a) Statement of Topic

After the Chinese economic reform in the 1980s, China's economy has grown dramatically, changing people's life and Chinese society. The economic reform has brought opportunities for entrepreneurs and start-up businesses, which made a part of the Chinese population rich. The newly formed middle class in the end of 20th century and the beginning of 21st century is composed of people who have a high living standard and also a yearning for civil society (Zhang, 2003). The boom of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society organizations is considered one of the significant developments of Chinese society to bring about a gradual bottom up reform (Morton, 2005, p. 521). China’s grassroots nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which started to form in the early 1990s and boomed in the early 21st century are important to be studied for their contribution of transforming the country to a more civic one.

China has an authoritarian society in which its media system has adopted the authoritarian tradition. After the People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949, the media in China adopted a wartime propaganda ethos and functioned as a “political tool” and an integral part of the state apparatus of the government, a role that was officially defined as the “throat and tongue” of the Party (Cao, 2010, p. 139). As Cao (2010)
articulates, “one primary responsibility of Chinese journalism is to ‘guide public opinion’” and to “distinguish ‘right’ from ‘wrong’” (p. 140).

After the economic reform in the past three decades, Chinese media has retained its mouthpiece function while achieving a profit in the market (Cao, 2010). Interestingly, with the economic development and emergence of the Internet, the Chinese government has become less hegemonic in dealing with media and “control has to be exercised through negotiation rather than imposition” (Cao, 2010, p. 145). As a result, the media has begun to publish more and more stories about issues and social conflicts. However, the media is not totally free from the government’s interference. The party-state still possesses the continuing ability to suppress oppositional ideas and prevent the formation of counterhegemonic alliances between various protesting social forces (Zhao, 2008, p. 62). Zhao (2008) argues, reporting on “numerous protests by expropriated farmers, laid-off state enterprise workers, and uncompensated pensioners, as well as other disenfranchised and dispossessed groups is almost impossible” (p. 62). With relatively looser control over today’s Chinese media, reporting on counterhegemonic alliances is still highly sensitive and even impossible.

Chinese NGOs on the other hand, stand for different voices in society and they contribute to a more civic society. They are different from counterhegemonic protesting groups because they are not totally against the central government’s policies. They tend to help solve social issues by volunteering and charity. By doing so, NGOs create their own voices as a third sector that is autonomous from the state (Morton, 2005, p. 519).
Their increasing power of articulating social issues and influencing how to solve social issues may create conflicts and tension with the central government. Recent studies of Chinese nongovernmental organizations have been focused on NGOs and civil society (Shieh & Deng, 2011; Tang & Zhan, 2006; Chen, 2010), use of the Internet by NGOs (Sima, 2011), grassroots NGOs in an authoritarian state (Spires, 2011), development of environmental NGOs in China (Ru & Ortolano, 2009), implications for domestic social and political reform (Morton, 2005). While most of these studies focus on the political impact brought about by these NGOs and a lot of scholars have addressed the grassroots movement in China to suggest an emerging civil society, little research has been conducted in the field of media representation of this group. This research, which is aimed at analyzing Chinese media’s representation of NGOs, may serve to fill this gap. Studying the news coverage of Chinese NGOs sheds light on how Chinese media perform their role with the tension between greater freedom to publish stories about issues and social conflicts and the mission to suppress oppositional ideas.

b) Theoretical Framework

The representation process mainly ties in with the journalism theory of framing. Framing is a concept in communication research developed in several different disciplines including psychology, psychiatry, sociology, anthropology, epistemology, ethnography and linguistics and communication (Johnson-Cartee, 2005, p.160). It is used in the research of mass media to address the media’s effect on audience and society. When reporting news stories, journalists write in narratives that are developed within
their culture to give meanings to the narratives so that they can be understood. Frames in media give emphasis on particular values, facts and problems in society and provide perspectives of approaching certain issues. By analyzing news frames, the underlying social factors such as political power, culture and historical background can be identified to achieve a deeper understanding of the media and society.

c) Literature Review

1. Mapping the Chinese NGOs.

With the emergence of Red Maple Women’s Psychological Counseling Center and Friends of Nature in the early 1990s, China has witnessed a rapid growth of NGOs in the early 2000s, which constitute the marker of an emerging civil society (Shieh & Deng, 2011). These NGOs include environmental organizations; organizations providing services to needy populations such as migrant workers, battered women and the disabled; homeowners’ associations; cultural and recreational associations; and professional associations (Shieh & Deng, 2011). Although no reliable number of such NGOs in China is available, some previous research suggests that by 2005 there were at least 2,768 environmental nongovernmental organizations (ENGOs) (Tang & Zhan, 2006). The estimated total number of NGOs goes as high as 1.5 million (Shieh & Deng, 2011). In recent years, Chinese NGOs have actively participated in environmental protection and education (Sima, 2011), crisis alleviation such as 2008 Sichuan earthquake, SARS and HIV/AIDS (Shieh & Deng, 2011).

2. Framing analysis of social movements.
Numerous researchers have explored the concept of framing in the field of journalism. Entman (1993) defines framing as the following:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation. (p. 52)

By giving selective information to readers, framing is being practiced by journalists to weave a value system in which the journalists and citizens live. Similarly, Reese explains that, “Frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (2001, p. 11). He also suggests that the study of framing helps provide tools for examining human knowledge structures.

In addition to giving priority to particular values, frames found in media can also serve to define political issues and as a result enhance the political power structure. For example, Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1997) argue, “framing is the process by which a communication source such as a news organization [or a political leader, public relations officer, political advertising consultant, or news consumer], defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy” (p. 576).

Framing can also be explored in the perspective of a journalism practice. Johnson-Cartee (2005) explains the framing process of news reporting as a “learned” craftsmanship based on the professional skills built in the journalism industry. She says:
In their efforts to define the situation, select a news frame, and then build upon that news frame, reporters seek evidence, whether in the form of expert testimony, written reports, public record or eyewitness accounts, that affirms their approach to the story. (p. 162)

She also addresses that the assigned responsibility is another important component in news framing that has been widely explored. Researchers such as Iyengar (1989) have categorized issue responsibility into two categories: causal responsibility, or the emphasis on the origin of the social problem; and treatment responsibility, or the emphasis on who or what has the means to resolve the social problem, whether by solving the social problem, alleviating the social problem, or perpetuating the social problem (Johnson-Cartee, 2005). The effect of framing can change the applicability of particular thoughts and result in their activation and use in evaluations (Pan & Kosicki, 2001). Pan and Kosicki (2001) describe framing as a “strategic action in a discursive form” (p. 39) and “framing an issue is to participate in public deliberation strategically” (p. 59).

When studying media representation of a social group in a social movement, framing analysis is a common approach. In 2005, Bronstein analyzed the framing of third wave feminism to compare the frames that have been used by journalists for second wave feminism. In her research, five major frames were identified in news stories from mainstream U.S. media. Bronstein (2005) found that “journalists have relied heavily upon some of the stock frames that were used to construct the second wave to depict third wave feminism” (p. 795) and the using of frames resulted in the media’s providing its
audiences “a limited and partial account of modern feminism” (p. 795). Bronstein’s research shows how the frames used by journalists in the coverage of a social movement were constructed. It also provides insights of how these frames could be identified, articulated and compared.

Maeseele (2011) examined whether or to what extent the media in Northern Belgium facilitates the democratic debate over the GM (genetically modified) crop, a debate brought about by the coalition of social movements/NGOs (non-governmental organizations) in the second half of 1990s. The debate is characterized by its bearing of “risk conflicts” a quality also possessed by the particular frames identified in news articles. Maeseele (2011) found that two examined newspapers prefer science and industry over movements for the interpretation of news events while the other two have an opposite preference. Maeseele’s (2011) research provided hints that NGOs as a third sector of society are considered by the media as less legitimate than the government in the news reports.

Edgerly, Toft and Veden’s (2011) analysis of the protest paradigm in the coverage of immigrants’ rights protests in 2006 determined the protest paradigm was a powerful organizing principle in media coverage where organizers could evaluate their discursive resources as effective countermeasures. They argue that an “issue frame” was caused by the organizers’ reliance on “strategically ambiguous terms such as immigration reform and amnesty” (p. 329). In the media coverage, the representation of the protest group put emphasis on the ambiguous “frames” rather than on the ideology of the group. Hence,
Edgerly et al. (2011) conclude, “Mass-mediated polysemy presents a difficult challenge for political activists who seek to use the mass media to broadcast their goals” (p. 328). The research suggested that media coverage of protests within the conventional issue frames might cause the failure of communicating the real ideology of protest groups and as a result, disrespect their value.

A similar example was examined by Watkins (2001) of the framing in network television news coverage of the Million Man March. He found the news framing was patterned by Louis Farrakhan, a central character being reported on, and his appeal as a deviant newsworthy personality. He claims that by using Farrakhan as their primary focus in their framing practices, the news media omitted other frames that “could have rendered the march and the complex web of factors that ignited interests in it more recognizable” (p. 98). He concludes, “While the media spotlight generates attention for organized protest, it seldom, if ever, promotes the goals of movement practitioners” (p. 99). Such media representation of protests uses popular narratives to tell the story while losing the information of the goals of these groups.

On the contrary, media representation can also lead to successful social movement. For example, Sandberg (2006) combined discourse analysis and framing analysis to analyze an anti-globalization movement organization, Association pour la taxation des transactions financiers pour l’aide aux citoyens’ (ATTAC) success in Norway in 2001. Sandberg focused on the perspective of the social constructivism that emphasizes “the production of knowledge” (p. 210). Sandberg suggests that “the well
developed collective action framing” (p. 222) may be the reason of ATTAC Norway’s success in 2001 because the discourses embedding it may “have given the organization the crucial values of novelty and ‘truth’” (p. 222). In the media’s representation of the organization, the emphasized values of “novelty” and “truth” are crucial for the success of the movement.

While studies of America and European countries are useful, it is important to examine Chinese media framing because the Chinese media system is inherently different. In China, the media system has an authoritarian tradition and is controlled strictly in the reporting of diverse social groups. Chen (2005) analyzed the framing of Xinhua News Agency’s coverage of the new religious movement in China. His discourse analysis provided insight on how journalists told the story of Falun Gong and the government crackdown. By identifying the frames and narratives in the news reports, Chen found that Xinhua News Agency portrayed the Falun Gong group as “deviant”, “dangerous”, “evil” and an organization needed to be contained (p. 30). He also states that the Xinhua serves as a “lapdog” function in the Chinese government’s anti-Falun Gong campaign (p. 30).

Although little research has addressed Chinese media’s representation of social movements, there are scholars who have conducted discourse analysis of Chinese media representation of social problems. For example, Tong (2009) conducted a discourse analysis of three cases in Chinese media’s coverage of social problems. He found that when covering a social riot in China, the newspaper Dahe Daily originally created an
“opposition” between people and the government, but it had to make revisions to conceal social conflicts and lessen political criticism (Tong, 2009, p. 598). The topics of social problems are considered to be “political minefields” (Tong, 2009, p. 609) and any improper approach to them may cause political crackdown on news media (Tong, 2009). Unlike the result of Chen’s (2005) research, Tong points out that journalists were actually willing to tell the truth and provide criticism of the government but there existed a compromise of content to protect the newspaper.

Based on the literature discussed above, it is expected that Chinese news media are still under tight government control. Despite their freedom on reporting some issues and conflicts, they are considered as the mouthpiece of the party. Although Chinese NGOs are not as controversial as protest groups, they have an increasing ability of endangering the value of the party. Looking at the relationship between journalistic structure, political power and social sector, I ask the following research questions:

**RQ1**: Are Chinese grassroots NGOs framed in terms of an issue or a personality?

**RQ2**: Are Chinese grassroots NGOs portrayed as adversarial to the government’s policy?

**RQ3**: Are Chinese NGOs framed as a third sector in Chinese society?

In order to answer these questions, I analyzed the coverage in a single media outlet, Xinhuanet.com. As the online English news website of Xinhua News Agency, Xinhuanet.com is the most used source of Chinese news that is open to all the other countries in the world.
d) Methodology

A qualitative content analysis of Chinese media Xinhua News Agency’s coverage of NGOs in China was conducted. The news articles were gathered on xinhuanet.com, the English website of Xinhua News Agency. All the articles on the website are in English. As one of China’s largest state news agencies, Xinhua News Agency is considered to be a government bureaucracy and a political and ideological apparatus for the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) since it was founded more than 80 years ago (Hong, 2011, p. 377). News articles published by Xinhua News Agency are representative of the discourse developed between the power of CCP and the democratic values embody in the NGOs.

I searched key words such as grassroots NGO, Chinese NGO to identify the articles that have a theme of Chinese NGOs from the date of January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2012. I found 88 articles that used or contained information of Chinese NGOs. I chose the year of 2008 because after the Sichuan earthquake in May 2008 the participation of volunteers in NGOs during the relief of the disaster has increased the awareness of the value of NGOs from the Chinese state and the media (Shieh & Deng, 2011). Since no preexisting frames of Chinese NGOs have been identified in previous studies, I established the frames using constant comparative method. This involves an inductive process of forming a theory by comparing, namely coding, categorizing, delineating categories and connecting them (Boeije, 2002). By reading the text, I created a unique code for any new idea presented by the text. The newly established code was
compared with the previous ones to see if it elucidated any new meaning on the theme or if the existing codes needed to be modified in light of the current one (Frohlich, 2013). After examining all the materials available, I categorized similar codes into a single category that formed a frame. During the coding process, I specifically examined aspects of news framing, including types of stories, sources used, topics, and general evaluative orientation of news frames.

e) Findings

Instead of the expected frames of “deviant”, “dangerous” and “evil” (Chen, 2005, p. 30), the “opposition” against government authority (Tong, 2009), the stories of Chinese NGOs in the news reports were portrayed as a friendly third sector between the government and citizens in Chinese society. Among the 88 articles, 35 articles quoted NGO documents or used comments of NGO workers; 25 articles were short news reports about NGOs; 2 articles were official reports of Chinese NGOs; and 25 articles were long feature stories of specific NGOs. In the articles that quoted NGO documents and workers, the content was informative and the NGOs were viewed as a social sector that offered an aspect in specific social issues. Short news reports told stories that were associated with NGOs. The official reports were articles written in an official manner that provide statistics and the status of Chinese NGOs. Feature stories of NGOs were longer pieces of human-interest in-depth stories. Among these articles, five frames can be identified.

A. Associated topics. Topics reported with quotes from NGOs include environmental issues, education, AIDS preventions, elderly welfare, animal welfare,
domestic abuse, women and family issues, the gay community, medical assistance, hospice care, smoking-control, human trafficking and immigrant workers. Among the above topics, AIDS prevention, smoking-control environmental issues and education issues were the most prominent. For example, a news report about China’s suspension of closure of rural schools cited an NGO report on the social issue of fast disappearing high schools in rural area. It said,

An average of 63 rural primary schools and three junior high schools disappeared each day between 2000 and 2010, according to an NGO report issued by the Beijing-based 21st Century Education Research Institute (CERC). (Tang, 2012)

The citation provided specific statistics and it shows that the Xinhua News Agency accepts NGO as a valid source of information. In an article about a newly introduced program by the government that helps young offenders, Chinese Society for Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Research, the only NGO in the country that specializes in young offenders was quoted to provide comments about this program. The secretary-general of the organization pointed out that the new system still needed exploration because “there’s no standard about what kind of people are suitable for the role” (Cao, 2012) and the system “isn’t independent and it must be used with other articles” (Cao, 2012). The comments made by the NGO served as a voice that is valid to be heard but different from the government in the news. A similar example can be seen in a news article about a man who founded a school for migrant workers’ children. As the story concerned the social issue of restrictions of educational resources to migrant workers’ children in China, an
NGO worker was quoted to comment on the issue.

The existence of schools for migrant workers’ children reflects that public schools cannot provide enough educational resources for the children, and that the government did not actually shoulder its responsibility to provide equal access to education for everybody,” said Sun Heng, founder of a Beijing-based NGO named Migrant Workers Home Cultural and Development Center. (Lu, 2011)

In *Xinhua News*, non-governmental organizations, though not associated with the government, were frequently quoted when it came to social issues. Their voice mostly appeared in the field of education, animal welfare, environment, etc. As a result, Chinese NGOs have the ability of making their voice heard under the circumstances that appeared in the articles. Generally speaking, the NGOs in China have gradually been recognized as a social sector that is capable of commenting on the social issues and government policies.

Most of the topics associated with NGOs were those that have no political controversies, those of social issues that call for the awareness of the whole society. But the issue of human rights, which has drawn special attention from foreign countries, was actually positively associated with Chinese NGOs in the news. An article called “Official: NGOs can play bigger role in China’s human rights protection” described “the rapid growth of non-governmental organizations in China has played an increasingly important role in human rights protection” (Yan, 2008). The article said,

In a paper presented to a human rights seminar here, Wang described the NGOs
as "the third force and mechanism with a special advantage, besides the
government and the market, to contribute to the improvement and protection of
human rights." He added: "They have played a positive role in China's cause of
human rights protection, which regards the rights to live and to develop as core
issues." (Yan, 2008)

The topics associated with NGOs were all associated with the general benefit of society.

Negative coverage that might bring political controversy was not seen in the data.

**B. Human interest.** In the news coverage, a major way of portraying the NGO
workers was to personalize the story by featuring individual lives. This narrative
appeared in all of the feature stories that were lengthier than the other types of articles.
The personal choice of founding an organization or joining one was a common theme in
the story to portray an NGO worker. Sympathy and passion were both the qualities of
NGO workers as portrayed in the media coverage. Lu launched an NGO dedicated to
animal welfare and rescue and was portrayed as a well-educated lady who devoted her
retired life to animal welfare. Lu couldn’t tolerate the “barbarian and uncivilized side of
China” and she started her “mission to save abused animals and to awaken people’s
conscience so they treat animals properly” (An, 2010). The personal feelings of Lu
reported in the article show a human-interest emphasis of the story. Environmentalist Ma
Jun was the central character in a feature story of river pollution. The story started by
portraying Ma Jun as an environment fighter,

When Ma Jun stood on the banks of the mighty and yet polluted Yangtze River in
1994, he had vague idea that one day he would devote himself to a Mission Impossible: saving China's dying rivers. Named as one of 100 Most Influential Persons of 2006 by Time magazine, Ma has spared no efforts to raise public participation in environmental protection. Backing him up is a brand-new information platform linking government, businesses and ordinary people. (Gong, 2009).

Zheng Xiaojie, an NGO worker “loves to tell heartwarming success stories about her work with the blind” (Feng, 2011). A volunteer who devoted to helping students in remote and poor areas said “I have been waiting for this moment for eight years” after knowing the easier registration process for social organizations because of the new policy (An, 2012). Feng, who ran an NGO dedicated to helping parents of mentally challenged children, was portrayed as a determined social worker who even sacrifice the time she could spent with her family,

Feng’s work at the organization has not come without a price. Last year, she got divorced because her husband wasn't’ satisfied with the amount of time she was spending with him or her son. “I don’t feel guilty about the divorce. I hope one day my son will grow up and understand.” Feng said she fells a sense of accomplishment when she meets with parents she has helped in the past. (An, 2010)

Like the story of Feng, feature stories of NGOs in Xinhua often told the personal stories of the founders and volunteers in the association.
Personalization of NGO workers depicted them as a group of people who were passionate about helping others and solving social issues. When journalists deployed this frame, they brought this group of people to light with their personal stories. To a certain extent, the journalists glorified these social workers through detailed stories and suggested the importance of their work. In this sense, NGO workers are viewed as contributors to a better society rather than rebellion.

C. Difficulties. The frame of operation difficulties can be found in the data. This frame highlighted the challenges faced by NGOs and such challenges have been widely discussed in Xinhua News. For example, in an article titled “China’s NGOs spread HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness” the author approved the efforts of NGOs first then pointed out the difficulties faced by the NGO,

Despite these and other NGOs’ efforts in the fight against HIV/AIDS, homosexual rights NGOs continue to struggle into existence. To date, no homosexual rights NGO has registered with China's civil affairs authorities, due to their unique and unprecedented nature. Their ambiguous status poses difficulties in raising funds and holding meetings. (Deng, 2011)

Two major challenges were identified in the news coverage: a lack of funding and a lack of legislation. A report about environmental NGOs said “most environment NGOs still face problems including difficulty in raising money, shortage in personnel and weak organization ability in their development process” (Yao, 2008). Lu, head of China Small Animal Protection Association “struggles to get enough money, as member contributions
and donations always fall short” (An, 2010). In an article about the NGO called Community Development Center for Facilitators, the most experienced member “earns a monthly salary of 2,000 yuan (about 318.6 U.S. dollars), while the average disposable income of a Nanjing resident is about 2,800 yuan a month” (Zhang & Wang, 2012). The legislation problem concerning NGOs was discussed in a few articles. For example, one article reported,

Tang Guoping, head of the Guangzhou administration of NGOs, said that prior to the new regulations, many administrative bodies would be reluctant to act as supervisors for social organizations, as they feared it would mean taking on troubles or responsibilities. As a result, many social organizations ended up operating without being registered, a move that has hampered their activities and development. (An, 2012)

Another news article described the situation of charity legislation in China,

There has been strong public desire to pass a charity law ever since the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, during which time some of the biggest charity foundations failed to reach Chinese people’s expectations. But 3 years on, though a draft of the legislation has been finished, the law remains near the bottom of the agenda of the state council. Without such legislation, charitable NGOs, especially grass-roots foundations are vulnerable to public accusations. (Chen, 2011)

Many NGOs were facing the difficulty of operation because of the low salary the organization can offer. The people who work for NGOs were said to be “undervalued”
and “underappreciated” (Feng, 2011). Jobs offered by NGOs “cannot be filled by qualified people due to the low pay and the lack of opportunity for career development”(Wu, 2012). Issues about the operation of NGOs were discussed and analyzed in the news to inform the public about the cost of running an NGO and the unfairness of the underpaid people who work for the good of society.

While covering difficulties faced by Chinese NGOs, the media didn’t pose a direct criticism to the government’s policy. However, it is very common to encounter suggestions to the government posed by NGO workers and scholars in the news articles. In a news piece, a professor suggested, “Chinese government should mobilize more NGOs to join the fight against HIV/AIDS” (Deng, 2011). The government was advised in an article to “become a pusher instead of an obstacle for the development of social welfare and charity” (An, 2012). Wang qiyan, director of the Policy Research Center under the Ministry of Civil Affairs was quoted in an article to comment on the policies toward NGOs,

He said the country needs to give more support to the NGOs in terms of tax relief, financial assistance and less intervention from governments. "Governments should realize the importance of the NGOs that can be a helpful partner in the building and management of a diversified society," he said. (Yan, 2008)

A professor of Beijing Normal University, Cheng Huixia provided legislation advice in an article,
Cheng said governments should regulate areas such as financing, project operating management and financial management in order to prevent the organizations from becoming tools for private gain. (An, 2012)

By reporting about advice to the Chinese government’s policy towards non-governmental organizations, the NGOs were portrayed as a social sector that needed more support from the government. At the same time, the government’s attitude was depicted as positive towards social organizations’ contribution and work. The frame indicates that, NGOs are not viewed as negative forces by the media and they serve as a social sector that has the right to make their voice heard.

**D. Civil society.** Quite unexpectedly, words such as civil society and democracy were associated with the work of NGOs in the news stories. Because of China’s authoritarian tradition toward the media, these words related to a more democratic society are supposed to be forbidden in a communist media. However, a news article about China’s environmental NGOs complimented their work as “influencing the government’s policy making, supervising the government’s task of environment responsibility and raising public awareness in environmental protection” (Yao, 2008). In an official report, the role of NGO has been portrayed as a third sector of society that should supervise the government. *Xinhua* reported,

More importantly, the NGOs have worked as a bridge between citizens and governments in the drive to nurture a civil society and promote democracy at the grassroots level, he said. "As organizations, they can represent individuals to
voice their concerns, coordinate dialogues with the government, and supervise the
government, which are quite important to the building of democracy in China," he
said. (Yan, 2008)

In addition, *Xinhua* has closely related the value of civil society to the work of NGOs. In
a report about an earthquake relief, NGOs were said to be “sprouting up everywhere”
which was a star performer of “China’s civil society” (Lu, 2008). A scholar was quoted
for his comment on the NGOs’ performance in the article,

> Economic liberalization and a changing culture have placed far greater emphasis
> on the individual. The public is more aware that everyone counts. A strong and
> persistent consciousness of citizenship and civic responsibility is the foundation
> for a civil society that is indispensable to the establishment of a harmonious and
democratic China. (Lu, 2008)

In this sense, “democracy” and “civil society”, concepts cherished by capitalist countries
were not avoided as deviant in the communist media. But rather, they were constructed in
the news as positive goals in Chinese society, which were also recognized by the
government. Moreover, the NGOs were portrayed as the social sector that helped fulfill
such goals and values.

**E. Boom of NGO.** Statistics of NGOs in China have been reported through the
news with a suggestion of the booming fact of their status. A report said China’s
environmental NGOs have “doubled their number in the past three years” (Yao, 2008). It
said, “there are 3,539 environment NGOs in the country” and “the figure jumped by 771
from three years ago.” Another article reported that “the number of Chinese NGOs increased to 386,000 in 2007 from 266,000 in 2003” (Yan, 2008). *Xinhua* also reported the statistics from the Ministry of Civil Affairs, which showed that China had 457,500 social organizations in 2011 (An, 2012). Along with the increasing number of NGOs, their contribution to society was recognized in the news coverage. In areas such as “poverty eradication, disaster relief, medical care, education and environmental protection” (Yan, 2008) their contributions were described as huge. A report said,

Soon after the catastrophic earthquake in Sichuan in May, the Red Cross Society of China raised 15.84 billion yuan (2.3 billion U.S. dollars) in relief funds and facilities through its national network. Another well-known NGO, the China Youth Development Foundation, has helped more than 2.5 million school drop-outs go back to school through its flagship Project Hope since 1989, Wang said. He said more than 2,000 NGOs focusing on environmental issues began to demonstrate their power through actions such as initiating environmental protection projects and offering advice to policy makers. (Yan, 2008)

A report about environmental NGOs said, “58.6 percent of the organizations were involved in the energy saving and emission cutting work, and 11 percent participated in protecting people’s rights concerning environment protection” (Yao, 2008). The numbers and social influence of NGOs in the news coverage showed the growing attention about this social sector. Again, the booming of NGOs is viewed as positive to society, not as a negative force.
f) Discussion

From the findings of the news frames, it is quite obvious that the language toward Chinese NGOs is positive and friendly. Without avoiding words like democracy and civil society, Chinese NGOs are portrayed as an important sector of society. The functions of NGOs and their contributions to social issues are approved in the news articles. All in all, no negative report about social organizations could be found. There are two possible explanations to this result. One is that the media coverage eliminated the negative portrayal of NGOs because of the authoritarian tradition of Chinese media. This is because the government worries that NGO growth will lead to loss of political control and stability. It coincides with the argument made by Huang (2003),

While there is no control over a lot of issues in China, sensitive political and policy issues such as the independent movements in Taiwan and Tibet, foreign policy and open criticism of Chinese leadership and their major socio-economic policies are still constrained by the authority of the Chinese Communist Party. (p. 448)

The other explanation could be that since the NGOs in China survive by avoiding offending the government, their activities involve no political controversies.

In addition, the frames may show an implicit message that social organizations in China are indeed portrayed as serving a facilitative role to the government. One article emphasizes, “the direct registration has not changed the government’s responsibility to regulate social organizations in accordance with the rule of law” (An, 2012). In the news
articles, social organizations in this sense are free to solve social issues and the
government is actually supportive about that. The government’s efforts were reported in
the actions of simplifying the registration process and drafting a law to regulate China’s
Charity Sector. When talking about the development of social organizations, the
government’s official voice is always somewhere in the article, either it’s about the
regulation of NGOs, or the status of NGOs. The data indicates that NGOs’ work is not to
be against the government and the authority of Chinese government should not be
shattered because of this different social sector. By portraying NGOs as a social sector
and the supportive government in a definite manner, the media made a determined role
for the NGOs. In this sense, NGOs are supposed to work facilitating the central
government. This in return shows that Chinese media is not totally away from the
propaganda tradition in a communist society even though it can’t be obviously read in the
article.

For example, news about NGOs is written in a way to lighten the atmosphere of
severe situations that government should be responsible for. An article about the smoggy
weather in Beijing has created a narrative to transfer the attention of people by talking
about NGOs. The story started with a discrepancy between the U.S. Embassy's
measurements and data released by the capital's environmental watchdog in Beijing.
While the U.S. Embassy rated the air as “hazardous”, Beijing Municipal Environmental
Protection Bureau said the pollution was “slight” (Bi, 2011). The article focuses on a
Beijing-based NGO, Daerwen Nature Quest Agency and how the members and other
citizens tested the air on their own. It went on as an actively participated grassroots environmental watch, but little has been mentioned in terms of the government. Nothing about why the air is polluted so badly has been discussed, and there’s no information of how this polluted air would affect people’s health. The only official response says,

In the growing public debate over air quality, Du Shaozhong, deputy head of Beijing's environmental watchdog, is in the spotlight. Over the past month, he has faced a flurry of questions and criticism regarding air quality from Internet users.

Du said the grassroots campaign and ongoing public discussion are indications of China's rising environmental awareness. (Bi, 2011)

The response by Du contains no explanation of the pollution itself or any of the responsibility of the government. Instead, it talks about the “rising environmental awareness” which is a “positive” thing.

However, in a lot of circumstances, NGOs are also used as a social sector that’s independent from the government. To a certain extent, their voice is considered positive to society and legal to the government. In a report about bile bears in China, there’s no other criticism than some from the quotes of NGO workers. It reports an NGO staffer said it is possible that the farm gives local anesthetics to the bears during the extraction to make them look fine (Mo, 2012). In this case, NGO stands out of the general public to articulate a different voice from the business company. Similar cases are seen in the reports of AIDS protection, environmental protection and gay rights. In this sense, when it is about social issues in China that has no conflict to the government, the NGO has a
strong voice because of their organization and specialty in those areas. On the other hand, in those cases, the media tend to put their attention on the social work of NGOs rather than questioning the policies made by the government for the overall media environment is affected by the authoritarian tradition. However, by reporting the stories, suggestions to the government are provided by NGOs.

g) Conclusion

After the year 2008, Xinhua has portrayed Chinese NGOs in a positive way to inform the public about their contribution to solving social issues and being as a third social sector. It is difficult to say the authoritarian tradition of Chinese media is apparent in a way that the media is trying to suppress social organizations as a new force in society. In this sense, the media is certainly not a single purpose press that serves party and state policies (Huang, 2003). But it is also hard to say that all of the NGOs in society are openly discussed and have gained their voice for the possibility that NGOs with political controversies are generally ignored by Xinhua News to avoid problems from the central government. The findings tend to support Liu and McCormick’s (2011) argument,

“Even under the political pressure of the state’s intervention, the commercialized media have already created some space for alternative ideas and perspectives, and critical and rational debate on political issues, some of it explicit and much more of it implicit.” (p. 132)

This phenomenon may reflect an aspect of “Chinese society in social transition” (Liu & McCormick, 2011) where the media tend to be “strange” (Huang, 2003, p. 453). Because
the media is in transition, it can hardly be simplified by a single existing normative press model (Huang, 2003). The press performs dynamically whereas Chinese society undergoes social change. Such social change features in an expanding civil society where diverse and numerous social organizations came into being and actively engaged in social issues. While the non-governmental organizations have gained their right and power in the public sphere, “state decentralization and institutional transformation have created some limited political space for independent social groups” (Yang & Calhoun, 2008, p. 11).

This research is limited in that it was only focused on five years’ worth of articles from Xinhua News, a state news agency of China. Its representation of NGOs reveals only a small part of the media in today’s pluralistic media environment in China. Comparison of different frames in different media is not studied here and the whole picture of how NGOs are represented in Chinese media can’t be seen. Different news organizations and other media forms such as online forum and blogs may provide a different image of Chinese NGOs. Further research should take the transitional status of Chinese media into account to provide better insights of the already very complicated Chinese media.
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doi:10.1080/10670561003666103


doi:10.1080/0129298042000329775


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