Jennifer Hsu, Timothy Hildebrandt, Reza Hasmath

'Going out' or staying in? The expansion of Chinese NGOs in Africa

Article (Accepted version) (Refereed)

Original citation:
Hsu, Jennifer, Hildebrandt, Timothy and Hasmath, Reza (2016) *'Going out' or staying in? The expansion of Chinese NGOs in Africa.* Development Policy Review, 34 (3). pp. 423-429. ISSN 1467-7679

DOI: 10.1111/dpr.12157

‘Going Out’ or Staying In? The Expansion of Chinese NGOs in Africa*

Jennifer Hsu, University of Alberta
Timothy Hildebrandt, London School of Economics and Political Science
Reza Hasmath, University of Oxford

Abstract: Growing attention has been paid to China’s recent entree into international development. While received wisdom has long suggested that NGOs have played key roles in assisting government-led development initiatives, little scholarly attention has been paid to the potential for Chinese non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in helping affect these process and outcomes. In this article, we examine two African nations – Ethiopia and Malawi – with high levels of Chinese development assistance, but with contrasting political regime types. Our findings indicate that irrespective of regime type, Chinese NGOs are yet to make a substantial impact in either nation. We argue that, despite the strength of the Chinese state and high levels of international development assistance given, domestic politics and regulatory frameworks in host nations still matter a great deal. These local contexts ultimately have constrained Chinese development work, especially in regards to the involvement of NGOs. Furthermore, the implications of our study suggest that the Chinese model of international development will continue to be one where temporary one-off projects are favoured; and, insofar as social organisations will play a role, they will be in the domain of government-organised, non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) than grassroots NGOs.

Keywords: NGO, Regulation, Regime Type, China, Africa, Ethiopia, Malawi

Introduction

The expansion of China’s overseas development assistance has mirrored the growth of its state-run commercial investments – as embodied in the 10th Five Year Plan (2001-2005) “Going Out” (*zou chu qu*) policy. Much of China’s overseas development assistance (ODA) is directed at nations where China has a substantial stake in the natural resources sector, most notably in Africa. Unlike the dominant practice of Western donors, Chinese assistance is provided largely in the form of concessional or low-interest loans, and government-financed or government-subsidised infrastructure projects.

However, these activities are not exclusively in the domain of the state. NGOs have traditionally played an important role in the development outcomes of a recipient nation. Harnessing a range of resources and power, including material, symbolic, interpretive and geographical power (Hasmath and Hsu 2014), NGOS are characterised by many scholars as

* The authors are grateful for the valuable feedback received at seminar presentations at St. Antony’s College, University of Oxford; China Institute, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; and, the China Studies Centre, University of Sydney. This research is supported, in part, by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, British Academy/Leverhulme Small Research Grant, and the John Fell OUP Fund.

providing social welfare and capacity-building functions (see Andrews 2014; Banks et al. 2015; Batley and Rose 2011; Brysk 2000; Scholte 1999).

In fact, domestically, China's NGO sector has played a growing role in the nation's own development, evident by their rising number – totalling over 546,000 registered social organisations (MoCA 2013). Literature analysing the behaviour of Chinese NGOs has sought to focus attention on the rise and development of the sector (Deng and Shieh 2011; Hasmath and Hsu 2009; Hildebrandt 2013; Hsu 2012a, 2012b; Kaufman 2012). Due to the dominance of the state, and tight regulatory supervision of social organisations, the growth of NGOs has not been easy; and, the nature of NGO development and maturation might look different here than in other contexts (see Hasmath and Hsu 2015a; Hsu and Hasmath 2013, 2014; Kang and Heng 2008; Wu and Chan 2012). Put differently, how Chinese NGOs operate overseas can potentially be shaped by their domestic upbringing, and thus, analytical queries about their behaviour, actions and practices in a new jurisdiction are all pertinent to analysing the opportunities and constraints Chinese NGOs face in conducting development in their host nation.

In this article, we examine two jurisdictions in Africa – Ethiopia and Malawi –with high levels of Chinese development assistance, but with contrasting political regime types. Drawing upon the extensive literature on the Chinese NGOs that suggests a rising presence in the domestic sphere, as well as the well-documented role that NGOs have played in official development assistance globally, we expect Chinese social organisations to follow the lead of the government's 'Going Out' development policies. However, our findings indicate that irrespective of political regime type, Chinese NGOs are yet to make a substantial impact in either nation. They have, on the whole, *stayed in*, rather than *gone out*. We argue that, despite the strength of the Chinese state and high levels of international development assistance, domestic politics and regulatory frameworks in host jurisdictions matter a great deal. These local contexts ultimately have constrained Chinese development work, especially in regards to the involvement of NGOs.

The article proceeds as follows: after rationalising our case study selection and discussing our methods, we briefly outline the role of NGOs in development more broadly and then contextualise our research by looking specifically at Chinese NGOs as development actors. In the two sections thereafter we explore why Chinese NGOs do not operate at a level expected in each jurisdiction, analysing the myriad domestic constraints and highlighting, in particular, the role of regulatory frameworks. Finally, we explore the implications for the future NGO involvement in official Chinese ODA and theorise how Chinese NGOs might follow in the footsteps of their Western counterparts.

Case Study Selection and Methodology

Our study looks at two African nations: Ethiopia and Malawi. In both jurisdictions, Chinese investment is significant relative to the size of their economy and population. Further, the two cases were chosen to capture dichotomous political regime types. We hypothesised that political regime type might have a strong effect on general openness for civil society organisations, and specifically the ability for Chinese NGOs to engage in development projects. Ethiopia is a "one-party democracy" – in actuality, semi-authoritarian with a Polity score of -3 (2013) – with the People's Revolutionary Democratic Front ruling since 1991; and, in the 2015 elections capturing virtually all electoral seats. Unlike the behaviour of many Western donors, China has not treated Ethiopia as only an aid recipient – since 2000, there have been 111 official projects funded,

totalling approximately USD 8.73 billion – but also a strategic partner and ally (China Aid Data 2015). Malawi is a young democratic, multi-party government system, with the current constitution intact since the mid-1990s; it boasts a Polity score of 6 (2013). Since 2007, China has funded an estimated 32 official projects – with initiatives ranging from education, water supply and sanitation, energy generation, agriculture, social infrastructure – totalling approximately USD 430 million (China Aid Data 2015).

The fieldwork is based upon elite interviews (see Hochschild 2009) that occurred in two simultaneous phases in the summer of 2014. In one phase, we conducted semi-structured interviews with NGO representatives, Chinese officials, and local government officials in Malawi and Ethiopia. In another phase, we conducted semi-structured interviews with Chinese NGOs and semi-autonomous government entities, in Mandarin, who have operations with the two case study nations. These interviews occurred in Beijing – the location for the headquarters of the Chinese NGOs operating overseas under study – to understand the organisational strategies and practices to be employed for "going out". Eighteen elite interviews in total were conducted – nine in Addis Ababa, six in Lilongwe, and seven in Beijing.

The Role of Chinese NGOs in Development

In this section we give a broad sketch of NGOs in development, honing in on the specifics of the Chinese case. Most scholars and activists agree that the work of many NGOs is vital to communities around the world. As both advocates and service providers, NGOs are credited for bringing an array of important issues like, climate change, poverty reduction, gender inequality and public health to the attention of the public, and onto the agenda of national governments. Despite their potential and successes, NGOs across the world have had to contend with issues and questions of representativeness, accountability and legitimacy given they are not elected by the constituents in whom they seek to represent (see Hasmath and Hsu 2008). In this context, NGOs are closely watched in nations like China, where there are significant attempts on the part of the state to monitor and regulate their development and movements.

Nonetheless, NGOs in China are emerging as important stakeholders in the delivery of social services, in part, incentivised by the state's move towards a procurement model (Hasmath and Hsu 2015b). As NGOs are pushed into the service delivery role, the institutional constraints have not necessarily lessened for NGOs (see Hasmath and Hsu 2014). While NGOs are increasingly able to register without a government sponsoring unit, such regulations only apply to a handful of NGOs working in a few pre-approved categories (see Hildebrandt 2011; Tam and Hasmath 2015). Still, Chinese NGOs have expanded and made an impact on a number of important sectors including migrant welfare, HIV/AIDS, environment and other issues that do not receive proper attention by the state (see Hsu 2014). As local levels of the state are tasked with the responsibility of welfare delivery, the increasingly cash-strapped local authorities across China will likely shift the burden to individuals, households, and other non-state actors. Such a situation may be seen as both an opportunity for NGOs to increase their presence, but given the institutional challenges such as lack of funding, regulatory constraints and inadequate organisational capacity, NGOs may not be in a position to satisfactorily carry out the necessary social services (Hasmath and Hsu 2014, 2015a; Hsu and Hasmath 2015).

As they mature, Chinese NGOs are looking beyond their local communities; indeed, they are even casting their gaze across national borders. Within the broader framework of China's "Going Out" policy, Chinese NGOs are starting to impress their presence abroad. According to Liu

Hongwu, director of the Institute of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University, there are some 100 Chinese NGOs working in Africa (quoted in Meng and Sun 2013). The likes of China's national Red Cross and China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA) are amongst the organisations with projects in Africa.

One important caveat to note in this optimistic assessment of 100 NGOs abroad is the fact that the vast majority are government-organised, non-governmental organisations (GONGOs). GONGOs intimate and intertwined connection with the state can make them qualitatively different from NGOs. In the Chinese context, the major GONGOs, such as the All-China Federation of Trade Unions and the Communist Youth League of China, emerged during the Maoist era. They were effectively constructs of the state, and acted as "transmission belts" between the Party and the people (Hsu, unpublished). In terms of social development work, GONGOs like the CFPA or the Soong Ching Ling Foundation were initially led by individuals with previous Party positions; and, personnel and finances were often not fully independent from their relevant government ministries at foundation. For instance, since the CFPA's organisational reform in 1999, personnel and finances are now separated from the government, with the ministry's organizational control of the CFPA existing only in name (He 2005).

In the case of China, the prevalence of GONGOs across the social realm and its overlap with the work of NGOs means that they must be accounted for in the process of social transformation. Our consideration of the role of GONGOs in Africa is thus necessary in this study due to the overlap between their work and that of NGOs. Furthermore, from the state's perspective there is little meaningful differentiation between GONGOs and NGOs. In short, our usage of "NGO" is broad and all-encompassing, although we are mindful of potential analytical shortcoming and variances.

From the standpoint of Chinese state, Chinese NGOs are seen as facilitators of friendlier relations with African nations. As the Chinese Association for International Understanding notes, despite increasing exchanges between Chinese and African governments, many African NGOs are still without adequate infrastructure and capacity-building knowledge, and to that end the China Association for NGO Co-operation (CANGO) is an important organisation to assist in the promotion of knowledge and co-operation between Chinese and African NGOs. In line with the rise of Chinese investments in Africa, Chinese NGOs are seen by observers as way to soften China's image abroad, and to an extent rectify some of the damages caused by Chinese investments. To put it more eloquently, Zadek (2013) writes:

> Chinese NGOs, working with African NGOs, can make a major difference in helping to avoid the sort of conflict that has taken place in the Zambian copper belt … Chinese NGOs can also help African communities hosting Chinese enterprises to talk effectively with both local managers and other China-based senior executives.

Here, the role of Chinese NGOs is seen as supplementing the corporate social responsibilities of Chinese companies. Such perspectives suggest that Chinese NGOs have a limited role in actually promoting long-term development projects, independent of Chinese commercial interests. Chinese involvement in Sudan's Merowe Dam project has also sparked discontent amongst local Sudanese, displaced by the project. Askouri (2008) notes, if China is to avoid local discontent as in the case of the Merowe Dam project, China needs to follow international standards of good practice and to achieve this to allow Chinese NGOs to engage with their African counterparts greater involvement in such projects.

The push for Chinese for-profit and non-profit organisations to expand abroad has led to some undesirable consequences as noted above. To mitigate this, the Chinese state has sought to translate the notion of "harmonious society" into "harmonious world". Bosshard (2008) believes that as Chinese companies continue to engage in environmentally and socially vulnerable sectors, they will increasingly have an interest in working with civil society groups that can help identify and resolve social and environmental problems, thus contributing to harmonious relations and development.

Nevertheless, the range of Chinese NGO activities, whether NGO or GONGO, have extended to areas such as agricultural training, drawing on China's own development and agricultural experiences in the 1980s and early 1990s. Given the mandate to "go out" and a range of expertise developed within the last 25 years by Chinese NGOs and GONGOs in social development, there is potential for these organisations to make some impact in nations such as Ethiopia and Malawi.

There is also, to be sure, a real demand for both development assistance, and the expertise that NGOs can provide. Both Ethiopia and Malawi are one of the world's poorest nations, and least developed, with a 2014 human development index of 0.434 and 0.414 respectively, well below the African average of 0.475. Despite our expectations and the rhetoric by Beijing, we did not find sustained Chinese NGOs activities in Ethiopia and Malawi. However, as we show in the following sections, future Chinese NGO activities in Ethiopia and Malawi will be shaped by the political and institutional context of the host nation. In Ethiopia, participation opportunities for Chinese NGOs may be more readily available due to the one-party government, whereas Malawi's young liberal democracy may present more constraints.

The Case of Ethiopia

Regulatory Environment

The famines of 1973-1974 and 1984-1985 provided a platform for international NGOs to emerge and gain prominence through relief efforts. The conflict between the authoritarian rule of the Derg and rebel groups also shaped the NGO sector, with NGOs working in tacit (and sometimes overt) support of the government or its opposition. However, with the over-throw of Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991, the Ethiopian NGO sector was propelled into chaos with little resources and capacity to make any significant impact. The new government under the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front endeavoured to reform the sector, by insisting on less foreign dependence and greater sustainability of projects, as demarcated in the 1995 "Guidelines for NGO Operations". As a consequence, the mid- to late-1990s witnessed an expansion of homegrown Ethiopian NGOs from 70 in 1994 to 368 in 2000 and 2775 in 2009 (Dupuy et al. 2014). The 2005 elections marked a souring of relations between the state and NGO sector, where NGOs were accused of supporting opposition parties and the ensuing violence due to electoral disputes. A series of laws were promulgated following the election, including the 2009 "Proclamation for the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies", to tighten control and management of NGOs. While the Proclamation seeks to establish a regulatory framework for NGOs, it was more restrictive in nature, highlighted by the policy NGOs cannot receive more than 10% of their funding from foreign sources.[1] In addition, only Ethiopian NGOs – those

[1] In the global context, restrictions placed on foreign NGOs operating in a host jurisdiction are not unique to a particular political regime type. For example, the Indian government in April 2015 blocked the

controlled and funded within Ethiopia – can advocate and work in the following areas: human and democratic rights, gender equality, rights of children and disabled persons, conflict resolution, and support to the judiciary.

As the vast majority of the Ethiopians population fall below the poverty line of 2 USD a day, the funding restrictions placed on NGOs means that it would be extremely challenging for Ethiopian NGOs to raise 90% of its finances domestically. Ironically, at odds with its own Proclamation, a quarter to one-third of the Ethiopian government's budget comes from foreign aid (Yeshanew 2012: 373). The restriction on areas of operation for NGOs, stemming from the 2009 Proclamation, demonstrate that the discourse on political and human rights remain in the realm and control of the state. Nevertheless, contemporary developments in the Ethiopian sector parallel the experience of Chinese NGOs, where the state is an active and strong participant in its development.

Opportunities and Constraints

The belief that the Chinese and Ethiopian governments share an ideological affinity, coupled with substantial Chinese commercial engagements in Ethiopia, prompted the Ethiopian NGO representatives to observe the potential for Chinese NGOs to make an impact in their nation. The lack of Chinese social development assistance and collaboration with Ethiopian NGOs while not surprising – as most co-operation is at the governmental level – our respondents felt that there is much that can be transferred in terms of skills and knowledge. Our interviewees' observations of Chinese workers across the numerous construction sites, coupled with rising investments made by Chinese companies and government, prompted an optimistic outlook on potential 'positive' behaviours and practices that can be imparted to Ethiopia. The Ethiopian country director of the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD) noted that: "China has very good relations with the government; the capacity of the Chinese is going up, and they have provided good lessons to us in terms of 'good work culture'" (Interview, June 2014). Looking at the extent of Chinese investments in Ethiopia, the Country Director of Hope International suggested that "perhaps the Chinese might bring in new concepts of entrepreneurship and investment to social development" (Interview, June 2014). These observations signify that Ethiopian NGO representatives associate "good" working culture in the for-profit sector with potential success in the non-profit sector. While none of the two NGOs are currently partnering with Chinese NGOs, both Directors believed that there was substantial room for knowledge and skill transfers. While our interviewees were aware of the negative press surrounding Chinese involvement on the continent, many were able to look beyond such reports and focus on the practicalities of the potential benefits of a partnership with Chinese NGOs.

In contrast to other African nations where there are substantial mineral resource deposits that are of interest to China, such as oil and copper, Ethiopia is a landlocked country with reserves of gold, platinum, tantalite, soda ash and phosphate rock. Unlikely to match the capacity of other African nations, the Ethiopian president Mulatu Teshome has emphasised that the bilateral relations between the two nations is predicated on mutual interests, common understanding and not on Chinese need for natural resources: "It's not the raw materials that attract Chinese to Ethiopia. Rather, it is the mutual interests and benefits, mutual respect and common understanding we have. And it is going to be further strengthened" (quoted in Li 2014).

---

accounts of Greenpeace, accusing the NGO for tax violations, and threatening national economic interests (BBC 27 May 2015).

The notion that there is mutual understanding between the two governments, translating to an ideal environment for Chinese NGOs to enter Ethiopia, is a recurring theme in the interviews. Unlike the case in Malawi, Ethiopia's one party rule and political culture parallels that of China, thereby providing likely partnerships between the two social sectors. Accordingly, the time is ripe for this partnership since the "competition" between Western and Chinese development forces and Ethiopia is likely to benefit from the contest (Interview, June 2014). Moreover, given the concern the Ethiopian government has with Western organisations operating in Ethiopia, particularly with regards to their criticisms of the NGO regulation, Chinese NGOs are more likely to be welcomed by the Ethiopian authorities as they less likely to address controversial and sensitive issues. This "mutual understanding" is further stressed by a foreign NGO representative, who noted that both the Chinese and Ethiopian authorities understand each other in terms of state monopolies, authoritarianism, and a one-party system (Interview, June 2014).

Aside from the political affinities, NGO representatives while cautious of Chinese commercial involvement in China, are at the same time making plans to seek Chinese collaboration. The country director of NASTAD admits "we haven't sought out Chinese funding yet, but it is something I am starting to think about." Clearly, the potential for Ethiopian NGOs in partnering or having Chinese funding is exciting and potentially transformative, as noted by NASTAD's director: "I am very eager to work with Chinese NGOS! And get Chinese funding!" The eagerness is also shared by the Country Director of Canadian Hunger Foundation (CHF): "I would have no problem to write grants soliciting their [Chinese] donation. At the end of the day, if I can have Chinese and Canadian donors work together to tackle gender violence, why not?" (Interview, June 2014). Here we see the desire mixed with a sense of pragmatism. The Director of Hope while enthusiastic at the possibilities afforded by Chinese funding, believed that the sharing of knowledge and expertise is an important part of the process (Interview, June 2014).

Our interviewees were circumspect with regards to the possible constraints facing Chinese entry into the Ethiopian NGO sector. As indicated by our interviewees, the negative press surrounding Chinese investments in Africa may present problems to Chinese involvement in social development. Apart from these general concerns, there were also questions about just how Chinese social stakeholders conduct development. For example, the Director of CHF suggested that unless Chinese NGOs "come into their own," then there is potential that they may be like the West (Interview, June 2014). The concerns expressed were broad and related to the general involvement of the Chinese in Ethiopia from the quality of infrastructure to the Chinese workers present in the nation. In the eyes of our NGO interviewees, the possible opportunities presented by Chinese social development assistance whether from NGOs or the government would seem to outweigh the costs. Furthermore, the representatives noted that Chinese social stakeholders would experience more opportunities rather than constraints upon entering Ethiopia, and into partnerships with local groups.

The Case of Malawi

Regulatory Environment

The current robust state of the NGO sector in Malawi obscures a much more complicated history that has received only scant attention in the academic literature. A long time civil society leader, and now presidential advisor on civil society, Mabvuto Bamusi, notes that Malawi had very few local NGOs as recently as 1994 (Interview, June 2014). This was, of course, not for

lack of need, but rather constricted political space under post-independence, where the one-party rule of Hastings Banda lasted 30 years. Multi-party elections in 1994 heralded a new era, and a significant and fast political opening that lead to a boom period for NGOs who generally focused on issues such as youth empowerment, human rights, and HIV/AIDS. Although this opening, and subsequent growth of the sector, is part attributable to the Western model of development aid – notably in a Wilsonian tradition that favours the principal channelling funds through the agent (the local civil society organisation) – other observers, such as the representative from the Institute for Social Research and Empowerment, a prominent Malawi think tank, contend that the new regime purposely created an environment positive for NGO growth in order to display its democratic bona fides (Interview, June 2014).

Despite early successes for these organisations, the development of NGOs in Malawi has not been entirely linear, nor has the relationship of NGOs with the state always been positive. The interviewee at the Institute for Social Research and Empowerment describes pendulum-type swings in the relationship between the state and NGOs (Interview, June 2014). In 2004, Bingu wa Mutharika was elected president in part due to strong support from the increasingly important civil society sector. But over his eight year tenure, this relationship became increasingly complicated with the president "dividing and ruling" over the large NGO community, favouring some while isolating others. Bingu was re-elected in 2009 with a mandate supported by 67% of the vote. Civil society actors, once crucial for his support base, were seen as a liability – those activists more critical of the government were "beaten up and terrorised". Indeed, during the last three years of Bingu's rule, NGOs found it difficult to carve out space in the country as they were more widely deemed as oppositional forces (Bamusi Interview, June 2014). In essence, even though the nation remained at least nominally democratic, the operational and institutional environment for NGOs is shaped by the political character of the regime in power at each given time – an observation that is generalisable across cases, irrespective of the democratic or non-democratic nature of the jurisdiction.

Even during this more negative period of NGO development in Malawi, activists held a good deal of ground, and "did not succumb to government bullying" (Interview with Institute for Social Research and Empowerment, June 2014). Indeed, NGOs in Malawi are notable for their ability to create both a culture of self-protection, and the institutional structure to back it up. Even before the end of one-party rule, a small number of local NGOs created an umbrella organisation, the Council for Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi (CONGOMA). While initially founded to protect civil society organisations from the state, its current broader mandate is centred on co-ordinating a network of NGOs with the government, identifying gaps in the NGO sector, and advocating for a more conducive institutional and regulatory environment for NGOs.

But CONGOMA's most interesting, and perhaps most significant function has been its central role in writing the nation's NGO registration law. According to the organization's leader, Ronald Mtonga, a grassroots effort to protect the continuation of political space for NGOs quickly took the form of creating a registration law for social organisations (Interview, June 2014). They sold themselves as an independent body, but perhaps most importantly, one that would do all of the work (and cover the costs, which were covered by membership fees of registered organisations) of registering and regulating the growing NGO sector in the nation. Cleverly, the organisation essentially pre-empted the state in creating a regulatory framework, which is a distinct reality both in China and Ethiopia. This makes the regulatory environment in Malawi decidedly unique, for it has been the NGO community itself who have written the rules

for registration, rather than leaving it in the hands of the government. The effect has been NGOs registered in Malawi represent a more "authentic civil society", without the overt oversight by the state.

Opportunities and Constraints

Although Malawi functions as a reasonably open, liberal democracy, the relationship between state and non-state actors is complex. Curled within this complexity between state-NGO relations, are similarities with China. Like in China, a large number of the NGOs operating in the nation do so as "service providers". These organisations essentially work at the pleasure of the state, and help it govern in areas that it lacks the capacity, time, or political will. It is as service providers that most NGOs have enjoyed political space, and economic opportunities, that have been fundamental for their individual growth, and the larger development of the NGO sector in China (see Hasmath and Hsu 2014; Hsu and Hasmath 2014). Informants who have followed the development of local Malawi NGOs (often from the inside) all report a kind of maturation wherein the organisations "learn how to behave". For example, Bamusi suggests that civil society has changed fundamentally, not because they have been repressed, but that they can be more effective if they are more moderate, "it was previously perhaps too loud, too vocal, and too frequently using demonstrations and sit-ins – its actions were more based on emotions" (Interview, June 2014). But in the case of China, this is ultimately the only space and role available for NGOs, whereas in Malawi there remains what the interviewee of Institute for Social Research and Empowerment described as the "100% Western-model type" that conducts advocacy and often in an adversarial manner, whereby the NGO "comes into conflict with the state more often" (Interview, June 2014). The fact that our Malawian interviewees refer to them as a "Western type" of NGOs suggests that, even though they might have some political space to operate, unlike in China, this "democratic" environment might well see them as more foreign. This suggests that the state will be open to providing more opportunities for those who subscribe to a varying partnership/governance model that is commonplace among NGOs operating in mainland China.

Given the particular strength of Chinese NGOs in the service delivery realm, interviewees suggest the possibility for some collaboration in the future. Long-time civil society participants, now in government and think tank roles, echoed the potential opportunity for a division of labour, with Chinese NGOs engaged in service delivery (which appears to be there comparative advantage), with local NGOs focusing on policy advocacy. This would likely mirror the division of labour currently between local and international NGOS in the nation. For instance, the head of CONGOMA reports that no INGOs conduct human rights or advocacy work, as this is reserved for local groups (Interview, June 2014). Yet, the presidential advisor on civil society issues was quick to note that if Chinese NGOs came to Malawi they would be "scrutinised on issues of transparency and accountability"; another suggested that if Chinese NGOs "displayed difference attitudes on democracy [from Malawi NGOs] there would be a problem" (Bamusi Interview, June 2014. One interviewee from the Institute of Social Research and Empowerment, who had travelled to China several times, wondered out loud if China had any "real" NGOs as all, "their closeness to the state is just too much … they lack freedom and so would bring a different character of civil society if they came" (Interview, June 2014).

As another type of constraint, local NGOs in Malawi (like smaller, less institutionalised NGOs in many developing nations) sometimes report feeling overshadowed by larger INGOs –

brain drain, resource hoarding, and "capacity sucking". This led a large number of domestic NGOs to boycott all INGO-organised meetings in 2006 (Bamusi Interview, June 2014). The NGO-friendly regulatory framework outlined above has sought to address many of these concerns. It mandates that INGOs operating in the nation must have a board comprised of at least 20% locals (Mtonga Interview, June 2014). Although, this has not appeared to scare off many Western INGOs, in fact, our interviewees noted that ActionAid has not just met the 20% threshold, but created a board of 90% local Malawians – this might well be a constraint to Chinese NGOs. That is, if they mirror the Chinese model, they will likely have a majority to all staff being Chinese.[2]

Additionally, informants all pointed to what they saw as China's real comparative advantage – large infrastructure projects, and their current model of development funding which favours no-string loans. China's development aid is designed solely to be "government to government" with no money being funnelled to grassroots civil society organisations (Interview, June 2014). With China controlling these purse strings, the Malawi government has little control over where the money flows. This makes funding of grassroots NGO projects increasingly difficult with the Chinese funding model (Kutengule Interview, June 2014).

Furthermore, given that many NGOs work in the field of social development, many in Malawi do not believe the Chinese government would be interested in these projects. A Chinese embassy official puts it as such: "we prefer the immediacy of government to government development … why would we want to resort to using NGOs if we can do the work well ourselves" (Interview, June 2014). The qualification here, of course, is if the government is only interested in infrastructure development they see little need to enlist the help of their own NGOs. However, if the state becomes interested in more social and welfare development projects we may we see a window of opportunity for Chinese NGOs to enter Malawi.

While the developmental interests of the Chinese government certainly matters, what is to stop well-funded Chinese NGOs from entering Malawi independently? It is not just the general reluctance or suspect feelings on the part of local civil society actors that gets in the way. Rather, the regulatory structure that was created by local NGOs themselves, as described in the previous section, which is perhaps the largest impediment for NGO entry in Malawi. The director of CONGMA, the independent regulatory board for NGOs, notes that all INGOs operating in the nation need to be registered – and he was highly doubtful that Chinese NGOs would be able to meet the criteria. Like other interviewees, he noted how Malawi NGOs value both independence and internal democracy, noting that registration required that NGOs must have a committee of directors that was separate from operations and had 20% Malawi representation; and that these organisations could not be formed or administered by the government or GONGOs. This may be problematic proposition for Chinese NGOs to achieve (see Hasmath and Hsu 2008).

The Potential Role and Behaviour of Chinese GONGOs

Interviews with Chinese GONGO representatives emphasised their work in promoting co-operation, understanding and exchanges with their African counterparts. Although, GONGOs are effectively agents of the state, they potentially have an important role to play in international development. Notwithstanding, it does appear that their reception by host jurisdictions can be

[2] Several informants in Malawi spoke with a great disdain that the new parliament was built with Chinese funds, and had a construction crew that was 100% Chinese nationals. This is an anticipation that Chinese NGOs may follow this trend as well.

less than rosy, as seen above, GONGOs such as the China NGO Network International Exchange (CNNIE), and Beijing NGO Association for International Exchanges (BNAIE), see themselves as platforms for promoting cross-cultural learning. As the Secretary of CNNIE noted, her organisation is "chiefly a networking platform" (Interview, August 2014). The Deputy Division Chief of BNAIE articulates similar organisational aims: "The Beijing NGO Association is primarily a networking platform and therefore [we] cooperate with the largest and most influential local African NGOs" (Interview, August 2014). While having commensurate goals as the previous two organisations, the larger Chinese-African People's Friendship Association (CFPA) works more at the governmental level, thereby reinforcing its GONGO nature. With various forums, lectures, study tours and publications, the activities of CFPA are bolstered by its co-operation with more 20 Chinese government departments and similar type of organisations in Africa, such as the Ghana-China Friendship Association, Association of Local Government Authorities of Kenya, or South Africa-China People's Friendship Association (Interview, August 2014).

The China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF) and China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA) are slightly different in focus where they are engaged in direct delivery of services. CYDF's China-Africa Hope Project launched in 2011 in Kenya, Burundi and Rwanda is its flagship project on the African continent, with the aim of building 1,000 primary schools in Africa. A range of Chinese companies have funded CYDF's project in Africa. CFPA's current focus is in the building of hospitals across Sudan. With a budget of RMB 60 million (USD 9.67 million), CFPA plans to build 13 hospitals and to train medical staff and provide equipment to the hospitals. According to the Chief of Division, CFPA intends to use Sudan as a model to roll out similar projects in Ethiopia, Chad, and Kenya (Interview, August 2014).

Despite the desire to undertake further projects in Africa, three of the five GONGOs believed that having sufficient funding is one of the biggest challenges to their organisation. In particular, the Division Director for South and East African Affairs of CFPA noted that in addition to funding, she also needed more "people willing to work in Africa, otherwise it will not be possible to establish a permanent office there" (Interview, August 2014). For BNAIE, the situation is similar – without more funding, it does not have the capacity to establish a permanent office in Africa. Chinese GONGO representatives demonstrate that their organisations are at the beginning of their social development work in Africa. Despite the enormous commercial interests and investments from China, the development sector as represented by the GONGOs, do not have sufficient resources to make the social impact that it intends to.

Implications and Conclusion

The state of the Ethiopian and Malawian NGO sectors suggest that there is both room and opportunity for Chinese NGOs to enter both jurisdictions. While Chinese NGOs have not had the same history or time in operation as Western NGOs, the experience accumulated within China – where development conditions more aptly reflect the recent experiences of Ethiopia and Malawi – provide a litany of best/worst practices and lessons learned that can be transferred. Further, interviewees in Ethiopia and Malawi noted that Chinese NGOs and social development assistance would be a welcomed addition in funding local social programs. The combination of expertise and need demonstrate two areas in which Chinese NGOs can capitalise and have a comparative advantage, relative to Western NGOs.

Having now understood both how Chinese NGOs have developed in their own context, and

analysed the domestic conditions that offer both opportunities and constraints for entry into Ethiopia and Malawi, we now explore the most likely future scenario. That is, insofar as Chinese NGOs continue to mature and follow the developmental and commercial interests of mainland China, what might their behaviour look like? Moreover, how should we theorise beyond these cases, into other parts of the developing world as China continues to "go out"?

First, and perhaps most likely in the immediate term, there will be more of the status quo. As has been replicated elsewhere in Africa, we will see more one-off, temporary entry of Chinese experts or volunteers. In Ethiopia, while in the field, we were informed of the presence of a large team of doctors from the Beijing Eye Hospital who were in the nation to provide "social capacity" (non-political action), which basically involved providing short-term surgery for those in need. The Economic and Commercial Counsellor based at China's Embassy in Lilongwe, Malawi highlighted one programme of non-state actors – with Chinese government assistance – in the form of the China Youth Volunteers who stayed in the nation from 2009 to 2010, and were tasked to primarily teach agricultural and computer skills to various government ministries (Interview, June 2014). Another observer recalls groups of Chinese dentists that came to the nation for three weeks at a time (Bamusi Interview, June 2014). These temporary, project-based interventions that, most notably, lack any attempt to institutionalise Chinese social organisations in the nation, is a model that widely used in mainland China (see Hasmath and Hsu 2014; Hsu and Hasmath 2015).

Second, given Beijing's professed preference of "government to government" linkages in development – reinforced by our interviewees – this may suggest a more sustained presence at the state-level, without the involvement of independent NGOs, but rather GONGOs. Such future GONGO initiatives will likewise have a one-off and ad hoc nature. While such one-off projects are easy to control, they lead to a loss of institutional knowledge – which likewise is witnessed in the domestic Chinese context (see Hasmath and Hsu 2015b) – and often the solutions are short-term and temporary and short.

Finally, we suspect that the "GONGO-isation of development" may not be a major barrier for entry for the Chinese in Ethiopia, largely due to the similarities in the political structure of the one-party system. In this system, the state is an unavoidable factor in all aspects of social, political and economic development. On the other hand, the regulatory framework governing NGOs in places such as Malawi would seem to make life difficult for GONGOs to enter the jurisdiction. Chinese NGOs who have a preference for operating in the nation will have to adapt by formally distancing themselves from the state, even if informally they are intimately tied. While we acknowledge that, at first glance, Chinese GONGOs may not look so different from Western NGO[3] – especially when considering sources of state-NGO funding as a proxy, for example, Swedish and Norwegian NGOs receive up to 35% of their finances from their respective governments, and Belgian and Irish up to 77% (Bullain 2011: 193) – what is different between Chinese GONGOs and their Western counterparts, is as noted previously, Chinese GONGOs emerged largely out of the constructs of an authoritarian state. In order to survive and flourish in China's domestic political and institutional environment, Chinese NGOs developed adaptive strategies which are now ingrained in their organisational culture and behaviour (see Hasmath and Hsu 2015a; Hsu et al, 2015; Hsu and Hasmath 2015). From another standpoint, Western NGOs, unlike Chinese NGOs, are generally able to create and implement their organisation's goals and strategies without (real or the threat of) direct government interference (McMahon 2002: 30).

[3] We thank the anonymous reviewer and the Editors for bringing this issue to our attention.

Suffice to say, Ethiopia and Malawi highlight some critical areas where Chinese NGOs may face entry barriers, but also opportunities to address the development needs in Ethiopia and Malawi. Our findings indicate that political regime type whether authoritarian (Ethiopia, sharing similarities with China) or democratic (Malawi) will pose a range of future challenges to Chinese NGOs. Consequently, we suggest that the authoritarian nature of Ethiopia's political system is unlikely to pose a significant (albeit some) advantage for Chinese NGOs due to the strict 2009 "Proclamation for the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies" (which ironically, the Chinese state is currently drafting an even more restrictive regulatory document in this fashion than the Ethiopian version). In Malawi, we see challenges of a different kind. Its young democracy has presented NGOs the opportunities to assume the role of watchdog of the government, and have played an important role in the process of consolidating Malawi's democracy. Thus, Chinese NGOs may have to contend with issues including governance, accountability and transparency. The value placed on democratic governance both at the political level and for NGOs, as indicated by our interviewees, may prove to be an institutional and regulatory challenge for Chinese organisations seeking entry into Malawi. In short, a nation's political regime type can potentially present either an opportunity or constraint for Chinese NGOs "going out" in Africa.

References

Andrews, A. (2014) "Downward Accountability in Unequal Alliances: Explaining NGO Responses to Zapatista Demands", *World Development* 54: 99-113.

Askouri, A. (2008) "Civil Society Initiative in Africa", in *China's New Role in Africa and the South: A Search for a New Perspective,* D.G. Guerrero and F. Manji, eds., pp. 238-245. Cape Town: Pambazuka Press.

Banks, N., Hulme, D., and Edwards, M. (2015) "NGOs, States and Donors Revisited: Still Too Close for Comfort?", *World Development* 66: 707-718.

Batley R. and Rose P. (2011) "Analysing Collaboration between Non-Government Service Providers and Governments", *Public Administration and Development* 30(4): 230-239.

British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC]. (2015) "India Court Orders Two Greenpeace Accounts Unblocked." 27 May. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-32900180 [Accessed 27 May 2015].

Bosshard, P. (2008) "No Harmonious Global Society Without Civil Society", in *China's New Role in Africa and the South: A Search for a New Perspective,* D.G. Guerrero and F. Manji, eds., pp. 246-252. Cape Town: Pambazuka Press.

Brysk, A. (2000) "Democratizing Civil Society in Latin America", *Journal of Democracy* 11(3): 151-65.

Bullain, N. (2011) "Creating an Enabling Environment for NGOs in Central and Eastern Europ, in Y. Li (ed). *NGOs in China and Europe.* Surrey: Ashgate.

China Aid Data (2015). *Chinese Development Finance.* Available at: http://china.aiddata.org [Accessed 10 May 2015].

Deng, G. and Shieh, S. (2011) "An Emerging Civil Society: The Impact of the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake on Grass-Roots Associations in China", *The China Journal* 65: 181-194.

Dupuy, K.E., Ron, J. and Prakash, A. (2014) "Who Survived? Ethiopia's Regulatory Crackdown on Foreign-funded NGOs", *Review of International Political Economy* 22(2): 419-456

Hasmath, R. and Hsu, J. (2008) "NGOs in China: Issues of Good Governance and Accountability", *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration* 30(1): 1-11.

Hasmath, R. and Hsu, J. eds. (2009) *China in an Era of Transition: Understanding Contemporary State and Society Actors*. New York and Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hasmath, R. and Hsu, J. (2014) "Isomorphic Pressures, Epistemic Communities and State-NGO Collaboration in China", *The China Quarterly* 220: 936-954.

Hasmath, R. and Hsu, J. (2015a) "Communities of Practice and the NGO Sector in China", Paper Presented at *Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action Conference* (Chicago, USA), November 19-21.

Hasmath, R. and Hsu, J., eds. (2015b) *NGO Governance and Management in China.* New York and Oxford: Routledge.

He, D. (2005) "The Missions and Challenges Chinese NGOs Face and the Reform of the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation", Presentation at *Building a 'Harmonious Society' in China: Non-Governmental and Faith-Based Organization as Agents of Social Change and Stability*, CSIS, Washington DC, 26 September 2005.

Hildebrandt, T. (2011) "The Political Economy of Social Organization Registration in China", *The China Quarterly* 208: 970-989.

Hildebrandt, T. (2013) *Social Organizations and the Authoritarian State in China*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
Hochschild J.L. (2009) "Conducting Intensive Interviews and Elite Interviews", *Workshop on Interdisciplinary Standards for Systematic Qualitative Research.*
Hsu, J. (Unpublished) *Layers and Spaces of the State: Non-governmental Organisations and the Chinese State.*
Hsu, J. (2012a) "Layers of the Urban State: Migrant Organizations and the Chinese State", *Urban Studies* 49(16): 3513-3530.
Hsu, J. (2012b) "Spaces of Civil Society: The Role of Migrant Non-Governmental Organisations in Beijing and Shanghai?" *Progress in Development Studies* 12(1): 63-76.
Hsu, J. (2014) "Chinese Non-Governmental Organisations and Civil Society: A Review of the Literature", *Geography Compass* 8(2): 98-110.
Hsu, J. and Hasmath, R., eds. (2013) *The Chinese Corporatist State: Adaptation, Survival and Resistance.* New York and Oxford: Routledge.
Hsu, J. and Hasmath, R. (2014) "The Local Corporatist State and NGO Relations in China", *Journal of Contemporary China* 23(87): 516-534.
Hsu, J. and Hasmath, R. (2015) "Approaching Maturity: The Role of Knowledge and Professionalization in the Development of Chinese NGOs", Paper Presented at *American Sociological Association Annual Meeting* (Chicago, USA), August 22-25.
Hsu, J., Hsu, C. and Hasmath, R. (2015) "NGO Strategies in an Authoritarian Context, and their Implications for Citizenship: The Case of the People's Republic of China", Working Paper.
Kang, X. and Heng, H. (2008) "Graduated Controls: The State-Society Relationship in Contemporary China", *Modern China* 34(1): 36-55.
Kaufman, J. (2012) "China's Evolving AIDS Policy: The Influence of Global Norms and Transnational Non-Governmental Organizations", *Contemporary Politics* 18(2): 225-238.
Li, L. (2014) "Ethiopia Welcomes Chinese Investment", *The China Daily,* 3 May. Available at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2014livisitafrica/2014-05/03/content_17480123.htm [Accessed 24 January 2015].
McMahon, P. (2002) "International Actors and Women's NGOs in Poland and Hungary", in S.E. Mendelson and J.K. Glen (eds), *The Power and Limits of NGOs*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Meng, J. and Sun, Y. (2013) "Chinese NGOs Reach Out to African Countries", *The China Daily*, 29 April. Available at: http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2013-04/29/content_16462082. htm [Accessed 12 January 2015].
Ministry of Civil Affairs [MoCA] (2013) *2013 Statistical Report of Social Service Development (Shehui Fuwu Fashan Tongji Baogao).* Beijing: Ministry of Civil Affairs.
Scholte, J.A. (1999) "Global Civil Society: Changing the World", *CSGR Working Paper* No. 31/99.
Tam, J. and Hasmath, R. (2015) "Navigating Uncertainty: The Survival Strategies of Religious NGOs in China", *Journal of Civil Society* 11(3): 283-299.
Wu, F. and Chan, K-M. (2012) "Graduated Control and Beyond: The Evolving Government-NGO Relations", *China Perspectives* 3: 9-17.
Yeshanew, S.A. (2012) "CSO Law in Ethiopia: Considering its Constraints and Consequences", *Journal of Civil Society* 8(4): 369-384.

Zadek, S. (2013) “Essential Link for the Future”, *The China Daily*, 26 April. Available at: http://africa.chinadaily.com.cn/weekly/2013-04/26/content_16452193.htm [Accessed 12 January 2015].