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# The Role of Environmental NGOs: From China to the Netherlands

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Thomas E. Klink

## I. Introduction

During the 2006–2007 academic year, I participated in Macalester College’s program, Globalization in Comparative Perspective, which afforded me the opportunity to study in Kunming, China, in Fall 2006 and Maastricht, Netherlands, in Spring 2007.\* As the program title indicates, studying globalization and its numerous processes was the central theme of the program. Authors like Amartya Sen claim that globalization is a deeply embedded historical process that has influenced the “progress of the world through travel, trade, migration, spread of cultural influence, and dissemination of knowledge and understanding.”<sup>1</sup> However, most scholars treat globalization as a relatively new phenomenon that signifies the increased depth, breadth, velocity, and intensity of international transactions. Countries are more sensitive than ever to events that take place outside their national borders.<sup>2</sup>

The manifestations of globalization are innumerable. In all areas of society, from business to government, from education to environment, one can see the influences of globalization. Yet the effects of globalization can be difficult to identify without a cross-cultural view. Foreign influences can be problematic to distinguish without an understanding of what is foreign. With that in mind, Macalester College’s Global-

\*Acknowledgments: I would like to thank Professor Samatar and Michael Monahan for their creativity and perseverance that enabled this program to take form. I would also like to thank Professor Ron Corvers for serving as my ISP adviser in the Netherlands. His insight was invaluable.

ization in Comparative Perspective program gave me the opportunity to gain some cross-cultural insight by examining the role of environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) in both China and the Netherlands.

The role of ENGOS in a country reflects the relationship of globalization with two different entities: civil society and the environment. Consequently, through the study of ENGOS, I am able to draw insights about both of these relationships. In addition, I chose this topic because little attention has been paid to ENGOS in their effort to protect the environment and halt global climate change. In light of the catastrophic consequences we face if we fail to stop global warming, all possible influential actors should be given due scrutiny. This study is organized as follows: first, the two case models will be presented in turn; and second, using these two models, I will explore what this means for the concept of globalization, with particular regard for its relationship with the environment and civil society.

## **II. ENGOS in China: A Tenuous Existence**

After nearly thirty years of successful economic development, China has arrived as a formidable economic force. Since 1980, over 180 million Chinese have been brought out of absolute poverty and that number continues to rise.<sup>3</sup> However, development has negatively impacted the environment. Urbanization, the burning of coal, and detrimental governmental policies have devastated much of China's natural environment, leading to the generation of greenhouse gases, water and air pollution, deforestation, and farmland loss.<sup>4</sup> Seven of the ten most polluted cities in the world are located in China, and it is well known that China is second only to the United States in carbon emissions and is soon expected to surpass it.

Despite all of these potentially catastrophic environmental problems that have been foreseen for decades,<sup>5</sup> the Chinese government maintains that environmental protection must not come at the cost of development and progress. One need only walk through the streets of Beijing, even on the cleanest of days, to question the government's logic. This is not to say, however, that the Chinese government has not made significant progress in environmental protection, including toughening enforcement and attempting to harmonize economic development with environmental protection, as is well documented in *Economy*,<sup>6</sup> but hard challenges and decisions still lie ahead.

I departed for China on August 31, 2006, as part of the School for International Training's (SIT) program entitled, China: Yunnan Province Language and Culture. Yunnan province is considered by many to be one of the few natural gems left in the world. It is host to two UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and its southern autonomous subtropical region, Xishuanbanna, has long been a backpacker's favorite and top tourist destination for Chinese travelers. Indeed, what makes Yunnan so rare and admired by so many is its variety of landscapes and the presence of minority cultures that depend heavily upon their surrounding environment.

As a result, it is no surprise that ENGOs are increasingly prevalent in Yunnan, both of local and transnational origin. I was fortunate to be able to interview and gather information from members of three prominent ENGOs in the area: The Nature Conservancy, The Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge, and the Yunnan Eco Network. I also was fortunate to interview two different employees (though not Party members as they were keen to point out) of the Yunnan Environmental Protection Bureau.\*\*

The interviews comprise an integral part of my research in China. While there is fairly extensive scholarship on the presence and scope of ENGOs in China, the interviews provide specific examples of ENGO activities, which is often absent from the record. Using previous literature and my own research, I will examine the role of ENGOs in China using the following structure: first, I will give a brief overview of the history of ENGOs in China; second, I will evaluate the types of ENGOs that exist in China, including their origin, aims, and activities; and third, I will explore ENGOs' relationships with the Chinese government, including regulation, joint projects, and an analysis of the present Chinese governance model regarding ENGOs.

### **A. Chinese ENGOs: Fifteen Years of Expansion**

A number of works have looked at the historical evolution of ENGOs in China in spite of the fact that their presence in the Middle Kingdom spans less than fifteen years. No ENGOs existed in China before 1994; however, today, there are at least 2,000 registered ENGOs. In addition, many more ENGOs exist in other forms. Some claim to be non-profit

\*\*Author's Note: Some names of those I interviewed in China have been changed as they requested.

companies or student groups because registration is more relaxed, and some do not register at all. In fact, one ENGO staff member I interviewed reluctantly mentioned that he never registered with an oversight agency because the process was unclear. Given these conditions, estimates for how many ENGOs actually operate in China range widely, between 4,000 and 100,000.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of the exact number, this shows a remarkable progression in less than fifteen years and raises the question of why a government that was so insistent on keeping ENGOs out of the picture until 1994 changed its mind.

Scholars point to the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992 as a significant catalyst for the development of ENGOs in China. The Chinese delegation to the summit was embarrassed by “their inability to participate in a meaningful way” at the NGO conference that occurred side by side with the government negotiations.<sup>8</sup> In an attempt to make up for their lack of genuine ENGOs, China sent Government-organized Non-Governmental Organizations, known entertainingly as GONGOs, to the NGO conference, but this fact was easily recognizable and hurt China’s reputation. The Chinese delegation left the summit feeling that ENGOs could play a significant role in environmental protection beneficial to the national government, while improving China’s international image, and they were willing to allow increased public participation in order to reach this goal.<sup>9</sup>

With the government wanting the presence of ENGOs, Liang Congjie, a member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (a government body), formed the first genuine environmental NGO, Friends of Nature, in 1994.<sup>10</sup> While Liang was no environmental expert, he was well insulated in political affairs, which gave him a certain amount of freedom and legitimacy. It is perhaps fitting, and even telling, that it was a political insider who founded the first environmental NGO. Yet even if one is skeptical of his relationship with the government, Liang’s position and recognition by fellow elites and his ability to work within the system gave the environmental movement a much needed boost that spurred the creation of several more ENGOs.

More recently, a number of national events have encouraged the creation of more ENGOs. First, many of President Hu Jintao’s new policies emphasize the need to “harmonize” environmental protection with economic development, which opens up the door for ENGOs to focus on this demand. Second, the State Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA, formerly known as NEPA) has stated on numerous occasions that ENGOs are its “natural friends.” Third, and perhaps

most importantly, a series of new laws have increased the oversight role for ENGOs, allowing them to participate in mandatory environmental risk assessments before a development project is undertaken. These events have coincided to strengthen the numbers and resolve of Chinese ENGOs.<sup>11</sup>

The development of the field of ENGOs, however, has not been without its setbacks. Local governments are sometimes suspicious of ENGOs. On multiple occasions, local government officials have blocked ENGO registration or even threatened their members and supporters. For example, in Yunnan province, photographer Xi Zhinong alerted the public to continued logging in an area that was determined off limits by the provincial government. As a result of his discovery of these environmentally devastating activities, some local officials “threatened that they could ‘make Xi disappear.’”<sup>12</sup> There are numerous examples of local government interests coming into conflict with NGOs. I will mention some of these later.

Another setback occurred at the national level soon after Friends of Nature was founded in 1994. Perhaps not anticipating the volume of applications to register as NGOs, the national government did not have strict rules regulating these organizations. Suspicious Party officials, who worried that NGOs could wander outside of “acceptable” areas of work, decided that more stringent rules had to be applied to NGOs to ensure that they did not work against the interests of the government. As a result, the government instituted a two-year moratorium on the registration of NGOs in 1995 to assess the situation. The result was more stringent rules on the registration and maintenance of all NGOs, including oversight provisions, membership guidelines, and mandatory levels of funding.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, despite these setbacks, some scholars claim that ENGOs are the vanguard of China’s civil society.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the sheer number of ENGOs in operation today illustrates the characteristics of a successful movement. In addition, there have also been numerous successful projects and activities on the local level, which the next section will address.

## **B. Aims and Activities of Chinese ENGOs: From International to Domestic**

The most evident distinction between Chinese ENGOs is that of their origin; there are ENGOs that originated from outside of China and those who find their roots in China. International ENGOs are perhaps

the most recognizable of all ENGOs located in China because of their resources. They often have significantly more funding and experience than domestic ENGOs. In fact, prior to 1994, international ENGOs did operate in China, but only in a very limited fashion and in close cooperation with the government. The projects they worked on were conservation based, including the World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) successful campaign to protect panda habitats and the International Crane Foundation's study of reserve management.<sup>15</sup> International ENGOs have been remarkably successful in their limited sphere of activities, perhaps because they have kept their issues of concern within three main areas: conservation, biodiversity, and more recently energy efficiency. In addition, their policy for interaction with the government has been non-confrontational.<sup>16</sup>

A valuable example of an international ENGO is The Nature Conservancy (TNC). This ENGO, with its China operations based in Yunnan province, began its work in China in 1998 and has since engaged in biodiversity, conservation, and energy efficiency oriented activities. TNC's communications liaison, T. Lijie, gave a lecture to my SIT group in late September. A main theme of this lecture was that it is necessary to work with the local government as partners. TNC's first project in Yunnan was a highly cooperative effort that involved the provincial and local government, Chinese and U.S. scientists, and various NGOs studying the ecology, culture, and history in parts of northwest Yunnan. As scholars Eric Zusman and Jennifer L. Turner note, this first project, known as the Yunnan Great Rivers project, "allowed the TNC staff to become familiar with local government officials, government-organized nongovernmental organizations (GONGOs), NGOs, local research centers, and community groups."<sup>17</sup> The building of such networks has been a main activity of international ENGOs, which may otherwise lack the confidence of local governments because their organization is not Chinese in origin. In this way, within their limited spheres of engagement, international ENGOs have been successful catalysts for group cooperation.

Domestic ENGOs, while not as well funded or as experienced, are given greater latitude within their operations. This is possibly because of their domestic origin, or because they are seen as less threatening, given their lack of connections and funding. Domestic ENGOs in China number in the thousands and perhaps even the tens of thousands, although most are not registered as NGOs. Many of these ENGOs do not maintain a strict policy of non-confrontation with the government

that almost all international ENGOs, like TNC, maintain. Likewise, these groups often have a wider range of activities than international ENGOs because they engage with some of the more sensitive issues, such as environmental policy in minority areas. Education is also a primary activity of many domestic ENGOs. While some international ENGOs do engage in education-related activities, they tread lightly because it could be considered a subversive outside influence.

The activities of the Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge (CBIK) provide an example of the programs unique to domestic ENGOs. As its name would indicate, CBIK seeks to develop a harmonious relationship between local villagers and their surroundings while often using traditional knowledge in the process. The general process of CBIK brings together villagers and local government officials as partners. Often this can be a tenuous project in which local government officials refuse the methods or advocated policy of CBIK. In these instances, according to Senior Project Manager Yin Lun, "we must change their [the government officials] minds."<sup>18</sup> This sort of open confrontation is afforded to some domestic ENGOs, but rarely to international ENGOs.

As the previous example shows, domestic ENGOs also act as coalition builders between different stakeholders. An even more striking example is the Yunnan Eco Network. At its origin, this domestic ENGO's main purpose was to bring together different ENGOs to discuss cooperative efforts for Yunnan province to prevent overlap and opposing objectives. However, as their director told me, its activities have changed with the demands of the times.<sup>19</sup> While they still attend and sponsor shareholder conferences, they also engage in educational activities.

More recently, domestic and international ENGOs have begun organizing protests, with some success. This activity takes place in previously unexplored territory and the consequences are still unknown. In 2004, Greenpeace China played a role in preventing Asian Pulp and Paper Company from illegally deforesting parts of Yunnan province. One year later, in spring 2005, multiple ENGOs organized a series of protests that eventually stopped a construction project in Yuanmingyuan.<sup>20</sup> While these signs are encouraging for those who want to see a more open civil society, events like these are still an exception to the rule.



### C. ENGOs and the Government: Inconsistent Hierarchy

Most scholarship focusing on ENGOs in China stresses a delicate relationship with the government. My research does not contest this finding; however, I proffer that the relationship varies depending on the origin, type, location, and activities of ENGOs. One important phenomenon that has not yet been adequately noted (and that I will not explore in great detail) is that of environmental GONGOs. Although most GONGOs will claim to be independent of the government, many are funded entirely through governmental agencies, with GONGO employees directly on the payroll.<sup>21</sup> While some of these GONGOs may become more independent in time, as of now they merit a distinction from independent ENGOs because their relationship with the government is significantly different.

Government regulation of ENGOs is at best inconsistent. While some ENGOs have been shut down and their members arrested, others experience little or no interaction with the government. Three key measures, which were instated following the 1995–1997 moratorium on NGO registration, govern the registration and activities of NGOs. A NGO must “(1) register with a governmental oversight agency, (2) refrain from establishing local offices in other parts of the country, and (3) maintain a certain level of funding.”<sup>22</sup> In addition, civil affairs offices are charged with forcing NGOs to comply with any control measures.<sup>23</sup>

Independent scholar Jiang Ru conducted a study of the regulation of twenty-two Chinese ENGOs and found that based on these key measures, some ENGOs experienced little or no interference from the government. In fact, five of the surveyed ENGOs were not registered with any government body, but they conducted their operations openly without consequences, even though they violated some control measures. ENGOs commonly stated that the civil affairs office barely interfered with their operations. This was not the case for the GONGOs that were included in her study, which experienced direct oversight, funding, and control. However, Jiang also found that GONGOs were involved in more sensitive areas, including policy consultation, while independent ENGOs were not as directly involved in lobbying or confrontational activities, even though some successfully challenged development projects.<sup>24</sup>

Yet other ENGOs have not escaped governmental regulation. Another NGO regulation is that political dissenters or former politi-

cal prisoners cannot be members. This has affected some organizations, as many scholars critical of China's environmental record are unable to join ENGOs and must also be careful in consultations. For example, one member of Friends of Nature, Wang Lixiong, protested the treatment of Tibetan dissidents. As a result, Friends of Nature was quickly informed to get rid of him or lose their license.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, the NGO guidelines basically give the branches of the civil affairs office unchecked authority to regulate NGO activity. This means that if an NGO is doing something undesirable, even if it is not outwardly illegal, the civil affairs office has a significant amount of leverage in punishing this NGO. However, it is not only the civil affairs office that can punish an NGO. Local governments also have their methods of closing NGOs. In 1997, a Public Security Bureau memo was issued to inform local government officials about how they can effectively control "troublesome" NGOs:

- (1) The sponsoring organization can cease its support;
- (2) The NGO can be closed down for financial reasons; and
- (3) key leaders of the NGO can be transferred to other jobs that leave them little or no time for outside work with the NGO.<sup>26</sup>

According to Economy's research, all of these methods have been used to "neutralize" unwanted NGOs.<sup>27</sup>

Reasons for this inconsistent oversight vary. In part, it is because of the decentralized nature of the Chinese state; while some local civil affairs offices may choose to be strict in their oversight, others might find it unnecessary, financially unfeasible, or contradictory to their mutual goals. Yunnan province is one location in which civil organization and freethinking has traditionally flourished. My program director attributed this to the saying that, "The Mountains are high and the Emperor is far away." However, this is not the case for all provinces and localities. Jiang also attributes lack of oversight in some areas to self-censorship.<sup>28</sup> ENGOs know which areas they are allowed to explore and which they should never mention.

Of course, there is government involvement with ENGOs outside of regulation. Private-public joint projects are common. In Yunnan province, this is certainly the case. The CBIK, TNC, and the Yunnan Eco Network all regularly engage in activities with the local and provincial governments, even though they are not all registered NGOs. CBIK senior project manager Yin Lun told me that this type of partnership

afforded his organization more liberty in its activities because the local and provincial governments grew to trust it even though they do not agree about everything.<sup>29</sup>

There is clearly a hierarchical model of governance in the relationship between the Chinese government and ENGOs. The government maintains the ability to punish or reward ENGOs at will. However, some ENGOs are also able to operate below the government's radar while securing funding necessary for their survival. As a result, ENGOs in China have a somewhat flexible role within this hierarchical governance model, depending on their origins and activities. So far the government seems content to allow domestic ENGOs to engage in education, grassroots organization and activities, biodiversity, conservation, and energy efficiency projects, while they allow international ENGOs to engage in the latter three. Hence, the role for ENGOs in China seems to be limited to educating the public about environmental issues and engaging in piecemeal biodiversity and conservation projects. While this allows for many locally successful projects, ENGO activities have not yet seemed to register on the national scene, where carbon emissions are increasing and the government still refuses to sacrifice economic development for environmental protection. This can be partially attributed to the government's reluctance to allow ENGOs to participate in open lobbying activities, which are considered too sensitive for any ENGO (perhaps with the exception of GONGOs), but even then their activities are not overt.

### **III. ENGOs in the Netherlands: Consensus, Cooperation, and Deep-Rooted Activism**

The Netherlands is often hailed as a nation on the forefront of the environmental movement. Much of its success can be attributed to the Dutch government's willingness to view environmental problems in a historical and systemic way, and look to remedy all environmental devastation simultaneously while putting measures in place to prevent future deterioration. The Netherlands was the first country to initiate a plan for long-term environmental recovery in 1989, known as the National Environmental Policy Plan (NEPP), which is now in its fourth version.<sup>30</sup> This plan, among many other things, stresses consensus—a traditional Dutch value—among all sectors of society including ENGOs. This is a dramatic departure from the piecemeal approach to fixing environmental problems on which many countries still rely.

While the Netherlands may be ahead of the curve in managing the environment, it still faces a number of environmental problems as a densely populated country, including climate change and the ensuing rise in sea levels. As a signatory of the Kyoto Protocol, the Netherlands is on track to complete its commitment to reduce emissions by six percent, according to the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment (VROM in Dutch). However, they realize that this may not be enough, especially if other countries, like China, do not do the same. Other problems facing the country include soil erosion and the loss of arable land, which can be devastating for a small coastal country, and the loss of flora and natural fauna.<sup>31</sup>

While I arrived in Maastricht, Netherlands, in early January 2007 and stayed there for five months, my research is less extensive than that focusing on China. This is mainly due to the lack of English-language literature on ENGOs in the Netherlands. While I am told literature in Dutch is extensive, one interviewee related to me that his organization rarely has demands for English language editions of publications, and I suspect that the same is true for Dutch environmental scholarship.<sup>32</sup> Thus, I was only able to arrange for interviews at two ENGOs, as others, including Greenpeace Netherlands, told me they did not accept student interviews or were too busy.

Drawing on all available resources in English, including my interviews, I will examine the role of ENGOs in Dutch society using the following format: first, I will give a brief overview of the history of Dutch ENGOs; second, I will classify the different types of Dutch ENGOs, including by origin and activities; and third, I will explore ENGO interaction with the government, including regulation, project interaction, and funding.

### **A. Dutch Environmental Activism: Close Ties with the Land**

The history of environmental civil society in the Netherlands is closely related to the physical geography of the country. Approximately thirty percent of the country is below sea level. This is the result of years of draining marshlands and the building of a complex system of dykes and canals that still exist today. Such significant projects that ultimately reshaped the landscape of the country required broad consensus and resources from all sectors of society. Activity of this sort can be traced back to the 13th century when “Water Boards” were created in order to plan how to effectively install and manage flood protection mecha-

nisms.<sup>33</sup> This system, of which elements such as the Water Boards are still in place today, has had a lasting impact on how the Dutch manage their environment. Planning and consensus building with numerous stakeholders is the norm, which explains the deeply rooted civil society activity in environmental issues.<sup>34</sup>

With a firmly embedded environmental consciousness already present, the first ENGOs in the Netherlands emerged with the stabilization of the modern Dutch nation-state at the turn of the 20th century. One of the first ENGOs was *Natuurmonumenten* (Dutch Society for the Preservation of Nature), which is now the largest independent organization for nature conservation, with over 950,000 members. In 1905, the local authority of Amsterdam sought to convert Lake Naardermeer into a garbage dump. The founding pioneers of *Natuurmonumenten* objected and mounted a campaign to purchase the lake from the government to prevent the conversion into a sewage disposal site. They were successful and, thus, a very influential conservation organization was founded that now manages over 350 nature conservation areas in the Netherlands, which accounts for 25% of the total nature areas.<sup>35</sup>

More recently, ENGOs have emerged with the creation of the National Environmental Policy Plans (NEPP), which calls for extensive collaboration and cooperation between government agencies, businesses, and civil society.<sup>36</sup> When the first NEPP was launched in 1989, it was a revolutionary new approach to environmental protection, partially because of this fact. Influenced by this new approach to environmental protection, the government now ensures a healthy environmental civil society sector by subsidizing and giving grants to numerous ENGOs. With such a robust environmental civil society, it is no surprise that more than two million Dutch (approximately one-eighth of the total population) are members of ENGOs.

## **B. Classification of Dutch ENGOs: Focus, Not Origin**

It is difficult to place ENGOs in the Netherlands into distinct categories because most are concerned with the same range of issues and use similar techniques to achieve their ends. While differences do exist from organization to organization, no significant differences exist between international ENGOs and domestic ENGOs. Both types are adequately funded and similarly experienced. No distinctions allow ENGOs to be neatly classified to show clear-cut differences. With this in mind, I believe a classification according to geographical focus, not origin, will

illustrate some of the more unique traits of ENGOs in the Netherlands that did not exist in China. While this classification system lacks perfect precision and trends, it recognizes a phenomenon that does not exist in many developing countries, including China: domestic and international ENGOs that explicitly focus on issues outside of the host country's borders. I will now give an overview of the aims and activities of ENGOs in the Netherlands according to whether they mainly focus on domestic or international issues, including those that focus on both.

Among those who maintain mainly a domestic focus, conservation, biodiversity, energy efficiency, and climate change on the domestic level are the main issues addressed. Local issues like the construction of roads and manure management are also a main focus of these organizations. Numerous means are used to address these issues including direct lobbying of the government and businesses, protest activities, educational outreach, and direct management of nature areas. These groups are especially adept at using coalition-building activities to halt the construction of government or business projects or to launch a full-scale awareness campaign. In fact, permanent measures link many of these domestically focused ENGOs in umbrella organizations like the *Nederland Natuurlijk* coalition.<sup>37</sup>

*Natuurmonumenten* is one organization that focuses solely on domestic issues. While they have worked across borders before with their immediate neighbors, they are solely concerned with managing nature in their area and the issues that impact it, such as road construction. To this end, they engage in numerous activities like direct lobbying, protest activities, and educational outreach programs in schools. They regularly invite students to their nature reserves for field trips or more extensive research trips to teach them about environmental responsibility.<sup>38</sup>

Other ENGOs in the Netherlands focus almost exclusively on international issues like sustainable development in the developing world, conservation and biodiversity in threatened habitats, and the broader issue of global climate change. Examples of these organizations include Greenpeace and the WWF. These international ENGOs use government lobbying, protest activities against businesses and government policies, and awareness projects to rally public support for their cause. Often their goal (in addition to raising public awareness about international environmental issues) is to gain monetary support from the Dutch public to fund their projects in other countries. To this end, these

ENGOS often form coalitions; however, they are just as likely to remain alone in order to distinguish themselves for potential donors.

Internationally focused ENGOS in the Netherlands are not only international in origin. Some domestic ENGOS, like the Center for International Cooperation (COS in Dutch), focus almost exclusively on international issues.<sup>39</sup> The principal aim of this organization is to encourage the Dutch population to donate money to projects in the developing world, although COS does not directly manage any of these projects. To achieve this objective, COS is engaged in awareness projects and lobbying activities relating to sustainable development. They host events and town hall discussions to encourage public discourse. They also serve as a link between individuals who want to complete a development project and larger organizations that can help them achieve their goal.<sup>40</sup>

Some ENGOS in the Netherlands also focus on both domestic and international issues in their operations. These ENGOS occupy a unique position within the landscape of environmental civil society in the Netherlands. They address most environmental issues and their expertise lies in “influencing the policy making process.”<sup>41</sup> To this end, they engage in public awareness campaigns and lobbying efforts both on the national and international level—mostly in Brussels. In fact, one of these organizations, The Netherlands Society for Nature and Environment (Stichting Natuur en Milieu), acts as a representative of sorts for numerous ENGOS at the wider European level. They coordinate the Strategic Council for nearly thirty national ENGOS, international and domestic, including Natuurmonumenten, the WWF, and Friends of the Earth Netherlands.<sup>42</sup> In this way, these types of ENGOS in the Netherlands are influential coalition builders that link the domestic and international. In addition, these ENGOS are familiar with environmental laws passed in Brussels, which comprise 75% of the environmental laws passed in Europe, and they use it, when necessary, to hold the Dutch government accountable to European standards. In some ways, these ENGOS are the most sophisticated in the Netherlands, as they navigate the complex web of international, national, and local law, politics, and economics simultaneously to ensure favorable results for the environment.



### C. ENGOs' Relationship with the Dutch Government

It should be noted that in this section I only analyze the relationship between ENGOs in the Netherlands and the Dutch national government and not the greater European system of governance, despite the fact that three-quarters of environmental legislation is initiated at the European level. This is mainly because most political control remains in the hands of national governments as evidenced by the rejection of the European constitution in 2006 by the French and Dutch populace. Additionally, Europe is not an individual political nation-state. Because I wish to compare the role of ENGOs in nation-states, Europe fails to constitute the model needed to compare with China. As a result, although being significantly smaller geographically and less populated, the Netherlands provides a better model for comparison.

ENGOs in the Netherlands maintain a significant amount of freedom from government regulation. As a professor joked during a class lecture, one only needs to find the paperwork and fill out a couple of forms to be considered an NGO in the Netherlands. However, in the past year, it has become slightly more difficult for ENGOs to maintain their status. As of January 1, 2007, ENGOs must submit reports documenting their activities and contribution to the community.<sup>43</sup> While ENGOs are not at risk of disappearing from the Netherlands anytime soon, the recently elected center-right government seems more wary of the need to fund these groups.

Outside of legal regulation, most ENGOs are intimately involved with governmental activity. Some receive money to provide the state with services, like *Natuurmonumenten*, which manages protected nature areas for the state. Additionally, ENGOs are regularly used as collaborators, given their interest and experience. Some are invited to be participants in ministerial meetings about the environment or about the implementation of the NEPP. The Society for Nature and Environment finds itself in a particularly influential role. Acting primarily as a think tank, this ENGO has representatives on numerous governmental committees.<sup>44</sup>

In other instances, the government and ENGOs find themselves on opposite ends of projects. Greenpeace is, of course, the obvious ENGO that regularly engages in protests and awareness raising activities in objection to government policies. However, other ENGOs are not afraid to use this method to influence the government. Especially in local projects, such as road construction through a preserved area,



the government often finds itself up against a coalition of NGOs. However, it should be stressed that more often than not, NGOs favor collaboration with the government rather than acts of protest.<sup>45</sup>

The most interesting aspect of NGOs' relationship with the Dutch government involves funding. The majority of NGOs in the Netherlands receive a substantial amount of funding from the government. With many organizations, this funding accounts for over half of their budget. Even some NGOs that regularly protest government projects, like Friends of the Environment, obtain over half of their funding from the government.<sup>46</sup> This is possible because funding is not politically motivated. An insulated independent government agency, VROM, is responsible for doling out the national grants. However, the potential conflict of interest of being funded by the government is not lost on NGOs. When asked about this phenomenon, the representative from Natuurmonumenten stated, "Well, we like to say that we are independent."<sup>47</sup>

The highly cooperative relationship with the government illustrates a model of co-governance in which different sectors of society are collaborative partners. While NGOs are heavily funded by the government and are not self-sustaining, they are presented as nearly equal partners in their endeavors to protect the environment. They are engaged in collaborative projects with the government and are included in high-level committee meetings. While there are instances in which the government makes decisions contradictory to the wishes of NGOs, such occurrences do not dominate their relationship. Disagreements are most often dealt with in the process of consensus, which is deeply engrained in Dutch culture.

The role, therefore, for NGOs in the Netherlands is extensive. They are involved in all environmental issues from the local to the global, and use all methods available to them to address these issues, including lobbying, awareness activities, and direct management of protected nature areas. What is unique in the Netherlands is the level of NGO involvement within the governmental structure. NGOs are collaborators and influential members of high-level committees, and most NGO projects are implemented with funding or support from the government. Additionally, NGOs in the Netherlands possess an unusually large number of members, with over two million Dutch belonging to an NGO. It is safe to say that NGOs are deeply embedded within Dutch society.

## IV. The Effects of Globalization

### A. Universal Environmental Concerns

The differences between the status and roles of ENGOs in the Netherlands and China are substantial. While the existence of ENGOs in China is still fragile, they are well established in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, ENGOs can openly and effectively challenge government decisions and projects, whereas in China they are not afforded this liberty. Despite the numerous differences, subtle similarities also exist. For example, it can be argued that the respective national governments maintain control over ENGOs in both countries. The mechanism of control in China is regulation and in the Netherlands it is funding. Within these differences and subtle similarities, there are significant lessons about the relationship of globalization to civil society, the environment, and national governments. To conclude this essay, I will explore what these case studies signify for the impact of globalization on each of these entities.

The relationship between globalization and civil society has not been adequately studied, possibly because establishing a link between the two concepts has been problematic. However, in a recent discourse, four professors have argued that globalization leads to an increase in activity within the civil society sector, as well as an increasing number of NGOs. Because globalization increases the velocity, breadth, depth, and intensity of information dissemination, citizens are exposed to an unprecedented amount of unfiltered information, which they are given the freedom to interpret.

Exposure to this flood of information can challenge old beliefs and expectations, reawaken old loyalties to old values and social identities, or provoke intense discussions of highly-charged concepts like 'women's liberation,' 'land to the tiller,' or 'ethnic cleansing.' Information flows that resonate with core social values can be the basis for the emergence of civil society organization or social movements that speak with powerful new voices in national policy and governance processes.<sup>48</sup>

These same scholars argue that the more open a society is to the process of information dissemination that is involved in globalization, the greater the influence and numbers of NGOs. In other words, the more uncensored information that is available to the public, the more

likely people are to use this information to express themselves via civil society. Of course, NGOs will also have a greater amount of influence if the public is aware of information about their cause and believes that it is just.

This theory linking civil society and globalization is supported by the case studies. The Netherlands has embraced the increased depth and velocity of information dissemination involved with globalization. The Dutch government does not censor the information its public receives. Dutch citizens use multiple channels to find information, including the Internet and international newspapers and television stations such as the BBC and CNN. Almost all of the Dutch are proficient in English, which gives them much greater liberty in choosing the news they digest. As a result, the theory would argue, the Netherlands has developed an influential and robust civil society in which citizens are well informed of the issues. As my research in the Netherlands has shown, this is the case for environmental civil society, as the ENGOs are deeply embedded in the societal structure and more than two million Dutch citizens are members of an ENGO.

China, on the other hand, has for decades carefully censored the information that its population has received. It has not embraced the information dissemination aspect of globalization. Consequently, the four Harvard scholars would argue that Chinese civil society has been slow to develop and remains a weak player within society. As far as ENGOs are concerned, this has been the case. Their existence in China has spanned a mere fifteen years, and their influence and support among the Chinese public has remained feeble. Although public surveys about the environment have been characteristically unreliable in China, the general trends show a weak understanding of environmental issues and a general reluctance to place it among the most important issues in the country.<sup>49</sup> While the government's control over the information digested by its public is beginning to ease slightly with the advent of the Internet, the effects of their attempts to control globalization has crippled the development of an influential civil society.

Globalization and civil society thus seem to have a positive relationship. The more accepting a country is of globalization, the more likely it is to have a robust civil society. Globalization and the environment, however, have a far more complicated relationship, as has been explored by numerous authors. Some scholars point to economic globalization as the prime culprit responsible for environmental devastation. Accordingly, globalization leads to an expansion of environmental

destruction through the rise of transportation and energy industries, the expansion of corporate influence, and the loss of control by national governments in regulating their environment. Other authors maintain, however, that, “globalization can and should advance the transition to sustainability” by creating an environmental consciousness among the public—through the spread of information and the attainment of personal affluence—that will urge its government to take action.<sup>50</sup> Once again, my research reinforces these theories. Globalization can be both beneficial and detrimental to the environment.

The case studies here represent this dichotomy. The Netherlands went through years of economic development spurred by global trade before attempting to reverse the negative effects on the environment. However, now globalization is partially responsible for the powerful environmental movement spearheading the transition toward sustainability. As the Netherlands has embraced the spread of information stimulated by globalization and has benefited financially to add to its affluence, the citizens are highly informed and supportive of measures to preserve their environment. They force their government to take environmentally conscious decisions.

China, on the other hand, has thus far only witnessed incredible destruction at the hands of economic globalization. In an attempt to spur economic growth in 1978, the Chinese government enacted reforms that allowed the wheels of economic globalization to turn. While these more open economic policies, involving substantial exports to the biggest markets in the world, spurred economic growth, their effects on the environment were devastating. Thus far, these forces show no sign of relenting. Though the environmental consciousness among the Chinese public is gaining strength as their wealth grows, the benefits of globalization on the environment are still dwarfed by its negative effects. However, as information continues to flow more freely in China and personal wealth continues to grow, albeit unequally, this may change in time.

This leads to the final argument about globalization that I have learned from the case studies. While globalization has weakened governments’ role in dispensing information and has increased the role of civil society, national governments remain in an influential position to mitigate the effects of the globalization of information. In China, this is still evidently the case, where to a large extent the Chinese government still controls the information that flows in and out of the country. In addition, the government remains in a strong position to weaken or

punish the civil society. ENGOs largely exist only because the government believes they are beneficial to its own aims. Governments maintain the right and ability to disassemble an ENGO when they decide that it is not in the public's best interest. In this way, the Chinese government is able to mitigate and control the rise of civil society, which was partially spurred by its more recent acceptance of some aspects of the information dissemination process of globalization. There is no question that the Chinese government's position in controlling information has been weakened in recent years by policy decisions and the spread of the Internet throughout the country, however it still remains in a strong position to control ENGO activity within its boundaries.

The Dutch Government, to a lesser extent, also maintains the ability among societal entities to best mitigate the effects of the information dissemination process of globalization in a more subtle fashion. While it does not control the information flow within the country as China largely does, it still holds a strong influence over the civil society sector. By cutting off funding for the variety of NGOs, it could lessen their effect on society, which would weaken the effect of the globalization of information, as the citizens would have fewer options by which to receive information or express opinions.

While national governments remain in the optimal position to weaken the effects of the globalization of information, this last example of the Dutch government also shows how much control governments who have already fully embraced the globalization of information maintain over information flows within their borders. Once the globalization of information has been wholly embraced by a society, it is nearly impossible for a government to successfully reverse or even mitigate its effects, according to my research. On the other hand, China, a country that has not yet wholly embraced the globalization of information, can still effectively control much information that crosses its borders, although its influence is weakening.

## **V. Conclusion**

Of course, globalization only provides part of the explanation that accounts for the different status of ENGOs in China and in the Netherlands. Undoubtedly, centuries under differing governmental structures, geographical constraints, and other societal forces have heavily contributed to the status of ENGOs today. A larger study with more countries is needed to account for these differences. While Macales-

ter College's program, *Globalization in Comparative Perspective*, gave me the opportunity to look into the role of ENGOs in two countries, it also made me realize that in order to comprehensively understand globalization's processes in their most raw condition through individual observation and research, it is necessary to study the processes in a wide range of nations from every corner of the world. Otherwise, the effects of globalization could easily be confused with other societal forces, especially when studying globalization's relationship with large entities, such as civil society or the environment.

Despite this shortcoming, there is no doubt that globalization has profoundly influenced the role of ENGOs in both the Netherlands and China. My research supports what other scholars have already theorized about globalization's relationship with civil society and the environment. What remains to be seen, however, is the impact that civil society will have in solving the environmental crisis we now face and what role, if any, globalization will play. ●

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## Notes

1. Sen 2002, para. 3.
2. Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton 1999, p. 2.
3. Smil 2000, p.195.
4. Xiaoying and Ortolano 2000, p. 2.
5. Environmental pollution was already being discussed in 1973 at a national conference, five years before the New Economic Plan of Deng Xiao Ping (J.B. Starr 2001, p. 180).
6. *Economy* 2004.
7. Yan 2005; *Economy* 2005, p. 2.
8. *Economy* 2005, p. 113.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
10. *Economy* 2004, p. 146.
11. Lee 2006, p. 8.
12. *Op. Cit.*, p. 151.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
15. Zusman et al. 2005, p. 142.
16. T. Lijie Lecture at The Nature Conservancy headquarters, October 7, 2006.
17. *Op. Cit.*, p. 143.
18. Y. Lun. Personal communication. 29 November 2006.
19. Y. Chang. Personal communication. 1 December 2006.
20. Lee 2006, p. 1.
21. Schwartz 2004, p. 42.

22. Economy 2005, p. 114.
23. Jiang 2006, p. 3.
24. Jiang 2006, para. 7.
25. Economy 2005, p. 115.
26. Economy 2004, p. 134.
27. Ibid.
28. Jiang 2005, para. 5.
29. Yin Lun. Personal communication. 29 November 2006.
30. Green Plans 2003, p. 10.
31. Bouder and Fink 2002, p. 224.
32. R. Kohnen. Personal communication. 23 May 2007.
33. Bouder et al. 2003, p. 239.
34. Green Plans, "Environmental History," 2002, para. 1.
35. Vereniging Natuurmonumenten 2007, p. 2.
36. Timmer 1997, para. 12.
37. Op. Cit., p. 6.
38. F. Prins. Personal communication. 14 May 2007.
39. While COS is primarily a development NGO, I include it among ENGOs because it stresses sustainability as one of its principal tenets, and frequently engages in awareness projects relating to the environment.
40. R. Kohnen. Personal communication. 23 May 2007.
41. Stichting Natuur en Milieu 2007, para. 3.
42. Ibid., para. 6.
43. R. Kohnen. Personal communication. 23 May 2007.
44. Bouder et al. 2002, p. 240.
45. F. Prins. Personal communication. 14 May 2007.
46. Financial Report 2006, p. 2.
47. F. Prins, Personal communication. 14 May 2007.
48. Brown, Khagram, Moore and Frumkin 2000, p. 14.
49. Lee 2005, p. 48.
50. Speth 2003, p. 2.

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