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China Association for NGO
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8, Xinzhong Xijie, Gongti Beilu
Asia Hotel, Office Building
No.309
100027 Beijing
China

**German Asia Foundation
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im Asienhaus
Bullmannaue 11
45327 Essen
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China and climate change – all bad news?

Although the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol nears its end in December 2012, progress towards a new global multilateral climate change agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) continues to lurch forward at slow and laboured pace. Whilst the possibility for negotiations in Durban's COP17 and beyond to ready the way for a fair, ambitious and legally binding climate treaty still exists, it has become very clear that, in addition to the multilateral UN process, other forms of action and global cooperation need to be explored. The task of engaging and cooperating with large developing countries to support their national and local climate change mitigation actions, in particular, is becoming increasingly important – that is, if the goal to keep global warming below 2 degrees, or even 1.5 degrees (as demanded by climate scientists, small island nations and many environmental groups), is to be achieved.

China – the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases – has been gaining more and more attention. Mostly negative news about China and climate change dominates western media coverage, in particular, the country's growing consumption of coal and other fossil fuels, which led to increases in CO₂ emissions of more than 785 million tonnes in 2010 – a more than 10 % increase compared to 2009, and almost as much as Germany's total emissions of 826 million tonnes CO₂ in 2010.¹ The rapid increase of CO₂ emissions in China is often used as an argument that there is no point in taking action, as the emissions of big emitters cancel out reductions in western countries. This argument, however, does not hold, because China is, in fact, taking action.

The positive trends in China towards low-carbon development are beginning to gain the attention of both the media and civil society in western countries. Greenpeace director Kumi Naidoo, for example stated at a press conference in July 2011 that China leads the world in addressing climate change.²

Whilst this might be an overstatement, the country's new 12th Five-Year Plan (2011–2015) definitely includes many elements for a low-carbon development pathway and progressive thinking on setting up an emissions trading scheme similar to that in Europe. It is imperative to note that the rapid development of China's renewable energy sector, consumption of renewable energy (excluding hydro power) having increased by almost 75 % from 2009 to 2010,³ and China having become the world's largest investment market in the clean tech sector in 2010, are also key developments for climate protection.

Top-down government action – sufficient to meet the challenge?

One of the main differences in the approach of fighting climate change and reducing CO₂ emissions between China and other countries is closely related to the differences in political systems. The government's strong top-down

China is not fundamentally different from Europe, the US, or any other country where a vast majority of the public is not overly concerned about climate change, and emission-intensive industries are lobbying strongly against climate policies.

action, which pushes for renewable energy, energy efficiency and greening economic growth has, within a short period, very successfully created a booming renewable energy sector. However, the successful transition to a low-carbon economy and society will, in addition to technology innovation, also require much more participation from the public. Raising public awareness and countering the strong influence of emission-intensive industries

on climate policy-making will be crucial. In this regard, China is not fundamentally different from Europe, the US, or any other country where a vast majority of the public is not overly concerned about climate change, and emission-intensive industries are lobbying strongly against climate policies.

Whilst China's technological developments and clean-tech business opportunities are being increasingly scrutinised by western media, not so much attention has been paid to the development of China's civil climate change movement. Although China does not (yet) have a strong and mature civil society and environmental movement comparable to that of other countries pushing for a transition to a low-carbon economy and society from the bottom-up, Chinese civil society and NGOs do deserve more interest and credit



Solar PV application at Beijing's Dongzhimen Station

then they currently receive. Civil engagement in climate protection is a very dynamic field and has undergone new developments in recent years, which will be covered in the remainder of this article.

Public engagement in climate protection – from ‘gong gong can yu’ to ‘gong gong xing dong’

The importance of “public participation” (公共参与 *gong gong can yu*) is frequently stated in official government documents in the context of climate change mitigation, for instance, China’s National Climate Change Program from 2007⁴. The government tries to encourage public participation for energy savings and emissions reductions (节能减排 *jie neng jian pai*), with, so far, only limited success, as the concept generally remains a rather empty slogan for most citizens. As China’s National Climate Change Program calls for ‘giving full play to the initiatives of social communities and non-govern-

Real and independent bottom-up “public activism” (公共行动 *gong gong xing dong*) could certainly add much to current government efforts in mobilising the public to become active climate protectors.

mental organizations’, real and independent bottom-up “public activism” (公共行动 *gong gong xing dong*) could certainly add much to current government efforts in mobilising the public to become active climate protectors, rather than reluctantly following yet another restriction, such as limits to private passenger car usage in cities like Beijing and Shanghai.

Chinese NGOs have already been doing significant work in mobilizing the public through localised low-carbon projects for quite a number of years. Examples include the Green Commuting Network, initiated by the China Association for NGO Cooperation (CANGO) and the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF). The network carried out activities to raise awareness and increase public acceptance towards the restrictions on car use in more than 20 cities and cooperated with the organisers of the Beijing Olympics in 2008, the Shanghai Expo in 2010, and Guangzhou Asian Games in 2011. Through this campaign, which involved a number of innovative approaches to draw the interest of the public and enterprises, such as low-carbon commuting metro cards and online carbon calculators, the concept of “green commuting” (绿色出行 *lv se chu xing*) has become widely known and is now even being promoted across China by municipal govern-



NGO Green Commuting advertising featuring Chinese pop stars Huang Yali and Zhang Chao (background left) facing fierce competition from Mercedes Benz and Hollywood star George Clooney.

ments. Other types of projects include the establishment of low-carbon rural eco-villages in Sichuan Province by Global Village of Beijing, forest carbon projects by Shanshui Conservation Centre, and supporting small and medium sized companies to measure energy consumption and calculate greenhouse gas emission data by the Institute for Environment and Development (IED).⁵

Joint-action through network building

To move beyond individual projects with localised impact to more coordinated NGO climate action, the China Civil Climate Action Network (CCAN) was established in 2007, with the network secretariat based at CANGO. The Heinrich Boell Foundation (HBF) played an important role as an initiator of the network. Even in the years before the official establishment of the network, HBF adopted a supporting role in bringing environmental NGOs to work together, for example, during the “26 Degrees Campaign” during 2005, which promoted energy efficiency in public buildings through reduced use of air conditioning. Public policymakers took up recommendations by the NGOs and issued a policy that air conditioning in public buildings should not be set below 26 degrees. In 2008, a follow-up action “Energy Saving 20 % – citizen action” (节能 20 – 公民行动 *jie neng 20 – gong min xing dong*) was carried out. In both cases coordination proved difficult, as individual NGOs needed to agree on common objectives and strategies.

The establishment of the CCAN network is a continuation and formalisation of this process of cooperation between environmental NGOs. Prior to setting up the network in 2007, environmental NGOs were not very interested in the topic of climate change, as it seemed too remote from the local environmental problems NGOs had been working on. Furthermore, the issue of climate change was perceived as a donor-driven issue, with only limited funding being available, potentially setting NGOs in a competitive relationship with each other, rather than promoting collaboration. Therefore, the initial goals of the network were defined as providing capacity-building opportunities for domestic Chinese environmental groups on climate change, introducing Chinese NGOs to the international climate change negotiations and commencing work on national climate and energy policies – all areas in which China’s NGO had not been very actively engaged in until the network had been established.

Professionalisation of NGO's climate change work

Since then, much progress has been made in bringing more organisations and actors closer together. In early 2011, the Chinese NGO climate network established two working groups, one to work on climate change-related policy issues (including international negotiations as well as China's domestic climate, energy and development policies). The Chinese government is, at the time of this publication's composition, working on establishing a special climate change law, and is seeking public comments and recommendations. Chinese NGOs prepared input and recommendations into the policy-making process for this important legislation. Being closer to the political centre as they are, it is mainly the NGOs based in Beijing who are engaged in national climate change and energy policy lobbying, while the environmental NGOs from other cities and regions are less involved on a national level, but work on local policies for low-carbon development.

The second NGO working group tackling climate change is exploring options for on-the-ground low-carbon projects and developing campaign strategies to engage the general public and public policymakers. These will include issues on promoting sustainable consumption and production, low-carbon commuting, or the relationship between the growing municipal solid waste problem and climate change, particularly focusing on waste incineration plants. For these issues, NGOs are building on existing knowledge and expertise whilst adding the additional dimension of climate change thereto. Here, initiatives overlap with those of other NGO networks, especially those projects relating to municipal waste issues and industrial water pollution led by the Green Choice Alliance⁶. Waste incineration in particular is a cross cutting issue that is also relevant to climate change as most waste-to-energy plants in China currently have very poor environmental performance standards and their emissions contribute significantly to local air pollution.

Cooperation with international NGO offices in Beijing

Most recent developments in China's NGO climate change movement also see much closer cooperation between local domestic NGOs of the CCAN network and the international groups based in China – particularly WWF, Greenpeace and Oxfam. This has not always been the case.

Whilst in Europe and the US, these international NGOs were incremental in setting up climate action networks, in China, they have not yet taken this leadership role. One key reason has been that international NGOs were simply too focused on addressing their own causes independently, whereby another reason has been domestic NGOs' desire for self-emancipation, thereby rejecting being led by international NGOs. Furthermore, in the Chinese socio-political context, it is politically unacceptable for international NGOs to take the lead in NGO networks.

US NGOs – such as the Environmental Defense Fund, Natural Resources Defense Council and The Nature Conservancy – are also beginning to contribute their resources and expertise to support the Chinese NGO climate change network and improve collaboration for a common goal. Whilst European environmental NGOs are currently not present in Beijing through representative offices, which makes closer cooperation more challenging, a number of European foundations support NGO development and dialogue with Europe. Cooperation with international NGOs in China on issues like media work,



Beijing East Fourth Ring Road

joint-messaging or climate policy, is a double edged sword. Whilst it does provide opportunities for capacity development and learning from colleagues working in international NGOs, and increases influence and supports capacity development of local NGOs, there is also the danger that the international or US-based NGOs may take the lead while local NGOs simply “tag along”.

Shaping public opinion – countering the “climate change conspiracy”

In addition to project-based actions, NGOs are also beginning to shape public opinion through media and journalist dialogues, blogging and social media like *Weibo*⁷ (the Chinese equivalent of Twitter). The bilingual website *China-dialogue* has also become an important web portal for international communication for Chinese NGOs to post news, articles, opinion pieces about climate change and related issues in China and globally. However, to bring debates about climate change to the attention of the majority of people, much more work is still needed. One major challenge for NGOs shaping public opinion is the growing influence of the idea that climate change is, in fact, a huge conspiracy. Adherents claim that climate change is a plot by western powers to restrict China’s development and limit China’s growing influence in world affairs. This kind of thinking has found its way to the mainstream, especially since the Copenhagen conference – after which China received a major bashing by the western media. It adds another layer of complexity to the already difficult problem of climate skepticism which is leaking into China from the US.

International engagement – Zero Hour in Tianjin 2010

Participation in international environmental summits began for Chinese NGOs in 2002 with the participation of a small NGO delegation to the Johannesburg Summit, which, also, was an initiative of the Heinrich Boell Foundation China Office. Since then, Chinese NGOs have also begun exploring the potential minefields of international climate governance, particularly in the context of the UNFCCC process and bilateral NGO “climate change diplomacy”. Having started as observers in 2007 at the Bali climate change conference, they more and more often become actors in the negotiations. Whereas Copenhagen was



UNFCCC Climate Change Conference - Meijiang International Centre in Tianjin, October 2010

a somewhat painful experience for most participants, including China and Chinese NGOs, the UN conferences in 2010 were more rewarding.

Although Chinese media were present and participated in NGO activities, the NGO's efforts remained more or less unnoticed by the Chinese general public in Tianjin, due largely to government restrictions which limited both the scope and visibility of NGO activities.

It is probably fair to say that the year 2010 was the birth of China's civil climate change movement in the context of the international negotiations and international civil society. The crucial event for the Chinese climate movement was the UNFCCC Tianjin conference in October 2010, where more than 60 Chinese NGOs joined forces and organised a multitude of activities under the slogan of "Green China, Race to

the Future"⁸. It is quite telling that this level of activity was only possible in the context of an international UN conference and through support of the Global Campaign for Climate Action (GCCA). Although Chinese media were

present and participated in NGO activities, the NGOs' efforts remained more or less unnoticed by the Chinese general public in Tianjin, due largely to government restrictions which limited both the scope and visibility of NGO activities.

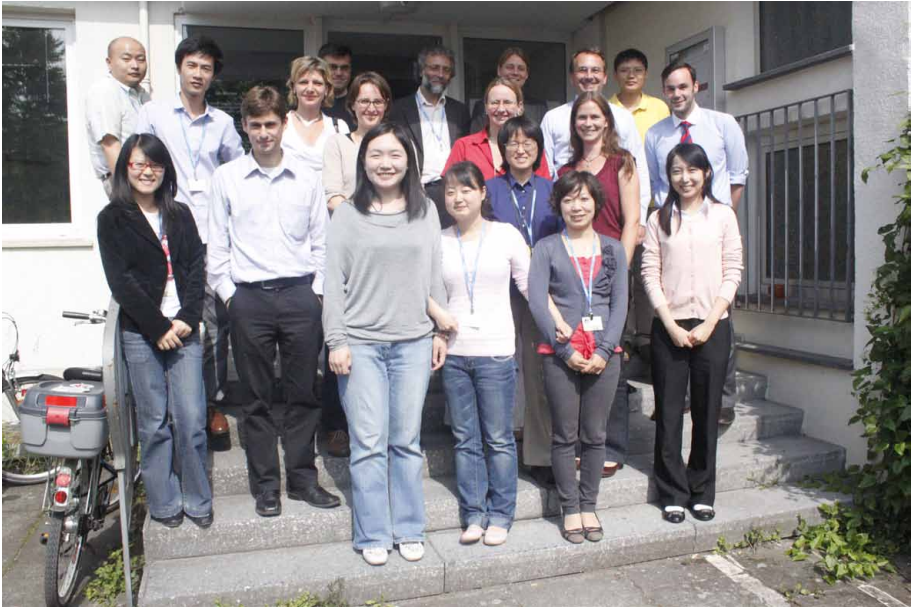
Joining global networks – navigating between North and South

Internationally, Chinese NGOs are now also actively engaging with other actors, especially with NGOs from other countries through the various global NGO networks. As there is not one unified global NGO climate change movement, Chinese NGOs are still in the process of positioning themselves in the complex landscape of different positions and alliances of global civil society. The global NGO climate change movement is fragmented into different networks with different approaches and strategies, which – in many cases – are united only by a common goal: to prevent dangerous climate change.

It is often remarked, in regards to the negotiations, that the devil is in the technical detail on how to design effective mechanisms to achieve the required emissions reductions. Not only are the technical issues important, but also considerations of equity and politics between the global North and South.

When it comes to participation in international climate change NGO networks, Chinese NGOs need to navigate between sometimes competing global networks and campaigns, such as Climate Action Network International (CAN-I), Climate Justice Now!, Third World Network, 350org or Global Campaign for Climate Action (GCCA). Association with each network, in most cases, means taking sides in political questions such as historical responsibility, burden sharing between North and South, or the choice for or against market-based mechanisms, such as emissions trading systems, or advocating complete changes of global socio-economic systems.

Initially, one of the motivations for founding CCAN was the establishment a contact point for the Climate Action Network International (CAN-I) in China. While CCAN, in many cases, already acts as the focal point for CAN, formal integration through the establishment of a “China Node” within CAN has not yet occurred. Reasons for this include a number of factors, including the still-limited capacity of CCAN NGOs, internal disagreements over which organi-



European and Chinese NGO discussion during UN climate change conference in Bonn, June 2011

sation should host the node, and the concern of being too closely associated with an international NGO network and positions. CAN also closely observes the government's performance during the negotiations and expresses criticism in form of the "Fossil of the Day" award by publicly exposing bad performance of countries during the negotiations.⁹

Bilateral exchanges: Europe-China dialogues

Bilateral international exchange and dialogue is another important element where Chinese NGOs have ramped up their efforts and continue to engage

actively in civil society "climate diplomacy". For example, in 2010, Werkstatt Oekonomie (WOEK) for the EU-China Civil Society Forum organised a climate change study-tour and conference for Chinese NGOs.¹⁰ Regular exchanges between European and Chinese colleagues have been established in

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the context of the climate change negotiations. These dialogues try to bring Chinese NGOs together with European organisations experienced in working with Chinese civil society groups and European NGOs and think tanks (e. g. Germanwatch, E3G, CAN-Europe) active in the climate change negotiations.

Topics of interest and discussion are positive examples from Europe, such as Germany's nuclear exit-strategy or the EU's energy roadmap, China's energy policies and recent developments, such as strategies of China's recently passed 12th Five Year Plan for the period from 2011–2015. Through these exchanges, Chinese NGOs support the dissemination of good examples for low-carbon development which are happening in China. As much as Chinese NGOs learn about developments in Europe, so do NGOs from Europe learn about China – in many cases they still lack a basic understanding of China's climate change or energy-related policies.

But unsolved problems and deep-lying issues are also being discussed in these NGO exchanges. Issues like “carbon leakage” and alternative consumption-based CO₂ accounting approaches, which would account for embodied emissions of international trade, have been topics of discussion between NGOs in both Europe and China. As about 22.5 % of the emissions produced in China in 2004 were exported, on net, to consumers elsewhere,¹¹ and solutions for how to share responsibility for emissions amongst producers in China and consumers elsewhere in an equitable way is a future challenge with no easy solutions close at hand. Very relevant to this issue are questions about the need to realise sustainable lifestyles and well-being in the context of “harmonious society” (和谐社会 *he xie she hui*) and how this stands in contrast to China's current development model focusing on resource-intensive rapid growth. This is related to the European debates about de-growth strategies, all of which will very likely receive much more attention in the coming years.

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EU-China Civil Society Dialogue on Climate Change & Sustainable Consumption and Production, Ningbo, August 2011

EU-China NGO cooperation – putting ideas into practice

More concrete cooperation between European and Chinese on climate change has been somewhat difficult to initiate. European environmental NGOs have, so far, not been very proactive in seeking engagement beyond dialogue. More recently, cooperation with young and innovative European NGOs, such as CDM-Watch and Sandbag, or the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA), was undertaken. Together, comments on questionable projects submitted under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) were written to prevent unsustainable projects such as waste incineration plants or coal-fired power plants to be financed through the CDM. Cooperation on low-carbon city developments is another real opportunity for European-Chinese NGO cooperation. As many municipal governments are beginning to use existing structures and channels of sister-city partnerships to have dialogues on

climate change and low-carbon development, NGOs can begin to explore options for city level cooperation. A noteworthy example is the cooperation between the cities of Bonn and Chengdu, where local NGOs are developing concrete models for collaboration mechanisms between Chinese and European NGOs, research institutes and city municipalities for low-carbon city development, particularly focusing on bottom-up low-carbon communities and neighbourhood initiatives, which are mostly neglected in urban planning processes.

China-US NGO exchanges – under the shadow of bilateral distrust

The relationship and dialogue with US NGOs is, to a large degree, impacted by the strained relationship between the two countries and differing viewpoints on many issues. The climate change negotiations in 2010 were characterized by high-profile fighting between government delegates on a number of issues including MRV (“measurable, reportable and verifiable”), a point of disagreement between China and the US since before Copenhagen, the legal form of the future climate agreement, finance, technology transfer (which includes intellectual property rights) and other issues. China criticises the US mainly for its lack of ambition and insufficient emissions reduction target – only 17 percent reduction by 2020 over 2005 emission levels, by far not enough to close the gigatonne gap and clearly insufficient given the currently very high per capita emissions of US citizens. US-China NGO dialogues have, so far, focused mainly on how to counterbalance the negative dynamics of their delegations. For instance, in Cancun, a US-China NGO “Agreement on Long-Term Cooperative Action”¹² was created where NGOs from both countries called on their governments to seek common ground and cooperate responsibly. The agreement also envisaged increased cooperation, dialogue and exchanges between US and Chinese NGOs, which is being facilitated through the Beijing-based US NGOs.



Chinese-Brazilian NGO climate change dialogue in Tianjin, October 2010

Trilateral dialogues for a “Low-carbon East Asia”

The East Asia Civil Society Environment Network,¹³ which comprises NGOs from China, South Korea and Japan, has since 2010 held climate change as an important topic for dialogue and exchange. For instance, in July 2010, an “East Asia Workshop on Low-carbon Communities” was held in Beijing, and in October 2010, at an NGO conference in Kwangju, South Korea, NGO representatives from the three countries issued a trilingual joint-statement on climate change. In September 2011, a trilateral NGO dialogue forum titled “Low-carbon East Asia – the road to its achievement” (「低炭素東アジア」実現への道 *Tei tanso higashi ajia jitsugen e no michi*)¹⁴ was held in Tokyo on the topic of energy security, nuclear safety and renewable energy. China’s rapid development of renewable energies was of particular interest for the Japanese and Korean NGO colleagues and public. In 2012, Chinese NGOs will host the next Low-carbon East Asia Forum meeting in China.

The dialogue with NGOs from other developing countries is not yet as advanced as that with NGOs from Europe, US or Japan and Korea. A first meeting between Chinese and African NGOs occurred during the climate conference in Cancun and will be followed up by a more formalized meeting in Durban at the COP17. Dialogue and exchange between Chinese and African NGOs is a brand new concept which will become more dynamic in the years to come. There are many issues that can be discussed, not only climate change, but also the growing number of investments of Chinese companies in Africa and solutions such as south-south climate technology transfer. Chinese NGOs are also engaged in dialogues with other colleagues from the BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India and China), a coalition that had initially been formed by the four governments and has growing influence on the negotiation context. This move by the governments was subsequently followed by NGOs to keep civil society up to date about BASIC country positions.

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Low Carbon East-Asia conference on nuclear safety, energy security and renewables, Tokyo, September 2011.

Opening windows of opportunity – widening political space

Chinese environmental NGOs continue to grow despite the environmental, social and political challenges they face – climate change being the biggest. These challenges also create numerous opportunities. However, Chinese climate NGOs now find themselves in a situation where they need to tackle too many issues at the same time, which creates the danger of overstretching and losing focus.

On the positive side, contrary to other trends in China, where civil rights activists have become more restricted in recent years and months, the political space for NGO activities in the field of environmental protection and climate change has been widening, particularly since the UNFCCC Tianjin

Chinese NGOs have provided their input in form of recommendations to China's climate change legislation – a move which has been welcomed by the climate change department at the NDRC.

conference, where Chinese government officials (likely for the first time) noticed domestic Chinese NGO activism and the work NGOs are doing on low-carbon development. As a result, prior to the COP16 Cancun conference a meeting between Xie Zhenhua, Vice-minister of the NDRC (National Development and Reform Com-

mission), and environmental NGOs (including Chinese grassroots organizations, GONGOs and international environmental groups based in Beijing) took place for a dialogue and exchange of ideas. Minister Xie further encouraged NGOs to continue their active engagement, both nationally and on the international stage. This encouragement has to be seen in the context of the contribution Chinese NGOs have made towards messaging of China's low-carbon actions and achievements. In Tianjin, the government experienced that Chinese NGOs have high credibility with the international community and media, and NGOs can therefore support the government in bridging its credibility gap which lies at the heart of the MRV discussions. As a result of improved relationships with NDRC, in the latter half of 2011, Chinese NGOs have provided their input in form of recommendations to China's climate change legislation – a move which has been welcomed by the climate change department at the NDRC.



Meeting between Chinese environmental NGOs and NDRC Minister Xie Zhenhua, November 2010

China's nuclear ambitions

Another window of opportunity has opened through the Fukushima nuclear accident and the 25th anniversary of Chernobyl, which has given rise to public discussion about China's future nuclear development plan. Whilst China currently has just 13 nuclear reactors which provide less than 2 % of the country's electricity, China has proposed to have installed a capacity of around 80 gigawatts by 2020, which would give China the second largest installed capacity, second only to the United States.¹⁵ In the wake of Fukushima, the Chinese government announced that approving new nuclear projects has been put on hold until new safety rules have been developed. In July 2012, China put its first 4th generation nuclear reactor online, supplying new momentum to the nuclear movement.¹⁶ Although most nuclear projects are likely to go ahead as planned, the issue of nuclear energy has never before been so hotly debated

It is not likely that a Chinese anti-nuclear movement will emerge anytime soon. The most Chinese civil society can realistically call for at this point in time are stringent safety measures for existing and newly planned nuclear power stations.

in China's blogs and media, and environmental groups and environmentalists are important players in this public debate, which is just beginning. However, it is not likely that a Chinese anti-nuclear movement will emerge anytime soon. The most Chinese civil society can realistically call for at this point in time are stringent safety measures for existing and newly planned nuclear power stations.

International mechanisms, carbon markets and climate finance – what's in for Chinese NGOs?

Even within the context of the far-from-completed climate negotiations, the current developments offer new prospects for Chinese NGOs. For example, the second track of the UNFCCC negotiations on Long-term Cooperative action (LCA) is concerned with 'Nationally appropriate mitigation actions by developing country Parties', or in short NAMAs. What NAMAs are in practice is still not properly defined. It likely will include activities in various sectors such as energy efficiency for buildings, optimising public transport, sustainable urban development or promotion of renewable energy technologies. Data collection and research studies, implementing pilot projects, capacity building and awareness raising through campaigns are all likely to fall under this category. These activities are likely not only carried out by the government agencies, as with most other concrete actions for low-carbon development, they need to be designed and implemented in cooperation with the private sector as well as civil society organisations. A good NAMA programme would ideally be developed from within a country in a participatory process involving multiple stakeholders. With increasing capacity of Chinese NGOs, they might become more attractive as partners for internationally supported NAMAs and other low-carbon development projects. For the international community, this means the exploration of more options for cooperation with Chinese NGOs for climate change solutions.

Another article of the Cancun Agreements¹⁷ that is of potential interest for Chinese NGOs concerns the development of low-carbon action plans (LCAPs). Developing countries are encouraged to develop LCAPs and, in the case of China, there already are low-carbon development plans in the making. China's renewable energy targets, emission trading schemes and other support policies are important elements of low-carbon development strategies. Civil



View on power station in Beijing's Chaoyang District

society is an important stakeholder in the implementation of LCAPs and Chinese NGOs could definitely play a role and provide value input and support. NGOs have already initiated many sound projects and developed innovative ideas on how to create low carbon communities and promote low-carbon lifestyles. Amongst international experts discussing LCAPs, many are of the opinion that the development of LCAPs should not simply be left to technical experts alone, but will require innovative and creative thinking from within society. Low-carbon development strategies are not just technology plans. There is need for public participation in the development of and, more importantly, in the execution of these action plans.

Just do it – implementing MRV (“measurable, reportable and verifiable”)

The groups within the Chinese NGOs who are working on climate change have initiated a new long-term climate campaign “C+ Action – Beyond Government Commitment, Beyond Climate, Beyond China”.¹⁸ C+ Action is an

Chinese NGOs will develop independent tools and methodologies for the measurement, reporting and verification of emissions reduction by organisations, companies and communities, acting as “third party verifiers”.

initiative by 40 NGOs based on the idea of mobilising organisations such as companies, communities, universities and schools, and individuals to take actions beyond government commitments. The campaign has the goal of engaging Chinese stakeholders to take more action than that required by government, especially in regards to energy efficiency and emissions reduction. The

issue of MRV will be a central element of this campaign, through which NGOs will not only encourage stakeholders to take action, but also offer cooperation on the issue of transparency of information. Chinese NGOs will develop independent tools and methodologies for the measurement, reporting and verification of emissions reduction by organisations, companies and communities, acting as “third party verifiers”. During the NGO meeting with Minister Xie Zhenhua, the issue of MRV was mentioned and it was stated that the government would like to see Chinese NGOs able to act as independent third parties in this process of measuring, reporting and verifying the efforts and achievements China will make towards realising low-carbon economy and the 40–45 % emissions intensity reduction target for 2020.

Remaining challenges are not insignificant

Politically, there are signals that new space has opened for NGOs, particularly since the political dialogue with the NDRC. But are NGOs in the position to use the new political space? In terms of capacity and professionalism, interim, Chinese NGOs need to acquire the necessary technical skills and knowledge to be able to contribute to future expert consultations and climate policy discussions to be able to exert influence on climate policies. Being taken seriously by experts and policymakers will only be possible if

NGOs further specialize in climate change-related areas. It will likely take a few more attempts to become a valued partner for China's climate policymakers. Particularly through participation in international processes and international exchanges can Chinese NGOs gain new expertise and establish new networks that will make them valuable partners. Shaping public opinion remains yet another area of concern. In many cases, NGOs are only discussing climate change issues amongst themselves, without reaching out to the public. For cooperation and dialogue with NGOs of other countries on very specific political or technical topics, more capacity building is needed. For example, a number of European NGOs working on issues of emissions trading, energy policy and CDM would like to cooperate more closely. However, due to the lack of expertise and resources, many requests for partnerships and collaboration have so far remained unanswered.

Understandably, many Chinese NGOs, like NGOs in other countries, do not see the benefit of putting large amounts of resources into following the international climate negotiation process and prefer to continue focusing on concrete local action. Overcoming the disconnection of concrete on-the-ground projects for low-carbon development and the international dimensions of climate change will be one of the new challenges for Chinese NGOs. Engaging in discussions on issues of fairness and equity to eventually achieve a common understanding is particularly crucial. Reaching a global deal on climate change will require agreement on how to share out remaining "carbon space" and NGO dialogue has an important role to play in this process. One of the future goals of CCAN – becoming an important civil society think tank on climate change issues – will require not only implementing local low-carbon projects and engaging sporadically in international dialogues, but providing concrete inputs to climate change policies on both national level and the international negotiations. More importantly, in the future it will require dealing with potentially sensitive political topics such as China's growing per capita emissions, China's future contribution to climate change or green trade barriers in a professional and sensitive manner.

Diversification of funding sources is another major challenge. So far, funding for NGO climate activity comes mainly from foreign foundations or networks. CCAN, for instance, is funded by the Heinrich Boell Foundation and the 'Green China, Race to the Future' campaign received financial support by the Global Campaign for Climate Action (GCCA). Funding for international

exchanges of CCAN is mainly provided by the German Federal Ministry of the Environment (BMU). US foundations like the Energy Foundation are also an emerging financial supporter of environmental groups working on energy and climate. However, international foundations increasingly tend towards allocating their funds for cooperation with government bodies and think tanks rather than NGOs. Whilst continued international support is crucial, the dependency of Chinese NGOs solely on foreign donors is not a very sustainable situation. Chinese foundations like the Society for Ecology and Entrepreneurs (SEE) have provided some support, by so far not made significant contribution to the development of a Chinese climate change movement – but will hopefully do so in the future.

Finding a place to stand

The funding situation shows how difficult it is for Chinese NGOs to find a place to stand. Becoming a strong, independent Chinese NGO network would also mean having mature and independent position on climate change. Independent would mean independent from the government position, but also independent from international financial supporters and expectations of

where Chinese NGOs should stand or what they should think or do. Commenting on the position paper on climate change from 2010, which was signed by more than 60 Chinese NGOs and was published during Tianjin and the COP16, a number of foreign commentators remarked that the position paper simply echoes the official position of the Chinese government. While it is true that

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many elements are identical to the government position, the view that NGOs are simply a mouthpiece of the government is very limited and does not fully consider the complexities and evolving relations between NGO, the Chinese government and international actors. When it comes to public international positions, Chinese NGOs are indeed in a somewhat difficult position: While on the international stage they do support the position of their government, domestically they try to push for more ambitious action of industry and government. Due to this situation, the NGOs have developed a somewhat knotty

relationship with the delegation: On the one hand, they are standing up for their country's position in NGO dialogues, while on the other hand they are worried that their increasing engagement within global civil society could result in repercussions back home. This is a reason why, so far, Chinese NGOs are not yet exactly clear on how to articulate what they want in the context of the international negotiations and have so far restrained from to directly trying to influence negotiations.

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The difficulty of finding a position emerged in the recent debate about the inclusion of international aviation into the EU's emission trading system, which will start in January 2012. The Chinese government and the Chinese Air Transport Association (CATA) have expressed opposition to the unilateral move by the EU, which makes public support for the inclusion of Chinese airlines into the emissions trading system a politically sensitive issue. Chinese NGOs have also not yet made up their minds about important issues, such as whether to support NGOs' positions of 1.5 degree or 2 degree targets. This is also a difficult issue as NGOs in China, as in other countries, look to scientists for guidance – and there are few Chinese climate change scientists who support the 1.5 degree target.

For a strong Chinese climate change movement to find a place to stand, it will be necessary for those organizations and individuals which can provide political leadership and those which shoulder the political responsibility for the climate movement to work closely together. China's NGO climate change movement and civil society will probably not be able to solve the world's climate change problem alone, but it will be impossible to solve it without their participation and contribution. Although many respectable efforts have been made, China has not (yet) achieved the shift towards a low-carbon development path. A more mature civil society with a climate change movement that has more freedom to act, would very likely

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support effective implementation of China's national climate change mitigation and adaptation actions.

The Author

Patrick Schröder is international advisor at the China Association for NGO Cooperation where he supports coordination and international cooperation of the China Civil Climate Action Network (CCAN). He holds a PhD in Environmental Studies from Victoria University of Wellington.

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China and climate change – all bad news?

As climate change becomes an increasingly urgent problem that needs to be addressed through global cooperation, China – the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases and, at the same time, largest manufacturer of renewable energy equipment – is attracting attention greater than ever before.

The global community is wants to understand what is happening in China in terms of climate change mitigation, energy policies, low-carbon urban development and other activities. The public is particularly curious to learn about the role of Chinese civil society and environmental NGOs' engagement in China's low-carbon development pathway.

This publication provides a brief overview of several important ways in which Chinese environmental groups are working to address climate change issues – both at home and internationally. It also explains the developing relationship between the Chinese government and NGO actions, how Chinese environmental NGOs are finding their way into global civil society, and their participation in global civil society debates on climate change.

It also forecasts what can be expected from Chinese NGOs in the field of climate change in the years to come. Although China's NGO climate change movement and civil society will have neither the strength nor the tools to solve the world's climate change problem alone, it will be impossible to solve it without their participation and contribution.

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