

### **Climate protection and civil society organisations in the P.R. China**

Solutions to complex problems such as climate change need a mix of policies, a variety of expert opinion, and the participation of all relevant parties concerned and interested in the subject. There is ample evidence that civil society organisations – registered associations, foundations and non-profit enterprises as well as community based initiatives – have made substantial contributions to the promotion of climate protection. Civil society organisations across the globe are engaged in critical observation as well as active participation in global summits. They have launched many awareness raising campaigns for the promotion of sustainable consumption and production and low-carbon lifestyles, collected critical data and information, and carried out pilot projects as well as protest activities. Their activities are targeting political institutions, industries and investment groups, research and education communities, as well as the general public.

#### **China is often perceived as a latecomer and hardliner**

In the western media, the P.R. China is often perceived as a latecomer and hardliner in climate protection policies (Zhang 2013) and Chinese civil society contributions to climate change awareness have not received much international attention. In the past years China has passed many new laws and regulations and has formulated new policies and targets for climate protection. The country's private sector is making contributions to this new focus, in terms of technology development, green investments, public-private partnerships, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reporting. Civil society organizations, meanwhile, have built networks and launched campaigns and projects at local and national level and presented their ideas and strategies and global summits as well as many regional, national and local level conferences (Kuhn 2014).

In short, China has stepped up its efforts in addressing climate change. The growing exposure to pollution problems and disasters, the increased media coverage and the dynamics of international negotiations and cooperation are among the key driving factors.

#### **Command-and-control as well as market-based mechanisms**

The process of policy-making – from agenda setting to policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – is of comprehensive nature. It involves the participation of multiple-

levels of governments, the private sector, and nongovernmental organization. The P.R. China has introduced a series of command-and-control as well as market-based mechanisms to tackle climate change. Command-and-control mechanisms refer to authoritative measures involving law-making, regulations, authoritative high-level target and standards-setting and the development of a system of fines and punishments to enforce compliance. Market-based mechanisms involve tax incentives and disincentives, carbon emissions trading schemes, access to loans, procurements rules and other subsidies and incentives to invest in and to operate clean-technologies. Campaigns for divestments in fossil fuel industries have recently made headlines, too. China has announced that it will implement a national emissions trading scheme in 2017, and encourage more power generation from renewables.

### **Emission trading**

The recent launch of emission trading schemes in several cities and regions will provide a major opportunity for the further evolution and consolidation of climate protection governance mechanisms at central, provincial and local level. Chinese experts have analysed lessons learnt from existing emission trading schemes, in particular from the two largest emission trading schemes in the European Union and in California. The seven regional and city level emission trading pilots in mainland China have some features in common, but they also vary in their approach to issues such as the coverage of sectors, allocation of allowances, price uncertainty and market stabilization, potential market power of dominated players, use of offsets, and enforcement and compliance (Zhang 2015).

Lessons learnt from the regional and city level schemes will influence the design of the national emission trading schemes that will be developed within the next months. The introduction of emission trading schemes China is likely to boost awareness across sectors and industries and involve many experts in monitoring and evaluation.

### **Complexity of newly emerging roles and responsibilities**

While the political leadership is recognizing the relevance of market-based mechanisms, it is yet to embark on a substantial involvement of NGOs in promoting the transition towards a low-carbon economy in China. The process of formulation and the implementation of climate change policies are still somewhat opaque in China. This might also have to do with the complexity of newly emerging roles and responsibilities of and between the National Development and Reform Commission and other Ministries and agencies.

We observe NGOs with different degrees of autonomy and independence from the government. The Guangdong Energy Conservation Association, the Guangzhou Source Association (GZES), and the Guangdong Low-Carbon (Development and Promotion) Association (GLCA) are embedded and operate within Chinese state structures, but are also part of the country's scientific communities.

Next to government sponsored NGOs (GONGOS), the number of independent Chinese environmental nongovernmental organizations (ENGOS) that focus on education and awareness raising as well as advocacy activities is steadily growing since the 1990s. Information sharing on environmental risks of infrastructure projects, in particular industrial plants and hydropower projects, pollution monitoring, awareness raising and education in the field of green commuting and sustainable consumption are typical advocacy activities of Chinese ENGOS.

### **Independent Chinese ENGOS**

Many independent Chinese ENGOS have recently incorporated climate protection into their agenda and set up joint initiatives and start networking at the provincial, national and transnational level. Some started to engage in lobbying activities targeted at delegates of the National Peoples' Congress (NPC), members of the provincial level Peoples' Congresses and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a high level political advisory body that consists of delegates from a range of political parties and organisations, as well as independent members under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

### **China Civil Climate Action Network**

The China Civil Climate Action Network (CAN-China) promotes and facilitates information sharing and joint action at various levels with the goal to form a wider coalition of stakeholders to address climate change. CCAN also communicates and cooperates with Climate Action Network International as an independent Chinese network. CAN-China includes the following renowned NGOs: the Chinese Association for NGO Cooperation (CANGO), Chinese Youth Climate Action Network, Friends of Nature, the Environmental and Development Institute, Global Village Beijing, Green Earth Volunteers, and Xiamen Green Cross Association (XGCA).

The **Chinese Youth Climate Action Network** is one of the most active organizations focusing on climate protection since its foundation in 2007. Members of seven different student associations started the organization after they attended a meeting in Singapore where they learned the growing transnational cooperation in climate change action. Today, the organization runs four main programmes. The low-carbon campus project looks at opportunities to reduce energy consumption and carbon emission on the campus. Another project invites companies and government representatives to an annual youth summit with more than 200 students. Both are supported by Chinese foundations. The China Youth Delegation project sends delegations to the global COP summits. The young delegates actively participate in side-events. A green platform project brings green companies together with students. Companies present themselves and introduce internship and job opportunities to the students. The organization registered as a company in Beijing and managed to register as a nonprofit organization in Guangzhou after regulations for registration of independent nonprofits have been eased. The organization has currently eight full-time employees. It is planning to further professional its activities. As it is the case with some other nonprofit



organizations in China, the prospects for running the organization as a consulting firm might be better and more attractive for the staff than keeping a nonprofit identity.

**Greenovation Hub**, started in 2012 in Beijing, is an environmental NGO that seeks to adopt a new approach by combining the competitiveness of grass-root and international NGOs. Its Climate and Finance Policy Centre conducts research on climate, energy and sustainable finance with a global perspective with the purpose to promote policy-making, effective implementation, stakeholder involvement and public participation in order to foster a positive transition to a low carbon economy,

**Green Zhejiang, Hangzhou**, founded by Hao Xin in the year 2000, is a very well networked organization in the South of China. It enjoys support from Zhejiang University and forged close ties with the government and local business (Zhejiang Suncha Bamboo and Wood Co. Ltd.). It started to focus on water pollution issues and, more recently, engages in various climate protection activities. Its mission is to promote low-carbon lifestyles and the open publication of environmental data and enhancing public awareness of environmental protection. The organization developed a digital map for pollution monitoring and has won many local and national awards.

#### **Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs**

The Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs (IPE), Beijing, under the leadership of Ma Yun, a former investigative journalist with the South China Morning Post, engages in major monitoring activities that focus on the most polluting industries. IPE makes this data accessible and easy to use, so that the press, investors, and citizens can hold suppliers, multinational corporations, and local governments accountable. IPE's Corporate Information Transparency Index ranks multinational brands by their environmental impact. Its Pollution Information Transparency Index ranks 113 Chinese cities according to their level of environmental information disclosure<sup>1</sup>. He was included in the list of the 100 most influential people in the world by Time Magazine in May 2006 and won the prestigious Scoll Foundation award in 2014.

#### **OASIS, Shanghai**

The Shanghai Oasis Ecological Conservation and Communication Centre (OASIS) has made contributions to low carbon lifestyles by promoting green commuting. As a member of the Green Commuting Network, it was OASIS that first promoted ideas about green commuting in Shanghai. It encourages local residents to choose comparatively environmentally friendly modes of transport to work and back.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://skoll.org/organization/institute-of-public-and-environmental-affairs/>

### **Green Watershed, Yunnan**

Green Watershed in Yunnan is an independent nongovernmental organizations that has mobilized the public and experts to closely monitor the environmental impact of major infrastructure projects and create awareness among local communities in Yunnan province. Its approach is more controversial than the one's of IPE and Green Zhejiang. Mobilising local communities is still politically sensitive in China.

### **Xiamen Green Cross Association**

Xiamen Green Cross association is a leading member of the China environmental advocacy network supported by the Danish Foundation for Human Rights. It focuses on green education, including garbage separation, and is also exploring legal remedies against pollution and infringement of citizens' rights in the context of industrial projects and investments. Ma Tiannan started off as a volunteer in the cleaning up of damages caused by a serious typhoon in the beautiful coastal city of Xiamen in 1999. Xiamen has now been labeled as low-carbon city and Ma Tiannan developed into one of the most charismatic female environmental leaders in China who is very well connected in China and at international level. She is an active member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. The local government shows a mixed attitude towards Xiamen Green Cross association. It provides some programme support, but also exercises tight control and critically observes its cooperation with international partners.

### **German development cooperation**

German development cooperation has for many years supported the capacity development of Chinese environmental NGOs and climate protection alliances through a well-targeted programme. However, the funding support provided by the Centrum for International Migration and Development of German International Cooperation (GIZ) has been phased out in 2013 as China is no longer considered as a recipient of German development aid. The gap is still felt by the Chinese Environmental NGO community and other institutions, but city level and University partnerships as well as think tanks continue their work.

### **Prospects for international partnerships**

The draft Overseas NGO Management Law in China is seen by some experts as a discouragement for international partnerships and cooperation. The draft law gives the Ministry of Public Securities wide ranging inspection powers. The current political leadership is concerned with public security, transparency and accountability issues and applies and promotes a more selective approach to international cooperation. However, collaborative forms of governance are still on the rise in the field of environmental and climate protection and international cooperation and partnerships have often demonstrated their resilience in China if both parties share common values and interests.

**The most arguments and examples are based on the following articles of the author:**

*Kuhn, Berthold (2015), Policies, Collaboration and Partnerships for Climate Protection in China, in: Jing,Yijia (ed.): The Road to Collaborative Governance in China, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 71-94.*

Kuhn, Berthold (2014), "Climate Protection Governance and Participation in the People's Republic of China, in ASIEN, The German Journal on Contemporary Asia, Nr. 133, October 2014, 52-71.

**Further literature:**

Kuhn, Berthold and Yangyong Zhang (2014), "Survey of Experts on Climate Change Awareness and Public Participation in China." *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 1/2014, pp. 177-212; <http://journals.sub.uni-hamburg.de/giga/jcca/>

Zhang, Haibin (2013), "China and international climate change negotiations", in: *WeltTrends*, [http://welttrends.de/res/uploads/Zhang\\_China-and-International-climate-change-negotiations.pdf](http://welttrends.de/res/uploads/Zhang_China-and-International-climate-change-negotiations.pdf) (accessed: 2014-04-26)

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