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Global China's human touch? The internationalisation of Chinese NGOs

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Chapter 3 An Emerging Sector: Mapping the International Development Projects of Chinese NGOs

Before examining the role of Chinese NGOs in Chinese international development, it is important to have an understanding of the current state of Chinese NGOs' internationalisation. How many Chinese NGOs have "gone out"? Where? What types of international activities have they conducted? What are their main sources of funding? These questions are fundamental not only to the understanding of Chinese NGOs' relationships with the government and companies (to be addressed in the next four chapters) but also for scholars and practitioners who are interested in Chinese NGOs and Global China. Although Chinese NGOs' internationalisation has attracted growing interest, systematic studies on organisations that have "gone out" are scarce. To fill the gap and provide a comprehensive picture of the landscape of Chinese NGOs' international development activities, I have built a database referencing Chinese NGOs that are involved in international development activities, the Chinese NGO Internationalisation Database, by adopting a systematic approach. Looking systematically at the international development activities of Chinese NGOs will allow us to obtain sector-wide knowledge. This database provides a foundation for a richer and broader research agenda regarding Chinese NGOs' internationalisation in the future. (Note: The initial version of the database was published on the Belt and Road Research Platform of Leiden Asia Centre in 2020, <https://www.beltroadresearch.com/ngo-map/>)

This chapter begins with an introduction of the sectorial approach to the studies of NGOs working in international development, followed by a detailed explanation of the process of creating the NGO Internationalisation Database and the main findings drawn from the database. Several aspects of the internationalisation of Chinese NGOs will be presented, including the types of Chinese NGOs that have engaged in internationalisation, the degrees of engagement, the issue areas, the location of these organisations' international development activities, the size and scale of the sector and the major financial sources. Subsequently, I will put Chinese NGOs' internationalisation into perspective by comparing it with the situations in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Canada.

3.1 Sectoral Approach to Chinese NGO Internationalisation

Although studies on NGOs in international development are abundant, few analyses of the NGO sector are available (Banks et al., 2020). Anheier and Themudo (2005) defined and mapped INGOs as a global sector based on data from the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Project and the Union of International Associations. However, the study is now outdated as it relies mostly on data up to 2000. In addition, it is not specific to NGOs working in international development. One of the most notable academic contributions to sectoral approaches to development NGOs in recent years comes from the special issue published by *Development in Practice* in 2020, where sectoral perspectives on Northern NGOs engaging in international development, notably from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, are studied.

However, these few studies are insufficient to provide a complete picture of global development NGOs.

Case studies are dominant in research on development INGOs. As shown in the review conducted by Brass et al. (2018) based on 35 years of scholarship on NGOs and international development, 54% of articles are small-scale case studies of specific places or organisations. Studies tend to emphasise the relationships and positionings of INGOs with different stakeholders, such as donors and partners (e.g. Banks et al., 2015; Boyer et al., 2017) and tend to skew towards large-scale INGOs (Banks and Brockington, 2020). Sectoral perspectives can be very important when studying the diversity of one sector, and such perspectives cannot be obtained by merely combining individual case studies from several articles (Banks et al, 2020). Sectoral perspectives can show the size, scale and typology of NGOs as a sector, offering a macro view of the evolution of NGOs in international development instead of presenting biased findings based on a few “big names”. Moreover, the use of quantitative analysis in studies on development NGOs remains fairly rare. Only one-third of the articles published since 2010 and reviewed by Brass et al. (2018) were found to use only quantitative data or a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Because Chinese international development NGOs form an emerging sector, sectoral approaches to their study are even more rare. Like studies of INGOs based in the Global North, most research in the Chinese context focuses on a selective few NGOs as case studies, such as the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation and the Global Environmental Institute (e.g. Brenner, 2012; GEI, 2016; Hsu et al., 2016). These case studies tend to concentrate on the most visible and largest organisations, which may produce misleading findings. There is a lack of studies from a macro and systematic perspective. As the sectoral studies published in the special issue of *Development in Practice* show, sectoral analysis is challenging to perform for at least two reasons: the definition of international development NGOs and the limitations of data collection. The questions of what kind of NGOs should be included in the study of international development and how to define international development activities are the most salient. Another issue is where to find these NGOs, especially the small-sized ones. Conducting a sectoral study of Chinese NGOs’ internationalisation faces similar constraints. Deng (2019) endeavoured to uncover the macro picture of Chinese NGOs “going out” through surveys, but his study is restricted to Chinese foundations and suffers from a low questionnaire-return rate (16.4% of 500 foundations). Therefore, the present study aims to fill this academic gap, remedy the lack of a sectoral approach to research on Chinese international development NGOs and provide a comprehensive picture of the landscape of Chinese NGOs’ international development activities by developing a systematic approach to collecting and analysing information on the topic.

3.2 Data collection Methodology

Definition and Criteria

The database includes any international donation or activity for humanitarian or global developmental causes involving an NGO originating in Mainland China and registered in the system of the Ministry of Civil Affairs in China. Consequently, the dataset excludes the following:

- International exchanges and communication in the fields of culture, economics, business, science and technology and sports. For example, a programme inviting a Pakistani delegation to visit China for cultural exchange and funding a Chinese delegation's visit to Pakistan for economic cooperation is not included.
- International conferences. For instance, an international conference on environmental protection in Malaysia is not included.
- International fundraising activities. Some Chinese NGOs conduct fundraising events overseas, especially in developed countries. These activities are not included.
- Projects conducted by NGOs and associations founded by overseas Chinese. For example, donations and activities conducted by local Overseas Chinese Chambers of Commerce are not included.
- Local projects involving NGOs founded by Chinese nationals but not registered in China.

The database includes Chinese NGOs that are involved in international development activities to various degrees. This means that the database features Chinese NGOs that have only conducted one international project or made a single donation to international development causes. The database does not differentiate between donations and projects from particular income sources, and projects of Chinese NGOs that are funded by international sources are included.

Data Collection

The database is the result of an intensive internet search relying on various sources. The first round of screening was performed using the search engine of the China Foundation Center's website (<http://www1.foundationcenter.org.cn/>), the most recognized information platform on Chinese foundations in China. It contains a comprehensive online database of over 7,000 legally registered foundations in China. Information about foundations, such as projects per year and description of projects, can be retrieved via the database's search engine. The primary source of the China Foundation Center database is NGOs' annual reports. I adopted a "search by country" (approximately 200 countries) approach instead of "search by NGO name" (more than 7,000 foundations) method to maximise effectiveness. I screened projects by typing the names of all sovereign countries in the search engine. This showed all projects reported by the foundations and media featuring the name of a particular country. For example, typing the word "Kenya" in Chinese returned all projects from the foundations in the database whose descriptions contain this word. I then took a closer look at the projects and selected only those that fulfil the previously defined criteria. As a second step, I went through all news releases from major NGO information platforms that are not included in the China Foundation Center's database, such as the *China Development Brief* (<http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/>), *China Philanthropy Times* (<http://www.gongyishibao.com/>), Charity and Philanthropy Forum and China Foundation Forum to identify news related to Chinese NGOs' internationalisation and add them to the database. The second step was especially important because it completed the database by adding information of non-foundation types of NGOs. In a third step, I triangulated the collected data with information from NGOs' official annual reports, official websites and official WeChat accounts as well as academic journals and policy reports. Most of the information gathered in the first step through the China Foundation Center's database could be verified by the official sources (e.g. press releases or annual reports) of the NGOs.

After conducting the above three steps, I completed the first version of the database in April 2020. This version provides a list of NGOs that are engaged in internationalisation. Over the course of my research, more international activities were carried out by Chinese NGOs, whose international donations for the fight against COVID-19 are especially notable. I continued to add to the database by searching for news updates in NGO-related media and the official publications of the NGOs already listed in the first version of the database. The fieldwork I have conducted in 2020 and 2021 has also helped me identify additional NGOs and projects to be added to the database. The finalised database includes 142 Chinese NGOs and the international development activities they conducted between January 2005 and December 2021. Their international activities are recorded per project or donation per country. Each donation/project in a country is recorded as one item. The database thus contains 840 items. A version of the complete database is attached in the Appendix 2, including all the 142 Chinese NGOs and their international development activities.

Limitation

The data collection presents several limitations and challenges. First, the method is likely to underestimate the activities of smaller private NGOs: because many do not disclose any public information, their information cannot be found through the search engine of the China Foundation Center's database or other media platforms. Second, the China Foundation Center and the China Social Organization Public Service Platform (the governmental platform for public information about NGOs) only provide annual reports published after 2014, and official information before 2014 is, therefore, more sporadic. However, as Chinese NGOs started to "go out" only in very recent years, the impact of the lack of information before 2014 is unlikely to be significant. Third, not every international donation or activity is disclosed in annual reports or in the media; this is especially true of smaller or less-significant ones and indirect donations. Chinese NGOs sometimes make international donations through third parties, and these donations are not thus shown as overseas donations in their annual reports. Despite these limitations, the database is, to the best of my knowledge, the most complete repository available on Chinese NGOs' international development activities.

3.3 Mapping Chinese NGOs' Internationalisation: Main Findings

Types of Chinese NGOs: Foundations and Non-GONGOs Dominate

Among the three types of Chinese social organisations and NGOs (i.e. foundations, non-profit enterprise units and social groups) registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, foundations, which make up 85% of the total number of Chinese NGOs, dominate the landscape of Chinese international development activities. They are followed almost evenly by social groups and private non-profit enterprise units (Figure 1). Foundations are the most financially resourceful type of social organisation and are thus more likely to make donations and carry out international activities than private non-profit enterprise units. Registering a foundation in China is subject to strict financial requirements. For example, the initial funding for a nationwide public fundraising foundation must exceed 8 million RMB. For local private foundations, the required funding is more than 2 million RMB. Nearly 40% of the foundations in the database are established by social groups or individuals. One-fourth of the foundations are GONGOs, and one-fifth are corporate foundations with strong financial connections to

corporations. One-tenth of the foundations have religious backgrounds, predominantly in Buddhism, followed by Christianity and Catholicism. The scale of Chinese private non-profit enterprise units (*minban fei qiye/民办非企业*) is comparatively limited. These organisations are encouraged to provide social services in the location where they are registered and are not allowed to set up branches. Five of the twelve private non-profit enterprise units in the database are located in the Yunnan province, neighbouring Myanmar and Laos. Although these NGOs are not sizable, they are more exposed to opportunities for international activities in neighbouring countries than NGOs located in other provinces. Social groups are member-based organisations addressing a specific topic. Because many are not charity organisations, they are less likely to be involved in international development activities. Two main types of social groups are represented in the Chinese NGO Internationalisation Database: GONGOs, which are established with the purpose of conducting international activities, and volunteering groups. For example, the Beijing People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, the China NGO Network for International Exchanges and the Beijing NGO Network for International Exchanges are all social groups that were initiated by governmental agencies to promote international exchanges. Conversely, the China Council of Lions Clubs, the China Young Volunteers Association and the Shenzhen Rescue Volunteers Federation are volunteer-based social groups that are occasionally involved in international volunteering.

The vast majority (103 out of 142) of Chinese NGOs engaged in international development activities are not GONGOs (see Figure 2). This contradicts the impression, expressed in the literature, that Chinese NGOs’ international activities are largely conducted by GONGOs. One reason is that some GONGOs are large and tend to attract journalists’ attention when they launch a new project. This publicity is likely to skew the public’s perception. Among these GONGOs, eight (20% of GONGOs) were established by Chinese governmental agencies with a primary mission to conduct international exchange activities. Most of these GONGOs focus on implementing exchange programmes and organising international meetings and conferences while carrying out international aid activities from time to time. Other GONGOs have international development activities on top of their primary domestic projects. Meanwhile, independent NGOs have diverse backgrounds as they may originate in social groups, individuals, corporations or religious institutions. They make up most of the Chinese NGOs involved in international development activities.

Figure 1: Distribution of Chinese NGOs Involved in International Development Activities by Registered Types

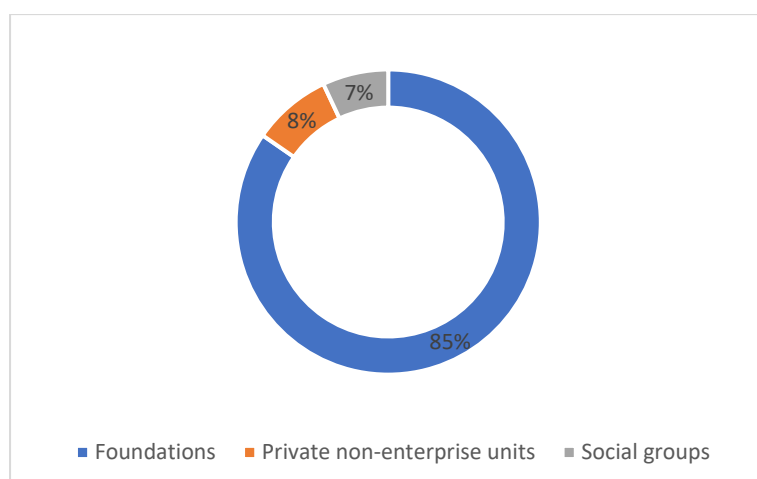
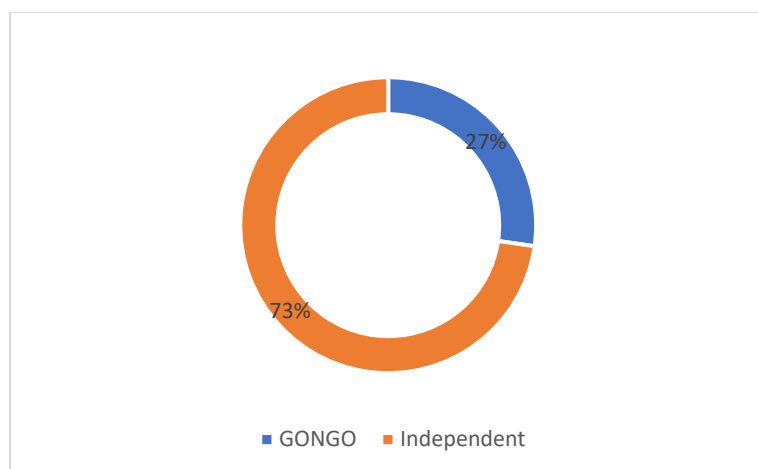


Figure 2: Distribution of Chinese NGOs Involved in International Development Activities by the Category of GONGO/Independent NGOs



Degree of Engagement: Still Very Limited

The degree of engagement in international development activities among the 142 NGOs varies greatly. I have divided the degree of Chinese NGOs' engagement into three levels (see Table 7). The first level includes those NGOs that have only performed a one-time project or donation internationally. The second level refers to NGOs that have implemented sporadic projects and donations. Finally, the third level, which represents the deepest level of engagement, concerns NGOs that have a long-term continuous presence overseas for conducting international development activities. The majority (56%) of the NGOs in the database were only involved in one-time activities.² Among them, 38% of one-time donations are humanitarian donations to help people in Nepal after the 2015 earthquake, and 32% of the one-time donations are directed at the global fight against COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021. In total, approximately 40% of the Chinese NGOs recorded in the database have not been involved in any international development activities other than donations for either the Nepal earthquake or COVID-19. In addition, 33% of the NGOs in the database have conducted sporadic development projects or made donations, and only 11% (16 NGOs) are continuously involved in international development activities. Among these 16 NGOs, 11 have overseas offices (see Table 8). The 16 Chinese NGOs are the China NGO Network for International Exchanges, the China Foundation for Peace and Development, the Chinese Red Cross Foundation, the China Foundation For Poverty Alleviation, Lunch for Children, the Shenzhen Foundation For International Exchange and Cooperation, the Rainbow Volunteer Club, the Yundi Behavior and Health Research Center, the Global Environmental Institute, the Youth Bridge Foundation (Common Future Project), Sichuan Haihui, RamUnion, the Peaceland Foundation, the Amity Foundation, the Ruili Women and Children Development Center and the Kunming Zhi Gen Social Work Development Centre. These NGOs are the most committed to international development

² Donations to multiple countries for the same cause at the same time are counted as one-time donations. For example, many Chinese NGOs made donations to several countries for the fight against COVID-19.

activities, and their engagement is not solely driven by emergencies such as the earthquake in Nepal or the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 7: Distribution of Chinese NGOs by Degree of Engagement in International Development Activities

Degree of Engagement	Number of Chinese NGOs	% of Total NGOs
One-time project/donation	79	56%
Sporadic projects/donations	47	33%
Long-term continuous presence	16	11%
Total	142	100%

Table 8: Chinese NGOs and Their Registered Overseas Offices

NGOs	Overseas Offices
China Foundation for Peace and Development	Cambodia
China Foundation For Poverty Alleviation	Myanmar, Nepal, Ethiopia
Youth Bridge Foundation (Common Future Project)	Lebanon
Sichuan Haihui	Thailand
RamUnion	Ethiopia
Peaceland Foundation	Lebanon, Switzerland (Geneva)
The Amity Foundation	Kenya and Ethiopia
Ruili Women and Children Development Center	Myanmar
Yundi Behavior and Health Research Cente	Cambodia
Rainbow Volunteer Club	Nepal
Global Environmental Institute	Laos (closed)

As shown in Table 9, half of the NGOs in the database have only donated or conducted projects in a single country, whereas approximately one-third have access to three or more countries. However, there is 8% of all NGOs, whose multinational coverage is only due to donations related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most NGOs present in a single country conduct only one-time or temporary activities; nonetheless, a few NGOs are present in only one country but exhibit a high degree of engagement. For example, the Ruili Women and Children Development Center, Sichuan Haihui and the Rainbow Volunteer Club are only present in Myanmar, Thailand and Nepal, respectively, but they have all established overseas offices and have long-term staff there for continuous contributions to local communities. Coincidentally, multinational reach does not necessarily imply that an NGO has a high degree of international engagement. Some NGOs implement one unified project (e.g. donating school bags and books) and make the same donations to multiple countries. They do not keep long-term staff in any of the recipient countries. Only 10 NGOs have both long-term continuous presence and multiple-country presence.

Table 9: Distribution of Chinese NGOs by Country Coverage

Country Coverage	Number of Chinese NGOs	% of Total NGOs
Single country	73	51%
Two countries	22	15%
Multiple countries	32	23%
Multiple countries (only for Covid donations)	11	8%
Non-specified/regional	4	3%
Total	142	100%

Issue Areas: Humanitarian and Emergency Causes Dominate, Followed by the Environment and Healthcare

As shown in Table 10, Humanitarian donations and assistance and donations for the fight against COVID-19, education and healthcare are the most common areas in which Chinese NGOs are involved. Almost half of the Chinese NGOs in the database have provided humanitarian donations and assistance, the majority of which are related to the earthquake in Nepal in 2015. The COVID-19 pandemic has stimulated another round of international donations from Chinese NGOs: one-third of Chinese NGOs in the database have made COVID-19-related donations.

Education and healthcare are the two most common areas for the Chinese NGOs' development activities. One-quarter of Chinese NGOs have conducted education-related development projects, and the same applies to healthcare-related development projects. Table 10 shows the complete distribution of the issue areas which Chinese NGOs have addressed, and Table 11 presents the distribution of sub-areas of each major issue area.

Table 10: Distribution of Chinese NGOs by Issue Areas

Issue Areas	Number of Chinese NGOs that have involved in	% of Total NGOs
Humanitarian Donations and Assistance	65	46%
Covid Donations	46	31%
Education	36	25%
Healthcare	33	23%
Poverty Alleviation	15	10%
Environmental Protection and Sustainability	12	9%
Volunteers	10	7%
Others	13	9%

Table 11: Distribution of Chinese NGOs by Issue Areas (sub-types)

<i>Activities</i>	<i>% of Chinese NGOs that are involved in</i>
<i>Education related activities</i>	
School infrastructure	8%
School goods	8%
Free meals delivery	5%
Vocational training	5%
General donations	4%
Teaching Chinese language	3%
Scholarship	3%
<i>Healthcare related activities</i>	
Cataract surgeries and eye care	9%
Water sanitation	6%
Medical service	6%
Medical equipment and goods	5%
Healthcare and medical training	3%
Healthcare infrastructure (hospital, clinic)	3%
<i>Poverty alleviation and livelihood related activities</i>	
Solar energy generation	4%
Improvement in agricultural productivity	3%
Biogas energy generation	1%
General donations	1%
Livelihood training	1%
<i>Environmental protection and sustainability related activities</i>	
Biodiversity	3%
Forest protection and timber governance	3%
Sustainable investments	3%
Anti-poaching	2%
<i>Others</i>	
Donation to disabled	3%
Entrepreneurship	2%
Donations (bicycles and TV)	2%
Refugee assistance	1%
Sports	1%
Others-unique projects	5%

Among education-related projects, the construction of school infrastructure (such as buildings and dormitories) and the delivery of school supplies (such as books, bags and stationery) are predominant, with 8% of the Chinese NGOs in the database having engaged in such activities. Delivering free meals to students and providing vocational training are also popular among Chinese NGOs and have attracted 5% of the Chinese NGOs in the database. Notably, 3% of

the referenced Chinese NGOs have made donations to support Chinese-language learning overseas.

Under the category of healthcare, the most popular project is called “Journey of Light” (“*guang ming xing*/光明行”) and provides free cataract surgeries and other eye-care services to patients abroad. Although several NGOs have their own projects providing free cataract surgeries, they all name them “Journey of Light” by custom. Nearly 10% of the Chinese NGOs in the database have implemented “Journey of Light” programmes overseas, which has been a popular charitable project domestically over the years. The second most popular healthcare project concerns water sanitation: 6% of the included Chinese NGOs have run sanitation-related projects, such as building toilets and water towers and delivering cleansing kits to local communities. In addition, 6% of Chinese NGOs have provided medical services other than cataract surgeries and eye care. These medical services include surgeries for children with congenital heart disease and free medical examinations. Further, 5% of NGOs have donated medical equipment and supplies, such as ambulances and disaster-relief family kits. Lastly, a few NGOs have provided medical and healthcare-related training to medical staff and local people, and a small number of large foundations have donated hospitals and clinics.

Among poverty-alleviation and livelihood-related projects, the donation of solar energy generation equipment is the most common activity, followed by the provision of technical assistance in agricultural productivity. Other activities featured include the construction of biogas energy-generating infrastructure, general donations to people living in poverty and livelihood training for local communities.

A few Chinese NGOs are involved in environmental protection and sustainability-related activities, the most common of which are the protection of wild animals for biodiversity, forest protection and timber governance, the promotion of sustainable investments and anti-poaching activities. Common activities in other areas include donations to the disabled, to promote entrepreneurship and to improve sports activities as well as projects related to refugee care. Interestingly, there are a wide range of other activities that are unique to a specific NGO (no similar projects conducted by other Chinese NGOs). Such unique projects include an overseas women protection project, an international child legal protection project, a monthly magazine in the host country project, a Chinese veteran project, an African governance project, a landmine detection project, a free meal to the homeless project. Although these projects are usually sporadic and small in scale, they represent a diverse range of issues and shown dynamics of the Chinese NGO internationalisation.

The analysis also shows that the Chinese NGOs in the database dominantly engage in the provision of basic forms of charity, either donating money, infrastructure or goods or offering charitable services. Some NGOs carry out modest advocacy work in the field of sustainable development, but these activities are insignificant when compared to other types of projects.

Geographical Distribution: Southeast Asia and South Asia are the Most Popular Regions

The geographical distribution was determined based on the number of projects or donations related to a specific country or region. It reflects the density of activities of Chinese NGOs in one specific area instead of the size of their activities. Excluding donations for COVID-19-related efforts, Southeast Asia, South Asia and East Africa are three regions that have received the most donations or projects from Chinese NGOs. Taking COVID-19-related donations into

consideration, the geographical distribution is more scattered, and Europe appears in the top 3, as shown in Figure 3. Given that COVID-19 triggered a pandemic that affects every country, some large Chinese foundations have donated globally. For instance, the Alibaba Foundation donated to more than 150 countries (Alibaba Foundation, n.d.), and the China Red Cross Foundation made donations to more than 40 countries (CRCF, 2020a). This is unprecedented because it is the first time that Chinese NGOs have donated to developed countries as well as developing countries. For example, some European countries (e.g. Italy) were affected strongly at the beginning of the pandemic and, thus, attracted numerous donations. However, these donations for the fight against COVID-19 are quite unique and largely one-time; consequently, they may distort our view of Chinese NGOs' core international development activities. Therefore, I perform one analysis disregarding COVID-19-related donations and one taking these donations into consideration. The five countries that have attracted the highest numbers of projects and donations are Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Ethiopia, both including and excluding COVID-19-related donations, as shown in Table 12.

Figure 3: Geographical Distribution of Chinese NGOs International Development Projects/Donations by Region

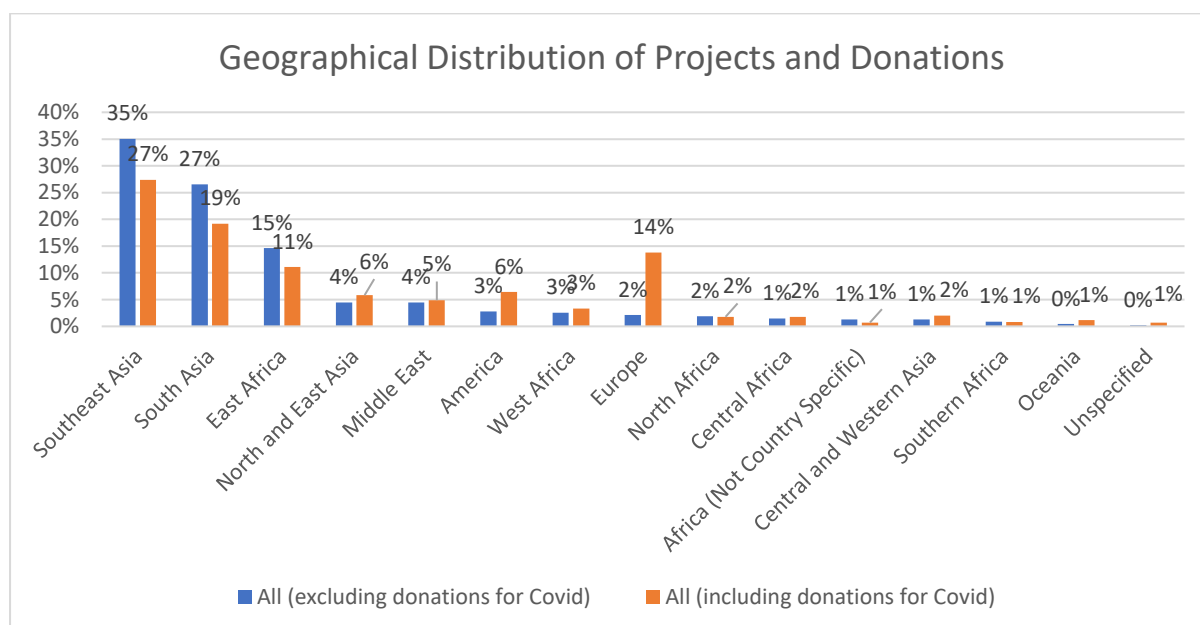


Table 12: Geographical Distribution of Chinese NGOs International Development Projects/Donations by Countries Ranking in the Top Five

Countries	% Total items of projects and donations	% Total items of projects and donations (excluding Covid donations)
Nepal	11%	18%
Myanmar	9%	14%
Cambodia	5%	7%
Laos	4%	6%
Ethiopia	3%	4%

Nepal takes first place, primarily due to the impact of the 2015 earthquake. This event triggered the first instance of a large number of Chinese NGOs conducting international relief activities and making international donations. Geographical proximity is one reason that contributed to the significant level of assistance from Chinese NGOs. The epicentre of the earthquake was located near the Chinese border, and the earthquake affected both Nepal and some parts of Tibet. Many Chinese felt connected to the event and wished to support the relief works as best they could. Geographical proximity also made international travel possible for humanitarian relief teams. More than 50 Chinese NGOs are recorded as having donated or provided humanitarian assistance to Nepal. A few Chinese NGOs remained in Nepal after the initial relief work and established a long-term presence, such as the Rainbow Volunteer Club and the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation.

Myanmar ranks second in the list of countries where Chinese NGOs have implemented the most activities. More than 30 Chinese NGOs have made donations to or carried out projects in Myanmar. A few of these have a long-term presence in the country, such as the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation, the Yundi Behavior and Health Research Center and the Ruili Women and Children Development Center. Myanmar lies on the border with the Yunnan province and has therefore attracted many local NGOs from Yunnan. From a diplomatic perspective, Yunnan is at the frontline of China's relationship with Myanmar, and several GONGOs in the province perform public diplomatic roles and conduct aid activities in Myanmar. These include the Yunnan International Non-Government Organisation Society, the Yunnan Youth Development Foundation and the Yunnan Women and Children Development Association. From a social perspective, there are close connections between people in Yunnan and Myanmar. Some ethnic groups in Yunnan and Myanmar share the same roots, especially those living on the Myanmar–Yunnan border. Thus, cross-border activities are natural to some of the Yunnan NGOs. For example, the Ruili Women and Children Development Center is an NGO located in Ruili, a city bordering Myanmar. It has organically extended its activities to Myanmar given the high frequency of daily exchanges between the inhabitants of the Yunnan province and Burmese people.

The third- and fourth-highest recipients of Chinese NGO assistance are Cambodia and Laos. Cambodia is the only host country that possesses a special official mechanism for dealing with activities and donations from Chinese NGOs. The Cambodian Council of Ministers has established the Cambodia CSO Alliance Forum to receive funding from China and distribute it to Cambodian NGOs. The Cambodia CSO Alliance Forum has forged connections with the China NGO Network for International Exchanges, which is responsible for promoting and coordinating Chinese NGOs' international activities and has supported some Chinese NGOs in accessing opportunities in Cambodia. This suggests that political factors at the state level play a role in Chinese NGOs' choice of destinations for their activities and donations. If the host government paves the way and makes it easier for Chinese NGOs to engage, the country will likely attract more activities from Chinese NGOs. Like Myanmar, Laos borders the Yunnan province and has also hosted a few international activities from NGOs based in Yunnan. However, given the relatively small size of Laos in terms of population and economy, the country has not seen as many activities from Chinese NGOs as Myanmar. Overall, the three Southeast Asian countries of Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos make up the most popular region for Chinese NGOs' activities and donations. Geographical proximity is a factor that contributes

to the prosperity of Chinese NGOs' activities in the region. In addition, these countries are among the least costly for Chinese NGOs to conduct international projects in. Mature networks in these countries are another factor. There are significant exchanges between Chinese and local people in these three countries for business or for life, which have formed strong networks. These networks may enable Chinese NGOs to enter the market more easily. The last factor is the conditions in the host country. For example, Vietnam is also a neighbour to China but the presence of Chinese NGOs in the country is limited. One Chinese NGO that is active in both Myanmar and Cambodia explained that it once tried to conduct activities in Vietnam and registered there, in vain because local regulations regarding the activities of foreign NGOs are very strict (Interview 5).

Another notable country is Ethiopia, the only African country in the top 5. Ethiopia is not only a recipient of Chinese aid but also a strategic partner. The ideological affinity between the Ethiopian and Chinese governments and strong commercial ties between the two countries have fostered an appealing environment for Chinese NGOs to conduct activities (Hsu et al., 2016). Several large foundations, such as the China Red Cross Foundation, the Amity Foundation and the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation are all active in the country. In addition, a large corporate foundation, the ZTE Foundation, has implemented several projects in Ethiopia. Three NGOs, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation, the Amity Foundation and RamUnion have all registered in Ethiopia. However, fewer small-scale Chinese NGOs operate in Ethiopia than in Southeast Asian countries, partly because travel costs are significantly higher.

Although a systemic and detailed explanation of the rationales behind Chinese NGOs' choices of destinations for their activities and donations is beyond the scope of this chapter, this brief examination suggests that a combination of geographic, social, political and economic factors have affected these decisions.

Size and Scale: Limited

The total amount of Chinese NGOs' annual international expenditures is very difficult to determine due to limited data availability. Nonetheless, efforts to provide a broad view of the scale of Chinese NGOs' international development activities remain worthwhile. For this purpose, I consulted the annual reports of all the 35 Chinese NGOs that carried out international activities in 2019 recorded in the database. Among these, 15 (43%) NGOs specified their annual expenditure on international development activities, 12 did not provide precise information regarding their international activities, and eight did not publish annual reports online.³ The 15 NGOs that provide specific numbers for their international activities include seven of the nine foundations with long-term continuous engagement overseas. They cover the most sizable international projects carried out by Chinese NGOs. The total size of the international expenditure of these 15 Chinese NGOs in 2019 was 110 million RMB (15 million euros⁴). Given that the NGOs that do not provide details about their international activities or make their annual reports public tend to be small and that most are only involved sporadically in international activities, the average annual spending on international activities of the

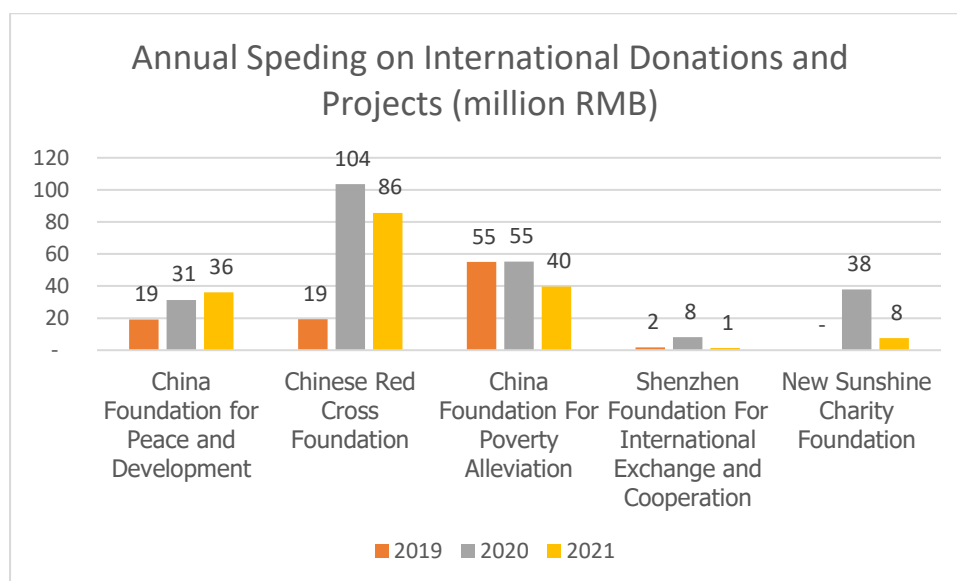
³ In a few cases, Chinese NGOs only report total expenditure on international activities, which may include meetings and exchanges. Meanwhile, some international development activities are grouped with domestic activities and cannot be included specifically. These two effects are likely to cancel each other out.

⁴ 1 euro = 7.26 RMB.

remaining 20 NGOs is highly unlikely to be larger than that of these 15 Chinese NGOs. Applying the average of the 15 Chinese NGOs with available data to the remaining 20 NGOs, the total size of Chinese NGOs' international development activities in 2019 amounts to 256 million RMB (35 million euros). Thus, the real figure of Chinese NGOs' total annual international spending is likely to fall between 110 million RMB and 256 million RMB. Only three foundations reported annual foreign spending over 10 million RMB: the China Foundation For Poverty Alleviation (55 million RMB), the Chinese Red Cross Foundation (19 million RMB) and the China Foundation for Peace and Development (19 million RMB). However, international spending only represents a small portion of the total spending of the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (7%) and the China Red Cross Foundation (3%). The China Foundation for Peace and Development, which was founded to promote international exchange and development, is an exception in that most of its spending is on international activities.

I apply the same method to Chinese NGOs that conducted international development activities in 2020 and find that 22 out of 65 NGOs (34%) provide numbers for these activities, which amount to 1.39 billion RMB (192 million euros). The figures for 2020 are significantly higher than for 2019 because a few large foundations donated significant amounts to the fight against COVID-19. For example, the Alibaba Foundation and the Jack Ma Foundation together contributed 1.1 billion RMB (152 million euros) globally to anti-COVID-19 efforts, and the Tianjin Rockcheck Puji Foundation donated 1 million USD to UN Women to support women who suffer economically due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These single donations of such large sums are unprecedented. Applying the average of the amounts (excluding obvious outliers like the donations from the Alibaba Foundation and the Jack Ma Foundation) to the remaining 43 NGOs produces a total estimated amount of international spending of 2 billion RMB (278 million euros) in 2020. Thus, the exact sum representing Chinese NGOs' international development activities in 2020 is likely to fall between 1.1 billion RMB and 2 billion RMB. Considering the impact of COVID-19-related donations, expenditures are 10 times higher in 2020 than in 2019. However, the figure in 2021 is likely to decrease from that in 2020. At the time of the research, many NGOs had not published their 2021 annual reports. Those that have been made public suggest reduced spending by some large foundations in 2021 compared to 2020. For example, the Alibaba Foundation's total COVID-19-related donations (both in China and overseas) was 1.4 billion RMB in 2020 but decreased to 31 million RMB in 2021. The annual spending of some of the largest foundations on international activities in 2019–2021 is reported in Figure 4 to give an idea of the trend over the 2019–2021 period. Except for the China Foundation for Peace and Development, annual spending increased across the board in 2020 but decreased from 2020 to 2021. The peak of 2020 is largely due to the sizeable donations for the fight against COVID-19, and many NGOs have reduced their donations in this area in 2021 due to the normalisation of the situation in many countries. Excluding COVID-19-related donations, long-term development activities overseas are likely to be affected by the pandemic as indicated by the decrease in annual spending of the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation in 2021. COVID-19 donations are likely to be one-time events, and whether the pandemic can become an opportunity for more Chinese NGOs to engage in long-term international development activities remain to be seen.

Figure 4: Annual International Spending by Major Chinese NGOs from 2019 to 2021



Source: based on annual reports of respective NGOs

Source of Income: Influential Corporate Funding and Limited Governmental Funding

The overall scale of Chinese NGOs’ international development activities is difficult to assess, and determining the complete distribution of the sources of income is even more complex. Instead of compiling a complete profile of income distribution, I will analyse various aspects of the sources of income and combine pieces of information to provide as many insights as possible. NGOs usually have several sources of income: governmental funding, private-sourced funding (e.g. from corporations, founders), funding from the general public and international foundations. I will analyse them one by one.

First, governmental funding for Chinese NGOs’ international projects is very limited. Currently, the only two institutional official funding channels for Chinese NGOs to finance their overseas projects are the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund at the central-government level and the official aid funds of the Department of Commerce in the Yunnan province. The South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund only began to give funding to Chinese NGOs in 2021. The Fund has only provided financing to two GONGOs, namely, the China Foundation for Peace and Development and the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation, which received around one million RMB each by 2022 (Interview 42). The provincial aid fund of the Yunnan province is usually small-scale, granting between 200,000 and 400,000 RMB per project per NGO (Department of Commerce of Yunnan, 2021). According to an interviewee, approximately 10 projects from NGOs received such funds per year (Interview 5). Taking these two sources into account, funding from the open governmental funding channels amounts to 4-6 million RMB annually. In addition, some NGOs may receive governmental funding privately. For example, the Amity Foundation has received official funding worth 100,000 RMB from the Foreign Affairs Office of the Jiangsu province. This private-sourced

governmental funding is opaque, but it is not likely to be significant based on the knowledge I acquired during fieldwork. Another proof that governmental funding in general is almost insignificant is that the most sizable and involved foundations obtain only a very little portion of their funding from governments despite being GONGOs. The three Chinese NGOs whose annual international spending exceeds 10 million RMB are examples of this. The China Foundation for Peace and Development is a GONGO that was initiated and is supervised by the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to carry out international exchange and development programmes. Yet, 99% of its revenues in 2018 and 2019 came from corporations (CFPD, 2019, 2020). In 2020 and 2021, although its source of income diversified, corporations and corporate foundations remain dominant (CFPD, 2021, 2022). In addition, the foundation received no funding from the government between 2018 and 2021. Another example is the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation, 70% of whose annual spending (approximately 35 million RMB) was obtained for one project, the International Panda Pack project, which is funded through a strategic arrangement with the Alibaba Group through the Alibaba charity platform Gongyi Baobei. Consumers on Taobao, the largest Chinese online shopping platform of the Alibaba Group, automatically donate to projects listed in the Alibaba charity platform when they purchase goods from merchandisers who choose to participate in the initiative. The consumers themselves cannot choose which charity project to donate to as it is the merchandisers who select the projects. However, Alibaba can affect merchandisers' preferences by prioritising certain projects in the list presented on the charity platform. Through a strategic alliance with Alibaba, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation is thus guaranteed 100 million RMB in funds raised via the Alibaba charity platform for the International Panda Pack project over 3 years (Interview 25, 41; Conference 27; Guo, 2022). Therefore, although the funding for the International Panda Pack project comes from consumers, Alibaba plays a major role in securing it. Meanwhile, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation received governmental funding only sporadically, for instance, for a scholarship in Myanmar sponsored by the Chinese embassy in Myanmar in 2019 and the Smiling Children project in Nepal funded by the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund between 2021 and 2022. The major funding source of the China Red Cross Foundation's flagship international programme, the Silk Road Funds, comes from 11 corporations (CRCF, 2020b). Based on the three examples above, corporations are likely to be leading the financial contributions to Chinese NGOs. However, my fieldwork indicates that corporate donations are limited to large foundations and smaller NGOs are less likely to attract donations from corporations. Instead, they usually rely on a variety of funding sources, such as the general public, international foundations and self-owned funds.

To get an idea of the size of the funds received from the general public, I calculated the total funds raised by Chinese NGOs for international development projects through the Tencent Charity and Alipay Charity, the top-two internet platforms for charitable online fundraising in China. According to the information available publicly on these two platforms, as of the end of 2020, the total funds raised for international humanitarian and development projects through these two channels was RMB 45 million. This amount was collected over several years and can thus hardly be compared to the annual international spending of the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation in 2019, for instance. This indicates that public funds make up only a small part of Chinese NGOs' funding.

Obtaining funding from international foundations is also common for some NGOs, especially in the environmental and sustainability sector. For example, several projects implemented by the Global Environmental Institute are funded by international foundations or organisations such as the Blue Moon Fund and the International Institute for Environment and Development.

In sum, governmental funding is largely insignificant in the landscape of Chinese NGOs' internationalisation, at least so far, and Chinese NGOs usually have diverse channels for funding. Given the size of the corporate donations to major Chinese foundations, corporations or corporate-influenced donations are likely to be the leading sources of income by far, although other funding sources such as the general public, international foundations and self-owned funds also exist. Taking COVID-19-related donations into account, the role of corporate donations is more prominent. Most of the leading foundations in terms of global COVID-19-related donations are large corporate foundations, such as the Alibaba Foundation, the Mammoth Foundation, the Fosun Foundation and the Tencent Foundation.

3.4 Comparative Perspectives

Lastly, to put the development of Chinese NGOs' international development activities into perspective, I compared Chinese NGOs with NGOs from countries in the Global North. Although there is significant literature on international NGOs, no study has specifically mapped the development of international NGOs focusing on international development activities on a global scale. The most suitable works for comparison are three separate studies that map international development NGOs in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Canada, respectively. I used the data and conclusions from these three studies to perform a comparison (see Table 13). However, given that these three studies were conducted separately, there is sometimes a lack of consistency in the categorisation. Nevertheless, these studies are the best benchmarks available to the best of my knowledge, and a comparative study may put the landscape of Chinese NGOs engaging in international development activities into perspective.

Banks and Brockington (2020) mapped the United Kingdom's international development NGO sector. They identified 895 British development NGOs, mainly through key international development networks in the country (e.g. BOND, Scotland's International Development Alliance, etc.), excluding organisations whose primary purposes are not international development, that are primarily grant-giving charities, that spent under 10,000 British pounds per annum on average between 2011 and 2015 and that are primarily religious NGOs. Schulpen and van Kempen (2020) mapped the international development NGO sector in the Netherlands, which is comprised of 366 Dutch INGOs. This list of Dutch INGOs was screened through the database of the Netherlands Fundraising Regulator, which includes a group of NGOs that are registered under the theme "international aid and human rights" and NGOs that describe themselves as working in developing countries. The researchers took a sample of 341 NGOs from the initial 773 that passed the screening process and further added 25 organisations through other sources. Davis (2019) compiled a database consisting of 991 Canadian international development charities, which he identified from a combination of data from the Canada Revenue Agency T3010, NGO websites and the Global Affairs Canada Statistical Report on International Assistance. The database only includes charities with a primary focus on international development which were operationally defined as having foreign expenditures

accounting for at least 40% of total expenses and/or with annual foreign expenditures exceeding 20,000 CAD.

Unlike the three databases of international development NGOs in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Canada, I adopted the broadest definition of international development NGOs to be included in the database. Even so, the number of Chinese NGOs engaged in international development activities is still far below those observed in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Canada. Counting only Chinese NGOs with international development as their primary purpose, following Banks and Brockington’s definition of United Kingdom development NGOs, the total number of Chinese NGOs would be less than 10. In addition, the total size of international spending from Chinese NGOs is around 100 times lower than that of the Netherlands and Canada each and represents an even smaller fraction of that of the United Kingdom. The average spending per NGO in China is approximately 10 to 100 times lower than that of NGOs in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Canada. In these three countries, international spending by NGOs is a comparable source of aid to official development assistance (ODA) spending as it is equivalent to approximately 46%, 40% and 60% of the ODA provided by their home countries, respectively. In contrast, Chinese NGOs, whose spending is equivalent to less than 1% of Chinese ODA, have not yet become an influential source of aid.

The sources of income vary across the four countries. Contrary to what may be expected, neither funding from the general public, which is the leading source of income for NGOs in the United Kingdom, nor governmental funding, which is the primary source of funding for NGOs in the Netherlands, are likely to be the main funding channel for Chinese NGOs. Instead, corporations are likely to be Chinese NGOs’ leading source of income, although further research is needed to confirm this finding.

Table 13: Comparative Analysis of International Development NGOs in Four Countries

	China	UK	Netherlands	Canada
Studies for Comparison	Chinese NGO Internationalisation Database	Banks and Brockington (2020)	Schulpen and van Kempen (2020)	Davis (2019)
Filtering criteria	As long as an NGO that has conducted one international development activity	NGOs with primary purposes of international development; > 10000 pounds of annual spending	NGOs identify themselves as “international aid and human rights” NGOs and working in developing countries	NGOs with primary purposes of international development; > CAD 20000 of annual foreign spending
Total NGOs included	142	895	366	991
Total annual international spending (local currency)	110 million to 256 million RMB (2019)	6.96 billion pounds (2015)	2.1 billion Euro yearly on average (2010-2017)	CAD 3.4 billion yearly on average (2011-2015)

Total annual international spending (Euro)	Between 15 and 35 million (2019)	7.93 billion (2015)	2.1 billion (2010-2017)	2.47 billion (2011-2015)
Annual spending per NGO (Euro)	0.1-0.2 million	8.9 million	5.7 million	2.5 million
Total annual spending as equivalent of % ODA that year	<1% of China official aid ⁵	Around 46% of British ODA ⁶	Around 40% of Dutch ODA ⁷	Around 60% of Canadian ODA ⁸
Source of income	Corporate funding is likely to be the leader source; limited governmental funding; limited public funding	Public (40%) UK government (18%) Nonprofits (16%) Overseas government (15%) Business sector (7%)	Government (41%) Own funding (e.g. general public, corporate donations) (36.2%) Others (e.g. income from sales off products and service) (22.5%)	Federal government (9%) Privately sourced (91%)

3.5 Conclusion

The research on Chinese NGOs' internationalisation tends to be either normative or focus on a few case studies. As a result, there is a lack of systematic sector-wide analysis. This chapter is an effort to fill this gap by mapping the landscape of the Chinese international development NGO sector based on a systematically collected and developed database, the Chinese NGO Internationalisation Database, which features 142 Chinese NGOs. The mapping exercise reveals several characteristics of the development of Chinese NGOs. First, the majority of Chinese NGOs in the sector are not GONGOs, which contradicts the perceptions of several scholars. Second, Chinese NGOs are still in the early stages of internationalisation, as evidenced by their size and scale as well as their level and ways of engagement. The annual international spending of Chinese NGOs is far below that of major countries in the Global North, such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Canada. Chinese NGOs have not yet become a force comparable to Chinese official aid, unlike NGOs in the three aforementioned countries. Most Chinese NGOs engage in one-time or sporadic donations and projects, and

⁵ Based on year average Chinese official aid from 2010-2012 from the <http://yws.mofcom.gov.cn/article/m/policies/201412/20141200822172.shtml>

⁶ Calculated using UK ODA in 2015, from <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/ff4da321-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/ff4da321-en>

⁷ Calculated using the average Netherlands ODA from 2011 to 2017, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/2faea623-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/2faea623-en>

⁸ Calculated using the average Canadian ODA from 2011 to 2015, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/aa7e3298-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/aa7e3298-en>

only 16 Chinese NGOs commit to continuous efforts in local communities in the host countries. Most one-time donations are triggered by natural disasters, such as the earthquake in Nepal in 2015 and the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020. Chinese NGOs have mostly engaged in the areas of humanitarian relief, education and health care with the majority of the projects being simple charitable activities. However, it's notable that Chinese NGOs have shown a wide diversity of projects even though the sector as a whole has not matured. Third, Southeast Asia is the most popular destination for Chinese NGOs, with Nepal topping the ranking due to the impact of the 2015 earthquake. Fourth, governmental funding is not significant to Chinese NGOs' internationalisation as a sector, and corporate donations, including corporate-influenced donations, are likely to be the leading source of income.