neutralized by the local state. Finally, their close cooperation with the local state in doing *gongyi* brought them more privileges and benefits in terms of their social status and organizational incomes. During my visit in

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[2] Although I did not get chances to do more in-depth participant observation with the other "*gongyi* people" just like Perry, I attended two internal meetings held by AF in May 2017, when most of its partner leaders were there. These meetings and my daily conversations with AF workers are very helpful in getting the general background information of the NGO leaders.

Sarah's organization, I also met many other NGO leaders from different towns of the province coming to visit Sarah, like Perry who was called as "elder brother (*dage*)", Sarah was also called by the organization leaders as "elder sister (*dajie*, 大姐)".

7.3 The making of a '*gongyi* people'

As I argue in the first chapter, the language of *gongyi* should be the 'keyword' in understanding the changing landscape of the Chinese NGO sector. By the changing landscape here, I look at how Chinese NGOs have become more depoliticized and commercialized in many aspects in Chapters 4 and 5. In AF's case, the foundation workers were asked to be more wolf-like, aggressive, and self-sacrificed, which partly constituted their daily anxieties living in the most prosperous areas in China (see Chapter 5). But the cases I present here could be different. Most of AF's partner organizations were located in less developed cities or towns. During my visits, I could hardly hear the organization leaders talking about their pressures of being a wolf-like worker, or buying houses and cars as most of the white collars in Shenzhen have to face today. In our conversations, regardless of whether we were discussing their private life or NGO work, most of the organization leaders would direct our discussions to the questions of how to manage the various social relations in their local society, including how to deal with the local officials, how to be more integrated into the local media and business circle, and how to work with different donors from the outside world.

It is not to say that these people I talked to had no anxieties at all, but it is because they were living a quite different life and therefore what *gongyi* means to them in their daily life should be understood in different ways. In this context, this chapter of local NGOs pays attention to a slightly different word that AF's partner organizations called themselves, "*gongyi* people". Identifying themselves as 'a person in the local society', rather than an 'urban professional', my study reveals how corporatism at the local level can be strengthened and reproduced through the various social relations and everyday practices of the local NGO workers. My study of these NGO leaders also turned out to be an exploration of their personal history and network of "how to become a success" in the local society in China.

7.3.1 Building and managing social relations

In Osburg's study of China's new rich, he looks at how the personal relationships in the city of Chengdu can be cultivated among the local businessmen as well as between the local government officials and the business circle. These personal relationships, called as *guanxi* in the Chinese language, have been seen as a legacy of the planned economy, which are supposed to be swept away by the expanding market reform in the past decades (Guthrie 1998; King 1991). Also, there are scholars emphasizing the adaptability and continuing evolution of *guanxi* in the reformist era (for example, Bian, 1994; Wank, 1999; Ho, 2009). Osburg's (2013) ethnographic study of *guanxin* in Chengdu finds that these personal networks should be understood as "evolving cultural practices" which have contributed to the local market economy in the reformist era. In his research on the local corruption in Chengdu, Osburg argues that the elite networks between the private entrepreneurs and local government officials are "at the very heart of capitalist development in urban China" (ibid: 32). Given that the networks provide opportunities for the personal wealth and status accumulation, these local elites are more "rallied" together to achieve the economic growth goals set up by Beijing. In particular, Osburg examines how *guanxin* has been produced in certain new, exclusive spaces of leisure in the city, for instance, the various salons, karaoke, private clubs, spas, and so forth (ibid.: 37-75). Based on the traditional native-place ties, these new spaces have become important platforms of building up more exclusive personal relationships between business associates and other local elites, which has also contributed to the growing social inequality in China.

My study of some NGO leaders' daily life echoes with Osburg's findings in two ways. Firstly, as these NGO leaders were running their own businesses and enjoying governmental titles at the same time, the people they met, the places they work, and the leisure time they spent every day were much more complex than most of the ordinary NGO workers I knew in the field. The most important job in dealing with the various social relations for them was not to clarify the differences but to manage, maintain, and live with them (Yan: 2003). The daily social activities that these NGO leaders did in their clubs or salons were not just to strengthen their personal networks, but also these social spaces and relationships have constituted to a culture of defining them as the "big bosses"

in the local society. Therefore, we can find that although the major donors of these organizations have changed from international agencies to domestic entrepreneurs, these organizations can still keep an extraordinary status in the local society. The current highly commercialized *gongyi* language has given these 'successful' NGO leaders more power in disciplining the other organizations in China's NGO community.

Secondly, as the corruption in Chengdu shows, NGO leaders with better *guanxi* in their local society may not contribute to a more open and accountable environment for China's NGO sector, although their organizations did have "stronger organizational capacity" in getting projects done in their local communities (Hsu & Hasmath, 2014; Hildebrandt, 2013). In my fieldwork, I found it difficult to talk to many of the "big bosses" that I had heard in AF's office. Perry and Sarah were two of the very few leaders that I can get access to, although both of them were also very cautious of talking about the details of their personal history and wealth, family backgrounds, and their social networks. At the same time, the other organization leaders from the bottom of the society such as Humphrey were more likely to be defined as "the lag behind" in China's NGO community, since they were seen as "less capable of mobilizing the local resources" for their *gongyi* work. In this sense, *gongyi* and Chinese NGOs, being deeply embedded in the various forms of corporatism and an increasingly polarized NGO sector, is producing new forms of social inequality from the internal structure of the NGO industry, as a mirror of the mainstream Chinese society.

7.3.2 Performing Buddhism

Doing *gongyi* in local society means more than just managing *guanxi*, it also indicates that the NGO leaders need to legitimate what they do in the sense of morality (Yarrow, 2008). My fieldwork with different local NGO leaders finds that their common belief in Buddhism turned out to be an important strategy of claiming their morality in the local society, though performed in different ways. In fact, many AF workers may have their own religions in their private life, but most of them were reluctant to show their faith in the workplace. On the one hand, the party-state in China is still ruled by the Communist Party; religious groups, especially Christian home churches, have been under strict

surveillance (see more in chapter 6). Therefore AF, as an influential NGO in China, tried to keep a non-religious face in the public. On the other hand, as the AF office has been deliberately designed as a place to separate its workers from their other aspects of life under the name of doing modern *gongyi*, so talking about their religions was perceived as "unprofessional" in the workplace. But the situations in AF's local partners were quite different. Given the vague boundary between their private and non-private life, performing and discussing Buddhism was also part of their NGO and business work. Just like my informant Perry said to me, "the mortal life can be also a pure land, we need to practice [Buddhism] no matter where".

Cao's (2008) ethnographic research of "Boss Christians" in the city of Wenzhou finds that the underground Christians and churches had overlapped with the emerging private entrepreneurs in China. With more than 90% of the economy in Wenzhou was from the private sector, especially family-owned businesses, the church-based social networks become quite crucial for these small businesses in terms of informal financing and information exchange. More importantly, being a Christian in the local society has become a symbol of most well to do families, so that they can present themselves to the nonbelievers (mostly immigrant workers), as having the most authentic reason to embrace the Western-style life and a high-class culture taste. Boss Christians in Wenzhou maintained a higher social status by performing their faith in distinctive ways, for instance, large scale drinking and banqueting events for their "church branding" and owning pianos at home as a Western culture symbol.

Unlike Christianity that has been seen as an imported symbol, the development of Buddhism has been much more popular among ordinary Chinese with its history dating back to two thousand years ago. There have been several culture fevers of Buddhism in reformist China, from the revival of martial arts and supernatural powers in the 1980s to the numerous reconstruction projects of traditional temples and monasteries across the country (Birnbaum 2003; Palmer 2007; Lai 2003). But the way that different groups of people perform Buddhism in creating a social hierarchy is much like the Christians in Wenzhou. Although all the three NGO leaders I discuss in this chapter were Buddhists, they tended to emphasize the differences in their daily Buddhist practices rather than their common faith. Like the "Boss Christians" in Wenzhou, Perry

and Sarah were the "Boss Buddhists" in their cities: comparing with Humphrey, they did not need to talk about Buddhism in a very straightforward way in their daily work, but the expensive and delicate Buddha statues and decorations in their offices and private clubs have perfectly presented their devotedness and outstanding cultural tastes, which in return justifies their morality in doing the noble cause of *gongyi*. However, for Humphrey, his way of practicing Buddhism was just like the immigrant workers in Wuzhou who participated in the church activities for learning a new language of being a success. As a person living in the bottom of the society in his early life, connecting his work with Buddhism was the only "language" that Humphrey could "speak" when he tried to socialize with the local business circle in doing modern *gongyi*. In the eyes of Perry and some other AF workers however, Humphrey's practice of talking about his personal belief was quite "unprofessional".

Conclusion

In September 2016, AF just finished another round of recruitment, with four new project officers in different humanitarian projects. In an internal AF meeting I attended, the then vice general secretary Calvin made a speech to these new employees, in which he spent most of the time talking about the importance of relationship maintenance with their local partner organization leaders:

> "These gongyi people are not simple. They are the key to keeping our project safe in different provinces. They are the big bosses in the local society…they are very sophisticated people in our circle, old and clever enough to take advantage of their donors. You can push their staff to work, but don't push them too hard. If you find yourself can't deal with them, come to me".

At the beginning of this chapter, Calvin described these NGO leaders as "big bosses (*dalao*)", my fieldwork finds that the secret of "becoming a *dalao*" is not in specific projects they were doing, but the way they live. Becoming a '*gongyi* people' in China's NGO sector, in the cases that I have discussed in this chapter, means to live within and to become part of the corporatism on a daily basis. The capacity of building and managing various social relations in the local society constitutes the major "competitiveness" in the *gongyi* market in front of various

donors; while the distinctive way of practicing faith—by showing but not talking—helps these NGO leaders to reach a higher social class in China.

However, what is behind such lifestyle and personal capacity is the increasingly widening gap between different social groups in China, and the marginalization of the organizations and their workers which are not able to be "incorporated" into China's development path in the past decades, if they are not "kicked out" by the fast-changing game. That is the reason why in this chapter, I divide the NGO leaders into two different types and discuss their different lives as a '*gongyi* people' in the local society. In the introduction of this thesis, I talked about the experience of meeting a group of the disabled and their donor Oxfam in an unexpected way. During my fieldwork with Humphrey and this 'marginalized' groups in the Nan city, I had never heard any of them calling themselves as '*gongyi* people'. Although most of the disabled group members also had other jobs to do, most of their jobs were part-time and lower-paid in the city; while their group activities had been surveilled by the municipal government for a long time. "*Gongyi* people" is a word that I have had a lot from the mainstream Chinese media reports, from AF's and other foundations' office, from Perry and Sarah, but never from the disabled group I met. While 'doing *gongyi*' in China has produced more and more powerful 'gongyi *people*' in the local society, some others in the same society may have been silenced.

Chapter 8   Conclusion

"Make sure that the government plays the leading role [in doing *gongyi*]. To guide social forces to participate [*gongyi*] on a larger scale. Introduce market and competition-based systems so that to motivate more participants and reinforce the vitality of *gongyi* organizations. Do the best to provide more *gongyi* services for people's social demands in different levels and geographic areas"[1].

Guidelines of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Promoting the Reform of Social Development, 2012

"So far, the government has made great achievements in poverty alleviation, now it is time for us [entrepreneurs] to participate…being an entrepreneur in this country is more than just being a businessman. A businessman only thinks about making profits, but an entrepreneur also thinks about the national interests, the future generation, and the whole society"[2].

Jack Ma at 2018 China Green Companies' Summit

"I am working here [AF] for myself, for these child protection projects, not for the big bosses [the entrepreneurs sitting in the board]…I want to be a child protection expert; you know, I want to deal with social problems directly, not something as a *gongyi* worker. I just recently found that *gongyi* is so meaningless (*mei yi si*, 没意思) to real social problems…" [3]

Cliff, a former AF worker

When talking about *gongyi*, people talk about a wide range of issues such as Lei Feng spirits, the new 'philanthropists', the social workers in the state-funded community center, and sometimes, 'civil society'. Although there are many

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[1] Source: http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2012/content_2121699.htm
[2] Source: https://tech.sina.com.cn/i/2019-03-29/doc-ihsxncvh6451711.shtml
[3] From a casual conversation on 17/04/2017.

academic debates on NGO-state relations in China, the internal power structure, politics, culture, and knowledge production of the NGO sector in China have been understudied. By looking at the recent development of *gongyi,* this thesis aims to fill this gap in two ways. On the one hand, I understand the internal politics of the Chinese NGO sector from an organizational perspective, examining their organizational culture as well as their interactions with the local state and business circle. On the other hand, I look at how *gongyi* as a new profess works at the individual level, putting Chinese NGO workers into a bigger picture of social change in China. By studying the language of *gongyi* from these two aspects, I argue that *gongyi* reveals a complicated picture of Chinese NGOs and society today. The popular use of *gongyi* presents the increasing commercialization of Chinese NGOs and the rising of Chinese entrepreneurs as donors in the past decade. Although self-claimed as distancing from the state, the close collaborations between the local state and the private sector finally strengthen the corporatism in the country. At the same time, the new skills, culture, and knowledge brought up by *gongyi* also widen the social inequalities between NGO workers in their everyday life; grassroots organizations are now deeply disciplined and marginalized in the sector. The thesis presents a complicated picture of the changing roles that NGOs play in an authoritarian state. The regulatory framework of the Chinese state has become much more multilayered, and NGO workers have to reidentify themselves and rearrange their everyday life accordingly.

Although there are people not using this popular language, the wide usage of *gongyi* in the mainstream Chinese society indicates the process of how the Chinese NGO sector have got tolerated and normalized in the country in some way. By a close examination of the internal structure, conflicts, and interactions within the NGO sector, my research demonstrates how a seemingly growing civil society in the authoritarian state has strengthened the status quo by its deeper embeddedness with corporatism at the local level in the past decade.

8.1 Revisiting the research questions

As introduced at the beginning of the thesis, this research aims to answer the three interconnected questions:1) given the rise of the Chinese private sector and the authoritarian state, how do the Chinese entrepreneurs identify

themselves as a new donor under the name of *gongyi*, and how do they imagine what NGOs should be like in China? 2) what roles does the Chinese state play in shaping *gongyi* in different local contexts? 3) what did this *gongyi* mean for ordinary Chinese NGO workers, in particular, how does *gongyi* shape the private life and personal identities of Chinese NGO workers, and how do they deal with *gongyi* in different ways?

The thesis answers these three questions by an ethnographic study of an entrepreneur founded foundation in the city of Shenzhen and its partner organization in different places. Chapters 4 and 5 aims to answer the first question. The two chapters discuss the new knowledge brought up by the private entrepreneurs in China, "modern *gongyi*". Under this modern *gongyi*, this thesis argues that a highly commercialized culture has been established in the foundation's office. Meanwhile, modern *gongyi* also redefines NGO workers with "wolf-spirit", which produced profound uneven impacts on its workers by creating more gender inequalities and strengthening the 'one family, two systems' in the reformist era.

The second question is mostly discussed in Chapters 4 and 6. By discussing the different state-NGO interactions in different places, this research demonstrates that the roles that the Chinese state played in these cases are different, given the fragmented nature of the Chinese state itself. In the city of Shenzhen, *gongyi* is largely a product of the close collaboration between the local government and the rising private sector. The foundation, doubted by the central government in some way, has been welcomed and incorporated into the neoliberal development model in Shenzhen. The city government has become a patron of emerging entrepreneurs and their foundations. However, in GH and GVC's cases in two different provinces, the situations are quite different. Without a prosperous private economy like the city of Shenzhen, the local state played a more decisive role in defining *gongyi*. AF and its partner organizations needed to respond to the political demands and economic orders from local governments in a more direct way. For NGOs like GVC that maintained a good relationship with the local state, doing *gongyi* with domestic donors provides them with a new platform to strengthen their extraordinary status in the local community. But for those like GH that kept partnerships with international donors, *gongyi* and AF turned out to be a political shelter for them to survive. In answering this question, I present the multi-layered state and the process of

how corporatism works in different places in different ways, in which *gongyi* has been learned, renegotiated, redefined, and reproduced.

The answer to the third question is closely connected with the second one and has been mostly discussed in Chapters 5 and 7.   These two chapters examine the NGO workers' everyday life in different organizations and geographic areas. Seen as an emerging profession in China, doing *gongyi* has different meanings in different contexts. In the more developed urban communities, the life of wolf-like '*gongyi* professionals' does contribute to an emerging middle class, helping NGO workers to be more normalized and incorporated into mainstream Chinese society. But at the same time, wolf-like *gongyi* workers in practice is highly masculinized in its nature, consolidating the widening gap of men and women in the workforce and at home. For those NGO workers in the local organizations, we may find *gongyi* becomes a highly relational thing, as it is greatly shaped by their relations with the local state and the business circles. It is not only "a job", but also a way of living: cultivating, maintaining and bridging social relations, and performing their personal faith in a proper way. In this sense, doing *gongyi* helps to define what calls a person in the local society.

8.2 The theoretical contributions of this research

The analytical framework of this thesis is developed around two major themes: corporatism and everyday life in reformist China. All four empirical chapters have covered these two themes in different ways. Here I would like to summarize the analytical framework again and clarify how my research can engage with the current academic discussions.

8.2.1 Corporatism

In chapter 1, I present the different approaches to understanding NGOs in China. Normally seen as a "new creature" since China's economic reform, non-governmental organizations have been taken as an indicator of a new, more autonomous associational life. Many scholars rely on insights from the literature on civil society, which usually assumes that social actors have a contentious or counterbalancing relationship with the state (Cohen and Arato, 1992; Gllener 1984) and that the various activities it explains will lead to

political change (e.g. Putnam, 1993; Keane, 1998). In China's context, academic discussions on whether and how to apply civil society theories in the country have been ongoing since the 1989 Student Movement in Beijing (Zhao, 1998, 2002, 2013). The independence of Chinese NGOs in relation to the state has become the major concern of many civil society researchers (e.g. Wu, 2017; Ma & Parish, 2014; Spires et al., 2014; Shieh, 2017). Some researchers conclude that even if civil society might not bring democracy to China, civil liberties are sure to increase because of the very existence of these social organizations (e.g. Morton, 2005).

However, this civil society approach has been challenged in many ways. Some researchers argue that the state must be taken into consideration when using the concept of civil society (Chamberlain, 1993; Nevitt, 1996; Zhou, 1993), as Chinese NGOs have been highly regulated after the 1989 Beijing Student Movement. Some scholars like Howell (2012) rectify this with the Gramscian concept of civil society, suggesting that Chinese NGOs and civil society are more like an extension of the capitalist state. Moreover, although the civil society approach helps understand the changes and dynamics of Chinese politics, it is still limited in explaining the status quo. Given the increasing numbers of NGOs and the resilience of authoritarianism in China, the liberal civil society approach has limitations in understanding the changing landscape of the Chinese NGO sector in the past decade.

My research on the popular language and knowledge production of *gongyi* reveals that the corporatism framework does have its strengths in analyzing Chinese NGOs in analyzing the local politics and state-NGO relations in a more decentralized way. Therefore, in this thesis, I propose two ways of expanding the existing corporatism framework as follows.

Firstly, in scholarly history, corporatism since the 1990s has been seen as a useful theory in understanding China's economic development model. The interaction between the local government and private businessmen is the key to contributing to China's economic growth (Oi, 1995). My analysis of the changing Chinese NGO sector is inspired by this academic tradition so as to present a more complicated picture of Chinese NGOs today. By increasingly complicated picture here, I go beyond the state-NGO relations and point to the collaboration between three groups of actors: the local state, entrepreneurs, and Chinese NGOs. In this thesis, I argue that corporatism is not just appeared

in the increasing state surveillance and regulations towards NGOs; but also it is working through many indirect ways, for instance, deeper collaboration between the state and the emerging domestic donors at the local level, the commercialization of the NGO sector, as well as the changing everyday life of ordinary NGO workers in China. The new knowledge of '*doing* gongyi', I propose, is largely a product of these new, complicated interactions between the three groups of actors in this thesis.

But at the same time, China's decentralization reform since the 1990s also calls for a more flexible application of the corporatist framework in analyzing the social and political change among various regions (Hsu, 2012). As I have discussed in Chapter 6 on China's NGO regulation change, the fragmented nature of the Chinese state has also contributed to different ways of dealing with NGOs in different places, departing from a unified authoritarian regulatory regime. Therefore, my study of *gongyi* in different places demonstrates the importance of discussing the various forms of corporatism in different parts of China. The research presents the process of how the reproduction of a seemingly commercialized knowledge could be possible in China with the negotiations and reinterpretations between the entrepreneurs, NGOs, and the local governments.

The increasing state control towards Chinese NGOs in recent years does not necessarily mean that there has been a more formal, unified, or established platform of social surveillance at the national level. As AF and its entrepreneurs' stories tell us, in many cases these new organizations have been deeply integrated into the local state via their daily interactions with the local authorities, government officials, and so forth. Although AF workers may still think that they are representing a liberal, progressive force in the country, the organization they were working for had become a social arm of the state. Under such condition, many Chinese NGO workers have developed different personal identities and ways of living, which includes their own understandings of the state politics, the roles that entrepreneurs play in the Chinese society, their own economic status, as well as religions. In this sense, my research goes beyond the existing literature that mostly takes corporatism as a regulatory strategy of the Chinese state. Corporatism, through everyday practices in and outside various Chinese NGOs, provides a better framework to analyze the normalization process of the Chinese NGO sector in the past decade.

8.2.2 Everyday life in reformist China

As the keyword of understanding the changing landscape of the Chinese NGO sector, *gongyi* tells us more than the state-NGO relations in China. Although the making of *gongyi* has been closely related to the deepening corporatism in different parts of China in the past decade, this research argues that *gongyi* also presents how the normalization process of the Chinese NGO sector is happening in the details of people's everyday life unevenly, which contributes to the increasing social inequality in the country. Using the language of *gongyi* and identifying oneself as a '*gongyi* professional/people' gives new meanings of NGO as a profession in Chinese society. In the empirical chapters (especially in chapters 4, 5 and 7), I pay attention to different people's career paths, family and education backgrounds, and their religious life.

In China, the everyday life of NGO workers is still understudied. Given the authoritarian NGO regulations in the country, it is very difficult to get accurate data of their working information, like the exact number of how many people working in the sector, the percentage of men and women, not to mention their average incomes. Although there has been more and more research on the changing Chinese NGOs on the organizational level in recent years, how such changes in the past decade have influenced Chinese NGO workers' career paths and private life is still unknown. My ethnographic work with AF workers and its partner organizations reveals that the normalization process of Chinese NGOs, featured with commercialization, was never a simple task for the individuals who were working in various organizations. The pains and gains they were experiencing everyday demonstrated in their economic conditions, former working experiences, social relations, faiths, marriage status, as well as their gender identities.

As ordinary Chinese living in the reformist era, my AF colleagues and other informants in the field may share many commonalities with other Chinese: they were eager to be a manly man in the own families and the workplace (see chapter 4 and 5), anxious with their incomes, career, and social status; they were asked to be more "professional" in the workplace, but such "professionalism" may bring them conflicts in their family life. Whether it is 'wolf-like professionals' in the big cities or 'capable *gongyi* people' in the local

society, my research finds that these new identities are creating new forms of hierarchies and social exclusions, just like the popular language of '*suzhi*' that we have discussed in the first chapter. What behind the popularity of *gongyi* in Chinese NGO workers' everyday life, is the strengthening of "one family, two systems" since China's economic reform (Hoffman, 2006), as well as the marginalization of the disadvantaged groups.

However, what distinguishes the NGO workers and other social groups in China lies in their political ideologies and the ways they dealt with these ideologies in their everyday life. In China, working in the NGO sector is still seen as a highly politicized job in its nature. Even for the very commercialized fundraising work, my AF colleagues still imagined it as a 'progressive' way of challenging the socialist legacies and reforming the state. This imagination was shared by most informants in different places regardless of their different economic and social status, which constituted the political nature of the *gongyi* language in China. The shared political imagination made long-term partnerships among different NGOs possible. But as I argue in the second chapter, such 'progressive *gongyi*' is highly self-limiting in China. Working under this *gongyi* model asks one to maintain certain strategies and lifestyles of living within the corporatism in one's everyday life: becoming part of the local state affiliations, building up connections with the local officials and the business elites circle, performing personal beliefs in an indirect way, etc. In this sense, corporatism involves a number of strategies and ways of living on a daily basis.

8.3 The never-ending *gongyi*

I finished the fieldwork in July 2017, but I still keep in touch with some of my informants in the field throughout my whole writing up process. In the recent two years, AF is still one of the top foundations receiving the most public donations and media coverage in China, but its ranking slides down a bit from 3rd to 8th. As the only non-state organized foundation in the top 10, AF has been gradually caught up by other GONGOs. For AF and all the other organizations, I knew, they were asked to set up a communist party branch within their own organizations by the local government. AF, as the role model of Shenzhen's NGOs in the eyes of the city government, became the first one to have such a branch in Shenzhen; a retired local official was appointed as the general secretary of AF's party branch. From 2017 until recently, my old

colleagues told me that this new secretary organized political study sessions on the current Chinese President Xi Jinping's words and speeches on a monthly basis, more workers were mobilized to join the communist party. It remains unknown to me that to what degree these party branches may change the daily operation of the organizations, and whether there are conflicts in terms of the organizational structure and internal governance.

But grassroots organizations may need to face more challenges than before. In fact, along with the new charity law, another influential law on international organizations also went into effect in January 2017 in a very silenced way. According to this law, international donors are asked to register with and regularly report to the police department in China. By the end of 2017 when I was back in the UK, Sue told me via online chats that she and Humphrey went to an NGO training program organized by Oxfam with another 10 organization leaders at that time; it was an annual meeting of Oxfam's NGO network in middle China. As soon as they were back in their own cities after the training, all of the attendees received the calls from the local police almost at the same time, asking them to report to the police of the meeting.   Sue thought that the collective calls were sending a very clear, warning message not from the local government, but from Beijing: no matter whether the INGOs were legally registered or not, working with them in China means political danger. Until this year, she still keeps working with Oxfam but meanwhile, she has been invited to 'have tea' with the local police almost every month. Managing local government relations has become more and more difficult for her.   In fact, the disabled group that I met in the hotel lobby in the cold evening in 2017 was dismissed in early 2019.

Most of the colleagues I knew at AF have left their jobs (even including the general secretary); only five old workers remained in the foundation. My line manager, Justin is still there, although he has been hunting jobs for a while. Tim, the youngest senior manager, is at AF too, he just got another promotion this early year, seemingly to be the next general secretary. Jerry, the young dad who quit his job after the birth of his son, has made a living in the city by setting up his own NGO, providing cloth recycling services for the middle-class communities. Jerry's NGO is fully funded by both AF and the municipal government, as Shenzhen has been designed as the first city in the country to promote the waste recycling industry. Now, Jerry's organization has expanded to some other places like the city of Beijing and Shanghai, with the recent

donation from the Alibaba Foundation. Taken the waste recycling industry as a good investment opportunity, many companies including Alibaba have invested in a number of waste recycling companies, social enterprises, and NGOs.

Many of other informants are still in the NGO sector but choose to work in other entrepreneur-founded foundations in different cities. Interestingly, although AF's partner organizations are relatively smaller in turns of their size, I have hardly seen any informants I visited changing their jobs in the past two years. However, what has not been changing much is people's minds and ideologies. The online chat group of 'Liberalists of China's NGO sector' (I mention this group in chapter 6) is still active until very recently. In an evening of October 2016, when I had already left AF, I found this group was active again as usual, given the presidential election in the U.S. became quite intense at that time. Hunter, a former senior manager at AF, forwarded a news report of the election and said:

> "I support Trump! I support the Republicans. I think most people in this group must agree with me that we only need a small government; the democrats are creating more lazy people in the US, just like what China did in the socialist era! I don't believe in Hillary either, women are just too sensitive to be a political leader".

Hunter's words in the group chats soon got several followers who were also supporters of Trump, all of them were AF's partner organization leaders like Humphrey. Until two hours later, Yvette, a junior project assistant who just joined AF, sent out a message: "What is wrong with you guys? I just cannot believe that discriminatory languages can just appear in this liberalist group in such a straightforward way. I am quitting from this group now".

In the past two years, Hunter became a general secretary of another entrepreneur-founded foundation in Shenzhen, although this year he has started a new business: helping more newly rich Chinese immigrants to Europe. Yvette is still working in the AF at almost the same position two years ago. I am not surprised by what Hunter did in the past few years; his political ideology has been developed for more than three decades in the country. Such a 'liberalist' ideology is a symbiosis of the state-directed reforms as well as the marketized economy. Since the 1980s, the authoritarian state and the

remarkable economic growth together have created an interesting social space that is relatively autonomous from the socialist era, ideologically distinct from the official propaganda, but deeply incorporated into China's development path in various ways. That is what I present in this thesis as the politics of doing *gongyi*. But we should also admit that there are always people reminding us of the alternatives of *gongyi*; I learn these alternatives from the closed factory women's groups, from Yvette, and from the eliminated good husbands and daddies that are 'not wolf enough'.

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Appendix A: Interviews with NGO workers in Shenzhen

No.	Gender	Age	Working fields	Date	Code
1	Male	25	Poverty reduction, T Foundation	07/07/2016	A1
2	Male	33	NGO capacity training	08/07/2016	A2
3	Female	24	Former AF worker	02/11/2016	A3
4	Male	28	Former AF worker, Working at a GONGO now	03/11/2016	A4
5	Male	26	Former AF worker	07/11/2016	A5
6	Male	30	Child protection, Partner organization of AF	07/11/2016	A6
7	Female	31	Project officer at AF	11/05/2017	A7
8	Female	29	Senior manager at AF	23/05/2017	A8
9	Female	32	Project officer at AF	24/05/2017	A9
10	Male	24	Project assistant at AF	25/05/2017	A10

Appendix B: Interviews with NGO workers in Beijing

No.	Gender	Age	Working fields	Date	Code
1	Female	62	Rural education, environmental protection	15/11/2016	B1
2	Female	52	Senior manager at AF	16/11/2016	B2
3	Male	28	Project officer at AF	19/11/2016	B3
4	Female	27	Project officer at AF	22/11/2016	B4
5	Male	32	Disaster relief	22/11/2016	B5
6	Male	30	Child protection, Partner organization of AF	07/11/2016	B6
7	Male	25	Child protection and NGO capacity training; Y Foundation	20/07/2017	B7
8	Female	27	Disaster relief and poverty reduction; GONGO	20/07/2017	B8
9	Female	34	NGO capacity training, L Foundation	21/07/2017	B9
10	Female	28	Child protection, INGO	22/07/2017	B10
11	Male	27	Project officer at AF	23/07/2017	B11
12	Female	29	Project officer at AF	24/07/2017	B12
13	Male	33	NGO capacity training, N Foundation	25/07/2017	B13
14	Female	27	Child protection, INGO	27/07/2017	B14

Appendix C: Interviews with NGO workers in other places

No.	Gender	Age	Working fields	Date	Province	Code
1	Male	33	Disaster relief and community development; Partner organization of AF	13/03/2017	G	G1
2	Female	29	Disaster relief and community development; Partner organization of AF	14/03/2017	G	G2
3	Male	32	Disaster relief and child protection; Partner organization of AF	16/03/2017	G	G3
4	Female	31	Community development; Partner organization of AF	28/03/2017	T	T1
5	Female	30	Community development	30/03/2017	T	T2
6	Male	30	Senior manager at AF	04/05/2017	T	T3
7	Female	25	Former AF worker	04/05/2017	T	T4
8	Male	30	Former AF worker; Working at C Foundation now	03/04/2017	Y	Y1
9	Male	23	Child protection, Partner organization of AF	03/04/2017	Y	Y2
10	Male	52	Gender, child protection, community development;	04/04/2017	Y	Y3

			Partner organization of AF			
11	Female	33	Disaster relief and child protection; Partner organization of AF	13/04 /2017	H	H1
12	Male	31	Poverty reduction, M Foundation	25/05 /2017	H	H2
13	Male	42	NGO capacity training	17/07 /2017	H	H3
14	Female	27	Gender and immigrant workers' rights	15/09 /2015 ; 18/07 /2017	H	H4
15	Female	29	Gender and immigrant workers' rights	12/09 /2015 ; 17/07 /2017	H	H5
16	Male	35	Disaster relief and child protection; Partner organization of AF	03/05 /2017	I	I1