EXPLORING THE COMMUNICATION BEHAVIORS OF CHINESE ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS: A STUDY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS FROM AN NGOS’ PERSPECTIVE

By

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To my parents who have always been loving and supportive
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By

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Up till now, many public relations scholarship has centered on building theories in the corporate contexts. This thesis looks at other organizations, and explores the function of strategic public relations in the NGOs’ setting. It is interesting to know that, on one hand, NGOs are audience that corporations would like to target through strategic communications. On the other hand, activists in NGOs are themselves public relations practitioners who are eager to build relationships with their publics as well.

Set in the unique context of China, this thesis centers on Chinese environmental NGOs, and aims to study their public relations efforts on various publics. Nineteen Chinese environmental NGOs were interviewed by the author regarding their strategies and tactics for advocacy, organization maintenance, and interactions with corporations. Their relationships with corporations and fellow institutions are specifically highlighted in this thesis. The author found that the Internet has become an integral medium for publicity and relationship nurturing with followers. And, media relations is extremely important for the survival and operation of Chinese environmental NGOs. It is also suggested that Chinese environmental NGOs should establish collaborative
relationships with target corporations for their mutual benefit. Limitations of this study and suggestions for future study in this field are also discussed for future reference.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The world has seen a tremendous increase in global transactions and foreign trade at the beginning of the XXI Century. Globalization is not an unfamiliar term when countries in different continents become interdependent in terms of economics, politics, social issues, and human movement. Corporations go across borders expanding their markets or simply to survive in an increasingly competitive environment in order to gain more leverage and comparative advantage in their business and institutional transactions. As is pointed out by Johnson and Turner (2003), the main objectives for corporations to engage in international business are expansion of sales, acquiring resources, minimizing competitive risk, and diversification of sources of sales and supplies.

The emergence and activities of transnational corporations (TNCs) are probably the most visible facets of globalization. They have played an important role in explicating the phenomenon and facilitating the progress of globalization. In 1970, there were 7,000 TNCs worldwide. Thirty years later, the number had grown to more than 60,000 (Blanchard, 2007). It is also cited by Blanchard (2007) that as early as 1999, the 1,000 largest TNCs are accounted for 80 percent of world industrial output and the world’s top 100 TNCs took up 4.3 percent of world GDP. It is not hasty to draw such conclusions as today’s TNCs have great power. This is not only because they are worldwide influential, but also because they can use their massive revenues to control over distribution channels, limit their support for dependent local companies, have weight in the forming of international accords, and even influence policies at host
locations (Blanchard, 2007). They also tend to employ their attractive and, frequently sought-after brands to attract more market of consumers in foreign countries.

China, being known by its rapid economic development, is one of the main playgrounds in the globalization progress. Various TNCs are looking to gain a share of this emerging market. According to Blanchard (2007), during 2004 to 2006 alone, the number of foreign-funded corporations jumped from nearly 470,000 to more than 500,000. TNCs have become indispensable in the Chinese economy. It is cited by Blanchard (2007), based on statistics provided by China Daily, TNCs in China employ about 24 million people, represent nearly half of the country’s largest exporters, and dominate various markets such as soft drinks and fast foods.

Like anywhere else in the world, TNCs operating in China are confronted with environmental uncertainties that pose challenges and threats to their survival. Along the way of China’s economic boom, many social conflicts are becoming overt. Local manufacture are so busy watching over their profits that some of them seldom pay attention to problems in regards to the environment, food safety, or labor rights, to name a few issues. Under these circumstances, citizen activism is therefore formed to protest in favor of social and legal justice. For example, since 2010, there has been continuous employee suicide incidents happened in Foxconn Company, which is a supplier company for Apple. News reports were all over television and the Internet at that time concerning those tragedies. Many human rights activists have directed expressed their anger and confusion to the late CEO of Apple, Steve Jobs. But the I.T. Giant refused to comment on those incidents.
There are several reasons why they tend to be targeted, according to Shireman (2007). First, most TNCs own well-known brands. It is advantageous for activists to generate greater attention for their causes and bring the issues to the publics’ eyes. Second, TNCs, because of their immense power and resources, have and are expected to have greater social responsibility as role models to the rest of the evolving open-market economy. Any violations of the social norms and regulations may cost them financial and reputational damage. Third, and probably one that is most explicit in China, TNCs are relatively safe to attack compared to directly targeting the Chinese government.

What is distinctive about Chinese activism has a lot to do with the political infrastructure and ideology in China. Unlike western countries where the rights of citizens taking action against government are protected, in a society as authoritarian as China, there are restrictions in terms of what you can do and say in public. Moreover, the lack of democracy results in pitfalls such as the lack of empowering public opinion when it comes to interactions between big corporations and grassroots citizens. These situations undoubtedly make it challenging for Chinese activist groups with different goals and hindered the development of citizen activism in China in general.

Citizen activism often rises from social conflicts. Some major issues in China that are being advocated most include human rights, environment protection, and food safety. Chinese activists who are involved in those issues are devoted to making the society more civil by exposing wrongdoings and improving social justice. Economy (2005) commented that environmental NGOs in China are “playing a critical role in advancing transparency, rule of law, and official accountability within the Chinese
However, these kinds of forces are not appreciated and strengthened by most ordinary people in China like many westerners would do. Instead, activist groups in China have been experiencing constant surveillance and restrictions by the Chinese government. Matthews (2011) wrote about the Chinese labor movement, “In China, what you don't say is as important as what you do say” (¶ 1). The report continued on how labor movement should be as low key as possible, and be co-opting of government speech in order not to alert the authorities.

It seems that in China the bottom line of engaging in activism is not to mess with the government or corporations that have relationship with government leadership. Many cases of some well-known activists suddenly disappeared, are arrested, or even imprisoned may be quite shocking to the rest of the world, but not to citizens who are used to power politics enforced by the Chinese government. In 2010, food safety activist Zhao Lianhai, a father who organized a support group for other parents whose children were sickened in one of China's worst food-safety scandals, was convicted and sentenced to two and a half years in prison for inciting social disorder (Burkitt, 2010). Another example would be Xiao Qingshan, a labor activist well known throughout the Pearl River Delta for his protests at courts and governments. He suddenly went missing in 2010, only later to be found by the Hong Kong-based Civil Rights and Livelihood Watch that he had been sent to a re-education labor camp in Shenzhen (Matthews, 2011).

While political activism and advocacy for human rights are sensitive topics in China, environmental activism is experiencing a relatively favorable situation in terms of government restrictions. This is probably due to severe level of pollution in China, which
the government does not seem to have solutions. Statistics are quite shocking as stating that 20 of the 30 most polluted cities in the world are in China. Xu (2008) stated that a report by CNN in 2007 estimated that about 300 million people drink contaminated water on a daily basis, and that 400,000 early deaths each year result from sulfur dioxide pollution due to the burning of coal. Even so, some local government still prefers to further economic growth at the cost of environmental hazards. As people are more aware of what pollution can do to their health, the unsatisfactory quality of the air, the water, and the food in China has become major public concerns. Xu (2008) stated that the cost of public health and the inability of the government to improve the situation are brewing social discontent. Based on Economy’s (2005) observation, Chinese government has generally adopted a positive attitude toward environmental NGOs because they realized that these organizations can fill a critical gap of government’s efficiency in dealing with environmental issues.

Environmental activism does not have a long history in China. There are no environmental NGOs in China until the mid 1990s. Now there are approximately 2,000 environmental groups officially registered as NGOs (Economy, 2005). Economy (2005) pointed out that most Chinese environmental NGOs “exist as part of a much wider community of environmental activism involving China’s scientific community, the media, multinationals, international non-governmental organizations, and elements of the Chinese government” (¶ 2). Since the establishment of the oldest environmental NGO, Friends of Nature, there has been a transformation of focus in their work of advocacy. Initially, they stay with relatively politically “safe” issues such as environmental education and biodiversity protection in order not to contravene government regulations.
Nowadays, environmental NGOs in China are engaged in a wider range of advocacy, such as protests for constructions of large dam projects, filing lawsuits against polluting factories, and pressuring TNCs that engaged in unethical activities (Xu, 2008).

In 2009, a leather factory in Shanghai owned by the Fuguo Company was reported by Chinese environmental groups as having emitted air pollution. In their efforts to leverage the situation, activists brought the issue to the attention of Timberland, the U.S. shoes and clothing seller, one of Fuguo’s biggest customers. The company then held an unlikely gathering inviting the relevant residents, the media, and environmental groups with an attempt to solve the pollution problems (Hays, 2008). Another timely example would be Apple, the IT giant, being picked out by a Chinese environmental group because its Chinese suppliers discharged polluted waste and toxic substances that are threatening public health in surrounding areas. The group, called the Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs directed by Ma Jun, one of China’s best known environmental activists. Ma said that Apple had a poor environmental record and the company had been less responsive to the group’s investigation compared to other electronic manufacturer (as cited in Barboza, 2011). He criticized Apple as not living up to its name as a green company if they do not consider environmental responsibility in the supplier country. In spite of those efforts made by environmental NGOs, grassroots movement is also making small but significant contributions to improve the environmental situation in China. In 2007, a plan of constructing a U.S. $1.6 billion chemical factory in Xiamen was pulled off after citizens successfully launched a text messaging campaign. Environmentalists posted the first message on the Internet, and it went on to appear in one million cell phones. Nearly all Xiamen’s 1.5 million residents
were reached through either text messages or word of mouth. Although Chinese authorities immediately shut down the websites and had attempted to block messages in Xiamen, the dissemination of messages was spread too fast to control (Hays, 2008).

The development of activist groups or NGOs is unique due to China’s political characteristics. Although the government has been most tolerant about advocacy on environmental protection, it is still watchful in fear that NGOs may be potential subversive entities that could cause political movement. Therefore, according to Economy (2005), every registered environmental NGO or NGOs in general are required to obtain special permit from government agencies. They are not allowed to have branches in different provinces and must not include political dissidents as members. In fact, Chinese NGOs are largely dependent on foreign funding for operation, many sources being international foundations or TNCs (Economy, 2005). They are expected to meet the ideas and agenda from those sponsors. Sometimes, they may suffer from negative public opinion asserting that they are foreign-managed enterprises. This also explains part of the reason why the Chinese government constantly stays vigilant about NGOs functioning in the country.

Like any other phenomena in the world, an academic study in public relations and communication management would not be considered current if the topic of emergent digital technology is not discussed. In the case of activism, the influence of the Internet and advanced information technology is revolutionary. The Internet is an undoubtedly useful tool for grassroots activists with small budgets. However, the Internet censorship in China is giving online activism a hard time by deleting sensitive contents and blocking political-unfavorable websites. Under this situation, a relatively new social networking
site “Weibo” (microblog) launched by Sina.com is now gaining activists’ attention in China. Weibo is similar to Twitter in the United States. Up to this point, Weibo has a total of 200 million registered accounts, which means it has increased 40 percent in three months’ time (Alexandroff, 2011). Due to its growing popularity and influence, many international celebrities have come to open their Weibo accounts to talk directly to their Chinese fans. What is distinctive about Weibo lies in that the viral effect it elicits is unstoppable once a single entry can be reposted by users hundreds of millions of times. This kind of Weibo activity was most notable when two high-speed trains crashed in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province due to operational mistakes in August, 2011. The disaster shocked the whole country, and Weibo became the place where people obtained the most instant and “uncontrolled” information in regards to the incident and where people could freely express their disappointment at the government’s response.

This thesis aims to study strategic public relations from the activist perspective. By exploring environmental NGOs in the unique context of China, this thesis is looking to find out their relationships with transnational corporations in China, and what strategic and tactics they employ when they perform public relations functions. Through Intensive interviews with several Chinese environmental NGOs, the author is able to understand their work more accurately, and provide useful information and guidance for global wise collaborations. The thesis is also looking to suggest some helpful public relations strategies for both NGOs and TNCs to develop long-term, mutually beneficial relationships.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

Global Public Relations

Molleda (2009) provided an overview of how present organizations interact with their publics in the globalized context:

Many types of organizations virtually and physically interact and communicate with publics and/or audiences outside their own country of origin to build a dynamic set of relationships. Trade, direct foreign investment, political coalitions, worthy global causes, information flow, and social networking, among other phenomena, are increasing the complexity of these relationships dramatically. (¶ 3)

The situation has made it more demanding for public relations professionals to accomplish their work, as they need to build and maintain relationships not only with publics at home, but also audiences in host countries or the transnational environment, especially with activist groups, non-government organizations (NGOs), and global media (Molleda, 2009). Global public relations is then defined as “strategic communications and actions carried out by private, government, or nonprofit organizations to build and maintain relationships with publics in socioeconomic and political environments outside their home location” (¶ 10).

Transnational organizations operating in several countries face particular challenges in terms of practicing public relations. These challenges come from a unique set of geographical, cultural, political and legal, socioeconomic, and communication media environments (Molleda, 2009). These environmental uncertainties distinguish global public relations from domestic practices, and they pose challenges and threats to the survival of transnational organizations. Scholars termed those uncertainties as contextual variables that describe the environmental condition of a host country. They include political and socioeconomic systems; cultural idiosyncrasies and traditions; the
extent, types, and history of activism; and level of development and infrastructure of the media (Verčič, J. Grunig, & L. Grunig, 1996). These variables visibly or invisibly influence the business practices of TNCs, as well as their public relations strategies and tactics.

A theoretical guideline for practicing public relations in transnational settings is suggested by Verčič, L. Grunig, and J. Grunig and Wakefield in the early 1990s (J. Grunig, 2006). The theory of generic principles and specific applications, according to J. Grunig (2006), “falls midway between an ethnocentric theory (that public relations is the same everywhere) and a polycentric theory (that public relations is different everywhere)” (p. 170). Wakefield (2008) further explained two important concepts conveyed by the theory. One concept answers to the prevailing arguments about whether TNCs should adopt a centralized or localized structure. The theory suggested a combination of the two, which is to practice the general principles of public relations while making specific adaption according to various local conditions (also see Lim, 2010; Molleda & Laskin, 2010). The other concept incorporated the theory of excellence and strategic communication that have already been proved valuable to public relations practice (J. Grunig, 1992). The theory emphasized the importance of two-way communication and establishing mutual beneficial relationship with stakeholders. It also suggested that public relations must not subject to other functions such as marketing or advertising. This problem is often evident in TNCs because when they expand their business abroad, foreign sales profits and market share become top priorities; thus, rendering public relations a supporting function to marketing and product promotion (Wakefield, 2008). The generic/specific theory is considered legitimate by many
scholars based on the assumption made by the Excellence team, that “communication excellence is universal — it is no different in Canada, the United Kingdom, or the United States” (Dozier, J. Grunig, & L. Grunig, 1995, p. 4). It is also suggested by J. Grunig (2006) that the excellence principles are applicable, on a broad and abstract basis, in different cultures, economic-political system, media system, and degree of activism.

L. Grunig, J. Grunig, and Dozier (2002) perceived activism as the most important specific variable. Activist groups are well organized and operate by a set of principles. As explained by Spar and La Mure (2003):

NGOs and activists tend to organize primarily around ideas; around a collective commitment to some shared belief or principle. Operating independently of any government, NGOs target both public and private entities and use whatever tools they can muster to secure their desired goal. (p. 79)

Simply put, NGOs organize to solve problems either not solved by businesses or governmental agencies, or to raise money at some benefits of communities (Kelly, 2005). A variety of activist groups are always monitoring the act of TNCs and are ready to bring pressures against the corporations whenever there is a chance (Wakefield, 2009). Most direct opposition against TNCs probably comes from anti-globalization activists. Other issues in activism can be seen regarding environmental issues, ethical practices, and human rights. The power of activists must not be underestimated especially by TNCs operating in a host environment. Practitioners in organizations regardless of their type, size, and industry are likely to be confronted by activist groups. In fact, according to Anderson (1992), L. Grunig (1987) sampled organizations range in a variety of sizes and functions and found that more than 95 percent of public relations practitioners had once dealt with activists.
There has been a shift of focus, mainly from state to non-state actors, in the developing of global activism (Spar & La Mure, 2003). This shift in emphasis is critical for understanding the current state of corporation-activists interaction. In the earliest days of activism activity, activists targeted the obvious source of power, such as the government sector: If they wanted to make societal change, they pressured the governments to take actions on the issues they are enthusiastic about, such as ending slavery or child labor. Today, as TNCs play an important role in the global economy, they have gradually become the direct target of activism in the form of boycotts, consumer protest, and shareholder rebellion (Spar & La Mure, 2003).

Spar and La Mure (2003) further summarized three possible responses for TNCs when they are encountered by global activism. They are named as preemption, capitulation, and resistance. Preemption refers to corporations taking the initiative to communicate with pressure groups before they start activist activities. Capitulation has much to do with cooperation, meaning that corporations and activist groups sit on some kind of agreements and that both of them would be willing to let go some part of their benefits. Resistance means corporations will not change their way of business operation due to activist efforts. Spar and La Mure (2003) posited that the choice made by a corporation to respond to activism pressures should be determined by the profitability of that action. This approach stands out among other communicative suggestions because of its financial touch on dealing with activism. This approach is quite self explanatory since corporations are supposed to behave rational and profit oriented, their first and foremost concern should be creating and maintaining values for their shareholders. Therefore, corporations are suggested agreeing rapidly and
completely on activist demands that have low cost. They should pay more attention on programs that are expensive and ignore those with no significant impact. In this manner, activism is perceived by corporations as another cost of doing business, one that needs a rational and well calculated response (Spar & La Mure, 2003).

**Corporation-Activist Relationships from the Public Relations Perspective**

The greatest challenge posed from activist groups is that they may be unpredictable. Often times, TNCs are not prepared for sudden confrontations and are not able to respond to them effectively and strategically. In order to take the initiative and perform environmental scanning, a close study of the publics is necessary (Anderson, 1992). Anderson (1992) referred to the situational theory (J. Grunig, 1977), a framework for isolating relevant publics in terms of organizational communication, for the study of activists. The theory explains “the likelihood that these publics will communicate with each issue, to measure the opinions of each public on each issue, and to design communication accordingly” (p. 154).

Anderson (1992) reviewed the three stages in the evolution of publics (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). In the latent stage, publics do not perceive a situation as problematic. They move to the aware stage when they recognized the problems. In the third state, they become active and would like to take actions on the perceived issues. The implication for the stage development is to communicate with aware publics and prevent them from turning into the active stage. The situational theory (J. Grunig, 1979) identified three important variables: problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement. Those variables are conducive to placing publics into either a latent, aware, or active stage. As is suggested by Anderson (1992), Active publics are characterized by high levels of problem recognition, low constraint recognition, and high
involvement. Aware publics are identified by a high level of problem recognition, which may be hindered by either high constraint recognition or a low level of involvement. Latent publics are characterized by a low level of problem recognition. It is without question that active and aware publics look for more information, process and have cognitions about them more often than latent publics.

Activist groups are relevant publics that belong to the aware and active stages. Anderson (1992) stressed that corporations should devote much of their efforts in communicating with educated activists because they have greater ability in seeking information and planning pressure campaigns. They are also more capable of lobbying against corporations and producing direct negative impact on the operation. She also stated, although communication is critical when dealing with active pressure groups, corporations should not expect to achieve satisfactory outcome by a single strategy. When multiple solutions are used, TNCs are considered proactive, and taking the initiative to communicate with activist groups. Once activist groups get the idea that corporations are willing to share their common ground, they will be less likely to take overt actions against that corporation (Anderson, 1992).

Regarding activism, public relations scholarship has contributed to theory building from the perspective of corporations. One dominant stream of research is based on the work of the Excellence team who perceived excellent public relations as two-way symmetrical. The Excellence study emphasizes communication management “employing a frank exchange of information and mutual respect” in order to build mutually beneficial relationships with shareholders (Smith & Ferguson, 2001, p. 298). This symmetrical approach of public relations was proposed by J. Grunig (1992) as a
social responsible normative theory to address the organization-activist group interplay. According to Dozier and Lauzen (2000), the model was “initially conceptualized to ameliorate the negative consequences of organizational behavior on people without resources to fight back” (p. 11). Despite the intention of stressing the ethical and reciprocal aspects of public relations, the symmetrical model is being criticized in recent public relations scholarship as framing the activist research in a corporate paradigm and is being questioned about whether it is adequate and applicable to explain the interaction between activist groups and their target organizations (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000; Stokes & Rubin, 2010).

Dozier and Lauzen (2000) explicated an interesting paradox generated by the findings of the Excellence study as applied to activist publics. On the one hand, critical theory (e.g., Karlberg, 1996) pointed out that “a symmetrical world view among large corporations is insufficient to offset the enormous resource disparity between corporations and activist publics” (p. 10). On the other hand, it is argued in Olson’s (1971) theory of collective action that “motivation and fervor were key ingredients that activist causes can invoke, perhaps offsetting the clear resource advantage of the large corporations and other organizations that activists target” (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000, pp. 9-10). What is important to excellent public relations and communication management is to have a group of sophisticated practitioners who have the professional expertise to plan and execute effective communication programs and a sophisticated dominant coalition running the organization to demand excellence from its public relations department (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000). However, often time, activist publics do not have the prerequisites to practice what is described in the Excellence study because of the
lack of sufficient resources. Moreover, those same publics with insufficient resources are unable to demand a relationship with corporations in the win-win zone. Dozier and Lauzen (2000) concluded that the Excellence Model fails to address the separate issues of powerless publics and irreconcilable differences. They further explained that the powerless publics can be safely ignored by organizations regarding the strategic mobilization of scarce resources. And irreconcilable differences involve situations when certain behaviors of organizations or even their existence are not acceptable to activist publics.

Another study conducted by Stokes and Rubin (2010) also challenged the two-way symmetrical model by explicating the case of the tobacco company Phillip Morris being targeted by the Group to Alleviate Smoking Pollution (GASP) in Colorado. The study demonstrated how activists employed asymmetrical approaches and effectively won public support against a deceptive, probably harmful organization. In their case, the only motive GASP has toward Phillip Morris is “defeat” instead of trying to reach some kind of agreement or compromise. The study made yet another example that there is not always a win-win zone in the organization-activist group interplay and the compromise metaphor implied in the two-way symmetrical model is not always appropriate. Through the case, the authors demonstrated one fact:

[A]ctivists groups often operate from a social justice metaphor, calling for structural changes that upset the status quo. Meanwhile, corporations operating within a capitalist system frequently invoke freedom and choice. (Stokes & Rubin, 2010, p. 42)

It is worth to recognize that compromise may not always be an option for activists. Its implications lie in that they can think outside of the symmetrical model and, in turn, make their goals more attainable with a different mindset. It is also pointed out by Heath
and Waymer (2009), one possible reason why activists refuse negotiations is because
the results might “privilege the organization being attacked and weaken the power of the
attacking organization” (p. 198). Their primary goal is to elevate the performance
standards of the attacked organizations.

As is cited by Dozier and Lauzen (2000), the two-way symmetrical model was
described by J. Grunig and Hunt (1984) as aiming to “learn how the public perceives the
organization and to determine what consequences the organization has for the public”
and to use information to “counsel management on public reaction to policies and on
how those policies could be changed to better serve the public interest” (p. 25).
However, to explicate the organization-activist group interplay using the symmetrical
model is to simply look at activists as one of the corporation’s publics that may pose
threats and challenges to the corporation. This may render organizations overlook the
specific attributes in activist groups that distinct them from other publics. The contention
here is justifiable, according to Dozier and Lauzen (2000). They explained how L.
Grunig (1992) introduced arguments as “an attempt to help public relations practitioners
deal in more than an ad hoc way with the opposition their organizations often face from
activist groups” (p. 503). This perspective of activism research framed many scholars in
studying the interaction between activists and corporations. Thus, an increasing number
of scholars have argued for moving away from the corporate-centric public relations
perspective in order to expand the terrain of activist research to other directions (Smith
& Ferguson, 2010).

The conflict between organizations and activist groups can also be explicated by
using the Co-orientation Model of public relations. Co-orientation was first proposed by
Newcomb (1953), which suggested that interaction involves two communicators co-orientating their opinions toward an object of common concerns. According to Kim (1986), the process of considering one’s own orientation toward an object, and the perception of the other’s orientation toward the object is called co-orientation. Chaffee and McLeod (1968) developed three important measurements based on Newcomb (1953)’s model, which are agreement, congruency, and accuracy. Congruency, also referred as perceived agreement, describes the extent to which your own opinions match your estimate of another’s opinions on the same topic, while Accuracy represents the extent to which your estimate matches the other person’s actual opinion.

As Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2000) has pointed out, people formulate strategies for responding to the communal issues or co-orienting with the other person based on their estimate (Congruency). That is, the perceived agreement is more likely to affect behaviors than actual agreement. This is because the actual opinion of the other person is usually unknown. In the case of corporation-activist communications, they are co-orienting toward a topic that is of their mutual interests. Misunderstanding between the two may result from a false perception of the other’s view toward the communal issue. To avoid the problem, it is essential to find out the common grounds and start to establish mutual understanding between activist groups and the target corporation. This is the basis for effective communication between two parties going from conflict to peace. By enhancing the quality of communication, the level of accuracy in the co-orientation process can then be raised.

Activist Public Relations

Perhaps a better way to study the relationship between activism and its targeting corporations is from the activists’ own perspective. Recent scholarship on activism has
stressed two aspects that have been overlooked in the long history of corporate-centric research. One is that cause-related groups or organizations are using publicity as early as the 19th century. The other aspect is that they are important in the development of public relations practice (Bourland-Davis, Thompson, & Brooks, 2010). However, Coombs and Holladay (2007) stated, “it is not until the mid-1990s that public relations research considered activists to be practicing public relations rather than simply posing an obstacle” (p. 53). In fact, they found that activists were practicing public relations before the existence of large corporations, and their ways of using public relations to achieve their goal “spurred the growth of corporate public relations” (p. 75). Many scholars begun to recognize the role of activism and claimed that “part of the historical evolution attributed to the field of public relations is tied to activism” (Coombs & Holladay, 2007, p. 52). According to Coombs and Holladay (2007), activists were perceived to have helped create the “need” for modern public relations. They stated:

If we shift the focus a bit, activism can be seen “as” modern public relations. In the 1960s activists utilized public relations to attract the attention of the corporate elite, developing and utilizing many of the modern tools of public relations (p. 52). This shift in thinking is an extension of the corporate-centric view of public relations.

There are two interrelated perspectives that explain the rationale of activist groups. Bourland-Davis et al. (2010) contended that social groups, advocacy groups, or activist organizations attempt to “redress power imbalances or unequal access to resources” (p. 409). This perspective does not perceive conflicts as negative occurring, but are natural condition in social life and human communication (Wilmot & Hocker, 2007). Activist groups attempting to meliorate disparities between groups and power resources use
conflict to their advantage. They believe in the role of publicity and that more equalized access to communication resources could solicit public support for causes (Bourland-Davis et al., 2010). The other perspective suggested activists contribute to the identification, development, and resolution of issues, which in turn leads to ultimate social good (Smith & Ferguson, 2010). Two important social roles of activists and their organizations are to elevate a society’s value standards and to “stress the failure to live up to hallowed values” (Heath & Waymer, 2009, p. 209). Activist organizations are conceptualized by the authors as operating in the “tensions between what is and what ought to be” (p. 201), or taking actions on the situations that the activists believe could be more legitimate and socially responsible (Smith & Ferguson, 2010). Heath (1997) argued that activists create and take endeavors to narrow the legitimacy gap (Sethi, 1977) between themselves and the target organization, whether business, government, or other nonprofit. The legitimacy gap motivates activists to come up with strategies to change public opinion and elicit social change.

In general, activists use public relations to make changes. Coombs and Holladay (2010) categorized changes as those on the part of a target organization, or even an industry or field; those of public policies and regulations; and those of social norms. Another important usage of public relations in activism is to maintain the organizations in pursuing their goals or, more broadly, to sustain the movement (Smith & Ferguson, 2010). These goals reflect the “dual publics” (p. 398) that activists must face. On the one hand, activist organizations target businesses, legislators, regulators, or other publics to fulfill their advocacy purposes. On the other hand, they need to attract and maintain followers who are supportive of their causes. Activists have their own publics
with varying levels of awareness and involvement in the organizations’ advocacy efforts (Heath & Palenchar, 2009).

According to Smith and Ferguson (2010), many previous studies have focused on how activists use public relations strategies and tactics to achieve the twin goal of “advocacy and maintenance” (p. 399). They noted Jackson (1982) grouped activist tactics based on their function, such as informative activities, which educate publics about an issue, or legalistic activities, which seek to resolve the problems through the courts or other legal venues. They also mentioned Zietsma and Winn (2008) who categorized activist strategies as issue raising, issue suppressing, positioning, and solution seeking. This is paralleled with the five stages of activist organization development: strain, mobilization, confrontation, negotiation, and resolution (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). To determine the proper strategies and tactics depends on how the issue is developing in its life cycle. Though different strategies and tactics are put in place at each stage of issue management, the overall movement of activists was “from confrontation to the establishment of industry-wide certification standards” (Smith & Ferguson, 2010, p. 398).

Among all public relations tactics, traditional or non-traditional, that are used by activists, there emerges a new trend of focusing attention on the Internet activism (e.g. Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Wakefield, 2008). According to Coombs and Holladay (2007), the use of Internet as activist tactics can be traced back to the late 1990s. The Internet was assessed by them as the next evolution in communication technology. With its viral traits, it has become one high-efficient channel to spread the word about an issue and to mobilize actions for a cause. They also pointed out that activist-based
public relations online has been ahead of corporate public relations. They used online tools such as discussion groups and blogs “well before corporations realized their relevance and incorporated them into the mix of public relations and marketing communications” (p. 73). This again shows the fact that corporations learned the value of public relations skills and tactics from activists.

Wakefield (2008) posited the Internet has turned activism into a global phenomenon. During the time before the Internet occurred, it is easy for mainstream entities to hide their misdeeds from the publics, and issues tend to stay in one place because of the lack of communication technology. Today, it is a whole different picture as information travels fast around the globe through the Internet. When TNCs are caught in the middle of a crisis, what await them may be pressures posed by activism that are across national borders. Cited in Wakefield (2008), this process of cross-border activism is described by Friedman (2000) as “globalution” (p. 151). Friedman (2000) posited, the Internet has made activist groups around the globe more organized and powerful, thus they become more demanding for mainstream entities to act up to their expectations. Given the circumstance, Wakefield (2008) then proposed for a reconsideration of activism's place in the generic/specific theory that was explained earlier, “Does activism remain a specific variable, or should it be incorporated into the overall generic response mechanisms of the multinational?” (p. 152). This question has implications to the way TNC practice public relations in response to activist pressures. It is suggested that TNCs should be prepared with global activism rather than just focusing on local activist issues.
Although the Internet plays an important role in facilitating the coalition of activist groups around the globe, global activism has been around for over two hundred years, according to Coombs and Holladay (2007). They stated some alternative terms for activist groups, which include civil society organizations, citizen associations, and the most common, NGOs. However, they referred to global activist groups as private voluntary organizations (PVOs) to emphasize their shared passion for advocacy. PVOs are depicted by them as “important actors in stakeholder networks”, and “are influential enough to help shape global agreements on such issues as the environment, women's rights, arms control, and the rights of children” (p. 110). PVOs often seek to form coalitions to become more powerful (Paul, 2000). Coombs and Holladay (2007) mentioned these coalitions are first conceptualized by Keck and Sikkink (1998) as “transnational advocacy networks (TANs)” (p. 111). They contended that “TANs erase national borders in the development of coalitions, selection of targets, and choice of issues”, and referred them as “further evidence of the global nature of activism” (p.111). Smith and Ferguson (2010) also noted the tendency for activist groups to form coalitions “with other organizations advocating for the same issue or for issues whose arguments rest on similar value premises” (p. 403). They referred to the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993) in discussing the act of coalition among activist groups. They found interesting similarities in the premises and strategies of the ACF and activist literature and practice. For instance, they cited Weible’s (2007) five types of resources that are helpful for advocacy coalitions to carry out strategies and achieve their goals: access to legal authority to make policy, public opinion, information, mobilizable troops, and skillful leadership.
In the book, Coombs and Holladay (2007) also mentioned a world wise survey about PVOs and corporations carried by Edelman’s Trust Barometer. The results showed a high level of perceived credibility in PVOs, leaving behind corporations and governments. Recognizing the power and influence of PVOs, corporations now see great advantages to partner with PVOs in order to enhance their image. Wal-Mart’s partnership with the Environment Defense Fund (EDF) not only is a good way to show the corporation’s environmental responsibility, but also gives a chance for PVOs to achieve their goals, which is, in this case, to make Wal-Mart reduce packing waste for toys. This kind of action is depicted by Richard Edelman, president of Edelman Public Relations as corporations borrowing credibility from PVOs (Iritani 2005). Taylor (2005) saw these “partnerships between NGOs and business organizations are a win-win situation for both parties” (p. 577).

According to Smith and Ferguson (2010), the core of activism research is mainly the “identification, development, and resolution of issues” (p. 400), and issues management is an important perspective and dominates most activism literature and practice. Heath and Waymer (2009) considered nonprofit activism as “a crucial factor in the evolutionary history of issues management” (p. 196). Issues management is a discipline in public relations domain, and is developed to address issues related to public policy. It was created in the 1970s to meet the need for corporations to have a more integrated and effective approach when shaping policy decisions. However, issues management studies extend beyond corporations. Any existing organizations, including activist groups, recognize the importance of being proactive, not reactive, in their interactions with the environment (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). Issues management
is, therefore, a process employed by organizations “to prevent negative developments (problems) and to cultivate a favorable environment (opportunities)” (p. 80). Activist groups operate around various issues, rendering issues management play an important role in activism. Definitions of issues management have been focused on either the objectives or the evolving stages of issues (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). When activists identify an issue and plan to confront certain target organization about it, what they look for is a satisfactory outcome, their objectives, through the stages of their activity development. Similar as the purpose of activism, the bottom line of issue management is recognized as “a belief that organizations and publics can engage each other in ways that allow for one or both parties to change” (Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 654).

The Chase-Jones Process model (1979) is the most influential model in taking a process definition of issues management. The proposed five steps are issue identification, issue analysis, issue change strategy option, issue action program, and evaluation. Though the model provides an overview of issues management procedures, it neglected the role of communication in affecting the process and outcomes of issues management (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). Crable and Vibbert’s (1985) Catalytic Model was the extension of the previous work. The model is a more fit to the activist-organization interplay because it incorporated the role of communication in shaping public opinion. According to Coombs and Holladay (2007), “[c]ommunication is employed to create arousal”, and “is used to spread the word about the issue, create legitimacy, and win support for the policy proposal” (p. 82). In the Catalytic Model, an issue has five different status levels, or generally understood as the life cycle of an issue: potential, imminent, current, critical, and dormant. Communication has significant
influence on the evolving of an issue status. It is also important to the maintenance of activist organizations (Smith & Ferguson, 2010). They must ensure the salience of an issue in order to attract followers and other resources. In other words, people need to be kept “aroused and interested” in the issue (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). Communication strategies must be adjusted to changes in different issue status (Smith, 1995). For example, at the current status, news media coverage or wide Internet exposure are used to influence a wide array of stakeholders. At the critical status, organizations use persuasion to win support for their issues and they are likely to involve the government in the issue activities. When an issue appeared resolved, it then falls to the dormant status where the issue starts to fade away. It is imperative to revive the issue and keep it salient before people lost their interests (Smith & Ferguson, 2010; Coombs & Holladay, 2007).

Legitimacy is another important concept in activism scholarship. According to Smith and Ferguson (2010), activists face “a dual legitimacy challenge”. On the one hand, they need to establish the legitimacy of their own issues or values (p. 401). On the other hand, they need to undermine the legitimacy proposed by their target organizations. As discussed in the previous paragraph, issues are the basis for activist activities and goals. Both activists and their target organizations are trying to find ways to legitimize their own positions on issues. This is a critical step especially in the early stages of an issue’s life cycle. In reality, activists and their target organizations are always questioning the opponent’s positions and values on the issues. Questioning the activists’ legitimacy has become the usual corporate response when they are confronted with activist challenges. It is special in the United States that after the 9/11
incident, the term “terrorists” has become extremely sensitive, and has been used to crash the legitimacy of some activist groups (Heath, 2008). According to Smith and Ferguson (2010), while some activist groups, such as the Earth Liberation Front, have used violent acts to achieve their goals, other activist groups who take the normal approach have also been labeled “terrorism”. They listed several examples. One is that, The Maryland State Police Department’s antiterrorism unit has surveillance and infiltrated more than 60 activist groups in the states. Among those being infiltrated are well known activist organizations such as Amnesty International and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (Rein & White, 2009).

Based on the literature review, research questions are developed as follows:

**RQ1.** What strategies and tactics do Chinese environmental NGOs employ when advocating their issues and carrying out their activities?

In the past, public relations scholars tended to consider activist groups as one of the “publics” with which to build relationships (e.g. Anderson, 1992; L. Grunig, 1992). More recent scholarship on activism has come to realize that activists are also public relations practitioners. It is indicated that activists play an important role in the history and development of public relations (Smith & Ferguson, 2010; Coombs & Holladay, 2007). According to Coombs and Holladay (2007), activists were practicing public relations before the existence of large corporations, and their ways of using public relations to achieve their goal “spurred the growth of corporate public relations” (p. 75).

**RQ2.** How do Chinese environmental NGOs manage to keep their issues salient and their followers interested overtime?
It is identified that activist groups use public relations strategies and tactics to achieve the dual goals of “advocacy and maintenance” (Smith & Ferguson, 2010, p. 399). That is, activist groups use public relations not only to influence and alter the behaviors of target organizations, but also to keep their followers interested in their activities overtime. As five stages of activist organizations development are recognized as strain, mobilization, confrontation, negotiation, and resolution (Heath & Palenchar, 2009), they face communication challenges at different stages. It is suggested by Smith and Ferguson (2010) that activist organizations need to take such measures as expanding membership, gathering resources, and establishing legitimacy during an issue’s strain and mobilization stages.

**RQ3.** What kind of relationships do Chinese environmental NGOs have with other NGOs and transnational corporations in China? And how do they cultivate those relationships?

Environmental NGOs come across opportunities and challenges meeting with different publics as ordinary organizations would do. Consequently, activist public relations does not limit its efforts on individuals alone, but includes interactions with other organizations as well. According to Xu (2009), environmental NGO research in China has already paid much emphasis on the relationship between NGOs and the government, lacking the studies focusing on their relationships with corporations, or other organizations. Spar and La Mure (2003) identified that TNCs have gradually become direct target of activist groups. They seek to take actions on the situations they believe could be more legitimate and social responsible. Other literature has found collaborative relationships evident between NGOs and corporations (e.g. Li & Wang,
2005; Coombs & Holladay, 2007). Alliances within NGOs that share the same interest are also commonly seen in activism scholarships (e.g. Taylor, 2005).
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Design

There are two major research approaches: qualitative and quantitative. In general, the difference between these two approaches is that quantitative researchers strive for breadth, while qualitative researchers strive for depth (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Researchers taking the quantitative approach have a clear idea of what they are looking for and they often use tools such as surveys for collecting data. In contrast, the main purpose of qualitative research is to understand the phenomenon studied and describe the situation. Qualitative research often takes the use of interviews and observations (Quinn, 2002). Since this thesis aims to study activist public relations strategies and tactics, and to have an in-depth understanding of Chinese civil activism, the author thus takes the qualitative approach and uses intensive interviews with Chinese environmental NGOs to satisfy the needs of this research.

Although there are many kinds of civil activist groups in China, the author choose to explore environmental NGOs in this research. This is because environmental NGOs bear relatively less restrictions from the government compared to other types of activism in China, such as human rights (Economy, 2005). The author tries to eliminate as many governmental factors as possible in studying the communicative behaviors of Chinese civil groups. Another reason is that environmental NGOs are considered to be pioneers in Chinese activism among many kinds of civil groups in China (Li & Wang, 2005). The author assumes the data generated by this research can best reflect the strategic communication aspect in Chinese civil activism.
Population and Sample

A recent study of Chinese NGOs pointed out that there are no more than 150 environmental NGOs that are still active in the environmental protection cause (Deng, 2010). Since there is no official listing of all Chinese environmental NGOs available, the author thus uses a convenience sample of 29 NGOs which is available at the official website of the Institute of Public & Environmental Affairs (IPE). IPE is led by a well-known Chinese environmental activist Ma Jun, and is the core actor in the recent condemnation of Apple’s supply chain management. The NGOs listed have partnerships with the IPE in the Green Choice Alliance program, which advocates for green corporate supply chain management China. The author assumes the listed NGOs may have interactions with corporations, which makes them favorable to this study.

Snowball sampling was also applied to this research. An additional number of environmental NGOs was added to the original sample according to interviewees’ reference and recommendation.

Questionnaire Construction

A questionnaire of 13 open-ended questions is developed according to three research questions proposed by this study. Questions 1 to 4 are centered on the communication channels used by Chinese environmental NGOs and how they promote the key issues of their organizations. Emerging social networking sites are specifically highlighted in order to examine their online presence. Questions 5 to 9 are centered on the maintenance of environmental NGOs, including their ways of tracking and evaluation measures, relationship nurturing with volunteers and followers. Questions 10 to 13 look at Chinese environmental NGOs’ relationships with corporations and fellow NGOs.
Data Collection Procedure

Textual Analysis

This study includes textual analysis to examine the online presence of Chinese environmental NGOs (official websites, Weibo page, and some electronic newsletter). Textual analysis is defined by Babbie (2010) as “the study of recorded human communications, such as books, websites, paintings, and laws” (p. 333). Through the textual analysis, the author is able to demonstrate the form and content of the communication made by environmental NGOs.

Intensive Interviews

After submitted to the IRB and obtained the approval for carrying out this research, the author contacted the listed environmental NGOs through e-mail and asked for opportunities to conduct interviews. There are three types of interviews: open interview, pre-coded interview (structured interview), and semi-structured interview (Fisher, 2007). Open interview takes the form of casual conversation. In the contrast, pre-coded interview is conducted strictly according to prepared script. Last, semi-structured interview is a method between open interview and pre-coded interview (Fisher, 2007). To satisfy the needs of this research, the interviews took the form of semi-structured interviews. Due to the fact that each NGO interviewed has different focuses of work, a list of questions was prepared beforehand. The questions were slightly altered by the author to suit different situations during each interview.

The interviews were taken by Skype™ and taped. They lasted for thirty minutes to one hour in average. They were conducted in Chinese and later translated into English by the author. Most of the NGOs have positively responded to the interview request, while some NGOs would like to take questionnaire (with open-ended questions) only.
From mid February to March 2012, the author has successfully interviewed 19 Chinese environmental NGOs. (Eleven of them are via Skype™, while eight of them are through e-mails.) A point of data saturation was reached when the content of the interviews started to repeat. The Environmental NGOs that have participated in this study are:

Table 3-1. A list of interviewees for the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of Interviewees</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greenpeace, Beijing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hangzhou Ecological and Cultural Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blue Ocean</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Institute of Environment and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Panjing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gull Protection Association of Panjing City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends of Green in Tianjing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South China Natural Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiamen Greencross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Kunming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanjing Green Stone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Huaihe Guardians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenpoint Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Xinjiang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Pearl River</td>
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<tr>
<td>Green Beagle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Oasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fujian Green Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends of Green in Jiangsu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

As explained above, most data in this research come in the form of narrative data or text. The data collected for this study include transcripts from the interviews, responses to open-ended questions on the questionnaire, and the text of websites and electronic publications. Techniques of theme analysis were used to identify themes from the pile of data, and in the data analysis process. Ryan and Bernard (2003) wrote an article explicating some techniques of theme identification, and pointing out that it is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research. Guided by their work, the author
first printed out the interview transcripts and read over them several times. In the transcripts, the author looked for repetitions, transitions, key phrases and sentences of the participants, and highlighted them with marker pen. Then, the author accomplished the procedures of “cutting and sorting” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 94), which mainly includes cutting and arranging quotes and expressions in piles that go together. When the author names each similar pile, these are the themes that are condensed from the transcripts.

**Validity**

Member check is used in this study to ensure the accuracy and validity of the data obtained from the interviews. It is completed during the interviews, when the author summarized the information provided by interviewees and asked for their verification on the interpretation. Follow-up questions were also posed to clarify a few confused points after the interviews. This process was enabled by e-mail contact with the interviewees.

It is also worth to point out that some of the interviewees are leaders of the groups, while others are person in charge of public affairs, and campaign coordinator in the organizations. They are experienced activist advocating for environmental protection in China. Therefore, the author is confident to produce a reliable work according to the information obtained through the interviews.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Strategies and Tactics for Advocacy

When asked about what type of media environmental NGOs use for promoting the level of recognition and various environmental programs, they first and foremost mentioned that the Internet has been an indispensable part to their work. To use the Internet resources to the fullest is no doubt their number one strategy for advocacy. Most environmental NGOs that participated in this study have official websites, where they demonstrate the nature, their purposes, and the goals of the organizations. Those websites usually have sophisticated layouts and contain substantial information. One can find technical environmental knowledge for field experts and educated followers, and non-technical events information or eco-friendly tips for beginners and other non-professional publics.

The second most mentioned tactic that is found widely used by the environmental NGOs is their Weibo page as a complementary Internet presence. As previously discussed in the introduction of this study, Weibo is an emerging social networking site similar to Twitter, and is favored by most Internet users for its features such as high level of interactivity and fast spread of news. Up to this state, almost every institution and well-known corporation you can think of has set up a Weibo account in order to keep up with the new trend. It is a cost-efficient tool for many environmental NGOs in terms of fast spreading of events, initiating campaigns, and soliciting endorsement from those who share the same objectives. Most environmental NGOs in their Weibo presence have 10,000 to 160,000 followers, among which are corporate foundations, fellow NGOs, and those who care about environmental issues. This renders Weibo a
natural platform that facilitates interactivity between environmental NGOs and their various publics. One participant said, “Weibo and those social networking sites alike are extremely helpful for promotion and information dissemination” (Zheng, February 23, 2012). This idea was echoed by all participants. Most of their accounts are registered with the name of the organizations, but there are a few significant environmental activists and NGO leaders have personal Weibo account so that they can be reached directly regarding environmental issues. Ma Jun, the leader of IPE has 15021 followers on Weibo and 5460 entries in total. His Weibo entries usually disseminate substantial useful environmental knowledge to the followers. It also shows the perseverance and determination of IPE on dealing with important environmental issues.

Online medium most commonly used by Chinese environmental NGOs are listed and compared in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online Medium</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weibo (Microblog)</td>
<td>Good for mobilization during campaigns; extremely useful tool for interactions with fellow NGOs</td>
<td>Needs to attract followers in order to generate more impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official Websites</td>
<td>Includes abundant information; designed to suit a variety of audience</td>
<td>No timely feedback and interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBS (Forum)</td>
<td>High specification and efficiency</td>
<td>Needs to attract traffic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatting Group via OICQ</td>
<td>Instant communication between members and the organization; convenient</td>
<td>Limited to certain group, not accessible to all people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douban Community</td>
<td>Targets mainly young people</td>
<td>Lack of generality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renren</td>
<td>Targets mainly college students; good for recruiting volunteers</td>
<td>Lack of generality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Besides those platforms brought by the Web 2.0 technology, usage of traditional public relations tactics is also found evident according to the interviews. Those tactics include print news, Internet news, television commercials, the online encyclopedia of Baidu and Hudong, and promotional pamphlets. Some environmental NGOs produce their own monthly magazine or periodical newspaper clipping for those who are interested in environmental protection in general or work done by particular NGOs. For instance, the “Green Front of the Yangts Delta” is a monthly newspaper started from 2008 and published by an environmental NGO named Green Zhejiang. It is a well-known environmental publication in Zhejiang Province for its effectiveness to bridge the platform for mutual understanding of people and the government, to establish a collaborative network among environmental NGOs in the Yangts Delta, and to enhance the collaboration between those NGOs with the government. Participants explained that some publications are accessible through the organization’s official websites, while others are sent via mail list to volunteers only. Moreover, some environmental NGOs give away small items that symbolize the organization to people as free publicity. For example, Blue Ocean Protection Association, the only non-governmental group aiming to protect ocean quality in China, distribute blue wristbands and blue silk ribbon to volunteers and those who care about ocean preservation in Hainan Province.

Another common strategy that is a critical part to their advocacy is to collaborate with fellow NGOs. It is very common to see an alliance of environmental NGOs that are the co-planners of particular events or campaigns. Most notable environmental events in China are collaborative projects among several NGOs. Even if a project is initiated by single large global environmental NGOs, it will be widely supported and responded by
other organizations as well. For example, the campaign against Apple’s supply chain is initiated by Greenpeace and IPE. But the campaign will not be this influential if it were not for the assistance of several regional NGOs. According to one of the interviewee, “The reason why environmental NGOs tend to work jointly in environmental project is because each organization has its specialties. The combination of our resources and complimentary specialties will make our project more brilliant” (Li, February 24, 2012).

**Organization Maintenance**

This study examines three factors that contribute to organization maintenance. First, the level of interactivity between environmental NGOs and their followers/volunteers is an important determinant in maintaining and nurturing the relationships. All interview participants claimed they have high level of interactivity with their volunteers. Online forums, Weibo, official websites provides platforms for convenient communication and interaction among followers, volunteers and the organization staffs. OICQ chatting group with its instant message features is the best tool for volunteers to get to know each other and keep in touch with the organization staffs. One director of public affair from Nanjing Green Stone said a lot of their environmental protection programs are based on these kinds of interactivity, “Many activities and programs are not initiated by the organization, rather the idea and planning of the activities are proposed by a group of volunteers that share the same interest. The organization will then make possible of their plans and carry out the activities, including taking care of the budgets” (Li, February 24, 2012). In this way interactivity strengthens mutual beneficial relationships between organizations and the followers, which is helpful to enhance the overall sustainability of the organizations.
According to interview participants, there are actually many opportunities for environmental NGOs to interact with their audience whether online or offline. One participant said they interact with volunteers and followers through regular work and over meetings. Other friendly gestures include visiting volunteers’ home, having dinner events, and holding birthday events for volunteers. Although monetary incentives for volunteers are very little or, what is often the case, none for their work in environmental NGOs, there are various non-financial incentives to keep volunteers interested in their work and be loyal to the organizations overtime. For example, some organizations provide work certificate to volunteers so that it benefits their competence in the job market. Others provide full-time positions in the NGO for those who have performed excellent in volunteer work. It is found in the interviews that those organizations usually have good management of their volunteers to the extent that the staff in charge of certain program knows every volunteer by name in his or her program. However, since most environmental NGOs are not membership based, they do not know much about their broad followers other than the volunteers. That is to say, they usually do not recognize a stable crowd that is loyal to the organizations, such as the size of the crowd, people’s age and occupation in that crowd.

Second, the effectiveness of program evaluation is another important aspect regarding organization maintenance. According to the participants, in China, the advocacy of environment protection in each environmental NGO is equivalent with what they actually do in each environmental project. Whether the environmental protection programs are effective or not has direct impact on the credibility of the organization. Good measures of evaluation ensures the quality of future programs and prevent them
suffer from previous mistakes. In terms of program evaluation and status monitoring, most interview participants responded positively that they have evaluation process at the end of each program and keep track of the status of current programs and activities. However, the levels of professional ability of the evaluation are uneven among the interviewed NGOs.

Only two organizations use scientific survey and data analysis to see how people react to their environmental program. Most organizations will hold a report meeting after a program is finished. In the meeting each significant members in charge of the program and the major volunteers will state their personal opinion regarding the procedures and results of the program, and the group will have an evaluation discussion. One staff said in the interview, “The evaluations we have are basically subjective. We don’t have systematic and standard evaluation measure” (Shen, February 24, 2012). But what is worth to mention is that some limitations of their evaluation work may possibly result from the nature of environmental projects themselves. As one participant commented, “Environmental protection is a long-term process, so the effectiveness of certain programs may not be easily observed at once” (Wang, March 2, 2012). Also, a few programs are evaluated in a different way because they are repetitive and have been last for several years. For example, “the Qinhui River Walk” is a popular event for people to investigate the quality of the water while walking along the river. When asked about the evaluation process, one participant explained, “The river walk is held once every two weeks. Each new agenda is based on the results of the investigation we did the previous time. In this way, evaluation is an inevitable process if the event is to sustain for long” (Li, February 24, 2012).
Last, this study attempts to find out how the degree of public attention is going to affect the maintenance of environmental NGOs. As shown in the interviews and the questionnaire collected, participants have almost reached to a consensus that public attention has substantial meaning to their organizations. One respondent from Blue Ocean (February 28, 2012) answered, “Of course we would like everyone to accept our concepts. We value the degree of public attention because only when people pay more attention to environmental protection and involve themselves in what we do, can our concepts be more widely known”. Similarly, it is stressed by another respondent:

Public attention is extremely important to the development of our programs, especially to environmental protection. If we long for environmental improvement and good results coming out of our programs, there has got to be people’s involvement. That’s why public attention becomes the premise to our work (Greenpoint, February 27, 2012).

When asked about their strategies to enhance the level of public awareness and support, many organizations said that they would make use of good media relations when their initiatives are short of public attention. According to one interviewee, “It is not uncommon for NGOs to initiative events or campaigns but do not receive enough responses. In those situations, we will try using new media to assist our events. If we do need certain level of public attention and involvement to accomplish our events, collaborating with the media is a possible option and they will help to tell our stories and reach to more people” (Wu, February 29, 2012). In general, when environmental NGOs are facing the problems of low level of public attention, they would first make self adjustment on their plans, and then have reinforcement on the extent of publicity. The difference lies in the communication channels they choose that are suitable for each programs and events. It is obvious that establishing good media relations is extremely important to NGO’s maintenance, not only in facilitating some of the events and
programs, but also in influencing the decision-making of corporations that will be discussed in the following section.

**Relationships with Corporations**

Environmental NGOs have various types of relationships with corporations. This study categorized those relationships into two columns: collaboration and conflict. It is also found that the nuances of their relationships are largely based on the scale of the non-governmental organizations. To some small environmental NGOs that have limited financial resources, sponsorship is vital to their work and survival. According to one interviewee, most of their financial supports are from foundations, a part of which are subordinated to corporations. She said:

> We have long been collaborating and communicating with one to two foundations and we know each other very well. When we have initiatives to do certain environmental programs, we will turn to them to see if they are interested in sponsoring. Sometimes it is the foundations that come to us with proposals and ask us to make designs and plans for carrying out the programs (Tu, March 1, 2012).

She stressed that their collaboration is based on mutual understanding, joint consultation, and good communication. Through this kind of partnership, both the NGO and sponsoring foundations have fulfilled their needs of serving and giving to the community.

In terms of corporate sponsorships, environmental NGOs usually do not accept them on every condition. One interviewee claimed that “sometimes it is be very tiresome to accomplish projects that are requested by enterprises. The results did not turn out as we both expected because our fundamental objectives were not the same” (Li, February 24, 2012). Moreover, some organizations expressed that they would avoid such partnership that is with commercial purposes. Their partnership is only limited within
charitable activities. Organizations that enjoy significant status in environmental protection are particularly strict about accepting donations and sponsorship from corporations. According to Greenpeace Beijing, a global wise environmental NGO, they will not accept any sponsorship offered by governments, enterprises, or political parties. Their money is all from independent foundations or direct donations to ensure their integrity and independence.

However, few cases of environmental NGOs having direct partnerships with corporations are still evident among the interviewees. Some partnerships between NGOs and small businesses have brought out meaningful outcomes in the overall environmental improvement. A program titled “New Ventures China” was jointly carried out by two research-focused environmental NGOs: the World Resources Institute and the Institute for Environment and Development. The program is China’s only ongoing public project that aims to facilitate the investment in sustainable development. What they do is providing professional training and financial docking opportunities to small and medium enterprises that have specialties in energy-saving, renewable energies, nature preservation and so on. According to IED’s respondent, in the past eight years, the program has helped more than 400 small and medium green enterprises on their paths of sustainable development. The amount of money that is raised from financial docking has reached one billion RMB. Another example for collaboration is quite unique as found in one of the NGO participant. According to the person in charge of the organization, their entire group is hired by a corporation as its CSR department. The NGO staffs are paid salary and welfare by the corporation. While the corporation sponsors the project of the environmental NGO, in return, they are responsible for
carrying out the corporation’s social responsible activities for the corporation’s purpose to issue shares.

It is understandable that the collaboration between environmental NGOs and corporations is based on one premise that is they have the same objectives, and their partnership is mutual beneficial. However, when corporations are involved in certain business transactions that go against what environmental NGOs believe in, they often become targets of those activist groups. Under this circumstance, environmental groups will seek to multiple ways in order to influence the decision-making of the target corporations. It can be summarized in this study, the scale of their campaigns or actions are different according to the size of the organizations and how much influence and resources they have. Some NGOs do not take part in such kind of events at all because they are more research-based institutions.

It is discovered that small NGOs usually do not directly confront target corporations and press them for solutions. Instead, they will draw support from the governments or the media in order to achieve their purposes. As we know in the past few months, a group of Chinese environmental NGOs have been prompting Apple to make responses regarding its problematic supply chain management. Although Ma Jun, the leader of IPE, has been made representative of all the environmental groups involved, many small NGOs have played important roles in the early stage of the campaign against Apple. Green Stone in Nanjing was one of such small environmental NGOs that have shed some light on the issue of NGO’s power on corporate decision-making.
Green Stone was responsible for most of the investigation of factories and injured workers that manufacture Apple products in Jiangsu Province. When asked about how they communicate with their target factories, the interviewee from Green Stone said that they do not have any interactions with factories, at least not at the early stage of the campaign. “After we had finished investigation, Green Stone and Mr. Ma attempted to communicate with the factories. They ignored us. That's why we choose to solve the problems by targeting the brands instead” (Li, February 24, 2012). She continued, “However, at that time Apple didn't respond to our requests either. Later, it is news media that amplifies our voice and the conflict was then widely spread. Apple was then forced to talk with us because of the pressure of public opinion generated by the media.” According to her, media plays a key role in advancing the process of the campaign and prompting Apple respond to the problems caused by its irresponsible supply chain. She also added that most environmental NGOs she knows of do not have direct contact with target corporations because the chance for an equal conversation is fairly low.

In addition to media effect that helps NGOs catch people’s eyes, environmental NGOs also take the use of governmental containment to those corporations that they found have wrongdoings in the operation system. Another small environmental NGO in Zhejiang Province has added to Green Stone’s attitude toward confronting corporations. He said:

We never fought face to face with those enterprises that are alleged for pollution emissions or bad product quality. What we do is to cumulate a handful of evidence through investigation, and hand those over to the department of environmental protection. It is very effective actually. We had three successful cases by making use of government deterrence last year (Shen, February 24, 2012).
When asked about his opinion on direct confrontation with corporations, he indicated that it is not the most appropriate way to solve problems because NGOs still are “not strong enough, if we look from the history and development trend of Chinese civil organizations”. It is indicated that small environmental NGOs perceive themselves at an inferior position when comparing with corporations, especially those with well-known brands. Therefore, they largely depend on the power of the media or the government to carry forward their campaign.

However, it is found that large environmental NGOs tend to take direct actions against target corporations. Their campaigns are usually much more organized and started at the same time and in different locations. Greenpeace is an example of this kind of environmental NGOs that enjoy a great deal of influence in global wise environmental protection. Greenpeace has planned and initiated many effective campaigns pointing out the wrongdoings related to commercial organizations. The campaign uncovering the harm caused by Apple’s supply chain is one of them. According to the campaign coordinator from Greenpeace Beijing, they always adhere to the idea of “non-violent direct action” whether they are lobbying the government or affecting corporations. He explained, “This is usually our last option after we have tried every way possible. The purpose of non-violent direct action is to produce public pressure on powerful targets by highlighting the injustice of certain policies or behaviors, thus making the targets cave to the needs and interest of ordinary people” (Law, March 6, 2012).

In the past few years, Greenpeace has been fighting with Sinar Mas Group because of its damage to the rain forest and animal habitat in Indonesia. Through non-
violent direct action, Greenpeace has successfully made Mattel (the manufacturer of Barbie Doll) and Hasbro Toy (the manufacturer of Transformers toy) eliminate APP’s paper products from their supply chain and commit to rain forest protection. It also successfully persuaded Nestle, the world’s largest food and nutrition company, say no to the palm oil provided by Sinar Mas Group in order to preserve the habitat of Orangutan in Indonesia. According to the interviewee, the campaign usually starts with press conferences where Greenpeace exposes their investigation results to the media. Then they started a signing event so that each consumer signs online to express their will of protecting rain forest to Nestle. Consumers are also encouraged to send emails, make phone calls or write to the CEO of Nestle requesting they stop buying palm oil from the supplier that is destroying the forest. After 150,000 emails, thousands of phone calls, and over one million clicks on the video clip on this topic, Nestle finally made a statement that they would no longer purchase the palm oil provided by the company after four months of campaigning.

Although the target corporation and the key issue may vary for each campaign, what stays the same is the purpose of leveraging attention from the media and the public. It is found that nowadays, environmental NGOs are good at incorporating currently-hit elements into their activities so as to catch more eyeballs for their campaigns. For instance, last year Greenpeace dominated an activity called flashmob targeting athletic apparel brands for releasing harmful substances into rivers during their production process. Those target brands include well-known international and national sports giant Adidas, Nike, and Li Ning. The flashmob was designed to take place at the same time with more than 2000 participants from 36 cities and 14 countries. Volunteers
all wore the sports clothing from the target brands. At the end of the flashmob, they took off their shirt and showed the slogan for the campaign. Their conviction to live with clean rivers is therefore expressed in front of numerous cameras and witnesses.

After a few months of petition, six sports name brands have made a joint statement to make promise to eliminate toxic substances from the production process. However, the timeline for their actions is stated to be in the year 2020. Although the statement was accepted by Greenpeace and has shown that the campaigns have more or less generated some effect on the corporate policy, the representative for this campaign in Greenpeace is not satisfied by the outcome. “They should have taken actions in less than the timeline they gave us. After all it is toxic pollutants we are dealing with right now, we are sorry that they did not remedy this situation soon enough” (Law, March 6, 2012).

Another unique yet insightful case of corporation-activist relationships is provided by Huo Daishan, the leader of the Huai River Guardians. The organization is quite influential in the North China region for its nine years of environmental protection advocacy in the Huai River valley. According to Huo, the Huai River Guardians has deeply influenced the behavior and policy change of a large Chinese-Japanese joint venture that manufactures Lotus gourmet powder in China. The corporation had long been condemned by the media and environmental groups for causing severe pollutions in the Huai River. Huo said, “It was a very powerful corporation that claimed to be protected by the government at that time. The corporation was not afraid of negative reports of the media, even those from China Central Television” (Huo, February 28. 2012).
After consistent negative reports from the media and public protest, the Japanese finally withdrew all their investment, rendering the rest of the company lingered on the edge of bankruptcy. The company had no choice but to reform the environmental standards according to the request of environmental groups so as to survive the crisis. To everyone’s surprise, with the help of the Huai River Guardians, the company with the new energy-saving and economical recycling techniques became a model for other corporations in the industry. And the Lotus Gourmet Powder was able to produce 20 million RMB revenues annually after the environmental rectification. Huo commented, “This is an experience that we managed to turn conflicts into collaboration”.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Based on the findings of this study, three important points need to be stressed and further discussed for the implications of the topic. A few suggestions for Chinese environmental NGOs are provided on their public relations strategies with media and corporations. Limitations and recommendations for future studies on this topic are also discussed.

The Internet

After a close look into how Chinese environmental NGOs use public relations strategies and tactics in their day-to-day work, it is obvious that the Internet is integral to the advocacy and the cause of environmental protection in China. It seems that environmental groups have high level of engagement in their online presence in their official websites, Weibo, and other popular social networking sites alike. As a communication medium, the Internet brings together those organizations and individuals who share the same values and objectives. Together they share information and knowledge, help each other with resources and techniques, and seek solutions to difficult problems. The Internet has facilitated the union of environmental NGOs, which expands the boundary of what every single organization is capable of. Through their combined social influence and resources, the possibility for them to talk equally with large interest groups is increased.

The advantage of online communication is perhaps most reflected in advocacy NGOs when they defend or promote a specific cause. For those organizations, the Internet is a critical medium to amplify their voices and perhaps influence the articulation or reform of governmental or corporate policies. Often time, a key essence of
environmental campaigns or protests is mobilization. That is, a successful campaign must be based on a large body of people being aware and accepting the key issue of a campaign. Public involvement appears to have a positive effect on the amount of media coverage for a topic or cause. As found in this study, activities such as online petition and Weibo campaigns are common activities that complement the offline events such as demonstration and protest. Moreover, global environmental NGOs such as Greenpeace rely largely on the Internet for initiating standard movement across the globe. The Internet also strengthens the union of environmental NGOs, enabling them to make joint advocacy and appealing at the earliest time.

It is also turned out online communication is most widely used by Chinese environmental NGOs in relationship nurturing with their supporters and volunteers. Since many of the followers are geographically scattered in different places, the Internet becomes the only cost-efficient medium for them to know the updates of the group and to interact with other followers. For instance, the OICQ chatting group is the most mentioned platform for bonding with volunteers and keep them posted with upcoming events and activities. In addition, those public relations outputs, such as newsletter and other periodicals, are forms of communication through which the NGOs document their events and report to loyal followers. Most of them are presented electronically and will be mailed to each volunteer through mailing lists, which again demonstrates the usage of the Internet throughout the work of environmental NGOs in China.

**Media Relations**

In the past few years, a series of environmental incidents have caught public attention nationwide. Invariably, those protests against certain corporations such as Apple and the Sinar Mas Group are brought to people’s attention by the media.
People’s attitudes to environmental issues or even their involvement in the campaign have been accelerated by the media effect, so that it eventually has influences on the policy makers to some extent. The media and environmental NGOs are together two important forces behind each story. The combination of the two has facilitated the conformation of people’s environmental awareness, affected related policy making, and played an important role in the environmental protection cause in China. Therefore, it has become a strategic issue for environmental NGOs to make use of media resources. The results of this study indicate that when a conflict between environmental groups and the target corporations has blown out, media’s involvement usually impels the process of the campaign and the dialogue between the two parties. Often time, the target corporations will not give any comments or responses to the allegation, especially at the early stage of a campaign. What makes them finally talk to environmental groups is the massive public opinion effect caused by the media.

Du (2008) explained the reason why media relations is extremely important to environmental NGOs in China. According to her, the reason is based on China’s special conditions and its current development stage. In China, market regulations have not yet fully developed, and the law and administration may still have pitfalls. While many environmental issues can be resolved by litigation in foreign countries, Chinese environmental NGOs can only count on the force of the public. Since those environmental groups have restricted right on speech, massive promotion becomes impossible work. Most environmental NGOs, especially those grass roots organizations, have very limited resources. However, the media and the journalists, on the contrary, have cumulated substantial social capital and resources. When they are in touch with a
public incident, media people are able to spread the topic and get resonance from across the nation. “It is a unique feature in China: environmental NGOs will be much more reliant on media effect for promotion and mobilization,” Du said (2008, p. 34).

From the media’s angle, the interaction and collaboration with environmental NGOs is important as well. Du (2008) pointed out two points that can be added to the media’s benefit. First, the focus of the media should contain a folk perspective, and the voice of environmental NGOs can definitely represent the voice from ordinary people. Second, through making interactions with environmental groups, media people will have a chance to increase professional knowledge and expand their social networks. Moreover, the act of helping environmental NGOs with information dissemination and environmental issues promotion fulfills media’s social conscience and the need of being social responsible. The fact that the government is somewhat supportive for media reports on the environment has objectively given more chances for media to put environmental groups on camera. All these have uncovered the foundation of reciprocal relations between environmental NGOs and the media. Establishing favorable media relations is definitely a feasible and also a necessary strategy for environmental NGOs.

The Increasing Power of NGOs

Although this thesis highlights the role of activists in NGOs as public relations practitioners, it does not mean to overlook their position as important publics who are able to influence target corporations’ name and reputation. Depending on different angles we see NGOs, our depiction and understanding of them therefore vary. This thesis serves as an explication for those who would like to have a better understanding of NGOs advocacy. Exploring strategic public relations in the NGOs contexts provides useful information and guidance to future interaction between NGOs and corporations.
It is undeniable that environmental NGOs’ power is rising. According to Nye (2004), the information age such as the usage of the Internet and the emerging social media has seen rapid growth of the amount and the scale of environmental NGOs. Those organizations, no matter transnational or national, usually represent broad public interests against individual authority or powerful TNCs, in a way to show their social conscience. Their power potential was reflected not only in the ability of directly pressing the government and enterprises change policies, but also in the ability of indirectly influencing people’s perception of what the government and enterprises should do (Nye, 2004). He further explained, “NGO’s do not have coercive ‘hard’ power, but they often enjoy considerable ‘soft’ power - the ability to get the outcomes they want through attraction rather than compulsion” (¶ 3). Indeed, the “soft power” is evident in the findings of Chinese environmental NGOs: the ability to bring various issues into the attention of the government, media, and the public.

However, after a close scrutiny of the primary data in this study, one important point needs to be brought to consideration, that is, the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the campaigns. Although Chinese environmental NGOs do have the capability of mobilizing the public to accept and reaching consensus on the advocated issues, they have limited power to supervise the actual implementation of the promised policy change. A rough pattern can be depicted according to several cases discussed in the previous chapter. After a conflict has broken out, the target corporations will not make responses to any form of contact and activities initiated by environmental groups. Responses such as news conference or other form of direct conversation with the activist groups will usually take place after a lengthy period, normally several months.
These gestures often happen after the involvement of the media and the public opinion effect generated by the media.

Therefore, this study has reasons to assume that although the power of environmental NGOs in China has increased due to external assistance such as media and the advanced information technologies, it still cannot counterbalance the power of corporations. Based on several interviewees’ statements, the resources and the rights of Chinese environmental NGOs are perceived to be inferior and limited compared with those of corporations. Except those large transnational ENGOs such as Greenpeace that are able to initiate large scale campaign, other environmental groups tend not to directly confront target corporations.

Perhaps the best strategy for environmental NGOs to coexist with large corporations is to move from conflict to collaboration. To enhance the communication and understanding between the two is the premise to achieve this objective. Kanal (2009) suggested environmental NGOs and corporations make mutual adaption in order to work toward the sustainability of the environment. It is also believed that mutual benefits will come out of the collaboration of the two. One advantage for this kind of collaboration is that environmental NGO and the media will both serve as monitors to corporate pollutants’ control. And the corporate management of environmental criterion and policy making would be more transparent to the public. Also, from the corporations’ angle, it helps them to realize the mission of its social responsibility and contributes to the overall environmental protection in China.

Limitations

This study is basically a discussion about public relations behavior of Chinese Environmental NGOs in current condition. It serves as an overview, demonstrating and
analyzing the communicative behaviors of environmental NGOs for those who are not familiar with this field. In explaining the function of public relations in Chinese ENGOs, this study specifically writes about how they maintain the relationships with followers; demonstrates their relationships with corporations and fellow NGOs; and analyzed their relationships with the media. However, the public relations of Chinese ENGOs are not limited within these three publics. For example, governmental relationships is also vital to ENGOs' survival and development, and determines the implementation of the environmental protection cause. Yet this study does not include the governmental influence on Chinese ENGOs.

Second, the participants recruited from the convenience sample covers a wide range of ENGOs that are different types, sizes, and have different focus of work. For instance, some of the participants are campaigning or advocacy oriented, while others have a strong focus on environmental policy research. It is found out the nature and the theme of each ENGO determines who their audience are, which in turn affects their strategies of public relations. This study did not categorize the object of study according to their size, orientation, and nature. It is suggested that future study should recruit participants that are within the same criterion.

Third, this study takes the qualitative approach to explore the communicative behaviors of Chinese environmental NGOs. It aims to explicate ENGOs' public relations from a longitudinal perspective. Since the study is not based on a large sample, the findings may not accurately represent all environmental NGOs in China. In terms of generality, quantitative method (Public Opinion Survey) is suggested for future study to verify the effectiveness of ENGOs’ communication from the audience side. In addition,
case study of one particular environmental NGO is also a good way to understand their communicative behavior more comprehensively.

**Conclusions**

This study has introduced and explicated the current condition of Chinese environmental NGOs implementing public relations strategies and tactics in the information era. The Internet has empowered environmental NGOs with “soft power”, rendering their communication and interaction with the audience more frequent and time-efficient. Large public involvement and attention is fundamental to the work of environmental NGOs, which positively impels the development of environmental protection cause in China.

It is also discovered Chinese environmental NGOs have a high level of dependence on media promotion and dissemination of campaigns or activities. To environmental NGOs with limited resources and rights of speech, media relations become extremely helpful to the implementation of work. To establish and maintain good media relations become the best way to catch attention of the public and the government.

This study has also come across a few cases of conflicts and collaborations among environmental NGOs and large corporations. It is worth to mention that although the power of NGOs is rising, it is still not sufficient to counterbalance the massive resources and power of the corporations. That is, environmental NGOs do not have an equal position to directly influence the decision making and policy change of corporations. A win-win strategy for both parties is to establish reciprocal and collaborative relationships instead of conflict relationship.
The past few decades have seen the development of environmental protection cause in China. The notable contribution of environmental NGOs to the cause cannot be ignored. Though environmental activists come across difficulties and restrictions along the way of petitions for the nature, they still have optimistic attitude to act positively on each environmental issue. In the process of building harmonious society, environmental NGOs call attention to issues that governments have not noticed or prefer to ignore. They are the forces to truly engage ordinary people into policy making and public affairs, and have facilitated the communication and interaction among the public, media, and the government in China.
APPENDIX
QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What type of media do you use to demonstrate the nature of your organization and advocate your key issues?

2. To what extent do you use emerging social networking sites, such as Renren or Weibo for promoting your key issues and your popularity?

3. What kind of regular program do you usually conduct to promote the issues and your credibility as an environmental NGO? How do you promote these programs?

4. Do you hold or participate in theme events? Do you have corporate sponsors or NGO partnership in these events?

5. Do you usually keep track of the status of your campaigns or activities and make overall evaluations after they are finished? What is your evaluation measure?

6. What strategies and tactics do you take if you discover your issues no longer receive public attention?

7. Are you a membership based organization? If not, do you recognize a stable crowd that is loyal to your organization?

8. Do you offer any kind of financial or nonfinancial incentive for your followers?

9. To what extent can you describe the degree of your interaction with the followers? In what forms do you interact with followers?

10. How often and under what circumstances do you collaborate with other NGOs?

11. Do you receive sponsorship from any corporations or companies? Is it for specific events or on long-term basis?

12. Have you ever been involved in or initiated public policy campaigns or environmental protest against certain companies or corporations? Please describe in detail.

13. What do you think is the biggest obstacle for environmental NGOs in those campaigns and programs? How would you describe your achievement so far?
LIST OF REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

A native Chinese, Rubing Shen was born and raised in Shanghai. She majored in business administration and English at Shanghai International Studies University, a school that is well known for foreign language teaching in China. In one summer break, Rubing interned at Shanghai Media Group (SMG) as a public relations specialist. It was since then she became interested in working in the media industry. She decided to further her study in communications in order to become a public relations professional one day. She has studied at the University of Florida for a master degree in public relations for the past two years.