

Food, Environment and Health Post-SARS: Corporate Expectations and Participation

By Megan Tracy

In first half of 2003, SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) challenged Beijing's urban population to reflect on what were for some of its members already significant anxieties about the health and well-being of themselves, their families, and, to a degree, of the entire nation. I received many well-intentioned warnings about many things during the peak SARS period, especially in the area of what food to consume and where to go to purchase it. "Eat more meat, eat *paocai* [pickled vegetables], avoid big supermarkets, cook at home"—all these admonishments and more I heard from Beijing friends, colleagues, and even the occasional taxi driver. What seemed clear in a country that spends a significant portion of its time in the production and consumption of food was that apprehension over health and food safety was exacerbated during this period.

The most explicit links between SARS, food consumption, and environmental issues were the connections made largely in the media between the consumption of wildlife and the possible link to the virus' origin, which caused the government to enact stricter regulations to limit wild animals landing on dinner plates. The opportunity, however, to use SARS to draw attention to other environmental issues was not lost on environmental groups. A news article published by Xinhua News Agency in May 2003 reported that Chinese environmental groups had targeted several sectors of society, including local communities, businesses, scientists, and journalists, with the responsibility for both protecting the environment and "rethinking their behavior." Specific demands listed in the article included greater community participation in environmental protection, increased scientific exploration into the links between environment and disease and promoting ideas of sustainable development within the corporate community. The environmental groups' appeal to encourage healthy lifestyles and protect against disease came at a time when probable cases in Beijing were numbering in the thousands and speculations about the human-animal link of the disease's origins were being disseminated widely.

More than half a year away from the early and tense days of the SARS virus, Beijing's populace seems to have returned largely to their pre-SARS patterns, routines, and behavior. Restaurants are full again, stores are as crowded

as ever, and the obligatory hand-washing when entering a building has petered out. However, the news media has continued to publish information about SARS research while the government maintains a low-level public health and sanitation campaign. Moreover, some commercial sectors in China have utilized the public's greater attention to the food, environment, and health nexus to promote their own products and ideas. One such sector is the "Green Food" (*lüse shipin*) industry that concentrates on the development of pesticide-reduced and chemical additive-reduced products. In conversations with representatives of a few Green Food corporations and with the Green Food Development Center just after the height of the SARS virus, I found expectations were high that experiences from this period would aid in the promotion of their products. In my more recent exchanges, Green Food representatives have begun to downplay the impact of SARS, but have emphasized the industry's continued commitment to both the environment and public wellbeing.

Green Food's Goals and Protecting the Public's Health

In 1992, the development and management of the Green Food industry was instituted under an organization created by the Ministry of Agriculture—the Green Food Development Center (GFDC), which was charged with certifying food-items as compliant with green foods standards.¹ Green food production, according to the institution's representatives, is envisioned as achieving several goals—protecting the agricultural ecological environment, improving food quality and safety, and ensuring people's health along with improving economic development in rural areas.² Products certified by GFDC, the only entity able to certify this type of food, bear the Green Food trademark along with a product's specific serial number. The mark itself depicts a sun, leaf and bud within a circle, which according to materials provided by the GFDC, represents the "harmonious" relationship between man and the environment. Corporations that meet the certification requirements of GFDC are given permission to use the trademark for a period of three years. At the end of 2002, more than 3,000 products nationwide were registered with the Green Food

Table 1. Scope of Green Food Certification 1997 and 2002

Year Certification Granted	Total Number of Enterprises Employing GF Certification ¹	Total Number of Certified GF Products	Monitored Area (per 10,000 mu) ²
1997	544	892	3213
2002	1756	3046	6670

Source: Adapted from *Green Food Statistical Report* (2002).

TABLE NOTES

¹ Corporations are allowed to use the Green Food trademark for three years before having to be recertified.

² One mu equals .165 acres.

trademark. (See Table 1). Moreover, most certification is taking place in relatively underdeveloped areas in China, which are considered to be less polluted than in the over-industrialized coastal areas. (See Table 2).

CSR and Green Food Producers: Ongoing Activities and Possibilities

In midsummer 2003, I traveled to the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region (IMAR) to conduct preliminary interviews with the regional GFDC office and with two of the largest Green Food dairies in the region. My goal was to learn if they perceived a significant increase in interest in their products or new opportunities for Green Food development as a result of the epidemic. Notably, both dairies responded to the health crisis by donating both money and goods to help in the regional and national “battle” against SARS. I was intrigued with these donations, for the usual type of “socially responsible” activities by Chinese national corporations are often limited to their support for ubiquitous (usually unsuccessful) tree-planting campaigns that are carried out by schools, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and government offices. Thus, I was curious to hear directly from dairy representatives how these particular donation activities fit within larger corporate objectives. Moreover, I was intent on learning about the extent of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities within these two corporations with an eye toward learning if there was a general interest in these issues within industry. CSR focuses on the integration of a set of ideas into corporations’ core business practices, encompassing but not limited to corporate governance, philanthropy and social investment, leadership, and corporations’ relationship with all of their stakeholders.³

In general, most experts and practitioners I consulted

during my field period consider CSR knowledge and practices to be fairly limited among Chinese corporations. At the same time, preliminary information that I was gathering about these corporations indicated that they were engaging in “socially responsible” activities, posing an interesting area for further investigation with the companies themselves. What I discovered was a strongly articulated commitment in these dairy corporations to the welfare of China’s citizenry and to the larger nation, which I am using here deliberately to refer to both the land and the people.⁴ Their position is echoed in statements produced by the GFDC and the China Green Food Association (CGFA) and its agents.⁵ Below I highlight the insights I gained into one of the companies, the Mengniu Dairy Corporation.

Milking SARS for What It Was(n’t) Worth

On driving to Mengniu’s operations in Helin county outside Huhhot, my host from the Inner Mongolia GFDC office informed me that Mengniu’s development has transformed one of the poorest counties into one of the wealthiest. The amount of new buildings and ongoing construction that we observed as we drew closer to Mengniu’s plant drove this point home. Construction of new buildings, however, was balanced by open spaces, dotted with cement replicas of traditional felt homes of Mongolian herders. In a news article about their SARS donation (Sohu.com, 2003), the corporation’s CEO, Niu Gensheng, was quoted as saying that Mengniu’s success was dependent upon the people and therefore the Mengniu Corporation had a responsibility to take care of the people—a sentiment echoed by Mengniu’s representative in our interview. Niu Gensheng also stated that the demand for her corporation’s products increased during SARS—largely due to the nutritional, healthful

content as well as the bulk packaging of their product. During the SARS outbreak, consumers were reluctant to spend a lot of time in stores and thus tended to purchase items available in bulk quantities.

Mengniu, however, in Niu's view, is not the average Chinese privately held corporation in that it has operated from its very beginning as a "true" joint-stock system (*gufenzhi*) rather than being a transformed state-run enterprise (*guoyingqiye*). The latter type of corporations often are hampered by management styles and a corporate philosophy leftover from their state-run days. When asked directly about their responsibility to the environment and to the common people (*laobaixing*), she replied that competition between dairy companies has spurred on development in the region. Thus, without these corporations, local people would have no market for their products, so their economic livelihood is therefore the company's responsibility. With regard to the environment, in addition to tree planting and trash collection programs in accordance with local government plans, the corporation has also initiated a program in their immediate area to convert farmland to grasslands. Although the area is not large, the ultimate goal is to

promote local farmers' understanding of the environmental and economic advantages of maintaining grasslands. My interviews and review of Mengniu's corporate materials stressed their dependence on healthy grasslands.

Still at the Initial Stage

When I attended a Green Food conference in the fall of 2002, I was struck how these corporations from across the country did not express strong commitment to social responsibility or at least they did not articulate these commitments in a manner that we in the West are used to hearing them. With the former structure of the state-run enterprises' that once provided the bulk of their employees social welfare needs (such as schools and clinics), it is, perhaps, not a surprise that they seem still to be framing the meeting of such needs within what may be considered as "corporate paternalism."⁶ Particularly in the case of the rural populations that are often the suppliers of land and labor for these corporations, corporate comments often focused on their ability to shelter from a potentially volatile market and provide services that these groups might not otherwise

Table 2. Locations Reaching Over 100 Certified Green Food Producers

Location	2000	2001	2002
Entire nation	1831	2400	3046
Beijing	58	90	100
Shanxi	81	107	188
Inner Mongola	159	183	220
Liaoning	77	104	154
Jilin	101	106	129
Heilongjiang	205	401	532
Jiangsu	90	118	149
Fujian	133	129	127
Shandong	136	150	153
Sichuan	76	103	170
Xinjiang	57	87	118

Source: Adapted from *Green Food Statistical Report (2002)*.

be able to access (e.g., loans and housing). Mengniu's clear mission to social welfare and the environment and its largesse in corporate social responsibility activities are perhaps the exception rather than the rule among Green Food industries.

Similar to other types of corporations in China, many of the Green Food industries as yet fail to see a direct link between social and environmental welfare activities and a tangible benefit for their corporation. The Green Food industry itself has had to launch widespread information campaigns to educate consumers and other members of the public about the potential benefits of Green Food. These campaigns appear to be quite successful given the rapid growth and development of the industry. National Green Food corporations are already employing technology and standards intended to further sustainable development and provide economic benefits to rural communities. Encouraging them to promote other types of activities that may provide additional advantages to their corporations could add another supportive dimension to their campaign. Moreover, because this industry is run assuming benefits to the "common people" are seen as able to be achieved through the corporation rather than coming up from the grassroots level, promoting these developments at the corporate level is a necessity.

A Boon for Green Foods?

Green Food industries remain unsure whether SARS actually sparked more than a short-term increase in the consumption of their products. While the long-term impact of SARS is even more difficult to assess, it is striking as one in a series of indicia that has propelled the food, environment, and health nexus into a prominent position in public conversation.⁷ One does not have to look beyond the daily news to get an idea of what other factors have raised public consciousness of food safety—such as the overuse of pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and other food additives.

That companies and other representatives of the industry have seized upon SARS as a potentially profit-enhancing factor indicates a need for those interested in these issues to examine how this incidence and other events are being constructed and used by these actors. For example, the upcoming 'Green' Olympics, with its attempt to create associations between environment and health, is another such event that these Green Food corporations have mentioned explicitly as an opportunity to capitalize on this relationship.⁸ Supporters of this industry, whether they are the companies, the regulators or informal promoters, see the environment, food, and health link as a method to gain competitive advantage

in the Chinese market with the hope of expanding internationally.

The Green Food industry could also increase their market niche by becoming the China's first industrial sector to develop a strong commitment to corporate social responsibility in the environmental and health spheres. While some domestic and international environmental NGOs have conducted CSR-related projects,⁹ the bilateral aid and international business communities could also help in cultivating the emergence of CSR and greening of the post-Socialist corporate landscape.

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ENDNOTES

¹ For a comprehensive discussion of the organization of the Green Food industry in the late 90s see Thiers (1999 and 2000). The standards referred to here are national standards.

² The most recent public statement of these goals I have heard is at the 2003 China Green Food Development Summit Forum in Beijing during a speech given by the China Green Food Association's president, Liu Lianfu (2003).

³ For further information and dialogues about CSR and corporate citizenship, see the United Nation's webpage on the Global Compact initiative at www.unglobalcompact.org or the World Economic Forum's webpage at www.weforum.org.

⁴ I am not making any assessment as to the efficacy or follow-through of these verbal commitments. Rather this data only speaks to their public commitment. Conversations with other actors have indicated that these verbal commitments often remain just that.

⁵ While the CGFA is a national specialized association under the administrative jurisdiction of the GFDC, it is considered a nongovernmental association that possesses a great deal of autonomy. Its primary goal is the promotion of Green Food development.

⁶ Special thanks to Jennifer Turner for underscoring this point on paternalism.

⁷ For relevant discussion, see Jessica Hamburger's feature article in *China Environment Series, Issue 5*, (2002).

⁸ Most recently, corporations mentioned the marketing of Green Food during the Olympics during two international conferences held in October of 2003.

⁹ The Chinese NGO Institute of Environment and Development has been active in CSR projects, as has the U.S.-based NGO PACT.

Atypical Environmental NGOs in Guangdong, China

By *Sylvia Ping Song*

With increasing economic integration between Hong Kong and Guangdong province's Pearl River Delta, it is imperative that civil society on both sides of the border becomes involved in the policy process to help guarantee the region develops in an environmentally sustainable way. While Hong Kong has a fairly active environmental nongovernmental organization (NGO) community, little is known about green social organizations in Guangdong province. In recognition of the need for greater dialogue and cooperation on environmental sustainability issues between civil society groups in this fast growing, highly populated region, the Hong Kong-based independent think-tank, Civic Exchange began in 2003 to develop a directory of NGOs involved in environmental issues in Guangdong. The directory aims to identify the environmental NGOs in Guangdong, including their contact details and short descriptions of their activities, which will help international and domestic organizations in seeking partners. Box 1 relates the initial challenges in setting up this survey project.

China's NGOs are emerging in a unique economic, social and political context, which gives them particular "Chinese characteristics" that distinguish them from

Western-style NGOs. For example, some are outgrowths of government bureau downsizing—called government-organized NGOs or GONGOs—and are not strictly nongovernmental in terms of their funding, staffing and policy activities. Truly independent NGOs do exist—some formally registered as a social organization or business, while others simply remain unregistered. The Civic Exchange directory mainly includes Guangdong's formally registered provincial-level environmental NGOs. However, to capture a complete and accurate picture of environmental civil society development in Guangdong, the importance of university-affiliated student environmental organizations, unregistered research centers and NGOs registered as businesses cannot be neglected.

Atypical Environmental NGOs in Guangdong

By the end of 2002, there were 744 provincial social organizations (or NGOs)—73 of which focusing on the environment—formally registered in Guangdong.¹ All of Guangdong's environmental NGOs fall into one of four categories: foundations, academic associations, professional societies (e.g., Urban Planning Association of Guangdong Province), or industrial associations (e.g.,

Box 1. An NGO-Related Survey in China: A Unique and Challenging Journey

Civic Exchange, a Hong Kong based public policy think tank, began compiling a directory of NGOs in Guangdong in mid-June 2003 after the SARS outbreak. To abide by the regulatory needs and to ensure that the project could proceed smoothly, Civic Exchange researchers began discussing the project with the Guangdong Provincial Bureau of Civil Affairs (which registers social groups) and the Guangdong Provincial Bureau of Environmental Protection (which is the professional sponsor [yewu zhuguan bumen] of most environmental NGOs in the province). Information was gathered through interviews carried out with Guangdong-based environmental groups and relevant government officials and researchers.

Before the real work could begin, however, Civic Exchange was advised by officials in Guangdong to enter into a collaborative arrangement with a Mainland Chinese organization, which could then issue a recommendation letter (jieshaoxin) to the provincial authorities. Civic Exchange approached the Liaison Office of the Central Government in Hong Kong, the Guangdong Provincial Bureau of Foreign Affairs, the Guangdong Provincial Bureau of Statistics and some other departments to find the best way to get an appropriate recommendation. On 25 August, the Guangdong Provincial Bureau of Foreign Affairs informed the Civic Exchange researchers they needed to comply with the Interim Measures for Administration of Foreign-related Social Survey Activities¹ and find a qualified Mainland organization that could be a partner for this project.

On 22 September, Civic Exchange entered into a collaborative agreement with Tsinghua University's NGO Research Center, which agreed to enable a Civic Exchange project manager to join one of their own NGO research projects. By being a part of the Tsinghua team, Civic Exchange's project manager would be able to collect information in Guangdong. However, the Guangdong Provincial Bureau of Civil Affairs later agreed to provide the required data only through Tsinghua University's NGO Research Centre, which would then forward the information to Civic Exchange. Civic Exchange researchers are pleased the project ultimately ran smoothly and grateful for all the help they received as Civic Exchange spent three months seeking legal status for conducting research. Going through the complex labyrinth to start the research notably gave the project staff insights into the challenges Chinese NGOs face when seeking legal status.

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¹ It is stated in Article 3 that "Organizations and individuals from outside the territory, subsidiaries of foreign enterprises and resident representative offices of foreign enterprises within the territory and resident institutions in China of other foreign organizations shall not, by their own, conduct social survey activities within the territory of China. Where there is a need to conduct such surveys, they shall be conducted by domestic institutions with the qualification of conducting foreign-related social surveys.

Guangdong Association of Environmental Protection Industries).² In terms of legal standing, environmental NGOs, like other social organizations in China, have three main options for obtaining a legal status: (1) submitting registration as "social organizations" to the Ministry of Civil Affairs; (2) registering as businesses with the Bureau of Industry and Commerce; or (3) operating as a research center or student environmental organization affiliated with a university (Lawrence, 2003; Young 2002). The data of registered environmental NGOs or social organizations are available from Guangdong Provincial Department of Civil Affairs. However, statistics regarding "atypical" NGOs—unregistered research centers, student environmental organizations, and those registered as businesses—are very difficult to gather. For example, it is challenging to locate information about student environmental organizations, as they concentrate their activities on campuses and are small, often unstable organizations plagued with the perennial problem of

frequent membership turnover (Lu, 2003).

Whether using top-down or bottom-up means of gaining legal status, many green NGOs—as well as GONGOs—are becoming important agents for improving environmental protection in China. The formation and impact of two atypical grassroots green NGOs—Fresh Environmental Association (a university student group) and Guangzhou Green Country Ecological Education Centre (established through contributions from Hong Kong and registered as a business)—are discussed below. While not included in the directory because it is a municipal GONGO, not a provincial NGO, Green Messengers is included in the discussion below, for like the other two groups it is one of the most influential green groups working in Guangdong.

Fresh Environmental Association

Fresh Environmental Association (Fresh) is a student green group established at the South China University of

Technology in June 1999. The group aims to “popularize environmental knowledge and ideologies, and advocate green civilization.”³ Now in its fifth year, Fresh has developed into an important student environmental association (SEA) with about 350 members on campus. Similar to their counterpart groups in other parts of China that arose in the mid-1990s, Fresh has successfully organized many environmental activities, including tree planting, environmental lectures, a “green” youth camp, and a paper recycling and other campus campaigns. One of the most effective projects was the “Anti-White campaign” (*fan bai*), which aimed at eliminating the use of white plastic lunchboxes on campus. This project significantly increased awareness of the environment campus-wide and raised the group’s profile among students.

As a SEA,⁴ Fresh did not register with the local Department of Civil Affairs, rather with the university’s Student Association Committee, listing the Environmental School of South China University of Technology as its sponsor. Fresh and other Guangdong student groups notably have not yet formed their own formal regional network, but Fresh members are increasingly cooperating and communicating with other SEAs, as well as other green NGOs.

Guangzhou Green Country Ecological Education Centre

Located in Longgui town, Baiyun district, the Guangzhou Green Country Ecological Education Centre (GGCEEC) was jointly established in 1998 by Green Power (a Hong Kong NGO), the Guangzhou Environmental Protection Bureau, and the Guangzhou Research Institute of Environmental Protection. The mission of GGCEEC is “Green, Ecology and Education,” which is embodied in the group’s goals to raise the public’s environmental awareness through audiovisual and demonstrative education.⁵ GGCEEC also sets up “return to nature” field trips, which include tours to understand natural farming and the ecological cycle. The centre is developing into a multifunctional centre of education, research, training, experimentation, and entertainment. It also acts as a forum for organizations from Guangzhou and Hong Kong to meet and exchange ideas.

GGCEEC originated from the efforts of Green Power, which wanted to establish an environmental education center in Guangdong. Early in 1994, Green Power visited the province and began to look for a partnership with the local government, and found it in Wu Zhengqi, the then-director of the Guangzhou

Research Institute of Environmental Protection.⁶ Wu is an excellent environmental expert and educator who often sparks interest in environmental issues in many who meet and hear him speak. Wu was integral in helping the GGCEEC’s founders come together. Wu’s dynamism coupled with support from the Guangzhou government in financing and supplying the land for the center facilitated GGCEEC’s smooth and quick establishment. The current director, Zhang Xijuan, noted that without the government’s support, GGCEEC would have been unable to obtain the more than 200 official chops permitting the construction of the centre or surmount other bureaucratic hurdles to complete the education center’s construction within two years. Green Power provides economic help for the center as well as technical support for the construction and maintenance of GGCEEC’s Web site.

Despite being an environmental NGO that enjoys government support, GGCEEC was unable to register as a social organization as there had been no precedent (*xianlei*) for such an organization. Thus, GGCEEC had to register as a business with the Bureau of Industry and Commerce, and as such cannot enjoy some favorable policies, such as a tax exemption, reserved for social organizations.

Leiwan’s Green Messengers

Green Messengers was informally established in early 1996, when the Leiwan Environmental Protection Bureau (EPB) was dissatisfied that the responsibility for environmental protection was restricted to governmental departments and environmental professionals, while public participation was limited. The Bureau’s Youth League therefore organized 25 young staff to form the group “Green Messengers,” who carried out a series of voluntary activities to further inform and engage the public in environmental issues. They initially distributed environmental pamphlets and newsletters, but quickly built their capacity to organize celebrations on World Environment Day (June 5) and carry out a broad range of public environmental education activities.

Representatives from Green Messengers describe their group as the first mass citizen (*minjian*) environmental organization in Guangdong with close links to their local community. Green Messenger is a nonprofit organization with a strong public outreach component that embraces the mission to “carry out public environmental education, develop and advocate green culture with Chinese characters, and promote Chinese environmental protection.”⁷ Green Messengers registered in 1999 as an NGO with the approval of the Leiwan Department

of Civil Affairs,⁸ but judging from its registration, funding, and staffing it is more like a GONGO. For example, the key leadership (the chair, vice-chair and general secretary) are staff in the Leiwan EPB. Green Messengers obtains funding mainly from the EPB, which is clearly important for the survival and stable development of the organization. Unlike most registered NGOs it has been allowed to grow from a single office to more than 10 branch offices. This expansion has facilitated its membership to grow from 25 government professionals to over 1,500 members that include a broad range of community members and educators. Its integration into community service and education combined with its close ties to the EPB has meant Green Messenger is capable of bridging dialogues between the government and public about environmental protection and sustainable development—a role that ultimately makes it a unique GONGO, which increasingly resembles a true independent NGO.

Problems Confronting Environmental NGOs in Guangdong

Environmental NGOs in Guangdong are still in their early stages of development and the three profiled above are similar in that they all face challenges to becoming sustainable—ranging from management and funding to issues of government control.

Chairman Zhou of the Fresh Environmental Association stated they are eager to improve the group's "internal framework [and] organization" and are therefore exploring options for an appropriate framework for operating effectively. One new change in operation will be to switch from organizing activities from within the environmental science department to creating more campus-wide event-based activities.⁹ Zhou further stated that Fresh lacks a stable and effective contact and communication system within the organization, due in part to the busy class schedules and high turnover of members. Most limiting is the challenge of finding sufficient funding. Although Fresh has so far survived on a small four-year membership fee of RMB 20 *Yuan* per person, the group has recently increased its revenue through a 2,000 *Yuan* award for being one of the top ten outstanding student associations of South China University of Technology, which established this award to improve campus life.

GGCEEC is concerned about its future, for their funding is primarily from the Guangdong Research Institute of Environmental Protection (GRIER) and Green Power. However, GRIER is adopting a more market-focused approach and is starting to move away

from nonprofit management activities. Thus, GGCEEC wishes to change their sponsor—colloquially known as its "mother-in-law" (*popo*)—to the Centre of Environmental Propaganda and Education under the Guangzhou Administration of Environmental Protection. If they cannot find another government supporter, the staff at GGCEEC believes their NGO will be limited in its growth and influence.

Green Messengers' staff believes they must increase their scope of operations and influence in order to address more effectively the public's lack of education and indifference to protecting the environment. One obstacle to their expansion goals is the numerous government restrictions. For example, Green Messengers wishes to expand its activities outside Leiwan District to Guangzhou and beyond and detach from Leiwan EPB. However, current government policies dictate that every social organization must specify the area where it operates, which means that Green Messengers can only carry out activities within Leiwan District where its sponsoring agency, the EPB, has jurisdiction.¹⁰ Breaking from the EPB would mean an end to government support, but this loss could be counterbalanced by hiring an influential environmental activist leader—following the model of Friends of Nature, one of China's leading green NGOs, headed by a famous and respected historian Liang Congjie.

The Government's Perspective

In Eastern and Central Europe's former socialist states, environmentalism was used as a mobilizing agent of popular protest against the old regimes. The environmental movement in China, however, seems to be traveling another path: environmental social organizations are increasingly courting government approval and influence in policymaking, rather than seeking a potentially dangerous confrontation with the government (Ho, 2001). This collaborative relationship with government is clearly demonstrated by the above three environmental NGOs, which notably differ in their legal status. As Knup (1998:9) correctly noted, "Chinese social organizations are tied more closely to the government than in many other countries, but this closeness, while limiting, also allows these groups to operate effectively within current Chinese context."

Interviews with local officials from Guangdong's Department of Civil Affairs offer a glimpse into the government's attitudes towards social organizations. The government adopts a *laissez-faire*, or even supportive, attitude if the organization and their activities do not confront the state or pose a threat to social stability. This new permissive attitude towards social

organizations reflects a significant shift from past government policies that totally controlled or suppressed social organizations or independent organizing of any kind. Table 1 shows this significant change in the state-society relationships in China, as well as speculation on future trends for greater NGO independence.

Despite the lackluster development of social organizations in Guangdong, the local government departments of Guangdong have done a fairly good job in managing NGOs. Guangdong province was the first province in China to: (1) finish the review and registration of the branches and representatives of social organizations, (2) complete the annual review of private non-corporate organizations (*minban feiqiye danwei*), and (3) regulate or close illegal foundations. In its most creative initiative, Guangdong leads the country in providing management training programs for the officials of social organizations. To better manage professional unions, Guangdong officials carried out a province-wide survey in 2003 not only to improve their knowledge of these social organizations, but also understand their perspectives and concerns.

Following the emergence of the Falun Gong, central and provincial governments in China have begun to more closely manage and supervise social organizations, which perhaps explains the slight drop in the growth of social organizations in Guangdong in the late 1990s. (See Table 2). The Guangdong government's management of social organizations has improved in the past few years—instead of being disorganized, passive, and secretive,

oversight of registration and supervision of social organizations is much more systematic and transparent today.

The Public's Attitude and Participation

According to one survey carried out by Civic Exchange on the attitudes of the public towards the environment,¹¹ few Pearl River Delta Region residents participate in environmental protection activities. Among those surveyed who do, the most popular activities are tree planting, visiting a natural reserve, and participating in clean-up campaigns—38, 35, and 33 percent, respectively. People visiting environmental facilities, engaging in environmental education activities or material recycling schemes represented less than 15.6 percent of the total number of respondents.¹²

Public attitudes in China towards environmental social organizations are related to many factors. Guangdong has led China's bold and ambitious drive towards modernization, but the public has not been as eager to participate in or support the development of social organizations as have citizens in other parts of China. Guangdong residents are known for being hardworking and flexible, and more interested in business and economic profits than social and environmental issues. In other words, Guangdong people are not as active in environmental initiatives as they are interested in economic development, a relationship they view as mutually exclusive. This is the primary reason given by Guangdong officials for the contrast between the slow development of NGOs and remarkable economic

Table 1. Evolution of the State-Society Relationships Surrounding NGO Activism in China

	Past (1949 to mid-1990s)	Present (beginning mid-1990s)	Future
Role of Government	Complete dominance	Relative dominance	Cooperation
NGOs Status	Government control	Government still controls registration and supervises NGOs, but NGOs create partnerships with government & private sectors. Public begins to recognize and respond to work of NGOs.	Self-management and greater public support
State-Society Relationship	State-dominated cooperation	Transition	Society-dominated cooperation

Source: Adapted from Chinese Youth Development Foundation and Research Committee of Foundation Development (2001,29)

Table 2. Growth in Social Organizations in Guangdong (1993 to 2002)

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Total Registered Social Organizations (SOs)	7911	8679	9405	10011	10124	9783	8416	7675	7723	7636
Provincial Level SOs	748	807	852	906	931	935	910	813	820	845
District Level SOs	3616	3990	4370	4632	4727	4589	4121	3810	3882	3723
Country Level SOs	3547	3882	4183	4473	4466	4259	3385	3052	3021	3068

Note: Data up to 2000 drawn from the annual reports of the Guangdong Department of Civil Affairs, [Online]. Available: <<http://www.gdmz.gov.cn/tongji/index-n.htm>> last reviewed in April 2004. Data for 2001 and 2002 from interviews with local government officials in 2003.

success of Guangdong.

Green NGOs in Guangdong could become more successful by integrating environmental education and propaganda with economic development. One of the three NGOs profiled above has followed this strategy; specifically, GGCEEC has created a relaxation retreat for corporate managers during which the NGO provides them with lively environmental education. Environmental NGOs in Guangdong could also learn how to better work with local business communities by communicating and cooperating with their counterparts in Hong Kong. Furthermore, through Hong Kong, Guangdong has a built-in connection to the global community of environmental NGOs. Increased efforts in promoting environmental issues are critical considering Guangdong people are less receptive to such issues. Educating the public as well as government officials is necessary. Moreover, environmental NGOs need to play an effective role as a bridge between the government and public to better serve both sides.

Summary

The development of environmental NGOs in Guangdong has been relatively slow because economic development has been the overwhelming local priority. However, the rapid pace of development has resulted in significant environment degradation and sustainable development; therefore, it is beginning to attract more interest from the authorities. As environmental NGOs in Guangdong begin maturing they will be able to play an increasingly important role to help integrate environmental education with economic development.

This is perhaps their greatest and most urgent challenge.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Data available on-line at www.gdmjzz.gov.cn. Interviews were conducted with officials of the Department of Social Organization Management, Guangdong Provincial Bureau of Civil Affairs.

² There is a fifth category—unions (*lianhe hui*), however to date, there are no Guangdong environmental social organizations falling into this category.

³ Interview with the Chairman, Zhou Yunpeng of Fresh

Environmental Association in 2003. Their Web site is <http://www.scutfresh.100steps.net>.

⁴ For a review of the student environmental associations see Lu, 2003.

⁵ Interviews with the ex-director Wu Zhengqi and current director of GGCEEC Zhang Xijuan in 2003. The Web site is www.greenpower.org.hk/new/yellow/ (which is supported and maintained by Green Power) or www.gzlty.com.

⁶ Wu Zhengqi is now the Mainland China representative of Green Power.

⁷ Interview with Huang Jiwei, General Secretary of Green Messengers in 2003. <http://www.green-china.org>

⁸ Leiwan is a district of Guangzhou.

⁹ Interview with the Chairman Zhou Yunpeng of Fresh Environmental Association in 2003.

¹⁰ "Regulations on Registration and Administration of Social Organizations" Decree No. 16 of the State Council of the People's Republic of China (1998).

¹¹ Civic Exchange and China Development Institute, 2002, Project Report "*Attitudes on the environment: A survey of Pearl River Delta Residents*," available online at www.civic-exchange.org.

¹² Opinions about public perception towards social organizations in China can be found in "Chinese NGO's – Carving a Niche Within Constraints" (The American Embassy in China, 2003). [Online]. Available: <http://www.usembassy-china.org.cn/sandt/ngos.htm>