

The Strategy of Chinese NGO in Dealing with the Government:

an Initial Research

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Abstract: as a result of its rapid development in China over the past few years, NGO is now taking shape as an autonomous section independent of the state. What will be analyzed in this article is how NGO, by utilizing various means to remold its relationship with the state, is effectively fulfilling its organizational goal and influencing the government in its favor. This article will examine the following three aspects of NGO's strategy in dealing with the government: its striving for legitimacy, its utilization of state---controlled resources, and its increasing influence on the government policy. This article will show that a broad interactive region has actually been formed between NGO and the state in China.

I. Influencing the government

Because of its restricted nature as civil society organization, Chinese NGO adapts to political restriction and utilizes state controlled resources. It also tries its best to enter the process of government policy making, influencing the government behaviors.

Utilizing the institutional channel is the directest way to enter the decision-making process of government. NPC (National People's congress) and CPPCC (The Chinese people's political consultative conference) are the legal, official and public participation institutions. The president of *Friends of nature* is one member of the National Committee of CPPCC, so it is easy for him/her to submit proposals every CPPCC. Since its foundation, *Friends of nature* has put forward many proposals to

relate government departments. These proposals cover various aspects, such as felling natural woods, protecting natural resources and wild animals, market management on urban wild animals, reducing and controlling urban pollution, afforesting mountains and taming rivers and so on. However, majority NGOs can't utilize such channel as efficiently as *Friends of nature* does. Therefore, many organizations often invite some community representatives through social relationships to speak out their minds in NPC or CPPCC. Every year, the center of women legal aid in law School of Peking University presents at least one proposal on NPC and CPPCC (both center and local) to appeal protecting women's rights. The committee of this organization includes members of NPC and CPPCC, Beijing community representatives and so on. So it is these members' of NPC and CPPCC responsibility to submit proposals for the organization. However, one feature of NPC and CPPCC is "many proposals, few responses." Besides this, for most NGOs, they haven't been qualified to utilize these Institutional channels. So, NPC and CPPCC is not an effective channel for NGOs to participate in government policy.

Researches show that some NGOs attempt to influence government by some comparatively special means. Take organization T for example, it is a non-profit research institute with great influence. Its leader says, "As a non-government organization, we have no chance to participate in the process of government policy-making. But we can influence the decision-making of government through influencing those who can influence the decision of government policy." Every week, organization T holds an academic forum, inviting scholars and officers to participate in some of them work at the department which enacts and studies policies and some are considered as brain trust of high-ranking officers in central government. In these forums, extensive and fierce discussions often take place. Different from organization T, organization H influences government's decision-making by training governmental officers. This organization aims to offer helps to those suffering from domestic violence. Sponsored by international organizations, it gives training for policemen and

governmental officers. On the one hand, this project aims to change the local government's attitude towards domestic violence and its ways to solve this problem. On the other hand, it helps to avoid victims' second suffers when policemen and governmental officers dealing with domestic violence.

Cases show that Chinese NGOs attempt to influence government's decision-making by mobilizing extensive social participation as well. There are following characters in these activities.

- (1). too many mobilized people.
- (2). mobilized media playing a great role.
- (3). lasting a long time
- (4). forming some public pressure
- (5). the commonly used methods are to write letter to high-ranking officers and convey their requirements to leaders through interpersonal relationship
- (6). requesting government to take action, instead of resisting government directly.

Even though the government takes slow action or takes no action, NGOs will not resort to fierce actions to put pressure on government (for example, organizing public assembly). There are two famous cases above.

II Protecting golden monkey in Dian area.

In December 1995, Xi Zhinong, a wild animal photographer working in Yunnan provincial department of forestry wrote a letter to *friends of nature*. Through Xi's letter, *friends of nature* knew that in Deqin, a small country of Diqing Tibet Autonomous Reign in northwest of Yunnan province, almost 100 square meters' primeval forest were going to be cut down for commercial purpose, which would

threaten the existing lives of almost 200 golden monkeys, the first class national protected animals.

Friends of nature immediately made an appeal to related government departments and mass media. The letter was conveyed to Song Jian, State Councilor at that time by Tang Xiyang, a director of *friends of nature* through interpersonal relationship. And then, after internal discussion, *friends of nature* wrote a letter of appeal, of which the message was “supporting Xi Zhihong and protecting primeval forest in northwest of Dian area” and this letter of appeal was delivered to vice-premier Mr. Jiang Chunyun at that moment. At the same time, mobilized by *friends of nature* and its network (at that time, more than 100 staff in friends of nature were medium workers), media in Beijing began to give an extensive, detailed and lasting report on the difficult position of these golden monkeys, which aroused great attention of public, especially that of students from various colleges and universities. After that, students of Beijing Forest University organized an activity for golden monkeys in Dian area--keeping watch at night with candles. The activity got positive responses from environmental protection organizations in other universities. Some environmental protection organizations of universities also held activities to protect golden monkeys in Dian area. These students' attention on golden monkeys resulted in the emergence of *university students' green campus*, which put golden monkey's protection into climax.

It seems that due to extensive media reports and public participation, especially university students' great passions on this activity, leaders of central government paid great attention to this issue as well. According to *friends of nature dispatch*, “Comrade Jiang Chunyun, Song Jian and leaders of department of forestry, as well as state bureau of environmental protection showed serious concerns over this issue, and soon they made an positive instruction on both Xi Zhihong's letter and the letter of appeal of *friends of nature*. Leaders of Yunnan province made decisions of stopping destroying primeval forest in northwest of Dian. The habitat of Dian golden monkeys is saved temporarily.

III Protecting Tibetan antelopes

Like golden monkey, the Tibetan antelope also belongs to the first class national protected animals, living in Kekexili in Qingzang Plateau of China. According to *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species*, the Tibetan antelope is listed as the species needing priority protection.

in international illegal market, Tibetan antelope's fur can be sold at such a high price droved by extortionate profits that some lawbreakers hunt Tibetan antelopes crazily. An organization named "Yak Team" launched an anti-hunting program in Kekexili. However, because of the insufficiency in equipments and money, it was hard for this organization composed by local residents to protect these Tibetan antelopes effectively.

In 1996, to collect information about Tibetan antelopes, some members of *friends of nature* went to Kekexili. In 1998, with several other international non-government organizations (such as World Wide Fund for Nature and International Fund for Animal Welfare) and several organizations of Hong Kong, *friends of nature* held several conferences about Tibetan antelopes. In these conferences, they discussed how to protect Tibetan antelopes, and heard proposals of institutions from Hong Kong. However, without government's participation, no feasible plans were reached. Later, *friends of nature* changed its strategy. In September 1998, *friends of nature* and Chinese forestry newspaper jointly invited Zhabaduojie, captain of Yak Team to Beijing, whose traveling expenses, board and lodging and activities in Beijing were paid and arranged by *friends of nature*. With great efforts of *friends of nature*, Zhabaduojie managed to report his work to State Bureau of Environmental Protection and State Forestry Bureau. Besides this, he visited World Wide Fund For Nature and International Fund for Animal Welfare as well. *Friends of nature* also arranged Zhabaduojie to meet mass media. With the help of campus environmental organizations, Zhabaduojie gave many lectures in Beijing University, Beijing Forestry University, and Beijing University of light industry. In October 1998, president of

friends of nature, Mr. Liang Congjie submitted an open letter to British Prime Minister Tony Blair, when he paid a visit to China in which he asked UK to stop illegal trade on Tibetan antelope's fur. He also asked Mr. Blair to support Chinese program on protecting Tibetan antelopes. The next day, Mr. Blair wrote an immediate reply, in which he showed his concerns and supporting. The journey of Zhabaduojie and replied letter of Tony Blair arouse extensive attention of media in China and overseas, therefore large numbers of individuals and organizations set to join this program. In February 1999, *friends of nature* submitted a report on protecting Tibetan antelopes to State Forestry Bureau. As a result, in April 1999, the State Forestry Bureau initiated a program named "Kekexili I". However, due to conflicts from different local governmental departments, this program didn't last a long time.

In August 1999, 17 journalists who had gathered news in Kekexili jointly presented a written statement to vice-premier and required government to take action to protect Tibetan antelopes (vice-premier was responsible for environmental protection at that time). At the beginning of 2000, a voluntary organization of environmental protection---"green Beijing" set up an online alliance on protecting Tibetan antelopes. Until the end of 2000, more than 20 communities of environmental protection jointly held an exhibition tour in 27 universities of Beijing, aiming at saving Tibetan antelopes, and then the tour was held in universities in Tianjin. From the beginning of 2000 to 2001, when Beijing was bidding for the 29th Olympic games, the program of protecting Tibetan antelopes got farther development, and several members of Yak Team were invited to Beijing. Thus, "green Olympic bidding, saving Tibetan antelopes" became a slogan of the program of protecting Tibetan antelopes. However, for various reasons, Yak Team was dismissed and the measures, which could effectively protect these Tibetan antelopes, were not formulated and the activity of hunting Tibetan antelopes was not inhibited effectively.

Around the issue of protecting Tibetan antelopes, an extensive social participation has formed, whose scale and scope overtook that of golden monkeys in Dian area. However, its effect and influence were not remarkable enough. From this point, we

can see that no matter how strong the public's appeal is, government can't always respond their voice as they expect, that is to say, although NGO forms certain social influence by launching extensive social participation, it does not mean that the public influence can influence the government effectively. After all, the solution of certain social concerns mostly depends on the government's will, instead of mutual negotiation, let alone public pressure.

IV Supervising and criticizing the government.

Facing a powerful country, Chinese NGO is trying to seek an effective way to supervise and criticize the government. The president of *friends of nature* said, "As a NGO, our mission is to fully play the role of supervisor. Whether or not we are able to supervise and make substantial criticisms and suggestions to the government is an important distinction between an independent non-government organization and that derived from Party and government departments. "Friends of nature" has been attempting to open up an available new way." (Gluckman, 2000). Cases show that Chinese NGO is trying to make a breakthrough in its supervisions on government. Here is a typical case.

To prevent diversion canal's leaking, city B set about rebuilding an old canal with a 35- year's history. This canal was 102 kilometers in length. It was a project costing almost 1.1billion RMB, which need reconstructing the old canal by laying cements. In some environmentalists' opinion: the project was not assessed by related environmental bureaus violate related national stipulations, and that the old canal has become a live system which is beneficial to wild animals. What's more, since the water leaked from the canal helped maintain underground water, rebuilding would cause serious ecological problems

As early as the beginning of 2000, environmental organizations organized a medium program to resist this project. However, it didn't bring any result. In order to

stop the continuation of the project, three environmental organizations in city B jointly organized a public dialogue with government. With their concerted effort, the government appointed a vice-mayor to attend the public dialogue. In May 2003, the dialogue was realized, which pushed the NGO's resisting activity to the climax. One leader of a NGO considered the dialogue as a frontal engagement with the government.

For this dialogue, NGO was fully prepared. They invited many journalists, experts on water resource and resource planning to join in the dialogue, who were all holding the same opinion with them. It was said that the vice-mayor and officers was greatly shocked when they found so many antis there. The vice-mayor explained that there were many experts, who favored government's plan, however, they were not invited. When answering NGO's impugnation, the vice-mayor argued that the project aimed to solve water shortage in the city and he stressed that the attendees should have a comprehensive consideration of water resource in city B. And he also added that the project complied with the process of evaluation on environmental effect, which was operated by local government departments.

The dialogue lasted nearly 4 hours and covered a wide range of issues on environmental protection. During the dialogue, something unpleasant happened. One leader of NGO criticized the government for not protecting cultural heritage effectively, and that urban construction was at the cost of destroying historical sites. However, the vice-mayor denied all these criticisms. But the leader of NGO took out some photos on the spot to prove his viewpoint, which made the vice-mayor very embarrassed. When a journalist working for a famous newspaper raised doubts for the mayor's environmental protection policies again, the vice-mayor went into a paroxysm of rage and warned the journalist not to report the content of that dialogue without being allowed. After that dialogue, all newspaper offices in city B received a notice and were ordered not to give a report on that dialogue. Some organizers and several participators were prosecuted to their work unites for besieging the mayor.

It is obvious that the dialogue was unsuccessful. It showed that government had an

absolute advantage over the society. In the face of public's pressure, the government was unwilling to make compromises with the public to reach an identical opinion. And although on behalf of society, NGO has enhanced the awareness of bargaining with government, the political government restrains NGO's capacity. So far in China, the power between government organization and non-government organization has not been balanced. The policy of influencing government's policy through non-government pressure is not quite effective, and to realize a civil society, a western conception. It's still a long way to go.

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