The Educational Movement for Social Justice of NGOs in China

Zhou Yong and He Shanyun
East China Normal University
The Institute of Curriculum and Instruction

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The Privatisation in Education Research Initiative (PERI) is a global research and networking initiative seeking to animate an accessible and informed public debate on alternative education provision. In particular, it examines the social justice implications of changes in the coordination, financing and governance of education services.
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Abstract

Over the last decade, there has been an increasing number of private NGOs dedicated to educational equality in China. This study explores NGOs' role in educational social justice, as well as the structural defects and difficulties involved in expanding the movement within the complex Chinese educational context. The study examines four typical NGOs and their action models. It finds that the expansion of the NGOs' educational movement for social justice depends largely on whether the NGOs, the state, and Chinese society can change the existing attitudes towards NGOs and foster a spirit of trust and cooperation.
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List of Acronyms

BNVS  Bai Nian Vocational School
CCPCC  Chinese Communist Party Central Committee
CDF  Cherished Dreams Foundation
CYDF  Chinese Youth Development Foundation
FON  Friends of Nature
GONGO  Government-operated NGO
MOE  Ministry of Education
NF  Narada Foundation
TF  Tencent Foundation
TFC  Teach Future China
SC  State Council
SCE  State Committee of Education
Introduction

In the past, Chinese intellectuals and professionals as well as other private social forces played leading roles in educational developments in the Republic of China. From 1949 to 1978, almost all the independent, progressive intellectuals and professionals were transformed and assimilated by the radical socialist state power. However, since the new socialist state power led by Deng Xiaoping has implemented a policy of economical reform and opening, more and more intellectuals and professionals are aspiring to develop their own enterprises.

In our opinion, some the most significant shifts in the role of intellectuals and professionals occurred during the 1990s, among them Liang Congjie, Yang Dongping and others who dedicated themselves to businesses devoted to the public good and founded new NGOs to realize their environmental conservation and social justice oriented educational ideals. It was these intellectuals and professionals who initiated the NGOs’ educational movements for social justice in contemporary China.

Over the last decade, there has been an increasing number of private NGOs dedicated to the cause of educational equality. Drawing on the four typical Chinese NGOs examined in this study, including the 21st Century, Cherished Dreams Foundation (CDF), Teach Future China (TFC), and Bai Nian Vocational School (BNVS), educational movements for social justice are characterized by four kinds of action models:

1) Participating in educational policy-making and innovations for educational equality and progress;
2) Providing the poor with good educational service and products;
3) Selecting and training university students to teach poor students for two years;
4) Establishing good schools for the urban migrant laborers’ children.

With these four action models, NGOs sponsored by intellectuals and professionals have launched numerous justice-oriented educational reform programs across the country, and have played a significant role in reducing the social educational gap through providing the poor with sound policy and practical support.

However, it must be pointed out that in China the state governs the educational movements for social justice. Although developments have been made by NGOs, the Chinese political system does not allow for a ‘civil society’ as in the West. Nevertheless, NGOs are becoming more independent and functional as state-governed participants in the educational movement for social justice.

NGOs are well aware of the extensive and urgent educational demands of the lower socioeconomic groups and thus aspire to further expand their justice-oriented educational enterprises. Yet they face two main challenges. The first is the NGOs’ financial and institutional shortcomings and the state’s rigorous governing systems over the NGOs. The second challenge results from the test-driven school pedagogies, as well as the general population’s educational values and their ignorance or lack of understanding of NGOs, which is difficult to change within a short period.
Despite facing severe challenges and difficulties, Xu Yongguang, Yang Dongping, Yao Li and other NGO sponsors have made the decision to persist in their pursuit of educational equality and social justice. The expansion of the NGOs’ educational movement for social justice depends largely on whether the NGOs, the state, and Chinese society can change the existing attitudes towards NGOs and foster a spirit of trust and cooperation.
1. Chinese NGOs’ Educational Movement for Social Justice

Since 1919, when the May Fourth New Culture Movement took place, Chinese intellectuals and students, influenced by western liberalism and its values of democracy, equity, and freedom, have been active in reforming the Chinese sociopolitical system (Chow 1960, Yeh 1996). It is significant that reform was led by intellectuals, professionals and students—non-government agents who adopted a new socio-political culture of democracy and equity, through educational reform.

Compared to mass political revolution and military struggle mobilized by the radical republicans, Marxists and communists, reform through education was a slower process (Keenan 1977; Kwan 1997). Nevertheless, education was widely considered as the most meaningful agent of change by many leading liberal modern Chinese intellectuals and professionals dedicated to eliminating the inequity between the wealthy urban minority and the rural majority. Among those liberal intellectuals and professionals favoring education for reform, the most influential were Tao Xingzhi, Liang Shuming, and Yan Yangchu, who pioneered the tradition of seeking for social justice through running high-quality non-profit private schools for the less privileged (Alitto 1986).

In 1949 Chinese society was taken over and reconstructed completely by the new socialist central government founded by the Chinese Communist Party (Zou Tang 1987). The liberal educational enterprises and their founders were remodelled or integrated with the new state-led new socialist school system. This new system played a significant role in providing the under-privileged majority with socialist values and the education necessary for developing socialist industry. However this progress was hindered by the Education Revolution in 1958, when the policy of the Great Leap Forward was introduced and the decision was made to integrate the school system more closely with industry and labor (Zhang 2009). This was followed in 1966 by the Cultural Revolution, during which students were mobilized to join the political and ideological struggles and later encouraged to leave university and dispatched to remote rural areas to learn from the peasant and the working class (Jiang 2009).

In 1981, the ten-year Culture Revolution was declared as a misguided period of civil unrest launched by Chairman Mao but exploited by the Gang of Four, which brought great loss and destruction to the party, the state and the people (Liao Wang Weekly 1984).

The damage caused resulted in the new central government led by Deng Xiaoping having to spend another ten years developing and implementing economical and scientific development strategies around the country.¹

¹ Chinese society was still reluctant to accept the central government’s call for economic reform until the early 1990s. Thus, in 1992 Deng Xiaoping delivered several influential speeches to address this problem during his visit to southern China (Jiang1992).
These strategies are central to understanding the Chinese social movement since the 1980s. In 1985, when considering reforming the country’s school system, the central government realized that it could not meet the huge educational demands of the new state strategy and the people alone, but needed the assistance of non-government sectors as business, and even the individuals who had the means and ability to run schools (CCPCC and SC 1985).

Such individuals, whose initiative and energy had been oppressed for decades, now had the opportunity to pursue their ideals of democracy and social development through education. Since the 1990s, Chinese society has witnessed the renewal of the educational movement for social justice led by various NGOs whose founders or key members are from the intellectual community. This event of the renewal of educational movement for social justice is meaningful not only because it has reproduced the social educational tradition or culture founded by Tao Xingzhi, Liang Shuming and Yan Yangchu, but also because it provides insight into how contemporary Chinese intellectuals and professionals can carry out their social justice-oriented educational programs within today’s Chinese social political context.

There is little difference between today’s Chinese sociopolitical context and that of Republican China. However, it is evident that contemporary Chinese intellectuals and professionals have made significant achievements in promoting social justice through their own institutional non-profit educational actions. In the field of education, NGOs, founded by Chinese intellectuals and professionals, also become a lively symbol of social justice, serving to remind people of its meaning and encourage them to develop non-profit educational enterprises.

Since the 1990s, NGOs have played a major role in research worldwide. However, international NGOs generally focus on environment, health and civilian right protection rather than education (Yang 2005, Cooper 2006, Thompson and Lu 2006, Frank et al. 2007). There are a few sociologists and education researchers (Liping et al. 2001; Ross 2006, Hsua 2008) who have done studies on international NGO programs to enhance Chinese girls’ educational opportunities, and the educational movements of Project Hope initiated by the Chinese Youth Development Foundation (CYDF) Local scholars have largely ignored NGOs efforts at for educational justice. In recent years, however, some leading educational researchers have begun to discuss the issue of how to strengthen national educational reform through obtaining the support of “social force,” or “civil society” (Jin 2009, Wu 2010).

The educational movements for social justice of Chinese NGOs are without question worthy of much more academic attention. This study, however, does not aim to provide a comprehensive picture of the vast and complicated educational movements for social justice sponsored by Chinese NGOs. Rather, it addresses some key issues concerning Chinese NGOs’ efforts at educational reform, and looks at the structural defects and hidden difficulties or challenges in expanding the movement within the context of Chinese society, which is dominated by the state power and the test-oriented school system.
2. Defining NGOs and Their Relations to the State

As the core subject of this study is how Chinese NGOs can develop their educational enterprises in contemporary Chinese society, which is dominated by state power, we need begin by defining our research targets—Chinese NGOs—and understanding the complicated relationship between NGOs and the state within the Chinese context.

2.1 NGOs in China: Definitions and Classifications Based on Legal Frames

Most understand NGOs to be organizations created by natural or legal persons that operate independently from government. However, due to strict regulations around registration, the reality of civic or social organizations in China is more complicated. Thus many Chinese NGOs do not have a legal name, despite doing a lot for the public good. These organizations can be referred to as non-profit organizations (NPOs), though some scholars refer to them as “third sector” or “civil society” organizations (Liu 2005). These differing conceptions have given rise to much controversy, making it difficult to define and classify NGOs in China.

To reach a common consensus in understanding NGOs, Chinese scholars have studied various western conceptions of NGOs and NPOs. According to Prof. Wang Ming, the director of the Institute of NGOs at Tsinghua University, the relatively well known conception among Chinese scholars is the model of “NGOs five characters” developed by Prof. Lester M. Salamon of John Hopkins University. According to Wang “Salamon defined NGOs as organized, private or non-governmental, non-profit distributing, self-governing, and of some voluntary character. Among them, non-governmental and non-profit are the two most important characteristics for defining the NGOs” (Wang et al. 2002: 31).

Salamon’s model provides us with five criteria to examine Chinese NGOs. Yet very few Chinese NGOs fit these criteria, since most of them are run by governmental organizations, and many are even founded by the government, although these kinds of government-run NGOs operate mainly on social resources and private donations, and their leaders have strong ideals of breaking away from governmental rule (Wang et al. 2002, Liu 2005, Ouyang 2006). Moreover, many organizations are formally registered as tax-paying businesses with the State Administration of Industry and Commerce, even though in practice they operate on a not-for-profit basis.

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2. Salamon’s five common characteristics of NGOs are: 1) Organization: they have an institutional presence and structure. 2) Independence: they are institutionally separate from the state, i.e. they are neither part of the government nor led by boards of directors with government officials playing leading roles. 3) Non-engagement in making profits: they do not distribute material gains to their members. 4) Self-governance: they are in control of their own affairs, i.e. their internal management is free from outside control. 5) Voluntary character: membership is not legally required and there is a remarkable degree of voluntary participation in both actual activities and administrative matters (Salamon and Anheier 1999: 3)
Thus the following simpler, functional definition of NGOs is widely accepted by Chinese scholars: “independent societal organizations whose primary aim is to promote common goals at the national or international level” (Duckett 2007: 4). Wang Ming and other leading Chinese NGO researchers, such as Kang Xiaoguang, the director of the Institute of NPOs at Renmin University of China, agree that in order to promote the development of Chinese NGOs, scholars do not need to comply strictly with the ideal models invented by Salamon or other western NGO experts. In China, all legally registered organizations that voluntarily dedicate themselves to the public good can be defined as “Chinese NGOs” (Kang 2001, Wang et al. 2002).

The above definition excludes the thousands of grass-root organizations (caogen zuzhi) that are voluntarily dedicated to the public good but which do not have sufficient institutional qualifications to meet the registration requirements of the government (Zhu Jiangang 2008). This is unfortunate, as these organizations have done much to contribute to the development of educational equity. The reason for our omission of these organizations is that the subject of this study is not to develop a comprehensive definition that covers all kinds of Chinese NGOs but to examine the educational social justice movement initiated by a sample Chinese NGOs that have obtained a legal institutional name from the government.

It can be argued that the academic definitions are useful tools for encouraging Chinese NGOs to meet the westernized standard of NGOs. However, more significant than the definitions are the governmental regulations that determine the development of Chinese NGOs. For any organization, including government agencies, wanting to establish a legal NGO, the founder can only do so under the guidance of the governmental framework for NGOs.

In the official websites1 sponsored by the Administration Bureau of Non-governmental Organizations attached to the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the legal Chinese NGOs are normally referred to as “non-governmental organizations” (Minjian Zuzhi), “non-profit organizations” (Fei Yingli Jigou), or “social organizations” (Shehui Zuzhi). But they are generally used to address the same type of organization. Under these names, the State Council issued, from 1998 to 2004, three new laws to structure domestic NGO developments.

The first one, issued in October 1998, is the “Regulations for the Registration and Management of Social Organizations.” In this law, “social organization” is a non-profit-making organization voluntary founded by Chinese citizens to realize its members’ common vision; its activities are structured by its constitution (The State Council 1998a). This liberal conception of social organization has strict registration regulations. For intellectuals or other public entities, it may be easy to find at least 50 organization members, but it is still difficult to register the organization, as in order to obtain authorization from the state for all organizational activities they have to find a government institution or university to form the main supervising unit. The supervising unit registers the NGO with the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

As stipulated in Article 9 of the regulation:

*Social organization candidates must be supervised and approved by a leading unit in their professional field, and the applying persons [faqi ren, refers to who wants to legally found a social organization] must make a preliminary application to the registration and management agency.*

Apparently, only the government itself, or those non-governmental entities that have a close relationship with government institutions, can set up a legal social organization. From 1978 to 1998, about 870,000 social organizations were formed in China. Most of them, however, were government-operated, known as “GONGOs,” or “government-organized NGOs” (Cooper 2006: 110). To some degree, the new law issued in 1998 was issued to further tighten government control over the rapid development of NGOs since the mid-1990s. Many social organizations that could not find a governmental supervising unit were eliminated after the new law was issued (Wang 2004).

The second law, issued in the same year, is the “Regulations for the Registration and Management of Popular Non-enterprise Work Units.” In this law, the “Popular Non-enterprise Work Units” refer to those non-profit-making social organizations that are founded by business enterprises, public institutions, social groups or other social forces, or individual citizens, and are supported by non-state-owned assets. A wide range of civic organizations fit these definitional categories, and organizations registered in this way can more readily self-govern, run programs and make decisions with considerable independence. The state is also aware that it cannot deal with the heavy task of social service and social development alone. This law, therefore, provides intellectuals, professionals and other entities with enough space to set up a legal NGO in China. Although according to this law, organization registration still requires nominal supervision from two tiers of government institutions, the leadership decisions and the activities of the organization are not necessarily dictated by the overseeing state institutions.

The third new law, issued in 2004, is the “Regulations for the Management of the Foundation.” In this law, a “foundation” is a kind of non-profit-making corporation whose purpose is to undertake public welfare with the donations of natural persons, corporations or other organizations. There are two categories of foundations: one has the legal right to independently solicit donations from the public; the other is forbidden to seek funds publicly. The second category is required to accumulate at least RMB2 million (Chinese Yuan Renminbi, US$327,000) to meet basic financial standards, which may prove difficult, while the first requires RMB4 million (US$654,000), which should not prove difficult for business professionals to secure (The State Council 2004).

Besides the above three state regulations, there is another way for intellectuals and professionals to formulate NGOs in China, by registering as tax-paid businesses or enterprises with the State Administration of Industry and Commerce. According to one of the NGO leaders we interviewed, registering NGOs in this way is perhaps the easiest route, although such NGOs can easily be mistaken for profit-making enterprises by the public. Nevertheless, this is a practical way for those intellectuals and professionals who cannot secure government sponsorship to set up a NGO. An example of such an NGO is the 21st Century Education Research Institute (commonly referred to as the 21st Century), one of the sample NGOs in this study, which is registered with the Administration Bureau of Industry and Commerce and which has become one of the most widely acknowledged educational justice NGOs.
Based on the above, we can draw two conclusions regarding the Chinese NGO system. First, a range of entities can establish and operate NGOs, from the state to business professionals to governmental institutions and various social forces. Second, there are four types of legal NGOs in China: social organizations, popular non-enterprise work units, foundations, and non-profit enterprises for public welfare. In this study, those intellectuals and professionals who want to or who have initiated independent social justice—oriented educational movements, are well aware of the ideal, Western NGO model. However, given the political situation, they normally can establish NGOs only in accordance with the three regulations issued by the State Council.

Figure 1. — The Chinese NGO legal system: its classifications and social justice function

2.2 Relations between NGOs and the State

The issue of the relationship between the state and NGOs has been addressed by numerous scholars of Chinese NGOs. According to our research, the most popular analyzing tool is the model of “civil society.”

In the early 1990s, the western academic world saw a shift in the concept of “civil society” in the field of Late Imperial China studies. Stimulated by Gramsci and Habermas’s theories on the divide between state and society, some American Sinologists argued that as early as the Ming Dynasty, a new sociopolitical space outside the state power had begun to emerge, which can be defined as “civil society” or “the public sphere.” This theory, however, was rejected by other Sinologists who gathered to discuss this topic at UCLA in 1993 (Huang 1993). Nevertheless, since the 1990s, more and more scholars have adopted the concept of civil society to examine the role of Chinese NGOs in the state-led social life (White 1993).

Caroline M. Cooper’s influential research about Chinese environmental NGOs was structured by this conception. As an NGO scholar from the UN Environmental Protection Agency, Cooper regards Chinese NGOs as an effective mechanism for developing
civil society. She argued that the “growing number of Chinese environmental groups constitutes not only an effective force in tackling environmental issues, but also a civil society that is starting to transform state–society relations.” In Cooper’s studies of Chinese NGOs, her main concern is to link Chinese NGOs’ environmental movement to “the important new freedoms for the public as well as jarring political change” (Cooper 2006: 109).

Cooper’s ideal of developing a civil society is welcomed by Yu Keping, He Zengke, and many other leading Chinese NGO scholars. They consider “the growth of NGOs as an essential index for evaluating the development of civil society in China,” and are glad to see that “NGOs have been flourishing since the policy of reform and opening was implemented.” Thus, in future, China could see the development of an independent civil society if NGOs and other similar social mechanisms can acquire sufficient institutional support and power to redress the present imbalance between society and state (Yu 2006, He 2006, Yu and Zhou 2008, Wang 2009).

The concept of civil society also popular among NGO workers. Wu Aqoi, a senior manager of an environmental NGO, commented that domestic NGOs’ main concern is not the abstract sociopolitical ideal, but how to do more to improve public welfare and institutional development. Wu was aware of NGO researchers’ tendency to emphasize the separation of state and civil society. He suggested that in this way scholars were highlighting the conflict between the two. He said that with the fast growth of civil society, some scholars felt that NGOs are becoming more independent while others argued that conflict remains because of the strong governance of the state (Wu 2011: 53–54).

Mr. Wu’s critiques indicate the theoretical limitations of civil society and its too optimistic conception of the role of Chinese NGOs. However he does not take into account the fact that scholars of Chinese NGOs have developed many other theories to examine relations between NGOs and the state power. In the last ten years, there have been numerous scholarly works on Chinese NGOs using different state–society relation models. One of the models is based on Philippe C. Schmitter’s “corporatist” theory, which shifts the focus to the effective integration efforts of the central state power (Schimiter 1979: 9–13; Xin and Xu 2005). The other influential model is borrowed from Salamon’s “partners theory,” which aims to explain the mutually beneficial interactions between NGOs and the state (Salamon 1995, Wang 2003, Fan 2011).

To obtain further understanding of the complicated relations between NGOs and the state, Chinese scholars have endeavored to invent more accurate conceptions. Professor Yu Jianxing, the director of the Institute of Civil Society at Zhejiang University, argued that the corporatist and partners theories were still problematic, as, according to these models, Chinese NGOs are considered to be independent social agencies, when, in fact, there are no such agencies in China. According to Yu, the more precise model is that of “state in society,” advocated by Joel S. Migdal. To our knowledge, Migdal invented this model to support a theoretical standpoint that the state consists of relatively limited actors who compete in society with various actors for influence and hegemony (Migdal 1997). When Yu first introduced Migdal’s model of “state in society,” it seem that he had filtered out Migdal’s key standpoint of competition for influence and hegemony, and imposed his own model of “approaching the state, but maintaining independence” on Migdal’s framework (Yu and Wu 2003).
Based on our empirical studies and discussions with NGO actors, we, however, we agree with Yu’s basic sociopolitical perspective of Chinese NGOs, which encourages us to abandon the idea of state—society separation and to regard Chinese NGOs as the products of the fluctuating interactions between the state power and social forces. However, defining these fluctuating interactions has proved impossible for us. As Professor Tony Saich of Harvard University pointed out,

*The problem of definition is compounded by the fact that we are trying to analyze a moving target, a state and society in transition. We are dealing with not only the dynamics of the interaction and how this has changed over time but also with the changes within the state sector and society. What appears in one place or at one time as a predatory local state may evolve into one of social partnership later. We are also dealing with a country where multiple models of state-society relations may be operating at the same time.... As Baum and Shevchenko have pointed out there is considerable ideological confusion concerning the analysis of the state in China. One can add that a field of study that was seriously under-theorized and parasitic in terms of the theory used is now seriously over-theorized and has begun to strain the imagination of creative word play. (Saich 2000: 138–9)*

For the purposes of this study, the key task, however, is neither to develop a universal definition of the changing relations between the state and society in China, nor to discuss which actors should or could win the competition for influence and hegemony, but to study how Chinese NGOs participate in the educational movement for social justice within their sociopolitical context, which is governed by state power. From our research, we have deduced that the sample NGOs in this study are not concerned with the theoretical or ideological problems of the NGO research world. For them, what matters is that over the last few decades the central and local governments have begun to put social justice on their education reform agendas, which means that the state and the NGOs examined in this study have the same ideologies regarding the field of education. At the same time, the NGOs all accept, at least on a theoretical level, the political leading position of the central government and its local institutions in the field of educational development. The main concern of the NGOs regarding relations with the state is to be acknowledged and better understood by the state and to receive institutional provisions in order to further the development of the justice-oriented educational movement and increase public awareness thereof, thus moving away from the examination-driven pedagogical tradition that has dominated for centuries.
Figure 2. — Model of the relationship between NGOs and the state

- NGOs as civil society
- Cooperations
- Partners
- Social justice oriented educational movement
- Changing relations
- The state
- NGOs
- The state
3. Research Methodology

On-going NGO Theories-based Fieldwork

As historians of Chinese educational reform and social change, we had never conducted any research on contemporary China before we sent the proposal for this study to the PERI steering committee. During the week of designing our research proposal, in September 2010, we were first encouraged by the historical context, which showed that, since the late 1910s, China has witnessed the birth of liberal and Marxist intellectuals who not only introduced the ideals of social equity and justice, but also founded many institutions to liberate the oppressed laborers to build a democratic or socialist society. Due to the PERI research requirements, we came to realize that in the last two decades, there have been numerous democratic and justice social movements initiated by intellectuals and professionals, with education as their central focus too.

Moreover, we felt that the present sociopolitical context is overall much better than that of the turbulent Republican years, when the country was fractured by wars and competition between parties for influence and hegemony. Today, intellectuals and professionals implementing progressive educational reform programs, operate in a far more peaceful context, although they are still confined by the dominant sociopolitical forces. Over the last two decades they have conducted numerous educational reforms for social justice. However, their achievements have been neglected by the community of educational scholars, and even by the leading NGO researchers. Thus we decided to develop a theory around the basic structure of the social justice oriented educational movement of NGOs founded by contemporary Chinese intellectuals and professionals.

After obtaining the grant from the Open Society Institution Foundations in November 2010, we first spent a month reading the relevant literature relating to our sample NGOs. We were impressed by their non-theorized but clear, strong social justice goals, their working groups composed of energetic activists and volunteers, as well as their different kinds of educational actions, which had been reported and praised by the public media. These reminded us of the educational movements led by Tao Xingzhi, Liang Shuming and other contemporary intellectuals and professionals.

Our first methodological challenge was how to study this movement in terms of the actions of NGOs, which were not formally recognized by the academic community. Despite having undertaken many studies on modern intellectuals and professionals' cultural and institutional actions in the field of education (such as Zhou 2008a, 2008b, Zhou 2010b, He 2010a, 2010b), we had never analyzed their institutional practices through the lens of NGOs. Thus, for this study, we were conflicted as to which research methods to use: our former historical research tools would have resulted in this study being readily acknowledged by the broader academic community. However, if we did not study educational reform from the perspective of NGOs, this would disappoint our sample institutions, who proudly regard themselves as Chinese NGOs or NPOs. Moreover, this would mean missing the opportunity to increase awareness of our sample NGOs by the growing community of NGO researches in China.

Based on the above considerations, we decided to combine popular theories in the field of Chinese NGOs studies, and then compare these to our empirical studies on
NGOs. We hoped that using this methodology, we would find a set of sound concepts to define the basic structures of educational movements of our sample NGOs and their development. We termed this methodology design “NGO theories-based fieldwork,” which means that when analyzing our sample NGOs, we will do so using the existing popular concept of NGOs along with other definitions such as Salamon’s and the “civil society” theory widely used to discuss NGOs’ political relations.

A second methodology challenge involved studying the current field as opposed to the past. Paul Rabinow, one of post-modern sociologists from the Foucault School, however, once reminded the audience that in fact there is no “field” as such at all (Rabinow, 1986). Thus there should be no “reality” of the “field” of Chinese NGOs’ educational movements out there waiting for us to see and analyze it. This Foucauldian insights tells us that the “field” of Chinese NGOs’ educational movements in this study, as a living, under-theorized text, and as an orchestration of moving artificial scenes, is definitely not an objective natural sights, but rather artificial constructions shaped by contemporary China’s social-political forces, and by the sample NGOs and by related people, as well as our theoretical perspectives and narrations as novice NGO researchers.

The sociopolitical forces are without doubt the most powerful background entities in the “field” of Chinese NGOs, and have been positively understood and acknowledged in different rational rhetoric or legal ways by our samples NGOs. In this study, one of the key challenges involves the disadvantageous political and social situation in which NGOs operate. We were able to study the political situation through researching relevant policy texts, such as Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations, and the Law of Promoting Civilian-run Education. These texts reveal that NGOs’ role in the field of education had not been put on the national reform agenda until recently. The latest outline of national educational reform released in 2010 promised that, in the next ten years, “social organizations” would be invited to join the “public educational governance.” However, two years have passed, and there is still no any further policy to detail the structure of “public educational governance” or the role of “the social organizations.” This also explains why we could not get constructive responses when we discussed NGOs with 15 officers of the local educational administration bureaus in Anhui, Guizhou, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. In fact, most of them have never considered the issue of NGOs involvement in educational reform. Only the vice-director of the Shanghai Education Committee expressed his support of NGOs’ participation.

To confirm this lack of social acknowledgement of NGOs, we talked to 50 school principals and 60 parents. Half of them were from our sample areas, Anhui, Guizhou and Jiangsu. The other half were from Shanghai, where knowledge of NGOs is particularly limited. After listening to our introduction, most of the interviewees expressed their appreciation for what NGOs had achieved. However, they did not feel that NGOs’ contributions were “relevant” or “very useful,” as in their opinion, “the most important aspect of education is testing and examinations, especially the college entrance examination, rather than the “life curriculum” or “environmental protection knowledge” advocated by NGOs. According to the principals, their most important and rewarding work is trying to keep their schools in the top of the prestigious university entrance-rate ranking list. The parents in Shanghai showed more interests in NGOs’ efforts than those from remote areas; two of them had made donations to the educational programs of CYDF, but most of them did not think NGOs could change the centuries-old test-oriented culture.
Thus it was not difficult to determine the political and social situation of NGOs. Although we had to inform our interviewees about the activities of NGOs and their educational contributions, most of them did not feel that we were going to interfere with their educational practice or profits, and thus were willing to talk freely with us. Only two principals refused to talk to us. We did not know the reason, despite that we had clarified that we would not mention their names and that what they said would be used only for research purposes, to study the external challenges and difficulties faced by NGOs.

When approaching the four sample NGOs (the 21st Century Education Institute (21st Century), the Cherished Dream Foundation (CDF), the Teach Future China (TFC), and the Bai Nian Vocational School (BNVS)), we needed to ensure that they thoroughly understood the purposes of our study and that we were not “foreign ethnographers” whose fieldwork in China must be governed by the government, since 1978 (Pun 2005: 17). However some NGOs did not believe that our study had no political agenda and thus asked us not to reveal their names, or, in the case of one NGO manager, refused to participate.

We were fortunate in that Yang Dongping, the head of the 21st Century, was aware of Yong Zhou’s previous research work. He trusted in the public good of our research, and was happy to accept Zhou’s interview invitation and to share with us his institutional and personal stories. He was so open that he even discussed his early efforts at education equity developed at the end of the 1990s, which were not welcomed by the market-oriented governmental agencies at that time. He invited us ten times to take part in one of his monthly seminar activities. With Yang Dongping’s support, Zhou twice met and talked with three executive managers of the 21st Century. They discussed institutional efforts at improving education equity, and their understanding of the difficulties in expanding their efforts. Zhou also went to Beijing on two occasions to observe the policy seminars on saving the local traditional culture of rural schools organized by the 21st Century, which informed Zhou on the policy of this institution.

As anticipated, our research was readily accepted by the CDF, as He Shanyun, the other key member of this study, had participated in their educational program developments before. When she revealed our research program to Hu Bin, an active manager of CDF, she was immediately accepted by Hu’s group, which often goes to Anhui, Guizhou to provide curriculum support for rural children. Moreover, since 2010, the institute of curriculum and instruction where Zhou works has also been invited as the professional supervisor to review and improve CDF’s curriculum programs. Thus we were able to have continual and open communication, and discussions with and observations of the CDF. In total, we interviewed two managers, four program assistants and ten volunteer teachers about CDF’s operations, achievements and challenges. He Shanyun and two research assistants visited the school sites in Anhui and Guizhou where CDF implemented its curriculum programs.

TFC was first brought to our attention by Yang, the leading figure widely admired by the Chinese educational NGO community. Thanks to the recommendation of one of our consultants, we were welcomed by Wang Yan, the General Secretary of TCF. Having read many institutional texts and public reports about TCF, Zhou visited Wang Yan’s office in the Beijing Normal University, where she informed him of the history and operational model of the TCF as well as the developments of its experiment schools in Beijing and Anhui. Three volunteer university student teachers were interviewed on addressing the
practical achievements and problems of TCF’s program, which involved selecting and training talented university students to teach for two years in rural schools. The TFC’s experiment schools in Guo Yang County in Anhui were visited by our research assistants, to deepen our understanding of the unique contribution of the TCF to poor rural communities where students would not normally have good university-level teachers.

The BNVC was also suggested to us by Yang. Among our four sample NGOs, BNVC, founded and supported by business professionals, is probably the biggest in terms of financial and institutional scale. We were unable to approach its founder, Yao Li, but Yang introduced us to the manager in charge of running the branch schools, who helped us with basic information about BNVC’s free and excellent educational programs provided to the city’s peasant-labor children. Two of our research assistants went to one of the branch schools in Nanjing to find out whether the special service is really free and good for the urban migrant laborers’ children. Ten students were interviewed. With regards to the history and operational model of BNVC, Yao Li’s autobiography published in 2008 gave us detailed insight. In addition, there were numerous media reports, videos and reviews available on the BNVC, as its activities, particularly the public fund-raisings, drew much public attention.

Our efforts at entering into the field revealed that for our study on Chinese NGOs theoretical tools were important, but more important was knowing how to approach those involved in the field. Within a short time we were able to ascertain the popular theories on Chinese NGOs from existing studies, but initially we did not have enough “social capital” to approach all the founders of our four sample NGOs. However, thanks to the guidance of Yang, our consultants and the managers of CDF, we were gradually adopted by our four sample NGOs. Frequently, we were able to influence each other: the NGOs gave us critiques, with their institutional experience, about our NGO theories, such as civil society, corporatists, and state in society; and we provided them with our cultural and educational knowledge, which were considered as beneficial for strengthening their programs. In addition, they introduced us to several other education NGOs, such as the Narada Foundation and the Tencent Foundation, which had also conducted many successful educational programs for social justice before 2010. This unexpected field experience helped us learn more about the developments of Chinese NGOs’ educational movements for social justice. Thus we were able to draw a much better picture of NGOs’ educational movements, and of the more pluralistic educational ways adopted by intellectuals and professionals to advance social justice.

The last methodological issue involved ethical considerations. In this study, all the researchers and assistants were well aware of the high ethical standards of good research. During the course of information gathering, we complied with principles aiming at protecting the dignity and privacy of every individual requested to provide institutional or personal information. During the fieldwork, all the subjects were notified of the aims, methods, anticipated benefits and potential hazards of the research. Only the names of those participants who had given us permission, such as Yao Li and Xu Yongguang, or who frequently appeared in the media, were revealed in our study. The information obtained during our fieldwork and the names of all other interviewees were kept confidential to avoid any negative consequences for the participants.
4. The Educational Social Justice Movement, the State, and NGOs in Contemporary China

From 1966 to 1976, the essential movement in Chinese society was around ideological and political struggles. In 1978, when the new central government came into power, China began to witness significant social changes directed by the new socialist state power. Since that year, China has pursued sweeping economic reforms in an officially sponsored transition from a centrally planned economy to a socialist market economy. China’s new generation of central reformers, led by Deng Xiaoping, has highlighted the need to rebuild the distorted state power and shift it from vague ideological and political struggles to more effective economic and social reforms. This rational political reconstruction has been the most important dynamic for understanding every noteworthy social movement and social change in contemporary China (White 1996; Lewis and Xue 2003).

The central government’s concentration on economic development has created stable and significant economic growth. At the same time, since the mid-1990s state political leaders are well aware of the costs and problems associated with this economic development, such as increasingly acute social divisions. In December 2001, The People’s Daily (Renmin Ribao), one of leading newspapers, reviewed the influential work published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences on the sharp demarcation of “ten social strata” in the nation’s rapidly changing society. This showed that the central political leaders also understood the new social situation caused by the drastic economic reform since the 1990s, such as the growing gap between the rich and the poor; millions of farmers and other “weakened groups” (ruoshi runti) lost land and migrated to the city to make a living.

In fact, the political leaders not only understood the new tense social situations, but also were good at taking effective measures to deal with the tough facing society and maintaining social stability. State leaders put in place effective measures to ensure economic development while neutralizing forces around the state power. As Professor Lin Shangli, one of the influential domestic political scholars from Fudan University, has pointed out, having successfully gone through the leviathan jungles of political revolution and reconstruction, and of socioeconomical development for many times, the socialist state has grown up to its most mature stage in terms of governing China’s social change in rational and effective ways (Lin, 2008 2009).

Since 1985, when the central government issued its first overall educational system reconstruction outlines, education has been undergoing reform. A nation-wide government initiative of providing every child with “nine years compulsory education” has emerged. Thus in terms of developing social justice in education, the state has been the key role player. Nevertheless the state is aware that it cannot address the huge challenge of educational development alone, and acknowledges the need for the involvement of positive social forces (CCPCC and SC 1985, 1993, 1999).
In 2002, the central government issued the Law of Promoting Civilian-run Education. Since then, all kinds of non-government agencies have entered the field of education. This law had been criticized for not making clear statements about the non-profit-making nature of private educational enterprises, and not supplying sufficient resources to help private educational enterprises become real public schools (Fang 2006; Wu 2008). Nevertheless, these deficits have not prevented this law from encouraging all kinds of non-government agencies from investing their capital and resources in the field of education. Studies show that most instances of high economic growth and social development around the world have followed “a grow-first-and-clean-up-later development strategy” (Sonnenfeld and Mol 2006, Frank 2007), as it evidenced by the emergence of different social forces in the field of education development in China.

With regards to the costs and challenges of the growing educational inequality caused by the opening of markets (Yang 2002, Postiglione 2006), since 2006 the central government has proposed the ideal of “building a harmonious, socialist society.” Since 2001, to overcome the education quality gap between different areas and social groups, the central government has allocated hundreds of billions of RMB to education development. Most of the financial aid is invested in underdeveloped areas. However, for various reasons, authorities in unprivileged areas still struggle to provide every child with good quality education (Yang 2008, Wang 2010).

On the positive side, since the 1990s hundreds of GONGOs and NGOs have been established. The emergence of these non-profit making educational development bodies resulted in part from the state’s economic and social reforms. Since the 1990s, the central government has not only encouraged the establishment of NGOs but also produced legal frameworks to guide their construction. And it is these two kinds of NGOs, seeing form a universal perspective, that has played worthy noticed roles in strengthening the non-profit making and justice oriented educational movements in Contemporary China since the 1990s.

Of the GONGOs participating in education development, the most influential is probably the Chinese Youth Development Foundation. This official NGO was sponsored by the Chinese Central Communist Youth League in 1989. The Youth League, however, contributed only 10,000 Yuan (US$1,634) towards helping the CYDF develop educational enterprises (Kang 2008). Thus the CYDF had to rely on public donations. Under the effective leadership of Xu Yongguang, the CYDF gradually found effective ways to mobilize social resources and manage public relations to keep the public informed about its justice-oriented educational movement, entitled Project Hope (Sun et al. 2001). The objective of Project Hope, which was founded in 1991, is to help school dropouts in poor rural regions return to school and complete compulsory education. It is one of the most successful public welfare projects in China (Hsua 2008: 81). And 20 years later, or by the end of 2009, CYDF had raised over 5.67 billion yuan (approximately USD900 million) in donations , helped 3.4 million children from poverty-stricken rural families continue their studies and built 15,940 primary schools (CYDF 2009).

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This has been acknowledged by many NGO leaders and workers. In her pioneering study on “social capital” theory, based on this NGO, Carolyn L. Hsua, a sociologist from Colgate University, Hamilton, NY, USA claims that the CYDF is one of the most influential NGOs in China (Hsua 2008: 81).
It was reported that Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Li Peng and several other political leaders strongly supported the project (Li Qin, 1993), which resulted in its being quickly adopted by enlightened governmental institutions. In 1992, the State Committee of Education (SCE, now called the Ministry of Education) issued a notice to ask every local government and education bureau to support Project Hope (SCE 1992). The provincial governments issued the same notice, which almost lead the NGOs' program to “governmental policy actions” (Weng 2009). In 2002, a newspaper in Hong Kong and a journalist from the Nan Fang Weekend, one of the most influential public weekly newspapers in mainland China, revealed that there was corruption in the fast-growing Project Hope (Fang 2002). Up to now, however, no one knew the facts behind the incident. Nevertheless this controversial incident has not prevented the CYNF from making more contributions to the social justice oriented educational movement since 2002.

In the 1990s, Chinese society witnessed the first independent civic environmental NGO, the Friends of Nature (FON). This NGO was founded by Liang Congjie, Yang Dongping, Liang Xiaoyan along with other university professors and well-known intellectuals. FON formally registered in 1994 as the Academy for Green Culture, affiliated to the non-governmental Academy for Chinese Culture. Several years later, FON became one of China's best known and most influential environmental NGOs. FON believes that the only way to create lasting environmental improvement is to raise public awareness and educate people. Its main focus has been on mass environmental education through field trips and holiday camps for students, lectures, seminars and training classes for teachers, as well as publications and campaigns for the general public (Zou Jing 2001, Edele 2005).

Environmental conservation is the FON’s primary mission, but it has also developed many environmental education programs for poor areas. The FON and CYDF can be regarded as pioneers in the field of educational development, and the leading NGOs in promoting China's social justice and social progress through non-profit educational movements. In fact, it was the founding members of these NGOs who later furthered the growth of independent education NGOs and their participation in the nationwide social justice—oriented educational movements in the early years of the 21st century. One of our sample NGOs, the 21st Century, was founded by Yang Dongping, who was also one of the founders of FON. The other founder, Liang Xiaoyan, set up an education NGO called the Beijing Tianxia Xi Center for Education Consultation (Ding and Zheng Shibo, 2007).

The early 2000s saw the development of over 100 independent education NGOs, according to Liang Xiaoyan. Though most of them are grassroots NGOs that are not registered with the central government, they share much of the state’s heavy responsibility for providing every child with good education (Liang Xiaoyan 2009).

Besides the legal NGOs founded by intellectuals, and the unacknowledged grassroots educational NGOs, since 2005 Chinese society has witnessed the rise of foundation-based education NGOs set up by professionals in the financial and business fields, such as our sample NGO, the Cherished Dream Foundation (CDF), and the Narada Foundation (NF) founded by Xu Yongguang, the former founder of CYDF and the Tencent Foundation (TF). CDF has directly participated in educational developments, while NF and TC do not provide the poor with quality education directly; their major function is to sponsor those qualified education NGOs that help the poor in different effective ways. The 21st Century often gets financial support from these two foundations. TFC and BNVS have also developed close relationships with them.
It is these institutions that have lead to the rise of NGOs in the field of Chinese educational reform in the past ten years. And Yang Dongping, one of the former founders of FON, and Xu Yongguang, the former founder of CYDF, are the widely acknowledged leaders of the rise of Chinese education NGOs. This also reveals the pioneering positions of CYDF and FON and their initiating roles in NGOs’ participation in Contemporary China’s educational development. These two NGOs believe that, in changing times, China needs to develop quality education, such as environment education, new citizenship education, and vocational education, but the more important work is to help the poor majority receive quality education. This ideal has been attained and implemented by the 21st Century, the BNVC and other NGOs with creative methods; which means that if you want to know the developments of Chinese NGOs’ educational movements, you must focus attention on the outstanding inheritors of the CYDF and FON, including our 4 sample NGOs. As Yang Dongping and many other NGO leaders have told us many times,

Owing to the pressure of the increasing challenges posed by the last ten years’ social change, and the inspiration of the widely admired CYDF and FON, more and more idealist intellectuals and professionals who are tired of being restricted by bureaucratic institutions and utilitarian ways of life, have found effective and ways to realize their personal ideals of advancing social progress for the nation through NGOs working for the public good, such as Xu Yongguang’s NF, Yang Dongping’s 21st Century, Yao Li’s BNVS and the TFC.

Figure 3. — NGO networks for advancing justice oriented-educational movements

It seems like that a strong NGO network has formed for advancing social justice—oriented educational movements, with NGO leaders having developed close relations with each other. At the top of the network, there are the CYDF and FON, whose founders later established the NF and the 21st Century. The 21st Century, TFC and BNVC often get funds from the NF. The CDF has not yet developed close relations with the NF and the 21st Century, though they have cooperated with their partner NGOs, such as the Tencent Foundation (TF). Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that regardless of these close relations, it is impossible for them to establish an NGO group that could replace the authoritative leading position of the state in the educational movement for social justice in contemporary China, or become an independent “civil society.” Rather, they are positive participants in the movements led by the state. In the following section, we will have a look at their action models, which constitute the basic structure of NGOs’ educational movements for social justice.
5. Typical Models of Chinese NGOs’ Educational Actions for Social Justice

As mentioned above, since the early years of the new century, inspired by the CYDF and FON’s pioneering performance, there have been more and more intellectuals and professionals who have founded NGOs to promote social justice through developing non-profit educational enterprises. Although the state, as the leader of China’s social reform, has been acknowledged numerous times for its miraculous educational development achievements, there is still a lot of scope for NGOs to play an active role in forwarding the justice-oriented educational movements. As discussed below, NGOs have successfully developed at least four effective ways to help the state and society provide every child with good education.

5.1 The 21st Century: Non-governmental Think Tanks as Policy Participants

There have emerged numerous arguments that stress that public participation is a crucial element that contributes to better policy making and policy implementation (Zillman et al. 2002, Doh et al. 2006, Li 2009, Wu and Wang 2011).

The institutional vision of the 21st Century is to “build a publicly acknowledged non-governmental educational think tank.” The NGO was founded by Yang Dongping in 2002. As mentioned before, Yang was one of the founders of FON. At the end of the 1990s, he shifted his focus from environmental protection to educational equity. As a professor of education at the Beijing University of Science and Technology, he founded an independent education policy research institution in Beijing. In the early years, effectiveness and marketization were considered by the government as more important than popularization and equity. Thus local government did not approve of Yang’s policy critiques, which is probably the main reason why 21st Century couldn’t obtain governmental sponsorship to register as “Popular Non-enterprise Work Units.” Until recently, the 21st Century was still registered with the Administration of Industry and Commerce as an enterprise, despite the fact that justice and equity has been on the top of its agenda (Zhou 2010a, 2011b).

Owing to its outstanding performance, the 21st Century was credited as being the Chinese NGO with the most potential. Recently, it was elected as the 2009 Organization of the Year by the Press of the Journal of Chinese Economic System Reform and the Board of China’s Reforms. The founding board of the 21st Century led by Yang is composed of Xu Yongguang, the founder of CYDF, Chen Danqing, one of the most famous Chinese painters and public intellectuals, and another six members, including academic leaders and CEOs of commercial think tanks.

During the past ten years, the 21st Century has developed four ways to illustrate its justice-oriented action model of policy participation.
1) Undertaking independent research around educational policy issues. In the past ten years, there have been numerous educational development trends that have accelerated the nation’s growing social gaps and inequality, such as the high school and college entrance examination reforms and market-oriented school operation. One of the essential policy participation activities of the 21st Century has been to study these widely concerned questions and to lobby government and the public to adopt their policy suggestions. To realize this aim, the 21st Century set up its own publishing system, of its main publication being *The China Educational Development Yearbook,*5 *Education Information Biweekly,* and the less regularly issued *Brief Report of Educational Policy Research.*

2) Promoting local government’s educational system innovations. Many local governments are actively making new policies and rules to rebuild the educational system. To acknowledge and encourage these efforts, the 21st Century invited the Narada Foundation (NF) and Sohu, the largest Chinese internet server, to sponsor a publicly selected prize called the “Local Education System Innovation Award.” The first awards ceremony was held at the University of Peking on 6 December 2008. More than 300 representatives from academic and governmental institutions from all 29 provinces attended, along with more than 50 journalists from such influential publications as *Nan Fang Weekend, China’s Youth Daily* and *China News Weekly.* The second awards ceremony was held in the city of Ningbo in December 2010.

3) Encouraging more governmental institutions and social elites to create a better educational environment for the children of the urban migrant laborers. One of the concerning costs of the economic growth is that millions of peasants have lost their land and migrated to the cities, but there is no quality school system for the peasants’ children in the city. In 2009, with the support of NF, Tencent Foundation (TF), and Beijing Western Sunshine Rural Development Foundation (BWSF), the 21st Century invented the “Tencent Public Good New Citizen Award” for government members and social elites from NGOs and the intellectual community, media and cultural fields who have taken action to create good education for the urban migrant laborers’ children.

4) Promoting citizens’ public participation in policy making. The ultimate purpose of the 21st Century is to “mobilize social forces to advance education progress.” Here, “social forces” refers to every involved citizen. The 21st Century believes that if every citizen were properly informed around China’s education reform, China could witness successful educational policy making and education reforms. To realize this ideal of public educational enlightenment, the 21st Century has, in cooperation with the National Library, set up a free monthly “Education Forum for the New Citizens” that enables experts from economic, scientific, social and cultural fields to present their thoughts and observations on education to the public. The 21st Century also has set up conferences, media interviews and documentary films to keep the public informed on educational policy making and innovations.

The activities of the 21st Century have been widely published in the media, and their opinions about educational reform are often broadcast on television programs. The 21st Century also considers the media as its primary means for developing policy participation of great influence. Besides this, Yang Dongping was elected as a member of the State’s

5. The English version has been published by Brill Inc. in the Netherlands since 2008.
Educational Consultation Committee, and at the same time, he has many friends who are representatives of the People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference. Thus the 21st Century has channels through which their voice can be constantly heard by the state. In 2009, the “Local Education System Innovation Award” was adopted, as a mechanism to persuade local government to carry out education reforms by the Hubei provincial government. This event reveals that intellectuals and professionals of the 21st Century have experienced some policy influence over the government, though they still face considerable challenges in achieving their goals.

5.2 The CYDF’s Project Hope: Providing the Poor with Quality Educational Services and Products

Generally, most Chinese NGOs in the field of education choose to focus on practical work rather than policy. CYDF’s Project Hope has provided them with an impressive action model, although most NGOs do not have the CYDF’s nationwide operating system structured by governmental institutions. As we have learned, however, this lack of government involvement results in greater independence and real non-governmental work. More than 100 projects similar to Project Hope have started up across the country. One of the longest standing of these is the Cherished Dream Foundation (CDF).

Founded in 2008, the CDF was sponsored by professionals from the financial and business sectors who were able to have the CDF successfully registered with the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs. The essential mission of the CDF is “dedication to changing the imbalanced situation of China’s educational development through providing poor children in remote areas and urban migrant laborer’s children with good educational services and products.” These educational services and products would help the poor children “feel happy, confident and fulfilled, and grow up in dignified ways” (CDF, 2008).

The concept of Project Dream was not originated by the CDF, but it is valid in defining what the CDF has done for the poor. The CDF has set up four educational services and products that, all of which contain the word “Dream” in their titles.

1) Dream Center. The CDF argues that “the most fundamental problem of China’s rural education in poor areas is the absence of perspectives, conceptions and software.” To solve this problem, the CDF created “dream centers” about 70 to 100 square meters in size, equipped with 3,000 books and a range of multimedia facilities. At the time of writing, the CDF had built 240 dream centers for the rural schools in 19 provinces.

2) Dream Curriculum. The CDF developed the “dream curriculum” with the help of curriculum experts from East China Normal University and Beijing Normal University. The dream curriculum aims to foster the spirit of exploration, team work, critical and innovative thinking and environmental conservation. Up to now, the CDF has developed 17 different learning subjects, such as the socioeconomic structure of the hometown and the natural environment of the hometown.

3) Dream Guide Professional Training System for Rural Teachers. Based on in-depth research, the CDF found that less than ten percent of teachers in remote rural areas had a four-year university degree. The Dream Guide Professional Training System is
designed to improve local teachers’ professional abilities, so that they can implement the dream curriculum effectively and become good “dream guides” for the rural children. There are currently more than 6,000 rural teachers who have gone through the CDF’s training system (CDF 2011).

4) Dream Bookrooms. These are rural libraries sponsored by the CDF and its partner NGOs. The CDF is concerned about the fact that “each year there about 20 million obsolete children’s books in the cities, while 30 million rural children studying in 200 thousand rural schools have almost no extra-curricular reading materials.” Thus the CDF invited TF, Xinping Public Foundation to develop a charity plan for building bookrooms for rural children. The plan is to collect and code the 1,000-1,200 obsolete books from the city schools for each rural school, and provide each rural school with a set of bookshelves, computers and scanners. All the rural students’ book borrowing records will be captured in the database system of the CDF via the internet so that the CDF can develop better library services for rural children (Dream Bookroom 2011).

CDF employees face the challenge of convincing local governments and other involved people to understand the value of the various dream projects. In addition, not all CDF managers have knowledge of the rural educational system (He 2011a). Nevertheless, since 2008 the CDF has made magnificent contributions towards providing the poor with relatively good educational services and products. Now in the modern classrooms of CDF’s dream centers across the country, thousands of rural teachers influenced by CDF’s dream educational conceptions have adopted curriculum reforms and are working towards the CDF’s goal of affording rural children a happy school life and bright future.6 As one teacher commented,

When I began to attempt the dream curriculum, I felt it was a further burden, as teaching the regular subjects occupied my time, and the dream curriculum is not covered by the test-based performance evaluation. I worried that spending time on the dream curriculum would affect the test performance of my subject. To give it a try, I taught one class of the dream curriculum. I was surprised to see that the children liked it very much; even those who were sick of classroom teaching were actively engaged in it. Since then, the children have always come to ask me when they can have a class of dream curriculum again. (Shanyun 2011b)

The teacher also was also positively affected by her dream curriculum experiment. Now she feels that, for both herself and her children, being a dream guide is more important than being a test-oriented mathematics teacher. She finds that the dream curriculum fosters good behavior and encourages the potential of rural children, which in turn improves their performance and test achievements in the regular subjects. Now when the dream center is occupied by her colleagues, she uses dream pedagogy in the regular classroom, as she is sure that the dream curriculum allows children to “feel happy, confident and fulfilled, and to grow up in dignified ways” (He 2011b).

The CDF has also obtained many awards from the public media. Most appreciated, however, is the recognition of the teachers and rural children. As an NGO sponsored by the financial and business professionals, it is not so difficult for the CDF to obtain funds, but their actions of developing dream curricula for the poor are limited by the test-based

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6. For more information about the rural teacher’s pedagogy of the CDF’s dream curriculum, refer to the following website: http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/vCXpJchKdpM/.
educational conceptions that have controlled the school system for thousands of years in China. One of the policy participation actions of the 21st century is to encourage the government to develop a more flexible high school and college entrance examination system, so as to change the present educational conceptions and promote the social justice and quality-based educational initiatives. As one of the program managers commented, the CDF’s goal is to encourage more teachers to create “a happy and progressive school environment for children” using the CDF’s educational services and products (He 2011a).

5.3 TFC’s Action Model: A Chinese Version of “Teach for America”

When designing its institutional action model, the CDF founders noticed that there had been numerous short-term volunteer teachers in the rural areas since the 1990s. Thus they decided to develop a more stable mechanism for educational services. However, they did not take into account that with good planning and organization, volunteer teachers can also become a stable and effective mechanism for the sustainable educational progress of poor schools. This has been clarified by Teach Future China (TFC).

TFC’s story begins with Teach for America (TFA). As a non-profit organization, Teach for America was founded by Wendy Kopp after she developed the idea to help eliminate educational inequality in the United States for her senior thesis at Princeton University in 1989. Since its inception in 1990, more than 20,000 members from Ivy League and other elite universities have been selected and trained by Teach For America to teach two years in urban and rural communities throughout the United States (Kopp 2011). Since 2005, the story of TFA has been imported to China by some journalists (Xu 2005; Li 2008). In 2009, after being well informed by a student organization of Beijing Normal University and visiting the headquarters of TFA in Texas, Shen Shide decided to sponsor the Chinese version of TFA, which is known as Teach Future China, with the financial support of the Chen Yixin Family Foundation.

Wang Yan, the general secretary of TFC, resigned her position as a journalist and joined the TFC. In May 2009, TCF initiated its first experiment. About 20 senior university students were selected and trained, and later were sent to teach for two years in rural schools in Anhui and Jiangsu provinces. In 2010, the NF approved the TFC’s financial application. TFC had the opportunity to select university students to teach in the schools especially founded for the urban migrant laborers’ children. By the year 2010, the TFC has provided about 2,000 students from poor rural backgrounds with young qualified voluntary teachers (TFC 2010).

Compared to the TFA, the TFC is relatively small and modest. Nevertheless it has a unique value and function among Chinese NGOs. The essential mission of the TFC is to “cultivate the leaders in promoting educational justice.” The organization has educated the metropolitan university students about the unequal reality of rural children’s education, and attempted to develop social justice through providing rural children with quality education. The voluntary teachers taught in Anhui Province have become independent leaders and purveyors of educational justice, having built a library for rural schools in cooperation with other NGOs. All of the various role players aspire to recreate the miracle of the TFA in China.
5.4 The Bai Nian Vocational School: A New Citizen School for the Children of Urban Migrant Laborers

The other action model we have seen was created by the Bai Nian Vocational School (BNVS). As the “first free vocational school in China,” BNVS was founded in 2005 by Yao Li. Before then, Yao was a successful CEO of a large real estate management corporation. She was able to secure one million yuan in sponsorship for her ideal of developing quality middle schools for peasant labor children.

As a former CEO, Yao Li first wanted to bring in a well-known international auditing institution as BNVS’s external auditor. However her application was rejected, which further strengthened Yao’s conviction to make BNVC the best and most trusted free middle school for peasant labor children. A professor at Qinghua University, a famous writer and many other intellectuals and professionals were moved by Yao’s school plan and become voluntary teachers or employees for BNVS (Yao Li 2008). BNVS’s free but good quality education provision as well as the living and developing networks can greatly help the urban migrant laborers’ children in their daily lives and to become responsible citizens in future.

Rather than focusing on math or Chinese, the BNVS educates children on cooking, hygiene and taking part in city life. They teach Chinese classical moral texts, practical writing and knowledge. English is confined to practical listening and speaking geared towards the service industries. Math teaching is also based on the practical demands of the urban migrant laborers children, such as an electrician’s needs to understand trigonometry. With regard to liberal education, the focus is on the cultivation of good workers and citizens who can contribute to the social progress.

BNVS’s pedagogical system has been adopted as a model of curriculum reform by the Beijing Municipal Committee of Education, which has been grappling with “the question of meeting with the different needs of different students” (Zhong 2006: 64). But for Yao Li and BNVS, the more important achievements are that they have successfully helped hundreds of peasant labor children become city industrial workers and good citizens. It is this achievement that sees BNVS being widely supported by the NF, CYDF, the 21st Century and hundreds of businesses.

During the visit to BNVS, Xu Xiaoping, a widely known business professional and one of sponsors of the 21st Century, was “deeply moved by the bright faces and eyes of the urban migrant laborers’ children.” He said to Yao that he “desperately wants to donate to you and BNVS.” By June 2011, BNVS had received donations of about 70 million yuan (US$11.4million) from 444 domestic enterprises and institutions, 67 international enterprises and institutions, 25 foundations, 721 personal agencies and 501 BNVS alumni (Yao Li 2011). This is the biggest justice oriented educational movement imitated by Chinese private NGOs we have not come across in the course of our research. Now BNVS has 1,357 volunteer teachers and workers and has established six schools in major cities such as as Beijing, Nanjing, Wuhan and Chengdu. By the end of 2010, the BNVS system had provided 1,224 urban migrant laborers’ children with free but quality

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7. For more in-depth knowledge of BNVS, see the documentary film on http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMjIzMDQ4ODE2.html [accessed on 12/19/2011].
vocational and liberal education, and many of the graduates have begun to create their own public good enterprises (Yao Li 2011).

Another model that plays an important and unique role in the Chinese NGOs’ justice oriented educational movements was invented by the NF and sponsored by Xu Yongguang, the original founder of the CYDF. The unique function of the NF is to provide financial support to the NGOs whose educational initiatives fit well with the NF's New Citizen Program and Non-Profit Incubator Plan. The New Citizen Program was founded to provide the nation’s 80 million peasant labor children with good education. From 2007 to 2017, the NF will invest 300 million yuan (US$49 million) to build 100 New Citizen Schools for the peasant labor children (NF 2007). BNVS was granted 3.6 million yuan (US$588,000) by the NF in 2009. The 21st Century has got a lot of financial support from the NF.

The records of NF’s financial support further reveal that the widely acknowledged action models were created by the above four NGOs. From these four NGOs, we can see the basic structure of the Chinese NGOs’ educational movements for social justice. The following are the essential arguments of this study:

Since the 1990s, Chinese NGO’s educational movements for social justice have been structured by four different kinds of actions. The first one is policy participation invented by the 21st Century. The second one is CDF’s providing the poor with good educational service and products. The third one is TFC’s selecting university students to teach two years in the underdeveloped areas. The last one is BNVS’s building good schools for the urban migrant laborers’ children (Zhou 2011b).

The above four actions demonstrate that Chinese NGOs and their founders, contemporary Chinese intellectuals and professionals, have found effective ways and played important roles in advancing social justice oriented educational development. It must be pointed out, however, that like the state, the leader of China’s social justice oriented educational reforms, NGOs face many challenges around developing more balanced education and are also confronted with many difficulties in terms of increasing their participations in China’s social justice oriented educational reforms.

**Figure 4. — The major action models of Chinese NGOs’ justice oriented educational movements**
6. The Structural Defects and Hidden Difficulties in Expanding Justice Oriented Educational Movement

The state of Chinese NGOs’ future development has been addressed by many NGOs scholars from the sociopolitical perspective as well as in terms of NGOs’ interior structures (Lewis and Litai 2003; Tian 2003; Liu 2005; Frank et al. 2007; Yu 2011). In our opinion, NGOs in the field of education face two main challenges when considering future developments. One is caused by the clear structural defects within and outside NGOs; the other results from the hidden ideological forces within the vast educational societal space.

6.1 The Internal and External Structural Defects of Chinese NGOs

The main internal structural defect of Chinese NGOs is the lack of money. Among the NGOs we have studied, even the relatively well-off ones that are sponsored or widely supported by business or financial professionals, such as the NF, CDF and BNVS, are still calling for more funds. The NF has the resources to budget 300 million yuan (US$49 million) for its plan of building New Citizen Schools. The CDF accumulated 17.18 million yuan (US$2.8 million) in 2010 which should easily have covered its educational services and productions in that year (CDF2011b). The NBVS has received 70 million yuan (US$11.4 million) in public donations since 2005. These hundreds of millions of yuan, however, are still inadequate to meet their ideal of providing 80 million poor children with good education.

With regard to the TFC, it is trying its best to increase awareness among the public regarding its programs of organizing university students to teach poor students for two years. Yang Dongping of the 21st Century informed us that the organization needs to find at least 3 million yuan to cover its policy participation activities. Basically, these two NGOs do not have a solid financial base. Both Yang Dongping and Wang Yan have told us that they are unable to get any financial support from the central government. At the same time, they are no longer able to get funds from international NGOs, due to complicated reasons. For the grassroot NGOs, finances are even more difficult to secure. Many of them have to close when they cannot find funding for the next year. The good news is that, as evident from the case of the 21st Century, if the NGOs have enough “social capital” within the networks of Chinese NGOs and the business community, then they can stay afloat and even enlarge their enterprises.

The other major interior structural problem involves the NGOs’ human resources and operating systems. All the NGOs examined in this study are sponsored by intellectuals and professionals who are well informed about China’s social and educational situation. However, due to the lack of money, they cannot select and employ highly qualified staff or provide them with high-positions. Thus most of the programs are conducted by themselves and their followers, and rely on the support of volunteers and the public
good. Yao Li once said that her ideal is to make the CEO of NBVS become the highest paid manager, as the western business professionals do not believe that a low paid CEO can perform as well. Yang Dongping has told us that one of his primary aims is to turn the 21st Century into a top-class think tank, which has at least ten outstanding professors of educational policy with high salaries. Thus they have to find more money to realize their ideals of institutional expansion and modernization (Zhou 2011b).

The last structural defect observed by many NGOs' sponsors is the NGOs' internal governing system. In recent years, there have been many incidents of corruption in the CONGO systems. Although it is difficult to analyse the workings of the governing system, we are certain that compared with the financial and institutional expansion problems, this is the easiest challenge one for NGOs to deal with. This is not only because their founders are motivated by the public good, but also because they have developed a strict performance and financial reporting system that can help them gain acknowledgement and support from funders and the public. This will encourage the sustainable development of these institutions in an unfavorable legal and social environment.

Regarding the external structural challenges, the clearest and most pressing is without doubt the state’s restrictive legal framework and administrative policies imposed on the NGOs. In contemporary China, the Constitution requires that all Chinese citizens have the right to freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom to peaceably assemble, organize, demonstrate and petition. However, in order to organize such constitutional activities as establishing an NGO in mainland China, as we mentioned before, you have to register the organization according to the state's legal regulations as issued from 1998 to 2004.

A lawyer recently argued that, because of the rigorous administration of NGOs, only those with governmental backgrounds are able to register. Some NGOs, such as the Disabled Persons' Federation, the Women's Federation and the National Labor Union, have governmental backgrounds. These organizations are called “GONGOs” in China. These GONGOs have long monopolized the philanthropic resources of China, including their funding, human resources and social trust (Yu, 2009). In our study, such NGOs as the 21st Century have to register as an enterprise, which means that the non-profit NGO must pay taxes. Thanks to the GONGOs’ growing independence, NGOs without a governmental background can develop informal relations based on “social capital” with the GONGOs, which has been demonstrated by the NBVS and NF’s close cooperation with the CYDF. However, these informal relations cannot remove the fact that most of the NGOs do not have the same legal status as NGOs, which have deeply affected their eligibility in fund-raising, and institutional expansions.

6.2. The Hidden Challenges within the Educational Social Context

Besides being limited by the clear internal and external structural defects, Chinese NGOs face many other challenges caused by certain ideological and cultural forces within China’s educational social context. According the NGOs examined in this study, there are two such challenges that often hinder NGOs' educational aspirations. The first
is the long tradition of test-oriented education and its deep influence over the school system throughout the country.

This kind of educational culture is so strong that it can cancel even the central government’s educational reform actions (Wu 2010). In this study, what the 21st Century and CDF have done, to some degree, can be regarded as introducing some new policy and pedagogy to the existing test–oriented school system. One of the 21st Century’s reform aims is to change the high school and college entrance examinations, the key testing mechanisms of the school system. Yang and his colleagues have produced numerous policy suggestions in this regard. However, no one, including the state, knows what measures should be taken for providing the school system with a better test mechanism that not only can be accepted by society but also will not lead to social conflict, as in the case of the corruption caused by the abolishment of the imperial examination system in 1905.

The successful stories of the dream center and dream curriculum of the CDF are a result of the efforts of those teachers motivated to go beyond test-driven teaching methods, unlike most of the teachers in China who prefer to avoid this extra work. There are many local officials, parents and students who feel that the dream curriculum is frivolous (Zhou 2011c). Thus it is a challenge for NGOs to help the state to change traditional values towards school education, which involve little or no concern for justice, freedom or other long-term ideals, focusing rather on tests and scores.

The BNVS’s sponsor and supporters are well aware that regular school pedagogical facilities are completely unsuitable for the practical needs of urban migrant laborers’ children; however, they are unable to change this system. What they can do is build new schools outside of the regular school system. This action strategy avoids the educational cultural barriers faced by the 21st Century and CDF. Nevertheless, the BNVS and all the other NGOs are still confronted with another a significant sociocultural challenge: the lack of social acknowledgement and trust in the young Chinese NGOs.

Since the Reform and Opening Policy of 1978, China has seen tremendous social changes both politically and economically. The past “society of acquaintances” completely fell apart due to the rapid urbanization process. In addition, its traditional social values have been gradually destroyed by the increasingly popular “money first” principle driven by self-interest since the 1990s. In this sociocultural context, the NGOs, particularly those that do not have legal status are facing harsh criticism, and are struggling to gain social acceptance and support. Basically, the public do not have a positive view of NGOs; they cannot comprehend that NGOs attempt to benefit society without any self-serving motive. In addition, owing to this lack of trust, most of the business sponsors prefer funding causes or organizations that the government has endorsed.

A manager from our sample NGO commented,

*In the past 10 years, the intellectuals and the media have been well aware of the NGOs, while most of the public have never heard of the word NGO in their life. Even those who have benefitted from our services by us do not care about our explanation of the NGO. When expressing thankfulness to us, they would persist in calling us the living “Lei Feng,” the most popular figure of socialist morality who passed away decades ago. (Zhou 2011b)*
The NGOs in this study have been deeply acknowledged by some influential public media, such as *Nan Fang Weekend, China’s Youth Daily*, and *China’s News Weekly*. And the public media has conducted numerous propaganda campaigns and social mobilizations for the NGOs. But there is still a long way to go for the NGOs to win social acceptance and support. This is the other hidden difficulty for the NGOs: to expand their justice oriented educational movement within China’s social context.
7. Conclusion

The studies of modern China have shown that independent private or social organizations have played an important role in China’s social and educational change, though they have not been able to reverse the historical trends shaped by political forces (Keenan 1977; Bailey 2001; Xu 2007). From 1949 to 1978, almost all the independent, progressive intellectuals and professionals had been transformed and assimilated by the radical socialist state power. However, since the new socialist state power led by Deng Xiaoping implemented a policy of economic reform and opening, more and more intellectuals and professionals have formed the ideal of developing their own enterprises. Impressed by this picture of drastic change, many western scholars were glad to argue that in this post-Mao period China was once again witnessing “civil society” (White 1996, Hunt 1996).

In the 1990s, many intellectuals and professionals entered the relatively free commercial environment and soon became wealthy, giving rise to heated debates and controversy around the role and mission of intellectuals (Ma 1995). For this study, the most significant examples of the intellectuals and professionals’ role change in the 1990s were that of Liang Congjie, Yang Dongping and other intellectuals and professionals who not only dedicated themselves to the public good but also established NGOs to realize their environmental conservation and social justice oriented educational ideals. It was these intellectuals and professionals who initiated the NGOs’ educational movements for social justice in contemporary China. Among them, CYDF, a GONGO sponsored by Xu Yongguang, was the most successful and influential, helping millions of poor students return to school.

In the last ten years, there have been more and more private NGOs dedicated to the cause of educational equality. It is difficult to calculate the total number of these NGOs, as most of them are grassroot NGOs that have not been registered. Many NGOs scholars note that Chinese society has established more than 3 million grassroot NGOs (Lin 2006). If this is true, the total number of NGOs in the field of education must be quite large, as education is one of most popular enterprises of NGOs (Lin Shangli 2006). Regardless, in this study, the more important question concerns the basic structure of the educational movements for social justice shaped by the NGOs with legal registrations.

Judging by the typical NGOs examined in this study, including the 21st Century, the CDF, TFC, and BNVS, the basic structure of the educational movement for social justice is typified by four kinds of action models: 1) participating in educational policy making and innovations for educational equality and progress; 2) providing the poor with good educational serviced and products; 3) selecting and training university students to teach poor students for two years; 4) establishing good schools for the urban migrant laborers’ children. With these four action models, the NGOs, sponsored by intellectuals and professionals, have launched numerous justice oriented educational reform programs all over the country, and played a significant role in reducing the social educational gap through providing the poor with sound policy and practical support.

However, it must be pointed out that, in China, the state is the highest leader of the educational movement for social justice in which the NGOs are deeply involved. No
matter what kind of development the NGOs are able to make, it is not possible to achieve a western “civil society” within the current Chinese political system; rather, it can become relatively more independent and functional. At times the 21st Century, CDF, TFC and BNVS refer to themselves as “civil society organizations,” but this kinds of self-acknowledgement does not contain any political meaning against the state power. The term “civil society organization” is used only to show that they have strong social responsibilities in sharing the state’s heavy burden of educational development and social progress. This tradition of sharing the state’s burden in legal and public good ways has been cherished by Chinese intellectuals and professionals for thousands of years. Today, it is the state’s opening and reform policy that gives Chinese intellectuals and professionals the opportunity once again to follow their traditional values with the establishment of NGOs or “civil society organizations.”

The NGOs examined in this study are well informed about the many and urgent educational demands of the lower socioeconim groups. Thus they aspire to further expand their justice oriented educational enterprises. But as mentioned above, with regard to the goal of expansion, the NGOs are facing at least two significant challenges. The first is caused by the NGOs’ financial and institutional shortcomings, as well as the state’s rigorous governing systems over the NGOs. NGO sponsors can attempt to address their financial and institutional shortcomings using their knowledge of corporate governance and their “social capital.” In terms of the state’s rigorous governing systems, NGOs have to wait until the state institutes more mutually beneficial governing strategies.

The second kind of challenge derives from the test-driven school pedagogy, as well as the public’s educational values and their ignorance or lack of understanding of NGOs—a challenge which is more difficult to define and change over short periods. The CDF and other NGOs adopting similar action models are working hard to encourage more enlightened teachers to join the cause of changing the test-oriented school teaching methods. However, this teaching method is strongly supported by the public’s educational values. At the same time, the public, who are strictly disciplined by the state and government, do not trust NGO’s role as non-profit entities working towards the public good and educational development. This probably is the greatest challenge for the NGOs in expanding their justice oriented educational enterprises.

Despite facing severe challenges and difficulties, Xu Yongguang, Yang Dongping, Yao Li and other NGO sponsors have made the decision to persist in their goal of educational equality and social justice. While working to provide non-profit, quality educational services and products, the NGOs have tried their best to deal with the abovementioned challenges. Xu Yongguang, the current CEO of NF, has been praised by the media as being a “forever young public good leader,” who, in 2010, took the lead in “fighting against the tax policy imposed on the NGOs” and founded the “center website” which aims to integrate the most famous Chinese foundations (Lei 2010: 32). With these kinds of efforts being made to deal with the development challenges and difficulties, Chinese NGOs can without doubt become more influential in the field of education. However, the expansion of the NGOs’ educational movement for social justice still depend largely on whether the NGOs, the state and society can improve the prevailing attitude of society towards NGOs and develop their trust and cooperation. We also need to look at what we, as NGO scholars, can do to improve these relations.
References


Appendix 1: Financial Report for this Study

| Total budget of the project | 20,570 |
| Total grant from ESP in June 2011 | 15,428 |

Total expenditure for 2010 and 2011

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<td>Post mail</td>
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<td>Trainings</td>
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## The Educational Movement for Social Justice of NGOs in China

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<td>Honoraria to consultant</td>
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Appendix 2

The Websites of NGOs Examined in this Study

- CYDF http://www.cydf.org.cn/
- The 21st Century http://www.21cedu.org/
- CDF http://www.adream.org/
- TFC http://www.21tfc.org/
- BNVS http://www.bnvs.cn/
- NF http://www.naradafoundation.org/
- TF http://gongyi.qq.com/tccf/