Projects, Donors, and Discourses

A Critical Look at Experiences and Representations in a Chinese Environmental NGO

By

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Abstract

Why are there so many assumptions about NGOs and so few attempts to describe the projects and procedures of specific NGOs? This thesis looks at the experiences of the leaders and workers of a NGO in Yunnan, China, and seeks to describe the personal stories of some of the workers in the organisation, as well as their relation to government officials, international donors and national policies in a way that might cast more light on the study of NGOs more generally. While keeping a focus on local practices and events, I analyse some of the possible effects of national and international policies and projects, and look at how the workers and leaders at the NGO relate to these policies by claiming to represent them, or even seeking to change them. Different from much of the literature on NGOs and social movements, I do not assume that NGOs are assisting in the construction of a new 'global civil society', but rather that possible changes made by NGOs can be just as much the result of unintended consequences and engagement in multiple collaborations with diverging interests and interpretations.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ASEAN   Association of Southeast Asian Nations

CI   Conservation International

CPC   The Communist Party of China

IMF   The International Monetary Fund

NPC   National People's Congress

PRC   The People's Republic of China

TNC   The Nature Conservancy

WTO   World Trade Organisation

WWF   World Wide Fund for Nature

YASS   Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences

Glossary

fei zhengfu	非政府	non-governmental
fubai	腐败	corruption
guanxi	关系	(personal) connections
hukou	户口	residence permit
jiang	江	river
kexue fazhan	科学学发	'scientific development'
laoban	老板	boss
minjian	民间	'people's realm', civil society
minzu	民族	nationality, ethnic group
minzu shibie	民族族识别	the "Ethnic Classification Project"
popo	婆婆	mother-in-law
renqing	人情	Project assistant
shan	山	mountain
shehui tuanti	社会团体	social organisation
wancheng renwu	完成任务	fulfilling targets
xibu dakaifa	西部大开发	the "Great Development of the West"
zheng ji	政绩	political achievement

Introduction

My object of study in this text is a Chinese organisation that is often referred to as an environmental NGO; I look at the history of this specific NGO, its leaders and workers, projects and daily life, and its engagement with other organisations, institutions, and donor agencies. All along, I try to relate my observations to historical events, national policies and socio-cultural settings that might be relevant as a context for my fieldwork. Limiting the focus to *one specific* NGO, while looking at their commitments to discourses and donors, has the possibility of providing a detailed picture of the inner workings of an NGO, at the same time as it can be used to assess some of assumptions about NGO an their role in society found in much literature (e.g. Ho, 2008; Yang, 2005; Yang, 2008; for a more critical view, see Fisher, 1997). The NGO that I focus on in the following, is a fairly small organisation based in Kunming – the administrative city of the Yunnan province in South-western China. Due to the size of the organisation, as well as the political 'sensitivity' of some of the issues I discuss in this text, I have decided to keep the identity of the organisation anonymous, and refer to it here as the Ethnobotany Research Society (EBOR), as a reflection of the focus of much of the work undertaken at the organisation. Throughout this text, I describe EBOR and its workers, detail the way the organisation is structured, and try to look at some of the personal experiences of workers in the organisation and their involvement in national discourses, funding schemes and development projects.

EBOR is one of several Chinese NGOs in the Yunnan province, many of whom have their headquarters in Kunming while carrying out projects in the Yunnan countryside. In Kunming, there is an 'umbrella organisation' for all the NGOs in the area – Yunnan NGO forum – which run their own website, circulate information on funding opportunities, and arranges regular seminars about once per month. The 'NGO scene' is perhaps small compared to the bigger cities of Beijing and Shanghai, but is relatively focused in scope on environmental concerns, ethnic diversity, and poverty alleviation, all related to Yunnan province being the province in China with the most officially

recognised ethnic groups (called 'nationalities' or *minzu*)[1], being one of the poorer provinces in China, and also the being the province which is considered to hold the greatest 'biological diversity' of all of China (Lan, 2000). However, it is difficult to get an overview of the many NGOs in the area, not only because they are numerous, but also due to the registration process of NGOs, which can be long and difficult, leading many NGOs to avoid registration or adopt strategies including registering as different entities (Yang and Calhoun 2008).

In order to address the themes that I take up in this text – the experiences of workers in a Chinese NGO, and their relations to donor agencies and government institutions – I found it useful to examine some of the discourses that the workers in the organisation seemed to relate to in their daily work. The identification of these discourses was not an easy task – something that I also comment upon later in this introduction – but nevertheless seemed to offer a productive way of examining some of the background and contexts for project and procedures at EBOR, as well as observations of some effects of Chinese development programmes. In taking a discursive approach, I have sought to be informed by some of the insights into the study of discourses provided by Michel Foucault (1972; 1977; 1994), as well as by a few influential anthropological texts that analyse environmentalism as a discourse. I detail these commitments in Chapter Two when I present the theoretical background for my use of 'discourse' in this text. Following what can perhaps be seen as an anthropological obsession of critical commentary, I take a critical stance towards many concepts that are used in this text, which I have aslo found to be a necessary (and important) approach in order to analyse the influence of certain discourses, and to present my experiences as accurate as possible. This does not mean that I do away with reality altogether – seeing everything as critique and discourse – but that my experiences are informed and analysed in the most open manner that I am able to command.

I began my fieldwork in early January 2008. I had decided to study what seemed to be an increasing attention given to environmental issues and governance in China, and the possible effect that this attention had on a Chinese rural community. A previous visit to China had provided me with some contacts and a promising field site – a village in

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[1] In Yunnan province, there are 26 officially recognised nationalities, compared to 56 nationwide.

Yunnan province where villagers had recently started planting cash crops in what seemed to be a response to government development and environmental policies. Upon arriving in Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan, I started looking up environmental organisations that where active in the area I was planning to travel to. However, my arrival coincided with one of the most important national holidays in China, the Spring Festival (*chunjie*) – better known in English as Chinese New Year – and efforts to approach various organisations were met with answers such as 'sorry, you have to wait until after *chunjie*'. Furthermore, although I had contacts that could set me up with a translator who commanded local dialect, this translator turned out to be unavailable for most of my fieldwork. I was faced with a dilemma: should I go to the village without translator, or stay in Kunming while attempting to find a different assistant – or even a different approach? I started to interview the leaders of a few environmental NGOs in Kunming, and was subsequently offered a job as a volunteer in EBOR – a Chinese environmental research organisation with headquarters in Kunming. This sealed my fate; studying environmental governance and interests in environmental issues seemed to be something that was well suited for an institutional fieldwork; problems of getting access to a 'locally' grounded understanding, could now be countered by being placed in a middle position as part of an organisation that was engaged in collaborations with both villagers and government officials.

The experience of working in an organisation that was often referred to as an environmental NGO (ENGO), made me have to rethink many assumptions of what an ENGO was, and what it was imagined to be. Stories of the 'relative freedom' of environmental NGOs in China flourish, and are circulated and 'reaffirmed' by scholars, the media, and by many people working in and running Chinese ENGOs. These stories are often backed up by references to the role played by environmental movements in assisting democratic transitions elsewhere in the world (Jancar-Webster 1998). Were EBOR and their projects part of a 'global movement', or was there another way of looking at the work of the organisation? I kept this in mind when analysing fieldwork material and reading texts and documents, trying to develop a critical approach to the study of NGOs while staying as close to my own experiences as possible.

Methodological Approach

The main research methodology used throughout my fieldwork was 'participant observation'. Most of the time allocated for the fieldwork was spent working in EBOR, observing practices at the office, and getting to know the workers and leaders of the organisation. When possible, I followed workers on project trips, and tried to be included in as many activities as possible, including seminars, discussions, report writing, research, teamwork and informal socialising. I had about seven main informants that I socialised with and had discussions with, both at the offices and elsewhere; four of these were workers in the organisation, while three were not. In addition to these 'key informants', whom I also considered my friends, I talked to, and conducted interviews with, a number of people totalling around twenty. Although I did not become especially close friends with these informants, we frequently met in various settings, and they provided me with insights on issues that could be compared to those of my main informants.

A limitation to my selection of informants could be that they were almost exclusively urban residents of Kunming, and most of them also worked in NGOs. This provided me with extensive insight into the interests and actions of NGO workers, but also meant that I did not have much material to compare their experiences with those of individuals who were not NGO workers. This was, however, also a limitation that I actively chose; I wanted to gain intimate knowledge of the lives of NGO workers and knew that this focus would perhaps affect the overall presentation of 'the field'. However, the knowledge that is produced through participant observation is never fully 'objective', something that precludes the possibility of describing the field from a privileged 'outsider' position. In a critique of the often implicit assumptions of the 'objectivity' of participant observation, and the possibility to discover 'secret' knowledge that has been hidden from the ethnographer, Jenkins (1994), has described the anthropological fieldwork as a series of apprenticeships in where the categories and linguistic tools for understanding social events can be gradually acquired by those who take interest, without assuming that the knowledge that is gained constitutes the 'true' knowledge of informants. My focus on the practices of workers in a NGO, and attempts to be included in as many of these practices as possible, could be considered as a form of 'apprenticeship', in where I became more familiar with certain practices at EBOR, such as report-writing, participation in seminars,

and project trips, at the same time as I gained insight into the self-presentations of the workers and leaders of the organisation.

One of the main concerns when attempting to collect data trough participant observation is to get entry into the field site and gain the trust of your informants (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). This includes not only getting to know your informants and letting them get to know you, but also making your intentions clear to the participants of your research in order for them to make a decision whether or not to participate. My introduction to EBOR had come through conducting an interview with the Project Management Director in the organisation where I made my research intentions clear. I also informed all of my main informants and most of my other informants about my research. There were, however, settings in where I did not find it appropriate to introduce myself as a researcher, and where I was not even sure whether or not I was one. These settings included situations where I acted as a volunteer at EBOR, conducting research and project assistance for them, in addition to situations that I had not believed to be important for my research until I started analysing my fieldwork material. In the last chapter of this text, I detail a project trip to a Dulong minority village in North-western Yunnan. Although the observations I did here make out the basis of many of my final arguments, they were made without 'informed consent' in the strictest sense, since I was visiting the community as a volunteer for EBOR. The project manager knew of my research intentions, and I relied on him to inform the local community about my research. However, he was also new to the area, and did not know many of the local people; subsequently, there were a number of people in this setting that were not informed about my research. Bourgois (1990) has pointed out the difficulty inherent in conducting a fieldwork where every statement and observation is based on 'informed consent', seeing this as possibly going against other considerations that fieldworkers have to make, such as building trust, and as far as possible attempt not to interrupt social interaction. Although I do not fully agree with Bourgois' argument, and think that he makes a too-sharp distinction between 'pure ethics' and 'objectivity', I can still relate to these considerations, as they were made by me several times during my fieldwork. I have tried to 'solve' this problem by leaving out descriptions of those people who were not informed about my research, or by simply referring to them as 'informants' or 'people'. This is not an ideal situation, and in subsequent fieldworks I would perhaps do better by

detailing my research intentions to all of my informants where possible, even if this might run the risk of distorting trust or interrupting social settings.

In addition to participant observation, I conducted a number of informal interviews with people who were directly or indirectly involved in the organisation. Many of the central arguments in this text are derived from interview material. Rather than 'taking the place of' participant observation and detailed description, this material is complimentary to it (Bleek, 1987), and perhaps also an invaluable component of studying discourses (Hannerz, 2003). Most of the interviews in my fieldwork, with the exception of two, were conducted in English. Since my informants were almost exclusively university graduates or had a university education, this did not present a problem, as their English in most instances was very good. I never used a professional interpreter for interviews and translations, and relied instead on favours and the kindness of friends who had been in similar research situations and could relate to my difficulties. Although this gave me a sense of being able to assess the accuracy of translations (and contact the translator later for a second check) a problematic aspect of this approach was that my insistence on accuracy and word-for-word translation seemed to irritate my translators, as they after all considered me a friend, not a boss. Consequently, I did not use the same translator more than once.

I tried to make the interview setting as informal as possible, and often met informants at cafés or bars in the city. At the same time, I made an attempt to find places that were not too crowded, and where the setting was quiet and intimate. I had initially decided to record my interviews, but my digital recorder was not of very good quality, and often stalled during interviews; I found it to be more distracting than of any use, and ended up making a point of *not* using the recorder as a signal of informality and trust to my interviewees. This meant that I had to be more vigorously in taking notes, something that I found to work well in setting a slower pace of interviews, which gave me time to reflect on answers and ask follow-up questions in the interviews. Bleek (1987) has made the point that the 'interrogative' setting of most interviews has the potential of producing 'untrue' statements. Although Bleek might be right that statements vary according to the setting in which they are produced, this does not necessarily have to be considered a problem. In my own descriptions, I have sought to include some of the background for

statements made by interviewees, without making a value judgement whether or not something constitutes a 'true' or 'untrue' statement. At the same time, instances where different versions of events was described to me not only had the potential of informing about the relationship between informants and the way they viewed each other, but also made me realise that some issues were, in one way or another, considered 'sensitive' by many informants; in this way they made up a valuable tool for exploring relationships between leaders and workers of EBOR, as well as relationships between NGO staff and government representatives.

Taking a 'discursive approach' was a conscious choice, at the same time as it seemed to be a necessity. In order to understand the relationship between observations, projects, laws, statements, attitudes, collaborations, and power, it seemed invaluable to approach 'the field' in the broadest possible sense. It is with this background that I have chosen to include a number of documents, texts, projects and campaigns in my analysis, while looking at their relationship to people and discourses, and trying to identify possible effects of these relationships. The selection of material for my analysis was not made arbitrarily, and I tried as far as possible to base my selections on events that I had observed, the interests of my informants, as well as general knowledge of the areas that I was interested in – Chinese development and environmentalism. As Neumann (2001) has rightly pointed out, such a selection is not easy to make, and requires a certain amount of 'cultural competency'. As a Master student, I do not claim to hold extensive and intimate knowledge over larger issues and discourses, but I do feel that my selections reflect the interests of many of my informants, and therefore make out a representative selection for the arguments that I make in this text.

Ethical Considerations

Doing fieldwork, and then writing about your experiences, could be seen as a minefield of ethical considerations in where every decision is wrought with dilemmas of betraying trust, countering expectations, and imposing certain representations of events that might very well be contested by other observers. In addition to the ethical considerations presented above, I would like to make two points here.

The first is the dilemma of building trust among a variety of people and in a variety of settings, and then use the information derived from these settings in accounts that supports arguments and builds textual coherence. Here too, ideals about presenting the 'field' as accurate as possible can go against other considerations and the expectations of my informants, who might expect that they and the organisation they work in will be presented favourably. In a fieldwork setting where my informants are largely resource-strong scientists and academics (some of them also anthropologists), my research will be more accessible to them, and therefore open for contestation. Rather than limiting my analysis to events that were considered less 'sensitive' by my informants, I have included many critical interpretations, but have also chosen to share my text with informants, and ask them for comments and suggestions. In this way, although still remaining critical, my text seeks not to impose *one* representation of the 'truth' of certain events and observations. Regarding the Dulong community mentioned above, I did not have the possibility to share my research with them, and this perhaps makes out a weakness in my research.

Representations of 'others' will always be present in the text. I have not found a writing strategy that would do with this altogether, but I have sought to reflect over my choices of writing style, especially regarding the use of ethnographic present. Some have pointed to the way anthropologists use ethnographic present as an outdated mode of description that 'captures' experiences in time and space, and in some way makes the people that are described 'timeless'; on the other hand, not using ethnographic present, might suggest that events 'belong' to the past, and are only relevant to the present through the interest of anthropologists (Hastrup 1990; Tsing 1993). In this text, I use present tense when describing events that I attended, and that were still part of ongoing projects at the time I left; I use preterit tense when detailing general observations and interviews, in order to reflect the limited scope of these actions and observations, without thereby rendering them to 'the past'. This might not be a perfect 'solution' to complex questions of representation, but it is a sincere attempt to address some of these questions.

A second consideration relates to the dangers inherent in making observations of certain practices and projects publicly accessible, also for people and institutions that might hold these observations against some of my informants. Some of the issues that I discuss in

this text can be regarded 'politically sensitive issues', and therefore subject to a certain degree of control by Chinese government officials and agencies. From the start of my fieldwork in EBOR, I made a promise to its leaders to keep the identity of the organisation anonymous, even though they did not ask me to do so. Additionally, to protect my informants, the names of people in this text are all made up, as well as the names of other local organisations that EBOR cooperated with. This is done in an attempt to describe observations as accurate as possible, while at the same time not betraying the trust given to me by my informants.

Structure of the Text

I have tried to arrange the chapters in this text around a central argument, while still staying true to the order in which I encountered them. In this way, I hope to engage the reader in a mutual 'discovery' of the field; that is, I hope that the arguments that I present in the text are made more clear by showing how they arrived to me while interacting with people and discourses in the field.

Chapter One details the theoretical and conceptual background for the arguments made in the following text. I make an attempt to critically analyse theoretical discussions and the 'definition' of several key concepts, by making use of insights from other anthropological texts. Chapter Two begins with a short description of the Chinese governmental administrative system, and provides some background for legislations of the registration of NGOs in China. I follow by introducing EBOR, detailing their history, organisational structure, leaders and programmes. Throughout the rest of the chapter, I introduce a few of the workers in the organisation and look at some of the procedures at the office, reflecting upon the relationship between workers, the organisation, government agencies and national regulations. In Chapter Three, I describe the visit of a representative from an international donor organisation to the offices of EBOR. I look at how this visit can be considered part of a 'disciplining practice' by international donors, in where they seek to further their own procedures and agendas through the act of providing funding. I argue that this disciplining practice has the potential of affecting both the donor *and* the receiver of the grant, and that the establishment of such a power relationship might be part of the reason why grants are not readily accessible to everyone, and require a certain amount of specialised knowledge in order to access. Chapter Four is

centred on what I identify as a dominant discourse in national development efforts in China. I detail how discussions on development and environment have come to be informed by a discourse of 'science', and how this make out a large part of policymaking in China, exemplified by the concept of 'scientific development'. I look at some of the effects of the official promotion of the 'scientific development' concept – focusing specifically on a 'tree-planting scheme' in Kunming city – and describe how people in EBOR reflect upon these effects. In Chapter Five, I look more specifically on one of the projects undertaken at EBOR. I present a case taken from a project trip that I participated in together with a project manager from the organisation, and look at how this project might reflect many of the themes that have been discussed earlier in the text. In the Conclusion, I go back to the discussion on NGOs and civil society from the start of the text, examining it in light of the example presented in Chapter Five.

I like to make clear that many of my arguments could not have been developed had it not been for the benefit of hindsight; the reader should be aware that 'the field' is not, and never will be, a bounded entity fixed in time and space (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992). With this in mind, 'the field' becomes just as much the desk(s) where this text was written up, the libraries that were consulted, resource sites on the Internet, as well as discussions with lecturers and fellow students (Des Chene, 1997; Hannerz, 2003; Marcus, 2008). These 'sites' have all assisted in the development of this final text, and should be accorded on the same level as the data collected through participant observation and interviews.

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Theory and Background

My decision to study an NGO came partly as a response to the proliferation of articles and texts concerned with studying and understanding the 'phenomenon' of NGOs that have occurred since the 1990's. Many of these texts have focused on environmental NGOs and their international involvement in social movements, as well as in creating a 'global civil society' (Kaldor 2003). My interest was spurred by a previous university exchange to the country, coupled with an interest in the way many environmental NGOs in China seemed to be regarded, either as a 'challenge' to the Central Government, or as 'embedded' in the political structure of China. Many of these various 'representations' of NGOs seemed to be connected to a certain agenda of documenting 'change' (or the lack of change), and promoting ideologies of 'democracy' and 'human rights', rather than presenting a detailed description of NGO practices and effects.

In this chapter, I take a look at some concepts and theoretical approaches that provide the background for many of my arguments in the following text. Instead of introducing concepts and theories as coherent wholes, I have chosen to focus on some specific approaches to them, in order to better present aspects that might be useful for my own engagement with the same concepts and theories. Instead of separating 'theory' and 'ethnography' then, I look at how they are both informed by one another, and how this understanding, in turn, might lead to a better analysis. This approach comes close to what Knauft (2006) has described as a tendency for 'mid-range articulations' in anthropological writing, which he describes as a promising starting point for critical engagement with theory and cross-disciplinary critique.

State and Civil Society

By focusing on a non-governmental organisation, one enters a field of study in where state and society are sometimes seen as distinct spheres engaging in some sort of

competition with one another. As I argue in the following, this kind of presentation runs the risk of simplifying and distorting many of the interactions between people, organisations, and state actors, and conflates the *experience* of these interactions with the *imagination* of them (Anderson, 1991). In the following I look at some anthropological analyses of 'the state' and 'civil society' in order to present a more critical view on these 'entities' and the relationship between them.

The State in Anthropology

Anthropological engagements with the state have often tended to come as a critique from the periphery. This peripheral engagement with the state has its background in the subjects that anthropologists have tended to study: nomads and people on the 'frontier' (Borneman, 2001). Notwithstanding this historical bias, there have been several attempts by anthropologists to approach the state in different ways. Many of them have sought to deconstruct the conception of the state as *an entity*, exercising *its* will on *its* subjects, and have tended to be inspired by foucaultian notions of *governmentality* and a careful attention to institutions (Borneman, 2001). In this way, anthropologists have been less concerned with *defining* the state, than to analyse how the idea of the state produces real effects on individuals (Foucault, 1991) and to stress the fact that the state is only one of many ways – and a fairly recent one at that – of organising society (Gupta, 1992).

Foucault has been influential in informing the deconstructivist approach that many anthropologists have taken towards 'the state' (Sharma and Gupta 2006); this is especially true with regard to the notion of governmentality. In a lecture from 1978, Foucault accords governmentalityto a set of practices by the (neoliberal) state aimed at controlling people within national territories through disciplinary institutions and the promotion of specific forms of knowledge (Foucault, 1991). For Foucault, governmentality, or governmental rationality (Gordon 1991), signified a change in power relations, from the sovereign ruler of the Middle Ages, to the administrative state of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and, finally, to the neoliberal 'state of government', focused on governing a 'population' through apparatuses of security (ibid.: 220). Governmentality can be seen as an attempt of bringing together a 'microphysics of power', identified by Foucault (1977) in *Discipline and Punish*, and a 'macrophysics of power', in order to describe how individual lives and 'how to live' had come to be seen as

a 'problem' for the state apparatus trough the identification and articulation of a 'population' (Gordon, 1991: 4-5). For Foucault, the focus is not so much to describe how the state 'imposes' their practices on individuals, as to investigate the 'power relationship' that exists between the actions of individuals, and the attempt by the state to 'conduct' this action; that is, state power does not constitute a closed regime, but an 'open ended' game where both state actors and individual citizens have 'agency' (ibid.: 7).

Although Foucault can be criticised for basing his theories and analyses on mostly European historical events and societies, his ideas have increasingly been taken up by anthropologists interested in analysing the idea of the nation state and how it is understood in different societies (Sharma and Gupta, 2006). Following many of the ideas of Foucault on State and government, Scott (1998) has made an account for the way modern 'statecraft' has come about a through a series of government-led planning efforts, directed at making the populace of the state *legible*. Scott attributes these planning efforts to what he calls the 'high-modernist ideology' – an ideology based on an unfettered belief in scientific and technical rationality and simplification (1998: 4). He argues that the high-modernist simplification of government planning efforts is analogous to the growth of scientific forestry in Europe in the late 19th century; both practices had at its core the will to make its 'objects' (people and trees, respectively) *intelligible* and make them 'fit' into centralised plans. Especially important for the state, then, was the administrative simplification of nature, space, and people. *Nature*, through science; *space* through maps, city plans, and legislation such as land tenure; and *people* through all of the simplifications above, as well as more directly through standardised language, inherited patronyms, and statistical methods making people visible and identifiable as a 'population' (ibid.). Scott does not claim to make a 'blanket case' against high-modernist planning, nor bureaucracy in general; however, he stresses that a high-modernist ideology combined with authoritarian state power can create disastrous effects, due to a tendency to use planning and design in an attempt to create social order (1998: 6). Although Scott's presentation of the state seems to follow some of the ideas of Foucault when it comes to the need for neoliberal state systems to identify and control a population, he still seems to ignore some on Foucault's insights on 'governmentality', when he presents the state as a unitary actor, and people as either being dominated by the

state, or seeking resistance through alternative forms of knowledge. Thus, Scott can be seen as coming dangerously close to the simplifying gaze that he seeks to critique.

As an extension of the study of the nation state, many contemporary anthropological approaches to the state have sought to analyse the state in relation to transnational networks, which seemingly challenge state legitimacy. For example, Gupta and Ferguson (2002) have called for an attention to *governmentality* as it exists amongst both state and non-state actors; they maintain that state power might not have diminished when confronted by transnational institutions, corporations and alliances, but rather that state power and state institutions have been *transformed* in ways that need to be examined (ibid.). Their focus on transnational governmentality includes not only transnational corporations and global institutions such as WTO and IMF, but also alliances between grassroots actors and non-governmental organisations (ibid.: 990).

Gupta and Ferguson argue that one of the effects of transnational governmentality has been the strengthening of bureaucracy in wider parts of society. In "The Anti-Politics Machine," Ferguson (1994) focuses specifically on this aspect of 'transnational governmentality'; trough a focus on the 'development' industry and the effects produced by a development project in Lesotho, Ferguson shows how a failed development project may have been unsuccessful in reaching the goals that were set for the project, but at the same time proved successful in expanding bureaucratic power to the periphery. Ferguson do not present the effects of development projects as necessarily being part of an pre-defined scheme or plan issued by *one* actor, be it a state apparatus or a trans-national funding agency; rather, he concludes that these effects often come about as unintended consequences – a sort of by-product of bureaucratic rationality that is often under-communicated in various representations of the same development projects. Bureaucratic power, in Ferguson's account, is not merely an extension of state power, but something that takes on a life of its own, "a characteristic mode of exercise of power, a mode of power that relies on state institutions, but exceeds them" (1994: 273).

The insights of Foucault on the emergence of forms of 'governmentality' has inspired many anthropologists to approach the study of the state by focusing on local understandings of the state and various reactions to projects and programmes by

bureaucrats and so-called 'state actors'. Although some of these approaches might come close to a reification of the state itself (as with Scott (1998)), or reflect a negative view on bureaucratic power (Ferguson 1994), they might still be useful as examples of different ways of theorising relationships between people and state interventions. Where Scott (1998), following Foucault (1977, 1991), provides historical background for the bureaucratisation of the state, Ferguson provides a background for investigating bureaucratic encounters in development projects, while Gupta and Ferguson seeks to expand the notion of governmentality to account for the actions of a range of non-state actors. Thus, they all serve as useful insights into the relationship between the idea of the state and bureaucratic practices, and into the power relationships that exist between local people and transnational networks and institutions, without necessarily having to assume the existence of *one* entity called 'the state'.

Civil Society

Related to the epistemology of 'the state', is the idea of 'civil society', often envisioned as a separate entity in opposition to the state. As adherents to the tradition of de Tocqueville, many contemporary scholars focus on the *separation* of civil society from the state, presenting civil society as an arena for mobilising people against suppressive state powers (Hann 1996, Islamoglu 2001). In these representations, 'the state' and 'civil society' is presented as having waxed and waned in getting the upper hand of a perceived power struggle (Islamoglu 2001). I will not attempt to reproduce such a narrative here; rather I take a critical approach to these representations of 'civil society', feeling that, more often than not, separating 'civil society' from 'the state' seems to serve the convenient purpose of explaining resistance to 'totalitarian' states and the global spread of 'universal' democratic values (Hann 1996).

'Civil society' has been discussed in a Chinese context by domestic and foreign scholars alike. According to Yang and Calhoun (2008), the scholarly debate on civil society in China gained impetus in the early 1990s, partly as an attempt to understand the student movement in 1989, which lead to violent police and military action against student protesters on Tiananmen Square. A symposium entitled "'Public Sphere'/'Civil Society' in China?" was held in Montreal in October 1992 and later developed into a special issue of the publication *Modern China*. These approaches have largely been informed by a view

on civil society as discussed above: student protesters on Tiananmen have been described as the leaders of a social movement assisting in the 'opening up' of Chinese civil society which, in turn, is perceived as being controlled by an all-encompassing totalitarian regime based in the Chinese Communist Party (Ma, 2002).

The Eurocentric historical baggage and essentialist tendencies inherent in the concept of civil society, has led it to be criticised by many anthropologists. Anthropologists have generally approached civil society in a more critical manner, stressing the heritage of the concept as it grew out of a European experience of statehood and power struggles between competing elites (see Hann and Dunn, 1996). Additionally, an anthropological approach has tended to challenge the notion of civil society as a distinct sphere of society that encompasses the shared values and beliefs between members, by instead focusing on everyday social practices and power relations as well as factors that constrain and influence shared moral beliefs and ideologies (ibid.). Flower and Leonard, when detailing their experiences of working in an international non-governmental organisation in the countryside of Sichuan, China, argue that:

> [T]he analysis of Chinese civil society should proceed not from a classical standard of competing state/society interests but from the investigation of the particular form of the interactions between the state and nominally non-state organisations, to see how power is negotiated and initiative channelled. (1996: 201).

This, then, provides a starting point for my own approach to civil society in China. Instead of seeking to identify a separate 'sphere' of channelled social resistance, I look more closely on some of the interaction between state bureaucrats and nongovernmental organisations, in an attempt to understand the relationship between these different actors, and how they are perceived in a Chinese context.

Global Civil Society, Social Movements and NGOs

Following a number of revolutions in Eastern Europe in late 1980's several former socialist states were provided with new governments who claimed to represent the people through multiparty elections and a shift to market oriented economies (Verdery, 1991).

Many observers have taken this 'shift' as a success of what has been perceived as a transnational or global civil society, inducing people to react against repressive state powers, and take the Eastern European experience as a model for how civil society can be organised in other parts of the world (see e.g. Kaldor, 2003). The perceived spread of a 'global civil society' is interpreted by many to represent a new 'social movement', where membership is based on shared values and beliefs, such as a 'democratic' ideology and environmental ethics (Jancar-Webster, 1998). 'Social movements', like the idea of a 'global civil society', are based upon the general idea that they constitute a critical component in the creation of social change (Chazel, 2001). Social movements are also seen as being connected to a number of voluntary groups and organisations, with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) receiving the highest attention in this regard (Fisher, 1997). The link between 'global civil society', 'social movements' and 'NGOs' are perhaps not surprising, but still constitute a problem when seeking to address the many objects and agendas that people and organisations included in these categories engage in.

NGOs and Anthropology

At least since the involvement of a high number of NGOs in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development[2] in Rio in 1992, scholars have been interested in studying, defining and theorising NGOs (Fisher, 1997). The term non-governmental organisation, however, existed long before this time, the term first being used officially in article 10 of the United Nations Charter established in 1945, where it was used mostly to signify international voluntary organisations that could be used as consultants for the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (Willetts, 1996). Since then, the term has increasingly taken on new meanings and has been used to identify a number of organisations and groups engaged in a variety of activities (Fisher, 1997)

Anthropologists have just recently started to devote their attention to non-governmental organisations. According to Brosius (1999), anthropologists have become interested in studying NGOs partly as a response to the increased presence of these organisations in areas where anthropologists have done their fieldwork. This does not explain, however, why anthropologists did not begin studying NGOs earlier. Maybe the reason has been

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[2] Also known as the Rio Earth Summit.

that political scientists, economists and development planners early on claimed the 'phenomenon' as part of their field; another reason could be the involvement of many anthropologists in NGOs as 'development specialists', and a lingering uneasiness to deal with issues reflecting too sharply the colonial legacy of the discipline (Escobar, 1991).

Fisher (1997) represents a notable exception to this lack of attention. In an article entitled, "Doing good? The politics and antipolitics of NGO practices," he gives an overview of the many studies made on NGOs, and outline their relevance for anthropology. According to Fisher, the label 'NGO' has proven notoriously hard to define. Something that, in turn, has led to the identification of a multitude of different sub-categories of NGOs, including international NGOs (INGOS), government-organised NGOs (GONGOS), donor organised NGOs (DONGOS) and a number of other acronyms attempting to encapsulate the increased diversification and specialisation between NGOs (1997: 448). A related problem of studying NGOs, then, is that they have proliferated, taken on new increasingly new functions, and started to engage in formal and informal linkages between each other as well as with a number of different state and non-state actors (ibid.). Fisher concludes that the contribution of anthropology to the study of NGOs might come from an attempt to deconstruct the 'phenomenon' itself, by not taking for granted that 'NGOs' make up one coherent whole. According to Fisher, paying attention to the many informal linkages between NGOs and also the way NGOs invariably are defined as, or define themselves as NGOs, might prove fruitful in providing a better understanding of the many different organisations labelled as NGOs. In this also lies a fruitful approach to critically examining some 'truths' about NGOs that have recently surfaced, such as descriptions of the tendency for NGOs to "drift from participatory to oligarchic political structures" (Fisher, 1997: 456). Instead of taking an approach in where NGOs are defined as *one* entity, seeking *one* goal, Fisher claims that we might be better off looking at the interests of NGOs as reflecting a processual society in where alliances and definitions constantly change (ibid.).

It might be appropriate here to recall a general definition of NGOs as 'legal entities' freed from state control; a defining feature of an NGO in this view, is that they are formally registered, thereby constituting a *legitimate* alternative to state power (Lister, 2003). This also constitutes some of the problems that scholars have when trying to 'fit' the

phenomenon in to categories, such as 'social movements' and 'civil society': NGOs are subjected to national laws, and their registration is secured by national bureaucratic institutions. To Kaldor (2003), NGOs represent a 'taming' of the social movements that were active in socialist Eastern Europe through official institutionalisation and registration. Although this view in itself runs the risk of simplifying the multitude of entities defining themselves as NGOs in the last twenty years (and assumes a relationship between social movements and NGOs), it still offers some insights not provided by many other approaches, namely that NGOs have received attention also from government actors interested in regulating the basis for popular association within and between national territories. This, then, can serve as a backdrop to the ways that NGOs are imagined in a Chinese context.

The Concept of NGO in China: 'Social Organisations'

When concepts such as 'non-governmental' are translated into different languages and cultural contexts, various interpretations might arise from the translation – interpretations that, although they are seen as connected to the original concept, in fact might prove to be very different from it (Li, 2000). Saich argues that the phrase non-governmental (*fei zhengfu*) in Chinese, might be taken to suggest an anti-governmental attitude, owing to the translation of the term having similarities with other concepts such as *wu zhengfu* – a word that literally means 'no government', implying anarchism, and *fan zhengfu* – meaning 'anti-government' (2000: 124). This seems to be part of the reason why the Chinese government do not use the term non-governmental officially in Chinese, but prefer to use the terms 'social organisation' (*shehui tuanti*) and 'non-profit organisation' (*fei yingli zuzhi*) (Saich, 2000; Yang, 2005). Another reason, as Ma (2002) has pointed out, can be that *shehui tuanti* has been used for a long time in China to refer to a number of different organisation that might or might not have a close relationship with the government administration structure. The use of this term by the Chinese government can also be seen as a way for them to *domesticate* the concept of NGO so that it becomes associated with an already established concept that does not include assumptions about competing interests with state institutions, while at the same time retaining the link to the globally circulating NGO concept.

The use of the term 'NGO', however, seems to be increasing in China. A national-level research centre devoted to the study of NGOs, uses 'NGO' in its title (Saich 2000); furthermore, the Chinese president Hu Jintao, in a speech given at the National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2007, has been cited to mention the importance of 'non-governmental support' for the Chinese government, while at the same time using the Chinese concept of 'social organisation' to describe the organisations that were intended to provide this 'support' (Hu, 2007). Although the use of NGO seems to be increasing in China, there also seems to be a division between the use of terms in Chinese presentations, where 'social organisation', or even 'civil society organisation' (*minjian zuzhi*) is preferred, and English presentations, where NGO is used together with other terms, such as for example 'non-profit organisations'. As we will see in chapter one in the case of EBOR, several different terms can be used at once to refer to an organisation in an attempt to avoid association with one specific term, and thereby be in a good position to build many alliances.

Environmental NGOs in China: Part of a Social Movement?

A number of scholars have pointed to Environmental NGOs (ENGO) as a 'special case' among the many non-governmental organisations that have emerged in China since the 1990s (Ho, 2008). The efforts of some Chinese ENGOs in uncovering and reporting on environmental problems and industrial pollution has by many scholars been considered an important influence for the recent policy change towards stricter environmental regulations and legislation in China, as well as the increased status given to environmental protection agencies in China since the late 1990's[3] (Yang, 2005). This presentation follows a more general tendency by social theorists to slot 'environmentalism' in to the category of social movements or as part of a 'global civil society'. ENGOs in China can be seen to 'conform' to the idea of what NGOs as part of a *social movement* to bring about change in society.

This entails a rather powerful rhetoric for Environmental NGOs in China, since they are able to claim international support for the causes they are advocating for. Organisations

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[3] One often cited example of the heightened importance of environmental protection in China, is the elevation of the status of the State Environmental Protection Agency in 1998, to that of a Ministry – the highest-level agency body in the administration structure. This increased the influence of the agency, but its influence has still been limited in some areas, due to low funding and lack of resources (Ru and Ortolano 2008).

successful in promoting themselves as ENGOs, can position themselves as 'agents for change' in addressing what have been perceived as global environmental problems. Although many of these environmental problems are undoubtedly real and much of the responses to them sincere, this rhetoric have given ENGOs a global legitimacy and claims of belonging to a 'global civil society', which increases likeability for support and funding. Of course, the category of ENGO contains a number of organisations that are genuinely concerned about the environment and are fervent in addressing problems caused by pollution, increased consumption, extinction of species of plants and animals, and so on. At the same time, slotting a number of organisations into the same category makes it difficult to distinguish between organisations that are addressing real problems and those who do not; additionally, the perceived 'global character' of such organisations might distort many other issues and agendas that Chinese ENGOs pursue, which are not seen as 'important' globally.

Addressing 'The Global'

What is 'the globe'? Ingold (1993) has made the argument that the image of the world as a 'globe' constitutes a specific worldview rooted in European colonialism and science. Contrasting this worldview with that of the world consisting of a number of spheres – an idea that according to Ingold has historically been more prominent and widespread than the globe, not only in European thought, but also among non-European societies – Ingold shows that recent scientific Western imaginations of the world has led to a 'detachment' of humans from 'the globe'; humans are no longer seen as part of the environment, but as observers of it (1993: 209). Ingold's critique of the 'the globe' as a concept can be taken further by focusing on recent ways that the globe and the global is imagined and represented in ideas about 'globalisation'.

Globalisation was for some time envisioned as a process that would make the world more streamlined: local differences would give way to global standards, and time and distance would become irrelevant. Yet, differences have continued to hold importance for most people, and, if anything, are often highlighted by increased global interconnections. Some scholars have sought to address these observations through focusing on changes in centre-periphery relations (Hannerz, 1989), and the way global ideas seem to have been appropriated and localised (Giddens, 2000). Others have sought

to identify arenas for contestation and convergence, for example Appadurai (1996) who have identified a number of global 'scapes', which, according to him, serve as spaces for disjuncture and interconnections of flows of ideas, people and goods. Many of these approaches, however, seem to infer that there is indeed something that can be identified as 'global', to which other processes can be compared. Even though such an approach has been, and might continue to be, productive, it still seems to pose some limitations to the ability to analyse individual experiences of 'the global' (Ong & Collier, 2005).

In addressing the global, I find Tsing's (2000) approach useful, as she makes an effort to address the global in 'its' making, while at the same time attempting to refrain from an identification of the global 'itself'. Focusing on aspects of presentations of the global in various projects, she shows that globalisation is not a single, directed process, but a multitude of contested opinions and projects that each make their own claim to 'globality' (2000: 23). Tsing criticises the 'futurism' that many social scientist divulge when trying to analyse global events – a futurism that can also be applied to the way many scholars have tried to represent 'global' aspects of 'civil society', 'social movements' and 'NGOs' – and suggests that we might be better informed by looking at how 'the global' and 'globalisation' exist as projects and imaginations, promoted and experienced by informants as well as scholars and other observers. This approach can help us avoid taking for granted that globalization is a unidirectional process (leading to either progress or destruction, depending on where you stand), or the idea that people are necessarily *resisting* or *localising* global flows, trends or forces. Instead, according to Tsing, we are imagining and making 'globality' through projects, encounters and collaborations, and it is this imagination that makes globalisation into a powerful discourse for those who are able to engage in it (2000, 2005, 2008).

Discourse

'Discourse' encompasses a wide variety of definitions and uses, some of which are overlapping, while others can be said to stand in contrast to one another (Mills, 2001). Discourse is both a concept used in linguistics, as well as constituting an interdisciplinary field, where the focus is not only on text and utterances in isolation, but also on discourse as a social practice (Fairclough, 1992).

According to Mills, "[discourse] has perhaps the widest range of possible significations of any term in literacy and cultural theory and yet is often the term within theoretical texts which is least defined" (2001: 1) This statement confirms my own observations and frustrations when reading anthropological and other academic writings and articles where the term discourse is used; one is seldom presented with a clear definition (or even an explanation) of the authors' understanding of 'discourse'. In the following, then, I first provide a short background to the concept of 'discourse' as it seems to be understood by many contemporary social scientists, before I go on to describe in more detail the way a few anthropologists have approached 'discourse' in their work.

Michel Foucault is often seen as one of the major academics that have influenced and inspired the use of the term 'discourse' in the social sciences; even so, he did not himself claim to have developed a coherent theory of the concept. In "The Archaeology of Knowledge" he writes:

> [I]nstead of gradually reducing the sometimes fluctuating meaning of the word 'discourse', I believe that I have in fact added to its meanings: treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements
>
> (Mills, 2004: 6, cf. Foucault, 1972)

According to Mills, the quote by Foucault presented above accounts for many of the ways in which 'discourse' has been used by theorists and academics inspired by his work. She argues that it is especially the last two 'definitions' given by Foucault that have become most used by scholars seeking to identify and analyse particular discourses. A discourse as an 'individualizable groups of statements' refers to statements that can be *identified* as belonging to a larger 'body' of statements; a discourses as 'a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements' refers to the rules and institutions producing and regulating certain utterances and statements (Mills, 2004: 6). For Foucault, 'statements' not only refers to speech acts, but to actions and practices that are in some way institutionalised (Mills, 2004; Neumann, 2001). It has been regarded as one of the most valuable contributions of Foucault to the study of discourse that he has

helped put the focus on statements and discourses as social practice and institutionalised forms of power (Mills, 2004). At the same time, identifying and describing discursive practices and statements have arguably been one of the most difficult undertakings for social scientists, and this aspect of discourse analysis is not extensively described by Foucault (Neumann, 2001).

Dove and Carpenter (2008) single out Foucault as the main influence of the 'discursive trend' in environmental anthropology, summarising his influence in this way:

> In Foucault's work, discourse defines ways of speaking and thinking about something (i.e., knowledge), but also ways of practicing and acting (and in fact the bulk of his work, especially his later work, concerned practices). Discourse is always political in Foucault, a "discursive regime. This regime governs truth …"
>
> <div align="right">Dove and Carpenter (2008: 49)</div>

According to Dove and Carpenter, a focus on 'discursive regimes' makes it possible to identify how statements and actions that are presented as being 'neutral' in fact often reflect a power relationship that affect the behaviours of the dominant actor as well as the dominated. A 'discursive regime' is also a regime for the production and maintenance of 'truth', and for the governance of 'true statements'. As Foucault states, "truth isn't outside of power, or lacking in power;" rather, he sees truth as intimately related to power, through 'regimes of truth' applicable to all societies and subject to institutional control as well as social confrontation (1994: 131). Thus, Foucault's view on 'power' differs from many other views that take power as the domination over 'the dominated', and the opposition to this power as 'resistance' (…). Instead, Foucault views both power and resistance as belonging to the same general discourse; power does not exist *outside of* the discourse, but is produced within it, all the same time as *effects* are also produced within discourses (Neumann, 2001).

Another influential approach taken by Foucault, is his insistence that we should see discourses not merely as a set of statements and signs that designate things, but rather as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (1972: 49). Seen in

this way, discourses as groups of textual and oral statements, as well as actions and practices, *produce* the basis for their own *reproduction* through repetition of statements and the institutionalisation of certain practices. In being productive and reproductive, it seems clear that is discourses produce *effects* that might be observable and possible to analyse. One way of studying discourses, then, is by looking at the *effects* that institutionalised discursive practices might have on individuals and groups within a society, how these individuals perceive what is 'true' and what is not, and how they relate to dominant discourses through certain practices. Although this is the approach taken by many anthropologists, it is also one of the least clearly defined aspects of analysing discourses (Neumann, 2001: 82-83).

The difficulty of *situating* discourses in social practices has been regarded as a problematic aspect of Foucault's approach to discourse (Fairclough, 1992; Neumann 2001). That is, how do people regularly evoke discourses? And, how can we observe the effects of discourses in a social setting? Neumann (2001) has sought to overcome these problems by focusing on a specific institution, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (UD), and the work put into upholding what he has termed the 'speech discourse' (*talediskursen*) within this institution. By focussing on the procedures and conventions that have become associated with the practice of writing and editing speeches within the institutional boundaries of UD, Neumann manages to limit his discourse analysis to a few central elements of the discursive practices within the ministry. This, in turn, makes it possible to address change (or lack of change) over time, the relationship between people (employees in UD) and discourses, the possible effects of discursive practices on events happening outside of the institution, and the possibility of situating the discourse within other, more dominant discourses (2001:133-165). One critique of this approach could be that the discursive boundaries are not set by the discourse itself, but by the analyst seeking to make the discourse 'manageable' in an academic text. However, as Neumann points out, it is practically impossible to 'include everything' in a discourse analysis, and therefore it is important to make a ('culturally competent') decision to limit the scope of the objects of analysis (2001: 54-55). It is not always possible, however, to limit the analysis to the degree that Neumann has done. Often the object of study is not a specific institution or 'genre', but individuals that might have different

understandings of, and position themselves differently in relation to, various discourses.

Where to Begin?

Faced with a multitude of definitions and approaches to 'discourse', at least two central problems arise for the researcher attempting to do a discursive analysis: which approach do you take, and where do you start? My approach has been to go back to what made me interested in discourses in the first place: a few influential anthropological texts that treat 'environmentalism' and 'development' as discourses. In the following, I look at the way these texts treat discourse, and try to identify some concepts that can be used to explore a more general discursive approach. I conclude by pointing out the potential usefulness of these approaches to my own work.

Kay Milton (1996), in her book "Environmentalism and Cultural Theory: Exploring the role of anthropology in environmental discourse," can be seen to have influenced the way environmentalism is regarded in anthropology. In her book, Milton criticises the ways that 'environmentalism' has come to be conceptualised by many social theorists. She shows how environmentalism has come to be places in different categories, such as 'political ideology' and 'social movements' and make the argument that the reason for these associations have more to do with a central theoretical problem of fitting 'new' objects in to familiar 'categories', than with a critical examination of the object (environmentalism) itself. Instead, she argues that environmentalism is best seen as a trans-cultural discourse that flows within "a global network of communication" (ibid.: 78).

Milton presents two ways of approaching this trans-cultural discourse. First, as "a field characterized by its own linguistic conventions which both draws on and generates a distinctive way of understanding the world," and second, as an "area of communication defined purely by its subject matter" (ibid.: 170). I find the first approach taken by Milton to be the most useful for my own work. In this sense, environmentalism is a field that can be identified by certain linguistic regularities, and which also generates knowledge of, and 'truths' about, the world. This approach is also the one that comes closest to the

approach taken by Foucault (1972, 1994). According to Milton, one of the contributions that anthropologists can make to environmental discourses is to criticise widely held 'myths' inherent in these discourses. One of these myths, "the myth of primitive ecological wisdom," Milton argues, has been evoked by environmentalists as a response to what has been framed as the destructive forces of industrialism in 'modern' societies (1996: 109). Milton goes on to show how the dichotomisation between 'ecological wisdom' and 'modern destruction' becomes problematic when one takes into account how 'modern' societies might engage in activities that are not environmentally destructive, or how 'indigenous' practices and knowledge systems might also have potentially destructive forces (such as the potlatch ritual of the Kwakiutl and the practice of 'wasting' yams in the Trobriand islands) (ibid.: 139). The myth, however, is regularly evoked by environmentalists for example through environmental campaign such as the case of the Penan campaign, studied extensively by Peter J. Brosius (in, for example: 1997,1999, 2003). The approach make it possible to analyse actions and statements in regard to power relations and knowledge, not taking for granted that environmentalism representation of 'noble savages' are more 'true' than other representations, nor accept claims from social scientists that environmentalists and environmental NGOs necessarily are part of wider social movements.

While Milton has been influential in identifying environmentalism as a discourse and in presenting the contribution from anthropology to environmental discourses as 'cultural critique', there are still some limitations to her approach. She seems to be overtly focused on the *linguistic* elements of environmental discourse, and therefore underplays the role of other types of statements, such as international environmental projects and their effect on local communities. Also, Milton is first and foremost interested in environmentalism as a discourse on the human protection of the environment, thereby missing out on other agendas in environmental discourses, as well as many of the unintended consequences that can arise from institutional engagement with environmentalism and development.

Peter J. Brosius (1999) presents a view of environmental discourse that focus both on the unintended consequences of environmentalist engagements, and also on how discourses change over time and are accommodated into other, more dominant discourses and institutions. Brosius has followed an international environmental campaign that started

in 1978, aimed at stopping the logging of tropical rainforests in Sarawak, Malaysia. In numerous articles, he has described how Northern environmentalists have been involved in the campaign on the side of the Eastern Penan, a local community of hunter-gatherers that live in the area affected by the logging (see Brosius 1997, 1999, 2003). One of Brosius' concerns has been the representation of the Penan in environmental discourses, where they are often presented as 'ecologically noble savages'. In this way, he follows Milton in doing the anthropology of environmentalism as a 'cultural critique'. But more than that, Brosius is interested in the ways the Sarawak campaign, and discourses surrounding the campaign, have changed and become institutionalised over time (1999). He presents the case of how discourses concerning the 'sustainable' management of the rainforest was appropriated by the Malaysian government and made into a case of timber certification – thereby shifting the contours of the discourse from a moral and political domain, towards bureaucratisation and managerialism (ibid.). Here, he is interested in the power relationships that are inherent in environmental discourses, where the definition of 'truth', that is, the power to represent 'truth', becomes inscribed in official institutions, such as the Malaysian government and the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO). Brosius' analysis of the Penan campaign builds on Foucault's notions of 'governmentality', Scott's account of the way states seek to make society legible, and Ferguson's "anti-politics machine," while seeking to tie these approaches together in a description of how large trans-national (environmental) institutions have come to take over environmental agendas and adopt an environmental rhetoric, at the same time as they displace moral issues in international discourses (ibid.: 50-51).

Collaboration, Translation and Mobilisation

Brosius' account of the effects of an environmental discourse in Malaysia paints a rather bleak picture of the possibilities for local people to engage in environmental discourses on their own terms (when faced with dominant institutionalised discourses). A more optimistic view on the *possibilities* inherent in environmental discourses for the engagement of local people can be drawn from some scholars focusing on *collaboration* (Dove and Carpenter, 2008). A focus on 'collaboration' is taken by many scholars attempting to analyse the relationship between local communities and powerful actors external to these communities, while at the same time not taking for granted that this relationship is characterised by 'resistance' to dominant discourses (Dove, 2006).

Collaboration has, according to Dove, come about as a critique of a focus on 'participation' in international development practices, and might be seen as a way of looking for alternatives by describing the agency of local people within these same discourses (ibid.: 10-11). An influential anthropologist in this approach is Tsing (2008), who focuses on the collaboration between different actors in the Indonesian rainforest and the possibilities that environmental and development discourses can afford to those different actors, including local people. Tsing, like Brosius, agrees that there are unequal distributions of access to discourses, but upholds that this inequality also opens up for the possibility of agency for people who are marginalised. She shows how some tribal elders in the Indonesian rainforest are able to successfully evoke their double-role in environmental discourses (as noble savages *and* as backwards 'hillbillies') to create a "field of attraction," and communicate a *desire* for development that make them into both national actors as well as global collaborators to development and environmental organisations and institutions (Dove & Carpenter, 2008: 52).

One of the possibilities for collaboration, according to Tsing (2000), lies in the translation of certain concepts into new settings, and the effective mobilisation of these concepts by local groups and organisations. This translation of concepts becomes powerful only when concepts are reinterpreted in a new setting, *while at the same time* retaining identification with their prior setting (Dove et al., 2003: 20). Li has shown how translation and mobilisation of 'indigenous knowledge' have constituted a possibility for local environmental organisations to effectively include a large number of local people and communities in the discourse on 'indigineity' in Malaysia, thereby effectively giving them a chance to be heard and noticed in national and international environmental discourses (2000).

A focus on collaboration could be seen as a simplification, and even rejection of, the complex power relationships that exists between transnational, national, and local actors. Furthermore, it is not evident that the examples of *collaboration* provided in specific settings are applicable to other areas and contexts. However, focusing on *collaboration*, where applicable, still presents an alternative to presenting local communities as mere respondents to statements circulated through dominant discourses, and might also avoid

reproducing the idea circulated by many transnational institutions and corporations, that they are the only players able to create global influence (Ho, 2005).

Discourse and Narratives

As Grillo states, "[a] discourse (e.g. of development) identifies appropriate and legitimate ways of practicing development as well as speaking and thinking about it" (1997: 12). One way of analysing such 'legitimate' practices, according to Grillo, can be to look at certain narratives that are produced and maintained within certain discourses.

In this text, I focus on a specific kind of narrative, prominent in international environmental and development discourse, and identified by Fairhead and Leach (1995) as a 'degradation narrative'. According to Fairhead and Leach, a narrative of degradation has been consistently evoked by scientists, bureaucrats and developmental institutions seeking to describe deforestation in western Africa. Through a number of case-studies, Fairhead and Leach present a counternarrative to the degradation narrative, in where they focus on the positive agency of local people; they show how the degradation narrative is based on a selective reading of historical 'evidence' of deforestation, a limited understanding of regenerative processes in forest ecology, and a disregard of local practices, which in most instances have been beneficial for the establishment of forested areas in the savannah. Ives (2004) has in a similar way described how governments and development institutions in countries in the Himalayan hinterland have evoked a narrative of 'Himalayan degradation', which has subsequently been used to restrict the actions of mountain peoples, based on their identification with the often uncontrolled flooding of major rivers. Ives calls this narrative 'the myth of Himalayan ecological degradation', and seeks to refute the 'evidence' behind the myth by focusing on specific local experiences, and attacking the scientific grounds for its establishment. Although Ives does not use the term 'degradation narrative' and prefer to use the term 'degradation myth', his examples are still strikingly similar to those of Fairhead and Leach, and I find it appropriate to present both as examples of counternarratives to degradation narratives.

When identifying degradation narratives, Fairhead and Leach (1995), are referring to Emery M. Roe's influential text "Development Narratives, Or Making the Best of Blueprint Development" (1991). In this article, Roe identifies a number of prominent

narratives used and evoked by development practitioners, but, more importantly, he seeks to explain why a small number of these narratives have come to be identified as "plausible assertions" and given legitimacy more generally in a number of different development projects (1991: 296). A 'degradation narrative' is related to the narrative of the "tragedy of the commons," which, according to Roe, has been favoured by many policy makers despite being heavily criticised for a long time. The appeal of the "tragedy of the commons" narrative, according to Roe, lies in its simplicity and usefulness for policy makers, and to confront it would mean to find an equally appealing counternarrative, based on local realities (1991: 290). This has been attempted by both Fairhead and Leach (1995) and Ives (2004) in relation to degradation narratives of forest loss and flooding.

Narratives and counternarratives are also translated and mobilised in the ways we have seen above with regard to concepts. Dove et al. (2003) have pointed out the way in which a few 'squatter cities' were targeted by the local government in Kathmandu in an attempt to evoke a narrative of 'ecological degradation', arguing for the removal of these cities in order to restore the water quality of a nearby river. The people living in these communities, however, were able to successfully mobilise a counternarrative based on the internationally ratified concept of 'healthy cities' used in the United Nations Habitat Agenda, thereby receiving international institutional backing for their claims that they were not the reason behind a degraded river quality (ibid.: 26).

My approach to 'discourse' in this text, 'borrows' from the approaches I have detailed above. Following Foucault (1972) and Milton (1996), I seek to identify discourses as fields that generate knowledge; at the same time I reflect on the attempt to approach environmentalism as 'cultural critique'. Following Brosius (1999), I look at how certain discourses have become institutionalised and appear as dominant, and how this might affect the relationship of actors within and between discourses. Like Tsing (1999, 2000) and Dove at al (2003), I look at the possibilities afforded by certain discourses for local actors, and how environmental knowledge is transported and translated through the mobilisation of specific concepts and narratives. Finally, in seeking to identify a 'degradation narrative' evoked by the introduction of national laws and regulations in China, I follow the approach taken by Fairhead and Leach (1995) as well as Ives (2004)

when describing the efforts of a project manager in EBOR to mobilise a counternarrative to a 'degradation narrative' circulated by the Chinese Central Government.

2

The Organisation: Background and Structure

Legal Framework for Social Organisations in China

As described in chapter one, the term non-governmental (*fei zhengfu*) is not often used in China, as the term is often seen as signifying anti-governmental attitudes. In the registration process of NGOs and non-profit organisations, the term 'social organisation' (*shehui tuanti*) is used, reflecting the positive attitudes of the Central Government towards this term (Saich, 2000). Although not all NGOs in China register as social organisations, official registration gives some advantages compared to not being registered; official registration gives an organisation the right to create an account where it can receive funding from international donors, and also makes the organisations exempt from paying taxes (on the grounds that social organisations are non-profit). In addition, registration provides an organisation and its workers with formal legal rights, and the ability to provide insurance to workers.

A large number of NGOs in China previously used to register in the category of 'business', taking advantage of a non-restrictive registration process for this entity. The possibility to register as a 'business' was blocked after the 1998 Registration Law, but another possibility, still open after 1998, has been to register as a 'secondary organisation', provided that you can find a 'host organisation' (usually a higher education institution) willing to support you (Saich, 2000). However, these options have some clear disadvantages. Registering as a different entity than 'social organisation' requires an organisation to pay taxes (from which social organisations are exempt); not registering at all leaves an organisation without legal rights, and might open up for prosecution against organisations and individuals working in them (Yang, 2005).

The background for the system of registration of social organisations came in 1989, when the Central Government issued a 'provisory' law requiring all 'independent'

organisations (meaning organisations not part of the government bureaucracy, and not directed by a government office) to register with the government, and to partner up with a government "professional leading unit" (*yewu zhuguan danwei*). The provisory law was issued shortly after the Tiananmen protests of the same year, and according to Saich (2000) was a measure taken by the government towards controlling a number of new informal organisations that had provided the student protesters at Tiananmen with broad mobilisation abilities and popular support. The law was revised and formalised by the State Council in 1998, under the heading "Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Organisations" (hereafter the Registration Law); the revision added some changes to the law, specifically by providing a more detailed description of what was expected of the relationship between a social organisation and its professional leading unit (see Appendix 2). The requirement of partnering up with a 'professional leading unit' has since become popularly known (with an ironic pun) as having a 'mother-in-law' (*popo*) (Ho, 2001; Saich, 2000).

Saich (2000) has pointed out how the administration of social organisations in China in effect duplicates the administration system of the PRC. The Registration Law states that organisations have to be registered with the department of Civil Affairs *on the relevant level* of the government administration hierarchy, which means that a social organisation registered at, say, county level does not have the possibility to enrol members from a different county, less so from a different prefecture or province. Furthermore, a social organisation does not have approval to carry out projects outside of the administrative level that it is registered at. Therefore, only a social organisation registered nationally with the Ministry of Civil Affairs have the lawful right to carry out projects and enrol members from all over China (Saich, 2000). All the regulations stated in the Registration Law combine to make the establishment of an NGO a difficult task. In order to set up a social organisation, you have to be able to command some resources, not only in the form of money, but also in the form of social connections and networks, in that you have to be able to find a government organisation that is willing to take responsibility for the actions of the organisation it sponsors. The establishment of a 'social organisation' also requires a long process of approval, where all the requirements listed in the Registration Law have to be sorted before an application can be sent to the department of Civil Affairs.

This then, is some of the legal background for NGOs in China. In order to understand better what this might entail for specific NGOs, I take a closer look at the experiences of EBOR staff in starting up and registering as a social organisation, and compare this with the experiences of another NGO based in Kunming.

EBOR: Starting up and Registering

The background for what was to become EBOR started in the research community at the Kunming Institute of Botany (KIB) in the early 1990s. Here, a number of scientists became interested in several topics that had been discussed at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, where delegates from China had also attended (…). Teacher Wu, a deputy director at the office, was one of the founders of EBOR; in an interview in his office, he gave me an account of his experiences when starting the organisation.

Teacher Wu's office is located at the entrance of the organisation offices. His office has large glass windows overlooking the lobby of the organisation and a private 'terrace garden' accessible from the offices. I had not scheduled the interview with teacher Wu, assuming that he would be as welcoming as he seemed to be to questions from the other staff members. His manner and background, as well as that of his senior age compared to most of the workers in the organisation, had earned him the title 'teacher', which was used as a way to signal respect towards him. When my interpreter and I humbly asked for an interview while knocking on his open office door, he invited us in to his office without hesitation, signalling that he was available to talk.

I began the interview by asking if he could tell me something about how EBOR was established. Teacher Wu seemed to think back, recalling his own experiences with the organisation. Taking his time, and in a manner that my interpreter would later describe as 'graceful', he began detailing his experiences as a founding member of EBOR. [The following account is taken from my fieldnotes.]

> EBOR was started in 1995. At that time it was known in the international community about biodiversity and indigenous knowledge protection. But then, no special institute in China was focusing on this. Should be cooperation between

studies… Not only social science, also natural science. EBOR was founded with this in background.

According to teacher Wu, EBOR started up as a research organisation, based on the mutual interests of scientist on 'international' topics such as biodiversity and indigenous knowledge, and focused on the cooperation between different fields of studies, especially between social science and natural science. In the beginning, he told us, the activities consisted mostly of seminars held at KIB where people from various research institutes attended in discussions.

Teacher Wu went on to tell us about some of the difficulties they had experienced when trying to establish and register as a social organisation.

> In 1995, there are few people working here. I am one of them, working with no salary. In the beginning, only two fulltime workers. One is finance, two is common management. That time law, this kind of NGO is 40.000 Yuan [RMB] (approximately $4800 at the time) to establish. We got money from several people. Spent 40.000 [RMB] renting small house… Very simple. All books were sponsored by people. A professor in Tibetan language sponsored 2000 books. American university gave us 5000 dollars buying books. 20.000 [RMB] rent every year… Could not afford. So, applied quickly for project funding. First was from Ford Foundation. Because good relationship between China Science Institute [a national-level institute that is responsible for the administration of KIB] and Ford Foundation, we could get fund.

Teacher Wu told us how EBOR had started almost from scratch, surviving on gifts and funds provided by various beneficiaries. He detailed the difficulties at the time, both to establish and to run an NGO financially. However, it seemed like having clear ties to KIB was a major advantage for the organisation, especially when applying for international funding. Additionally, ties to a government-run institute and a member base of exclusively government employed researchers might have made it easier for EBOR to gain formal approval than it would have been for an organisations that did not have such clear ties to government institutions and agencies.

HYGO: Starting up and Registering

Another informant, Mr Luo, was the leader of a small environmental NGO, Hydropower Governance (HYGO), which had previously cooperated with EBOR on a watershed management project. Mr Luo told me that he had initially experienced some problems when seeking to register his organisation with the government. In an informal interview conducted at the headquarters of his organisation, he recounted to me how HYGO had started up and received formal registration. The interview with Mr Luo was conducted with the help of an interpreter, a graduate student from a University in Kunming. The English level of my interpreter was good, but not perfect; the excerpt included below is from the parts of the interview where the translation (following my knowledge of Chinese) seemed to be consistent with Mr Luo's account. The following excerpt is taken from my fieldnotes, written down during the interview.

> We were formally registered in 2002. I had started a project in Lijiang in 2000 through Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences. It was very hard to register as an NGO then. Now, it is still hard, but next year will be better. There's a new policy… Don't need to have 'mother in law' from government. No one likes to be responsible. Next year in Beijing, they will eliminate this… We already had many achievements; therefore it was easier for us to set up in 2002. That year, only 3 [organisations] were approved. Before 2002, we only had projects; they were sponsored by the Ford Foundation and Oxfam.

According to Mr Luo, it was difficult for an organisation to register at the time when he had started his project; he had not been able to register with the government until 2002, when he already had some 'successful' projects to show for, and had been able to secure funding from the Ford Foundation and Oxfam. It had been possible for Mr Luo to undertake projects prior to the registration of his organisation because of his position as a researcher at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences (YASS). Funding for his first projects were made available through the official channels of YASS, which enjoyed a long-standing relationship with the Ford Foundation.

One of the reasons for his success to register, according to Mr Luo, was that he had supported the local government in Lijiang (a municipality close to Kunming) to help with "management problems." He did not elaborate on these 'problems', but it seems clear that Mr. Luo had effectively taken advantage of the official rhetoric surrounding 'social organisations' following the 1998 revision of the Registration Law. Part of the outcome of the revision was that 'social organisations' were identified as possible collaborators to the government; in pointing out some local 'management problems' Mr. Luo managed to present his organisation as being able to 'assist' the Central Government in improving the performance of the government administration.

Comparison: EBOR and HYGO

EBOR was formally registered in 1995 as a provincial level organisation. This happened before the establishment of the Registration Law of 1998, which seems to have made their registration process easier than it had been for HYGO. In the 1989 'provisory law', as we have seen, the role and status of the 'professional leading unit' was not explicitly stated and, as Saich (2000) has pointed out, many organisations had little contact with neither their "mother in law," nor their registration and management units during this time. Following the 1998 Registration Law, EBOR were required to re-register with the Department of Civil Affairs, and in 2001 EBOR was provided with a new 'mother in law': Yunnan Department of Forestry. The relationship between EBOR and the Department of Forestry was now stipulated in the guidelines of the new Registration Law.

HYGO and EBOR seem to have been started up in much the same way: by researchers based in research institutes in Kunming that had been able to secure funding for projects and then moved on to apply for registration as 'social organisations'. According to one of my informants, who was studying the growth of Chinese NGOs in Yunnan, this was a common way for many NGOs to start up in China. He provided me with a 'recipe' on how some NGOs would usually be established: a community of researchers and students would gather around a famous researcher or professor at a university or research academy, first in informal discussion groups, and then later starting to undertake projects based on mutual interests; when projects were established and funding secured, many or these 'research societies' would go on to register, either as 'social organisation' or as

other forms of organisations. This 'recipe' is clearly a generalisation, and does not account for the varieties of NGOs that have been started up in China during the last twenty years. However, it gives a pretty detailed picture on how many researchers and academics in China seemed to be envisioning 'legitimate' environmental NGOs; in order to create widespread acknowledgement, an organisation needs to have a 'scientific' basis, which is often provided through affiliations with various research institutes, universities and 'famous' professors. The 'recipe', however, seems to be reserved for NGOs that have close contacts with government institutions and are able to get funding prior to their official registration. For many NGOs in Yunnan and in China, which do not have such clear ties to government institutions, getting funding can be more difficult, which also means that it might be more difficult for them to register.

Mr Luo and teacher Wu were both researchers with interests that spurred them to establish organisations that would help further their research, and at the same time make some sort of 'social' contribution. In Teacher Wu's case, the contribution was to further Chinese science by promoting interdisciplinary research and knowledge sharing. EBOR would then go on to make an increased effort in advocating the rights of disadvantaged groups, especially poor farmers in the Yunnan province. In Mr Luo's case, the contribution was to 'mediate' between local people and local governments. However, after being formally registered, Mr Luo and his organisation would eventually begin to point out 'management problems' surrounding a subject that was increasingly becoming more and more of a 'sensitive' issue for the Central Government: large-scale hydropower dam construction. The 'tactic' that had helped secure registration for HYGO, now seemed to work in disfavour of the organisation; Mr Luo's active involvement in advocating the rights of people that had been resettled due to the construction of hydropower dams eventually made him a target of counter-campaigns by local government officials. He was forced to leave his position as a researcher at YASS due to this controversy, but still managed to retain the official registration of HYGO. Prior to this controversy, HYGO and EBOR had collaborated on a 'watershed management' project in Yunnan. Upon hearing that HYGO and Mr Luo were being targeted by a local government counter-campaign, the leaders of EBOR decided to disassociate themselves from the organisation and terminated the collaboration with HYGO.

An Overview of EBOR

In the following, I present an overview of the structure of EBOR, including its leadership structure and the organisation of projects and programmes at the offices. I focus primarily on the offices of the organisation, as this is where most of the work of EBOR is carried out; as we will see, however, there is also a leadership that is based at Kunming Institute of Botany that is not directly involved in the practices at the office.

The Leadership: Hierarchical Structure

The leadership structure of EBOR is organised hierarchically. At the top sits a board of directors, which holds the ultimate mandate to appoint leadership positions within the organisation. The directors of the board, thirteen in all, are elected from the membership base of EBOR at a board meeting held every four years. EBOR has approximately 100 members; most of them come from KIB or from partner institutions and government agencies. When the board of directors have been elected, the board then unanimously elects three members to the positions as *chairman*, *vice-chairman*, and *executive director*. While the chairman and vice chairman of the board are the leaders that are highest in the hierarchical structure, the executive director is given special authorities over the office of the organisation, including approval of new staff, authority in matters regarding the financial resources of the office, approval of new project sites, and designation of project managers. In the following, I refer to the executive director as 'the director', following the way the workers in EBOR referred to her. Directly below the director in the hierarchical structure, are two deputy directors, based at the offices of EBOR. One of these is in charge of 'administration' and is elected directly from the board of directors, while the other is in charge of 'project management' and is appointed by the director. The project management director, in turn, is in charge of three program directors each heading one of three departments associated with three different programs (examined more closely below). A general outline of the leadership structure of EBOR is presented in figure 1.
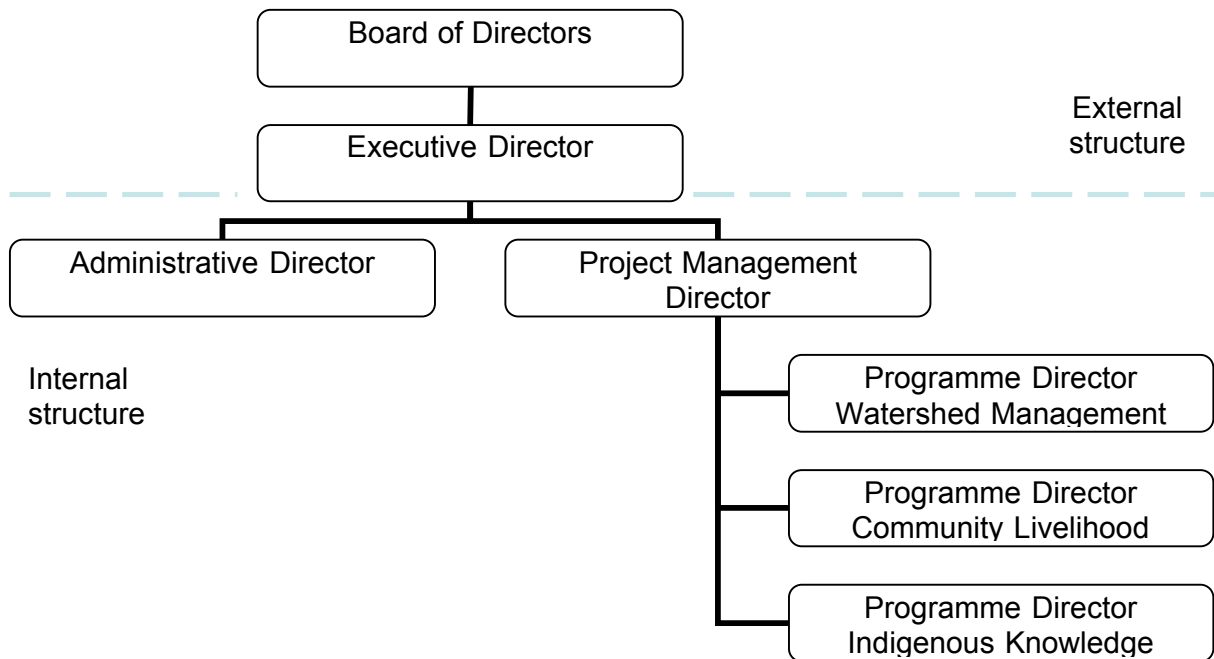
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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │   Board of Directors    │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
                                │
                    ┌─────────────────────────┐                    External
                    │   Executive Director    │                    structure
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        ┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────┐
        │ Administrative   │      │  Project Management   │
        │    Director      │      │      Director         │
        └──────────────────┘      └──────────────────────┘
                                            │
   Internal                        ┌────────────────────────────┐
   structure                       │   Programme Director       │
                                    │   Watershed Management     │
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                                    ┌────────────────────────────┐
                                    │   Programme Director       │
                                    │   Community Livelihood     │
                                    └────────────────────────────┘
                                    ┌────────────────────────────┐
                                    │   Programme Director       │
                                    │   Indigenous Knowledge     │
                                    └────────────────────────────┘
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Figure 1. Leadership structure at EBOR

The leadership structure at EBOR can be described as a 'two-tier' structure, where one is 'external' to the offices of the organisation, while the other is 'internal'. This division was also made by most of the workers in the organisation, who were regularly dealing with the deputy directors at the office, but were also occasionally reminded of the administrative power commanded by the director. The 'external' leadership was not involved in many of the projects undertaken at the office, but still held decision-making powers over most of the workers at the office. The position as executive director seemed to be the position with the most decision-making power; it made up the clearest link between the office, where projects were carried out, and the 'board of directors' where decisions regarding the organisation were made. The director also controlled most of the resources of the organisation, which came through grants connected to various projects undertaken by workers at the office. The position as deputy director of administration, although also providing a link between 'the office' and 'the board', did not hold the same authority; the person in this position was a member of the board of directors, but placed below the director in the administrative hierarchy.

The Administrative Director

Teacher Wu, as mentioned earlier, was one of the founders of EBOR. Now, his position in the organisation was as the deputy director in charge of administration at the office. Teacher Wu had previously been a researcher at KIB, and had worked for over twenty years at a government-run botanical garden in the south of Yunnan; he was now semi-retired and received a monthly allowance from the government. Teacher Wu did not receive a salary from EBOR, and his role in the organisation, besides being in charge of the administration of the office, often seemed to be that of an advisor to the younger workers. Teacher Wu once expressed to me that he was proud of all the workers at EBOR, especially the ones that had moved on to work for bigger organisations, some even for international NGOs.

His office was located close to the entrance of the organisation. He was one of very few staff members to hold a key to the office, and one of his responsibilities as administrative deputy director was to make sure that the office was opened in the morning and locked after everyone had left. I was often welcomed by teacher Wu when I rang the doorbell to the organisation at the start of my working day. Although he was one of the deputy directors he did not seem to position himself above others at the office. His relation to many of the workers at EBOR seem to be as a 'teacher'; most of the people at the office referred to him as 'teacher Wang' as an act of respect towards an older person, but also to signal his status in the organisation. He was one of the more respected leaders in the organisation, even though his influence was not as high as the director, or as that of the project management director.

The Project Management Director

The project management director at the office was Yang Cheng, a 32-year old social science researcher from the Bai nationality minority. Cheng had lived for most of his life in Kunming as the son of a well-known Chinese ethnologist, before conducting university studies in Beijing and subsequently obtaining a postgraduate diploma in anthropology from a French university. Cheng had spent close to five years in EBOR as a project manager on various projects, and had just recently been promoted to the position as project management director. He told me that he had became involved with EBOR because one of their project sites had been close to the village where was doing

anthropological fieldwork. He had cooperated with the project managers through his research. Upon graduating, he had come back to EBOR to work as a project manager. Recently, there had been a change of leaders in the organisation, whereupon many of the senior workers at EBOR had decided to leave the organisation. Cheng stayed on, and was subsequently appointed as a deputy director.

At the office, Cheng's main tasks were to oversee the various departments and the respective programmes, seeking out new recruits to work in the organisation, as well as researching opportunities for grants and funding. He also functioned as a project manager on a number of projects, and had recently been given the temporary role as programme director for the Watershed department, following the resignation of the former programme director. His desk had the most prominent location in the offices – at the end of a large room with many glass cases displaying items from various project sites. His office was also frequently used as a reception area for visiting guests. When he was not visiting international conferences as a representative for EBOR, Cheng spent his time mostly in the office. During the time I spent in the organisation, Cheng attended three international workshops. One was in Thailand, where he attended a workshop on capacity building for fundraising, one was in Bali, Indonesia, where he attended a workshop entitled: 'leadership capacity building on institutional development'; the third international conference he attended was the 2008 World Conservation Congress held in Barcelona. These international workshops and conferences were both meeting grounds for establishing networks, as well as an opportunity to receive training and capacity building.

Cheng's knowledge of procedures, his international training, and his extended network seemed to make him a powerful figure in EBOR. His privileged position might also be what made him the target of rumours at the office. Many people commented on him not going on project trips; as one informant put it to me, "[Cheng] prefers to stay in the office." Although Cheng was skilled in writing project proposals and dealing with government officials and international donors, his status as a fieldworker was not highly regard by some people at the office. I only saw him go on a field trip once – whereupon he caught a cold from not wearing appropriate clothes in the high-altitude project site. He described this to me as a "terrible experience."

Projects and Programmes

During the time I spent in the organisation, workers in EBOR were undertaking more than twenty projects in ten main areas in Yunnan province. According to the national regulations, social organisations are not allowed to have projects in administrative areas other than the one they are registered in. Therefore, EBOR could only carry out projects in the Yunnan province.

The projects carried out by workers in EBOR covered a broad number of topics, such as: sustainable livelihoods, rangeland co-management, eco-agriculture, climate change, traditional housing, traditional papermaking, and animal husbandry technology development. Some of these topics were a reflection of the research interests of staff members, while others seemed to be a combination of research interests with the funding scheme that was tied to the project. On the homepage of their website, the various projects undertaken by EBOR workers are presented in one map of Yunnan, under the heading "focus regions," showing all the projects undertaken by researchers at EBOR are all part of a larger 'body' of work represented by the organisation. The *holistic* presentation of the work of the organisation represented by the map is further strengthened by models showing how the three programs at the organisation make up a composite whole. Figure 2 shows one such model, which is frequently used to in presentation of EBOR in brochures and on their website.
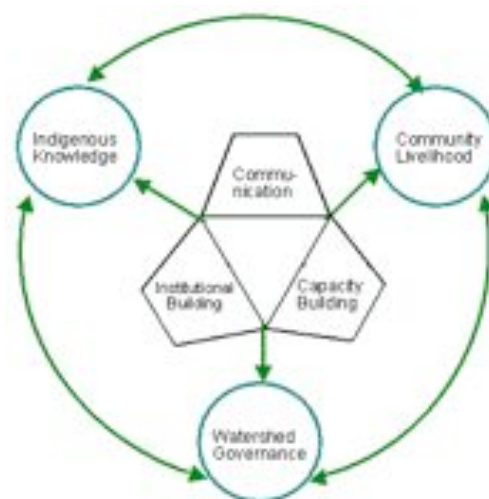

Figure 2. A Presentation of the different programmes at EBOR (reproduced here with permission from the organisation

In the model, we can see how the three programmes of Indigenous Knowledge, Community Livelihood and Watershed Governance are presented as 'interacting' with one another, and with three supporting programmes. The main programmes make out the outer circle of the organisation, while the supporting programmes of Communication, Capacity Building, and Institutional Design seems to represent some core administrative functions of the organisation. If we compare this model to the administrative structure of EBOR (fig. 2) we see that it does not reflect the hierarchical leadership structure of the organisation; rather, the model seems to suggest a 'holistic approach', where the programs of EBOR are in dialogue with each other.

The many projects undertaken at EBOR did indeed seem to suggest that the programmes were interacting with one another, but perhaps not in the 'holistic' way presented by the model in fig 3. Often, project sites contained many projects from different departments; one 'umbrella project' could contain projects from several different departments. For example, a project called "Eco-Agriculture of Yunnan Upland" that was organised under the Community Livelihood department, included smaller projects and staff members from both the Watershed Governance department as well as the Indigenous Knowledge department. This interaction, however, did not seem to reflect a dialogue between the different departments, but was rather an efficient way of organising projects. One of the workers at EBOR told me that the organisation would usually introduce one project into a certain area; then, when, when contacts had been established, subsequent projects would be introduced. According to him, this method served to limit the need of constantly having to establish new contacts, a process that was very time consuming. In this way, a project site that had been established by researchers from one department could later also include researchers from other departments as new projects were added to the first one.

Another informant from EBOR gave me a different explanation. He told me that many projects in the organisation were organised by several departments because the programme structure of the organisation no longer represented the multitude of projects undertaken at EBOR. According to him, the research interests of the people working in the organisation, and much of the contemporary environmental focus in China, had changed since the establishment of the programme structure of EBOR. According to him,

more departments should have been introduced to reflect this change, but the leaders of the organisation had not been interested in doing this.

Introduction to the EBOR Offices

The offices of EBOR are not easy to find. The office space, which is rather extensive compared to that of many other local NGOs in Kunming, is nevertheless nested within an apartment block in the middle of a small residential district. There is a rather anonymous sign on a board by the entrance exhibiting the name of the organisation next to the names of a number of other small 'enterprises' that crowd the same apartment building. A few more signs guide you up the stairs, until you stand face to face with an grey door – the only sign of activity is a small doorbell with a note reading: "qing an menling" (please press doorbell). Few people at the organisation have their own key, so it is quite common to hear the doorbell ring as workers show up in the morning and return from lunch, or when visitors come to the offices. The offices of EBOR are made up of several large rooms adjacent to a corridor circling the centre of the apartment block. The offices have a library and reading room, seminar room, copy room, a kitchen, an editing room, as well as a number of staff offices and workspaces. A door leads out to a large terrace with a variety of plants and flowers surrounding a red-painted pavilion. The workers in the organisation are all spread out in this office landscape, some sitting together in groups while others worked alone.

During the time I spent in the organisation, there was little sign of a division between the workers according to programmes and departments. The Community Livelihood department was the only department where most of the project managers were occupying the same office. Workers from the other departments were spread out among the many rooms and desks in the offices – many chose to sit together with friends, while some worked from desks that were more isolated from the rest of the offices. New workers were also encouraged to choose their own desks in the offices. The offices would sometimes be filled with people, other times they would be almost empty. Workers were often visiting their project sites, attending conferences, of fulfilling other obligations. Few were fulltime employees in the organisation, and accordingly, few spent all of their time at the offices. Furthermore, visitors came regularly to the offices; occasionally there

would be seminars and presentations with invited guests, representatives from donor agencies would visit the organisation, and volunteers and new recruits came and went.

According to Gupta and Ferguson, a 'locality' can refer *both* to a demarcated physical space and to clusters of interaction; the *identity* of a place, then, is created out of the intersection between the cultural construction of a locality and its involvement in a system of hierarchically organised spaces (1997: 36). This perception of a locality might serve as an introduction to my experience in EBOR and my subsequent attempt to capture my experiences of working in the office. The office was never just a locality occupied by workers and leaders. With people regularly coming and going the office was a meeting place and a returning point; a place where experiences from project sites and stories of travel was told; a meeting place for visitors from different organisations, agencies and offices; and a meeting place for concepts, discourses, cooperation and representations.

Daily Life at the Office: People and Practices

In the following, I take a closer look at some of the practices undertaken at the offices of EBOR, and how they relate to, and maintain linkages to, a number of other practices and localities. Some of the practices I describe here, are further elaborated in subsequent chapters.

Writing Grant Proposals

EBOR is entirely dependent on funding from international foundations and donor organisations – both in the daily running of the organisations office, as well as the specific projects they engage in. They have managed to secure sustained funding for the office expenses through an annual grant from the Ford Foundation. Each project, however, has to be able to acquire most of, if not all of its resources from external funding. This means that grant proposals has to be written for each individual project, and approval from the funding agency has to come trough before any project can be started. Projects receive funding for a fixed term, usually between two to four years for larger projects. Funding can also come in the form of smaller grants directed at a specific activity, for example a workshop, which has to be complete within a certain time limit.

Projects that can claim to be 'successful,' have the possibility of receiving extended funding of successive two-to-four-year terms.

The practice of writing grant proposals involves a lot of time and effort, both in researching possibilities for grants and then writing them; in addition, highly specialised knowledge is needed on what constitutes a good proposal, how to frame your project, and how to attract the interest of the funding agency. This also requires an overview over donors' agendas and interests, and the ability to relate these to the interests and projects of EBOR staff and researchers. In EBOR, GK has the main responsibility for both researching and writing grant proposals. He has received extensive training in writing project proposals trough attending international workshops on the subject. GK is also the person in the organisation who receives representatives from donor organisations, and communicates with donor representatives and partner organisations. Occasionally, project managers also write project proposals in order to sustain further funding for the project they are managing.

The practice of writing grant proposals, as well as that of making connections and building networks, take up much of the time of the managers and leaders of the organisation, and is an under-exposed side of their work that rarely is reflected in publications or presentations of the organisation. Although arguably the most important 'work' for the stability and continued operation of EBOR, this is not considered 'work' along the same line as doing research and managing projects in the field.

Recruitment of New Staff

The recruitment of new staff to EBOR seemed to be conducted in mainly three ways (which were often interrelated). One, EBOR staff and deputy directors would find potential candidates trough personal networks; two, representatives from the organisation would visit universities promoting the organisation and interviewing potential candidates; and three, a job advertisement would be put up on the EBOR website, encouraging job seekers to send their applications directly to GK.

The use of personal networks in finding jobs is not an uncommon way of acquiring jobs in China, especially for young university graduates facing an increasingly tough Chinese

job market (Bian 2002) (see box). In China, personal networks are often referred to as *guanxi* networks, or merely *guanxi* (Gold, Guthrie and Wank 2002). Literally translated, *guanxi* refers to a 'relation' or 'relationship'; however, the term is frequently used to describe a form of 'social network' that is thought to be particular for Chinese society (ibid.). Mayfair (1994) details the many ways in which *guanxi* can be understood in China, reflecting on some of the changes to *guanxi* during the communist rule under Mao, and after the more recent "Reform and Opening Up" policies. Some other scholars are arguing whether or not *guanxi* has lost its importance in a 'modernising' job market after China decided to pursue a version of market economy (Bian, 1997). It is well out of the scope of this discussion to assess these various analyses. In this text, following the way many of my informants used the word *guanxi*, I refer to the term as 'personal connections' that are sometimes 'used' to maintain a social network of friends, relatives, colleagues and contacts by exchanging favours, and less frequently, gifts. According to my informants, one of the most important aspects of a guanxi relationship is that it contains personal feelings (*renqing*). Even though contacts are sometimes called upon to give favours, the personal feeling involved in the exchange, according to my informants, still exceeds the instrumental aspect of the relationship.

Box 2

> ## Using *guanxi* to find a job in a difficult job market
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> One of my informants, AP, was a Master student in anthropology at a university in Kunming. As the time of her graduation drew closer, she became increasingly worried about finding a job in Kunming. She did not hold a residence permit (*hukou**) for Kunming, and would therefore have to leave the city unless she managed to find a job. To complicate things further, her boyfriend had recently experienced the same problems, and had been forced to return to his home county to search for a job there. AP complained that other less qualified people than her seemed to be able to get jobs, and blamed this to her poor *guanxi*, saying that if she had had more contacts it would have been easier for her to get a job. At the same time, AP did not want to get a job this way, hoping that employers would hire her based on her merits (she was the top student in her class). In the end, AP felt that she was out of options; trough one of her mothers work colleagues she got in touch with a teacher in the same county that her boyfriend lived in, and agreed to meet her to discuss job opportunities. AP was not sure how she should approach this meeting, and wondered if she would have to give a gift to the teacher, and if so, what kind of gift would be appropriate for the exchange. I did not hear from AP until a few months later. Apparently, her meeting with the teacher had not been a success, something that seemed to stem from her relationship to the teacher not being very personal. Instead of pursuing a teaching career, AP had entered a civil service examination and had succeeded in getting a job working in the local government office at her boyfriend's county. She did not consider this position to be very attractive – anyone can become a civil servant as long as they pass an examination – but faced with difficulties in getting a job and poor *guanxi*, she found it to be the only option that she could turn to.
>
> AP's experiences were not unique. Several university graduates that I talked to, were worried about finding a good job; they also worried about having to move to a rural place in order to get a job. Even some of the workers at EBOR would tell me that they had chosen to apply for a job in the organisation out of lack of other alternatives. In their eyes, working in a social organisation was not very lucrative, nor did it provide a lot of financial security. However, it could function as a step along the way to getting a fulltime job somewhere else.
>
> **Hukou* refers to the Chinese household registration system, which requires Chinese citizens to be registered according to their birth place. In this system, students with a rural *hukou* are required to return to the countryside to work unless they get a job offer in the city.

As a second method of recruitment, representatives from EBOR would sometimes visit universities to promote the work of the organisation. Although this had been common in the past, it did not seem to be exercised by the current leaders. One of the workers in EBOR told me how he had been recruited in this way more than five years ago, when he was a student at the Yunnan Agricultural University. At that time, Teacher Wu had visited his university to look for a student to get involved with one of EBOR's projects.

According to the worker, he was chosen based on his rural background and that his major – sustainable agriculture – fitted well in with the projects undertaken at EBOR at that time. Advertising jobs on the EBOR website, seemed to be the most common form of recruitment currently practiced in the organisation. When I asked Cheng how he usually recruited people, he told me that he would make an announcement on the website where he called for new applicants. After receiving CV's from the applicants via e-mail, he would choose 5 to 10 candidates to be invited to an interview. According to him, he was especially looking for people with a background in biology, development studies, anthropology and agronomy. Based on the interviews, he and the deputy director would then choose who would be the new recruit; this person would be put through a three-month trial period before finally being selected as a worker for the organisation.

Cheng had the ultimate responsibility at EBOR for seeking out and assessing new candidates, but in order for them to become members of the organisation and included in projects, they also had to be approved by the director. Often, new recruits were put through a trial period where they did not receive a salary. This trial period would usually last between one and two months. Only after being formally approved by the director would they be able to receive a salary and enjoy other benefits such as insurance and legal assistance, as full staff members of EBOR.

The Workers and Affiliates at the Office

It was not always easy to keep track on who worked in the organisation and who did not. The workers were often away from the office, either out on project trips, or attending international workshops and meetings; often no more than half of the staff would be at the office at the same time. Also, as we have seen from the recruitment process, some new recruits would be put on a trial period and not all would eventually go on to become fulltime workers in the organisation. In addition, some of the researchers would be *affiliated* with EBOR, dividing their time between the organisation and other jobs and commitments. Although the term was not used by people in EBOR, I find *affiliated* an apt description of the situation of many of the workers at EBOR: they were not officially recorded as workers in the organisation, but nevertheless had a more or less official connection to EBOR; many of them were mentioned in grant applications as possible project managers and assistants. Furthermore, the Latin origin of the word, *affiliare*,

meaning 'adopted as a son', gives a sense of the personal connections involved in the process of choosing *affiliates*: they were often friends and colleagues of other workers in the organisation; some were familiar with GK from YASS, others knew the director from jobs at KIB. The personal connection should not be overstated, however: affiliates were also chosen based on their knowledge in a certain field, or of a certain area in which EBOR needed expertise in for specific projects.

Name	Age	Sex	Ethnicity	Position
A	68	male	han	Administrative director
B	33	female	han	Executive director
C	32	male	bai	Programme director
D	36	male	han	Programme director
E	30	male	han	Project leader
F	42	male	yi	Project leader
G	31	male	han	Project leader
H	30	male	han	Project assistant
I	29	female	han	Project assistant
J	26	female	han	Project assistant
K	28	female	han	Project assistant
L	29	female	han	Project assistant
M	32	male	han	Project assistant
N	29	female	han	Project assistant
O	28	male	han	Driver
P	39	female	han	Accountant

Figure 3: This table is based on the template that EBOR uses when detailing the staff members at the office. This version is modified to make all identities anonymous.

The table (fig. 3) presented above indicates the staff situation at the office when I began my fieldwork there. Although this figure gives a general outline of the workers that make up the staff of the organisation, it is not complete due to the high turnover of workers in the organisation. At the time I started my fieldwork, 17 people were more employed in the organisation. Four of them resigned (one man and two women), while four new people were recruited (all of them women). Of the new recruits, one did not make it through the trial period. One of the programme directors had resigned a few months before I started working there, therefore GK had a dual role as project management director and programme director for the Watershed department. As we can see from the table, the average age of the workers at the office is roughly 30. Most of the project assistants are in their late 20's, while all project leaders are over 30 years of age. All directors at the office (two), and all project leaders (five) were men. Of seven project assistants, two were male, while five were female.

Gender in the Organisation

The executive director aside, there seemed to be a male dominance in most of the other leading positions at the office. Why were all of the project leaders in the organisation males, while most of the project assistants were females? In EBOR, workers were often assessed based on their abilities to perform well in their project sites, a situation that often required the worker to establish good *guanxi* relationship with local government officials – especially CPC cadres, most of whom are men. In such a male-dominated environment, establishing relationships could prove to be difficult for female workers. Project managers would try to present themselves as 'partners' to local government officials, which means that a relationship is to be built on an equal level. Among cadres, this especially involves giving and attending banquets, as well as consuming a lot of alcohol. It is generally regarded as more 'safe' for men to engage in these interpersonal relationships than women. According to Mayfair (1994), it is more difficult for women to present a 'disinterested' request for a favour, especially in a public domain; stories circulate of women being taken advantage of by cadres and officials, stories that make it even more difficult for women to engage in relationship building without possibly attracting suspicion. Mayfair contrasts the problems for women to create public interpersonal relationship, with those regularly maintained more privately – small favours are often obtained and granted between neighbours, classmates and kin, as well

as between officially sanctioned categorical relationships, like those between teacher and pupil. Relationships that cannot easily be classified are often considered suspicious (ibid.: 79). Although this view might not be held by everyone, it still could be seen as significant enough for the leaders of the organisation to decide against hiring female workers as project assistants. The following story of a female worker at EBOR might help to illuminate this gender issue.

Personal Stories

In the following, I include a more detailed account of the experiences of two workers at EBOR. The first 'story' details a female social scientist, who was recruited into the organisation during my fieldwork, but was not successful in getting permanent employment at EBOR. The second 'story' details a project manager at EBOR, his commitment to his project site and his view on some of the other workers in the organisation.

Zhou Meixiu: Entering and Leaving the Organisation

I had been in EBOR for nearly a month when a new person showed up at the office. This person was Zhou Meixiu, a 31-year-old female social scientist who had recently graduated with a Master degree in sustainable development from a university in Thailand. Meixiu was a Han Chinese, and had grown up in Kunming, where her parents also lived. Before going to Thailand for Master studies, she had finished an undergraduate degree in economy from a university in Kunming, and had also volunteered in a number of NGOs that were active in the region, including World Wide Fund For Nature[4] (WWF). Meixiu immediately struck me as a resourceful person. It might have been the way she successfully gave the impression of a person who knew what she was doing all the time; maybe it was also that she was the only person at the office besides GK that seemed to be constantly busy. In my field notes, I initially described Meixiu as "the new second-in-command," based on my first observations of her and the way she seemed to be involved with many of the projects in the organisation. It was not until after a while that it became clear to me that SB's involvement in many projects did not only reflect her abilities, but also represented a bone of contention for

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[4] Formerly named World Wildlife Fund.

other workers at the office that were interested in the position that seemed to be taken up by SB.

Meixiu was not "the new second-in-command," as I had somewhat hastily anticipated. She did, however have a background that suggested that she was a skilled worker: she had an international academic degree, she was affiliated with Yunnan Academy of Social Science (as one of only three people in EBOR) and she had previously worked in the local Kunming office of WWF. She also had contacts in other international environmental organisations. It was one of these friends that had suggested that she should start working in EBOR. This friend worked in the China office of The Nature Conservancy, and had a personal relationship with GK. It was through this contact that Meixiu was offered a job in EBOR. Meixiu was put on a trial period as a project assistant in the Livelihood Department. However, she soon also became involved with other EBOR projects. Her English was quite good, so she was assigned by GK to translate a project proposal to the Ford Foundation together with a volunteer from the USA, Michael. She also attended a meeting with a representative from an international donor organisation, where her English skills were valuable when discussing the assessment of a project that the donor organisation was willing to fund. Meixiu's only income came from being a researcher as YASS, where she received a monthly stipend. However, this stipend was not enough for her to live on by itself, and although the academy offered cheap housing close to their premises, she had decided to live together with her parents in the northern suburbs of Kunming. A fulltime job as a project assistant in EBOR, with the possibility of becoming a project manager, would supply the income of Meixiu and allow her to move into her own apartment.

After a while, however, something seemed to be wrong. When Meixiu returned from a project trip together with Michael, I was told that there had been a conflict between her and two other staff members from the Livelihood Department during the trip. Meixiu did not mention this herself, but according to Michael, the other workers had been very critical to her coming to the project site, and had told her to go back to the office, saying "what are you doing here?" and "you should go back." When she refused to return to the office, the other workers apparently decided to make the trip short, and returned without her. Meixiu and Michael stayed at the project site for a few days longer, interviewing

local people who were involved in the project. According to Michael, many of the people they interviewed expressed that they were not satisfied with the project, and told them that it did not address the needs of the local people.

When Meixiu came back to the office, many of the staff members did not talk to her. She only had a few friends at the office, all of them female workers her age, but did not seem to be especially close to any of them. I talked to Meixiu after she had been working in the organisation for one and a half months – one month after she had come back from the project trip with people from the Livelihood Department. During our conversation, I asked her if I could borrow one of her 'business cards' in order to copy down the address of EBOR from it. When she gave the card to me she said: "they will soon be worthless." I did not understand at once, and asked her why. She told me in English in a low voice that the director of EBOR was not satisfied with her work, and that therefore she had been told that she could not work in the organisation anymore. When I showed my surprise to her, she laughed. She told me that she now would have more time to spend with her family, and that she had already thought about quitting anyway.

What was the reason that Meixiu had to quit? Based on rumours in the organisation, and observations from the office, she did not get along with most of the other workers in her department. She later told me that she believed that someone from the Livelihood Department had given the director a phone call and complained about her. When I was asked by someone in the Livelihood Department to collect a project report from Meixiu on his memory stick, she asked me who had given me the memory stick, adding: "was it the short guy?" When I said yes, she made a grimace, and told me, while signalling with her hand as if holding a cell phone to her ear, "it was him who gave that telephone [call] to the director."

'Having *guanxi*' was one of the reasons that Meixiu got her job in the first place. But having connections does not only represent possibilities; if someone else's *guanxi* is stronger than yours, getting a job can prove to be difficult. It seems as though Meixiu had come to be seen as a threat to some people at the organisation. Some of the people working in the Livelihood Department seemed to be dissatisfied with her being given senior roles after working in the organisation for only a short time. Other people from the

department who had worked there for a long time had not been given the same opportunities as Meixiu. Her education and background was more extensive than most of the people that were currently working in the Livelihood Department; three of the workers (including the person Meixiu claimed made a phone call to the director) only held undergraduate degrees from universities in Kunming, and little or no prior experience in working for non-governmental organisations. At the office, only the deputy directors and one of the project managers had a background that could match that of Meixiu. Her assignment to a number of tasks was given by GK, who had the power to delegate work at the office, and who also had a personal relationship with Meixiu's friend from the TNC. However, it was the director, who in the end made the decision of whether or not Meixiu would be included in a project and receive a salary. It seemed as though one of the staff members who had better *guanxi* with the director had called and asked the director not to hire Meixiu. If this was the case, then his relationship to the director in the end outweighed the relationship between Meixiu and GK.

A second explanation could be that she was asked to leave because she was a female. As we have seen, female workers were often seen as less able than male counterparts in creating the kind of relationships with local government officials that the organisation needed in order to carry out projects. Meixiu told me later that she did not get a job in another NGO that she had applied for; the director had told her that they wanted a male worker, since the position involved being able to maintain a good relationship with the local government. Meixiu had a good relationship with the person that turned down her application – she had previously worked on a project together with her. Still, the argument for getting a male worker seemed to be stronger than this relationship.

The ultimate reason behind Meixiu being told to leave might not be easy to detect, and perhaps there was more than one single reason behind the decision. What the example might tell us, however, is that at the office there were rumours and insecurity and workers taking sides against one another, which could be related to the competitive job market at the time, but also to some recent problems in the organisation, as we will see later.

Zhu Liang: The Story of a Worker and his Commitment to a Project Site

Not everyone at the office was in the same situation as Meixiu. Some of the staff had worked in the organisation for many years, and had already been given responsibilities as project managers. Zhu Liang was one of these. Like Meixiu, he was in his early 30's, but, unlike her, had been working in EBOR since 2001 when he finished his undergraduate degree in agriculture and was recruited into the organisation.

He started his job in EBOR as a project assistant in the Livelihood Department, where he carried out research for a project in Gongshan in North-western Yunnan on the management of rangelands. He then successfully applied for a scholarship to Thailand, where he started postgraduate studies in 'sustainable agriculture'. He was still affiliated with EBOR during this time, and returned to do field research for his thesis, while at the same time taking up the position as a project manager in the Gongshan project site.

Liang was one of the workers that I came to know best while staying in EBOR, although he was often busy with his work – his research as well as his responsibilities as a project manager at EBOR. Liang did not enjoy smoking or drinking, which was unusual among the other male workers of the organisation. He seemed very committed to the project that he managed and often expressed personal feelings towards the project site that he was involved in, and the people there.

I once followed him on a trip to his project site. This was a place that he had visited many times before, and he also told me that he had many friends here. During the trip, we stayed at the house of one of his friends, a Tibetan who was running a guesthouse and a trekking service in the area. His friend was out on a guiding job at the time we arrived, but we were welcomed by his wife and his young daughter who ran the guesthouse while he was away. Liang treated them both with familiarity, and they returned his friendliness; dinner was eaten together with the family, the evening was spent sitting in front of the TV together with the family and other friends, exchanging jokes and experiences.

"Do you know anything about law?" Liang asked me while we were spending an evening in the guesthouse. I confessed to him that I in fact knew very little of the subject. He then told me that he was interested in learning more about 'law' in order to protect the interests of the local people here who, according to him, were often tricked by people from outside the village. As a researcher with education in sustainable agriculture, Liang was not too familiar with other aspects of village affairs, such as legal matters. Still, he was interested in learning more, so that his work could have wider benefits for the local people. It was clear the he had witnessed problems that villagers at his project site had experience in dealing with people outside of the village. This kind of commitment seemed to be rare at the organisation, where some people even seemed to resent the obligations they had to their project site, and complained about having to travel to the 'field' every month.

The last day in the village, Liang visited the houses of different families in order to conduct research on the use of medicinal plants. Before he went out, we had a short talk. He told me that he was worried about what would happen to this place if he was no longer working on this project. Liang said that if anyone was to take over the projects in the Gongshan area, they might forget about this village, which, according to him was the most important of the project sites in the area. Liang's worries of the future of the project site were based on his ambitions as an academic. He later told me that he was considering the possibility of applying for a PhD scholarship to go to Europe. He also told me that he wanted to finish the project here before moving on to do a PhD, saying that he had a responsibility to this project site, since he was the only researcher left who had originally been involved in the project. He told me that part of the reason that the funding for this project had been extended was that he was involved in it. Liang's commitment to the village seemed to stem from both a personal feeling and bonds to the people here, as well as his research interests. His relationship with the villagers also reflected this 'double interest': one day he was joking together with them, while the next day he was the researcher, handing out surveys, attentively writing down their answers, which would later be included in a research paper and a project report.

Liang expressed to me that he was critical to the way some other projects were run in EBOR, where, according to him, "staff only do what is written on the paper." His approach, he told me, was different. "I will try different things, both traditional and introduced – if something does not work, I will write down why." During the conversation, he also confessed to me that he was somewhat critical towards GK, saying: "*laoban* (meaning 'boss' and referring to GK) does not like to go on project trips, he prefers to stay in the office." He continued to proclaim how a *laoban* should lead by example, be able to connect all the workers and give them clear guidelines. According to Liang, GK did not fulfil all of these functions.

Experience and Background

Through the two stories presented above, it might be possible to grasp the interaction, not only between EBOR staff and the people at their project sites, but also between staff members themselves. The stories were not chosen as representations of the 'typical' experience of a worker in EBOR; rather, I chose them as examples of the complex relationships that exist both at the office and in the 'field' – and also as examples of how NGO workers might perceive themselves as being different from other workers, although 'belonging' to the same organisation.

A common thread in the two stories presented above is 'experience'. Both Liang and Meixiu had studied abroad, an opportunity that is not available to many university students in China. Liang had gotten the opportunity through his work in EBOR; contacts that the organisation had in Thailand made it possible for him to pursue a postgraduate degree at a university in Bangkok, while at the same time doing research for EBOR. Meixiu had applied for a scholarship to go abroad; her background in a number of organisations (some international) in Kunming made it easier for her to get this scholarship. The ability and willingness to express criticism or praise of other people at the office, often seemed to be based in the background and status of the person giving the comment. Liang had been working in EBOR for over five years and could be said to hold some seniority over the other workers. But this seniority did not seem to be used as an argument in itself. Rather, it was his specific background and experiences that made him consider himself different from many of the other workers. The project that Liang was undertaking in Gongshan was funded by an international research organisation focusing

on a research methodology called Participatory Research Development (PTD). This methodology, often referred to as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is presented in the development discourse as a break with earlier development trends in that it seeks to include local people in development projects as partners (Dove 2006; Mosse 1994). Although this approach had been adopted by EBOR to use in most of their projects, it was first introduced in the project that Liang was currently managing, and he could therefore claim to have a deeper understanding of the approach than others working in the organisation. In the case of Meixiu, her background and experience seemed to make her appear as threatening to many of the other workers in her department, and in turn might have led to rumours at the offices, and her rejection by the director.

Approaching 'Sensitive Issues'

Although EBOR did not receive much attention from their 'mother in law', besides the annual assessment, their registration as a 'social organisation' still means that they have to keep a good relationship with their 'mother in law', as well as with their registration and management unit. In the Registration Law, it is stated that the registration of a social organisation can be revoked by the registration and management unit at any time; this leaves organisations with an uncertainty, and ultimately might lead some social organisations to be careful when it comes to approaching 'sensitive issues'.

Negotiating the 'Sensitivity' of a Project Site

Hu Xiaoli is a girl in her mid twenties working in the Watershed Department of EBOR. In late June, over three months after demonstrations erupted in Tibet and surrounding areas, she was getting ready to visit her project site in Diqing, a prefecture bordering Tibet in the northwest of Yunnan with a large ethnic Tibetan population. I talked to Xiaoli a week before she was going on the project trip, and asked her if I could follow her on the trip.

I ask her if I can come along on this project trip. She tells me that she is not sure. "It's a sensitive area, especially after that march" (she is referring to the demonstrations that happened in Tibet and surrounding areas in March that year, where several people were killed). The location of the project site is, according to her, particularly sensitive. She first tells me: "it is the home town of Dalai Lama," then she thinks better of it, and says: "no, the home

town of Dalai Lama's Prime Minister." She tells me that this might make it difficult for me to visit. What is more, she says, she wants to try to move the project to another location. She was not aware that the area had strong ties to Dalai Lama, which, according to her, makes it more difficult to do projects here, because "there are too many restrictions." She does not give me much detail of these restrictions or how they have been presented to her, but tells me that among them is a new regulation restricting people from a certain area to work on the project; I assume that this area is Tibet. Furthermore, she tells me that The Nature Conservancy used to have many projects in the Diqing area, but that they have now decided to pull back from some of them. "Therefore," she says, "we should also pull out."

The protests in Tibet, which Xiaoli refers to as 'that march', happened at the same time as I was doing my fieldwork. In China, it was reported as a riot instigated by the 'separatist' forces led by Dalai Lama. In the weeks following the incident, newspapers were filled with reports of the 'riots', focusing on the violence caused by rioters, while providing sparse information on the efforts the Chinese government had put in to quell the riots. In international media, the reporting was almost the inverse of the Chinese media tactic; here, protesters were described as 'freedom fighters' opposing violent and repressive Chinese rule in the area. Although versions of the event differed, it was clear that this had become a sensitive issue in China. As Greenhalgh (2008) has pointed out, when an issue is seen as sensitive by the Central Government, they make sure that all state-owned media publications are aware of this fact. Tibet has for a long time been a sensitive issue in China, and Chinese media reporting necessarily take the 'Party line' on issues regarding Tibet. Furthermore, sensitive issues are closed for public discussion amongst scholars, who will be wise either to adopt the party line on these issues (if only seemingly) or abstain from comment (ibid.).

Xiaoli's comments reflect one side of the close relationship between NGOs and government institutions in China. As NGOs are attentive to government policies and interests, they also sometimes act accordingly. In this case, the effort of the Central Government in controlling the Tibetan areas, influenced Xiaoli to consider moving her project site from the 'sensitive' areas bordering Tibet. The decision by the international environmental organisation TNC to pull out of the area was also used by Xiaoli as a sign that EBOR should consider 'pulling out'.

In order to check if I can come along on the project trip, Xiaoli goes to ask teacher Wu, who is the oldest member of the office staff, and also a member of the' board of directors'. Given this, it might not be surprising that Xiaoli goes to see him for advice. It also seems like teacher Wu is consulted when there are questions on how to deal with the government. He has been working for Kunming Institute of Botany, a government institution, most of his life, and might be the person among the staff that is most able to evaluate how to deal with the government. When Xiaoli comes back, she tells me that teacher Wu told her that I could come along on the project trip as long as I got an approval from the director. She adds that teacher Wu is very cautious and does not want the organisation to get into any trouble; then she says: "you know, EBOR is a very suspicious organisation." I tell her that I will talk to the director. She nods, and adds that if I come along I might not be able to attend the first meeting, where some government officials will be present. According to her, the officials might get nervous if I am present.

I make a call to the director from the EBOR office, and tell her about my desire to go on a project trip together with Xiaoli. I also tell the director that teacher Wu had asked me to give her a call. The director listens to my request, and is silent for a little while before she replies: "The problem is … it's like a Tibetan area. Since EBOR is not certified, we need an invitation [in order for me to come along]." She further tells me: "When we bring donors, we often need to bring written application. Maybe for this trip, time is limited."
I agree that it will be too much trouble for me to go on this trip; I do not want to make any trouble for the organisation. Instead, I ask the director if it will be possible for me to go on a project trip to a different area. I tell her that I have already spoken to another project manager, Liang, about visiting his project site, and that he did not have any objections to me coming along. When I mention this, she tells me that it should not be a problem for me to visit this project site, saying: "I think that area is a little bit friendly."

Although neither Xiaoli nor the director tells me directly that I cannot come on the project trip, they give some examples of why it might be difficult. It is not certain that it would have been impossible for me to come, but it seems more than certain that this could have created some problems for the organisation. The workers in the organisation also have to consider their own position in a tough Chinese job market, as we have seen above, especially for young university graduates. If EBOR

had its registration revoked over challenging a sensitive issue, these workers would loose their income and face the same problems that a number of young people in China face when trying to acquire a job. I did not get to visit the project, but still I gained some valuable information on the way 'sensitive issues' might be negotiated in EBOR. It is clear that Xiaoli did not have the authority to tell me not to come along on the project trip, even though she suspected that it could be a problem. In order to make me understand this trouble, she first approached teacher Wang, who, anticipating that the director would also be sceptical, told me to ask her for approval. The line of authority within the organisation was not breached, and the message was made clear – it was a complex issue, and would be better left alone.

Regulation or Cooperation?

The approach that Xiaoli and the leaders of EBOR took in relation to this incident could reflect what Ho has described as a "non-confrontational strategy" (2008b: 8), in where activists and environmental organisations in China often adopt certain strategies as a reaction to restrictions enforced by the Central Government. These strategies include portraying themselves as partners to the Central Government, as well as seeking to avoiding sensitive issues (ibid.). As we have seen from the example above, a strategy for EBOR when faced with a sensitive issue such as 'Tibet', was to be cautious, and not do anything that might show that they were not the 'partners' to central authorities. This included not bringing any foreigners in to the area that was affected by the uprising, and even evaluating whether or not it would be wise to move their project site to another area altogether.

Adopting a non-confrontational strategy, however, does not mean that an organisation is 'controlled' by the government. According to Ho (2008a), social organisations can take advantage of their close relationship with government by constantly negotiating the current policies of the government. A similar idea is formulated in an Annual Report issued by EBOR in 2002, where they reflect on the way 'regulation' from the government can go both ways:

> EBOR accept the need for regulation by the government. However, we in turn want to regulate government planning, policy and project processes. EBOR sees the

virtues in regulation of the government and closer consultation with the state.

Although this statement is stylized and refined to meet the demands of a publication like the Annual Report, which is presented to donor organisations as well as government partners, the argument is clear: if you can control us, we can control you.

Success and Political Fights

The ideals that EBOR projected outwards, might not, however, apply to the management of the organisation itself. During my stay in Kunming, several people told me how EBOR was not a 'successful' organisation anymore. This information came from a variety of sources, but mostly seemed to be based on a consensus among 'intellectuals' and staff from other NGOs in the region. Some expressed their scepticism of the abilities of the current leaders and staff, as these were seen being less qualified to do their job than their predecessors had been. The reason for EBOR's 'decline' was given by most people to be recent changes in the leadership of the organisation, and following this, the resignation of many of the most qualified workers and researchers in the organisation. According to these rumours, there had been a power struggle in the organisation at the last board meeting in 2005, where the outcome had been that a well-respected researcher, who used to be the director of the organisation, was now replaced by the current director, who was much younger and less experienced. When I asked one of my informants, who was also studying NGOs in Kunming, about this incident, he told me: "This kind of thing is a political fight. It is very popular in organisations in China." Although the comment was said in a half-joking manner, he still expressed that the problems at EBOR were real. He attributed the problems with the organisation getting too concerned with money. He told me that EBOR had been a more 'open' organisation in the beginning, arranging seminars that could be attended not only by researchers, but also by students and other people that were interested in the topics that were being discussed. He told me that he himself has attended some of these seminars as a younger student, and said that things had changed when EBOR started applying for more funding: "when they were more connected with money, it got difficult."

Rumours were also circulating at the office. When I was talking to Song Qiao, a girl working in the Watershed Department, about her project site, she told me that she was

concerned about the budget for the project she was currently engaged in. She told me that there was 170.000 Yuan (RMB) that had been 'misspent', and that the accountant at the office had resigned earlier this year. Qiao had been assigned with the job to make a new budget and was not very pleased with the situation. Furthermore, she told me, she did not dare to ask for insurance for herself when she was travelling to her project site; according to her, insurance was not too expensive – maybe not more than 1-2000 Yuan per year – but since the budget for the project had already been exceeded, she feared that it would be difficult for her to ask for insurance, let alone include it in the budget without asking. Qiao told me that it was up to the director whether employees were given insurance or not, and, although she was going to manage without for now, with all the insecurity that this entailed – especially when travelling on poorly maintained roads in the Yunnan countryside – she was determined to ask for insurance later, telling me: "I will do it for the next project."

Unwillingness to confront the director seemed to stem from insecurity among the workers based on some of the arbitrary decisions made by the director. As we saw with the example of Meixiu earlier in the chapter, the director had chosen to let her go, even though she seemed to be doing a good job. Some of the workers at the office seemed to think this was unfair, but nevertheless did not speak up for Meixiu. When I asked Qiao more about the director, she told me: "she is behind the curtains, like Cixi." This comment surprised me, as no one I had spoken to up until this time had given me a characterisation of the director; most people either referred to the incident happening at the last board meeting and election, or did not give any comment at all. This comment, on the other hand, seemed to be more straightforward in describing the influence of the director in the organisation. Cixi was the aunt of the last emperor of China, and was allegedly the real power behind the throne in the Qing dynasty, keeping her nephew restricted to the palace, the Forbidden City in Beijing, as a 'puppet emperor'. What the comment from Qiao seemed to suggest, was that although the director was not often present at the offices she still controlled what was going on there. Furthermore, it also seemed to suggest that the deputy directors at the offices were really 'puppet emperors', and that all matters had to go through the director who held the real power in the organisation.

In the Annual Report of EBOR from 2005, the new changes in the leadership of the organisation was described as an improvement of EBOR, presenting the changes as having led to a new management style, where the organisation was now run in a more "collective, open and transparent manner." This presentation of the management style did not seem to reflect the way many of the workers experienced the situation: some seemed afraid to confront the director with questions of salaries and insurance, others quietly grumbled, engaged in rumours and stories, while many decided to leave the organisation.

Towards an Oligarchy?

Fisher has commented on presentations that describes a tendency for nongovernmental organisations to "drift from participatory to oligarchic political structures," citing the "iron law of oligarchy" as something that is perhaps also applicable to NGOs (1997: 456). In the case of EBOR, the "iron law" might seem to fit with recent events in the organisation; EBOR used to be regarded as a successful and democratic organisation, but as it became more successful and received more funding, there was a 'political fight' and a new, more autocratic leadership seemed now to be in place. However, this presentation might be to simple to account for the changes that some NGOs go through, and the variation of experiences among different NGOs. Commenting on the way many observers seem to seek out instances where observations of organisations confirms the "iron law," Fisher presents an alternative view, in where NGOs are "vectors of antagonistic contentions over governmental relations" (1997: 456; cf. Gordon, 1991). In such a view, whether or not NGOs drift towards "oligarchy" might be irrelevant all the time that NGOs are characterised by constant transformations and renegotiations.

Indeed, some people at the office did not view the current situation as being all that bad, showing an attitude that seemed to reflect that leadership changes were natural, and that power struggles were not necessarily bad or even avoidable. One of the workers told me that he did not think that EBOR was in a worse situation now than it had been before. Although he saw it as out of his hands to create any change to the better, he still seemed confident that positive changes could happen, and told me that they would just have to "wait and see." The 'fixity' of the NGO category ensures that 'change' within NGOs, as well as the diversity between them, might often be undercommunicated, leading to

presentations of NGOs as either 'ideal' organisation, or 'corrupted' by state politics and greed. As I have tried to show in this chapter, EBOR is neither an 'ideal' NGO, nor an 'oligarchic' organisation; rather, by being in constant transformation, EBOR represents a little bit of both.

3

The Grant Application: Experts, Donors and Discipline

"The traffic in specialists and the pervasiveness of training ensure that the world of projects has its own discourse."

(Sampson, 1996: 123)

The 'transition' from socialism in many Eastern European countries in 1989 was followed by a massive increase in development projects in the region. Many observers in Western Europe saw this as an opportunity for the former 'socialist' countries to adopt 'western-style' democratic political systems, and a lot of resources were put into fostering what was seen as the development of a nascent 'civil society' (Hann, 1996). Sampson (1996) has looked at how concepts and models focusing on the 'transition' of formerly socialist countries were exported to Eastern Europe in the 1990's, through projects funded and supported by Western countries and institutions. His argument is that transfers of resources in these projects interacted with the "informal circulation of money, objects, people and representations" in the recipient countries, where access to resources became based on knowledge of the donor agencies 'goals' and 'procedures', rather than the needs in recipient countries (ibid.: 142). Sampson describes projects as 'magical objects', where power relations are mystified, yet reproduced in a circulation of resources and representations that is sustained through what he calls a "traffic in specialists" (ibid.: 123).

The 'traffic' and circulation of specialists is an integral part of development and environmental projects around the world (Mosse and Lewis, 2006). Specialists in 'project design', representatives from funding agencies, experts on certain topics and concepts are all visiting organisations and travelling to conferences where they 'disseminate' their knowledge at the same time as their knowledge is made relevant and legitimate (Mosse,

2005). In this chapter, I take a closer look at the visit from a donor agency representative who travels to EBOR in order to evaluate a recent project application. This visit provides us with an opportunity to examine the 'traffic in specialists' between donor agencies and EBOR, and what this traffic might reveal about power relationships and access to 'legitimate' knowledge.

Networks and Grant Proposals

The income of EBOR is, as we have seen, almost entirely dependent on receiving money from external sources. According to their financial report from 2007, EBOR derived less than 1 percent of their income from domestic fundraising. Funds channelled from government agencies, institutes and units, accounted for close to 10 percent of the overall income, while the remaining 90 percent came from international foundations, donor organisations and government-funded national research institutes. It seems clear that the ability to secure a stable flow of grants from international sources is a major concern for the organisation, perhaps reflected by the fact that one of the main responsibilities of Cheng as project management director was to search for available grants and write grant applications.

The Story of a Grant Application

Early in 2008, Cheng was informed of the possibility to apply for a grant from the China Office of the Ford Foundation (hereafter the China Office), where they were currently making funding available for projects focusing on eco-tourism. He started preparing the application by filling out a standard application form in Chinese, before passing the application draft on to a girl at the office who was an English major and who's primary job in the organisation was to translate documents and applications from Chinese to English. The whole document was compromised of 16 pages, including a summary of the project, information about the organisation, a 'narrative' of proposed project activities, as well as proposed grant budget. It took the translator roughly two weeks to finish the translation, whereupon Cheng sent it to the Ford Foundation, via e-mail and 'hard copy', as was requested in the application form. The project that was proposed by Cheng in the application to the Ford Foundation, had the title: "Yunnan Upland Eco-Tourism Grasslands Project." It was to be headed by Cheng and included four project sites – each with their own project manager and project assistant. The proposed budget that was

$150.000, and the length of the project was set to three years. By the middle of June, Cheng was notified via e-mail by the China Office that the initial application had been successful, and that EBOR would shortly receive a representative from the Ford Foundation to oversee the details of the project.

A few days after he received this news, I met with Cheng at a small bar in Kunming. With a smile on his face and with subtly restrained satisfaction, he told me that the Ford Foundation application had just been approved, together with two grant applications from other donor agencies. He was confident that the project would be implemented shortly, and seemed happy that his efforts in writing these grant proposals had not been in vain. However, he also presented this information to me in a by-the-way manner that seemed to downplay the crucial role of these grants in the financial foundation of EBOR's operations, as well as their dependence on donors and beneficiaries. This resembled the way EBOR often was often presented as 'independent' in official publications, while downplaying the financial background for their projects, as well as their 'management' by government institutions. Being dependent on others might be seen to conflict with the presentation of EBOR as an independent organisation (non-governmental, non-profit), free to engage in voluntary 'collaborations' with other organisations as well as with state actors. This might be part of the reason why financial matters and grant schemes are not so much commented upon in the organisation.

In fact, EBOR has had a long-standing relationship with the Ford Foundation. As we saw in chapter one, the Ford Foundation provided EBOR with their first grant when they started up in 1995, and thereby played a major role in the establishment of the organisation. Since then, the Ford Foundation has sustained EBOR with an annual grant of roughly $300.000 to cover administrative expenses and rent for the office space of the organisation. The fact that the daily operation of EBOR relies on an annual grant from the Ford Foundation suggests that it is important for EBOR to maintain a good relationship with the foundation. Being on good terms with the Ford Foundation is not only crucial in order to maintain the *status quo* of funding, it is also important as a way of learning about new funding opportunities – Cheng had learned about the 'eco tourism' funding scheme though contacts in the China Office of the organisation.

The Visit

The representative that came to visit the organisation was a program officer from the China Office in Beijing; a woman originally from the USA, but who had lived in China for many years and, according to Cheng, spoke fluent mandarin Chinese. The following details my account of the visit from the Ford Foundation representative to the EBOR offices. Cheng had allowed me to join in on the meeting, as well as the following lunch and discussion. My notes are based on field notes written down before, during, and immediately after the visit.

At the offices, we are waiting for the representative from the Ford Foundation to arrive. The offices seem busier than usual, with workers entering and leaving the seminar room, preparing the coming meeting. Even Cheng seems busier than his usual energetic style, going back and forth between his office and the seminar room in order to make sure that everything is ready for the visit. More and more people arrive at the offices; they find their own seats in the seminar room, where desks and chairs are set up in a semi-circle around a main 'stage' where a screen is lit up by a projector from across the room. Cheng keeps checking his wristwatch, and comments to me that the representative should have been here thirty minutes ago. He seems a bit restless. A few minutes past twelve, and something is happening. Cheng leaves his desk and walks down the corridor to greet a woman heading for the seminar room – the representative has finally arrived.

Cheng shows the representative (I call her Karen) to a seat in the middle of the room. Before sitting down, she greets everyone in the room, and gives a short presentation of herself in Chinese. All the attendants seem to be paying attention to what she does; when she finally sits down, so does everyone else. There are eleven people attending the meeting. All of them are affiliated with EBOR either as workers, leaders, or members of the board of directors. The director, however, is not present. Cheng opens the meeting by greeting all the attendants, and introducing everyone to Karen. He then starts his presentation (in Chinese) of the project that EBOR has applied funding for; on the screen behind him the project title appears: "Yunnan Upland Eco-tourism Grassland Project." He begins by introducing the project sites, and then goes on to detail what he describes as the 'goals' and the 'results' of the project. His presentation repeats what has already been stated in the project report, and after about 15 minutes Karen seems to be getting a bit restless. She gets up from her seat, and politely starts directing some questions to Cheng, asking about the size of the proposed budget as well as the number of project sites. She says that the budget proposed for this project was higher than she

had expected. She also says that they will have to go through some of the project sites since she knows that other NGOs have already done similar projects in these areas. She then turns to the other attendants, saying: "Should we maybe take lunch first?" Everyone laughs, but her question is taken seriously, and people get up from their seats in order to go to lunch. We all walk together out of the office and down the road to an expensive restaurant; everyone gathers around the large, round table in a separate room of the restaurant waiting for the food to arrive. Karen exchange jokes together with the other attendants. The atmosphere seems relaxed; this is not the time to discuss serious matters.

After lunch, most of the attendants leave, and only a few people walk back to the office with Karen – these are the project managers that have been included in the proposal. Two of the project managers in the project sit down with Karen to assess the proposal. I sit down next to them (Cheng has presented me as a Chinese expert and part of the project). Karen sits down at the end of the table; pointing to different sections in the proposals, she explains to the project manages the changes that have to be made to the project. She tells them that she does not think that all of the project sites are good, and mentions several organisations that have been doing, or are still doing projects in these areas, "CI, Action Aid, WWF, TNC." The project managers do not seem to have the same overview as Karen, and do not argue with her. One of them is busy writing down the changes that Karen proposed, while the other person nods in agreement with the proposed changes.

It seems clear that Karen is not impressed by the knowledge that the project managers command over the subject of 'eco-tourism'. She goes on to explain (both in English and Chinese) some of the benefits of this concept, and dictates a few 'research questions' that she wants the project managers to consider. I have detailed a list of these 'research questions' below.

> i.   *The roles and views of the different stakeholders involved in the project (government bureaus, committees, board members)*
> ii. *What kind of eco-tourism do you want? Why do we need eco-tourism?*
> iii. *The role of partner institutions (especially tourism agencies)*
> iv. *More details about the grasslands*
> v.   *Analyse the market position of Fair Trade; how to sell the items?*
> vi. *Find information about successful eco-tourism projects from other organisations*

After doing this, she begins suggesting roles to each of the project managers and me. She tells me in English that I should do some research on eco-tourism, and write an article about it. She gives me a title for an imagined article: "How does NGOs acquire knowledge? A case study of eco-tourism in Yunnan." She then says that I perhaps could also look into why Fair Trade has not been very successful in China. In the end, when everyone is getting ready to leave, she addresses me directly, saying that it is not easy for environmental NGOs in China to acquire "technical knowledge." She then opens her arms and exclaims: "This is one of the most technical NGOs you'll find."

The visit by Karen was short but intensive. Her approach was authoritative: this was not a discussion on how to best approach the project. She gave instructions to the project managers, including questions that she wanted them to address, changes had to be made to the project sites, and the budget had to be reduced. Everyone at the office seemed to do their best to follow her lead and accommodate her criticism. Karen could act authoritatively because she commanded resources and knowledge that were valuable for EBOR. 'Technical knowledge' was presented by Karen as valuable type of knowledge; something that could be acquired by NGOs and that would make their projects better. But what does this 'type' of knowledge entail? The 'technical knowledge' she talks about, seems to be the ability to effectively mobilise the 'models' and concepts that are part of the ever-changing jargon of international development and environmental institutions. In this case, the 'technical knowledge' was knowledge of the concept of 'fair trade', and how to utilise this knowledge in projects and research. It was also the knowledge of what *other* NGOs were doing in Yunnan, in order to avoid implementing projects in areas that already had similar projects by other organisations. Furthermore, 'technical knowledge' was presented by Karen as something that is 'difficult to obtain'; it was not knowledge that could be acquired easily, but required a certain amount of resources and connections. Trough the visit, Karen promoted some of the 'technical knowledge' that the Ford Foundation could provide; at the same time she did not seem to be satisfied with the level of knowledge in most Chinese environmental NGOs; EBOR was presented as a positive exception, but still not good enough.

A Disciplining Practice?

Mosse argues that the adaptation of certain 'project designs' or models by NGOs "primarily serves to mobilize and maintain political support, that is to legitimize rather

than orientate practice" (2004: 648). According to him, 'technical knowledge' such as project designs and awareness of international jargon, is affected by an international policy discourse that disciplines both donors and recipients of grants and resources. The exchange between the project managers of EBOR and Karen could be seen as such a 'disciplining practice'. The changes that Karen proposed were not major, and a few weeks after her visit Cheng sent a revised proposal to Ford Foundation China Office where the grant allocated for the project was reduced by $20 000, the funding period was reduced to two years, and two of the project sites were left out of the proposal. Shortly thereafter, he was told that the application had been finally approved. The main agenda and scope of the project was not changed, most of the people proposed to be involved in the project could begin their work as project managers, and EBOR received funding from their donor and could claim to have acquired 'technical knowledge' in the area of eco-tourism. It seems as though the main reason for the revision, and the need for the director of the Ford Foundation China Office to visit, was to make sure that the procedures of Ford Foundation was followed all the way down to the implementation of projects. A project proposal was not considered complete until it had been revised, discussed and changed, although not dramatically altering the project. In the same way, the Ford Foundation was *expected* to carry out such a 'quality check' in order to retain the legitimacy of the foundation vis-à-vis other funding agencies, national governments, and national and international policies (Mosse, 2004).

Not all projects at EBOR were based on the same type of funding scheme. As Liang had told me, the projects that he were involved in, as well as a lot of other projects undertaken at EBOR, were funded by grants that were less restricted and directed. He was critical towards the eco-tourism project and considered it to be less informed by local problems than many other EBOR projects. According to him, this project was more informed by the willingness of Cheng to receive grant money from the Ford Foundation, that it was by research into rural needs and problems. Neither do all grant makers follow the same procedures as the Ford Foundation. In Kunming, I met with a person who had previously worked in a US-based donor organisation called Global Greengrants Fund, and who had visited China as a representative for this organisation on several previous occasions. This person, I call her Jennifer, had told me that the approach of Global Greengrants Fund was to make funding available for as many people as possible.

Therefore, their grant applications were simple, consisting of only one page written in both English and standard Chinese, and with the option of filling out the application entirely in Chinese. She contrasted this approach to the Ford Foundation, who, according to her, was too conservative and focused on "box thinking." She told me that on one occasion, while visiting Beijing, she had been confronted by the head of the Ford Foundation's China Office (the same person that visited EBOR), who had criticized the approach of Global Greengrants Fund for being irresponsible and putting too much trust in their beneficiaries. She held this as an example of the restrictions of the "box thinking" of the Ford Foundation: that they did not put enough trust in individuals, and had too many requirements for prospective applicants, making it difficult for smaller organisations to be successful in their applications.

According to the Ford Foundation website, less than 3% of the grant inquiries they receive annually are awarded with a grant (www.fordfund.org). This might reflect the great advantage inherent in having access to knowledge on application procedures, 'desirable' projects, and valued knowledge, and of staying on good terms with staff members of large, international donor organisations such as the Ford Foundation.

4

National Discourses on 'Environment' and 'Development': The Scientific Development Concept

In the previous chapters, I have focused on some stories and events based on observations taken from the offices of EBOR, and looked at how the same offices often function as a meeting ground for specialists and representatives from donor organisations. In this chapter, I take a closer look at some aspects of discourses on 'environment' and 'development' in China, and how the workers and leaders at EBOR relate to these aspects. In order to make this task manageable, I have chosen to limit my analysis to *one* concept circulated by the Central Government, called the 'scientific development concept' (*kexue fazhan guan*). The decision to focus on this specific concept is based on discussions and interviews with EBOR leaders and workers, observations of urban development projects in Kunming, and the extensive media reporting of the concept, which seems to reflect a certain commitment to the scientific development concept by the Central Government. The scientific development concept has been identified by many observers as a 'guiding principle' of the current Hu administration. As such, it deserves attention for its possible influence throughout Chinese society. My selection of examples is based on fieldwork over a limited timeframe and in a limited geographical area, and therefore cannot be seen as 'taking stock' over the importance of the 'scientific development concept' in China more generally. However, I believe that these examples reflect some of the ways in which different actors might seek to mobilise and attempt to represent officially sanctioned concepts such as the 'scientific development' concept to further their own agendas and justify their actions.

A Short Introduction to the Scientific Development Concept

The concept of scientific development (*kexue fazhan*) was actively promoted by the Chinese leadership during the 10th National People's Congress (NPC) in March 2004 (Fewsmith, 2004). In his address to the National Congress, prime minister Wen Jiabao made several references to 'scientific development', stating that "The main ideas and principal tasks for the work of the government are: … to make development our top priority and adhere to the scientific viewpoint of development." ("Report on the work of the government," 2004). The speech was followed by newspaper articles in a the state-owned *People's Daily* that made sure that the concept received attention as a "defining thought of the new leadership" (Fewsmith, 2004: 7). The emergence of the 'scientific development concept' can be seen to have come though the effort of the PRC president and general secretary of CPC, Hu Jintao, in establishing a body of "Hu Jintao thought" in the government (ibid.). This might explain why the concept has been so much commented upon; its importance has been mentioned in following speeches and reports, amongst others, at the 11th National People's Congress in 2008, and has been included in the 11th Five Year Plan, one of the most important guidelines for national economic development, thereby assuring that it has to be taken into consideration by government agencies at least until the Five Year Plan is replaced by a new plan by the end of 2010 (Naughton, 2005).

Although the concept of scientific development and its importance in China are mentioned in speeches and documents, it is difficult to get a grip on what the concept really entails. Greenhalgh has shown that it is not unusual for policies and concepts to be propagandised before their final formulation is established by the Central Government and the CPC; often, she says, "party implementation precedes final formulation," and it is left to scientists, academics, and media to establish the grounds for the concept in due time (Greenhalgh, 2008: 31). However, the 'legitimate' channels for 'science' and 'media reporting' are both controlled by the Central Government and the CPC, which means that the elaboration of concepts such as the scientific development concept are often sanctioned by the Central Government prior to official publication (ibid.). Reporting on the 'scientific development concept' both preceded and followed the official endorsement of the concept, and can be seen to have been important in elaborating on the details of the concepts more than had been done in official speeches and documents. Thus, in the

months leading up to the 10th NPC, state owned media and communist party journals signalled that a changing approach to 'development' was imminent among the Chinese leadership, a change that was reported to be 'people centred' (*yren weiben*), and more 'comprehensive' than earlier development efforts (Fewsmith, 2004). The articles also identified a relationship between the 'scientific development concept' and other concepts such as 'sustainable development', without further elaborating on this relationship (Naughton, 2005). The articles in *People's Daily* that followed the 10th NPC, replicated these ideas, helped to put emphasis on the national applicability of them; scientific development was about *Chinese* development (Fewsmith 2004).

From Sustainable Development to Scientific Development

In order to investigate the details of the 'scientific development concept', we might look at some of the background for recent government approaches to 'development' and 'environment' in China. In the following, I especially focus on two issues that preceded the 'scientific development concept': The establishment of a "China Agenda 21" following the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and a large-scale national development programme initiated in 1999.

Shortly after China's involvement in the Rio Earth Summit, and following recommendations made in the conference, the Central Government established a White Paper, the "China Agenda 21," which details China's commitment to working for 'sustainable development'. According to Yang and Calhoun, this marked the starting point for an "official discourse of sustainable development in China," in where the Central Government sought to legitimise their use of the concept in a Chinese context (2008: 72). The concept of "sustainable development" has long been criticised for being vaguely defined, and has led to a number of different interpretations and representations worldwide (Hajer, 1995). "Sustainable development" was popularised in the report *Our Common Future*, published by the World Commission on Environment and Development[5] in 1987, and has been influential in informing national and international development plans despite sustained critique. As Milton (1996) has pointed out, the concept of

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[5] Also known as the "Brundtland Commission" after its chairwoman Gro Harlem Brundtland, the commission was established by the UN general assembly in 1983; one of its suggestions were: "[t]o propose long-term environmental strategies for achieving sustainable development to the year 2000 and beyond" (see: http://www.un-documents.net/a38r161)

"sustainable development" is riddled with thoughts about the separation of 'human' from 'nature', and, in an extension of this, the assumption that human activity necessarily *degrades* nature. In this sense, 'sustainable' seems to denote a 'reaction' to something that is 'unsustainable' – namely, practices that degrades nature. However, which practices count as sustainable and which does not, is an issue of constant negotiation and might in the end be defined by those with power and resources to do so. According to Escobar (1995) 'sustainable development' has been used in a number of development projects where the 'scientific' management of natural resources has arguably led to simplifications and increased bureaucratisation and institutionalisation of environmental issues. The establishment of an international system of timber certification following debates over logging in Sarawak can function as one example of technocratic and managerial attitudes to sustainable development, and problems deriving from different understandings of the term 'sustainable' (Brosius, 1999; Bendig and Rosendo, 2006).

According to Blaikie and Muldavin, the rapid publication of a "China Agenda 21" White Paper following the Rio Earth Summit can serve as an example of the commitment of the Chinese Central Government to legitimise their own development programs in relation to international agencies and governments, as well as to a national audience (2004: 534). As we will see in the following, this legitimising practice might be evident in a recent large-scale Chinese development programme.

The "Go West" Campaign and National Development

In China, 'sustainable development' was one of the components in a large-scale national development plan: the "Great Development of the West" (*xibu dakaifa*)[6], also known as the "Go West" campaign. In 1999, the "Go West" campaign was launched nationwide by the Central Government, and then-president Jiang Zemin, with the stated aim to 'develop' the western parts of China so that they could 'catch up' with the more prosperous eastern parts of the country (Economy, 2002). The areas targeted by the "Go West" campaign amounted to six provinces, five autonomous regions, and one

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[6] In some sources, e.g. Economy (2002), *xibu dakaifa* is translated as the "Great Opening of the West," reflecting a double meaning of the word *kaifa*, as 'development', or 'to open up' (for development/exploitation). When describing the plan in this context, I find it more useful to focus on the implicit meaning of *kaifa* as 'development', thereby identifying *xibu dakaifa* as a national development plan that simultaneously seeks to draw upon, and distinguish itself from an international development discourse.

municipality, including Yunnan province. According to Economy, the "Go West" campaign is reminiscent of many large-scale 'mobilisation campaigns' that have been issued in China under various Dynasties, as well as under the Mao government, which in many cases have not paid enough attention to local social and ecological conditions. As Economy points out, the rhetoric of the "Go West" campaign presents this campaign as different from earlier campaigns, by focusing on the 'balancing' of economic development with 'sustainable development' (2002: 10). Economy is, however, sceptical to the efforts made by the Central Government towards 'sustainability' and environmental concerns, pointing out that "mobilisation campaigns in China often have served a dual purpose of consolidating power and developing the economy" (2002: 1).

I will not attempt, like Economy, to trace the affinity of the "Go West" campaign to earlier 'mobilisation campaigns', or to make a value judgement on the 'commitment' of the Central Government towards environmental concerns. Instead, I believe it to be more fruitful to look at the campaign as a 'statement' that produces and mobilises some 'truths' about Chinese development (Foucault, 1972; 1977; 1994). First, the campaign can be seen to symmetrically oppose 'west' to 'east', where 'the west' is presented as backwards, while 'the east' constitutes the antithesis of 'the west': modern and developed. In addition, the west is asked to 'catch up' to the east, thereby leaving some of the responsibility on the west for their perceived backwardness, and also on their own 'development'. Finally, the west can only 'catch up' with the help of the east, which is, of course, already 'developed' and thereby has a privileged position from which to judge and assess development projects[7]. According to Li, 'development', along with education, land law and administration, is part of the regular actions of 'state formation' in where a state apparatus presents itself as being concerned with, and constantly serving, 'national interests' (1999: 297). National development, according to Li, makes sure that a separation between 'the developing state' and a recipient populace is maintained, while the techniques for bringing about change (science and management), as well as the criteria with which to judge 'successful' change, are both controlled by state agencies.

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[7] For a similar argument of international development projects, see Escobar (1995).

From Marxism to Scientism

The focus on 'science' as part of the 'guiding thought' of the Chinese leadership might seem odd, considering that for a long time, 'science' was considered 'bourgeoisie' and not applicable to communist China (Greenhalgh, 2008). However, as Greenhalgh has pointed out, the transition from Mao (and his followers) to Deng Xiaoping in 1978 signalled a shift in the policymaking rhetoric, from being focused on one ideology (Marxism) to another (scientism) (2008: 316). As an example of this rhetorical shift, Greenhalg examines the one-child policy that was implemented in China from the early 1980's, looking at how a Marxist rhetoric for population change gradually came to be replaced by a 'scientific policymaking' more focused on the 'control' of population growth (ibid.: 271). Similarly, Boland, when describing the debate over the building of the "Three Gorges Dam" on the *Changjiang*, has made the case that 'scientific decision making' has attained a largely unchallenged role in policy making in China – science functions to legitimate debates that have been characterised by social and political uncertainty (1998: 42). The construction of 'science' as the new 'truth', can perhaps be seen as a general trend in Chinese policymaking, in where the new leaders have sought to create a basis for their authority that differs from Marxism/communism, which has become associated with uncertainty following the devastating policies of the Great Leap Forward in 1958, and the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 (Blaikie and Muldavin, 2004).

Reflections on 'Scientific Development' in Kunming: The Tree-planting Scheme

Although the Chinese government can bee seen to have made an attempt to construct their own version of Chinese development and to control the 'appropriate' techniques for implementation and evaluation of 'development', their representation is never *absolute*, and is constantly subjected to local interpretations, contestation and mobilisation, from non-state and state actors alike. In the following, I will take a look at how government officials and the director of EBOR can be said to make an attempt to represent the 'scientific development concept' on their own terms. I try to show how these different 'representations' seems to be grounded in different understandings of what development is, and also what it should be. The starting point for this analysis will be what can be termed a small-scale campaign, issued by the municipal government of Kunming and

carried out through numerous infrastructure projects in the city during the time I was doing fieldwork there.

Situated in Yunnan – one of the 12 areas included in the 'Go West' campaign – Kunming has received attention from the Central Government as an area targeted for 'development'. The city is currently one of the fastest growing cities in China; its location between China and much of South and South-East Asia, has increased the Central Government's focus on the city and its economic potential in regional trade. Kunming is the municipal seat of Yunnan province, and by far the largest city in the province; not only does it receive an increasing number of labour migrants to assist on ambitious construction projects – the city also has one of the fastest per capita growth of private cars in all of China, and is set to become an important economic factor in the country through the establishment of a Free Trade Zone with the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries in 2010 ("China-ASEAN," 2009).

During my stay in Kunming, there was a constant succession of infrastructure projects, turning large parts of the city upside down. Buildings and structures were demolished to give way to larger streets, parks, and highways; traffic was diverted due to the construction of a large motorway overpass just north of the city centre; elevated motorways were constructed from north to south, casting their shadows over the daily life below. The workers undertaking the construction of these 'developments' could be seen all over the city: migrant workers wearing yellow helmets – nearly all of them men.

One project in particular seemed to overshadow the others in scope and in intensity as the summer months approached. The project in question was part of a general 'overhaul' of Kunming city, including the demolition of several illegal housing structures in the central city and the use of police force to drive away food hawkers and night market stalls from streets in the city centre. The focus of this project, however, was to increase the green space of the city by planting a high number of trees in the city centre. The tree planting was not confined to just parks or certain neighbourhoods, but happened everywhere in the central city, mostly along pedestrian sidewalks, in alleys, backstreets and open spaces. Square holes measuring roughly 1 x 1 metre, often as much as 50 centimetres deep, were dug out in sidewalks by migrant workers using industrial cutting

machines powered by portable generators, and expanded by a number of workers with shovels and pick axes. Judging by the reach and scope of the activities and the mobilisation of personnel and trees, the tree planting was highly organised. At the same time, the multitudes of events taking place all over the city were each different from the other; some sidewalks were lined with trees on one side, some on the other, some had trees in the middle, and some had trees on both sides – you could even see places where the walking space of the sidewalk had to give way to three rows of newly planted trees, the spacing between them was often so narrow that they nearly touched. Some sidewalks were full of newly made holes – beside them were bags of dirt and sand, ready to be filled in to support the foundation of the trees. Many trees seemed to be in a bad condition after being transported in to the city *en masse* on the open planes of blue transport trucks; it was not unusual to see trees that were dying, or had already died shortly after being transplanted.

Trees lined up in two rows on a busy commercial sidewalk. The sidewalk is filled with bags of sand and dirt awaiting the arrival of newly transported trees.

Becoming a 'National Ecological Garden City'

What was the background for this large-scale infrastructure project? It almost seemed to fit the 'high-modernist ideology' described by Scott (1998), in the simplification of planning and grid-like imposition of trees, roads and buildings all over the city. But this explanation would be too simple, and does not serve as a sufficient explanation to the rationale and personal considerations that lay behind the infrastructure development and tree planting. As I was later to find out, the tree planting was part of a plan designed to increase the 'green space' of Kunming to a level that would allow the city to be included in the category of 'National Ecological Garden City' – a status only attained by a few other cities in China that had already become famous for their efforts of increasing their 'green coverage' to meet national standards.

In a newspaper article in a local Kunming newspaper, *Dushi Shibao*, the director of the Kunming Municipal Parks Bureau gave an account of the efforts put into achieving the status of a National Ecological Garden City. In he title of the article, Kunming was presented as becoming the new "emerald of the plateau," reflecting a double meaning of 'emerald', as 'green' (a symbol frequently used for something that is considered environmentally friendly) and 'valuable', as emeralds are usually held as a symbol for high value[8].

> Kunming has already put forth a higher target [for green coverage]. We will establish a national ecological garden city. If we want to realize this goal, the rate of green space needs to reach 38 percent, the rate of green coverage must reach 45 percent and per capita green space must reach 12 square metres. ("Nian nai zhong," 2008, my translation)

The article continued to describe how the Kunming government were to realise their goal: by planting 200,000 trees every month until they had reached the target of 800,000 trees, which in turn would ensue that the target of 45 percent green coverage was met. Later in the article, the director of the Municipal Parks Bureau was stated as saying that

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[8] This interpretation of the double meaning of 'emerald' as it is used in the newspaper article is based on anecdotal information from one of my Chinese informants.

Kunming lagged behind other cities in China when it came to green coverage, and that they had to put a lot of effort into "catching up" and becoming an "exemplary city."

The jargon used in the article – 'reaching targets', 'realize goals', 'catching up' – is similar to the jargon and rhetoric used in official government speeches, and, as we have seen, seems to be a common way of reporting on development efforts in China; the use of such jargon makes sure that development efforts are presented as being 'in line' with government plans and directions (Huang, 2006). Reaching targets, Flower and Leonard (1996) have shown, is a major component of the term 'scientific' (*kexue*) as this is used by government officials in China. In a study of development projects in rural Sichuan province, they point out that what they call the 'scientific idiom' often reflects a top-down relationship in China; for local officials 'scientific' often implies "a tendency toward quantification in the design and evaluation of projects, and reinforces a preoccupation with 'fulfilling targets' (*wancheng renwu*)" (ibid.: 207). According to Flower and Leonard, this tendency is linked to state policies since 1978 that have all put an emphasis on 'modernisation', and focussed especially on the development of science and technology. But, they point out, 'science' is regarded as more than just policy, it evokes "a whole discourse of progress, modernisation and national wealth and power" (ibid.: 207). In this light, the 'fulfilling of targets' evident in the tree-planting scheme could bee seen as an attempt to follow the insistence from the Central Government and the president to 'adhere to the scientific development concept'. The symbolic double-meaning of "the emerald of the plateau" presented in the newspaper article cited above, further suggests that the tree planting has an economic as well as an ecological component: it makes Kunming greener, at the same time as it increases the marketing value of the city as one of only a few 'ecological garden cities' in China.

Officials and Success: The Mayor of Kunming

There also seemed to be personal considerations behind the scheme that were more complex than simply to follow orders and carry out directions from the political centre. According to some of my Chinese friends, the tree-planting scheme had been ordered by the recently appointed Mayor of Kunming in an attempt to obtain a higher position in the hierarchical state administrative system. During a restaurant dinner following a documentary film screening in Kunming, a friend of mine discussed the Mayor with

some of his acquaintances. Most of the people around the table were either documentary filmmakers or working in NGOs, or, like my friend, both. The discussion was carried out in Chinese, and I relied on another friend to translate the discussion to me during the dinner. There was a division in the crowd on the issue of Mayor – some being positive to him, but most being critical to his approach. One of the discussants said that the approach of the Mayor was too authoritarian: he did whatever he wanted and made decisions without discussing them with others first. Some people thought this approach was good: perhaps the Mayor was too authoritarian, they said, but at least he made things happen. Others argued that although the Mayor certainly had a way of getting things done, nothing was done properly since there was no time for assessment first. Some days later, I asked my friend what he knew about the Mayor of Kunming. He told me that the Mayor had already become famous for 'modernising' a city not far from Shanghai, and that he had subsequently been promoted to the job of Mayor of Kunming. If he was successful in 'modernising' Kunming too, my friend said, the Mayor would be promoted again, maybe even attaining a position in the Central administration in Beijing.

As a rule, most government cadres in higher positions do not stay at their post for more than five years (Huang, 2006). This 'shuffling of cadres' is a way for the Central Government to ensure that no regional leader becomes too powerful, and thereby possibly threatening the unity of the Chinese nation state (Chen, 1999). Being promoted generally means that the official or cadre is moved to a place with higher status than the previous (a large or important city, a province, or even to Beijing), thereby establishing a link between social mobility and spatial mobility. The success of cadres to be moved to a place with more status depends on their ability of to present a history of 'success' to the Central Government during the five years they hold their office (Huang 2006). As mentioned earlier, the 'scientific development' concept has been circulated as a 'guiding principle' by the current Chinese government. As Huang (2006) argues, local government cadres always claim to follow the 'guiding principles' of the Central Government in order to obtain 'political achievement' (*zheng ji*) and possibly promotion, although their obligations to local social networks sometimes leads to actions that conflict with these claims. Although the tree planting scheme only moves trees from the countryside to the city, resulting in many of the trees dying along the way, it can be seen as an effort to claim adherence to the 'scientific development' concept of the Central Government, by

promoting the 'modernisation' and (green) 'development' of Kunming. If the Mayor was able to claim responsibility for reaching the target of 45 per cent green coverage by planting 800,000 trees, he would have made a 'political achievement' and be in a good position to attain promotion to a higher office.

A Different Representation: The Director of EBOR

Although the Mayor might have succeeded in creating an impression of 'political achievement' and adherence to Central Government ideas through the tree-planting scheme, his efforts were still open for contestation, as we saw from the dinner described above. The discussion during the dinner was not a discussion between politically influential people, and did not necessarily represent a 'challenge' to the Mayor. However, some can speak from a more privileged position than others; in the following, I look at how the director of EBOR commented on the tree planting scheme and the work of the Party Secretary, opposing this approach to 'scientific development' to her approach, as a member of a 'scientific' institution – the Kunming Institute of Botany (KIB). The quotes below are taken from an informal interview with the director at a small café inn Kunming, in where we discussed a number of topics, eventually coming to be more focused on Chinese development policies, and the approach taken by the local government of Kunming towards these topics.

"After Hu Jintao [became the president of PRC] there are more effort for local people's livelihoods;" during the interview, the director talked positively about the leaders of China and their efforts to improve the conditions for the people and the environment. Before Hu Jintao came to power, she told me, there was a lot of corruption (fubai), whereas now, according to her, "people see if officials are doing a good job." She attested this not only to the effort of the government, but also to the development of Internet in China, and told me that the reason why Internet developed so quickly in China was because it created "some sort of space for people to say their mind." But, she told me, there was still a "gap of information" to villagers, who did not have access to Internet. She presented the work of EBOR as bridging this gap by connecting villagers to higher officials, for example by using participatory approaches or by including villagers in forums where many 'stakeholders' are present.

Part of the positive effort of the current government, the director told me, was that they had helped to put a focus on environmental protection; "now," according to her "government think environmental protection is the most important.… Wen Jiabao has said: if achieve everything except environmental protection, we're a looser." Contrasting this to the attitudes of earlier governments the director continued, saying: "after 1980s – ten years after the Cultural Revolution – we started economic development, but not scientific. We built factories, but not considering pollution." The present government, according to the director, were starting to pay more attention to the limits of economic development, and, she told me, "that is why the Central Government introduced scientific development." The director did not identify the concept of 'scientific development' to me, but told me that it was a complex concept, saying: "not all officials know what it means; if only consult one scientist cannot know what it means."

The way the director talked about the changes brought by the current government and the implementation of them, revealed some scepticism towards local government officials. She told me that despite good policies, there had not been many real changes: "In 1998, we had flood. Now, we will have another one. With 10 years of logging ban, why still problems?" Following her critical comment on local officials, I went on to ask her what she thought about the Mayor of Kunming. She followed by shaking her head, saying "too concerned about the data;" then, she went on to comment on the tree-planting that was happening in Kunming: "the trees, sometimes three rows – I don't see how this makes people's lives better." She told me that the Party Secretary was "too radical," and that he is concerned with increasing the data itself, but not the quality of the data: "Plant trees in Kunming is easy, but still make no difference." Following this, the director told me that she had recently been approached by reporters from a local newspaper who wanted to interview her about the tree planting happening in Kunming. But, she said, they only wanted the 'good part': "I have to tell the truth about the horticulture; don't include me. Why not make good evaluation before?" She then smiled and told me that she had referred the reporters to an expert on horticulture that was even more critical to the tree planting in Kunming than she was. She said that the local government had tried to get positive support from KIB, but that they had refused: "no support for their foolish decisions."

Through these comments, we might start to grasp one way of 'mobilising' concepts; that is, trough contrasting one representation of the concept to another. According to the director, 'scientific development' was part of an attempt by the government to address problems created by a too strong focus on economic development. She told me that the policy was good, but that the implementation of policy had not been good enough, something that she attributed to the inability of local officials to understand 'scientific development'. At the same time, she implied that *her* knowledge of 'scientific development' was better than that of the local government. While local officials only consulted *one* scientist, she was part of a larger body of scientists at KIB – clearly the scientific knowledge represented by such an institution would be more extensive than that of *one*? Whether or not the local government had only consulted *one* scientist before carrying out the 'tree-planting scheme' is another matter, and of less importance than the way the director focused on the *differences* between only "increasing the data" and the scientific knowledge at KIB, where, according to her, they were better equipped to follow the national focus on environmental protection than local government cadres.

The director not only claimed to know the 'scientific development concept' though KIB; also at EBOR the concept has been included in official documents. In the 2007 Annual Report from EBOR under the heading of "Supervision and administration of EBOR," it says:

> The leader of EBOR strove to learn and actively implement the 17th CPC National Congress spirit and the address given by President Hu Jintao set a direction for healthy development if [sic] non-governmental organizations. In addition, EBOR requires every employee to apply *the scientific development concept* and the important thought of Three Representatives [sic] into real-time practice so as to improve our work [emphasis added].

Here the director (leader of EBOR) is presented as being 'in line' with the direction of the government and the communist party by following the 'spirit' from the National Congress and the speech of the President. References are made to the scientific

development concept, and the idea of 'Tree Represents'[9], which has been regarded as the 'guiding thought' of the former president Jiang Zemin. That EBOR can *require* their employees to "apply the scientific development concept" implies that they also possess privileged knowledge about the concept. This knowledge, in turn, is based on their affiliation with KIB. Although it can be argued that EBOR are required by the Central Government to claim that they follow Central Government guidelines (especially the reference to the "healthy development of non-governmental organisations is interesting here, as this is part of the Central Government rhetoric of 'cooperation' with social organisations), it can also be argued that by mentioning Central Government concepts they are positioning themselves favourably vis-à-vis local government partners by claiming to hold knowledge that local government do not.

The View 'From Below': A Reflection on 'Scientific Development'

Not everyone seemed to agree on the usefulness of the 'scientific development' concept. During an interview with Meixiu at the end of my fieldwork, I was presented with a different view on development and institutional efforts for sustainable and scientific development. As I described in chapter two, Meixiu had worked in EBOR for roughly two months before having to leave. I interviewed her at a café after she had left EBOR. During the interview we discussed religion, personal interests and views on nature, but most of all, the interview came to be focused on government policies and environmental protection.

I began the interview by asking her what she thought was the most important environmental issue facing China today. She told me: "sustainable development," then added that poverty alleviation was also important, and that these two issues together were "very urgent and important in China." According to her, there is a lack of theory to address these issues in China. Also, she said, China still has a long way to go in putting theory to practice: "policy is ok, but the bureaucratic structure makes it difficult to put into practice."

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[9] 'The Three Represents' theory is credited to the former president Jiang Zemin and was included in the Constitution of the PRC in 2002. It is considered by many to have played an important part in reforming the ideology of the Central government towards being more inclusive of non-Party elements (see Fewsmith 2002).

Meixiu told me that regular people should have a chance to get interested in the topic of the environment: "economy is only short term, but we need long term; if there is more chance for education, there will be more ways to understand." She went on to say that if living conditions were better, people would have "space and time to consider." Today, according to her, there were more chances for people to get information, and this gives the whole society "more chance to know." Like the director, Meixiu was positive to the efforts of the Central Government in addressing environmental problems; she presented me with an outline of the varying degrees of interest by successive governments on environmental issues, which I briefly sketched down in my notebook:

> 1950-70 → only economy
>
> 1980　→ government more concerned
>
> 1998　→ Yangtze flooding. More concern (logging ban, converting to forest).
>
> 2000　→ now: practical state, "total implementation"

Meixiu's outline reflects a rather positive view of the governments focus on environmental protection; in her 'timeline' the concern of the Chinese government towards environmental issues has increased steadily since the 1970's, arriving of the current situation, which she identifies as "total implementation." However, although she viewed this "practical stage" as favourable, she was also critical to some of the ways the government was actually trying to implement their 'concerns' on the ground. In the interview, she told me that the government was affected by ideology, adding that the current interest of the government in environmental issues was "maybe just for show." Following this comment, the told me: "Now, we have scientific development; development can refer to many things, but this is on the institutional level." She went on to tell me how the concept of scientific development called for a "harmonious living" between human and nature, country and city, adding that "development is not simple like before."

At the time of the interview, I was not familiar with the concept of 'scientific development' and I was a bit confused by the way that Meixiu used different words to describe what seemed to be the same thing. She had previously talked about 'sustainable development', as well as 'harmonious development', and I asked her whether or not these terms could be compared to the scientific development concept. Instead of answering my question directly, she looked at

me, saying that it did not really matter: "local people don't care which term you use." Here, the viewpoint of Meixiu differs from that of both the Kunming government and the director of EBOR, who both seemed to be concerned with mobilising and seeking to represent the 'scientific development' concept by claiming to understand the concept and its validity for the development of China. Meixiu's approach was more pragmatic. She went on to tell me: "In practice, villagers do not benefit, other stakeholders do. The structure is nice, but from the outside. Their participation… It's just a show. It's about power relations." According to her, development questions were complicated, and even though a lot of information could be found on the Internet, this was not enough to understand the situation of villagers. "It is not a feeling. If you don't go to villages, [you] don't know. Government officials can not understand."

Both Meixiu and the director seemed to mobilise concepts in a way that augmented the difference between their views and that of government officials, but where the director seemed to hold more faith in the concept of 'scientific development', and attributed the failure of the Kunming government in the tree-planting scheme as a failure to consult scientists, Meixiu focused on issues facing local people, such as poverty, which she said was often overlooked in policy implementation. According to Meixiu, 'concepts' did not hold much relevance to villagers, as long as they could not benefit from them. To her, concepts were not enough *in themselves* to address the real situation; the only way of truly understanding issues like development and environmentalism was, according to Meixiu, to "go to villages."

5
The Project

In Chapter two, I argued that the projects undertaken by staff at EBOR, apart from being based in interests of leaders and workers in the organisation, also make out part of the *legitimacy* of the organisation towards other organisations, government actors and donor agencies. As we saw in the chapter three, this legitimacy rests on a flow of funding that is not necessarily steady and transparent, at the same time as some of the funding might be seen as 'directed' towards upholding political 'truths' and practices. Furthermore, the work of many social organisations, such as EBOR, has to be balanced with knowledge of what topics are considered 'sensitive' by the Central Government, and of 'guiding thoughts' and current ideas and concepts circulated by the PRC leadership. I now make an attempt to examine more closely one of the projects at EBOR, while keeping in mind some of the points made earlier in this text.

Background: Logging Ban and the "Grain for Green" Programme

Following a major flooding of the Yangtze River (*chang jiang*) in 1998, the Central Government issued a logging ban on all forest areas in the upper reaches of major rivers in the country. The official rationale behind the logging ban was reported to be an attempt to prevent continued soil erosion, which had been identified as one of the major contributors to large-scale floods in China's major rivers (Blaikie and Muldavin, 2004). Since the sources of the largest rivers in China all lay in the western part of the country, the logging ban consequently targeted many of China's western regions and provinces, including Yunnan province. The ban was followed shortly by similar regulations that aimed at increasing the forest cover in the steep headwaters of major rivers. One of the most prominent, the Sloping Land Conversion Programme (SLCP), commonly referred to as the "Grain for Green" programme, started as a pilot project in a few provinces in 1999, before being implemented nationwide in 2002 (see box 3).

Box 3

> ***SLCP****
>
> The Sloping Land Conversion Programme (SLCP) was implemented nationwide in China from 2002. The regulation was designed to prevent soil erosion in steep farmland areas by appropriating farmland and compensating local farmers with monetary and grain subsidies over a period of 8 years (4 years if farmland is converted into cash-crops).
>
> County and township governments are put in charge of overseeing the change, while farmers (ambiguously called contractors according to the regulation text) are entrusted with maintaining the forested areas. Although the regulation explicitly states the responsibilities for various government agencies and local farmers in executing the programme, it is ambiguous when it comes to defining which party holds responsibility for identifying areas for conversion.
>
> Some of the focus areas for this programme are "steep slope farmland in river headwater regions and on both sides of river valleys," a type of area common in North-western Yunnan.
>
> *Information retrieved from the Peoples Republic of China State Council (2002)

The "Grain for Green" programme has been presented in Chinese media as addressing the important problem of flooding, by restoring areas that have been 'mismanaged' by farmers.

The state-owned newspaper People's Daily has described the background for the SLCP in the following way:

> Accounting for more than one half of China's total area, the west is known for its backward economy and vulnerable ecological environment. For years, farmers in the region were short of grain and cut down huge tracts of forest, much of it on steep slopes, to turn it into farmland, and also ploughed up large areas of grassland. This has resulted in severe soil erosion and flooding.
>
> …

As China has unveiled its ambitious plan to develop its west, greater attention has been attached to environmental protection, since the west must be turned not only into a modern, prosperous region, but also a land of green where humans and nature harmoniously co-exist. To this end, the government has initiated a programme to help restore ecological balance in the western region by turning low-yielding farmland back into forest and pasture. ("Grain-for-Green Project Takes Off," 2000)

In the article, farmers in the western areas of China, with their 'backwards economy' are identified as the main propagators of 'severe' soil erosion, which is placed in a causal relationship with flooding. Furthermore, the article presents the efforts of the government in the development and modernisation of western China, and the need for environmental protection in creating a utopian future where 'humans and nature harmoniously co-exist'. The current state of many of the areas in the western region is presented as low yielding and undesirable; they will be turned *back* into their original state of green forest and pasture. The presentation of 'the west' in this article, is consistent with the way 'the west' has been constructed through the "Go West" campaign as the antithesis of the eastern parts of China, thereby presenting 'the west' and its inhabitants as recipients of aid and management from the central ('eastern') government (see chapter 4).

A National Narrative of Degradation

Following, Roe (1991), the underlying assumptions behind both the logging ban and the "Grain for Green" programme can be seen as constituting a development narrative. The story presented in the media possesses the "classic properties of beginning, middle, and end" that characterises narratives (1991: 288). It *begins* with farmers who are lacking grain and therefore starts ploughing up land and farming steep hillsides; the *middle* is constituted by the problems that the farmers then invariably cause: soil erosion and flooding; the *end*, however, is not destruction, but the promise offered by the 'unveiling' of a new plan by the Chinese government and assisting programmes that will make sure that the West becomes modern, and the same time as the disrupted harmony is restored.

Whereas 'humans' are placed outside of nature (which is a prerequisite for co-existence), and imagined as necessarily degrading nature, the government is imagined as the only

actor able to bridge the gap between 'human' and 'nature', 'destruction' and 'harmony'. The presentation does not only simplify complex relationships between local practices and environmental and climatological fluctuations, but also manages to completely ignore the unintended consequences from economy-focused national policies and development plans, and the role played by government agencies such as Forest Bureaus in the deforestation of these areas (Blaikie and Muldavin, 2004; Economy, 2000; Sturgeon, 2007).

Some of the scientific 'rationale' behind the logging ban, and the subsequent "Grain for Green" programme, can be found in what Ives (2004) has identified as *the Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation* (hereafter, the Theory). The Theory, according to Ives, argues that mountain farmers in the Himalaya regions are the main culprits behind large floods occurring periodically along major rivers that have their sources in the Himalayan region. Following the Theory, an increase in mountain subsistence farming populations leads to extensive deforestation, which leads to landslides, which in turn helps to accelerate downstream flooding (Ives, 2004: xv). Ives argues that the foundations for the Theory is not based sufficiently in observable realities, and is wrought with generalisations and simplifications – something that has lead to a high number of researchers being sceptical to the Theory, increasingly referring to it as a myth (2004: 218). Still, national policies both in India and in China have continued to make use of the theory/myth/narrative of Himalayan Environmental Degradation to support their development policies (Blaikie and Muldavin, 2004; Ives, 2004: 59).

Some Chinese researchers have similarly pointed out flaws in the SLCP. An article written by a cooperative of Chinese botanists, social scientists and environmentalists, point out that early reports have shown that the SLCP has seemingly not had the effect on soil erosion that it was intended to have (Xu et al., 2006). Furthermore, these authors claim that the SLCP, combined with the logging ban of 1998, has generally created "negative impacts on the livelihoods of mountain communities, on their environment, and on overall agrobiodiversity" (ibid.: 15). Still, as Blaikie and Muldavin points out, there is an extensive body of research made by Chinese scientists pointing to the need for the Central Government to take control over what is seen as a "less than ideal" local management of upstream watersheds (2004: 538).

Development narratives are often useful for policymakers in that they identify a clearly defined problem that is perceived as 'external' to the central administrators; resources can be channelled towards an identified 'problem area' without having to reassess already established governmental perceptions and procedures (Roe, 1991). This can help to explain why a narrative of 'upstream' degradation has been evoked by the Chinese Central Government, why national policies such as the logging ban and the SLCP are sustained despite some critique, and why these policies identify upland farmers as the main problem behind natural disasters, while overlooking the problems caused by what can be seen as a flawed development strategy in the western parts of China (Economy, 2002).

The Future of Swidden Agriculture: Research and Project Proposal

In 2006, two project managers from EBOR, Liang, who was introduced in chapter two, and William, an English social scientist who worked for a few years in EBOR, carried out research in the Gongshan area of north-western Yunnan (see map) aimed at identifying the impacts on local biodiversity of the Slope Land Conversion Programme (SLCP), introduced in the area in 2003. During the research, they visited a number of villages along the banks of the Dulong River – an area inhabited mostly people from the Dulong nationality, one of China's smallest nationalities with a population of less than 6000. The Dulong share ethnic kinship with a number of groups inhabiting the borderlands between the present-day national territories of China and Myanmar, but were designated as a distinct, official Chinese minority nationality (*minzu*) by the Chinese government in 1964, in an extension of the Ethnic Classification Project[10] (*minzu shibie*) initiated by the government in 1954 (Gros 2004). Liang and William's focused on the Dulong, because members of this nationality had long been conducting a form of swidden agriculture in the area, but most of their fields were located in on steep slopes in the Dulong River valley, and were targeted by the "Grain for Green" policy (Xu & Wilkes, 2005). In the title of his project, and in subsequent project reports, Liang referred to the Dulong agricultural system as 'swidden agriculture'. I have chosen also to use this term here, as it seems to incorporate elements from both 'shifting cultivation' and 'slash-

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[10] For a more detailed analysis of the Ethnic Classification Project, see Harrell (1995), Mackerras (2004) and Mullaney (2004a, 2004b)

and-burn agriculture' without being reducible to either term. Swidden agriculture can thus be used as an approximation of a form of agriculture found in much of Southeast Asia, in where land is cleared by using fire, and where land-use is signified by shifting plots of fallow, where the fallow period is longer than the cultivation period of annual crops (Mertz et al., 2009)
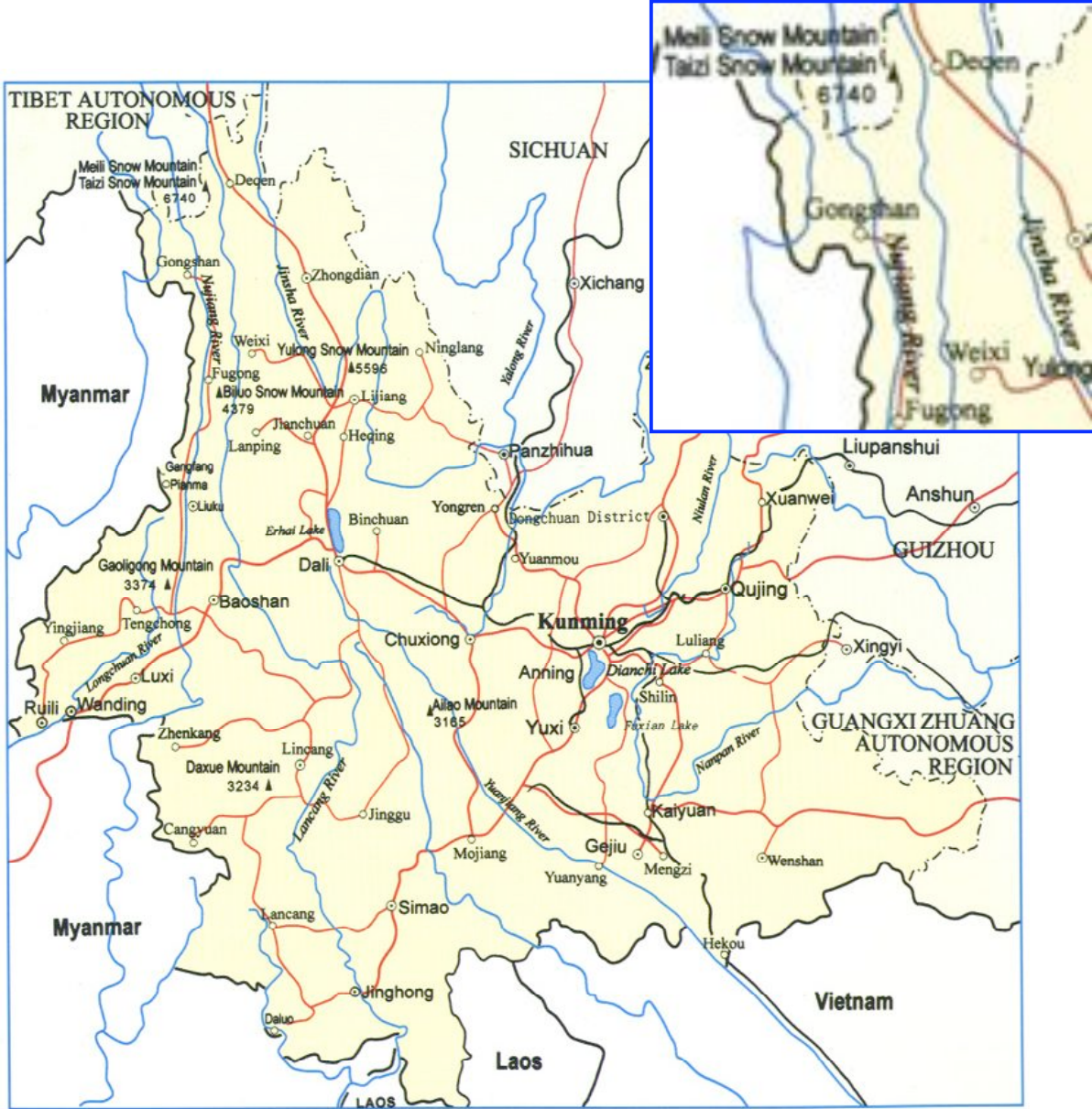
Map over Yunnan; an enlargement of the Gongshan area in the upper right corner (China Trekking, 2007).

According to the report issued by Liang and William for EBOR shortly after undertaking their research, the introduction of the SLCP in the area had and impact on the number

and varieties of crops planted by local farmers in the area – the most severe impact stressed by the report was the "loss of unique crop varieties" experienced as local people no longer were able to practice swidden agriculture. In the report, Liang and William stressed that it was a matter of urgency to reverse this 'loss', as stored seeds could not retain their viability for very long, possibly resulting in the disappearance of more crop varieties. The report stated that certain crop varieties could only be grown in the area through the continued use of swidden agriculture practices, and presenting the Dulong people as being concerned about the disappearance of some of their seed varieties, but not knowing how to reverse this trend. The report concluded that, "[p]olitical will to support the Dulong to conserve their seeds and their culture is urgently required."

Through the report, Liang and William identified some actions to be addressed in future research and projects:

(1) Promote consensus among different stakeholders (e.g. villagers with local government departments) on the value of agro-biodiversity conservation
(2) Continue to encourage households to conserve traditional varieties in plots of permanent land, and also
(3) Find ways to improve the performance of traditional varieties on permanent arable land
(4) Convene seed exchange fairs among farmers
(5) Allow communities to apply for prescribed fire permits so that they can continue to plant traditional varieties
(6) Make a visual documentary of the IK related to cultivation to be used for cultural education in schools

William resigned from EBOR shortly after finishing this research, but many of the 'suggestions' were to be followed up by Liang in some of his later projects. The workshop presented below details a trip made to the area by Liang and a 'Dulong expert' from one of EBOR's partner institutions, the Yunnan Academy of Social Science (YASS). During this workshop, and in meetings with government officials both before and after the workshop, Liang addressed most of the future 'suggested actions' detailed above.

The Seed-sharing Workshop – Securing a Grant

As the project manager for the Gongshan area, Liang is in charge of planning and implementing a number of projects undertaken here. On one occasion he confided to me that he felt a certain responsibility for the area, and told me to me that he did not want anyone else to take over the projects here, as he did not trust them to have the same commitment to the area as he did. Liang had been involved in the Gongshan area for many years, starting out as a project assistant, before eventually taking over the role as project manager. His main project site had not been the area where the Seed-sharing Workshop was to be held, but after the resignation of William, Liang has also taken over as project manager for this area.

Liang applied to the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF) for a grant that would allow him to continue the research conducted in 2006, and enable him to address the 'future suggested actions' that had been identified in the research report. The grant he applied for had recently been promoted by the Kunming office of WWF as a "Conservation Stakeholder Workshop Grant," directed at projects that would help bring together various 'stakeholders', including "community leaders, farmers and fishers, people living in or close to protected areas, teachers, students, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, local and national governments or anyone with a direct interest in the sustainable development and conservation of nature in their communities." According to the grant application, stakeholders should ideally have common environmental concerns, but "may not share opinions and ideas on how to address these concerns." The 'future suggested actions' identified in the research report had many elements that seemed to fit well with the requirements for the WWF grant, and in the application for the grant, Liang presented the previous research he had conducted in the area as "phase one," while the workshop that would be supported by the grant was presented as "phase two" of the same project. Liang's application was successful, and he received $5000 for the project cost, with an initial $1000 to come from EBOR funds that had already been allocated to the Gongshan area.

The Project Trip

The project trip begins and ends with movement. In many ways, the movement of EBOR staff from the offices to their project sites represent only a small part of the work put into

establishing and maintaining a project. Still, this is where the practices at the office and the practices in the field most clearly intersect: planning turns to implementation, and implementation is translated into reports and representations.

The planning for this project trip had been conducted by Liang in cooperation with a researcher from the Yunnan Academy of Social Science (YASS). The YASS researcher, I will call him Mr Xu, was also a member of the Dulong nationality and had been recruited by Liang as a "Dulong expert" to assist in the implementation of the project. The village where the workshop was to be held, had been chosen based on Mr Xu's contacts: it was his home village, but also the main administrative village for the Dulong in this area, which made it a convenient location for the workshop. The village was located in an area that was a seemingly out-of-the-way place (Tsing 1993: 10). Located at 2000 meters in the narrow Dulong valley, the village lies just west of the Gaoligongshan mountain range with peaks ranging over 5000 meters high. The only road in to the valley traverses the mountains through a pass and a tunnel that is open during the summer months from May through to September; heavy snowstorms and bad road conditions inhibits travel between the area and the rest of China during most of the year. The small administrative township of Dulongjiang lies at the end of the valley; the closest city from here is Gongshan, the administrative seat of Gongshan County, and the first destination for the project trip.

In the following, I detail my experiences of accompanying Liang on his project trip to the Gongshan area to implement the Seed-sharing Workshop. My role in the project was that of a volunteer for EBOR, something which gave me clear identification with the organisation. The time set out for the project trip was only five days, which did not leave much time to get to know the area, less so the local people involved in the project. However, in my presentation, I focus primarily on the advantages that this role provided in getting to attend meetings between local government officials and EBOR researchers, as well as 'seeing' the local people from the viewpoint of officials and researchers. In the following description, I seek to account for some of these observations in a way that might help illuminate some wider questions connected to the relationship between Chinese citizens, bureaucratic institutions, and nongovernmental organisations.

We arrive in Gongshan late in the afternoon, following a 20 hrs bus ride from Kunming. In Gongshan, we have dinner with local officials from the County Animal Husbandry Bureau – all of them men. Liang has already made an agreement with these officials to give us a ride over the mountain pass in one of the land rovers that the bureau commands, and the dinner seems to be part of finalising the agreement before we set out. A lot of alcohol is consumed during the dinner in what seems to be a competition, both in courtesy (by offering toasts to others) and in endurance (by declining constant offers to drink alcohol (he jiu)*, or by accepting to drink, but refusing to get drunk). After this 'game' is over, and most of the officials has left or had become too drunk to speak, LB, who skilfully had managed to resist most of the drinking offers, starts discussing possibilities for future cooperation together with an official from the Gongshan administration.*

We leave Gongshan city at 10 AM. The ride to Dulongjiang Township takes nearly 7 hours in a Land Rover that seems to be pretty much the only vehicle capable of manoeuvring the gravel and dirt road, which is frequently washed out by melting water and heavy rains. Another Land Rover leaves the Animal Husbandry Bureau together with us, taking officials from different bureaus out to the township of Dulongjiang to conduct administrative assignments. After arriving in Dulongjiang Township, we follow the Dulong River upstream to the village where the workshop is to be held. The road is narrow, so we undertake the last part of the journey on foot. The Animal Husbandry officials seem to be in a hurry and walk on while I, Liang, and Joker together made up the tail of the procession.

As we are walking along the riverbank, Liang constantly points out different aspects of the vegetation of the area. He eagerly shows me a type of tree, shuidonggua[11], which, according to him, was being planted by the local people practicing swidden agriculture, and is especially good for the soil. He points to the hills on both sides of the road, telling me that on these hills, in between larger strands of trees, are areas that were formerly used for swidden agriculture. He points these areas out to me; they make out small 'pockets' of various stages of re-growth in the forested vegetation. We make constant stops like these along the way, and Liang asks me to take pictures of hillsides, plants and vegetables that he finds interesting. He seems to hold a great deal of interest and knowledge of the local vegetation, and is more than willing to pass this on to me.

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[11] LB had previously conducted research on the effect of this tree in the area. The latin name for the tree is *Alnus nepalensis*; it helps to fix nitrogen in the soil, and is thus works well with swidden agriculture.

A hillside with 'pockets' of re-growth from swidden agriculture.

Shuidonggua, or Alnus Nepalensis: A nitrogen-fixing tree that receives interest from ethnobotanists.

We reach the village in the afternoon, and stay at the offices of the village government, a complex of wooden buildings arranged around a grassy square where the red PRC flag waves from the top of a flagpole. During the evening, all the government officials are gathered in the office we stay at, and Liang spends most of the evening discussing the events of tomorrow with them. During this meeting, Liang keeps addressing the township leader who had travelled in together with the officials from the county government, even though he is on a lower level of the administrative hierarchy than many of them. However, the township leader is a member of the CPC, and as a 'party secretary', albeit on the lowest level of the CPC hierarchy, he seems to hold seniority over the workers, who are all regional civil servants. The village leaders, two men in their late thirties, are not consulted during the discussion of the coming event, but stay close, and are invited to join in on the late night drinking and socialising that occurs following the meeting.

Early the next morning, Liang begins preparing for the event together with helpers from the Animal Husbandry, Agriculture, and Forestry bureaus. The event is set to be held at the only concrete square in the village – a basketball court in front of the local schoolhouse. Here, they hang up a banner that LB has prepared in Gongshan, and arrange a set of tables and chairs at one end of the basketball court. Liang has decided that the 'workshop' is to be held as a competition, where attendants bring traditional seeds for assessment, and have the possibility of winning a number of prizes if they can show that they cultivate and preserve a number of 'traditional' seeds. According to Liang, this has the potential of being an example for the rest of the village – and especially for younger people – that it is important to preserve their traditions; at the same time, Liang hopes that villagers will exchange seeds among each other, thereby helping to preserve seed varieties. When it gets close to the time for the event, Liang seems a bit nervous and tells me that he is not sure whether or not many people will show up. I am a bit surprised by this, as he up until now has seemed confident that the workshop would be a success. I realise that LB relies on most of his information from government officials, who in turn has been left in charge of informing the villagers about the workshop. As it is, Liang can do nothing but wait and see.

An hour later, local people begin to arrive in the square, spreading out their 'display areas' of various seed types and vegetables at the edges of the basketball court. It turns out that many local people have decided to come, and close to ninety people end up participating in the workshop – nearly all of them are women, and many with young children. When I ask Liang why there are so many women here, he explains to me that women here are in charge of the family vegetable gardens,

and therefore they are also the ones with the most knowledge of traditional seeds and plants. The women fills up the edges of the basketball court with their seeds and plants carefully displayed on sheets and plastic tarps; in the front of the schoolhouse sit the government officials, researchers, and civil servants in charge of the event – all of them men.

The event is opened by speeches from the township leader and from Liang, who stresses the importance of the project to the participants and introduces them to the event. Then, the researchers (Liang and Mr Xu) get up from their chairs, and begin to circle the square, visiting the different display areas. They ask each attendant about the seeds that they possess, and then write down the number of varieties displayed at each 'stall' in their notebooks. At times, they stop and argue whether or not a seed variety qualifies as 'traditional' or not; although some participants have presented an impressive number of seeds and vegetables, not all of these are classified as 'traditional' in the assessment made by Liang and Mr. Xu, and therefore can not be included in the seed-sharing competition. Also, they discuss if some seeds are merely different variations of the same kind, instead of constituting separate categories. This taxonomisation of different seed varieties, sporadically interrupted by disputes and discussions, continues until Liang and Mr. Xu has visited all of the display areas. They then return to the chairs and tables in front of the crowd to assess their findings and consult with additional 'experts' from the bureaus as well as with some of the Dulong leaders. Interestingly enough, although Liang stated to me that it is Dulong women who have the most knowledge of local seed and plant varieties, the assessment of the women's knowledge is done by men exclusively.

Assessing the contestants.

While the results are being examined, someone brings a table to the centre of the square. Liang comes over to me and tells me enthusiastically that there will be a performance by some of the elders in the village who will demonstrate a ritual that used to be performed before the planting of a swidden. Into the square steps two middle-aged Dulong men, one of whom is also a village leader. They are dressed in Western-style clothes; the village leader is wearing a pink long-sleeve sweater, a dark-grey hat, and blue Adidas-style trek pants rolled up over his thighs, and is draped in a white woven cloth with multi-coloured stripes following the length of the cloth. Covering their ankles are similar pieces of white cloth, but with fewer stripes. The village leader wears a long-bladed knife in a sheath attached to a piece of string hanging over his shoulder. From his shoulder and crossing his torso he carries a fishnet bag, and holds a long bamboo stick firmly in his hand.

The attendants of the workshop all sit around their display areas and watch – some of them look like they are amused, and talking to their neighbours while pointing to the two men. The ritual-performance begins when a male helper enters the square and places a bowl of wine and a small twig from a pine tree on the table in front of the two men. The village leader then takes out his knife and places it on the table while the other man begins chanting and reciting words in the Dulong language. The man dips the twig in the bowl, and starts shaking it rhythmically, sprinkling alcohol on the ground and towards the sky. The village leader picks up the knife again and starts moving it around in circles while joining in on the chanting. This continues for a while, until the movements and the chanting suddenly stop – the 'performance' is over. The two men receive applause from the audience, and are given some money by LB.

Although a lot of the meaning of the performance is lost to me during the short time it lasts – mostly because I do not understand the language – it nevertheless constitutes an interesting example of how symbols and performances can take on different meanings in different contexts. Previously, the ritual had served the function of assuring a good harvest for a cleared swidden; now, it is part of a performance that has been held at the request of Liang, as part of a local government- and NGO-led workshop. What new functions do the ritual take on in this setting? Its function in the workshop is, according to Liang, to make the local people more aware of the importance of their own traditional knowledge – but can knowledge be taken out of its original context and replicated in a different setting without loosing some of its meaning along the way? Liang does not seem to consider this aspect as problematic, and indeed does not seem to have reflected on this; his concern is focused on

recording and documenting traditional practices in order to keep them, and the biodiversity they are seen to uphold, alive.

After the performance, Liang and Mr Xu announce the winners of the seed-sharing competition (Liang speaks first in Chinese, and Mr Xu translates into the Dulong language). Liang had in advance decided to hand out six prizes for the people with the most traditional seed varieties and six prizes for those who had displayed the most plant varieties. One by one, the winners are announced, and asked to come up to the tables at the front and collect their prizes – a 100-Yuan note is given to each winner. Liang tries to encourage the winners to give a short speech, but this seems to make many of the winners feel uncomfortable; most say a few words before quickly returning to their display areas. After the last prize has been handed out, Liang declares that the workshop is over, and people begin to disperse. Liang then approaches some of the attendants that still have not packed up their seeds and plants, and starts making inquiries about the different varieties of seeds that they have. He takes out a pre-arranged form from his backpack, and fills out the form while constantly asking questions to the attendants. He writes down what he has identified as different 'qualities' of the seeds, categorising them according to criteria such as 'seed colour', 'productivity', 'seed storage time', and 'present situation'. He also asks about the names of the seeds in the Dulong language, and receives help from Mr Xu and another Dulong man to identify some of the seeds and to translate Dulong seed names into Chinese. When he is finished filling out the form, Liang collects bags of seeds from the attendants to take back to EBOR, containing most of the seed varieties that he made inquiries about. After collecting 17 varieties, Liang exclaims that it is "gaole" (enough).

Collecting seeds to take back to EBOR.

Interpretations – and the production of 'success'

It seems as though most of the 'objectives' set out in the project proposal were fulfilled through the workshop. Liang had arranged a seed-sharing workshop, he had met with local government officials and negotiated the allocation of a land area for the making of a swidden agriculture documentary, and had additionally started advocating local governments for the need to preserve biodiversity through the 'protection' of swidden agriculture. Despite limited interaction with local villagers through the workshop, they were still included for in Liang's project report as accounting for part of the 'success' of the project. In the report, he wrote:

> According to the opinion of many old Dulong people, local government, Dulong expert of Yunnan Society and Science Academy Yunnan, and the observation of Norway volunteer [sic] for CBIK, this event was a success. The turnout was high (especially considering that this was the first time an event like this has been held in the valley). The event acted as a forum for people to come together and exchange ideas, at the same time as it functioned as an exhibition area for people from the village not involved in the project.

Here, the workshop was presented as a "forum," and accounted for the participation of local people. The interest of the researcher and EBOR was played down, while focusing on the role played by local people, and the observations of other 'stakeholders' and participators in the 'success' of the workshop. In the 'world of projects' it might not take long to establish a project as a success. The progress report is written directly after the project trip, whereupon the project is represented in various forums and interpreted by a range of actors. The Seed-sharing Workshop is presented as a success in the project report; it also features as a 'story' on the EBOR website. The continuity of certain representations of the project is sustained by meetings and seminars, exemplified by the program director of the Livelihood Department being asked by WWF shortly after the workshop to present the project at a WWF seminar in the Sichuan province.

As we saw in Chapter Four, the visit of a donor representative to the offices of EBOR seemed to constitute a disciplining practice that affected both the donor as well as EBOR as a recipient of grant support. Although WWF did not, like the Ford Foundation, visit

EBOR in order to assess the project, the grant application that Liang had submitted still seemed to represented elements of the disciplining practices that the Ford Foundation representative had embodied. As we have seen, the workshop grant was directed towards bringing together government and non-government 'stakeholders' around issues of environmental concern. In the grant application, it was stated that if the workshop did not follow a "satisfactory progress," or were seen as not in the best interests of the funding scheme, financial support could be withdrawn. This, then, constitutes an incentive for Liang both to present the project as a workshop that reflected the interests of all the 'stakeholders' in the area, and to establish the project as a 'success'. At the same time as the presentation of a project as a 'success' provides a donor organisation with legitimacy, and shows the value if their work, it is also important for the 'success' and legitimacy of EBOR to represent a number of projects that are considered 'successful'. From Chapter Two, we saw that EBOR was going trough a difficult time after a change in the leadership of the organisation, and that this seemed to have led to a number of people not considering the organisation as 'successful' anymore. Being able to present their current projects as 'successful' might in time lead to the organisation also being considered 'successful' once again.

According to Mosse (2004), 'success' in development projects depends on the ability of a range of actors to receive support through the circulation of certain project *interpretations*. Whether or not government agencies or a donor agency exercises some sort of disciplinary power over an NGO, then, becomes less important than the establishment of a range of supporting actors that function as interpretive communities for the 'success' of the projects of an organisation. As Mosse states: "[d]onor advisers, consultants and project managers are able to exert influence only because the ideas or instructions they purvey can be translated into other people's own intentions, goals and ambitions" (Ibid.: 8). Seen in this way, projects are always part of larger discourses, in where the 'truth' of development and environmental projects as 'successful' is produced and maintained; the success of a project can indeed be seen as necessary component of the maintenance of development and environmental discourses themselves (Foucault, 1994; Neumann, 2001).

Participation or Collaboration? Who Was the Workshop Really 'For'?

The establishment of the project as a 'success' seemed beneficial for a number of actors that were in some way or another involved in the project, but was it beneficial for Dulong farmers? Rather than being a collaborative effort between 'equal partners', as we might be led to believe by reading the grant application and the project report, the establishment of the project and workshop as a success seemed to represent a number of institutional interests in the area. As Brosius has commented upon, environmental institutions have a tendency to reduce what are really 'sites of struggle' to "the affectless, faux-inclusive language of 'participation', in which a range of 'stakeholders' are brought together to work toward the resolution of some environmental concern" (1999: 50). The role played by Dulong villagers in the project indeed seemed to represent an agentless 'participation' in a project that was directed and decided by institutionalised actors whose collaboration generated mutual benefits for them.

As we have seen, the workshop was based on earlier research in the area by Liang, and was presented in the grant application and the research report as 'phase two' of an ongoing research project. There would have been no workshop if it had not been for Liang and Williams earlier research; Liang had a vested interest in the area; not only was he the project manager of other projects in the Gongshan project site – he was also writing an article based on his research to be submitted to an international development journal. Liang therefore had all reason to present the project as 'successful', and to claim it as *his* project. The workshop was also presented as one of EBOR's projects. It was part of a larger 'project site', the Gongshan project site, which in turn was administered by the Community Livelihood Department at EBOR. When implemented, the project would become a dot on a map in EBOR's representation of their project sites on their website; it would also be included in documents and seminars held by EBOR staff as one of the 'successful' projects at EBOR. Furthermore, the funding that WWF had provided for the workshop, made it part of the 'global reach' of the organisation. WWF reserved the right to use reports from the workshop in promotional material for their own organisation, thereby effectively giving WWF rights to represent the workshop as part of their own work. The interests of WWF in the area was also reflected through their identification of Gaoligongshan as part of their Priority Ecoregions; that is, a region with "high levels of biodiversity" that can be targeted for conservation (Ricketts and Imhoff 2003: 1). The

"Conservation Stakeholder Workshop Grant" was part of a larger funding scheme, where workshops conducted in WWF's Ecoregions would be preferred. This provided Liang with an opportunity to apply and successfully receive the grant, while WWF made sure that 'conservation work' was conducted in 'their' Ecoregions.

The local government did also seem to benefit from the project. According to Huang (2003), bureaucrats in local governments in China are straddling a middle-position between the interests of local people and official regulations commanded through a hierarchical governmental administration system. The example of the Party Secretary in Kunming from Chapter Four, showed that while claiming adherence to nationally circulated policies and concepts, officials also seek 'political achievement' in order to support a potential promotion. For officials on the lower levels of the government administration hierarchy it might be more difficult to seek political achievement without also negotiating with local people. This is why, as Huang (2003) states, local governments often seek to maintain a base in local interests, even if this might end up contradicting government policies. For the local government, Liang and EBOR's interest in the area seemed to give an opportunity to take advantage of their middle-position.

Following the workshop, Liang and Mr Xu travelled back to Dulongjiang Township together with many of the government officials, to attend a meeting in the township government building. Liang had already arranged the formalities of this meeting when visiting the area a month earlier to get permission to arrange the workshop. Attending the meeting were representatives from the Township administration, representatives from the County departments of Forestry and Agriculture, as well as to village leaders from the Dulong village. The topic of the discussion was the negotiation of a joint project between EBOR and local government departments. Liang wanted the local government to set aside some of the state-owned land for Dulong villagers to practice swidden agriculture on. He also wanted some of the officials to record the practice, so that a DVD could be produced and used for 'education' in schools in the area, as well as for 'policy dissemination' to various government departments. The idea of making of a DVD had been established in the 'future suggested actions' of the research report, and this meeting represented Liang's attempt to follow up another one of these 'actions'. In the meeting an agreement was reached regarding the making of the DVD; the Local Government agreed

to set aside a piece of land for swidden agriculture over the course of one year, and at the same time make sure that the practice was properly documented. The deal also involved the transfer of a sum of money from EBOR to the local government to cover the cost of the project, especially fire safety, which had been one of the major concerns of the representatives from the Forestry Department. The formal agreement, the transfer of the money (in cash) and the issuing of a receipt, was undertaken when we came back to Gongshan, at the offices of one of the county bureaus. We see that Liang brought in resources through some of the grant money that was transferred to local government officials overseeing the making of the Swidden Agriculture DVD. EBOR's involvement then presented the local government with an opportunity to follow a project that could possibly be beneficial for Dulong villagers and thereby give them local support, and that at the same time give them the possibility to receive more international support, by them being seen as favouring international environmental concepts and ideas.

The project also seemed to be beneficial for SEPA, who were already involved in biodiversity protection in the area trough the responsibility of overseeing a National Nature Reserve in Gaoligongshan. Liang's cooperation with SEPA proved fruitful, as the agency eventually got more interested in the Swidden Agriculture project. A few months after the making of the Swidden Agriculture DVD had started, I talked to Liang via instant messaging and asked him about the progress of the project. He told me that the he had gotten support from SEPA to ask the local government of Gongshan to approve the allocation of a piece of permanent land that Dulong communities could practice swidden agriculture on. Liang saw this as a big success for the project, and something that in many ways exceeded the 'suggested actions' that had been presented in the research report. He was thrilled that swidden agriculture had captured the attention of the local government. According to him, now the local government also wanted to "protect local traditional knowledge and crop varieties."

What about the local people? The initial background for the workshop, as stated in the research report, was to 'protect the bio-cultural heritage' of Dulong communities. Liang told me that most of the concerns that were stated in the research report had initially been presented to him by local villagers. According to Liang, it was the local villagers who first and foremost worried about the changes brought by the SLCP. Still, during the

workshop, there was little interaction between Liang and the villagers; similarly, there was little interaction between the local government and the villagers, despite the stated goal of the workshop to 'bring together stakeholders'. The interaction that did take place seemed to be formal and stylised; during the workshop, the local party secretary held a speech to the attendants; Liang and Mr Xu introduced the workshop, assessed the candidates and handed out prizes. Liang had made arrangements for a communal dinner in the square between the government buildings directly following the workshop. Although this was a more informal setting than the previous workshop, there still seemed to be a separation between the villagers, who gathered together in groups at one end of the square, and the officials, Liang, and me, who sat down at a separate table at the other end. The only one to talk to and visit the villagers was Mr Xu – after all, this was his home village.

We have seen that most people and institutions involved in the project seemed to benefit from it, with the exception of the local people. The situation for local people might not, however, be as bad as this presentation suggests. A plausible explanation for the limited interaction between Liang and the villagers could be that this particular project site was relatively new for him; he did not personally know any of the people in the village, and had previously only briefly cooperated with the township government. It seemed as though the main concern for Liang on this project trip was to establish a good relationship with government officials, something that would make it easier for him to conduct more projects in the area in the future. As we saw in chapter two, Liang had expressed personal feelings and dedication towards another village in the area, where he was familiar with many of the people, treating them almost as 'family'. During that particular project trip, he had told me: "I find this work very interesting. To cooperate with local people and local government is good." He then said that it was easy to cooperate with local communities, but to cooperate with county government, he said, was "very difficult." In the seed-sharing workshop, Liang's focus seemed to be on the 'difficult' part of his work: to establish a personal relationship with local government officials. Once this was done, cooperation with the local community could follow. This also signalled the long-term interest of Liang in the area, and this interest could perhaps prove to be beneficial for Dulong villagers in the long run.

The Project and the Workshop as a Counternarrative

As we saw earlier in this chapter, the government-led "Grain for Green" programme seeks to mobilise a degradation narrative that presents upland farmers as 'backwards' and in need of help and involvement from the Central Government. In this narrative, the Central Government is presented as a scientific and technical-rational alternative to backwards practices: the 'modern' state must protect the environment from a 'backwards' other. The Central Government is thus positioned as the only actor able to 'sustainably' and 'scientifically' manage the forests and watersheds of China. In Chapter Three, we saw that this is part of a national discourse on development in where the Central Government has sought to legitimise their own approach to development by mobilising internationally circulated concepts such as 'sustainable development'.

Liang's view of local farmers and of the value of forests, presented through the workshop and the 'swidden agriculture' project, differ from that of the officially sanctioned view. Through Liang's involvement, the swidden agriculture practices of Dulong farmers are presented as beneficial for the environment, in that they help to preserve certain species of plans that would otherwise not be able to regenerate. Liang mobilises the globally circulating concepts of 'indigenous knowledge' and 'biodiversity' to support his project, and thereby can bee seen to construct a narrative in where upland farmers are not 'backwards', but 'traditional', not 'destructive' but 'productive'. As we have seen, the area that his project lies in receives attention from international environmental organisations, as many identify the area as being 'rich' in biodiversity. Liang is able to successfully mobilise the concept of agro-biodiversity by first receiving a grant from WWF, and then receiving support from the State Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) for the creation of a permanent area for swidden agricultural practice. He further mobilises the concept of 'traditional knowledge' in relation to his identification of the valuable knowledge about plants that the Dulong hold, and their role in preserving biodiversity in the area. As I outlined in Chapter One, mobilisation of concepts become powerful as long as they are translated in a new setting while retaining their identification to already established concepts (Dove et al., 2003; Li, 2000; Tsing, 2000). In Chapter Two, we saw that the concepts of indigenous knowledge and biodiversity were presented by teacher Wang as the main reason behind the establishment of EBOR; researchers at Kunming Institute of Botany had become interested in these topics based on their

popularity in the 'international community'. Then, like in this project, the concepts were mobilised in order to foster cooperation and create interest in research and projects. This might show some of the ways that dominant discourses, such as those focussing on 'development' and 'environment' and the concepts circulated in these discourses, can create long lasting effects. At the same time, it might show that concepts are mobilised in different contexts and also produce different outcomes. In the fist instance, the mobilisation of the concepts led to the establishment of EBOR. In the second instance, that is, trough the Swidden Agriculture Project, the effects are yet to be seen, but in the concluding remarks, I will make an attempt to look at some of the possible effects that this project might produce.

The Counternarrative as a Viable Alternative?

Did Liang then manage to create a viable counternarrative to the 'degradation narrative' mobilised by the PRC? And what could be some of the possible effects of his counternarrative? Liang managed to negotiate a deal with the local government that was at odds with central policies; setting aside a piece of land for swidden agriculture did not fit well with Central Government policies circulated through the Go West campaign and the "grain for green" programme, but still the local government approved the project, while continuing to enforce the state-led programmes. Liang's ability to get support from a number of actors seems to have been based on his ability to play on some uncertainties with concepts and policies that could be seen to contradict each other. Parts of Dulong valley and the Gaoligong Mountains had been designated as a National Nature Reserve as well as a World Heritage Site. The "Grain for Green' programme was presented as complimentary to the environmental protection of the area, but also could be seen as contradicting it. The focus of the programme was not on biodiversity, but rather on flood control and poverty alleviation. In the programme, it was stated the trees that were planted could include cash crops and 'ecological trees' – meaning that large areas that were 'reforested' in effect had the possibility to become mono-crop plantations. The programme therefore did not harmonise with international environmental interests in the area that had led to the establishment of nature reserves, the designation of World Heritage status, and the identification the area as being important for the preservation of biodiversity.

As Roe (1991) argues, for a counternarrative to be successful, it must present an appealing alternative to policymakers. Both the Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation and the 'grain for green' programme have been criticised by many observers, while biodiversity protection has received more international attention, through the creation of Ecoregions and Biodiversity Hotspots[12], and national attention through the interest of the State Environmental Protection Bureau (SEPA) in protecting the biodiversity of the area. Despite discursive and institutional support, however, it might be difficult for Liang to frame his narrative as equally appealing as the 'degradation narrative'. One of the reasons for this is that the 'degradation narrative' is presented as something that affects China as a whole. Contrary to the protection of biodiversity that is only identified as important for a small part of the Chinese nation state, the 'degradation narrative' is presented as protecting national interests and saving human lives.

However, the mobilisation of a counternarrative does not necessarily have to be seen as a 'resistance' to a programme that is imposed by the state. A point already made is that local government officials might seek to represent national policies, while also seeking to engage in their own collaborations and projects, some of which might even counter the national policies themselves. Although a degradation-narrative is evoked and maintained though national development programmes, what is happening in the actual *implementation* of these programmes might differ. As we have seen from the project above, the establishment of areas for practice of swidden agriculture might be a small step along the way to establish a different 'truth' about developmental and environment efforts in China, but it still presents an alternative for various collaborations that helps to negotiate some of the effects of national development programmes.

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[12] 'Biodiversity Hotspots' is a concept with a similar agenda to that of 'Ecoregions', nemaly to identfy regions and areas of great species diversity where conservation efforts can be concentrated (see Conservation Internationsl, 2007).

Conclusion

As I have tried to point out in this text – procedures and projects at EBOR do not necessarily make up 'one body', or represent 'one direction'. To refer to their work as an attempt to resist state power and expand civil society, seems to be both misleading and grossly simplifying a number of complex relationships. An intimate description of an NGO can bee seen to stand in contrast to the way NGOs are often imagined and presented in much literature, and also to the way leaders and workers at EBOR represents the organisation to a range of actors.

Looking for Resistance or Resisting the Temptation

If Liang, by seeking to continue his research in the Gongshan area, is evoking a 'counternarrative' to a degradation narrative circulated by Central Government agencies, it is not necessarily because he is doing 'global activism' on behalf of an NGO against a repressive state. From the example above, Liang's involvement in the project seemed to come equally from a feeling of 'being responsible' for his project site, as well as his interests as a student and researcher. We might say that some of the effects that the project has produced have come about as unintended consequences, and are subject to dialogue between many actors with different stakes in the area. If I had chosen to frame Liang's engagement through this project as an example of how NGOs seek to 'confront the state', or even as an attempt to carve out space for a 'global civil society', this would have both simplified and distorted the diversity of projects within EBOR, as well as the diversity between a range of organisations that are lumped together under the category of 'NGO'.

Unintended Consequences and Alternatives

Although Liang can bee seen to try to empower local people by mobilising the concepts of indigenous knowledge and biodiversity, this mobilisation might also have the potential of sustaining certain stereotypes. Liang can be seen as presenting Dulong people in a way that resembles an 'ecologically noble savage' – a view that has been criticised for harbouring ideas about the separation of 'nature' from 'culture', and distorting and

simplifying local experiences (Milton, 1996). Liang might present local communities with an alternative to the degradation narrative, but it is not certain that the narrative that he seeks to mobilise represent an appealing alternative to most Dulong people. The swidden agriculture that is promoted by Liang, and introduced through the project, is also not necessarily the same as the swidden agriculture that Dulong communities used to practice. The piece of land allocated by the local government is limited, and does not represent an economically viable alternative for Dulong communities. Furthermore, Dulong communities can now only practice swidden agriculture under the supervision of local government officials – they are not trusted to be able to control the fire themselves. Fire control is a major concern for the local government, and one of the criteria for opening up plots for the practice of swidden agriculture was that the Forestry Department would be included as observers in order to maintain fire safety. Following observations made by Ferguson (1991) and Brosius (1999), we might say that one of the unintended consequences of the project has been an expansion of bureaucratic management of local affairs, and a swidden agriculture practice that has been hijacked by governmental rationality.

Although, what are the alternatives? The grain and cash subsidies that are provided to Dulong communities through the current 'grain for green' programme are only available until 2011, while the areas 'converted' into forest are expected to retain their forest cover also after this date. The programme does not give any guarantee for income generation after state subsidies run out, and it is unclear whether or not Dulong families will profit from timber extractive practices, as this would involve the participation of a number of other actors, thereby greatly reducing the profit margin. Furthermore, the planted trees will not reach 'maturity' until many years after subsidies are stopped, and timber extraction therefore does not represent an alternative in the near future. Faced with a narrative that portray them as 'backwards' and unproductive, Dulong villagers might have more to gain from engaging in collaborations with Liang and local government actors, where they are represented in positive terms as holding valuable knowledge for environmental protection. In the long run, collaboration between Dulong villagers, local government agencies and EBOR, and the mobilisation of concepts and a counternarrative that lends some of its support from government actors but still portrays local villagers positively, might present new channels for agency for Dulong villagers,

and the possibility to create "fields of attraction" that gives access to dominant discourses (Tsing, 2008: 398). This could prove to be more fruitful than a focus on a one-sided 'resistance' to Central Government policies, or even the blanket rejection of positively framed representations.

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Appendix 1: The Administrative System of The People's Republic of China

This appendix is intended as a brief overview of the administrative system of the People's Republic of China (PRC). It is not a complete overview, but is intended as a reference to be used when reading the text. The overview is focused on hierarchical structure of the national administration and its basis units, which can be used for reference when reading specific sections and chapters where I mention some of these administrative units, or institutions and organisations that are associated with, or registered by, departments on the various levels of the administrative hierarchy.

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     ┌─────────────────────┐
     │      PROVINCE       │
     └─────────────────────┘
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        │     PREFECTURE      │
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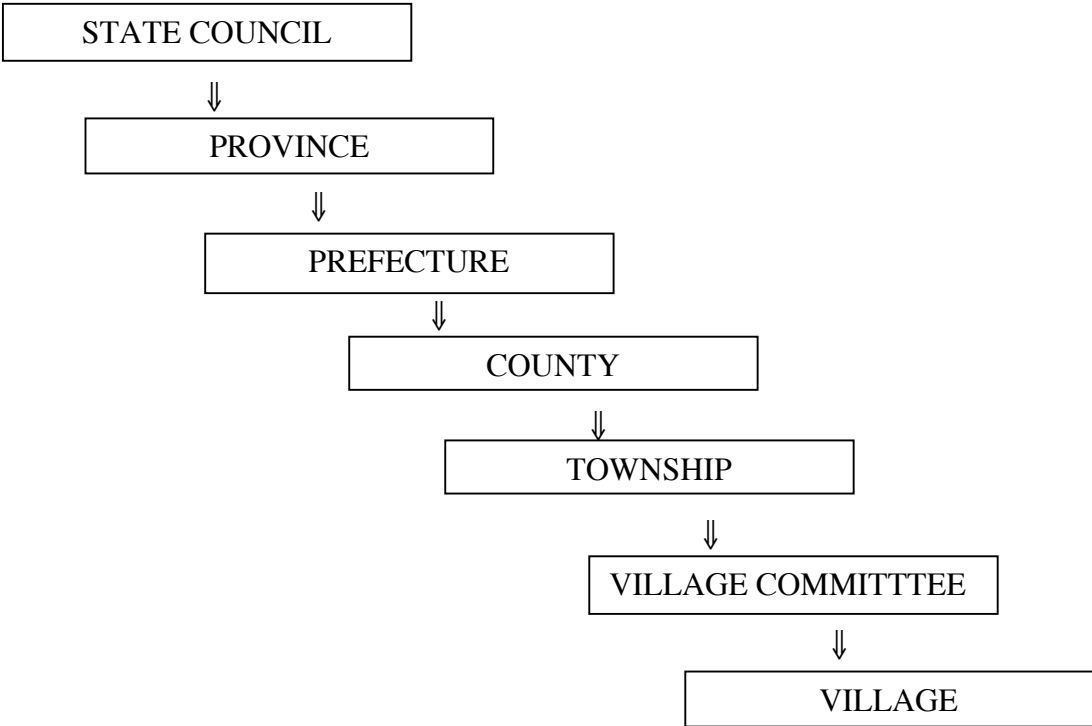
Figure 3. Basic administration structure of the PRC, with hierarchical levels of administrative units.

In the simplified administrative structure presented above (Fig. 3), the different units represent the hierarchical levels in the administration system of the PRC. Established shortly after the creation of the People's Republic in 1949, the administrative levels are

arranged according to the system of People's Congresses: decision making units on each level which is meant to be representative of represent the various constituencies. The system of people's congresses was established through the First session of the first National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing in 1954; The National People's Congress is convened by the State Council every four years, and functions as the authoritative decision-making body for the administration system as a whole (Zheng 1997).

As Zheng (1997), and Huang (2003) have pointed out, the hierarchical organisation of the government administration is mirrored by that of the Communist Party of China (CPC) on all levels, where official 'cadres' from the CPC hold a high degree of formal influence owing to their link to the Central Committee of the CPC, which, in effect, dictate the 'direction' and policies of the government (Huang 2003). This degree of influence can be seen all the way to the top of the hierarchical structure, where the president of PRC, Hu Jintao, is also the General Secretary of the CPC.

Appendix 2: Regulations for Registration and Management of Social Organisations – Some Excerpts

Regulations for registration and management of Social Organisations [Shehui tuanti dengji guanli tiaoli]

> Published by the State Council at the 8th ordinary session on 25/9/98, to take effect from that date.

The regulations identify a number of criterions for the establishment of a 'social organisation'. These are outlined in Article 10 of the regulations as:

I. An organisation must have more than 50 individual members or more than 30 institutional members or, if it has both individual and institutional members, a total of at least fifty.

II. It must have a standard name, and organisational capacity.

III. It must have a fixed location.

IV. It must have staff with qualifications appropriate to the professional activities of the organisation.

V. It must have lawful assets and a source of funds. National level organisations must have a minimum of 100,000 Yuan to cover their activities; local social organisations and inter-area social organisations must have a minimum of 30,000 Yuan.

VI. It must be legally liable in its own right.

The regulation states that two separate state agencies are to register and supervise social organisations. The first type of agency is referred to as: 'registration and management agencies' *[dengji guanli jiguan]*, which includes "Civil Affairs departments at county level and above." The responsibilities of the agency is laid out in Article 27 of the regulations:

I. It is responsible for the registration and record keeping [*bei an*] with respect to establishment, modification and closure of social organisations.

II. It is responsible for conducting an annual review [*jiancha*] on the social organisation.

III. It is responsible for supervision and review in cases where social organisations fail to comply [*weifan*] with these regulations, and for applying disciplinary sanctions [*xingzheng chufa*] to organisations which fail to comply with these regulations.

The second type of acency, is referred to as a 'professional leading unit' *[yewu zhuguan danwei]*, and includes government departments and organizations administered by government departments, from "related trade, scientific or other professional areas." The responsibility of this unit is laid out in article 28 of the regulations.

I. It is responsible for investigating [*shencha*] the social organisation's preliminary application, establishment, modification or cancellation of registration.

II. It is responsible for supervising and guiding the social organisation in observance of the constitution, laws, statutory regulations, national policy, and in developing activities in accordance with their charter.

III. It is responsible for conducting a preliminary stage of the annual review.

IV. It is responsible for helping the registration and management agency and other relevant departments to investigate and deal with illegal activities of social organisations.

V. It is responsible with other relevant departments for guiding the process of winding up social organisations [*qingsuan shiyi*].

(Peoples Republic of China State Council, 1998)