

How Do Chinese Grassroots NGOs Fight Local Pollution? An Organizational Perspective

Yumin Wang

Supervisor: Kathinka Fürst, Ph. D

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Abstract

In recent years, the Chinese government started to encourage more stakeholders to participate in the environmental protection field. However, little information told us what role grassroots non-governmental organizations (GNGOs) can play in the environmental protection field. In this study, the development history of two GNGOs were traced in parallel. The two GNGOs were both established by environmental journalists who wished to mitigate local pollution. However, the development history of the two GNGOs were totally different. I found that two external factors could explain this difference: government's different willingness on pollution mitigation and the severity of the pollution. In order to mitigate the local pollution, both of the two GNGOs reached out to different stakeholders, especially government agencies, for cooperation. For the government, this cooperation is beneficial to fulfill their environmental protection responsibility. For the two GNGOs, the cooperation is a stable source of legitimacy, which is critical for GNGO's survival when they worked on pollution mitigation, a relatively controversial field in China. The cooperation, however, strongly depends on founder's personal relationship with different stakeholders. This dependency brought both of the two EGNGOs into the trap of elite governance.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Literature Review	5
2.1 How Chinese EGNNGOs Fight Against Pollution	5
2.2 The Unfavorable Political Environment for GNGOs in China.....	5
2.3 Understanding Chinese NGOs: Three General Frameworks	6
3. Methodology.....	6
3.1 Process Tracing and Comparative Study	6
3.2 Data Collection	8
3.3 Data Analysis Process	9
4. Pollution Faced by the Founder of the Two EGNNGOs.....	9
4.1 Huo Daishan and the Cross-Basin water pollution in Huai River, 2000.....	9
4.2 Huang and the Municipal Industrial Pollution in Guiyang, 2010.....	11
4.3 How the political background and pollution severity shaped founders' early opinion	11
5. Early Stage of the Two NGOs.....	12
5.1 Huo: Photo Exhibition	12
5.2 Huang: "All-citizen involved Green River Protection Action" (ACIGIPA) and Public Interest Litigation.....	13
5.3 How the Political and Environmental Background shaped the Early Stage Activity	14
6. Transformation of the Strategy	14
6.1 Huo: Targeting the Biggest Polluter, and Reporting the Water Pollution.....	15
6.1.1 Fighting Against Lotus Company: from Boycott to Cooperation	15
6.1.2 Reporting to the Media: Using China Central Television (CCTV) Interview in 2004 as an Example.....	16
6.1.3 Reporting to the Central Government	16
6.1.4 Operating Under the Pressure of Local Government.....	17
6.2 Huang: Selling Service to Local Government and to Companies	17
6.2.1 Selling Service to Supervise Hao Yiduo Signals the transformation of Huang's Organization	17
6.2.2 Selling the Service to the Local Government and Companies	18
6.3 Why the two Founders Chose Different Strategies After Transformation	19
7. Why Two EGNNGOs Chose Different Strategy: The Selective Cooperation Model	20
7.1 Finding Cooperation (Arrow 1, 2, 3): The Key to EGNNGO's Success in Mitigating Local Pollution	21

7.2 Cooperate with Different Stakeholders at Different Time (Arrow 4, 5): The Consequence of Chinese Top-Down Enforcement of Environmental Protection	22
7.3 The Cooperation Heavily Relies on the Personal Relationship of the Founder.....	23
7.4 The Pollution Brought the Two EINGOs Societal Support and Legitimacy (Arrow 6, 7, 8, 9), which is Unstable	23
8. Conclusion.....	24
Acknowledgement	24
Reference	25
Appendix.....	27

1. Introduction

The Chinese government has been ramping up its top-down environmental protection efforts in the past 40 years. Much has happened in these years. In 1982, the environmental protection office was just a bureau under the Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction and Environmental Protection. In 2007, Hu Jintao as the President of China proposed the concept of “Eco-civilization”, which was written into the Chinese constitution in 2018. In 2018, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment was established with the rank at the ministerial level. Along with central government’s raised awareness on environmental protection, the Chinese state is also pushing the local government and holding these agencies responsible for their environmental protection responsibilities. According to the environmental protection law of People’s Republic of China which was first formulated in 1979 and later revised in 2014, government officials failing to enforce the law face tangible legal liabilities ranging from receiving demerits to being expelled from their position.¹ In 2015, the Environmental Protection Central Inspection Team was set up by the central government to supervise local government officials on their environmental protection work. Under this supervision system, officials’ failure on fulfilling environmental protection responsibility will negatively affect their future promotion.²

The top-down environmental regulation initiated by Chinese central government is not always successful. There are many reasons for this. First, due to the de-centralized nature of the Chinese governance system, local governments are not always motivated to enforce the environmental protection tasks distributed by the central government (Economy, 2014). Evidences show that the local government sometimes tend to protect the local industries from environmental enforcement in favor of GDP growth (Tilt, 2013; Van Rooij, Zhu, Na, & Qiliang, 2017), since the GDP growth is one of the most important indicators deciding the promotion of local government leader (Zhou, 2007). Second, data accuracy. Since 1998, 113 key cities in China were required to weekly report the air quality data to the public. This report was required in order to create incentive for local government to regulate pollution. However, air quality data has not always been accurate, in some cases such data has been documented to have been manipulated by the local government (Ghanem & Zhang, 2014). Third, the local environmental protection bureaus do not always have enough human, technical, or financial resources to regulate all of the polluters in their jurisdiction (Zhan, Lo, & Tang, 2013). Fourth, the local environmental protection bureaus lack the independency from the local government (Ma, 2017).

In recent years, being aware of the ineffectiveness of top-down, state-control environmental governance, the Chinese government has explicitly encouraged more stakeholders to take part in the environmental protection field (Van Rooij, Stern, & Fürst, 2016). For instance, the environmental protection law revised in 2014 gave the legal basis, for the first time, to the qualified social organizations to file the environmental public interest litigation.³ Not only citizens and social organizations, but also the courts and prosecutors are increasingly taking part in the environmental regulatory arena in China. The traditional government-led environmental regulation is transforming into “regulator pluralism” (Van Rooij et al., 2016), where multiple stakeholders are

¹ Environmental Protection Law of People’s Republic of China (2014 Revised), Article 68.

² Regulations on central ecological and environmental protection supervision. State Council. Article 24.

³ Environmental Protection Law of People’s Republic of China (2014 Revised), Article 58.

participating in the environmental protection arena in addition to the government.

Among all of the emerging stakeholders in environmental protection field, the endeavors of environmental grassroots non-governmental organizations (EGNGOs) have not been fully documented. Even if there is no widely-acknowledged definition of grassroots non-governmental organizations (GNGOs), GNGOs in China can be generally regarded as non-profit organizations established by Chinese citizens, with certain level of autonomy from the government, and either registered or not registered in the civil affairs office (Spires, 2011). Although without enough attention, EGNGO's work on environmental protection should not be ignored. The most famous case was the suspension of the dam on Nu River: Around 2003, under the pressure from EGNGOs and other social organizations, the state-led dam project on Nu River in southwest China was suspended (Matsuzawa, 2011).

Until now, there is still little literature telling us the situation of EGNGOs in China. In this research, I traced the development history of two EGNGOs. Both of the EGNGOs were established by an environmental journalist who tried to mitigate the local pollution. Notably, both of the two EGNGOs have been worked for more than ten years and both survived, even if the political environment in China is not favorable for GNGOs. Through this study I seek to answer the following three questions. First, *what roles can EGNGOs play in the environmental protection field in China?* Second, and based on a preliminary analysis of the two case studies, *why have the two EGNGOs, which were established under similar circumstances with a similar goal, followed such a different development path and achieved such different regulatory results? Which factors can explain this difference?* Third, *which factors constrain the two EGNGOs in their development and operation? How the two EGNGOs react to these constraining factors?*

The rest of this paper is separated into seven sections. Section two summarizes the current literature about Chinese GNGOs and their work in environmental protection in China. Section three describes the qualitative methodology used in this study. Section four to section six traces the development history of the two EGNGOs. Section seven discusses the main findings and section eight concludes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 How Chinese EGNGOs Fight Against Pollution

Chinese EGNGOs have developed various strategies to fight against pollution, such as awareness raising, by which raising people's awareness of severity of the pollution and pushing government and enterprises to mitigate the pollution; community-based services for risk mitigation, by which reducing individuals' exposure to the pollution; discussion and collaborative problem-solving, by which initiating the dialogue with relevant industrial polluters to address the most environmentally and financially solutions to mitigate the pollution. Compared to western NGOs, Chinese EGNGOs tend to avoid using aggressive strategies to mitigate the pollution, such as public protest and boycott (Fürst, 2016). Aside from targeting the public and companies, members in some EGNGOs also advocate the local government to protect the environment. Three advocacy strategies have been documented: cultivating stable and interactive relationship with the government, carefully selecting the "frames" to present the preferred policy goals of the EGNGOs, and obtaining media exposure to mobilize societal support (Dai & Spires, 2018).

2.2 The Unfavorable Political Environment for GNGOs in China

Preliminary understanding of GNGOs' situation in China is helpful for us to understand the difference between the two EGNNGOs discussed in this study. Under the authoritarian regime, Chinese GNGOs face more constraint than in democratic countries. One common difficulty Chinese GNGOs face is registration. Only after the registration, the NGO becomes a legal organization. In order to register an GNGO, the founder need to first find a government sponsor as a "professional supervising unit" and then register in the Ministry of Civil Affairs. Finding the government sponsor, in most cases, is hard because of the cautious attitude of Chinese government toward GNGOs (Ashley & He, 2008). In an investigation on 263 Chinese GNGOs, 70% GNGOs were not registered properly, either completely not registered, registered as for-profit businesses, registered in Hong Kong, or claimed sponsorship "under another organization" which has no legal basis (Spires, Tao, & Chan, 2014). Spires (2011) describes the relationship between the Chinese government and GNGOs as "contingent symbiosis", which means that the cooperation between the Chinese government and GNGOs can exist when (1). the work of GNGOs is helpful for the government to fulfill governments' responsibility and (2). the work of GNGOs does not harm what the government calls "the stability of the society". The Chinese government tends to hold the attitude as "no recognition, no banning, no intervention" toward the NGOs which are not registered, as long as the unregistered NGOs do not harm the state security and social stability (Deng, 2010). From Hu Jintao's age to Xi Jinping's age, the state suppression on the grassroots activists and organizations has consolidated: there is less room for contentious participation, while the institutionalized political participation has persisted (Fu & Distelhorst, 2018).

2.3 Understanding Chinese NGOs: Three General Frameworks

Scholars have developed three frameworks to understand NGOs in China: the civil society framework, the privatization framework, and the organizational framework (Hsu, 2010). The civil society framework was developed based on the western neoliberal assumption that private/market initiatives are always preferable to state action (Hsu, 2010). Wood (1997) and Zhang and Ong (2008) contested this assumption by adopting privatization framework and argued that citizens lose their ability to hold anyone accountable when the state outsource the public services to the private. Hsu (2010) argued that both the civil society and privatization framework assume a zero-sum game between a monolithic state and NGOs, which contradicts the empirical evidence that Chinese NGOs are more interested in building alliance with the Chinese government. Hsu (2010) raised the organizational framework, arguing that state agencies and the NGOs are two organizations which need each other for constant supply of resources to survive.

3. Methodology

3.1 Process Tracing and Comparative Study

In this qualitative study, process tracing was applied to uncover and explain the difference between two EGNNGOs which both work on fighting against the local pollution. Different from experimental or statistical methods which are good at uncovering relatively simple casual relationships (Collier, 1993), process tracing "attempts to identify the intervening causal process—the casual chain and causal mechanism—between an independent variable and the outcome of the dependent variable" (Collier, 2011). The difference of the two EGNNGOs could not be explained by one or two factors. Instead, facing different external environment, the founders of the two EGNNGOs made different strategies to mitigate the local pollution. The different strategies impact

the subsequent development of the two EGNNGOs. As time goes by, the changing internal and external environment, again, forced the founders to change their strategy in mitigating the pollution. In another word, the difference between the two EGNNGOs was formed by numerous external and internal factors in the whole development history of the two EGNNGOs. In order to understand the difference between the two EGNNGOs and the casual mechanism behind this difference, process tracing was used in this study.

Two EGNNGOs were selected in this study: Guardian of Huai River (GHR) and Guiyang Public Environmental Education Center (GPEEC). Information about the two EGNNGOs were summarized in **Table 1**. Their geographic locations are showed in **Figure 1**. Both of the two EGNNGOs were established by an environmental journalist targeting local pollution. However, the two EGNNGOs were established in different time in different region. By choosing the two EGNNGOs with seemingly similar background and similar goal to achieve, I am able to focus on analyzing how the external and internal factors formed the difference between the two EGNNGOs. Also, both of the two EGNNGOs have been worked for more than 10 years, which gave me relatively long time period to observe how the two EGNNGOs manage to not only mitigate local pollution but also keep the operation of the grassroots organization.

Table 1. Major Difference Between the Two EGNNGOs.

Name of the EGNNGO	GHR	GPEEC
Location	Shenqiu County, Henan Province, China	Guizhou City, Guiyang Province, China
Founder	Huo, an environmental journalist	Huang, an environmental journalist
Time	The work started in 2000. Officially registered in 2003. Unregistered in 2005	Registered in 2010
Full-Time Employees	1~3	3~5
Cooperated with	The Central Government and Media	The Local Government and Companies
Severity of the Pollution (Relatively)	High	Low

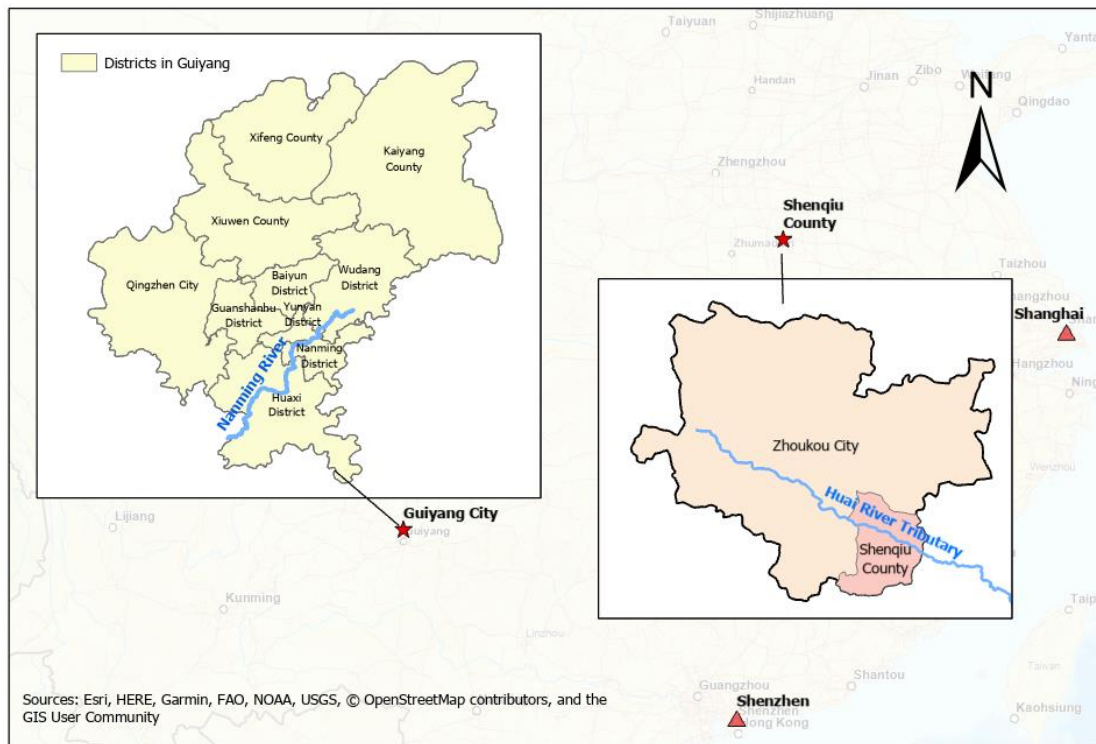


Figure1. Location of the two EGNGOs: GHR in Shenjiu County, GPEEC in Guiyang City.

3.2 Data Collection

I used both participatory observation and in-depth interviews to collect the firsthand data. I spent three months (1.5 months each) as an intern in the two EGNGOs in 2019. Prior to the arrival to the NGO, IRB was passed in Duke Kunshan University. As an intern, I participated in the daily work of the two EGNGOs. The internship experience gave me opportunity to observe how the two EGNGOs operated on a daily basis. My observation was manually recorded in paper notebook. Before the intern period, I already obtained the agreement of the founder of the two EGNGOs to use my internship experience as the data for my research.

Participatory observation may generate bias, because when the subjects know that they are under observation, subject's behavior may change accordingly. In my case, my subjects already knew that they are under observation. However, they would not change their behavior based on the following two reasons. First, I observed them for 45 days in each EGNGOs. In this relatively long time period, it was unlikely that the subject changes their behavior through the whole period. Second, instead of observing as an outsider, I participated into the daily work of the two EGNGOs. From my observation, the two EGNGOs welcomed me as a graduate student, and the NGO members sometimes even asked for my suggestion in their daily work. My observations were less likely to be biased because the two EGNGOs already regarded me as a member of their organization.

The participatory observation was helpful in understanding the daily work of the two EGNGOs. However, in order to answer the research question, I also needed to understand the history of the two organizations and contextualize them into the environment in which the EGNGOs were situated. Consequently, I used qualitative interviews to understand the personal opinion of the founder of two NGOs, such as why they chose different strategies to address the environmental problems where they worked on, their understanding of their current situation, and the future plan

for the organization, etc.

The interviews I conducted in the two EGNNGOs were mainly unstructured interview. Before I arrived at the two organizations, I prepared a question list for the interview. However, after I arrived at the two EGNNGOs, I found that some of the questions could be more easily answered through observations (e.g. the daily work of the volunteers in the two NGOs). Meanwhile, more questions that I did not expect appeared as my observation got deeper. Consequently, I started to focus on the questions which may help me to deepen the understanding of the two NGOs, instead of only focusing on the questions I prepared before arrival. Thus, un-structured interview was chosen as the interview strategy used in this research.

Because both of the two organizations have been active for a relatively long time (GHR for 20 years and GPPEC for 10 years), collecting all the data was still hard in only three months field work. Thus, second-hand data was also used, which includes website information, internal materials shared by the NGO members, etc. The accuracy of the information collected from these secondary resources was always triangulated with the information I got in the interview and observation.

3.3 Data Analysis Process

The interviews I conducted were transcribed into MS Word documents. Then, the diaries and the transcription of the interviews were coded in Nvivo. The coding was inductive to avoid *a priori* theory about the grassroots NGO which could have influenced the interpretation and led to omitting some important information. In the coding process, I organized the important events happened in the two EGNNGOs chronologically for the process tracing. The important timepoints for the two EGNNGOs were summarized in **Appendix A**.

4. Pollution Faced by the Founder of the Two EGNNGOs

The two environmental journalists established their EGNNGOs to fight against the pollution. However, the severity of the pollution was different. The local government also held different attitude toward the pollution regulation. Understanding these two differences is important for us to understand the subsequent different development path of the two EGNNGOs.

4.1 Huo and the Cross-Basin water pollution in Huai River, 2000

Huo's EGNNGO, GHR, was established in response to the well-reported water pollution in Huai River Basin (HRB) around 2000. Huai River is located in middle east China crossing four provinces: Anhui, Shandong, Jiangsu, and Henan. After the reform and opening up policy was established, numerous factories were built along the HRB. On one hand, these factories triggered the economic growth in the HRB. On the other hand, the pollution brought by the industrialization became increasingly severe in the HRB. Wang Guanyi, the previous village party secretary (*cun zhi shu*) recalled what happened in Shenqiu County near Huai River in 1990s:

“The pollution started at the end of ‘People’s commune (ren min gong she)’ period. It was required that every production team (sheng chan dui) need to initiate subsidiary business (fu ye) and establish industry (gong ye).....In 1994, the pollution had already been very serious...There was several pollution source at Xiang Cheng city. A MSG factory⁷, a leather factory, and some paper mills...When the wind blow south, the smell was intolerable (the river is at the

⁷ The MSG factory is the Lotus Company

north of the village where Wang lived in)... Water was as black as soy sauce (jiang you)”.⁸

The central government realized the severity of the pollution issue in the HRB and took some actions against water pollution. In 1974, the Beijing leaderships established the Huai River Valley Bureau of Water Resources Protection and the Huai River Conservancy Commission of the Ministry of Water Resource. However, these officials had no funding and no authority in regulating the Huai River pollution crossing four provinces.⁹ In 1993, the Director of the Bureau of Water Resources Protection was complaining that no authorities can really resolve the Huai River Pollution.¹⁰ The local government, on the other hand, tried to hide the pollution when the investigation team from the central government came to check the water pollution. As Wang Guanyi recalled:

“Xie Zhenhua¹¹ and Songjian¹² also came to Shenqiu County to investigate the pollution. When the leaders from top (shangmian de lingdao) came to investigate, the leaders from the bottom (xiamian de lingdao) tried to hide.....Before Song Jian came, the municipal government opened the dam gate ,and the river water rushed away the pollution. Song came, saw the river and asked: ‘What is going wrong? There is no problem with the water quality!’”¹³

Huo, the founder of GHR, was also a resident living in Shenqiu County near Huai River. Before 1998, he was a journalist serving in Henan Pictorial and Zhoukou Daily. As a journalist concerned about water pollution, he took lots of photos of the pollution. However, he could not publish these photos, since the pollution was a sensitive topic. In 1998, Huo voluntarily resigned from the newspaper office and started taking photos for the Huai River Pollution. Huo’s original plan was to package these photos up and send them to the central government to show the severity of Huai River Pollution. The severity of the pollution and the local government’s rejection on regulating the pollution formed the attitude of Huo. As Huo explained:

“The signal from the central government was clear: we cannot follow the path of ‘grow first, clean up later’.....But the enforcement at the local level was different. The decision from the central government was not implemented at the local level.....There was no fine on the pollution companies. The companies were big and were protected by the (local) government. The Lotus Company¹⁴, for example, had lots of badges (issued by the government) at the front door, saying ‘Strictly Protected Company (zhongdian baohu danwei)’.¹⁵

Huo thought the local government’s inaction was the problem of everything. At the bottom, the local government was closing its ears to the complaint from the citizens and protected the local companies as their main taxpayers. Towards the top, they hid the pollution issue from the

⁸ W.G., 20190527

⁹ See “The River Runs Black” by Elizabeth C. Economy, page 3

¹⁰ See “The River Runs Black” by Elizabeth C. Economy, page 3

¹¹ Xie Zhenhua was the Director of the State Environmental Protection Administration, from 1998-2005

¹² Song Jian was the head of State Environmental Protection Commission, in 1996

¹³ W.G., 20190527. Huo Daishan, 20190507

¹⁴ The Lotus Company was the China biggest MSG company, which is located in Xiangcheng City, a county-level city neighboring and at the upstream of Shenqiu County where Huo lived in.

¹⁵ Huo, 20190507

investigation team sent by the central government. As a journalist, he hoped to use the photos to show the central government how severe the pollution was.

4.2 Huang and the Municipal Industrial Pollution in Guiyang, 2010

Huang established GPEEC in 2010. Before 2010, Huang was also an environmental journalist serving in the Guiyang Daily. However, compared to Huo in 1990s, Huang in 2010 was in a very different situation.

First, compared to Huai River Basin, the pollution issue was less severe in Guiyang where Huang lived. In 2010, 27.2% rivers (by total length) in Guiyang administrative region were classified as worse than grade five (*lie wu lei*).¹⁶ In comparison, 53.2% of Huai River and its tribute (length) in 2000 Henan were classified as worse than grade five.¹⁷ Furthermore, 90.3% of Guizhou urbanites got water for daily use from the urban water supply facilities, while the villagers near HRB use polluted river water for daily use with no purification process back in 2000.¹⁸ Second, the CCP Party Sectary of Guiyang City, Li Jun, had high awareness of environmental protection when Huang's EGNGO was established. In 2007, Li Jun became the Party Secretary of Guiyang City. In the same year, Guiyang Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China issued "Decision on Building an Ecologically Civilized City"¹⁹. In 2009, Guiyang Municipal People's Congress Standing Committee approved "Regulations of Guiyang City on Promoting the Construction of Ecological Civilization", which was the predecessor of the first Chinese regional law focusing on the ecological conservation²⁰. Li Jun described in an interview²¹ published in the Southern Weekend why he prioritized ecological conservation in Guiyang:

"After I came to Guiyang, I had been thinking...Comparing GDP (with other cities) is not smart...We need to maximize our advantage and avoid our disadvantage. Our advantage is our ecology. Guiyang is a city have lots of natural resource. To some extent, we had fallen into the resource trap.....In 1990s, Guiyang was once listed as top 10 polluted city in the world.....When we made our plan for development, we only focused on mineral resource. But now we find that the biggest resource for Guiyang is the weather, the ecology....."

Huo, in his own word, faced a local government which hopes to hide the pollution from the central government. By contrast, Huang met a municipal leader who sets the goal of development as ecological conservation. Even if the Guiyang local government wished to regulate the pollution, the pollution issue such as illegal emission and open dumping still existed in Guiyang. Addressing these environmental problems was the goal of Huang's upcoming EGNGO.

4.3 How the political background and pollution severity shaped founders' early opinion

Understanding the difference of political environment and the nature of the pollution are

¹⁶ Guizhou Province Water Resources Bulletin 2010, by Guizhou Provincial Water Resources Department. See: http://mwr.guizhou.gov.cn/slgb/slgb1/201610/t20161021_19648509.html

¹⁷ Water Resources Bulletin 2000, by Hydrology and Water Resources Bureau of Henan Province. See: <http://www.hnsl.gov.cn/gallery/ff8080812b1a47b4012b1b5f03190ac4.html>

¹⁸ W.G., 20190527. Wang Linsheng, 20190423

¹⁹ For full text, see: <http://gymg.cn/article/1062.html>

²⁰ Ministry of Natural Resources, see:

http://www.mnr.gov.cn/zt/hd/dqr/44earthday/stwm/xdcx/201304/t20130409_2057588.html

²¹ For full text, see: <https://cul.sohu.com/20100913/n274905222.shtml>

important for us to understand the strategy the two founders going to make in fighting against the pollution. Huo was in Henan rural area. In Huo's opinion, the local government not only refused to regulate the pollution, but also hid the pollution from the investigations from the central government, which were seen as the hope of local residents on being rescued from the pollution. Huang was luckier: the municipal leader, Li Jun, showed strong signal on his willingness to regulate the pollution and conserve the ecology. The government's attitude toward the pollution regulation had strong impact on the decision making of the two founders. Huo first chose to find support from the public to give pressure on the local government and companies to stop the pollution. Huang, on the other hand, started to reach out to local officials to find cooperation.

Compared to the political background, the difference of pollution's severity also influenced the decision making of the two founders. Unlike Huang, a resident in the provincial capital with little need to concern the effect of pollution on his daily life, Huo saw the effect of the pollution on himself and the people around him every day. The urgency of the pollution required Huo to take action with immediate short-term effect (stop the pollution as quick as possible), while Huang had more time to sit down and to think about the long-term benefit of his strategy.

5. Early Stage of the Two EGNNGOs

Both of the two EGNNGOs initiated public activities in different ways with different outcomes. Huo started to exhibit the pollution photo to the public on the street. The exhibition educated local residents the severity of the pollution. By contrast, Huang initiated "All-citizen involved Green River Protection Action" (ACIGIPA), by which mobilizing citizens to find the pollution in Guiyang and to report to the local government. The public activities recruited lots of volunteers for the two EGNNGOs. Different from Huang, Huo also wished to use the wide support from the volunteers to protect himself from the potential suppression from the local government.

5.1 Huo: Photo Exhibition

Since 1998, Huo resigned from his journalist position and started to take pictures of the pollution in HRB. After 3 years, Huo took 20,000 pictures together. These pictures became impressive proofs of the HRB pollution. Huo exhibited the photos in his hometown, Shenqiu County, and other places including Anhui Province, Zhengzhou City, and Beijing City to show the people how severe the pollution was. Along with the photo exhibition, Huo also collected signatures from the people who supported his work. Huo called it "ten thousand signatures (*wan ren qianming*)". Huo's work got silent consent from the Shenqiu County government. To some extent, Shenqiu county was also the victim of the water pollution came from the upstream.

The wide support from the society inspired Huo on continuing his environmental protection work instead of just simply collecting the photos and sending them to the central government. Around 2000, Huo met Liang Congjie, the founder of Friend of Nature, which was the Chinese first environmental NGO. The meeting with Liang Congjie inspired Huo to think about establishing his own NGO:

Q: When did you met Liang Congjie?

Huo: 1999? 2000? I could not remember the exact date. It was before the establishment of GHR anyway. That was the first time that I knew there was something like NGO. My heart was beating.....We only knew that we had basic rights from the constitution, such as the freedom of speech, press, and

association, but we did not know how to use them. By that time, three people gathering together could be regarded as illegal!

Q: What did you feel when you saw the NGO (Friend of Nature)?

Huo: Shocked, and the thrill you feel before you make up your mind. The hope, and lots of worries.

Q: What were you worry about?

Huo: I had been worked in the government. I knew how the local government will use the power in their hand to counteract. I knew.....I was in a county, not in Beijing. I was too far from the State Council.....²²

Huo's own explanation on why he collected thousands of signatures helps us understand how he tried to protect himself:

"I collected the signatures strategically. There had been other three 'Guardians' in China. Why I am the only one who is still able to work? Because of my strategy!..... One day if I am in danger, I can say, come to see the ten thousand signatures!"²³

Along with all of these public activities, Huo established his EGNGO, officially named "Huai River Ecology Research Center" in 2001. Two years later, in 2003, Huo found Science and Technology Bureau of Shenqiu County as his supervision department and registered his NGO. Huo used the name "research center" to avoid any relationship with environmental protection during the registration, which in Huo's opinion was a sensitive topic.

5.2 Huang: "All-citizen involved Green River Protection Action" (ACIGIPA) and Public Interest Litigation

GPEEC was established in 2010. In 2011, GPEEC initiated "All-citizen-involved Green River Protection Action" (ACIGIPA).²⁴ By the time of 2012, ACIGIPA had mobilized more than 2,000 volunteers with various background, such as provincial and municipal people's congress representatives, members in Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), legal workers, journalists, water law enforcement personnel, civil society organizations, and urban and rural residents. Activities included submitting suggestions to the municipal government about regulating the scattered coal kilns in Guiyang city, inviting journalists from CCTV to report the transboundary pollution issue in the Hongfeng Lake (a lake in Guiyang), and encouraging families in Guiyang to "adopt" rivers in Guiyang and monitor the river water quality. ACIGIPA received positive outcome: the suggestion about regulating coal kilns was adopted by the municipal government; coal kilns were closed after the report; 126 families adopted the rivers and put effort in investigating the pollution sources along the river.

Another endeavor GPEEC tried was experiments with public interest litigation which was not yet legally recognized. The most famous one was the litigation against Dingpa paper mill. In 2010, GPEEC collaborated with Department of Litigation of the All China Environmental Federation (ACEF) to sue the Dingpa Paper Mill in Guiyang (Fürst, 2016). Dingpa Paper Mill had long been illegally and secretly emitting the sewage into the Nanming River at night. After GPEEC and ACEF filed the litigation, the Qingzhen court heard the case and ordered the mill to immediately stop the emission.

²² Huo, 20190507

²³ Huo, 20190507

²⁴ See GPEEC's website: <http://www.gyepchina.com/557/571/249>

This litigation has been reported by CCTV and Daily Legal, and was listed as one of the Nine Model Cases involving Environmental Resources Issued by the Supreme People's Court.

5.3 How the Political and Environmental Background shaped the Early Stage Activity

Both of the two EGNNGOs initiated public-involved activities in the early stage of the two EGNNGOs. This kind of activities quickly gathered large number of volunteers for the two EGNNGOs. Previous literature also found that grassroots generally have huge amount of volunteers (Spires et al., 2014). However, even if we see that both the two NGOs raised volunteers by public-involved activities, the goal and result of the two NGOs, or their two founders, were not same. Huo started the photo exhibition to educate the people how severe the water pollution was. More importantly, Huo also wished to protect himself by finding support from the society. Huang, on the other hand, did not have this concern. Huang's ACIGIPA motivated volunteers to find the pollution issue in the city they lived in. Different from Huo's photo exhibition, after finding these environmental problems, Huang and volunteers could directly report these pollution issue to the local government. The local government solved them.

Why did the two EGNNGOs started both the public-involved activities, but based on such different reason and led to different result? Two factors were helpful to explain these differences: the willingness of local government to regulate the pollution and the severity of the pollution. In Huo's personal opinion, it was impossible to cooperate with the local government in mitigating the pollution. Huo also thought that his work would trigger the local people's disappointment on the local government. Facing the severe pollution in HRB, he went out to the street to find the support from the local residents by photo exhibition. In contrast, Huang's NGO was born in a more favorable political environment. The municipal leader of Guiyang City, namely Lijun, set the ecological conservation as the priority of Guiyang's development plan in 2007. If Huo saw no hope to get support from the local government, there was no reason for Huang to think so. Before the established of his NGO, Huang already "intentionally" started to find the support from the local government.²⁵ Little information told us how Huang established the personal relationship with government officials, but the outcome is clear: Huang's work, more or less, has the back up from the local government leader. The pollution in Guiyang was also less severe than the pollution in HRB. Thus, Huang had little need to go on to street to take relatively aggressive ways to mitigate the pollution.

6. Transformation of the Strategy

The large-scale public activities brought volunteers for the two EGNNGOs. However, these large-scale activities were not financially sustainable. Hosting these activities requires lots of money, which was mostly supplied by the founders themselves.²⁶ Short after the early stage public activities, both of the two founders changed their strategies. In order to mitigate the local pollution, Huo started to target the locally biggest polluter and also started to cooperate with the central government and the media. Huang, on the other hand, started to cooperate with the local government and companies to help them regulate the pollution. Huo and Huang cooperated with different stakeholders to mitigation the pollution. For both the two EGNNGOs, however, the

²⁵ Jun 24, B, GPEEC

²⁶ H.M., 20190507. Jul.15, B, GPEEC.

cooperation strongly depended on the social resource the founder had.

6.1 Huo: Targeting the Biggest Polluter, and Reporting the Water Pollution

Huo first organized the boycott against Lotus after gathering support from the local residents with photo exhibition. On the other hand, Huo's personal fame was increasing because of his early stage photo exhibition work. This personal fame helped him to reach out to the central government and media for help on regulating the local pollution.

6.1.1 Fighting Against Lotus Company: from Boycott to Cooperation

Lotus company was the locally biggest factory and polluter in the Xiangcheng County, which was in the upstream of Shenqiu County. Meanwhile, GHR was still a family-based NGO with three full-time members: Huo and his two sons. Unable to target all of the polluters in the HRB, Huo targeted the biggest polluter in the HRB: Lotus company.

In order to push the Lotus company to mitigate its pollution, the GHR initiated the boycott against Lotus. Huo's son joined Huo in the early 2000. In order to encourage the volunteers to boycott the Lotus company, Huo's son established a website to encourage people stop buying the aginomoto from the Lotus company. The website drew the municipal government's attention. Soon after the establishment of the website, the server of the website was destroyed by the local government.²⁷ Meanwhile, Huo tried to communicate with the managers of Lotus. The communication was refused.

The early stage of the protest against Lotus company was frustrated. However, as time went by, the circumstance changed. Around 2005, the central government started to regulate the MSG industry, which was a pollution intensive industry. Gradually, the Lotus company started to accept the dialogue with GHR. When I asked the reason behind the transformation of Lotus company's attitude toward GHR, Huo answered:

"The power of both side (GHR and Lotus) changed. At the beginning, we were powerless. Afterwards, the policy from the central government and the voice from the media became increasingly unfavorable to the Lotus Company.....Some investigation teams from the central government came. The Lotus company still wanted to hide the pollution, but the central government knew that and found the evidence of their pollution.....The boss of Lotus was fined CNY 200,000.

The meaning (of this fine) was that the Lotus, which was the banner of the MSG industry, was crashed! They were (actually) touchable.....Why Lotus changed their attitude? Because they wanted to survive (from the environmental regulation)"²⁸

Around 2005, the Lotus finally agreed to communicate with the GHR. Huo affirmed that Lotus had the sincerity for cooperation: the wastewater treatment facilities of Lotus Company started to work. The first thing that Huo advised Lotus to do was to build trust with the local residents. Taking GHR's advice, the Lotus established the Public Sign of the Pollution Emission on which showing its emission information to the public. Lotus also started to recycle the wastewater instead of emitting them directly into the river. Out of Lotus's expectation, the recycling of the wastewater even brought net revenue for the Lotus. Both Huo and the Lotus were satisfied with the cooperation

²⁷ Y.J.. 20190525

²⁸ Huo, 20190602

between the two parties. Huo calls the cooperation the “Lotus Model” proudly. In the rest of his career, Huo frequently introduced the model to other companies who wanted to cooperate with him or took his advice on pollution mitigation.

6.1.2 Reporting to the Media: Using China Central Television (CCTV) Interview in 2004 as an Example

From 2000 to 2010, Huo had been actively communicating with the journalists from both the media from Beijing and other countries to report the cancer village in Henan. Among the cooperation with the media, the cooperation with CCTV in 2004 was one of the most important one. In this cooperation, Huo and a party secretary in a village were interviewed by the journalists from CCTV. In the interview, the village party secretary showed to the journalists the severity of the water pollution and how the pollution threatened villagers’ life. The interview was presented in CCTV, which was one of the most influential TV channels in China. Sooner after the show was presented in CCTV, the local government invested money for the party secretary’s village to dig a deep well to supply villagers with clean drinking water.²⁹ According to the village party secretary, without the CCTV show, it was impossible for the well to be dug by the local government.³⁰

According to Huo, the party secretary of Zhoukou City (the city governing Shenqiu County) was irritated by the CCTV interview.³¹ The interview shamed the local government on its failure on protecting villagers from the water pollution. After the interview was showed in CCTV, the village’s party secretary was dismissed.³² On the next year, the Science and Technology Bureau of Shenqiu County felt the pressure from its higher-up, thus refused to rectify the annual examination of Huo’s organization. Since passing the annual examination was the requirement of being a legal NGO, Huo’s NGO became illegal.

6.1.3 Reporting to the Central Government

Starting from 2005, the Chinese government commissioned the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) started to investigate the relationship between the water pollution and cancer prevalence in HRB. However, according to Huo, local government still tried to intervene in the investigation. Huo managed to get connection with Yang Gonghuan, who was the deputy director of CDC in charge of the cancer investigation. After meeting with Yang, Huo told her the pollution issue in and around Shenqiu County. In 2014, “*Atlas of water environment and digestive tract cancer death in huaihe river basin*” (Yang & Zhuang, 2014) was published. This was regarded as the first scientific evidence which proved the casual link between the water pollution and the cancer break out in Huai River Basin.

Except for the cooperation with CDC, Huo also got connected with officials in the Ministry of Environmental Protection. In 2011, officials in the Ministry of Environmental Protection established “Environmental Protection Express” with Huo. Huo could directly call officials in the Ministry of Environmental Protection to report the pollution issue. According to Huo, the Henan stadholder had been invited to Beijing to discuss the environmental protection issue after Huo’s call.³³ Huai River Conservancy Commission of the Ministry of Water Resource was also friendly to Huo. The

²⁹ W.L., 20190413

³⁰ W.L., 20190413

³¹ Huo, 20190511

³² W.L., 20190413

³³ Huo, 20190511

commission, even if was established by State Council, had no real power to coordinate four provinces to regulate the Huai River Pollution. However, when Huo asked the commission to help him conduct water quality testing, commission always accepted the request with no charge.

6.1.4 Operating Under the Pressure of Local Government

Huo's boycott against Lotus Company and reporting the pollution brought his EGNGO the biggest opponent: the Zhoukou Municipal Government. Huo's EGNGO not only targeted the biggest taxpayer, Lotus, but also brought the failure of the local government in addressing the pollution issue into the public sphere.

GHR's daily work was thus under pressure of the local government. The server of the GHR website was destroyed, and the organization was unregistered in 2005. Huo and his family was under harassment from the police. As a family-based NGO, these difficulties were not ignorable. After the cancellation of the registration, Huo's EGNGO could not receive funding in normal channels anymore. Policeman's intervention made it harder for the Huo and his son to conduct daily work.

Into Xi's age, the intervention from the government has disappeared. Even if Huo's organization is still illegal, his work continues. From 2016, Huo started a biodiversity conservation program in the Tongbai County, which is located in the source of the Huai River. Huo connected to the NGOs at Beijing to conserve the endangered species at Tongbai. Building up personal relationships with the forest keepers in Tongbai County, he tries to improve the living standard of forest keepers with his social relationship.

However, the future for Huo's EGNGO is still pessimistic. The severe pollution in the Huai River is gone, and so as the support from the local residents. Huo's public protest became a history, which only exists in local people's memory. Additionally, Huo's organization is still unregistered, which made it very hard to raise money from the foundations. How Huo would find a new field for his organization to keep working on is still in doubt.

6.2 Huang: Selling Service to Local Government and to Companies

From top, Huang had the support from local government which Huo did not have. From bottom, Huang gathered the volunteers. How he found a sustainable way to gather funding? His personal money was "used up" by the early stage public interest litigation and ACIGIPA.

6.2.1 Selling Service to Supervise Hao Yiduo Signals the transformation of Huang's Organization

Hao Yiduo was a dairy company located in Qingzhen City, a county-level city subordinate to Guiyang city. Like Dingpa case, in 2012, APEC sued Hao Yiduo for emitting untreated sewage into the environment.³⁴ In the court, the plaintiff (APEC) and the defendant (Hao Yiduo) agreed to settle out of court. Hao Yiduo agreed to stop the emission immediately and upgrade the treatment facilities to prevent future pollution. However, both the court and the APEC, which headquartered in Beijing, had limited human resources to supervise Hao Yiduo to fulfill its commitment.

Right after the case, on December 31, 2013, Huang's organization signed the organization's first contract with Hao Yiduo. As the third-party supervisor, Huang's organization was in charge of supervising Hao Yiduo's fulfilling of its commitment. During the supervision time, Huang's organization organized expertise in water treatment field to make sure that Hao Yiduo stopped the emission, and the newly implemented water treatment facility could achieve the requirement of

³⁴ GPEEC's official website. See: <http://www.gyepchina.com/557/583/171>

the national standard. Expertise as the volunteers in GPEEC were both capable and willing to give Hao Yiduo advice on how to upgrade the water treatment facility. The suggestion helped Hao Yiduo to meet the emission standard in a cost-effective way.

This case became the milestone of GPEEC. Signing the contract was found to be a stable funding source for GPEEC. Just like a core member in Huang's organization said:

"Before the case of Hao Yiduo, all the fees were covered by Huang himself..... We just held some public activities..... We were also thinking about what we could do On 2013, ACEF paid us to supervise the recitify of Hao Yiduo, until then we knew that we can sell over service!"³⁵

6.2.2 Selling the Service to the Local Government and Companies

Since the first contract with Hao Yiduo, more organizations signed the contract with GPEEC to buy their service. Firstly, Huang signed contract with the local government. In the end of 2013, the Qingzhen Municipal government signed contract with GPEEC for two years. In the contract, GPEEC as the service provider needed to supervise the companies in the jurisdictions of Qingzhen government to comply with the environmental protection law. Another duty was supervising the government department to perform environmental protection duty. Not only the Qingzhen municipal government, but also the Guanshanhu district government signed the contract with GPEEC.³⁶

How Huang cooperated with the local government to address the pollution issue? On the one hand, Huang and his volunteers searched the pollution issue in Guiyang jurisdiction. Some simple pollution issues were directly reported to the local government. For some complicated pollution issue, Huang would investigate the origin of the pollution and give the government suggestions about how to address the pollution issue. As Huang explained to other members in his EGNCO:

"Finding and addressing the pollution problem are the soul of our organization. After you find the pollution, you need to investigate it. Which government department is in charge of solving it? The mayor and the district head know nothing about the pollution. We investigate the pollution, then give succinct suggestions to the government leaders about how to solve the problem. This is how to help the government!The government do not pay us to simply expose the pollution. We also need to tell them how to solve the pollution."³⁷

An example of how Huang helped the local government to solve the floating rubbish in Nanming River, one of the mainstreams in Guiyang City, illustrated how Huang helped the government leaders to solve the pollution issue. Here is a memo excerpt in an internal meeting including Huang, government officials from different districts, and the companies near Nanming River:

"Today we investigated the problem of floating rubbish on Nanming River. Municipal Water Bureau, River Chief Office, Huaxi District Government, Yunyan District Government, Nanming District Government, Wudang District Government, Economic Development Zone Management Committee, Municipal River Management Office, Guiyang Public Education Environment Center and Related Enterprises attended.

³⁵ Jun 15, B, GPEEC

³⁶ See GPEEC website: <http://www.gyepchina.com/566/576/83>

³⁷ Jun 8, 2020. B.

Huang Chengde first introduced about the floating rubbish issue on Nanming River. After the discussion, the meeting decided: A. The corresponding bureaus need to clean up the floating rubbish in their jurisdiction and set up the slag net (to block the floating rubbish). B. The enterprises shall clear their rubbish under government's supervision. C. River Chief's office and GPEEC supervises the enforcement of the cleaning work. D. River Chief offices and GPEEC need to further investigate the floating rubbish issue in other Guiyang rivers.”³⁸

The suggestion Huang gave on solving the problem was not complicated: the corresponding departments needed to clean the rubbish in their jurisdiction. The importance of Huang's work was that Huang was able to convene the numerous government departments together, clearly define the responsibility of each department in the rubbish cleaning work and supervise the enforcement.

Like signing contracts with the local government and helping the bureaus to address the pollution issue, Huo also signed the contract with the companies.³⁹ As the service provider, Huo helped the companies to comply with the environmental protection law. For companies which were willing to comply with the environmental protection law and cooperate, GPEEC provided engineers and expertise, also as volunteers, to give suggestions to the company about how to reduce emission. Companies were willing to accept this “soft” regulation, because they could upgrade steadily and avoid the punishment from EPB. GPEEC still occasionally initiate litigation towards the companies which violated the law. But the companies under sue were only the companies which are unwilling to cooperate and refuse to rectify. Huang's cooperation with companies also reduced the workload of EPB: the violations of the environmental protection law were reduced by GPEEC's work.

6.3 Why the two Founders Chose Different Strategies After Transformation

The two founders transferred working strategy after early-stage public activities. Huo turned to target Lotus and reached out to the media and the central government to expose the local pollution. Huang cooperated with the local government and companies. Among all the outside factors which could explain strategical difference after the transformation, the government's willingness on pollution mitigation was still the most obvious one. Huo reached out to the central government to find help, because in Huo's opinion, the local government did not want to mitigate the pollution. Lotus company changed the attitude toward Huo because of the pressure from the central government. Huang was able to cooperate with the local government because the local government wanted, or at least felt the responsibility, to regulate the pollution. The municipal CPC secretary raised the ecological development as the development strategy of Guiyang City. As is going to be explained in Section 7.2, the frequent revision of environmental protection-related laws and the enforcement from the State Council on environmental protection on and after 2010 also put more stress on the local government on their environmental protection work.

Another factor constraining EGNGO's work was the social relationship the founder had. The personal relationship might not be that important in their early stage public-activity work. However, after the transformation, both Huo and Huang relied heavily on their personal relationship with

³⁸ Meeting Memorandum on Floating Rubbish Issue on Nanming River. Internal Material.

³⁹ For the contract with companies, see GPEEC website: <http://www.gyepchina.com/574/574/301>, <http://www.gyepchina.com/566/575/50>, <http://www.gyepchina.com/574/590/18>

the government when they wanted to cooperate with the central or local government to continue their activities. Huo became famous because of the photo exhibition work. That was the reason why the media came to interview him, and the reason why Huo could reach out to central government for help. Huang built the personal relationship with Lijun and other district-level officials. That is one of the most important reason why he could build the cooperation with the local government and companies. Huang also expressed that compare to his organization's work, Huang's personal relationship was more important in explaining why the district government agreed to sign the contract with his organization.⁴⁰

7. Why Two EGNNGOs Chose Different Strategy: The Selective Cooperation Model

By tracing the development history of the two EGNNGOs, I answer the question raised at the beginning of the paper: why the two EGNNGOs, which were both established by environmental journalists hoping to address the local pollution, followed such different development path and resulted in such different regulatory outcome? What factors could explain this difference?

From the analysis above, I summarize three factors constraining the development of EGNNGOs when they tried to mitigate the local pollution: the government's willingness on pollution mitigation, the severity of the pollution, and the social relationship the founder had. In order to explain how these factors impacted the decision making of the two EGNNGOs, I raise the selective cooperation model (**Figure 2**). To summarize this model, the two EGNNGOs *selectively* reached out to and cooperated with the government agencies/companies who felt the urgency/pressure to regulate/mitigate the pollution. The cooperation with the government brought reliable legitimacy for the two EGNNGOs, even if the possibility of cooperation strongly depended on the social resource the founder had. On the other hand, the severity of the pollution decided how aggressive the strategy will be. However, even if the pollution itself can also bring volunteers and social legitimacy for the two EGNNGOs, relying on this legitimacy to conduct work, such as boycott, was not a sustainable choice for the two EGNNGOs.

⁴⁰ Jun 5, B, GPEEC

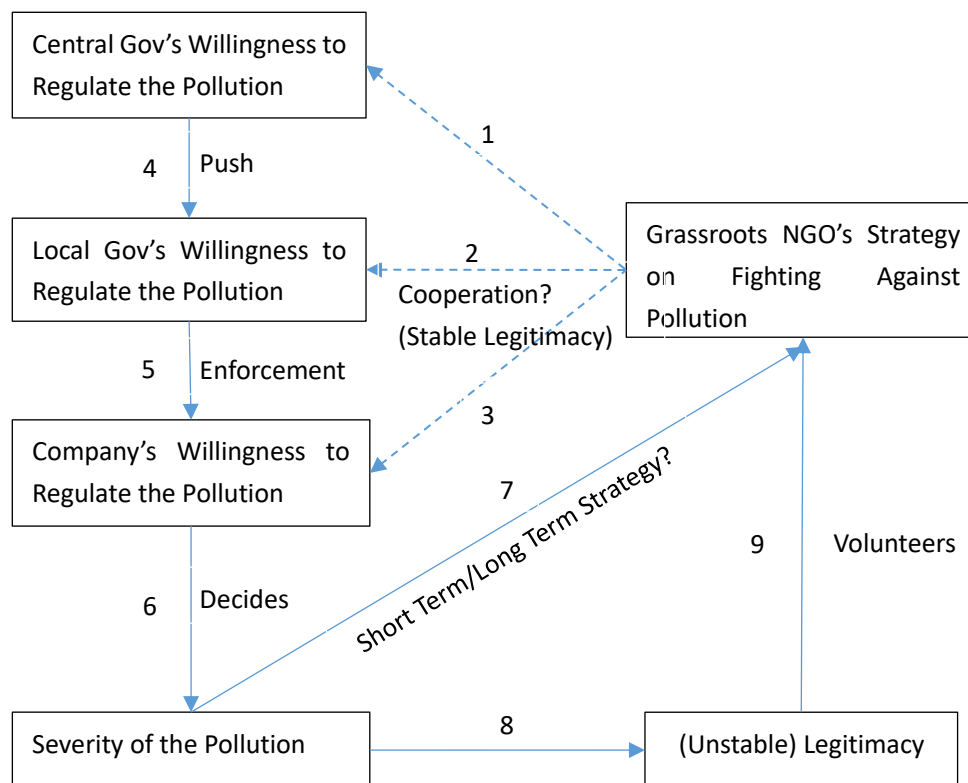


Figure 2. The Selective Cooperation Model to explain two EGNNGOs' pollution mitigation strategy

7.1 Finding Cooperation (Arrow 1, 2, 3): The Key to EGNNGO's Success in Mitigating Local Pollution

In order to solve the environmental problem, the two founders worked on building cooperation with the stakeholders who were able to solve the pollution problem. After his early stage photo exhibition work, Huo worked with the central government and the media to expose the Huai River pollution to push local governments and companies to regulate pollution. Huang cooperated directly with the local government and companies to mitigate the pollution issue.

Why the cooperation was of great importance for the survival of the two EGNNGOs? First, the cooperation, especially with the government, brought legitimacy to the two EGNNGOs. Huo built the cooperation with the central government and the media. The cooperation protected him from the suppression from the local government. Huang built the cooperation with the municipal and district leader. The cooperation gave him authority when he tried to cooperate with the other lower-level government officials who had the responsibility to regulate the pollution.

Second, cooperation, instead of confrontation, was perhaps the only sustainable choice the two founders had to mitigate the pollution. Both of the two founders were journalists, with limited funding and limited experience to operate the NGO. In Huo's early stage work, there was a confrontational way to fight against pollution: showing the photo on the street and boycotting the Lotus. However, instead of saying Huo *wanted* to do this, it is better to say Huo just *had* to do this if he wanted to solve the pollution problem. In the early stage of Huo's work, neither the local government nor the local companies wanted to regulate the pollution. Huo saw villagers dying

from the cancer after drinking polluted water. His fame, by that time, was not big enough to support the cooperation with the central government or the media. Huo also expressed his hesitation on using the aggressive measures:

“We did not want to be a hero. We just wanted to change (the pollution). It is easy to be a hero. You organize a demonstration, then you are arrested. People might say, ‘Oh, you are cool! (niu!)’ But how do you keep working? So, we focused on solving the problem.....If you cannot solve the problem, not matter how good your plan is, it is useless.”⁴¹

Both Huo and Huang wished to solve the local pollution. Finding cooperation was regarded as the most effective problem-solving measure by both of two founders. After Huo got famous, he actively reached out to officials in central government and medias to find support. After Lotus changed the attitude and started to mitigate the pollution, Huo started to cooperate with Lotus as well. Huang followed a simpler pattern: he started to cooperate with the local government directly. After building trust with the companies, Huang started to cooperate with companies as well. In Huang’s work, he avoided any confrontational measures. He had been a journalist, but he avoided to explicitly criticize the government in any situation.⁴²

7.2 Cooperate with Different Stakeholders at Different Time (Arrow 4, 5): The Consequence of Chinese Top-Down Enforcement of Environmental Protection

In the past 30 years, Chinese government pushes the environmental regulation from the top to the bottom gradually. From the story of the two EINGOs, we see how the two founders cooperated with different agencies to fulfill the founders’ goal of pollution mitigation in different time period. Huo established his NGO in 2000 Henan. Short after the early stage of the photo exhibition, Huo reached out to personals in Ministry of Environmental Protection in Beijing for help. Ten years later, in 2010, Huang reached out to local governments in Guiyang which feel more responsibility and pressure to mitigate the pollution. In Nanming River’s case, we see how Huang as an outsider of the government assigned tasks to different bureaus and helped them mitigate the pollution issue together. In Huang’s cooperation with the companies, we see Huang’s not only helped companies to comply with the law, but also reduced the workload for EPB. If there is no enforcement of environmental protection from the top to the bottom, there would be less incentive for the local government and companies to cooperate with Huang.

The evidence above strongly supports the organizational perspective (Hsu, 2010) of Chinese grassroots movements. As Hsu (2010) pointed out, grassroots NGOs and the government agencies needed each other to fulfill their goal and sustain their organization. In this study, we see that both Huo and Huang get legitimacy from cooperation with the government. The government agencies themselves need help from the two EINGOs to fulfill its environmental protection mission. Neither Huo nor Huang’s organization can be interpreted as western civil society which stand opposed to the government. Huang’s organization cannot be interpreted as a company to which the government outsource its service, even if the government buy service from Huang’s organization.

Since 2014, the Chinese central government started to encourage more actors to participate in the environmental protection work. Even if Chinese government hold a skeptical perspective on grassroots NGOs, the story of the two EINGOs shows that the importance of grassroots NGOs in

⁴¹ Huo, 20190612

⁴² Jul 5, B, GPEEC

environmental protection work should not be ignored. In 2000, the central government failed to push the local government on regulating pollution in the Huai River. Huo, as the founder of GHR, bravely reached out to the media and central government to report the severity of pollution. Without his work, the local government would not implemented the deep well to give villagers clean water. In 2010, Guiyang local government faced its shortcoming in regulating the local pollution. Huang, as the founder of GPEEC, mobilized the volunteers to find pollution issue in Guiyang, gave suggestions to the local government on mitigating pollution, and helped companies to comply with the environmental protection law. Without Huang's report and suggestion, the floating rubbish on Nanming river would not be addressed in time. The work of the two EGNGOs effectively addressed the shortcoming of government-led pollution regulation.

7.3 The Cooperation Heavily Relies on the Personal Relationship of the Founder

Two successful examples of the NGO-Government cooperation were presented in this study: Huo with the central government and Huang with the local government. However, both two examples of the cooperation rely heavily on Huo and Huang's personal relationship. Huo established the cooperation with central government and the media after he got famous with his photo exhibition work. In the cooperation, the bureaus from the central government and the medias reached out to Huo Daishan as a person instead of reaching out to his EGNGO. Huang and his EGNGO had the same story. The personal relationship among Huang and government officials, courts, and the volunteers is the most valuable resource for Huang's organization. The dependency on founder's personal relationship brought both of the two GNGOs into the trap of elite governance, a not unusual phenomenon in other Chinese GNGOs (Cui, Yuan, & Wang, 2014). In the field work, Huang explicitly expressed his worries to other members in his organization: "If one day I am retired, don't you think this organization is over?"⁴³

What is the reason of this dependency on founder's personal relationship? The dependency was caused by the imbalance of power between the government and the EGNGO. Both of the two EGNGOs reached out to the government for cooperation. Even if the cooperation is mutually beneficial, compare to the government, the EGNGOs need this cooperation more. The EGNGOs need to survive in an authoritarian regime. The controversial nature of environmental protection work made EGNGO's pollution mitigation work more challenging. Either for Huo or Huang, the cooperation with the government gave them strong legitimacy for their organizations. The personal relationship became the most effective way to find cooperation from the government. With personal relationship, the mutual trust could be easily built between the government and the EGNGOs. With this mutual trust, the cooperation became possible.

7.4 The Pollution Brought the Two EGNGOs Societal Support and Legitimacy (Arrow 6, 7, 8, 9), which is Unstable

Aside for the possibility of cooperation, another factor influencing EGNGO's work is the severity of the pollution. The severity of the pollution largely determines how aggressive the strategy of the founder will be. Also, the severity of the pollution determines the social legitimacy of NGO's work. In Huo's early stage work, he selected to undertake a brave endeavor regardless of unfavorable political environment. The strong social legitimacy of his work backed him up.

Even if the support from the volunteers is a great resource for the the two EGNGOs, in the environmental protection sector, the support from the volunteers will vanish when the pollution is

⁴³ Jun 24, B.

mitigated. This is another reason why the two founders not only rely on volunteers but also relies on the cooperation with other stakeholders, such as the government and the companies. After 2010, the pollution in Huai River was largely mitigated. The volunteers who once had in the early 2000 were less motivated in 2010. Also, after the ACIGIPA, when the environmental problems were reported to the local government and solved, volunteers in GPEEC lost motivation as well. Huang found a sustainable way to motivate his volunteers: hiring some volunteers to find the pollution issue in Guiyang and inviting expertise with engineering and legal background to help companies comply with the law. Huang's EGNGO had continuous financial support by signing contract with local government and companies. Huo does not have the same luck. After his EGNGO was unregistered, raise funding became illegal.

8. Conclusion

In order to understand the role of EGNGOs in environmental protection work, I traced the development history of two EGNGOs. Both of the two EGNGOs set their goals as mitigating the local pollution. In order to effectively mitigate the local pollution, the two founders actively reached out to the government agencies and the companies who had the willingness to mitigate the pollution. This cooperation brought strong legitimacy for the EGNGOs, which is the key for the survival of the two EGNGOs. The cooperation is also beneficial for the government itself to fulfill its responsibility on environmental protection. The cooperation, however, strongly relies on the personal connection of EGNGO's founder. This dependency brought the two EGNGOs into the trap of elite governance, which is adverse for the long-term development of the EGNGOs. In order to save the EGNGOs from the elite governance, the unfavorable political environment for grassroots organizations in China need to be changed.

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Appendix A. Timeline of the two EGNNGOs

Year	Stakeholder	What Happened
1995	Central Government	Premier Li Peng announced that by 2000, the Huai River need to be clear
1998	Central Government	Xie Zhenhua arrived at Shenqiu County to investigate the pollution issue. Public protest against the pollution happened during the investigation.
1998	Huo	Huo Daishan resigned from newspaper office, and started taking photos of Huai River Pollution
1999-2000	Huo	Photo Exhibition
2000	Huo	Huo Daishan became interviewed by CCTV, thus goes to the public. The interview targets the pollution of Lotus Company. Lotus Company refuse to be interviewed. Thus, the interview was conducted secretly.
2003	Huo	Huo's NGO, the Guardian of Huai River, was officially registered in the technology bureau of Shenqiu County
2004	Huo	"News Investigation <新闻调查>" was presented in CCTV. In the News Investigation, the pollution and cancer issue in Shenqiu County was publiced. The investigation was made possible by the help of Huo Daishan. On the same month, Zeng Peiyan issued 工作现场会. Zhoukou municipal CPC secretary was irritated by Huo Daishan
2006	Huo	The GHR cannot pass the annual investigation, thus became illegal. On the first year, Wang Guanyi was fired.
2007	Huo	Huo won China's Green Figure awarded by Ministry of Environmental Protection. Chaijing got the same reward, who directed the documentary "Under the Dome"
2007	Guiyang Municipal Government	Li Jun became the Party Secretary of Guiyang City. Ecological Development was set as the development goal.
2010	Huo	Huo won Magsaysay Reward, issued by President of the Philippines
2010	Huang	GPEEC was established
2011	Huo and the Central Government	Environmental Protection Express was set up between Huo and the Ministry of EnvironmetnalEnvironmental Protection
2011	Huang	Huang established ACIGIPA
2014	Huang	Started signing contract with Guiyang local government and Companies